

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 5

This chapter relates how that the ark being brought by the Philistines to Ashdod, and placed in the temple of their idol, that fell down before it, (^{<090E>}1 Samuel 5:1-5), that the hand of the Lord was upon the men of Ashdod, and smote them with emerods, (^{<090E>}1 Samuel 5:6,7) and being carried to Gath, the men of Gath were smitten likewise with the same, (^{<090E>}1 Samuel 5:8,9), and after that the men of Ekron, whither it also was carried, (^{<090E>}1 Samuel 5:10-12).

Ver. 1. *And the Philistines took the ark of God*, etc.] Which fell into their hands, Israel being beaten, and caused to flee, and the priests that had the care of the ark slain; and when possessed of it, they did not destroy it, nor take out of it what was in it, only took it up:

and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. Ebenezer was the place where the camp of Israel was pitched, (^{<090E>}1 Samuel 4:1) and near to which the battle was fought. Ashdod was one of the five principalities of the Philistines, the same with Azotus, (^{<408D>}Acts 8:40). The distance between these two places, according to Bunting^{f97} was one hundred and sixty miles; though one would think the distance from each other was not so great: why it was carried to Ashdod is not plain; perhaps it might be the nearest place of note in their country; and certain it is that it was one of their most famous cities, if not the most famous; (see Gill on “^{<290E>}Isaiah 20:1”), and had a famous idol temple in it.

Ver. 2. *When the Philistines took the ark of God*, etc.] And had brought it to Ashdod:

they brought it into the house of Dagon; a temple dedicated to that idol, and in which his image stood; of which (see Gill on “^{<076E>}Judges 16:23”),

and set it by Dagon; by the side of him, either in honour to the ark, as Abarbinel, designing to give it homage and adoration, as to their own deity; for though the Gentiles did not choose to change their gods, yet they would add the gods of other nations to them; and such the Philistines might

take the ark to be: or else, as Procopius Gazaeus, they brought it into their idol's temple, as a trophy of victory, and as a spoil taken from their enemies, and which they dedicated to their idol. Laniado^{f98} observes, that the word here used signifies servitude, as in (⁰¹³¹⁵Genesis 33:15) and that the ark was set here to minister to, or serve their god Dagon. The temple of Dagon at Ashdod or Azotus was in being in the times of the Maccabees, and was burnt by Jonathan,

83 The horsemen also, being scattered in the field, fled to Azotus, and went into Bethdagon, their idol's temple, for safety. 84 But Jonathan set fire on Azotus, and the cities round about it, and took their spoils; and the temple of Dagon, with them that were fled into it, he burned with fire." (1 Maccabees 10)

Ver. 3. *And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow*, &c.] Either the people, the inhabitants of the place, who came early to pay their devotions to their idol, before they went on their business; or the priests of the idol, who came to sacrifice in the morning:

and, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord; as if he was subject to it, and giving adoration to it, and owning it was above him, and had superior power over him:

and they took Dagon, and set him in his place again; having no notion that it was owing to the ark of God, or to the God of Israel, that he was fallen, but that it was a matter of chance.

Ver. 4. *And when they arose early on the morrow morning*, etc.] For the same purpose as before; unless they had any curiosity to indulge, to see whether the ark and Dagon agreed better together, if they had any suspicion that the former mischance was to be attributed to some variance and disagreement between them:

behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord: again, and in a worse condition than before:

and the head of Dagon, and both the palms of his hands, were cut off upon the threshold; of the temple, upon which he fell with such force, that the threshold cut off his head, and both his hands; which signified he had neither wisdom to contrive for his own safety, nor strength and power to defend himself; and therefore of what advantage could he be to his votaries? This may be an emblem of the fall of idolatry in the Gentile

world, before the preaching of Christ and his Gospel in it; or of the idol of man's righteousness, which is set up, though it cannot stand, against the righteousness of Christ, and of man's renouncing that, when convinced of the weakness and insufficiency of it, and submitting to the righteousness of Christ:

only the stump of Dagon was left to him: his body, as the Targum, his head and hands being cut off; or, as it is in the Hebrew text, only Dagon was left; that is, the fishy part of this idol; for "Dag" signifies a fish; and, as Kimchi relates, this idol, from the navel upwards, had the form of a man, and from thence downwards the form of a fish; and it was the lower part that was left; (see Gill on "⁴⁰⁷⁶²³Judges 16:23").

Ver. 5. *Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house*, etc.] Neither the priests that continually attended the worship and service of Dagon, nor the people that came there to pay their devotions to him:

tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day: but used to leap over it, either reckoning it sacred because touched by their idol, which fell upon it; or rather, as it should seem, in a way of detestation, because it had been the means of cutting off the head and hands of their idol; and this custom not only continued to the latter days of Samuel, the writer of this book; but even among the Philistines in one place or another to the times of Zephaniah, who seems to allude to it, (³⁰⁰⁰Zephaniah 1:9). In later times there was another deity worshipped at Ashdod; according to Masius^{f99}, the Philistine Venus, or Astarte, was worshipped in this place; though perhaps she may be no other than Atergatis, or Adergatis, which with Selden^{f100} is only a corruption of Addir-dag, the magnificent fish, in which form Dagon is supposed to be; so the Phoenician goddess Derceto, worshipped at Ashkelon had the face of a woman, and the other part was all fish; though Ben Gersom says Dagon was in the form of a man, and which is confirmed by the Complutensian edition of the Septuagint, which on (⁴⁰⁰⁰1 Samuel 5:4) reads, "the soles of his feet were cut off"; which is a much better reading than the common one, "the soles of his hands", which is not sense; by which it appears that he had head, hands, and feet; wherefore it seems most likely that he had his name from Dagon, signifying corn: (see Gill on "⁴⁰⁷⁶²³Judges 16:23").

Ver. 6. *But the hand of the Lord was heavy on them of Ashdod*, etc.] Not only on their idol, but on themselves; it had crushed him to pieces, and now it fell heavy on them to their destruction:

and he destroyed them; either by the disease after mentioned they were smitten with, or rather with some other, since that seems not to be mortal, though painful; it may be with the pestilence:

and smote them with emerods; more properly haemorrhoids, which, as Kimchi says, was the name of a disease, but he says not what; Ben Gersom calls it a very painful disease, from whence comes a great quantity of blood. Josephus^{f101} takes it to be the dysentery or bloody flux; it seems to be what we commonly call the piles, and has its name in Hebrew from the height of them, rising up sometimes into high large tumours:

even Ashdod and the coasts thereof; not only the inhabitants of the city were afflicted with this disease, but those of the villages round about.

Ver. 7. *And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so*, etc.] That many of their inhabitants were taken away by death, and others afflicted with a painful disease; all which they imputed to the ark being among them:

they said, the ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us; like the Gergesenes, who besought Christ to depart their coasts, having more regard for their swine than for him:

for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon, our god, not the hand of the ark, unless they took it for a god, but the hand of the God of Israel; in this they were right, and seem to have understood the case better than the other lords they after consulted; his hand was upon Dagon, as appeared his fall before the ark, and upon them by smiting with the haemorrhoids, the memory of which abode with the Philistines for ages afterwards; for we are told^{f102} that the Scythians, having plundered the temple of Venus at Ashkelon, one of their five principalities, the goddess inflicted upon them the female disease, or the haemorrhoids; which shows that it was thought to be a disease inflicted by way of punishment for sacrilege, and that it was still remembered what the Philistines suffered for a crime of the like nature.

Ver. 8. *They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them*, etc.] The other four lords, for there were five with this; (see ~~6:13~~ Joshua 13:3),

and said, what shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? they no doubt told them what they and their idol had suffered on account of it, and the resolution they were come to that it should be no longer with them; and therefore desire to know what must be done with it, whether they should return it to the people of Israel, or dispose of it somewhere else; it is probable some might be for the former, but the greater part were not, and were for keeping it in their possession somewhere or another:

and they answered, let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath; which was another of the five principalities of the Philistines, and not far from Ashdod; according to Jerom^{f103}, it is included in the remnant of Ashdod, (~~253~~Jeremiah 25:20) and according to Bunting^{f104} but four miles from it. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions make this to be the answer of the men of Gath, the one reading it,

“and they of Gath said, let the ark of God come to us;”

and the other,

“they of Gath answered, let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about;”

for they suspected, as Procopius Gazaeus observes, that the destruction did not come from God, but was a disease arising from some pestilential cause. They perhaps imagined it was in the air in and about Ashdod, or that though the situation of the ark was not liked, in another place it might be otherwise, and more agreeable:

and they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither; they seem not to carry it directly to the place, but carried it in a round about way, as if they had a mind to give it an airing, before they fixed it any where.

Ver. 9. *And it was so, that after they had carried it about,* etc.] And at last placed it in the city of Gath;

the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction: greater than that at Ashdod, more persons were destroyed; the distemper sent among them was more epidemic and mortal:

and he smote the men of the city, both small and great; high and low, persons of every class, rank, and station, young and old, men, women, and children:

and they had emerods in their secret parts; and so had the men of Ashdod; and the design of this expression is, not to point at the place where they were, which it is well known they are always in those parts, but the different nature of them; the emerods or piles of the men of Ashdod were more outward, these more inward, and so more painful, and not so easy to come at, and more difficult of cure; for the words may be rendered,

and the emerods were hidden unto them^{f105}; were inward, and out of sight; and perhaps this disease as inflicted on them might be more grievous than it commonly is now. Josephus^{f106} wrongly makes these to be the Ashkalonites, when they were the men of Gath.

Ver. 10. *Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron*, etc.] Another of the five principalities of the Philistines, about ten miles from Gath, where Baalzebub, or the god of the fly, was worshipped:

and it came to pass, that as the ark of God came to Ekron; and had been there some little time:

that the Ekronites cried out; when they perceived the hand of God was upon them, as upon the other cities; these were the chief magistrates of the city, with the lord of them, as appears by what follows:

saying, they have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us; from one city to another, and at length to us:

to slay us and our people; not that this was their intention, but so it was eventually.

Ver. 11. *So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines*, etc.] As the men of Ashdod had done before on the same account, (^{CHRS}1 Samuel 5:8)

and said, send away the ark of the God of Israel; as these lords were united in their government, and made one common cause of it against Israel, one could not dispose of this capture without the consent of the rest; otherwise the lord of Ekron, with his princes, were clearly in it that it was right and best to send it away out of any of their principalities:

and let it go again to its own place; to the land of Israel and Shiloh there, though to that it never returned more:

that it slay us not, and our people; that is, all of them, for great numbers had been slain already, as follows:

for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; a mortal disease went through the whole city, and swept away a multitude of people:

the hand of God was very heavy there; it seems by the expression to haste been heavier on the inhabitants of this city than upon those of Ashdod and Gath, which made them the more pressing to get rid of the ark.

Ver. 12. *And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods*, etc.] As the inhabitants of Ashdod and Gath had been; this shows that those that died did not die of that disease, but of some other; very likely the pestilence:

and the cry of the city went up to heaven; not that it was heard and regarded there, but the phrase is used to denote the greatness of it, how exceeding loud and clamorous it was; partly on the account of the death of so many of the inhabitants, their relations and friends; and partly because of the intolerable pain they endured through the emerods. There is something of this history preserved in a story wrongly told by Herodotus^{f107}, who relates that the Scythians returning from Egypt passed through Ashkelon, a city of Syria (one of the five principalities of the Philistines), and that some of them robbed the temple of Venus there; for which the goddess sent on them and their posterity the disease of emerods, and that the Scythians themselves acknowledged that they were troubled with it on that account.