

Our God Is God

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[0 : 00] Go ahead and open your Bibles, if you would, 1 Samuel chapter 5, and we're going to, believe it or not, take the entire chapter tonight.

Let me go ahead and read the text. Not a very long chapter, 12 verses. Then the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

When the Philistines took the Ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, falling on its face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord.

So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. That's what you have to do with gods, you know, sometimes you put them back up. And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, falling on its face to the ground before the Ark of the Lord.

The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold. Only Dagon's torso was left to it. Therefore, neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

[1 : 26] But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and he ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory.

And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, The Ark of God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our God.

Therefore, they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines and said, What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?

And they answered, Let the Ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath. So they carried the Ark of God of Israel away. So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the Lord was against the city with the very great destruction.

And he struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them. Therefore, they sent the Ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the Ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought the Ark of God of Israel to us to kill us and our people.

[2 : 35] So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, Send away the Ark of God of Israel and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people.

For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city, and the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men who did not die were stricken with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

That means it was a great cry. Big cry. It didn't mean that they started praying to God, all right? Just this big cry, and everybody could hear it. I've entitled the message tonight, Our God is God.

Our God is God. And that really, I think, sums up the real message. Now, I would admit to you that the people of the Philistines, they thought the same thing.

Our God is God. And yet, of course, some very obvious things take place in this chapter, in this passage, that reveal that really our God, the God of the Bible, is God.

[3 : 46] One of my favorite movies, and I love classic movies, old movies. One of my favorite ones is The Ten Commandments. You know, I'm talking about Cecil B. DeMille's version of it.

Charlton Heston, he's Moses. Made a perfect Moses, didn't he? And who played Pharaoh? Anybody know? Yul Brynner. All right, you're very familiar with this movie. Seen it many, many times.

And there are some great lines in this movie, all right? And you might, if you've seen this movie a number of times, you might already be guessing the line that I'm going to refer to. It's a great line. Spoken by Yul Brynner, the Pharaoh. He's Ramses, of course. And it's what he said after his armies had been destroyed, when God brought the Red Sea back together, and he goes back to

the palace, and he sits on his throne.

And what does he say? Moses God is God. It's a great line in the movie. Now, of course, that's just a line from a movie, right?

[4 : 52] And someone created that. Someone wrote that for Yul Brynner to say, and for a fact, and so forth, even though it's a great line. We don't, of course, have any, anywhere, don't find anywhere in the Exodus account in the Bible that would even suggest that the Egyptian Pharaoh said such a thing, obviously.

In fact, we don't have anywhere in Scripture that even suggests that the Pharaoh of Egypt thought such a thing, that the God of Moses is God. And we certainly do not have any record in or out of the Bible that suggests that the Egyptians suddenly became Yahweh worshipers because of what happened there at the Red Sea, really, really what happened there even before that, when God sent the plagues upon Egypt and so forth.

Rather, they continued in their idolatry. They really did. We know that historically as well as biblically. And continued in their idolatry just as much as before.

And regardless of the overwhelming evidence that God, the God of the Hebrews, is the one true God, they still believed in other gods.

I mean, think of the overwhelming evidence. The ten plagues, each one intensifying, and each one addressing some godly Egyptians we're worshiping, and ultimately, even the judgment of Pharaoh himself, who was considered a god, and his son that was considered a god.

[6 : 34] The pillar of fire and cloud that led Israel, protected Israel, came between Israel and the Egyptian army, the parting of the Red Sea, of course, and then the destruction of the Egyptian army, their mighty army.

Overwhelming evidence, right? That the God of the Bible is God, that Moses' God is God. And yet they still did not believe. In fact, they continued to believe in false gods.

Now, we have a similar lesson here in our story. In fact, we could say that this theme, or this idea, or truth, that our God is God, we could say that that really is the overarching story of the entire Bible.

God proving himself, down through history, to be the one and only God. And that he is not like all other man-made gods. He's not like them in any shape or form, any fashion.

He's unique. He is not something tangible, you know, like stone, or wood, or some other material.

[7 : 50] He does not need anything. Our God doesn't need anything. And nor does he need anyone. He didn't need anyone like Dagon needed to have somebody lift him up.

Now, our God demands worship, but he doesn't need it. Don't ever get the idea that somehow God is completed by our worship. God is complete. God doesn't need anything.

He's perfect. There's nothing that could be added to him. And so he demands our worship, but he doesn't have to have it. He doesn't need it. In fact, in order for man to even know him, to know God, the one true God, or to know anything about him, in order for that to have happened, he had to condescend.

Think about it. He had to accommodate himself to our kind of level of existence to reveal himself. He took the initiative to do that.

To accommodate himself to our kind of sphere of perception. Otherwise, we would never know God, never know anything about God, the one true God.

[8 : 57] We would be worshiping other man-made gods, just like all other civilizations have throughout the history of man. All right. Now, we have to go back to get to our story and to understand the lesson about God, his uniqueness.

We really have to go back and grab some of the story from the previous chapter. Israel, remember, went out to battle against the Philistines at a place called Aphek.

Aphek. Aphek is a city in Philistia, the land of the Philistines, one of several key cities in Philistia. Philistia is an area of today, modern-day Gaza, from just kind of west of Jerusalem and all the way southward along the coast.

That was Philistia in that day. And so, how did the battle go? You remember from last week? Not so good. Not so good.

The Israelites were defeated and 4,000 were destroyed. 4,000 were killed. And so, remember, someone came up with the harebrained idea to go to Shiloh and get the Ark of the Covenant and bring the Ark here and have the Ark go out and lead us into battle.

[10:19] Great idea. I mean, you know, the Ark of God has power, right? I mean, it has power. Great power. I mean, you know, I've seen the movie Indiana Jones and the Lost Ark.

You know, it has great power. They must have seen that movie. Well, no, they didn't see that movie. But here's the idea. You know, just put the Ark out there in front of the battle lines and the Philistine soldiers are going to just, you know, kind of burn up or melt away or get struck by lightning or get sucked up into heaven, just like in the movie.

If you've seen it. If you've seen it. You know, that's probably what would happen, right? I mean, it's the Ark of the Covenant. The movie was correct. I mean, Spielberg is a Jew, so he must know, you know, how the Ark works and things like that.

Well, you know, that's ridiculous. But what happened, rather? Well, the battle was fought at a place called Ebenezer and 30,000 Israelite men were killed in battle.

Remember, we're just kind of drawing from the story in the last chapter. Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's sons, also killed in the battle, just as God had prophesied.

[11:40] And then news gets back to Eli and he falls backward on his chair and breaks his neck and he dies. Phinehas' wife, her name was Mrs. Phinehas, and she also died.

She was pregnant. And as soon as she heard the news, she went into labor and had the child. And before she died, she named him, really gave him a name that tells the whole story.

Ichabod. The glory has departed. Now, the tragedy of all tragedies, of course, is the Ark of God has now been captured by the Philistines.

Okay? And, you know, what's happened then? Israel's God has been captured. Right? No, don't say right. That's what they thought.

They thought, we've captured Israel's God. And so that brings us to chapter 5. And the Philistines now have the Ark of God in their possession.

[12:37] And what do they think about that? And what do they do with that? And what happens to them as a result is kind of the subject of the chapter. Now, the first thing I want you to see is what I want to call a prideful conjugation.

I don't mean conjugating verbs. I mean pairing something together, putting something together. A very prideful conjugation. The Philistines conjugated, in a sense, two gods together.

That's what they did when they got the Ark of the Covenant, brought it back to their hometown or their particular city called Ashdod.

They joined two gods together. And that's what they did. Look at verse 1 again. Then the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. That was a principal city in Philistia, kind of the northern part of it.

When the Philistines took the Ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. Now, we know that story, you know, but isn't that a little strange that they would do that?

[13:48] That they would take the Ark of God and put it in the temple beside Dagon. That's odd. Strange.

Needs some explanation. Why not put the Ark in their, say, their treasure house? I mean, it's made out of gold. They could melt it down.

It's worth a lot. Why not put it there? It's a treasure. Or, why not put it in some place, some very secure place for safekeeping?

Put it under guard. I mean, it's very valuable to the Israelites. They're going to want it back. Maybe try to get it back. Why not put it there? It seems logical that if you capture this thing, this gold box, you know, it's made of gold, that you would put it someplace where it would be safe, someplace where it would be secured, or you would melt it down and use the gold for the making of your own idols and so forth, whatever.

Why put it in the temple? In their temple? In their place of worship? It's really a logical question.

[15:07] And I don't know if you've ever thought about it as you've read the story and thought about the story. Why did they put it in the temple next to their God? Now, the clue to that, I think, is found in chapter 4.

In fact, let's go back to chapter 4, verse 5. And just listen. This is some ground we've already covered, but this helps us understand why they did what they did. And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.

All right? So they're bringing the ark for the battle. Now, when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean? Then

they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp.

Now, listen to verse 7. So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God has come into the camp. God is coming to the camp.

And they said, Woe to us, for such a thing has never happened before. Woe to us. Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

[16:17] Now, think about this. What are they saying here? They're saying that the ark of the covenant, the ark of God, is God.

It's just as much an idol as Dagon was. They associated the deity with the object.

In this case, a gold box. Right? A gold box. And so, what did they do? They think, now God is in the camp. The same God that did what happened to the Egyptians and so forth.

And so, now God is here. They associated with the box. And so, what did they do? Well, look further in chapter 4, starting with verse 9.

Be strong, they said. Conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines. Don't be afraid of this God, is basically what they're saying. That you do not become servants of the Hebrews as they have been to you.

[17:21] Conduct yourselves like men and fight. Right? Now, God, their God is coming to the camp. That is, that ark is there. Their idol is on the premises. You know, they said, we've never seen this happen before.

Basically, because you didn't bring your idols out into the battlefield. They had theirs back at the temple. But the Hebrews brought their God out to the battle. And so, the Philistines are terrified. Because again, they associate the deity with the object. With that gold box. And so, they said, we're in a fight. And so, the Philistines fought.

And Israel was defeated and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter and there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers. Also, the ark of God was captured.

That's why I said earlier, you know, they captured Israel's God. Because that's what they thought. They had captured the very God of Israel.

[18:19] Right? They now have the golden box. And to them, the golden box is just as much God as the stone statue of Dagon in their temple.

And where did they put Israel's God? They put him in their temple. They put him right next to Dagon. Two gods are better than one. You just got to put these together here and now we're doubly strong.

Dagon and Israel's God and they're in league with one. They put the two together. So here's the lesson of course and it's a very simple one. First, the lesson for the people in this day.

Israel's God, his power, not connected to a box, not connected to any golden box or to any stone statue or any piece of wood.

Right? We know that, don't we? Well, what about the lesson for us today? Well, our God and his power, not connected with, say for example, a replica of the cross whether it's made out of metal or wood and hang around your neck or on top of a building or hanging on the wall or wherever you might have it.

[19:34] The power and presence and the person of God is not connected with some replica of the cross. Don't let it be, you know, somehow associated with a way where you receive comfort from the cross.

It has nothing to do with it. Or a Bible. I kind of covered this ground last week. Or any religious object. Our God and his power is not connected with any church building.

So, you know, some people say, well, I just want to go into the church. I feel safe there. See, feel closer to God. You be careful about that. God's not confined to a building like this or to a metal cross or to a picture of Jesus or to a Bible or any other religious object.

He's not connected to a preacher. Not that you think that about me, but I've had the impression sometimes when I would visit people. And so, you know, God, his power, who he is, his presence, the things he's doing and going to do, any comfort that we can have in him are not connected with any tangible object.

Even, not even a kind of formulaic prayer. I want to be very careful there because prayer does have power in it. But it's not some formula of prayer that we speak, you know, and recite from rote memory that is the key.

[21 : 03] That's sometimes, if we're not careful, that's associating some power in the prayer itself. It's God. It's only God. All right, so a kind of prayerful conjugation, and we're kind of guilty of that.

We'll pair things together. You know, I mentioned, you know, a cross or a Bible or an angel figurine or religious object of some kind or church building. Sometimes we'll even just combine one or more of those things with our faith in the invisible sovereign God and somehow, you know, the combination of the two brings us confidence or security or great blessing, we think.

And we just, it's just not the right way. So a prideful conjugation. Second, a pitiful conclusion. The Philistines made a pitiful conclusion about the tragic things that befell their beloved God, Dagon. They came to the wrong conclusion about these things. And these things that happened to Dagon are kind of humorous to us. You know, I can remember, you know, I think Matthew in particular, our oldest boy, he just loved this story.

Talked about it all the time, about Dagon falling down and all that kind of stuff. And, but they made a very pitiful conclusion about God in general.

[22 : 27] And really, two pitiful things are revealed here. One, what kind of God needs to be picked up when he falls down? And the very belief in that, thought of that, acceptance of that, pitiful.

I mean, are these people stupid? Are they? I mean, they put the ark next to Dagon, and the next morning the priests come in, and their beloved God has fallen over on his face.

I mean, to us it's humorous. Now, what do they conclude about that? I don't know. There's nothing in the biblical record here. Perhaps we could say some things, or come to some conclusion, make a few guesses about that.

Maybe they thought an earthquake took place overnight. You know, and the idol just fell over because of an earthquake. I don't know how they explained it. You know, maybe it was the cleaning ladies who worked that night, and they're moving a little bit to dust it, and they put it back, but they didn't put it back quite right, and it's kind of teetering, and it falls over, and I'm sure, you know, that the cleaning service at the Dagon Temple had something to answer for that.

I don't know. So, whatever explanation they came up with, what did they do? Well, they picked up their god, placed him right back into his place.

[23 : 54] I mean, it just makes perfect sense. He couldn't get up on his own, and so they put him back in his place. And what happens? Well, you know the story. The next morning, Dagon is back on his face, but this time he fell kind of over the threshold of wherever he was placed, and he fell over, and this time his head and his hands are broken off.

Broken off. Completely severed. His hands are broken from the body. all that's left is the torso, the trunk of the idol. So, no ears to hear with, no eyes to see, no mouth to speak with, no hands to help with, you know, to do things.

And so, how could they believe in a god like that? We're just kind of dumbfounded by that. How could they believe in a god like that? A god that has to be helped by human hands. Can't move on his own.

A god that cannot pick himself up when he falls down. A god who cannot see, cannot hear, cannot speak, cannot do anything. Blessed with his hands. It's pitiful. But it gets worse than that because there's a second thing that's pitiful in their conclusions about their god and really the one true god as well.

When he falls the second time, I don't know if you noticed this, when he falls that second time and is effectively destroyed, by the way, why did they not credit that to Yahweh?

[25 : 28] Now, they say a little something about it later on. You know, just because the mere presence of the ark is causing them all kinds of trouble.

But why did they not credit what happened to Dagon to Yahweh God? Because what did they do? They revered the threshold.

Can you believe that? That's what happens. Verse 5, Therefore, neither the priests of Dagon nor any who came into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon to this day.

Unbelievable. I mean, they're worshipping Dagon, now they're worshipping the threshold that he fell on and was broken on. Instead, I mean, instead of saying, you know, there's something about this god, the true god of Israel.

Weird. And I wonder, though, if we make some kind of application, how many times God has done something in our lives, something great, something gracious, something powerful in our lives, and instead of giving him the credit, we take the credit.

[26 : 40] Or we give the credit, give it to chance. It's just something that happened. Or, you know, to look for some natural explanation.

We have kind of a tendency to say, well, you know, it just happened this way, some explanation. All right, so a pitiful conjugation, excuse me, prideful and pitiful conclusion.

Then one more tonight, and we'll be finished. A painful confusion. Painful confusion. The Philistines confused Yahweh God with all other gods in the world, specifically their own.

He's no different, basically, than Dagon. No different. Dagon is our God, and now Yahweh is our God also. He belongs to us now because we have him.

Because he's in that box. And so he'll work for us now, and bless us now along with Dagon, and we're doubly blessed now. We have Dagon and the God of Israel, and he then will have a place in our temple and be as one of our other gods.

[27 : 54] They made a confusion. And it was a very painful one, because what happened? Well, something very painful happened. Look at verse 6.

I'm not going to detail everything in this part of the chapter, but I want to read through it again. But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod.

There's kind of a poetic justice here. Dagon lost his hands. God's hand is on the people. And he ravaged them, struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory.

So not just the city, but all that region, kind of the northern part of Felicity. And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, you know, the ark of God of Israel must not remain with us.

For his hand is harsh toward us, and Dagon our God. Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of Philistines and said, what shall we do? What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?

[28 : 59] And they answered, let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath. Let's send it to another city. You know, we don't really like people down in Gath. They're mostly giants, and so we'll just send the ark down there.

And so they carry the ark of God of Israel away. And so it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction, and he struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them.

Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron, and I don't need to read the rest of it, Ekron didn't want any part of that. I want any part of that. You can go on with the story, and we'll find out next week in chapter six, what they finally did with the ark.

But God sent a very painful judgment to these people. And, you know, I really kind of need to mention something here, and it's kind of touchy, but most of the modern translations use the word tumors.

tumors. In fact, every modern translation I looked at uses the word, translates with the word tumors. Now, the King James has the word emirads.

[30 : 15] Emerads. And who knows what that is? Well, actually, a little study can find out that emirads is an old, old English word, 16th century word, medical term, for certain medical malady that I'm going to explain here in just a minute.

The Hebrew word is the word tekora, which means to burn. To burn. And we know that means to burn the body.

All right, so it's something that burns. Now, so, most Hebrew language scholars tell us that the word refers not to tumors, but to hemorrhoids.

I'm serious. I'm not telling a joke in my sermon. Hemorrhoids. Now, why the modern translations don't use that word, well, I guess we could guess why they don't.

And in a kind of stretch of it, hemorrhoid is kind of a two. But that's what these were. In fact, you'll love this.

[31 : 27] The Latin vulgate. Vulgate is the fourth century Latin translation of the Bible, translated in the fourth century. And the vulgate translates verse six this way.

Now, get a load of this. He smote them in the more secret parts of their posteriors. I can't put that. I mean, it's terrible.

It's not funny, really, is it? Because this is very severe. In fact, it says here, toward the end of the chapter, that many died. Not just suffered, but died.

We're talking about major problems with hemorrhoids, if you die from them. And so, this is God's judgment.

Because, you see, they were confused, they'd confused something, painfully confused. God is not like any other God. Not like all the other gods.

[32 : 29] And, therefore, God, and this is the lesson the Israelites had to learn as well, God will not be used. You can't just take that box and think somehow that you can manipulate certain blessings because you have God there in that box.

God will not be used. Rather, and here's the lesson that we must always learn and continue to learn. God will not be used. Man, rather, submits himself to God's use. To God's use. Always. Always. to God's to to to to to to!