

G'Day church family

We're continuing our series on the OT book of 1 Samuel.

And we're looking at 1 Samuel chapter 5

And we'll also briefly look at the NT passage from Acts 17

There's a sermon outline in the bulletin if you'd like to take down notes

Let's pray before we take a look at this passage together

## Intro

My French teacher at school - Mr McClaren - was Scottish

It was pretty difficult learning French from someone with such a thick

Scottish accent

Whenever we got something wrong in class - like pronunciation or grammar -

He would say in his thick Scottish accent - "You ignorant Philistines!"

At the time I didn't know who the Philistines were - but I knew Mr McClaren

wasn't giving us a compliment

(pause)

*Ignorant Philistines* is a good description of what is going on with the Philistines

here 1 Samuel chapter 5

## Context

The context is - that the Philistines are Israel's arch enemies

[PowerPoint 1-Map]

Explain the Map...

Last week we learnt that the Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant

### [PowerPoint 2-Ark]

Explain the Ark...

The Philistines believed that by capturing the ark - they have captured Israel's God - and captured God's power

That's why there are ignorant

(pause)

To add to the Philistines ignorance

The Philistines were polytheistic

### [PowerPoint 3-Polytheistic]

Poly=Many

Theos=God

Therefore polytheistic = [belief in or worship of more than one god!](#)

Here are some of the Philistine gods

### [PowerPoint 4-Ashtoreth]

Ashtoreth

Female goddess

Carved out of wood and seen as the goddess of love and war

### [PowerPoint 5-Baal Zebub]

Baal Zebub

Lord of the Flies

A god who was supposed to be able to prevent a plague of flies

Later the name was adapted as a name for demons and then for the devil himself

### [PowerPoint 6-Dagon]

Then there was Dagon

Half man-half fish

Hebrew word for fish = dag

Principal god of the Philistines

The god of fertility and crops

To worship such gods seems quite bizarre to us today - doesn't it?

The Philistines were not only polytheistic (worshipping many gods)

They were also syncretic - so we'd better define that

### [PowerPoint 7-Syncretic definition]

Syn=Together/with

Crete=Island of Crete - Greek gods/culture

The blending or amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought.

### God with Dagon (vv1-2)

So picking up our passage from 1 Samuel chapter 5 then

Because the Philistines have captured the Ark of God - so think they have captured Israel's God

And because they worship many gods (polytheism)

And because they practiced amalgamating or blending with other religions  
(syncretic)

They think it's a good idea to place the Ark of God in the temple of Dagon in  
the city of Ashdod

They think the more gods the merrier

Ignorant Philistines!

(pause)

But before we give the Philistines too much bad press

Are we any different to them?

Theologian James Packer says this:

[PowerPoint 8-J I Packer]

*What other gods could we have besides the Lord? Plenty! For Israel there were the Philistine and Canaanite gods, those jolly nature gods whose worship was a rampage of gluttony, drunkenness, and ritual prostitution.*

[PowerPoint 9-Unholy Trinity]

*For us there are still the great gods of Sex, Shekels (Money), and Stomach (an unholy trinity constituting one god: our self),*

As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money".

[PowerPoint 10-Another trio]

*And the other enslaving trio, Pleasure, Possessions, and Position, whose worship is described as "The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).*

[PowerPoint 11-Another trio of "F"]

*Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some.*

Packer goes on to say

*Indeed the list of other gods is endless, for anything that anyone allows to run their life becomes their god.*

*In the matter of life's basic loyalty, temptation is a many-headed monster.*

[James Packer, [Your Father Loves You](#), Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986]

The challenge for us today is:

Are we worshipping other gods as well as our Lord God? That's polytheism and idolatry - and we need to repent of it, now?

(pause)

Have we blended other gods in with our worship of the Lord God - so those other gods have an equal standing with the Lord God? That's syncretism - and we need to repent of it, now?

(pause)

**God defeats Dagon (vv3-5)**

Meanwhile back in the temple of Dagon at Ashdod

The Ark of God and Dagon share the temple overnight

[PowerPoint 12-Dagon in the temple]

What will God think of such a cozy arrangement?

I was reminded of a few verses from Psalm 2:

- <sup>1</sup> Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?
- <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the LORD

<sup>4</sup> The One enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.

<sup>5</sup> He rebukes them in his anger

God thinks this cozy arrangement is laughable!

The Philistines and Dagon can't confine god to time and place

See v3 - the people of Ashdod find Dagon flat on his face

So they stand him up again

And the next morning - Dagon is flat on his face again - this time - his head and hands broken off!

Humpty Dumpty Dagon had a great fall - all the kings horses and all the kings men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty Dagon together again!

See v4 - Dagon is found lying over the threshold!

Ignorant Philistines!

Superstitiously in v5 - from that day forward no-one who entered the temple stepped on the threshold!

It wasn't the threshold that flattened Dagon

It was the one true God - the Lord God of Heaven and Earth

Last week - Phinehas' wife thought God's glory had departed when the Ark had been captured by the Philistines

But she was wrong!

God's glory never departs

God will not be mocked

He deals with the Philistine god - Dagon

He will deal with our other gods - He won't tolerate them!

God is in control

(pause)

### **God deals with Philistines (vv6-12)**

Once God has dealt with the Philistine chief God - Dagon

He then deals with the Philistines also

In verses 6 to 12

He deals with the Philistines because they're the ones worshipping this false god

They would not listen to God when he struck down Dagon - they just stood Dagon up again

When we close our ears to God (fingers in the ears la la la) - when we close our ears to God - God finds another way to speak to us, and we may not like the 2<sup>nd</sup> way He chooses

See v6 - The Lord afflicted the people of Ashdod with tumors

[PowerPoint 13-Ashdod]

The Hebrew word used for tumors here can also mean hemorrhoids

The Greek OT (Septuagint) and Latin Bible (Vulgate) mention that rats appeared in the town - so the idea is that the rats (sent by God) gave the people these tumors

The people of Ashdod see the Ark as a god

They are superstitious and afraid

[PowerPoint 14-Gath]

So the rulers of Ashdod palm the Ark off to city of Gath

But the people in Gath are afflicted with tumors too

[PowerPoint 15-Ekron]

So they pass the Ark onto Ekron

And Ekron suffered the same way

The Ark was passed on like a game of hot potato

Ironically the people of the city cried out to Heaven

It's funny how even today - non-believers cry out to the God in Heaven - even though they don't believe?

There's warnings for all of us here!

God deals with false gods

God deals with people who worship false gods

God is in control

### **Polytheism and Syncretism in Paul's Day (Acts 17:16-29)**

Polytheism and syncretism was a problem in the Apostle Paul's day also

In our NT passage from Acts chapter 17 - starting at verse 16

[Please turn there now]

Paul has travelled to Athens in Greece

[PowerPoint 16-Paul]

Paul begins to preach and teach in the synagogue with Jews and God-fearing Greeks

Then teaching in the marketplace daily

He comes across philosophers - Epicureans (they believed in pleasure being the greatest good but pleasure achieved by living modestly) and Stoics (they believed in not being controlled by our emotions)

Some see Paul as a babbler in verse 18?

Some see Paul has teaching about a foreign god - also in v18 - a foreign god - in comparison to the many gods that the Greeks believed in - but Paul is simply preaching the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection

So the philosophers take him to a hill outside Athens called the Areopagus - in v22 - The highest judicial and legislative council of ancient Athens (Roman name for this Mars Hill)

The Greek Philosophers of Paul's time were always interested in new teaching  
- v19

In fact that's what the Athenians and foreigners did all day - see v21- talking  
and listening to the latest ideas on this Hill of the Areopagus

But notice not only are they polytheistic

They have a touch of syncretism

See v23

[PowerPoint 17-Altar]

They cover all bases and they even have an altar with the inscription "TO AN  
UNKNOWN GOD" - just in case there is another God they haven't thought of!

Paul uses this altar for the unknown God - as a connection point with the people  
of Athens - to share the Gospel of Jesus with them

Paul says in v23 - this altar you worship in ignorance - as the unknown God

Is in fact the ONE TRUE GOD

Ignorant Athenians!

This One True God is

In V24 - The creator - the Lord of Heaven and Earth

In V25 - The One who gives life and breath

In V26 - The One who made all nations from one man and allowed the earth to  
be populated

In V27 - The One who made humans to seek Him

In fact Paul says in v28 - Even one of their own Greek poets - a Stoic philosopher called Aratus - said "that people are [this unknown God's] offspring"

So Paul reasons in V29 - Once we know we are God's offspring - we must realize God cannot be domesticated or made into an image - and ignorance is not an option anymore

He is not an unknown God - made of gold or silver or stone - an image made by human beings - He is THE ONE TRUE LIVING GOD!

And He is a God who is in Control of all things!

### **Our Response (Acts 17:30-31)**

So how should we today respond to this ONE TRUE LIVING GOD?

[PowerPoint 18-Response]

Paul gives us the responses in our passage from Acts 17 from verse 30 to 31

[PowerPoint 18a-Response 1]

1. 1<sup>st</sup> **we must not be ignorant.** God will no longer overlook ignorance - Paul says in v30. The Philistines would not submit to God despite the evidence. They could have turned from their weak, defeated, inferior God, Dagon - and begin serving the mighty, superior Lord God of Israel - but they chose to be ignorant and not to serve the Lord God and they moved the ark on! God cannot be moved on - He's in control. The Philistines like many people today who are confronted with the truth about God, rejected God, despite the evidence - they'd rather believe what happened to Dagon was a superstitious accident. People don't want to change - following God and His Son Jesus - might require a complete lifestyle change and that's not acceptable to them.

The Greek philosophers of Paul's time out of ignorance had an altar for the God they didn't know. But now they know of Him - they cannot be ignorant anymore. Once someone has been told about God - ignorance is not an option! So today, anyone who ignores God - does so at their own peril. As Hebrews 10:31 says (and the Philistines can vouch for this) - **It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

**[PowerPoint 18b-Response 2]**

2. 2<sup>nd</sup> Paul says in v30 that **God wants people to repent** [explain] - repenting is not just a one-off exercise either - yes we make a decision to turn back to God and say sorry - and follow Jesus. But we also need to be continually repenting of our sinful behaviour - repenting of our polytheistic behaviour? And repenting of our syncretic behaviour!

**[PowerPoint 18c-Response 3]**

3. 3<sup>rd</sup> Paul says in v31 **God has set a day to judge the world** - and has appointed King Jesus - Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42) - proof that Jesus is the judge - Paul says - is the fact of His resurrection - death can't hold Him down (Acts 2:24) - Are we ready to face our Judge - what will our judge have to say to us?

**Conclusion (Acts 17:32)**

**[PowerPoint 19a-Conclusion]**

As Paul talked to the Greeks about God and His Son Jesus

Some listening to Paul:

When they heard about Jesus resurrection sneered

Some said they would like to hear him again

And some became followers of Paul and believed in Jesus - in v34

[PowerPoint 19b-Conclusion]

The story of defeat of the false god Dagon

The story of the punishment of the Philistines who worshipped the false god Dagon

And the story of Paul using the altar of the unknown god as a way of sharing the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus

Should show us that God is in Control

The Gospel of Jesus is not to be sneered at as the Greeks did

Jesus is the Living God and the ONLY Saviour of the World

We must always want to hear the message of Jesus again and again

The message of Jesus is life changing, life giving and life transforming?

Paul would not be stopped from telling the Good News of Jesus

We can learn from Paul - 1) to persevere and 2) Find a connection point with people to share the Gospel

Always trusting that - God is in control

Let's pray...