

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH
DAVID-THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART
THE WORTHINESS OF GOD
1 SAMUEL 4:12-22; 5:1-12; 6:1-21
08/06/2017



MAIN POINT

Because God is holy and worthy of praise, we ought to approach Him with awe, gratitude, and reverence.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever lost something of symbolic value (i.e., a wedding ring, a family heirloom, or some sort of memorabilia)? If so, explain what made this item special, how it felt when you lost it, and if you were able to retrieve it later.

Which is worth more to you—monetary value or symbolic value?

What does the way we treat items of symbolic value say about how we think about the things they represent?

Similarly to how we treat our items of symbolic value with respect and care, Israel was to care for and honor the ark of the covenant. The ark represented their history and relationship with Yahweh, the one true God. Where they were mistaken, however, was to presume that possession of the ark meant that their relationship with Yahweh was fine as it was. They thought that the mere presence of the ark with them in battle against the Philistines automatically ensured the presence of God would be with them to gain victory over their enemies (see 1 Sam. 4:3-10). Israel's simply possessing the ark, though, did not indicate a right relationship with God anymore than wearing a wedding ring indicates a healthy marriage. The symbol serves the greater reality, but the symbol does not control or confine the greater reality. As we study 1 Samuel 5–6, we will see how both the Philistines and the Israelites learned this lesson in difficult ways in the case of the ark of the covenant. We should not approach God with presumption with regard to how He will act or how He desires to be worshiped.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 4:12–5:5.

Why do you think losing the ark to the Philistines was a big deal to Eli and the Israelites? How did losing the ark reflect the spiritual state of Israel at the time?

How did the Philistines repeat Israel's mistake regarding God's power and holding possession of ark?

While God does not wink at His people's sin, He does not allow false gods to rob Him of His glory. How is this

truth demonstrated in the passage so far, particularly with respect to Dagon's statue in 5:1-5?

What did the symbolic objects representing Dagon (statue) and Yahweh (ark with tablets) say about each of them and the differences between the two divine figures? How does the former show man reaching up to the divine, and the latter the divine reaching down to man?

How did God correct the Philistines' belief that their god was superior to Israel's (see v. 3-5)? How does this show Yahweh to be holy and unique among the gods of Israel's neighbors, and the only God worthy of worship?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 5:6-12.

God moved from bringing physical harm to the Philistines' idol, Dagon, to bringing physical harm on the Philistines themselves with the plagues of tumors. What does this affliction on each of the cities (Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron) suggest about God's commitment to display His holiness to the world?

The Philistines' presumptuous treatment of the ark (i.e., passing it around from location to location) coincided with their experience of God's judgments. How do the Philistines' assumptions about God expressed in the passage parallel how people today think about God and worship Him?

In what ways do people in our culture and within our churches overlook the holiness of the God of the Bible?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 6:1-9.

How do we see God glorified with the Philistines' decision to send back the ark back to Israel (see especially verses 3-5)?

What does the Philistines' guilt offering and attempt to make reparations with God tell us about their attitude toward holy things or places? What does this reveal about humanity's knowledge of spiritual things since even non-Israelites found it intuitive to revere holy things and offer sacrifices?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 6:10-21.

In light of verses 8 and 9, how does Yahweh demonstrate to the Philistines that He is responsible for the plights of tumors they experienced and that the events were not just "by chance"?

How does verse 20 point to our need for salvation? How is Jesus ultimately the answer to the question raised by the men of Beth-shemesh in this verse?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can we avoid becoming presumptuous about God's presence and favor toward us like the Israelites did with the ark? Do we sometimes fall prey to this way of thinking when it comes to self-righteousness about our church

denominations, political parties, and nationalities?

How should reverence for God inform how we worship corporately in our local churches? Is our approach to public worship services inappropriately casual and noticeably lethargic at times? How does God's Word serve as a guard and corrective to compromised worship in the church?

The Israelites were presumptuous about God both before the ark's departure and after its return. They thought similarly to Philistines, which meant their worldview was more pagan than biblical on this matter. Why is Scripture necessary for us to think about God and our relationship with Him properly? How does preaching the gospel to our non-Christian friends and neighbors work to correct their misconceptions about God?

PRAY

God, You are holy; apart from Christ, we are not. Forgive us for our presumptuous sins and hidden faults. Remove wrong thinking about You from our hearts and minds. According to Your grace, make us faithful to the mission of making disciples. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

COMMENTARY

1 SAMUEL 4:12-22

4:12 A Benjaminite was a man from the tribal territory of Benjamin to the south. Shiloh was part of Ephraim's territory. Clothes were torn... dirt on his head were expressions of mourning (2Sam 1:2).

4:13 "Keeping vigil" might be a better translation than watching since Eli was now blind (v. 15). The Hebrew word translated cried out always has a negative connotation, as does the related word "outcry" in the next verse.

4:14 In his haste, this man had run by Israel's former high priest. Now he returned to report to Eli and apprise him of the battle.

4:16 The words I'm the one suggest the man was a designated messenger to bring the news of the battle (v. 17; cp. 2Sam 18:19-23).

4:19 Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, had lost three family members—her father-in-law... husband, and brother-in-law—and that news, coupled with the news of the capture of God's ark, suddenly brought her labor pains.

4:21 Ichabod means "where is the glory?" with the clear implication, as she then said, that the glory has departed from Israel.

4:22 The wife of Phinehas incorrectly associated God's glorious presence with the presence of the ark of God. However, she was right in the sense that she believed life apart from God's presence was not worth living.

1 SAMUEL 5:1-12

5:1 The trip from Ebenezer to Ashdod was about 19 miles. Ashdod—along with Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza, and Gath—was one of Philistia's five major cities.

5:2 Dagon was originally an agricultural and/or storm god of Canaan and Mesopotamia, but the Philistines made him head of their pantheon. Perhaps the Philistines thought they should place the ark next to his statue as a symbolic gesture of Dagon's defeat of the Lord in battle.

5:4 Dagon's head and the palms of his hands were broken off (lit "cut off"), suggesting Dagon's fall was no accident. The positioning of head and palms on the threshold nearby also ruled out an accident.

5:5 From then on the priests of Dagon and all his worshipers avoided stepping on Dagon's threshold—a threshold that marked the place of his defeat before God.

5:6 The Lord now oppressed the people of Ashdod, plaguing them as He had plagued the Egyptians (4:8). Tumors (Dt 28:27) probably describe symptoms of bubonic plague, a disease spread by rodents (1Sam 6:4). Others believe the term describes boils or hemorrhoids.

5:8 Perhaps Gath, located more than 20 miles away at the mouth of the Elah Valley, was on friendlier terms with Israel (21:10; 27:3; 2Sam 15:18; 1Ki 2:39), prompting relocation of the ark.

5:9 The Philistines' plan failed as God then brought the tumors to Gath.

5:10 The Philistine citizens of Ekron, located 10 miles north of Gath, cried out in fear of their lives when the ark of...God came to their city.

1 SAMUEL 6:1-21

6:1 The allusion to seven months dates the battle that resulted in the ark's capture to around late October, since the wheat harvest (v. 13) typically occurred around late May.

6:2 Priests and... diviners represented the Philistines' religious authorities. Diviners were prohibited by the law of Moses (Dt 18:10,14) because they attempted to discern the will of the divine apart from the methods God had prescribed.

6:3 A restitution offering applied to situations where holy things (here the ark) became defiled (Lv 5:15).

6:4 The five gold tumors and five gold mice do not correspond to the items the law of Moses required for guilt offerings (Lv 5:14-6:7). However, fashioning an offering in the shape of the thing from which a people wanted to be delivered is well attested in the ancient world (Num 21:6-9).

6:6 The Philistines knew Israel's history and what God had done in Egypt (4:8). They were determined to learn their spiritual lesson quicker than the Egyptians had.

6:7-8 The Philistines put forth this one final test with a cart and two cows to make sure the plagues had come from the Lord's hand. Nonetheless, they were certain they needed to send the ark of the Lord away. Untrained cows would not normally know how to work together to pull a cart on a road, and they would not normally leave their calves behind, so when that's what happened, they knew it was from God.

6:9 Beth-shemesh lay in the Sorek Valley a short distance from Timnah, which was controlled by the Philistines (Jdg 14:1).

6:12 The text emphasizes how the cows' path left no room for doubt about God's guidance. The Philistine rulers followed the cart to the territory of Beth-shemesh, which probably marked the beginning of Israelite-controlled land.

6:13 Harvesting wheat was typically done around late May. The Festival of Weeks, called shavu'oth in Hebrew (Num 28:26-31; Dt 16:16), marked this time of ingathering and included Pentecost (Lv 23:15-16; Ac 2:1).

6:14 The text does not suggest that the people sinned in offering the cows as a burnt offering, though such offerings normally required a male without blemish (Lv 1).

6:15 Beth-shemesh was a city appointed for the Levites (Jos 21:16).

6:16 The five Philistine rulers recognized God's hand in their troubles of the past seven months. They returned to Ekron, where presumably they reported what had happened.

6:17-18 The expression to this day refers to the time 1 Samuel was written, probably early in the days of the divided kingdom.

6:19 The Hebrew words translated out of 50,000 men do not occur in many early manuscripts, and Beth-shemesh could not have supported such a large population. The reading 70 men, on the other hand, is undisputed. The phrase looked inside the ark may also be translated "looked at the ark" in the sense of unholy staring or gazing. The Levites should have covered the ark as soon as possible and treated it more reverently.

6:20 The men of Beth-shemesh realized their own unholiness in the presence of the holy Lord God. The Philistines had sent the ark away; the citizens of Beth-shemesh now determined to do the same.

6:21 Kiriath-jearim was a city in Judah's territory about 15 miles to the east. Sending the ark there instead of to Shiloh suggests the Philistines may have overrun Shiloh after they captured the ark. Archaeological evidence indicates the city was destroyed about this time.