

1 Samuel 5-7

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[0 : 00] Chapter 5. And we're flying through it. This morning is 5 to 7. And then tonight is 8 to 12. And so it's challenging for me.

! See what's happened to you.

It's often said that the Bible has got two gods. There's the Old Testament God who is righteous, stern, bloodthirsty, mean.

And then you've got gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who's forgiving, who loves all. And people say to me, it's like there's two gods. And if you've ever felt that issue or heard that, this passage this morning takes you a little bit down that road.

Because the God of 1 Samuel 5 to 7 is not a God you ought to mess with. In chapter 5 to 7, the main character in many ways is a box.

[1 : 12] It's the Ark of the Covenant. It's a box, four foot by two foot. It was located right at the heart of Israel, right in the heart of the tabernacle in the Holy of Holies. In the box were the Ten Commandments, amongst other things.

It had a cherubim carved on top, two angelic creatures. And there between the cherubim was the footstool of God.

And God spoke from there. God ruled Israel from there. It represented, amongst other things, the rule of God. And what we're about to see is that God's heavy hand of rule and judgment falls on his people.

And on his enemy's people. And no one will be exempted. And so, in many ways, 1 Samuel 5 to 7 is a heavy word. And yet, it is the bedrock of you and I appreciating Jesus.

In this chapter before, chapter 4, Israel had rebelled against God. The priesthood had been shown to be corrupt. They've got their quota of idols. And everyone is doing what seemed right in their own eyes.

[2 : 24] And they lose a battle with the Philistines. And so, they lose with the Philistines and think, right, what are we going to do? I tell you what we'll do. We'll take the ark into battle. The lucky charm.

We'll bring it into battle with us. Because, just like God led the people of Israel to victory when they marched around the walls of Jericho with the ark, he can do it again. The people of Israel have got no concept that God is not an idiot.

And that you can't treat anything of God's like a lucky charm and a rabbit's foot. And they find out the hard way. Because they go out to battle. And instead of losing 4,000 men, they lose 30,000. 30,000 of God's own people slaughtered by the Philistines. And God is consistent with his covenant promises. He says, I will turn against you if you turn against me.

And God is keeping his word. The Philistines are a coastal people. They live by the sea, right next to the promised land. And they worship a God called Dagon.

[3 : 30] They're a seafaring people. And they made their God, Dagon, according to their culture. And so, you've got Dagon, half God, half fish. Dagon is his name.

And a victory for the nations was a victory for their God. That's what they thought. And so, what that means is that when the victory took place, when the Philistines beat Israel, they thought that their God had it all over the God of Israel.

So, the Philistines, they capture the Ark of the Covenant. And they bring it to the Temple of Dagon. And they place the Ark of the Covenant symbolically at the feet of Dagon.

It's a little bit like my God is bigger than your God kind of thing going on. The Philistines have got no idea. Their Bible is closed. And they don't know the only reason that they won this battle is because the God of Israel was actually fighting against his people.

And that's the problem. There's a little insight for you. Never read your circumstances to guide you with your Bible closed. Never read your circumstances to guide you with your Bible closed.

[4 : 48] And what I mean by that is the Philistines thought that their God was better than the Lord God of Israel because they'd won the battle. I was reading that Adolf Hitler, after one of the many failed attempts to kill him, there was a bomb that didn't wipe him out.

He said to his generals, and I quote, this proves that I'm on the right track. Adolf Hitler had no idea that God was actually showing him mercy. That God was giving him time so that he could repent. You read the wrong thing from your circumstances when your Bible is closed. Well, the Philistines thought that their God had defeated Israel's God, and boy, they're in for a shock, aren't they? Because the heavy hand of God falls not only on Israel, but he falls on Dagon, and the Philistines, and then Israel. So chapter 5, verses 1 to 3.

Can you look there with me? When the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they brought him in, brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod, and then the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.

[5 : 54] And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the Ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.

There's something quite funny about that story. The Ark is set before Dagon, but instead of God worshipping Dagon, it is Dagon who worships God.

They turn up the next morning, and he's flat on his face in a worshipful position. Next day, they rush him to his throne, and they hope for better things.

But the following morning, Dagon is flat again on his face, but this time his head and his hands have been severed from his torso. It's not looking good. Dagon's head has been decapitated.

It's a classic ancient story of victory, isn't it? So when you won a battle in the ancient world, you always slice the head of the king off as a mark of the victory. That's what they did with David and Goliath, isn't it?

[6 : 58] Goliath's head is held up. And so here is the God of Israel, and he's taken the head off their imaginary God. You see, God is king, isn't he?

And God will get his glory with or without his people. He doesn't need anyone to fight his battles for him. And that's a recurring theme in chapters 5 to 7.

The heavy hand of God is falling on these deaf and dumb and blind idols. And the knockout punch is given. And what you've got here really is the stupidity of idolatry.

And you need to see it for what it is. Sarcasm is very, very dangerous, isn't it? But God uses sarcasm when it comes to idolatry.

His point is really simple. Here's his point. If you have to carry your God, the choices are he won't be able to carry you in the course of your life. If he's the sort of God who needs to be upheld, who needs to be physically carried and moved, who is dependent on human beings, then you can bet your life he's not fit for your worship.

[8 : 12] And Dagon needs to be moved and put back on his step. Even a trained dog, some of you have trained dogs, even a trained dog will stay put when you tell them.

But not this one. And God, however, represented by the Ark of the Covenant, is about to do some amazing things. He's about to wipe out the enemy.

And there's not one Israelite. Do you notice that? When I say pagan religions, I'm referring to any religion that refuses to heed to the words of the Bible.

And so rather than rethink whether we want to stick with Dagon, the Philistines, listen to what they do, chapter 5 and verse 5.

This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter into the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon and Ashdod to this day. He's fallen over two nights in a row. The second time with his head chopped off and his arms chopped off.

[9 : 18] And the religious people, they love to set up religious rules and a tradition has arisen. And the idea is that because Dagon had fallen, the area where he'd fallen was now holy ground.

So you don't walk around Dagon. Certain areas you keep out of. And that's a tradition that is held for a thousand years. It's crazy.

You would think that seeing Dagon fall on his face, flat, humiliated, seeing him smashed to pieces, it might have been a good clue that it's not really worth worrying about him. That it might be better to trade him in for a better God or at the very least get some glue to stick him up there and keep him

up there.

But no, here is the heavy hand of a holy God condemning an imaginary God. Because in the end there is only one living and true God.

And God will be glorified. So the ark moves from three cities in Philistia. If we stick the map up, can you see it? The ark starts off in Shiloh. That's where Hannah went to worship, to pray.

[10:23] It's taken as a lucky charm into battle, to Ebenezer. And it's taken captive over Eshdod, the first Philistine town. They unload it. But they quickly send it on to Gad.

And the people of Gad, they unload it. And then send it on to Ekron. And eventually it goes to Beth Shemosh. And then eventually to Kirith Jirem into Samuel. That's the journey. And so, as you read it, you see wherever the ark goes, the heavy hand of God's judgment goes.

The judge of all the earth follows. Let's feel the judgment. It's actually good to feel it. Look at chapter 5 and verse 6. The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Eshdod.

And he terrified and afflicted them with tumors. And so, they want rid of it. They go off in a blind panic. Young and old, plagues are spreading around, all on people's bodies.

They're desperate. So, they unload it onto Ekron. The people of Ekron, they don't even wait for it to come to the city. They say, no way is it coming in here. Send it back.

[11:31] It's like the people of Egypt who cried out at the judgment of God when the Israelites were enslaved. Chapter 5 and verse 11. They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, send away the ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place that it may not kill us and our people.

It's like radioactive plutonium. It's like a nuclear power reactor. We don't mind it as long as there's nowhere near us.

We'll use the power but we just don't want it anywhere near us. Get rid of it. It's like the Newbonic plague taking over and wiping out humans. And all this time, Dagon is in his temple absolutely useless in protecting his people.

The heavier hand of God falling on Israel the heavy hand of God now falling on Dagon the heavy hand of God now falling on the people of the Philistines.

And there's not an Israelite in sight because God will fight his own battles and God will gain his own glory. And what do the Philistines learn when they learn this?

[12:46] They know that they can't fight God. They know, don't they? Right? They can't take him on. You can't get an army and fight against this kind of judgment.

They don't want to worship him. And so they think their conclusion is get rid of him. Do you notice they don't seem to worry about the fact that they're palming it on to their neighbors, their countrymen.

If they palm it on to the next Philistine camp those people will be killed. There's no love for their own people there, is there? And yet God is wonderfully kind. Don't misread that.

He allows that when the ark goes they're restored. He allows the judgment to leave them as well.

He allows them to escape the judgment at least for now. There is a day coming. You know that there is a day coming when you will not be able to ask God to go away.

Revelation captures that day of judgment and it says men and women, boys and girls will beg God to kill them and they will not be able to die.

[13:58] There will come a day when you will not be able to tell God to go away. He will say depart from me I never knew you. And that in itself will be the horror of Horus.

the priests of Dagon and they recommend that if you are going to send the ark back to Israel send it back with a guilt offering. They're half right there. So they come up with this crazy idea of sending five gold shaped tumors images of the judgment they were under.

I don't know what a gold shaped tumor would look like but it wouldn't be pretty would it? And they say five gold rats as a kind of payment for the injuries done to the God of Israel because they want the heavy hand of God's judgment to be lifted from them.

And again it's classic man made worship isn't it? Human priests deciding for themselves how God is to be worshipped. No one ever bothered to ask the Israelites how does God actually demand to be worshipped and give him those sacrifices?

These sacrifices of gold shaped tumors and golden rats would be offensive to him. And what is so surprising here is that with all the evidence that is coming their way they still think that maybe this was just bad luck.

[15 : 23] So they do a little test they put God to the test they get a cart and they don't get two cows two cows that have now been yoked together that is they've never had the experience of being trained to carry a cart and normally normally you do that on a cow and the cow goes ballistic on you you've got to train them so it's already set up that it would really need to be a miracle if these cows would work together and then be sent to Israel but more than that they're milking cows which means they were calves they had a natural inclination their default position would always be to go towards their mother so it's set up for the animals not to go to Israel so there are two calves there's the ark on the cart and they stand back and in chapter 6 verses 9 this is how they see it send it on its way but keep watching if it goes to its own territory that is in Israel towards Beth Shemesh well then the Lord has brought great disaster upon us it's not a fluke but if we if they go the other way we will know that it's not his hand that struck us but it happened to us by chance bad luck this will be the test it's very interesting after all the evidence the fall of Dagon twice once with his head decapitated and his hands chopped off the way that the plagues follow the towns one by one where the ark is and the third test the cows they are watching the cows do exactly what we'd expect them to do in fact the cows are the only obedient characters in this whole few chapters no one is obeying God except the cows under the gentle hand of God and the cows are sent back to Beth Shemesh and interestingly all under the eyewitness of the Philistine rulers chapter 6 verse 16

I think it's important that the five rulers of the Philistines they saw all of this and they returned the same day to Ekron and they even acknowledged that it was Yahweh the God of Israel who did it the God Almighty but do you notice they go back and they don't change their gods they are still worshipping the same God and you think how much evidence do you need before you change your God?

how much evidence would it take for you to change your God? how much evidence would it take for you to finally submit yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ?

the Bible is 66 books it's written over a 1300 to 1500 year period there are 300 at least prophecies that find their fulfilment in one 33 year life of Jesus you have Jesus who has risen from the dead on the third day as predicted and then for 50 days he appears on 10 to 11 different occasions you have 30 recorded miracles and signs and wonders and following that the Lord Jesus performing miracles through his apostles and you have 2000 years of church history where Christianity moved from 11 guys scared witless in a room to becoming the world's biggest religion and people still prefer to worship a dead deaf dumb idol which they've created and they prefer to still follow a leader where their leader is still in the grave instead of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only reported religious leader to be alive who demonstrated evidence because in the end what we find out is you believe what you want to believe and so make sure this morning it is the evidence driving your conclusions so the heavy hand of God is not just on the Philistines is it but though Israel still has got some lessons to learn and judgment always begins with the household of God and so in 1 Samuel chapter 6 verse 19 the ark arrives back in Beth Shemesh back in Israel's territory and God struck down some of the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh 70 of them to death because they looked into the ark of God and the people mourned it says because of the heavy blow the Lord dealt with them and God is king and he is to be approached on his terms and Israel was given specific instructions that no one not even the priests not even that one particular clan within the priests the Levites were permitted to touch the ark when they carried it it had to be covered you weren't even allowed to look on it let alone touch it let alone look at it and so you've got 70 people here who aren't even priests who say well give me a look inside and in an instant 70 of them are wiped out God's holiness is uncompromising and so for those of you who've got a bit of a and it'll be alright religion and Jesus is your mate understand who you're dealing with here that the God of the universe is not to be treated lightly and this is not a game that God is playing the heavy hand of God is begging a question is begging a question from you and from me and from the people of Israel so look at chapter 6 verse 20 then the people of Beth Shemesh said who is able to stand before the Lord this holy God because no one no one can cope having a holy God living amongst an unholy people it's not going to work think about that you will not appreciate who Jesus is and what Jesus did unless you appreciate the hotness of God it is so uncompromising it is so totally pure that he is unable to tolerate sin unless you get this you'll never understand the Bible he is not an 80% holy God or a 90% holy God he is 100% holy he cannot tolerate sin so think about this with me that is the story of the Bible isn't it one disobedient act by Adam and the whole human race dies one act of reaching out for the fruit and death enters through that one man and sin spreads through all

humanity to men and women and boys and girls because he is our representative how uncompromising is that think about that one act three cities death death death one nosy group equivalent to

[22 : 28] I don't know half this congregation and they're wiped out and so who is able to stand who is able to stand before the Lord this holy God and you think who can you there's a little kind of bumper sticker isn't there or sometimes a sign outside churches which says Jesus is the answer and you think well what's the question well this is the question it's the question from the people of Beth Shemesh who can stand in the presence of the Lord the holy God and the answer is it ain't me and it ain't you now let's get back to the original question are we dealing with different gods in the Old Testament and the New Testament God's anger is there in the Old Testament isn't it he is holy and whatever whenever holiness encounters sin it will result in the righteous judgment but so is God's love and so is God's mercy it is there it is there to the Philistines and he was showing mercy to the Israelites because the ark was coming back he hadn't given up on his people even though they'd broken his heart year after year after year century after century millennium after millennium all day long

God says I've held out my hands to this obstinate people and the love of God perseveres with rebellious people even with the ones he's made a covenant with and it's true that God's judgment is all over the Old Testament it's undeniable but it's nothing compared to the judgment in the New Testament you go home and you read Jesus' 11 descriptions of the nature of hell the absolute never ending horror of those descriptions and whatever you read in the Old Testament it is a picnic to what Jesus describes hell as Jesus taught that hell is a place of utter darkness where the worm does not die out Jesus taught that hell is a place where the fire never ends and it is eternal it's not just like I'm dead it just goes on and on and on and on and it's the same God the difference is when you come to the New Testament is that God's holiness and God's love are turned up to the full volume you see his holiness on a much higher level but you see his love wonderfully on a much greater level while we were still sinners while we were God's enemies

Christ died for us and so you see the heavy hand of God falls on Israel and the heavy hand of God falls on Dagon and the heavy hand of God falls on the Philistines and then the heavy hand of God falls on the Israelites again but the amazing thing about the teaching of the Bible is that according to God's plan God's heavy hand will ultimately fall on the Lord Jesus when he hangs on the cross because God God in Christ took upon himself the judgment that our sins deserve imagine this book it is a book recording every sin that I've ever done every sin you've ever done every sin you've ever committed every thought every word every deed every motive page after page after page the things you shouldn't have done the things you should have done it never ends so many of them if you have only sinned three times a day okay three times a day that's a thousand per year I'm forty five that's forty five thousand cents and you can bet your life that is a gross underestimation and so this is a capturing of the fact that here is a God who has recorded every instance of my rebellion to be used against me now picture my hand the palm of my hand let's say this palm of my hand is me alright that is who I am and the ceiling represents God without any sin I can have fellowship can't I I can know God I can understand God I can have fellowship with him but because of my sin I am cut off from God and all the I'm sorry's in all the world it's not going to fix that problem because I cannot change that and you cannot deal with that problem your sin just sits there it hangs there it needs to be dealt with but I cannot deal with it myself and so I am cut off from God there's a million of acts of sin but the wonder of the Christian story is that

God in his kindness has provided the Lord Jesus Christ let's say this hand is the Lord Jesus Christ and this Lord Jesus he has done no sin there is no book giving the details of his sin and he comes into this world and he never sins he's tempted in every way as you are but without sin he matches God's law that I have broken but he matches it with perfect obedience he matches God's love with perfect love he loves the Lord God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength and he loves his neighbour as himself finally there's somebody who did it right and what we're told in Isaiah chapter 53 is that we all like sheep have gone astray everyone has turned into his own way but the Lord has laid the iniquity of us all on him that my sin has been transferred to the Lord Jesus and judgment always follows sin and judgment will follow sin so my sin is transferred to the Lord Jesus at the cross and that is where

[29 : 24] God's judgment is carried out and so Jesus Christ doesn't he he says my God my God why have you forsaken me and so I can know God and I can have a relationship with God because

the Lord Jesus Christ has taken my sin the heavy hand of God has been laid on the Lord Jesus now to prove that Jesus did the job properly God raised him on the third day and placed him and raised him to the right hand of the throne of the universe and so Jesus calls on each one of us now to come before him and enter into that relationship with him but you've got to do it on his terms there is no other name given to men by which you be saved and when you do it on that day there is rejoicing in heaven have you done that have you grabbed the hand of Jesus and asked him to forgive you and to save you have you trusted that he has taken your place and taken the holy anger of God in your place that God has laid his heavy hand of judgment on his son and so he will never lay it on you and so that is why as Christians we do not fear the judgment of God there's no condemnation for those in Christ

Jesus but we look forward to it as a day when he will hand out judgment alright the judgment will be into the new creation for you I will love you for all eternity I do want to finish that I want to close to the final point it is clear isn't it that when it comes to my biggest problem and your biggest problem biggest problem of sin that God will have to fight the battle on your behalf God does not need you you've got to understand that you need to understand that God does not need you you've got to be clear in your mind on that if he was a God that needed you he would not be God he would not be a God worth worshipping God does not need you he never did and he never will he doesn't need you to worship him he doesn't need you to love him he doesn't need you you need him and God will be glorified with or without you that he is being glorified as a statement of fact he will be glorified in judgment on sin and he will be glorified in salvation and he will turn the sins of men to the praise of his glory like he did in chapter 5 to 7 in 1 Samuel and so

Israel disobeys so he allows the ark to be captured and he systematically demolishes the Philistines until they recognize that the God of Israel is the God of all the earth he never did need Israel and he doesn't need us that's truth number one now people play this silly logical game if God owns everything why does he need my money if God speaks why does he need me to speak for him if God knows everything why does he need me to pray to him if God rules over everything well what I do doesn't matter where did you come up with those conclusions God will be glorified with or without you because of you or in spite of you and the question for you and me is very simple at the end of this sermon is this do you want to be the reason why he is glorified do you want to share in the rewards and the blessings that come with him being glorified do you want to be the reason why he is given pleasure

I want to follow God and his ways I want to be glorified in me not in spite of me I want God to be glorified not in spite of me but because of me because that is what he wants and his glory is our joy and our obedience his pleasure and my prayer is that as a church family he will be glorified because of us not in spite of us let's pray