

1 Samuel 4-5

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[0 : 00] So we've come as far as 1 Samuel chapter 4.!

We've seen Samuel, well I think the author has deliberately wanted us to compare in our minds Samuel to Eli and to his sons.

We've seen Eli presented as an undiscerning priest. He couldn't understand, he couldn't discern what was going on in Hannah's mind.

But we've also seen that he's an incapable parent, which is to say his children have not, they're not obedient to the ways and Eli was rebuked for failing to discipline them appropriately.

That is Hophni and Phinehas, his children, and they're blatantly sinning against God and despising his offering. One thing that I would just like to bring to your attention, in 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 17, it's translated as, The sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for the men despised the offering of the Lord.

[1 : 28] And what I thought was interesting and noteworthy is that the near King James, and possibly the King James as well, I'm not sure, translates it as, The sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.

Which is to say, they caused Israel to hate worship. And I thought, wow, that's a hard thing, isn't it? I mean, it's one thing, I think, to despise God, but it's another thing to make other people do that. I haven't looked at the Hebrew to know which is more accurate. It may be there's an element of both, but I thought that was worth bringing out. But this was serious stuff. So serious that God sent a man of God to Eli.

And given how rare the word of the Lord was in these days, that in itself is noteworthy. The fact that God sent a man of God. He's not called a prophet, because actually that term hadn't been coined yet.

Samuel was the first of the prophets. But he is, in effect, a prophet. So, in the context of this wickedness and of Eli's progeny, then we see the young Samuel.

[2 : 39] He didn't know the voice of God yet, but he was open to hearing it. And I think it's to Eli's credit that he guided Samuel to hear and understand. Now, we read, just to conclude last week, chapter 3, we read there from verse 19.

It says that, Now Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and he let none of his words fail. That is, God let none of Samuel's words fail. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord.

And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And really, the very next sentence should be connected as well, which says, chapter 4, verse 1, So the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

And that really brings us to a close for now, talking about Samuel. Because he also fades into the background as we now go on a bit of a three-chapter excursion.

It gives a little bit of the background, a little bit, it gives us the background to Samuel's early ministry. And Samuel won't come back in until the end of chapter 7.

[3 : 53] And what we're going to read are these, well, it's an unprecedented event. It is the capturing of the Ark of God, the most holy box, the most holy item that exists.

It's unprecedented. An incredible defeat. But what we're going to see is, even in the context of that defeat, God cannot be defeated. And we'll see him continue to demonstrate his power and authority over people and events.

Exciting. That's the grabber. Right. So verse 1 of chapter 4, reading on from where we left off. So, now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle, and they camped at Ebenezer, while the Philistines camped at Aphek.

Well, we're used to reading about the Philistines. Oh yeah, those guys, the Philistines. I heard of them. Who are they? Who are they? Well, we first see them in Genesis chapter 10, which shouldn't be a surprise, because Genesis chapter 10 is the table of nations.

And that is how all of the nations of the world descended from Noah, through Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And what we read there in Genesis 10 is that they are descended through a chap called Mitzrayim.

[5 : 14] Who's that? Well, he's also known as Egypt. Mitzrayim is usually translated as Egypt throughout the text, actually. So they're sons of Egyptians. Now, what's the land we're talking about?

Well, the land of the Philistines is defined as within the border of the promised land, actually. I'm going to whiz through quite a bit of this, because there's quite a lot of background. But for your notes, Exodus 23, 31 makes that quite clear, where it declares that the boundary of Israel is from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines.

The Sea of the Philistines, that's the Mediterranean Sea, because they were a coastal people over there on the west of Israel. Now, Joshua 13, 1 to 3.

I will just read that real quick. Joshua chapter 13, verses 1 through 3. It says this. Now, Joshua was old and advanced in years when the Lord said to him, You are old and advanced in years.

Cheers. And a very large amount of the land remains to be possessed. This is the land that remains. All the regions of the Philistines and all those of the Geshurites, from the Shehor, which is east of Egypt, even as far as the border of Ekron to the north, it is counted as Canaanite, the five governors of the Philistines, the Gazite, the Ashtorite, the Ashkelonite, the Gittite, the Ekronite.

[6 : 39] Five governors, five lords, five rulers of the Philistines. And actually, we're going to talk about all of those today. So, what do we learn in the text?

We learn that it wasn't captured under Joshua. That's the key point. Part of the Promised Land, not captured under Joshua. And there are these five key areas.

Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, Ekron. Okay? Got it. Now, another key text on this is in Judges, which I'll also read, because this is important. Judges chapter 1 verse...

No, Judges chapter 3 verse 1 through 4. This is what we read. It says, Now, these are the nations that the Lord left to test Israel by them, that is, all the Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan, only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war.

Those who had not experienced it previously, these nations are, the five governors of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-Haman to as far as Lebo-Hamath, they were left to test Israel by them to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he had commanded their fathers through Moses.

[8 : 03] Why are the Philistines allowed and why are they left in the Promised Land? Because Joshua didn't get around to it. Joshua didn't complete the mission quite. And because God wanted to leave them in order to maintain a test on Israel to see whether they would be obedient to Moses.

And we'll see how that goes today. So that's the Philistines. Now, taking from there up to today, in 1 Samuel, we've also read through the whole book of Judges, and we've seen how Shamgar, Jephthah, and then Samson all fought against the Philistines.

Samson, you'll remember, was the guy who struck a major blow against the Philistines, and in fact the house of Dagon, in Gaza. And Gaza was one of those five.

And actually what we read there in Judges was that all the governors of the Philistines were there, along with around 3,000 others. So this was a massive deal, and it probably has been, it's probably quite recent.

It's hard to put together a chronology of Judges and Samuel. It's even possible that they overlapped. But certainly this was very, very recent, and the Philistines would have been smarting from it.

[9 : 18] So, and then we come here to chapter 4 in 1 Samuel. This is the first time we read of the Philistines since then.

Right, enough of that. Now, God was with Israel. God promised them victory, and I think this is what God was getting at when he said, I'm going to test Israel to see if they're obedient.

Because if they're obedient, then they'll be victorious. Deuteronomy chapter 28 is all about this, and it's well worth a good read. Verse 7 of that chapter says, The Lord will cause your enemies who rise

up against you to be defeated by you.

They will go out against you one way, and they will flee at your presence seven ways. So there's a promise. There's a conditional promise if you guys are obedient to the law.

And again, chapter 28 also talks about the consequences for disobedience. So that's the Philistines and the context and a bit about what the Lord is doing with them.

[10:22] Now we look at these two places, Ebenezer and Aphek. Aphek's quite far north. It's actually roughly 20-odd miles west of Shiloh.

And Ebenezer is, I don't know. We're going to read about another Ebenezer in chapter 7. I'm pretty sure it's a different Ebenezer, because that one is quite far north. And what we're going to see is that Ebenezer and Aphek are within shouting distance of each other in our text.

So I think it probably has to be somewhere else, and I lost interest trying to figure that out. Verse 2. So, then the Philistines drew up in battle formation to meet Israel.

When the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about 4,000 men on the battlefield. When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?

Let's take the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh, that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies. Well, what can we say about this?

[11:32] I think, first of all, I'll say it is good that they are asking, Why has this, why has God allowed us to be defeated?

That is a good question to ask. Because the law says, if we're walking in obedience, we'll be victorious. And there's other examples where this kind of thing has happened before.

If you remember Joshua, after the battle of Jericho, there was that guy, Achan, who pinched some things from Jericho, and everything was supposed to be destroyed. And then they get defeated in the battle of Ai.

And Joshua tears his clothes, like, why have you done it? And the Lord says to Joshua, Stand up! Why is it that you fall on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them.

Anyway, and you can read that for yourself in Joshua 7. So it's right to ask that question, and the Lord answers there. There's been sin.

[12:31] And, you know, I thought about this, and I thought, I think there's a little point to ponder in terms of application here, because I think sometimes we can think that our sins, that don't really affect other people.

Those secret sins, they're just really between me and God. Does it? It doesn't really affect others. Well, actually, 1 Corinthians 5 gives an example of sin, sexual sin between two people, when Paul argues that the church should have taken action.

He says, a little leaven, leavens the whole lump. And, I think there are sins that we allow and tolerate in our lives and hearts, and they do impact others, either in that they, they reduce our ability to minister, or, I think in many ways.

So anyway, a little thing I thought that's worth us pondering on as we go through. Now, I should also say this, though, that it would be superstitious error for us, you and me, to believe today that the battles and the problems that we face are caused by disobedience, and, consequently, avoided through obedience.

That ain't how life works. Israel had a conditional promise, a conditional covenant. The promise to the church is different, right?

[13:56] We are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, we are permanently saved, and we're in the grace of God. That's not to say that God won't chastise us and correct us, which Hebrews has a lot to say, and sometimes it ain't too pleasant.

Take the word sometimes out of that sentence. But, you know, going into this would be a big, big tangent. I just want to say in passing that we ought not to think in those terms.

Why has this thing happened to me? I must be sinning. Or, why has that thing happened to so and so? They must be sinning. No, no, no. That's not how things work. So, okay, so they asked a sensible question and then they came up with a terrible, terrible answer.

The ark. Let us take the ark of the Lord into the battle so that he may save us. If you're reading the 95 or 1977 edition of NASB, it will say it.

It will save us. Why does it say that? Well, because Hebrew doesn't have a neuter pronoun. It has only male and female. Masculine, feminine, sorry, I should say.

[15:04] It has only masculine and feminine nouns. There's no neuter gender. So, actually, it does say he because that would mean inanimate he as well. So, actually, it's ambiguous. It could mean they'll think that bringing the ark will mean the ark will save them.

It could mean they think bringing the ark will mean God will save them. That's why. The moot point, really. So, let's talk about this ark. If you want to read about its design, then you would turn to Exodus 25.

The summary is it's a wooden box. It's about a meter long, about 70 centimeters tall and wide. So, think of it as like a big trunk. But it's covered inside and out with gold.

Beautiful, shiny, pure gold. It has a ring on each foot because it's too holy to touch. You can't be touching that. You need poles through those rings to carry it lifted high up.

And there is also a lid, if you can call it that, which is called the mercy seat. This is a solid gold piece and it has two cherubim of hammered gold on it.

[16:13] And this is the key verse there, Exodus 25, 22. God said there, between the cherubim that is, I will meet with you and from above the atoning cover, or mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about every commandment that I will give you for the sons of Israel.

Incredible. That is where God had said, I will meet with you. And that's not to say that it is God. It is to say this is my chosen place.

such an incredible holy item. Nobody ever saw it. Once a year, one man, the high priest, would see it on the day of atonement.

Nobody else ever saw it. Numbers four details how they would pack down the tabernacle. You know, during the wilderness wanderings, the tabernacle was kind of like a tent. It was a portable tent that they would move.

And they had these instructions for how you pack it down. And, you know, they'd go in with the sheep. They'd take the veil and they would cover over the ark. They wouldn't see it. Ever. Except once a year.

[17:23] And the only people who were even permitted to do that were the Kohathites. One family from Levi. And God says, they shall not come in to see the holy objects even for a moment or they will die.

Numbers four, 20. I hope I've made the point this is an incredibly, incredibly, holy, precious object. But again, not the presence of God.

It is a symbol of the presence of God. And Israel thought, let's grab that thing up and take it out into the battle. Well, I've told you already, victory in war is predicated on obedience.

And this is an example of disobedience. So we can probably predict the outcome. Let's read on.

Verse four. So the people sent men to Shiloh and from there they carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Armies who was enthroned above the cherubim and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the Ark of the Covenant of God.

And as the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was coming into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, what does this noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?

[18:39] Then they understood that the Ark of the Lord had come into the camp. And so the Philistines were afraid for they said, God has come into the camp. And they said, woe to us for nothing like this has ever happened before.

Woe to us. Who will save us from the hands of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. Take courage and be men, Philistines, or you will become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been slaves to you.

So be men and fight. Hoorah. I want you to see that there is considerable faith being exercised here.

They really believe, faith, believe, same thing, that this gold covered box is going to change the battle's outcome. They really believe it.

There's a great shout as the ark enters the camp. So they really believe it. They have faith and their faith is connected to the true and living God.

[19 : 47] Yahweh. There is great religious fervour. There is shouting. There is rejoicing. Singing. Faith. Faith is good, right?

So what's the problem? Here's the thing. Faith, faith per se, which means by itself, faith by itself is not valuable. Actually, all practitioners of all religions have some things that they believe and believe as faith.

Faith, belief. It means the same thing. And so faith per se is not the thing. And so when we see Christian churches with huge apparent amounts of faith, loads of joy and loud music and excitement and we believe God's going to do great things.

Is God definitely pleased? Are these people definitely saved even? They're singing songs about Jesus. Well, my point is only that we don't know because faith per se is not the thing.

It's faith, believing the right things is the key. Believing the right things. And Israel is outworking faith in a way that is disobedient to God.

[21 : 03] Their faith isn't in what God has said in the law of Moses. And our faith needs to be in what God has said in the word of God. We must be careful how and where we put our faith.

So, and then we see this reaction from the Philistines. You know, and again, they're exercising faith as well. They are, you know, some generations away from the Exodus.

So they've only heard about it and they believe it. They know what's written and they've heard about it and they believe it. They've heard about this God Yahweh who's done great in awesome things in the past and they believe it. And at the same time they believe they can man up and that they can defeat God.

Well, interesting, isn't it? Now we have two sides both of whom are opposed to God. What's going to happen? Neither of these sides is aligned to the Lord.

The people of Israel, the people of Philistia. Well, verse 10 let's see what happens. So the Philistines fought. And Israel was defeated and every man fled to his tent and the defeat was very great for 30,000 foot soldiers of Israel fell.

[22 : 18] Moreover, the ark of God was taken and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. Well, Israel has taken courage.

They've exercised their faith and then they ironically face a far more severe blow. Seven and a half times more severe if you do the maths.

Well, let's read on. Verse 12. Now a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes torn and dust on his head.

When he came, behold, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road keeping watch because his heart was anxious about the ark of God. And the man came to give a report in the city and all the city cried out.

When Eli heard the noise of the outcry he said, what does the noise of this commotion mean? Then the man came hurriedly and told Eli. Now Eli was 98 years old and his eyes were fixed and he could not see.

[23 : 23] The man said to Eli, I am the one who came from the battle line. Indeed, I escaped from the battle line today. And he said, how are things, my son? Then the one who brought the news replied, Israel has fled before the Philistines and there has also been a great defeat among the people.

And your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are also dead and the ark of God has been taken. When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell off the seat backwards beside the gate and his neck was broken and he died for he was old and heavy.

And so, he judged Israel 40 years. Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was pregnant and about to give birth and when she heard the news that the ark of God had been taken and that her father-in-law and her husband had died, she knelt down and gave birth because her pains came upon her.

And about the time of her death, the women who were standing by her said to her, Do not be afraid for you have given birth to a son. But she did not answer or pay attention and she named the boy Ichabod saying, The glory has departed from Israel because the ark of God had been taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband, so she said, The glory has departed from Israel because the ark of God has been taken.

Wow. So this man of Benjamin comes from the battle line and he delivers four pieces of news to Eli, each of them increasingly grave.

[24 : 56] Israel has fled, Israel has suffered a great slaughter or a severe blow or a disaster, your two sons have been slain and then fourthly, and most grave of all, the ark of God has been taken.

And we can't help but recall that dreadful prophecy from 1 Samuel 2, 27, well, 1 Samuel 2, 34. This will be a sign to you which will come in regard to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, on the same day, both of them will die.

And of course, the whole prophecy is about how this is the consequence to you and your family and you will no longer have an old man. All will die before that time. Eli was anxious for the ark of God and I do wonder if he was anxious about that prophecy as well and whether this was the day it would come to pass.

And then we read about this chap, the birth of Ichabod. Kavod, or Kavod, is the word for glory. I don't even know this but in Hebrew, B and V is the same letter.

I guess very confusing. Kavod, Kavod. Ichabod. Kavod is glory and then the prefix that's attached to it is just an E.

[26 : 15] It could be a negation, not as in there is no glory or it could be a question, where? Where is the glory? So Ichabod either means where is the glory or it means there is no glory.

Now Ichabod, he doesn't actually show up in the narrative again. He would of course be a priest as the son of Phinehas. and therefore he's in the line of course.

And I think for the duration of his lifetime his name is going to recall this dreadful event. The only other thing we can really say about him is that he has at least one older brother which we'll read about later in the book.

And of course bearing in mind the curse on the line he won't live to be an old man. So this is a massive massive blow.

The people of Israel have gone from this extreme religious fervour in the morning extreme confidence it's going to be great to a state of utter dejection and loss.

[27 : 26] The priests are dead. The ark is gone. Tens of thousands dead. Massive massive blow.

And the ark is gone. Now the prevailing wisdom was that the battlefield was where the spiritual battles between gods would be manifested.

That was sort of the pagan thinking of the day. If God A's army can defeat God B's army then that means God A is stronger than God B. What's happened here?

Well the pagan god Dagon has defeated the Jewish god Yahweh and the implication then certainly in the minds of the Philistines if not also in the minds of the Jews is that Dagon is stronger.

Yahweh was stronger than the gods of Egypt but Dagon was stronger than Yahweh. that is the dreadful situation that we are pondering as we come to the end of the chapter but God is not like that.

[28 : 34] God is omnipotent as we shall see. So let's read on in chapter 5 verse 1. Now the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and placed it beside Dagon. So let's talk about this guy this god Dagon. A false god venerated by the ancient Middle East because there's been a lot of speculation as to what he was the god of.

Is he a fish god? Is he a god of grain and agriculture? Is he a storm god? I don't know. I don't know. Do your own research if you're interested. I couldn't figure it out. The point is he was, I think there's two salient points to make. One is the worship of Dagon precedes this episode by a long time.

Possibly as early as third millennium BC is Dagon's name found. And in spite of the blow that Samson struck against Dagon in Gaza, and we're going to read about three other cities.

[29 : 51] So that's four of the five being very embarrassed. In spite of these blows, actually Dagon remained an object of worship right up until Jesus' day, if not later.

So a big and major figure in the pagan pantheon. And the ark is placed in his temple. The ark is placed in the temple of Dagon and most likely the picture there would be that there was a towering statue of Dagon looking down on this little box because bear in mind it's only 70 centimetres or so tall.

The picture being Dagon beat Yahweh. Well, let's see what happens eh? Verse 3, when the Ashtoreites got up early the next day behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord.

So they took Dagon and set him back in his place. But when they got up early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. And the head of

Dagon and both palms of his hands cut off on the threshold.

Only the torso of Dagon was left. For that reason, neither the priests of Dagon nor any who entered Dagon's house step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. So, the statue fell over once.

[31 : 24] Maybe it was just a little earthquake or something. You know, let's not read anything to it, the fact that the statue is face down before Yahweh. I'm sure it was just twice.

And with the head and hands cut off, there's no doubt now that this is supernatural. And we see God turning the tables. God permitted the capture of the ark.

It is a very precious and holy box, but it is just a thing. It's just an item. It isn't God, and it isn't God's presence. And this inanimate fake god Dagon is mocked.

It is mocked. And I thought to myself, we see quite a lot in the Bible of God mocking other gods, like loads. And I'm just going to give you a bunch of passages and then I'll just read one of them.

So Jeremiah 10 is a great example where the Lord mocks these gods which terrify the nations and yet they have to be fastened in place with nails. That's great, Jeremiah 10.

[32 : 29] And then they've got Psalm 115. That's the one where the psalmist talks about how they've got mouths but they can't talk, they've got eyes but they can't see, dumb blocks of wood.

And then you've got Isaiah 41, verse 23 and 24 which has got God mocking the false gods and he basically says, do something, do anything, good or evil, just do anything that we may fear.

And then of course we've got 1 Kings 18, which is Elijah, where he's mocking the priests of Baal. Hey, maybe your God's busy. Maybe he's asleep. Maybe he's relieving himself.

But my favourite is Isaiah 44. I probably don't have time to read all this. What a shame. Isaiah 44, you've got to read it, verse 9 through 20.

It's such a wheeze. But it basically talks about the ridiculousness of how a bloke will go into the woods or drop down a tree and half of it he'll cook his food over and the other half he'll fashion into a god and bow down to it.

[33 : 38] He'll bow down to it and pray, save me for you are my God. Duh. God's all a lie. In God's estimation, it's worthy of being mocked.

There is only one God who created everything and everything else is a lie. Then why are there false gods? Why are there, are humans by and large insane?

I'll let you answer that question. I think there's actually two aspects to this question. why are we as humans so prone to worshipping things that are not God?

Well, two aspects I suggest. One is Romans 1. Romans 1 talks about how if we are unwilling to honour God, then he will give us over to something else.

exactly how that works out, I don't know. I don't think that God causes sinful thoughts to come into people's minds. That's not God.

[34 : 44] But he does allow them, certainly, and gives them over. And to be fair, we do read about God sending a strong delusion, don't we? So there's an element of that. God will give people over.

People who have already made a decision, I don't want anything to do with God, God will give them over. You don't want to worship me? Okay, you can worship nonsense. Nonsense that you have to cut down in the forest and fix with nails.

But the other aspect is that there are in fact spiritual beings. There are spiritual beings. God created angels, which are immortal, supernatural beings. Satan is one of them.

The tempter of Adam and Eve right through to the end, where he's the great serpent of old. Satan lives the duration of the earth. And there seem to be many ranks of angelic enemies.

One thing I will read, because I think this is an interesting thing. The Bible doesn't talk much about this, but what it does share, you're like, oh, what? Wow. Daniel 10. Daniel 10 is, we read Daniel, he's been fasting and he's been in prayer for three weeks.

[35 : 52] He's in Babylon, he's fasting and praying, and then he has his visitation from an angel.

Verse 11 of Daniel chapter 10. The angel says, and he said to me, Daniel, you who are treasured, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand at your place, for I have now been sent to you.

And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was standing in my way for 21 days. Then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.

Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the latter days, because the vision pertains to the days still future. What are we reading here?

We are reading that we get this glimpse into the spiritual warfare that is taking place. Daniel's been praying and fasting for three weeks. This angel, this unnamed angel, was dispatched immediately, but he was withstood by this guy called the prince of Persia.

[37 : 21] A spiritual battle. And Michael, the archangel, comes by way of reinforcements, if you like, and only then is he able to break through and come to Daniel. You're like, wow.

I mean, I don't know what we make of that, except this, for the purposes of our study today. There is a spiritual realm. There is a spiritual realm. And I have no doubt that oftentimes there is a false spiritual power behind these pagan gods that is deceiving many.

So there's two aspects. God gives over to a lie. And there is a genuine spiritual power. Now it's obviously completely subservient to God.

God is all-powerful, omnipotent. So, summarizing Dagon then, he's a false god. There's a chunk, there's a block of wood in the temple, carved maybe to look like a fish guy, I don't know, standing there in the temple, but it has no more power than a block of wood.

The Philistines, again, they are the sons of Ham. They are the sons of a family who knew God. And at some point in their history, they turned them back on God.

[38 : 33] They knew God and they chose to forget the true God and God gave them over to a lie. chapter 5, verse 6.

Now, the hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, and he made them feel devastated and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories.

Oh, boy. Tumors. Different Bible translations put different things here, and the confusion is compounded by the fact that there's even two different Hebrew words, depending on which version you're reading.

to save you a little bit of knowledge, I think that here's the thing to realize, it was embarrassing. It was so uncomfortable to the scribes that first of all, they changed the Hebrew word at some point to make it a little bit less embarrassing.

And then when the Septuagint translators came along, which is 3rd, 2nd century BC, something like that, I forget when, before Christ anyway, they were translating the Hebrew into Greek, they were super uncomfortable with this.

[39 : 45] And so they changed it entirely to say, God broke out against them in their ships. That's not what it says. Or later, God broke out against them in their homes.

Still not what it says. That's not what it says. Tumors. Yeah. Piles. Hemorrhoids. I think that's what the King James says.

Emeralds. Emeralds. Yeah. So you get the picture. Let's move on. Let's just say it was a loathsome and embarrassing condition.

Embarrassing even to the people reading about it, let alone the people who were experiencing it.

Verse 7. When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us because his hand is severe on us and on Dagon our God.

You think. So they sent word and gathered all the governors of the Philistines to them and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they said, Have the ark of the God of Israel brought to Gath.

[40 : 54] That's where the Gittites are. That's another one of the cities of the Philistines. So they took the ark of the God of Israel away. After they had taken it away, the hand of the Lord was against the city, creating a very great panic.

And he struck the people of the city from the young to the old so that tumors broke out on them. So they sent the ark of God to Ekron, city number three.

The Ekronites are there. And the ark of God came to Ekron and the Ekronites cried out saying, They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us to kill us and our people. Therefore they sent word and gathered all the governors of the Philistines and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place so that it will not kill us and our people.

For there was a deadly panic throughout the city. The hand of God was very heavy there and the people who did not die were struck with tumors and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

So the Philistines don't even know what to do. They were feeling super chuffed with themselves. We beat the Israelites and they've stolen their God and our God is greater.

[42 : 07] They're singing all these things and well, God has turned that into mourning and suffering and embarrassment. It goes bad on Ashdod, they send it to Gath.

It goes bad there, they send it to Ekron and Ekron's like, no way, we ain't having that thing here. That's four of the five cities of the Philistines now. We include Gaza, which Samson struck.

A big, big, big blow for the Philistines. Well, we'll read next week when Tony takes us through the next couple of chapters about what happens next. To wrap up today, I think, well, what are a few applications and conclusions to make?

I've touched on a few as we went. The first one was that sin affects others. Satan wants us to keep sins private.

It's just your thing. No one else can know because no one else would understand. It won't harm anyone else. It won't harm you. And all of that is lies.

[43 : 12] And actually, sin is defeated when it is brought into the light. When you bring it, when you confess your sins to one another and we pray together, that is how sin is beaten. When we hold one another accountable, when we choose to become accountable to one another, that is how sin's power is defeated.

And sin does affect others. If I choose to embrace sin, I am less effective in my role and my ministry. And that's true for all of us. So sin affects others. Second one was, we talked about that false faith.

Faith that is sort of loosely connected to Jesus Christ and God is not enough. Faith that makes, you know, sings songs that talk about Jesus and so forth isn't enough *passee*.

We aren't saved by faith. Error. We are saved through faith. We are saved by grace. We are saved by Jesus Christ, the gift of God's grace.

That's what saves us. We are saved by the atonement of Jesus Christ, justified as the gift of God's grace. How is it made effective? Well, it's made effective through our faith, through believing it.

[44 : 22] By grace through faith, not by faith alone. Thirdly, this, so God turns defeat into victory. God turns defeat into victory.

You know, I saw someone wearing his t-shirt recently. And it said that everyone you meet is fighting a battle that you know nothing about. And the sense behind that is basically be kind, be nice.

Everyone has struggles. And I think that's a good message. We should be patient. But it is true, isn't it? We are all facing struggles and battles.

Sometimes they're significant. Sometimes they're long-term. And then sometimes they're short-lived. saved. And as God's people, we're not exempt. But God, as we see in this text today, he is the kind of God who turns defeat, who turns struggles into victory.

We've seen the Jews, they've sinned against God by their foolish acts. and the Philistines would have been very much emboldened. But God showed them that he didn't need a single soldier to bring the Philistines into submission.

[45 : 36] God, by doing this, I think God saved Israel from probably being wiped out. You know, those Philistines would have been emboldened to come against them and the Israelites, similarly, would have been very suppressed and subdued.

God turns defeat into victory. And I think we need no other example than the cross. Because the cross of Christ, the crucifixion of Christ, was, by all appearances, a terrible defeat for the disciples.

We thought he was going to be the one who would save Israel, they said. And now he's gone. Defeat. How could God allow this? What do we do now?

And of course, God transformed that defeat into, the most glorious and resounding victory of all over sin and death itself. So what? Well, the so what is that you and I don't need to fear the appearance of defeat.

We don't need to fear an apparent defeat. We don't need to fear a battle that appears to be going against us. We don't need to fear even if things seem to be impossible. We don't need to strive to get the victory.

[46 : 49] We don't need to strive to be proven right or respected or whatever it is that we think we need. I want to leave you with this paragraph and with this we'll close.

This is 1 John 5 verse 1 to 4. It says, everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and everyone who loves the father loves the child born of him.

By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and follow his commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not

burdensome.

For whoever has been born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Amen. Lord, we praise you.

Lord, we thank you that in you there is victory. Lord, we thank you that in you sin and death are defeated. Lord, we thank you that even in the error of the Israelites, Lord, you worked a great victory against your enemies.

[47 : 55] Lord, I pray God that you would keep us from sin. I pray, Lord God, that you would help us to stay faithful and to walk with you. But, Lord, it does give us such reassurance to know that even when we stumble, your plans are never thwarted and you are a powerful God who can still accomplish his purposes and cause all things to work together for good.

Lord, we thank you that this is our God. What an awesome, wonderful God you are. We praise you. In Jesus' mighty name, amen. Amen. Amen.