

Samuel 5 - God Is Sovereign

In 1 Samuel chapter 4 we saw the defeat of Israel by the Philistines two times because of the Israelites' superstitious use of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant held the Law and represented the presence of God in the Tabernacle. The Israelites used it as a good luck charm with mystical power. But, God is not just some *thing* to be manipulated.

This is what prompts me to often ask the question how someone spells "God". After they spell "God" I ask if that is with a capital *G* or a small *g*. This is to point out that for many people, their god is too small. By capital-*G* God we are referring to the God of all creation Who has all knowledge, wisdom, and power. The God Who is infinitely righteous and is to be obeyed in all things. People will *thoughtlessly* agree to that. When you point out things that God clearly commands, their excuses for why they "can't" obey are evidence of who they really think is more powerful: themselves. The one who has veto power is the more powerful. For the Israelites, God had been reduced to a servant. God *does* desire to fight our battles, but as our God, not just because He is convenient to have around.

1. Not just another god -

It would be far fetched to think that the Philistines would see their victory as now having God on their side to fight for them. They did not experience a revival where they repented and turned to God in faith. They responded to this situation as pagans did in that day. Although Jehovah was superior, the Philistines only saw Him as just another god who could be defeated.

1Sam 5:1-12 And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod.

2When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

Dagon was a god that was half fish and half man, similar to a mermaid. This is consistent with a history of the Philistines' origin as a seafaring people of Greek origin. Placing the Ark of the Covenant by this idol was a common way for the "gods" of a defeated enemy to be treated like a trophy. This signified the power of the victor's god over the power of the defeated god. This treatment was not tolerated by God. He might have permitted them to defeat Israel, but that was for *His* purpose, not for *theirs*.

3And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon *was* fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

You have to wonder what was going on the Philistine's minds in this moment. Coincidence is *not necessarily* proof of anything, but extraordinary coincidence is powerfully suspicious. Unless they had a problem with the Dagon statue falling over every once in a while, it should have been startling to have it topple over when it fell *only* after the Ark of the Covenant was placed near it. This was something new to them. They had probably never had a protocol in place in case their god

should fall down. So, they put the statue back into its place.

4And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon *was* fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands *were* cut off upon the threshold; only *the stump of* Dagon was left to him.

5Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

If it hadn't occurred to them before, God was truly getting their attention. The Philistines had put the idol back in place. God had been gracious to them, but this was promising to become a problem.

They knew there was something special about the Ark so that when their idol was fallen again and the head and hands removed, they should have gotten the *heebie-jeebies*, *the creeps*, or the *shivers*. If the idol had fallen on one side or another, the impact might have broken off of the place of impact. The breaks were in three separate places. This was evidence to them that Jehovah God was Someone you don't take for granted!

2. The merciful God -

I think that most people don't need to give too much honest thought to realize when God is trying to get their attention. When people are called on their wrong doing, they sometimes demonstrate some way that they know it. They might try to minimize their guilt, use blame-shifting, inordinately protest their innocence, or overcompensate to hide any guilt.

The Philistines had grace but had proceeded to continue with the idol. There was no ignoring the fact that God was trying to get their attention now. God will not be ignored. God sent them yet another, stronger message.

6But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, *even* Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

Emerods are ulcers, or boils. The modern spelling is hemorrhoids. It's like the old Verizon wireless commercial. It as though God was saying, "Can you hear me now?"

They half-way heard God. What they should have done was to send the Ark back to Israel as fast as possible. What they *did* do was send the Ark out of the house of Dagon and the city of Ashdod. They sent it to Gath. Would sending it out of the house of Dagon be sufficient? No.

7And when the men of Ashdod saw that *it was* so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.

8They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, 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 about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about *thither*.

9And it was *so*, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.

Next, they sent the Ark to Ekron. The Ekronites were finally getting the message.

10Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.

11So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

12And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Do you remember early in life God trying to reach you? Or, has that memory been obscured by a calloused heart from resisting God? What will it take for people to realize that putting the pleasures of the world in the place of God is devastating. Now some might be critical of God for sending His plagues on the Philistines. They ask how can a merciful God do this. The plagues *were* God's mercy. Mercy is when you don't get the judgment you deserve. Someone might ask how plagues are merciful. Wouldn't it be more merciful to just let people go on pursuing life, enjoying the fruit of their labors? Only a short-sighted person would presume that. Look around America and observe what happens if you remove God and "just" let people live and let live.

Prov 16:25-26 There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

26He that laboureth laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.

People pursuing what *seems* right to them, laboring to fulfill their cravings and appetites, leads to death. As God's agents in government have backed off and removed judgment we are watching our cities implode with avoidable homelessness, murder, theft, and assault. Human trafficking is sapping and exhausting social resources. Perversity is celebrated. The *merciful* thing to do would be for God to *send* judgment, not *withhold* it.

Mercy is *withholding judgment* that we *deserve*. Early in the history of the world God demonstrated what He *could* do when He sent a worldwide deluge to destroy mankind except for the only one who had *not* given himself over to wickedness. The fact that God allows time for people to repent is due to His mercy. God *could* have just wiped out the Philistines, but in His sovereign mercy He was giving them room to *repent*.

3. The sovereign God -

When we refer to God as *sovereign*, some treat that as a code word for a system of theology. By *sovereign*, we mean that God is to be supremely respected. There is no higher authority than God. There are three ways in which we acknowledge God's sovereignty in our lives. We recognize His sovereignty *actively* when we obey His commands as we see them in the Bible. We recognize His sovereignty *passively* when we appreciate what He has given or done for us. We recognize His sovereignty *proactively* when the way we live, work, and play reflect His character and goodness. Everything about Christian living is not just *following* God as though we have no will of our own. By that I mean that we can *initiate* action, especially when it comes to being proactive. You can wait and look up a Bible verse when you go to respond to your neighbor *or* your enemy. Or, you can act

out of the character you possess that has been transformed by God. You don't need a Bible verse to tell you to hold the door open for someone who is struggling. Once you have learned from the Bible that you should love your neighbor, then you own that principle. If you have become a neighbor and enemy loving person, you don't need to quote that you should love your neighbor as yourself or to love your enemy in order to bless them. You love them because you are now a loving person with the love of God in you. In all of this, we are accountable to God because He is sovereign and has all authority.

Jas 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

However, not everyone is at the same level of spiritual maturity. In God's mercy, He holds everyone accountable to the knowledge they have. Salvation is always only by grace through faith in Christ. This is not according to how we *imagine* Christ and salvation to be, but how God *revealed* Christ and salvation in His Bible to be. God has every right to take anyone out at any time. But, He is merciful. He is at work in our lives with what light we have.

This is illustrated in how God treated the way the Philistines in contrast to the Israelites in the way they handled the Ark.

1Sam 6:1-12 And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

2And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place.

3And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you.

4Then said they, What *shall be* the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, Five golden emerods, and five golden mice, *according to* the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague *was* on you all, and on your lords.

5Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land. **[These pagan priests were acting out of the best way they could imagine to deal with God.]**

6Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed? **[They saw what God had done with the Pharaoh and the Egyptians and held themselves accountable to God.]**

7Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them:

8And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him *for* a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go.

9And see, **if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us: it was a chance that happened to us.**

10And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home:

The priests did not decide for God how He should respond, but left it completely up to Him what would happen. They set up the task of taking the Ark in such a way that it would be absolutely clear that it was God Who had been directing them. There would be no *humanly* involvement in getting the Ark back to Israel. First, they did not carry the Ark themselves, but put the burden on the cows who had no opinion about the problem. Next, they chose cows who didn't know how to draw a cart. If they were going to draw the cart, it would have to be because *God* controlled them. They also chose cows who had calves. If the cows were to go to Bethshemesh, it would be contrary to their maternal instincts to get back to their calves. The only explanation for the plagues and the cows would be that God had been in charge and that it had not been by chance.

11And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods.

12And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, *and* went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside *to* the right hand or *to* the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh.

When the Israelites received the Ark, they made a sacrifice of the cows and rejoiced in the Ark's return. But there was also something else that happened. The men of Bethshemesh took a peek at what was inside the Ark. They violated the Ark. God held them accountable and slew 50,070 of them.

1Sam 6:19 And he smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten *many* of the people with a great slaughter.

This detail that is included reveals the issue of accountability we have before God. Why had God not slain the Philistines when they treated the Ark like a trophy of Dagon's victory over Jehovah? Furthermore, there was a way to transport the Ark but it was not on a cart. Later on, an Israelite named Uzza was going to perish because the Israelites transported the Ark on a cart and he impulsively reached out to steady it. Handling the Ark improperly was treated more severely for the Israelites than for the Philistines.

This principle of accountability is described by Jesus in Luke 12:47-78.

Luke 12:47-48 And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.

48But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. **[To whom much is given, from him is much required.]**

The Israelites had more enlightenment because they had the teaching of the Law available to them. Their breach was treated more severely. The Philistines had finally realized that God is not just *another* god. Although they responded to the judgment of God and gave Him respect, that doesn't mean that they were saved. But, it *does* demonstrate the principle of accountability to God and His sovereign authority. It also demonstrates God's sovereign mercy in giving us room to grow and

respond to Him.

What does this say about us, today? We have even more teaching available to us. How much more accountable is *our* generation? God could deal with us as sinners and give us what our rebellious selves deserve. What opportunities from God have we spurned?

Prov 1:22-23 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

Rom 2:4-5 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;

How has God reached out to us? We know from Romans 1-3 that

- In His creation we understand God's eternal power and divine nature
- We know God through our conscience as our society is a reflection of His

Recently, another reporter tried to present that the critical difference between Christians and Christian Nationalists was that the nationalist believes that our rights come from God and not from congress or the court as if this was a bad thing. This is Biblical, *not* political. She appeared to be totally unaware that the Declaration of Independence, one of our founding documents, distinctly says that our rights *do* come from God. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."¹

- We know God from His Word, the Bible
- We know God through His mighty acts

Ps 145:3-5 Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness *is* unsearchable.

4 One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.

5 I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.

- We know God through His Son

Gal 4:3-5 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

¹<https://townhall.com/tipsheet/mattvespa/2024/02/23/politico-reporter-unloaded-a-dangerous-commentary-about-christianity-on-msnbc-n2635665>

5To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Heb 10:5-7 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

6In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

7Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

John 1:9 *That [Jesus] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. [Each person is given an understanding of God]*

Beginning with salvation, people have spurned God. But it doesn't stop there. People criticize Christians for trying to maintain a Christian standard. They are quick to call them out as being judgmental. But, this criticism flows both ways.

- People move from church to church or avoid church altogether because no church is ever good enough. Although God is merciful while people are growing spiritually, these critical people are not.
- People leave churches because they can't be forgiving and gracious while their brothers or sisters are not yet perfect. But, God forgives and gives people room to grow while serving Him.
- Some church people behave as if their church is not good enough to support. They treat church as a place to visit but not as a place to *actually* serve God. They pat themselves on the back because they are minimally involved. Although God is willing to work with imperfect churches, these people are not.

Some people make the gross mistake that if they leave *God* alone then He should leave *them* alone. They don't realize that they are accountable to Him whether they recognize Him or not.

Perhaps you knew in your heart that you should have surrendered to Him long ago. Perhaps you sense the moving of God in your heart to surrender yourself to Him, ask His forgiveness for being a sinner, and to thank Him for the sacrifice Christ made of Himself to take your sins away. God's mercy *does* have its limit. At some point your time on earth is going to run out.

If you are a believer, does your life make a statement about how you respect the sovereignty of God? We have so much more to give account for than the world. God will still be merciful as we grow spiritually, if indeed we are growing and not avoiding God's direction.

1. Not just another god - 1Sam 5:1-12
2. The merciful God - Prov 16:25-26
3. The sovereign God - Jas 4:17, 1Sam 6:1-19, Luke 12:47-48, Prov 1:22-23, Rom 2:4-5, Ps 145:3-5, Gal 4:3-5, Heb 10:5-7, John 1:9