

1SAMUEL 5: 1 Now the Philistines had taken the ark of God, and they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

The Philistines set up the ark in the temple of Dagon at Ashdod; whose image is found next morning prostrate before it, broken in pieces, 1Sam 5:1-5. The Philistines are also smitten with a sore disease, 1Sam 5:6. The people of Ashdod refuse to let the ark stay with them; and the lords of the Philistines, with whom they consulted, order it to be carried to Gath, 1Sam 5:7, 1Sam 5:8. They do so; and God smites the inhabitants of that city, young and old, with the same disease, 1Sam 5:9. They send the ark to Ekron, and a heavy destruction falls upon that city, and they resolve to send it back to Shiloh, 1Sam 5:10-12.

Verse 1

Brought it from Eben-ezer unto Ashdod - Ashdod or Azotus was one of the five satrapies or lordships of the Philistines.

1SAMUEL 5: 2 The Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

Verse 2

The house of Dagon - On this idol, which was supposed to be partly in a human form, and partly in that of a fish, see the note on Jdg 16:23. Some think that this idol was the same with Dirceto, Attergatis, the Venus of Askelon, and the Moon. - See Calmet's Dissertation on the gods of the Philistines.

The motive which induced the Philistines to set up the ark in the temple of Dagon, may be easily ascertained. It was customary, in all nations, to dedicate the spoils taken from an enemy to their gods:

1. As a gratitude-offering for the help which they supposed them to have furnished; and,
2. As a proof that their gods, i.e., the gods of the conquerors, were more powerful than those of the conquered.

It was, no doubt, to insult the God of Israel, and to insult and terrify his people, that they placed his ark in the temple of Dagon. When the Philistines had conquered Saul, they hung up his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, 1Sam 31:10. And when David slew Goliath, he laid up his sword in the tabernacle of the Lord, 1Sam 21:8, 1Sam 21:9. We have the remains of this custom in the depositing of colors, standards, etc., taken from an enemy, in our churches; but whether this may be called superstition or a religious act, is hard to say. If the battle were the Lord's, which few battles are, the dedication might be right.

1SAMUEL 5: 3 When they of Ashdod arose early on the next day, behold, Dagon was fallen on his face to the ground before the LORD's ark. They took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

Verse 3

They of Ashdod arose early on the morrow - Probably to perform some act of their superstition in the temple of their idol.

Dagon was fallen upon his face - This was one proof, which they little expected, of the superiority of the God of Israel.

Set him in his place again - Supposing his fall might have been merely accidental.

1SAMUEL 5: 4 When they arose early on the next day morning, behold, Dagon was fallen on his face to the ground before the LORD's ark; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold. Only Dagon's torso was intact.

Verse 4

Only the stump of Dagon was left - Literally, Only $\mu\alpha\tau$ dagon (i.e., the little fish) was left. It has already been remarked that Dagon had the head, arms and hands of a man or woman, and that the rest of the idol was in the form of a fish, to which Horace is supposed to make allusion in the following words: -

Desinat in pisces mulier formosa superne "The upper part resembling a beautiful woman; the lower, a fish."

All that was human in his form was broken off from what resembled a fish. Here was a proof that the affair was not accidental; and these proofs of God's power and authority prepared the way for his judgments.

1SAMUEL 5: 5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any who come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod, to this day.

Verse 5

Tread on the threshold - Because the arms, etc., of Dagon were broken off by his fall on the threshold, the threshold became sacred, and neither his priests nor worshippers ever tread on the threshold. Thus it was ordered, in the Divine providence, that, by a religious custom of their own, they should perpetuate their disgrace, the insufficiency of their worship, and the superiority of the God of Israel.

It is supposed that the idolatrous Israelites, in the time of Zephaniah, had adopted the worship of Dagon: and that in this sense 1Sam 1:9 is to be understood: In the same day will I punish all those who leap upon the threshold. In order to go into such temples, and not tread on the threshold, the people must step or leap over them; and in this way the above passage may be understood. Indeed, the thresholds of the temples in various places were deemed so sacred that the people were

accustomed to fall down and kiss them. When Christianity became corrupted, this adoration of the thresholds of the churches took place.

1SAMUEL 5: 6 But the hand of the LORD was heavy on them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and struck them with tumours, even Ashdod and its borders.

Verse 6

Smote them with emerods - The word **אפלים** *apholim*, from **אפל** *aphal*, to be elevated, probably means the disease called the bleeding piles, which appears to have been accompanied with dysentery, bloody flux, and ulcerated anus.

The Vulgate says, *Et percussit in secretiori parte natium*; "And he smote them in the more secret parts of their posteriors." To this the psalmist is supposed to refer, *Psa 78:66*, He smote all his enemies in the Hinder Parts; he put them to a perpetual reproach. Some copies of the Septuagint have *εξεξεσεν αυτοις εις τας ναυς*, "he inflamed them in their ships:" other copies have *εις τας εδρας*, "in their posteriors." The Syriac is the same. The Arabic enlarges: "He smote them in their posteriors, so that they were affected with a dysentery." I suppose them to have been affected with enlargements of the haemorrhoidal veins, from which there came frequent discharges of blood.

The Septuagint and Vulgate make a very material addition to this verse: *Και μεσον της χωρας αυτης ανεφυσιν μυες· και εγενετο συγχυσις θανατου μεγαλη εν τη πολει; Et ebullierunt villae et agri in medio regionis illius; et nati sunt mures, et facta est confusio mortis magnae in civitate*: "And the cities and fields of all that region burst up, and mice were produced, and there was the confusion of a great death in the city." This addition Houbigant contends was originally in the Hebrew text; and this gives us the reason why golden mice were sent, as well as the images of the emerods, (1Sam 6:4), when the ark was restored.

1SAMUEL 5: 7 When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel shall not stay with us; for his hand is severe on us, and on Dagon our god."

Verse 7

His hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god - Here the end was completely answered: they now saw that they had not prevailed against Israel, on account of their god being more powerful than Jehovah; and they now feel how easily this God can confound and destroy their whole nation.

1SAMUEL 5: 8 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them, 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 carried over to Gath." They carried the ark of the God of Israel there.

Verse 8

The lords of the Philistines - The word סרני sarney, which we translate lords, is rendered by the Chaldee טורני tureney, tyrants. The Syriac is the same. By the Vulgate and Septuagint, satrapae, satraps. Palestine was divided into five satrapies: Ashdod, Ekron, Askelon, Gath, and Gaza. See Jos 13:8. But these were all federates and acted under one general government, for which they assembled in council.

Let the ark - be carried about - They probably thought that their affliction rose from some natural cause; and therefore they wished the ark to be carried about from place to place, to see what the effects might be. If they found the same evil produced wherever it came, then they must conclude that it was a judgment from the God of Israel.

1SAMUEL 5: 9 It was so, that after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great confusion: and he struck the men of the city, both small and great; and tumours broke out on them.

Verse 9

The hand of the Lord was against the city - As it was at Ashdod, so it was at Gath. The Vulgate says, *Et computrescebant prominenter extales eorum*; which conveys the idea of a bloody flux, dysentery, and ulcerated anus; and it adds, what is not to be found in the Hebrew text, nor many of the versions, except some traces in the Septuagint, *Et fecerunt sibi sedes pelliceas*, "And they made unto themselves seats of skins;" for the purpose of sitting more easy, on account of the malady already mentioned.

1SAMUEL 5: 10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God came to Ekron, the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people."

1SAMUEL 5: 11 They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and they said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to its own place, that it not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly confusion throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

Verse 11

Send away the ark - It appears that it had been received at Ekron, for there was a deadly destruction through the whole city. They therefore concluded that the ark should be sent back to Shiloh.

1SAMUEL 5: 12 The men who didn't die were struck with the tumours; and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Verse 12

The men that died not - Some it seems were smitten with instant death; others with the haemorrhoids, and there was a universal consternation; and the cry of the city went up to heaven - it was an exceeding great cry.

It does not appear that the Philistines had any correct knowledge of the nature of Jehovah, though they seemed to acknowledge his supremacy. They imagined that every country, district, mountain, and valley, had its peculiar deity; who, in its place, was supreme over all others. They thought therefore to appease Jehovah by sending him back his ark or shrine: and, in order to be redeemed from their plagues, they send golden mice and emerods as telesms, probably made under some particular configurations of the planets. See at the end of 1Sam 6:21 (note).