

God Fights for Himself

We ended [part 3](#) with the Philistines having captured the ark of the covenant of God. In the pagan Philistine way of thinking, their god had defeated the god of Israel. In his [commentary](#) on 1 Samuel, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, explained that, according to pagan theology, whenever a battle was taking place on earth, the gods of one nation were fighting the gods of the other nation in the heavens. The 10th chapter of Daniel would seem to validate this view to some extent, however, in our present context, we are talking about Jehovah and He cannot be defeated. He simply permits certain advances when His people or a particular nation or kingdom does not obey His voice.

The United States of America (U.S.A.) is one nation where demonic advances are increasingly being permitted. At one point, the Presidential primaries had four remaining candidates: Clinton, Cruz, Sanders, and Trump. Each one of these characterized a potential path for the country, such as follows:

- Sanders - total oppression (a complete giving over)
- Clinton - continuation of corrupt, oppressive status quo (under judgement)
- Trump - hollow rejection of status quo lacking moral change (still under judgement)
- Cruz - true repentance leading to liberty (national blessing)

In early 2016, when the Republican primaries were unfolding in the U.S.A., I was praying for Ted Cruz, because he had the most biblically sound views and track record. At one point, his campaign was gaining steam and I remember asking the Lord about him being elected and He told me, "I can't." Sad but true. The level of righteousness required to have the level of freedom that a Cruz or similar Presidency would usher in is simply not existent. As a nation, we need serious pain first. By "pain" I mean the catastrophic failure of the gods we have chosen leading to repentance.

Having defeated Israel in battle and captured the ark of God, the Philistines believed that Jehovah was a defeated God. We are then told the following at the beginning of chapter 5:

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.
(1-2)

To the pagan Philistines, the ark of God was the equivalent *image* of the Hebrew god that they may have thought Israel worshipped. Thus, they put the ark of God in the temple of their god, Dagon, in Ashdod as a symbolic gesture to represent his victory.

The pagans in America today have the same limited perspective about the one true God. In their

depraved minds they think they can defeat him by removing His truth from government, science, schools, and so on. No way ... impossible. He has always been, is, and always will be "before all things," as the apostle Paul explained through the Spirit of God:

For by him [Jesus Christ], all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* (Colossians 1:16-17; emphasis mine)

The distance between this reality and the ignoramus perspectives of this age demonstrate just how far some have been given over.

Just when a kingdom of this world thinks it has a victory over His people, God begins to shake things up. In part 3, we read from the verses of Psalm 78 that detailed God's judgement on Israel and the destruction of Shiloh. I purposely left the following last two verses out:

Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of wine. And he put his adversaries to rout; he put them to everlasting shame. (Psalm 78:65-66)

God considered Israel's enemies to be "his adversaries." God uses the kingdoms of this world as instruments to correct and sharpen His people, but if they come to think their success is attributable to their own greatness or the apparent weakness of God, then they are digging the pit that they will soon fall into.

This brings us to the curious situation where God's people are being disciplined, yet, at the same time, He Himself is doing a number on *those who think they can defeat Him*. Continuing in the 5th chapter we read the following:

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. 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 lying cut off on the threshold. 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. (3-5)

This Dagon had the body and tail of a fish but a human head and hands. It is intriguing to think about only his trunk remaining as God seemingly filleted him into a fish dinner.

http://www.gracefellowshipofaugusta.com/hp_wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/dagon.jpg

Contemporary readers look at this passage and mock at how ridiculous it was for these foolish ancients to worship a fish man, yet many of them believe *intangible* information somehow came from the "chance," "random" mixture of strictly *tangible* matter. I often make pancakes for my family, but no matter how many times I do it, the batter is never going to talk to me.

A Return To Jesus

After being ravaged by plagues for seven months, the Philistines came to their senses and decided it was time to give the ark of the LORD back to Israel. One day, while the Hebrews at Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest, they looked up and saw the ark coming on a cart carried by two milk cows. We are then told the following:

The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there. A great stone was there.
(14a)

The Philistines had placed the ark on a cart carried by two milk cows that had never been yoked. They kept back their calves and let them loose to see where they would carry the ark. They basically said to themselves that if the cows carried the ark toward Beth-shemesh, then it would be confirmation that God had truly plagued them. We are told that "the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went" and "they turned neither to the right nor to the left" (6:12). These mommy cows were lowing because God had forced them, against their natural instincts, to leave their calves. These cows proceeded to go a straight ten miles, not swerving at all, directly into the field of Joshua. This was a supernatural work of God.

I do not believe that it was a coincidence that God returned the ark of God (His dwelling place) to the field of Yeshua (translated "Jesus" in Greek) where there was a "great stone". This was a symbolic act to demonstrate that the glory of God resides in Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone.

A Different Spirit is Needed

The ark of God was eventually relocated to Kiriath-jearim. Concerning this we are told:

Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us?" So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to you."

And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. (6:20 - 7:2)

I am not sure if the men of Beth-shemesh thought the men of Kiriath-jearim were best "able to stand before the LORD," meaning they had a reputation for righteousness, or if they were simply looking to unload this hot potato to a neighboring town. Either way, Kiriath-jearim was able to hold the ark without trouble. The wording in verse 7:2 is misleading. The ark actually stayed in Kiriath-jearim for 90 years until David moved it to Jerusalem. The twenty years refers to the length of time Israel lamented after the Lord.

Interestingly, the men of Kiriath-jearim were descended from Caleb, a man of great faith. Faith is required to have the Lord dwell among us. God seemingly blessed Caleb's descendants with His unique presence.

Recall that because of Moses' pleading, God pardoned the Israelites who rebelled against Him in the wilderness, but of all that generation only Caleb and Joshua would enter the promised land. It is worthwhile to review what God said at that time:

Then the LORD said [to Moses], "I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. *But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.*" (Numbers 14:20-24; emphasis mine)

For the church today, the promised land is a type of our life in Christ. We are saved and made righteous through our initial faith in Christ, but to actually walk with Him and experience His life, *the ongoing exercise of faith is required*. The Hebrew congregation in the wilderness was unable to enter into the promised land because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:19). It is no different for the church today. We must exude faith to experience the true blessings of His resurrected life.

We are told that "a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD." To lament after the Lord means to cry out to Him. Israel was crying out to God because of the

Philistine oppression they were again under, yet they lacked a true heart reversal. The proof is that some twenty years passed while they were in this state. They did not have a *different spirit*.

I have learned in life that most people desire the spiritual condition they are in and they only cry out to God when their economic or physical condition is hindered. Many will put on a religious show, but do they really desire a new life? This is the picture that forms in my mind regarding Israel during this time (1141 - 1122 B.C.) and it is also a valid picture of the church today. Hope that is not in truth is false hope. Israel cried out to the Lord for twenty years and nothing happened. They were the problem then just as the church is the problem now.

This false outward display goes hand and hand with fruitless prayer. The church's application of prayer today is a burdensome yoke derived from unbelief. Many religiously pray over every meal, but if they were really thankful, then they would amend their ways and obey God's voice.

Last year I kept getting spam emails from Ashley Madison, the perverted company that promotes extramarital affairs. No matter how many times I tried to block the emails, they just kept coming. One time, the Spirit of the Lord rose up in me in righteous indignation and I prayed an unhealthy sort of desire upon the company. A few days later the company was in the news because their database was hacked and the names of the participants were exposed. Their business quickly unravelled. For all I know they are bankrupt. I know I haven't received an email from them since! One prayer, no program required. I am not going to say it was because of my prayer, but I must say I was connected with the Spirit of God to make a difference.

This event exposed many so-called church leaders. I'm sure if Hophni and Phineas were alive today they would be all over such websites too. We either walk in the fire or die by it.

Foreign gods

Finally, after twenty years, Samuel told Israel:

"If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only. (7:2-4)

Having studied, reflected upon, and written about the first few chapters of 1 Samuel for months now, I must say that these three verses are critical to synthesizing the overall message. They illuminate so many other observations. Most notably, the hearts of the people had been contrary to the Lord throughout the

entire historical period covered by the first several chapters of 1 Samuel. God's chosen leader knew all along that He could not move while the hearts of the people remained in this idolatrous condition.

Pointedly, after twenty years, Samuel said, "If" Apparently, Israel had reached an "end of the wilderness" moment where God knew they were finally able to collectively repent. I am not so sure Samuel believed they would. Prompted by the Lord, I suspect he was just being an obedient minister. Twenty years of witnessing the ongoing worship of "the Baals and the Ashtaroth" were undoubtedly uninspiring.

Baal was the god of weather.¹ In agrarian Israel, weather determined the success of the harvest, and thus, financial success. The church today has its prosperity message, revealing the true god of many.

Ashtoreth was the goddess of fertility and the consort of Baal. Her Babylonian equivalent was Ishtar, from which was derived Easter, where we have rabbits laying eggs demonstrating the productive power of nature or fertility.² Apparently, the worship of Ashtoreth often involved prostitution.

We are told that "the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD *only*." Israel had not rejected Jehovah outwardly, they maintained a religious show and *added* their gods of prosperity and sexuality to Him. Allow me to solve some spiritual algebra: the visible church in America is just like the world and America worships money and perverted sexuality (among other things) so the visible church has added—typically through New Age methods—money and perverted sexuality to Jesus Christ. Israel, before they repented, was a valid picture of the church today—a godly veneer painted over a rotten core.

Avoiding False Hope

There is something subtle here in Samuel's approach that is a leadership lesson for all and it is this: remain anchored in the principles of God's word and separate your own emotions and hopes. Samuel would later stumble a bit with Saul in this regard, but he was a superb example overall of how to conduct oneself in this manner.

As a professional investor, separating emotional hope from reality is a constant internal exercise for me. It is a discipline that all good investors have to develop. If one clings to false hope for too long it can cause serious damage to their wealth or their soul. (I do not say wealth *and* soul, because if false hope destroys your wealth it may very well ultimately benefit your soul.) If one is managing other people's wealth or leading others in some capacity the consequences can be far worse.

Samuel knew that there was only one way for Israel to receive God's true blessings. Today, there is only

one way for the church to receive God's true blessings and that is to live in Christ. Talk is cheap, obeying God's voice is priceless.

Endnotes

1. During Elijah's ministry, God withheld the rain for 3 1/2 years, because of Israel's Baal worship. It then rained immediately after Elijah killed the prophets of Baal. God reminded Israel who the real deal was.
2. The Roman Catholic Church was founded on Babylonian Paganism.