

## October 19

**Scriptures:** Read 1 Samuel 5 & 6

**Key Verse:** “Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?” (1 Samuel 6:20)

### Overview

As a trophy of their defeat over the Israelites and their God, the Philistines placed the ark in the temple of their god Dagon in Ashdod. This was one of the five major Philistine cities near the coast of the Mediterranean about 35 miles west of Jerusalem in the territory allotted to the tribe of Judah. The Philistines may have done this out of revenge for the destruction of their other temple of Dagon in Gaza which Samson had caused some years earlier, resulting in the deaths of thousands (Judges 16:21-30). In placing the ark below Dagon, they intended to show the superiority of their god over the God of Israel, but once again the true God of Israel was not put to shame. The idol fell twice as though in homage to Him, and the second time God smashed it in pieces. Dagon may have been the “fish-god” (dag means “fish”), having the hands and head of a man and the body of a fish, or it may have been a grain-god of agriculture (dagan means “corn” or “grain”), since that territory was very fertile.

Not only did God humiliate the Philistine god, He also humbled and cursed the people of the three cities to which they took the ark with terrible sicknesses (probably boils, tumors, or abscesses; or it may have been the bubonic plague). After much destruction in both Ashdod and Gath, the ark was sent to Ekron. When the people saw it coming to their city, it is no wonder they feared greatly, refused to keep it, and sought out advice for its return.

In returning the ark, the Philistines showed respect and fear of the God of Israel. The ancient religions had offerings to appease their gods in order to avoid divine punishment, and this was their purpose in sending the five golden tumors and the five golden rats with the ark (6:5). It was clearly evident to them that the plague had come directly from God when they saw how the milk cows behaved in an unnatural manner. They did not return to their calves, but rather walked directly into Israelite territory as though being led. The cows walked in unison, even though they had never before been yoked (6:7).

What a difference there was in the reaction of the Israelites of Beth Shemesh to the arrival of the ark when compared to that of the Philistines upon its arrival at Ekron (compare 5:10; 6:13). The symbolic presence of the Lord brought great rejoicing for Israel but dread and great fear for the enemy. In their thankfulness to God, the people of Beth Shemesh called upon the Levites to aid them in worshipping the Lord with sacrifices. Shiloh had probably been destroyed by the Philistines (compare Psalm 78:60-64; Jeremiah 7:12; 26:9), and so they could not make plans for the ark to be sent immediately to its proper home. Without any serving priests or a central place of worship, the usual law concerning sacrifices (Deuteronomy 12:10-14) was temporarily suspended. With the gathering of the Levites and these sacrifices, the restoration of order began.

The happiness, however, soon faded when some curious, disrespectful and unholy people looked into the ark (Numbers 1:50-51; 4:20). God’s wrath and immediate judgment came upon them in the form of the same plague, bringing death to many in Beth Shemesh. Rather than repenting and

desiring to live in accordance with the holiness of God, they wanted to be free from the responsibilities involved with His presence. They were quick to ask the people of the nearby town of Kirjath Jearim to take the ark away.

### **Prayer**

You are an awesome God. We stand in awe before You, worshipping You. You've told us that to fear You is the beginning of wisdom. Teach us today as we meditate on our Bible reading. Amen.