

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,  
3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 4B**

**FIRST SAMUEL**

**CHAPTERS 4-6**

**INTRODUCTION**

Some believers have the notion that God needs them more than they need Him. They drag their feet when they serve as if they are doing God a favour. They brag and fill themselves with the pride of life when they give up their "prestigious" jobs and "fat" pay checks to serve God. The reality is that God can do without us but we cannot do without Him.

Reluctantly they defend His Holy Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ feeling that it is a burden most of the time rather than a privilege. 1 Samuel 5 teaches us that God is more than able to defend His own Name.

Let us consider some facts first before we examine 1 Samuel 5.

**"Ash'-dod** ('ashdodh; Azotos; modern Esdud) was one of the five chief cities of the Philistines. The name Ashdod means stronghold or fortress and its strength may be inferred by the fact that Psammetik I of Egypt besieged it for many years

(Herodotus says 29 years). Some of the Anakim were found there in the days of Joshua (Joshua 11:22) and the inhabitants were too strong for the Israelites at that time. It was among the towns assigned to Judah, but was not occupied by her (Jos 13:3; 15:46-47). It was still independent in the days of Samuel, and the ark was taken to the house of Dagon in Ashdod after the defeat of the Israelites (1Sam 5:1-2). We have no account of it being occupied even by David, although he defeated the Philistines many times. We have no definite knowledge of it coming into the hands of Judah until the time of Uzziah (2Ch 26:6). Ashdod, like the other Philistine towns, was under the authority of the Assyrian monarchs. It revolted against Sargon in 711 BC and deposed of the Assyrian governor, Akhimiti, who had been appointed in 720 BC. Sargon at once dispatched a force to subdue the rebels and the city was severely punished. This was referred to in Isaiah 20:1. Amos had prophesied such a calamity some years before (Isa 1:8). Jeremiah referred to "the remnant of Ashdod" as though it had continued weak until his day (Jer 25:20). Zephaniah referred to the desolation of Ashdod (Zep 2:4). Zechariah referred to its degraded condition (Zec 9:6). It continued to be inhabited by the Canaanites, however, for we find the Jews inter-married with them after their return from Babylon (Neh. 13:23-24). In the

Maccabean period, we are told that Judas and Jonathan both took it and purified it of idolatry (1 Macc 5:68, 10:84). In these passages and in the New Testament, it was called Azotus (Acts 8:40). In the 4th century AD, it became the seat of a bishopric. It had been restored in the time of Herod by the Roman general Gabinius and was presented to Salome, the sister of Herod, by the emperor Augustus. It is now a small village about 18 miles Northeast of Gaza." [International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Sword-searcher, 4.7]

**Gath** was also "one of the five chief cities of the Philistines (Jos 13:3; 1Sam 6:17). It was a walled town (2Ch 26:6) and was not taken by Joshua. Although many conflicts took place between the Israelites and its people, it did not seem to have been captured until the time of David (1Ch 18:1). It was rendered famous as the abode of the giant Goliath whom David slew (1Sa 17:4), and other giants of the same race (2Sam 21:18-22). It was to Gath that the Ashdodites conveyed the ark when smitten with the plague, and Gath was also smitten (1Sam 5:8-9). Gath was where David took refuge twice when persecuted by Saul (1Sam 21:10; 27:2-4). It seemed to have been destroyed after being taken by David for we find Rehoboam restoring it (2Ch 11:8). It was after this that it was reoccupied by the Philistines, for we read that

Uzziah took it and razed its walls (2Ch 26:6) but it must have been restored again, for we find Hazael of Damascus capturing it (2Ki 12:17). It seemed to have been destroyed before the time of Amos (Am 6:2), and was not mentioned anymore in the Old Testament or Macc, except in Mic 1:10 where it was referred to in the proverb, "Tell it not in Gath" (compare 2Sam 1:20)" [ISBE]

**Ekron** means "migration," or "rooting out". It was "the most northerly of the chief cities of the Philistines. It was not subdued by Joshua (13:3) but was allotted, in the division of the land, first to Judah and then to Dan (Jos 15:11, 45-46; 19:43). It was taken by Judah (Jg 1:18). The people of Ekron were prominent in the story of the ark in the land of the Philistines. It was they who proposed to have it sent back to Israel (1Sam 5:10; 6:16-17). After the defeat of the Philistines when David killed Goliath, the Israelites pursued them to the gates of Ekron, which was evidently the nearest walled town in which the fugitives could take refuge (1Sam 17:52). It was the seat of the worship of the god Baalzebub as appeared in the account of the sickness and death of Ahaziah (2Ki 1:2-3, 6:2Ki 16:1-20). It was included among other cities in the denunciations of Amos (1:8) and of Jeremiah (25:20). Zephaniah declared that it shall be rooted up (2:4). Zechariah spoke of its consternation at the fall of Tyre (9:5,

7). From the Assyrian records we learned that it revolted against Sennacherib and expelled Padi, the governor who was placed over it and sent him to Hezekiah at Jerusalem for safekeeping. Sennacherib marched against it and Ekron called for aid from the king of Mutsri, formerly supposed to be part of Egypt but now regarded by some scholars as a district of Northwestern Arabia. Sennacherib raised the siege of Ekron to defeat this army, which he did at Eltekeh and then returned and took the city by storm and put to death the leaders of the revolt and carried their adherents into captivity. He then compelled Hezekiah to restore Padi, who was once more made governor. This affair led to the famous attack of Sennacherib on Hezekiah and Jerusalem (Rawl, Anc. Mon, II, 159). Ekron is mentioned in 1 Macc 10:89 as being given by Alexander Balas to Jonathan Maccabeus, and it appeared in the accounts of the first Crusade. **[ISBE]**

Dagon was a fish God of the Philistines. It had an upper body of a man and the tail of a fish on its lower torso. "Stately temples were erected in honor of this idol, which was the principal deity of the Philistines but whose worship extended over all Syria as well as Mesopotamia and Chaldea; its name being found among the Assyrian gods on the cuneiform inscriptions **[RAWLINSON]**. It was represented under a monstrous combination of a

human head, breast and arms joined to the belly and tail of a fish. The captured ark was placed in the temple of Dagon right before this image of the idol." **[Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Commentary, Swordsearcher, 4.7]**

## COMMENTARY

### The LORD Defends Himself—5:1-5

The Philistines who captured the ark of God at Ebenezer, transported it to their city, Ashdod, south east of Ebenezer and 33 miles east of Jerusalem. The city was strategically located on the main road from Syria in the north to Egypt in the south.

The Philistines placed the ark of God in the temple of Dagon. Dagon was the Philistines' god of crops and fertility. In Canaanite mythology, Dagon is the father of Baal, a god which eventually took over Dagon as the god of fertility in the land. Later Baal became the primary Canaanite deity.

The ark of God was put side by side with Dagon indicating that the Philistines had accepted and added another deity to their own. It was more than mere acceptance but a demonstration of the greatness of Dagon over Jehovah, the God of Israel, as the ark of the Covenant was a representation of Israel's God, in the minds of the Philistines. When you defeat your opponent you place the gods of your opponent inside

your temple as an additional “trophy” demonstrating that it was your god that had helped you defeat your enemies and their gods.

What ensued showed that the LORD is the one living and true God and beside Him there is none other. When the people of Ashdod woke up early the next morning, they found that their god, Dagon, had fallen flat on the earth before the ark of the LORD (YAHWEH or Jehovah). This was to demonstrate that the LORD was by far the greatest God compared to all the Philistine gods. The posture of falling face down BEFORE the ark of the Covenant would point to this conclusion. The gods of Dagon seemed to be “worshipping” before the ark of the Covenant.

The Philistines simply put Dagon back up thinking that their god had fallen down by accident.

The following morning however the same thing happened — Dagon laid face downwards on the ground before the ark of the LORD. But this time, in addition to lying prostrate at the feet of the ark of the Covenant, the head of Dagon and its hands were dismembered. This humiliation of Dagon by the LORD demonstrated that the LORD can very ably defend Himself. He does not need man to fight for Him. Eli and his sons were a great disappointment. God had to remove them. They died. Now that the ark of

the Covenant which was the most sacred of all the items in The Tabernacle was captured by the heathens, the LORD must do something on His own. To have the ark of the Covenant placed next to Dagon was a humiliation beyond imagination! God cannot allow such an insult to prevail especially in the heart of enemy territory. When man who had been given the honour to serve Him and fight for Him fail Him so miserably like Eli and his sons, God had to intervene supernaturally. And He did it for His own glory!

The Philistines realized without a shadow of doubt that it was no accident that Dagon had fallen. Dagon their chief god was humiliated beyond belief. To have its head cut off means that it is dead, impotent and unable to help the Philistines. Certainly it was in no position to even defend or help itself. The cutting off of the hands means that Dagon was utterly helpless to render any help. He cannot do anything! How true are the words of Psalms 115:4-8, *“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”*

The Philistines and their priests would not set foot on the threshold where Dagon had fallen. Their superstitions got the better of them as they probably believed that that portion of ground must have been cursed. Perhaps that was the reason why Dagon had fallen.

**The LORD Defeats  
His Enemies—5:6-12**

God did not stop at humiliating the Philistines' chief deity. His "hand was heavy" upon the inhabitants of Ashdod. The heavy hand of God meant that the LORD would continue to deal harshly with the Philistines as long as they kept the ark of the Covenant.

The LORD "destroyed them." The word "destroyed" means "to utterly devastate." The scope of the destruction would include not only afflictions upon the inhabitants but also the crops. The agricultural economy was wiped out and the people suffered from painful plagues. They were inflicted with "emerods" which were swelling tumours that grew on parts of the body and in particular, on the anus. It was not too difficult to conclude that it was the God of Israel who was responsible for their calamity. The Philistines acknowledged that their afflictions came from the LORD and concluded that the ark of the Covenant cannot remain with them. It had to be moved elsewhere. This was what they said, *"And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of*

*the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god."* [1 Samuel 5:7]

A general meeting of all the chiefs of the Philistines was convened. The only item on the agenda was what to do with the Ark of the God of Israel. They decided to send the ark to Gath, another one of their cities. When the Ark of God was carried into Gath, the LORD smote the inhabitants of the city both small and great with tumours that affected their private parts. They suffered what the people in Ashdod suffered. It was decided that the ark of God had to be moved out of Gath.

This time they transferred the Ark of God to Ekron about 6 miles to the north. By now, the people in Ekron had heard about how the inhabitants of Ashdod and Gath had been afflicted with the same disease. The Ekronites were smarter. When they saw the ark of God being carried into their city, they cried out, *"They have brought about the ark of God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people"* (5:10). The people of Ekron called on all the lords of the Philistines to return the Ark of the God of Israel so as to spare them from further destruction. There were already great casualties throughout the city for "the hand of God was very heavy there" (5:11). There was much crying and mourning for there was great pain and deaths in the Land of the Philistines.

Israel lost the battle because the LORD their God was not with them. That did not mean that the LORD their God was impotent and powerless. Israel had sinned against God and that was the reason why God was angry with them. God used the Philistines to chastise His people. But that did not imply that the Philistines had found favour in the sight of God. God who is sovereign uses whomsoever He chooses to accomplish His plan and purpose. Even the Philistines were at God's sovereign disposal!

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

Israel failed to witness the majesty, glory, and power of God to its neighbours. God bore His own witness of His power and glory. God is more than able to defend His own Name. At Ashdod, He demonstrated that idols were nothing. God caused Dagon to fall flat on his face before Him. On the second day, not only did Dagon fall flat, his head and hands were dismembered. God showed His power and glory. The gods of the heathens were useless and powerless against the one living and true God.

The Philistines very quickly learned and recognized the power and glory of the LORD God of Israel. It was ironic that the Israelites, who were the chosen people of God and who were given the oracles of God

and who had witnessed so many stupendous works, failed to do so.

It was not because the Philistines were stronger than the Israelites or that their gods were more powerful than Jehovah that Israel was defeated. It was the sin in Israel that brought about the defeat of God's people. This was true then and it is still true today. The enemies of the Christians are helpless against God and God's people. But when God's people live in open and unconfessed sins, God will use even heathens to judge His own people that they may be disciplined, that they may learn and repent!

God is more than capable of defending Himself especially when His people fail. We are fools to think that we are doing God a favour when we defend God's Word or God's Name. We fool ourselves when we think that God needs us as if without us God cannot get His work done! This is wrong theology! God does not need us. We need Him. It is always a privilege and the greatest honour to be allowed to serve and glorify Him by what we do, but many times we do them haphazardly and imperfectly. God is gracious to not only save us but also call us to serve Him. Therefore serve Him well and give Him our very best. It is the least we can do for God. Stop the murmuring, complaining and boasting.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**Monday:** 1 Samuel 4:1-11; Deuteronomy 28:15, 25.

**Tuesday:** 1 Samuel 4:12-21; Jeremiah 7:12.

**Wednesday:** 1 Samuel 5:1-12; Psalm 115:1-11.

**Thursday:** 1 Samuel 6:1-12; Hebrews 9:14-28.

**Friday:** 1 Samuel 6:13-21; Hebrews 12:28-29.

**Analysis**

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 5:1-5	
1 Samuel 6:6-12	

**Discussion Questions**

1. How did God demonstrate His power in the temple of Dagon?

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2. What is the significance of Dagon falling down before the ark of the Covenant?

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3. Why did God break off the head and arms of Dagon the second time it fell prostrate before the ark?

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4. Why did God afflict the Philistines with such severe plagues which caused so much pain and deaths?

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5. Why did the Philistines move the ark of the Covenant from one city to the next?

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