

# THE ROCK COMMUNITY CHURCH

## 1 Samuel 5

### “The Philistines and the Ark”

3\_10\_2024

Speaker: Pastor Dave Briggs

Anaheim Hills, CA | RockCC.com

21:21

Do you find it easy or difficult to admit when you are wrong? Maybe I should have started with the question, do you ever think you are wrong? When I was little, my mom found a funny saying on a magnet that she liked and it was on our refrigerator for years, it said something like, I'm never wrong, I thought I was once but I was mistaken. I remember that.

21:52

And there's a similar saying that can describe human thinking sometimes, I'm sure you've heard it, it goes like this, my mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts. In our passage today, we're going to meet people who are firmly entrenched in their polytheism, they worship more than one God. And they are going to have a close encounter with the one true God and this God will show them the error of their ways.

22:27

So here's the question for them, how will they respond? How will these people respond? Will they open their eyes to see the truth or will they keep their eyes shut tight? We'll find out after we pray together.

22:40

Father, you are so kind to speak to us directly through your holy word today. Father, I pray that we will respond to your kindness by giving you our undivided attention. Please give us ears to hear and open hearts to receive and obey the word of truth you have for us this morning and we ask this always in the saving name of Jesus. Amen.

23:11

Our passage is 1st Samuel chapter 5, we're going to do all 12 verses if you're using the Bible under your chair or in front of you, it's on page 278. We finished chapter 4 with Pastor Mike last week where we saw Israel fought a battle with their mortal enemies, the Philistines.

23:34

We saw how the people of Israel were not living in obedience to God so the Lord was not with them in the fight. Israel was defeated in that battle and lost 4 ,000 men. 4 ,000 sons, brothers, husbands, fathers were killed.

23:58

Instead of going to the Lord to seek forgiveness and direction, the leaders of Israel acted like all they needed was an Amazon account. They ordered the Ark of the Covenant of God be delivered to them promptly with no shipping fees.

24:14

And they thought their problems were solved. We got this. But they actually created a huge problem for themselves because God did not tell his people to move his Ark. The leaders of Israel took matters into their own hands and as we saw they treated the Ark like a lucky charm as if the Ark was their savior, not the Lord.

24:41

And what happened when Israel's army got all fired up and brought the mighty Ark of God into their next battle with the Philistines? You remember what happened? They were not just defeated, they were slaughtered and lost 30 ,000 soldiers this time.

24:57

And the wretched, hated Philistines captured the Ark of God. Chapter 4 records this epic disaster for Israel who scattered home in total defeat. And now we come to chapter 5 that follows the victor's home so we get to see what happened with the Philistines and the Ark.

25:23

Let's read chapter 5 together. It's a really, really, interesting and fun section. Verse 1, when the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.

25:44

And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the Ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put it back in its place. But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the Ark of the Lord and the head of Dagon, and both his hands were laying cut off on the threshold.

26:07

Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors.

26:24

Both Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, the Ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our God. So they sent and gathered together all the Lords of the Philistines and said, what shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel? They answered, let the Ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath.

26:49

So they brought the Ark of the God of Israel there. But after they had brought it around, the hand of the Lord was against the city, causing a very great panic, and he afflicted the men of this city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them.

27:05

So they sent the Ark of God to Ekron. But as soon as the Ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, they have brought around to us the Ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people. They sent therefore and gathered together all the Lords of the Philistines and said, send away the Ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place that it may not kill us and our people, for there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city.

27:30

The hand of God was very heavy there. The men who did not die were struck with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven. Wow, yeah, wow. There are a few unfamiliar locations mentioned in this passage.

27:50

So let's start by looking at a map together. The big yellow area, light area is Israel on this map. And you'll see at the top there's a red arrow that shows how the people of Israel brought the Ark of God from Shiloh to Ebenezer in chapter four for their battle with the Philistines.

28:11

So that top red arrow is from chapter four. Now then you see a purple or lavender arrow going down the left side of the map that shows how the Philistines in chapter five that we just read took the captured Ark from Ebenezer down to their royal city of Ashdod, which is in the bottom left corner of the map.

28:29

The next two purple arrows show how the Philistines moved the Ark from Ashdod to Gath and then they moved it from Gath to Ekron. And then the last purple arrow shows how the Ark went back to Israel. There is a great story about the Ark going back to Israel.

28:49

But you're gonna have to wait till next week. Or you can go home today and read all about it in chapter six. Let's think about this together. When the Philistines paraded home with the Ark of the God of Israel, think about this.

29:07

They had to feel like they were the greatest, strongest, bravest, baddest army of all time. Not only did they slaughter Israel, but they defeated Israel's God and they captured the famous Ark of God that was feared throughout the land.

29:27

Remember, we've looked at this a few times, but remember what the Philistines thought when the Ark came into the camp of Israel before the battle? Pastor Mike looked at this last week, but let's look at it one more time just for this context.

29:38

This is interesting. First Samuel chapter four, verse seven to eight. When the Ark came into Israel's camp, we read the Philistines were afraid. For they said, a God has come into the camp. And they said, woe to us, we are toast.

29:53

I added, we are toast. For nothing like this, nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods. These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.

30:12

The Philistines did not worship the God of Israel, but they sure feared his power. The Philistines knew all about Israel's exodus from Egypt and how the mighty, mighty Egyptians were brought to their knees by all these horrible plagues that came from Israel's God.

30:34

The Philistines would also know what happened to the fortified city of Jericho when the Israel entered the Promised Land. Remember, Jericho was surrounded by towering walls that Israel could never have breached on their own.

30:46

But what did Israel do? They just marched around that city for seven days with the Ark of God and the walls came tumbling down by the power of Israel's God. The Philistines were idol worshippers, so they thought the ark was a god.

31:03

Unfortunately for Israel, the Philistines did not give in to their fear and run away from the ark. Philistines fought like the battle -tested soldiers they were, and they massacred Israel. Let's go to verse 1 and 2 of our passage.

31:20

We'll just go through this fascinating story. When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.

31:37

The Philistines believed their god, Dagon, gave them the victory over Israel's god. So they took the captured ark straight to the royal city of Ashdod, which was one of the five main or royal cities that the Philistines had, and there was a temple there in Ashdod for Dagon, and they presented the ark of Dagon as that god's war trophy.

32:05

Dagon was called the father of gods because he was the father of Baal, who was another god that the Philistines worshipped. Dagon was represented in two different ways, as a standing statue of a towering man like you see here.

32:19

In other times, there are depictions of Dagon with the lower body of a fish and the upper body of a man, sort of a merman or fish-god. The Philistines had at least three different temples for Dagon in three different cities.

32:36

One in Ashdod that we just read about. There was another temple for Dagon in Bethshan, which was also called Beth-Dagon, and then also in Gaza. Before we focus on the temple in Ashdod and our passage, do you remember what happened to Dagon's temple in Gaza?

32:54

Pastor Drew touched on this a couple of weeks ago. I'll show you. This is what happened to the temple of Dagon in Gaza. Samson remodeled the temple. Various Bible timelines show that this event probably happened a few years before the ark was captured.

33:15

So a few years before that, Samson was a judge, and he made life miserable for the Philistines, and they all feared him. One time, Samson, for fun, set fire to the Philistine's wheat, and not only did the fire destroy the entire harvest and all the wheat in the field, but the fire also destroyed a lot of valuable olive orchards.

33:38

Philistines didn't like that at all. So the army came after Samson, and he killed a thousand of them all by himself with the jawbone of a donkey. Samson was a Nazarite, a Nazarite as someone separated or consecrated to God through a vow.

33:56

As long as no razor touched Samson's hair, God would be with him and give him supernatural strength. Unfortunately, Samson had a weakness for women that led to his downfall. You know the story. Samson got involved with a Philistine spy named Delilah, and she eventually convinced Samson to tell her the secret to his strength.

34:23

And after he did, he fell asleep, and Delilah had a man come in and cut off Samson's seven long, long braids. Then Delilah woke Samson up and said, oh, the Philistines are here. And so Samson got up to fight them, and he did not realize the Lord had left him.

34:41

And when he fought the Philistines, they overpowered him this time, and they put him in chains after they gouged out his eyes. The Philistines threw Samson into prison in Gaza, and later the people gathered at the to Dagon for delivering Samson into their hand.

35:05

When the celebration really got going, and everybody was in a happy mood, that's what Scripture tells us, probably because the wine bar was open more than they were in love with Dagon, they decided to call for Samson and have him brought out of prison to be put on public display so that they could ridicule him while they feasted at the temple.

35:27

As the Lord would have it, you know this story, they placed Samson between the two main load-bearing pillars of the temple. There, Samson prayed to God one more time and asked for the gift of strength.

35:42

And then he toppled that temple and died along with about 3,000 Philistines. So, point being, things did not go well when the Philistines mocked God's servant at the Temple of



Dagon in Gaza. So now we'll return to our passage to examine what happened a few years later when the Philistines decided to mock God's ark at the Temple of Dagon.

36:12

By the way, don't you think if Dagon was a real God, he would have commanded his people to stop bringing him things that belonged to the living God? Let's read verses 1 to 3 in 1 Samuel chapter 5. When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

36:30

Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord.

36:44

So they took Dagon and put him back in place. When the Philistines placed the ark of the Lord next to Dagon, they were brazenly declaring Dagon's superiority over the God of Israel. The Philistines had at least four different gods they worshipped, and they had temples for these gods spread out all through their land.

37:11

But now this temple in Ashdod had the ark, so that meant this temple would be seeing huge crowds and huge donations coming first thing in the morning. Let's use our imaginations for a minute just for fun.

37:27

Let's try to imagine the excited chief priest of that temple trying to get everything ready for the big showing the next day. Maybe the chief priest would have gathered his team together and said something like this.

37:45

Gentlemen, as you know, we've been chosen to have this amazing new exhibit here at our temple. It's none other than the ark of the God of Israel right here. I just looked at the VIP list, and as expected, tomorrow morning at dawn, all our lords and leaders want to be the first ones through the door, so that means we have a lot of work to do tonight.

38:10

Men, here are your assignments. You men, sweep the floors and be sure to get the corners this time. You guys, polish anything that shines, and you fellows, go arrange for extra security for all the offerings that will be in our treasury tomorrow.

38:31

All right, let's show the world we know how to do things right here at Dagon Ashdod. How did the big reveal go the next morning? Look at verse 3. The eager people of Ashdod rose early the next day, and behold, or uh -oh, doggone Dagon had face planted.

38:59

Here God was face down before the ark, like He was bowing down to Israel's God. The Philistines thought Dagon gave them the victory over Israel, but God was showing them they had it figured all wrong.

39:16

Dagon did exactly nothing. God allowed the Philistines to defeat Israel as God's instrument of punishment for Israel's disobedience. When God put Dagon on his face before the ark, the Lord was showing the people of Ashdod there is only one true God, and their idols are powerless.

39:47

God has the same message for you and me today as we read this. The Lord wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt there is one true God, and all the things we substitute for God are powerless, powerless.

40:08

I know we don't physically bow down to idols today, and we don't make sacrifices to statues with names like Dagon or Baal. What we do instead is we bow our hearts, we give our hearts, we give our attention and our devotion to our idols, and we certainly make all kinds of sacrifices to our idols that have names like Success, Power, Popularity, Possessions, Money, Pleasure, and the list goes on.

40:50

Here's the definition of idolatry from the dictionary. Idolatry is to give our highest devotion to any person or thing other than God. I'll read that again. It's the definition of idolatry is to give our highest devotion to any person or anything other than God.

41:13

Dagon was the main God of the Philistines because he was the father of their other gods. Pride could be called the main God of our day because pride is the father of selfishness, greed, lust, covetousness, and so on.

41:33

Think about this with me. What would an idol named pride look like if we made a statue? What would that idol look like? You saw what Dagon looked like. What would an idol of pride look like? Well, I think your idol would look like you sitting on the throne of your life and my idol of pride would look like me.

42:02

Because pride brazenly declares, I want my way, not God's way, and pride. Pride puffs us up and makes us actually believe, actually believe that our thinking and our ways are better than God's. When you and I elevate ourselves over the Lord, we are mocking God just like the Philistines mock God by putting the Ark next to Dagon.

42:39

The Philistines feared Israel's God, but they did not worship him as their God. The Philistines had their own gods that they wanted to worship in their own way. Sounds like the popular thinking today, doesn't it?

42:55

Popular thinking today says that you, you get to decide who or what you want to worship in your own way, and you'll be fine. You'll be fine. Just choose anything. It's fine. You're okay. If that is your thinking, God disagrees with you. That's important to know. It doesn't matter if I disagree with you, but God disagrees with you. Our passage in the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the entire Bible declares there is only one God and one way of salvation.

43:29

The picture of Dagon bowing before the Lord gives us a preview of what is to come for every single one of us and everyone in the world. Let's turn to Philippians chapter 2 verse 9 to 11. It ties in very beautifully.

43:48

We read, therefore God has exalted him, Jesus, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. In heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

44:09

Every knee, every person will bow before Jesus at his second coming, or would we die and we meet the Lord face to face. If, if you have repented of your sin and you have put your faith in Jesus to save you, then you will bow, but you're going to bow before your Savior joyfully, gratefully.

44:37

If you have not trusted in Jesus as your Savior, then you will bow before your judge with much fear and trembling, because now you will know the truth about who Jesus is, but it will be too late to save you.

44:57

When the people of Ashdod walked into the temple and found Dagon on his face before the Lord, did they understand what God was telling them? Did they forsake their idols and turn to the one through God?

45:13

Let's look at verse 3 again. And when the people of Ashdod rose early, the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.

45:33

Yeah, the people just put Dagon back on its pedestal as if nothing happened. Nothing to see here, folks. It's all good. Nothing happened. This is such typical human behavior, isn't it? Don't confuse me with the facts, God.

45:51

My mind's made up. I'm going to keep my idols right where I want them. After the people got Dagon back on his feet, or fins, if he was in the fish form, what happened next? Poor Dagon had another bad night, in fact worse than the night before.

46:13

Let's look at verse 4. But when they rose early the next morning, behold, uh -oh, Dagon had fallen face -down and on the ground before the Ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were laying cut off on the threshold.

46:28

Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. When the people rose early the next morning, darn, Dagon was down again, but this time the idols head and hands had been cut off. When God knocked Dagon down the first time, people didn't get the message, did they?

46:53

So now God, the second time, gave them a stronger message. Dagon's head and hands had been cut off. Everyone in Ashdod would know what this meant. Everyone would know. It did not mean Humpty Dumpty Dagon had a bad fall.

47:13

Cutting off the head and hands meant just one thing, Dagon be dead. How did the people of Ashdod react this time to this second message from God? Did they take the pieces of dead Dagon out to the dumpster and close the temple?

47:40

Verse 5, let's read. No, they didn't. This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon and Ashdod to this day. That was their solution. Temple stayed open for business, as usual, for years to come.

47:59

The priests kept serving and the people kept coming to worship Dagon, even if he was held together with super glue and duct tape. Here's the big question for us, okay? Why didn't the people reject their dead idol and turn to the living God?

48:23

That was the obvious choice, wasn't it? Why didn't they reject their dead idol and turn to the living God? Here's the answer. Worshiping the Lord instead of Dagon would mean a huge change in their thinking and their living, and they were unwilling to make that change.

48:49

About a thousand years later, our Lord Jesus would explain why people can be confronted with the truth of God but choose to ignore it. Let's look at what Jesus said in

John 3:19. Jesus said, and this is the judgment, or this is the verdict, or this is the condemnation.

49:10

The light has come into the world and the people love the darkness rather than the light because they're works or evil. Philistines love the darkness of their idolatry too much to let it go, even when God shined a spotlight on their foolishness with Dagon.

49:36

Jesus is asking us the same question, what do you love more? Do you love the darkness or do you love the light? What do you love more? The ways of the world or the ways of God? What do you love more?

49:52

Let's look at verse 5 one more time. This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on that threshold of Dagon and Ashdod to this day. God showed the people of Ashdod that Dagon was dead, but the only change, the only change the priests and the people made was to be super careful never to step on that threshold ever again because that's where they found the head and hands of Dagon.

50:24

Dagon totally missed God's message that they were cursed, not the threshold. Totally missed it. They were cursed. Are we listening? Are we understanding this message from God to us today? It's telling us we are cursed and the Lord is the only one that can save us.

50:48

Let's look at verse 6 and 7. The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, the Ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our God.

51:10

Dagon lost his hands, but the hand of the Lord was alive and powerful against the people in Ashdod and its surrounding territory. The people were no longer excited to have the Ark in their midst. They were terrified.

51:28

They were plagued by tumors. What did the people do about it? That's the question they asked their leaders. Let's look at verse 8. So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?

51:44

They answered that the Ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath. So they brought the Ark of God there. People called an emergency meeting with the lords. The word lords here refers to the men that ruled like kings in the five main cities or royal cities in the Philistine area.

52:05

And being true politicians, they made the decision. Let's just move the Ark away to become some other city's problem. They sent the Ark to Gath, which is about 12 miles east of Ashdod. Push it over there.

52:22

Okay, gotta ask, don't you wonder how Gath got stuck with the Ark? The king of Gath would have been in that meeting with the other five lords. He was one of the five lords. He was in the meeting. Did he draw the short straw, do you think?

52:40

Or do you think the king of Gath stepped out to grab a Philistine latte and while he was away, the other four kings voted to give him the Ark? Sorry, this is how my mind works. Probably shouldn't share it with you.



52:53

Let's read what the Lord has to say, much more important to focus on. Verse 9, But after they brought it, the Ark, around to Gath, the hand of the Lord was against the city, causing a very great panic.

53:06

And he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. When the Ark came to Gath, God's wrath came with it. And the people, both young and old, broke out with tumors.

53:21

And verse 9 tells us there was a very great panic. This means the people of Gath really knew how to be scared. They knew how to be scared, but they did not know how to repent. They knew how to be scared, really scared, but they did not know how to repent.

53:45

We never do that, do we? We never panic instead of pray, do we? What decision did the people make? Verse 10. So, they sent the Ark of God to Ekron. But as soon as the Ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, They have brought around to us the Ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people.

54:10

The people of Gath re-gifted the Ark to Ekron. Here you go. Your turn. Now, as the Ark moved from Ashdod to Gath, and then from Gath to Ekron, it did follow a path that took it closer and closer to Israel's border.

54:32

So it does seem the Philistine leaders had a contingency plan to give that Ark back to Israel if things did not go well in Gath and Ekron. That probably was their plan. Now, the folks at Ekron, they already heard about what happened in the other cities.

54:49

So as soon as the Ark rolled into town, they didn't waste any time. They just started screaming. Our leaders are trying to kill us. So what happened next? They had another meeting. Let's finish, 11 and 12.

55:05

They sent, therefore, and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines again, and said, send away the Ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place that it may not kill us and our people.

55:15

For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there. Verse 12, the men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven. The people in Ekron wanted to give the Ark back to Israel so it wouldn't kill everyone.

55:35

Because verse 12 tells us people were just dropping dead all over the place and those that didn't die were struck with tumors. The cries of the people went up to heaven. This means their screams filled the air.

55:50

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine the sound of an entire city shrieking in pain and fear and grief? This is the heartbreaking reality for everyone who does not trust in the Lord. They cry out in pain, fear, panic and grief, but they never cry out in repentance and surrender to be rescued by the only God that can save them.

56:31

It's heartbreaking, terrible picture. Instead of turning to God, what did the Philistines do? They pushed God away from city to city. They just pushed God away so they could get back to their idols, get back to their lives, get on with business as usual.

56:57

Like the Philistines, we can push God away too, but here's the main point. Please, please, please don't miss it. We can push God away, but only temporarily, because all of us one day must stand before God, and that day will be here before we know it.

57:22

And then, and then it will be too late if you have not trusted in the Lord Jesus to save you. Let me share a verse with you from Isaiah. Isaiah 55:6. Wonderful, wonderful verse. Seek the Lord while He may be found.

57:47

Call a kind and powerful warning from our God. Seek Jesus now while you can, because your next heartbeat is not guaranteed. Seek the Lord now while you can. The Philistines had a golden opportunity to be saved from the darkness of idolatry. They had a close encounter with the one true God, but they chose to keep their broken idols and send God away. So what about you? Are you tilting up any idols in your life? Let them fall today. Let them fall.

58:31

Knock down anything or anyone that is sitting on the throne of your life. That throne belongs to Jesus and no one else. Jesus is the light that came into this world. So please, please, for your sake, do not love the darkness more than the light, because you do not want an eternity of darkness.

58:58

You don't want that. I started the message with a question for you, so now it's your turn. If you have any questions for me about anything you heard today, please come talk to me. I'll be walking around.

59:14

Just come talk to me or talk to anyone wearing a lanyard. Our prayer team will be over here at the end of the service. If you want to come, they would be happy to pray with you about anything. If it feels a little intimidating to come up here, then there's a prayer wall in the back corner.

59:28

You can just, right outside the door, you can just go write your request down. You can sign your name to it or not. Put it in the wall, and I promise you our prayer warriors will be praying over you in that request.

59:40

Let's pray together. Father, you alone are God. You alone deserve our wholehearted love, worship, and obedience. Father, please forgive us for continually finding other things to put on the throne of our lives rather than just give you our full and undivided love and worship.

01:00:01

Help us see where we need to make changes in our lives. Help us see the idols we need to carry out to the dumpster. Help us turn away from the things we substitute for you. Thank you, Father, for your word of truth for us today.

01:00:15

I pray we all heard you loud and clear. We love you, and we praise you, and we always pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.