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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

Dagon Has Fallen And He Can't Get Up

In last week's bulletin, we saw how the children of Israel thought they could put God in a box, literally and figuratively, and use the Ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm to ensure victory over the Philistines. God corrected their view, and caused Israel to be defeated.

After the Ark of the Covenant was taken in battle by the Philistines, they brought it home as a prize.

The Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again. But when they arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on 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 on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.

Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day (1 Samuel 5:1-5).

Just because God had taught His people a lesson by allowing the Ark of the Covenant to be captured, does not mean that He had abandoned His own glory. “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). Israel had been defeated, but God had not!

Instead, this was a great opportunity for God to demonstrate His sovereignty to all the nations. When the Philistines put the Ark of God into the temple of their idol Dagon—perhaps to show the triumph of their god over the God of Israel—they awoke to find their idol had bowed before the ark. Dagon had fallen, and could not get up without help! The next morning, Dagon had once again toppled, but this time it smashed on the floor.

Idolatry is utterly silly. Decades before, when Joash’s son Gideon had crept into the temple of Baal and burned the idol, the people demanded that Joash punish his son. Joash replied, “if Baal is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar” (Judges 6:31). Baal, of course, could do nothing.

Centuries later, God pointed out the folly of worshiping an idol that some weary and weak man, working for profit, and using his tools, carved out of a block of wood, painted, and hauled into position. The craftsman and his sponsors are too stupid to realize the obvious, “I have burned half of [the wood] in the fire and have baked bread over its coals ... then I make the rest of it into an abomination, I fall down before a block of wood!” (Isaiah 44:19). “They set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; it cannot deliver him from his distress” (Isaiah 46:7). The craftsman “fastens it with nails, so that it will not totter” (Isaiah 41:7).

Our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever He pleases.
Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of man’s hands.
They have mouths, but they cannot speak;
They have eyes, but they cannot see;

They have ears, but they cannot hear;
They have noses, but they cannot smell;
They have hands, but they cannot feel;
They have feet, but they cannot walk;
They cannot make a sound with their throat.
Those who make them will become like them,
Everyone who trusts in them (Psalm 115:3–8).

As if the collapse and destruction of the Dagon idol were not proof enough, God continued showing the Philistines signs of His power.

The hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories. When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our God” (1 Sam. 5:6–7).

They shipped it from Ashdod to Gath, but problems continued,

The hand of the Lord was against the city with very great confusion; and He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them (5:9).

For seven months this went on, and the Philistines moved the ark to the city of Ekron with the same result (5:10). Finally, they resolved to send it away. It would have been better if they had renounced their faith in Dagon, and learned to love and obey the words that were contained within the ark! But, we often see that sinful people, convicted of the power of God, would rather push Him farther away than unite with Him. Thus, the Philistines made an effort to pacify the God of Israel, placing the ark on a brand new cart, and giving a guilt offering of gold to recognize the plagues they had suffered.

Surprisingly, they were still ready, even this late in the game, to explain away their painful encounter with God as mere chance. They performed a test, to see whether or not a divine power was really

cursing them. They hitched the cart to two “milch cows,” that is, mother cows with nursing calves. When released, the cows did not turn back toward their babies, but, against their powerful instincts, pulled the ark directly to Beth-shemesh in the territory of Israel.

By the way, God doesn’t play favorites either. When the Israelites of Beth-shemesh did not treat the ark in a holy manner, but looked inside, many were struck down (some scholars suspect a manuscript problem, and say 70 rather than 50,070; or suggest that 70 refers to the people of the tiny town of Beth-shemesh, and 50,000 refers to the Philistines). The Law of Moses clearly stated that the ark was to be handled only by a select group of the priests (Numb. 3:31), and then only after it had been safely covered from the defilement of human hands and eyes (Numb. 4:5, 15). “They shall not go in to see the holy objects even for a moment, or they will die” (4:20).

Finally, the people of Kiriath-jearim came up and took the ark back to their city, placing it in the house of Abinidab, and consecrating his son Eleazar to care for it (6:13–7:2). There it remained for a long while, through the reign of Saul, until David secured his kingdom, and sought to return the ark to its proper place in the tabernacle (2 Samuel 6).

The folly of idolatry is not the only lesson here—the power of God is on display, too. God is not dependent upon mankind in any way. Even when Christians make themselves unworthy to fight God’s battles, He can fight for Himself, and uphold His own glory.

There are times in history and in this life where it seems that Satan is gaining the upper hand, and evil men are winning. Rest assured that God needs no help defeating evil. Things may occur that seem to us like setbacks—the capture of the ark, the confiscation of a church building, the decimation of a congregation due to sickness or maybe sin—and the handful of faithful are tempted to doubt. Have no fear! One day, all evil will collapse, and every knee will bow.

—*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“No matter how big the lie; repeat it often enough, and the masses will regard it as the truth.”

—*John F. Kennedy*