

1 Samuel 5:1-7:1 | “The Ark Adventures”  
*Preached on October 31, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 5, and we will be covering two whole chapters today, chapters 5 and 6.

This means that we can’t necessarily get into all the small details of these stories, but we can get a good understanding of them, and see what God wants us to know. *[pauseeee]*

There’s nothing like an *adventure*.

As we all know, and as the dictionary makes clear: an adventure is “an exciting or remarkable experience.”

And an adventure can sometimes involve “danger or unknown risks”.<sup>1</sup> *[pause]*

We have all experienced adventures in our lives.

Sometimes just going to the grocery store can be an adventure, depending on what day and time you go to Walmart. *[pause]*

Maybe you experienced an adventure as you took a trip somewhere new and encountered some exciting or unusual things.

Or maybe you experienced an adventure as you did something like hiking or cliff jumping when you were younger. *[pauseeee]*

So we are familiar with adventures in our personal lives, and we are also familiar with adventures in stories.

We read stories like, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

We watch movies like *The Adventures of Indiana Jones* or TV shows like *The Adventures of Superman*.

All of these stories involve a main character, who goes through “exciting or remarkable experiences,” and we enjoy the ups and downs of it all.

We enjoy the intense moments, the moments where we don’t know what to expect next, and the moments where the main character is triumphant over danger.

It’s exciting to us. *[pause]*

Well this morning we will be looking at some stories that could be accurately called, “adventures”.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adventure>.

And the main character isn't some made up character in a book, but it is the Ark of the Covenant.

And so I've entitled my sermon this morning, "The Ark Adventures".

For as we will see, the stories are all about the Ark and what it goes through in different places, as it's moved around from city to city.

Yet unlike other peoples' adventures, the Ark's adventures don't involve any danger or risk to the Ark itself, but it does involve danger and risk to those near it.

So let's hear about the adventures of the Ark, shall we? *[pauseeee]*

In 1 Samuel 5, we see the Ark behind enemy lines, but what will happen?

Let's READ 1 Samuel 5. *[pauseeee]*

In verses 1-5, we see Dagon vs. Yahweh, as the Lord's ark is placed in Dagon's temple. *[pause]*

If you remember from previous weeks, the Israelites had lost the battle against the Philistines.

And so the Philistines captured the Ark, and that's why here in chapter 5, we find that they place the Ark in their god's temple, whose name is Dagon.

By doing this, it was their way of saying that Dagon had defeated Israel's God, and that he was therefore inferior and subservient to Dagon.

But little did they know who they were dealing with, and what was to come!

For the very next day, the people wake up to find a shocking scene.

Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the Ark, and they simply put him back. *[pause]*

This first time, they probably thought that something knocked over the idol.

You know how something falls in your house, and you don't know how it fell, but you figure that something happened and you just put it back?

Well that's most likely what they were thinking here the first time. *[pause]*

And isn't it ironic that their venerated god had to be put back in place by the people?

Dagon was useless, for he couldn't even get back up on his own. *[pauseeee]*

So the people think all is well, but the next morning they find something even more astonishing: Dagon is once again face down on the ground before the Ark, but there's more...

His head and hands are cut off, and only his trunk remains. *[pause]*

The cutting off of the head and hands show someone completely defeated and dominated.

And so Dagon's posture before the Ark showed a totally defeated king bowing before a triumphant King.

And we even find that because of this, the Philistines create a superstition when entering the temple about not stepping on the threshold. *[pause]*

Isn't this amazing!

Here's this so-called god of the Philistines that they thought was amazing, yet God utterly humiliates him.

The Philistines thought that their god was superior to Israel's God because they had captured the Ark, but they were dead wrong.

Dagon is shown to be useless, humiliated, powerless, and disgraced.

In fact, God had so disgraced Dagon that this event was remembered for the rest of time in their superstitious entering of Dagon's temple!

*And so what we see is that this story and the next couple cause us to respond in a certain way, and it's this - we ought to...*

### **I. Stand in awe of the glorious sovereignty of the Lord! (5:1-6:18)**

What else can we do when we read a story such as this one?

We see that God is God of the Universe.

Just because the Ark is in enemy territory doesn't change anything, for the Lord is not confined to a place.

May we always remember that!

God doesn't just reign over the church, he reigns over the world.

God doesn't just work in a church building, but he works everywhere that He purposes.

God is the God of the Universe, and all are called to bow before Him like Dagon. *[pause]*

Truly, the Lord is inferior to no one, for He is the Lord of lords.

His absolute supremacy is seen over Dagon, and by implication, His supremacy is over all so-called gods. *[pause]*

Though the Philistines thought they could do whatever they wanted with the Ark, they soon realized that God cannot be controlled.

God is no servant of another god or person, He bows to no one, but He is the one and only true Lord and King. *[pauseeee]*

**Sadly, we each have idols in our hearts.**

Idols of comfort, success, good looks, pride, approval, and so much more.

These things may not be made of stone or any other material, but they are idols just the same, as we worship them over God.

And without thinking about it, we put God next to our “Dagon’s” and think that He should serve them, but God will not have it.

He will not be controlled or manipulated, He is inferior to no one. *[pauseeee]*

What foolishness it is to worship anything over God.

**No one is even in the same category, and any other wannabe competitor is shown to be no competitor at all....**

...And they will be so defeated that it’s like their head and hands are cut off, and they can’t help but bow before Him. *[pauseeee]*

The next section is 1 Samuel 5:6-12, where we find the Ark being moved all around Philistia.

The ark starts out in Ashdod where it was brought first, and the people are terrified and afflicted with tumors.

Now commentators have differing opinions on what these tumors were as some think it may have been the bubonic plague, as mice are mentioned later.

But no matter what it was exactly, it certainly wasn’t pleasant for the Philistines.

**For they gather together and determine to get rid of the Ark because of what it was causing among them.**

And so the leaders decide to just move it on to another city. *[pause]*

They might have thought that it was something that only Ashdod did that made God angry, and so they assumed that moving it to a different city would make the suffering stop.

But they were wrong. *[pause]*

The Ark was brought to Gath, and the same exact thing happened there - panic and tumors.

And so they foolishly decide to move it once again to Ekron.

**But notice how the people of Ekron respond.**

They heard all about what happened whenever the Ark went into a city, and they are like, “What are you doing? Are you trying to kill us?! Oh no, you don’t. We don’t want any part of that thing.”

So they determine to send the Ark back because it was causing such a deathly panic among the people. *[pauseeee]*

So what do we see in this section? Isn’t it once again the glorious sovereignty of the Lord?

His power is on full display, as Philistia is ravaged. *[pauseeeee]*

For the Philistines their prior victory over Israel has only brought calamity upon the nation, and their own god, Dagon, is useless against it. *[pause]*

While Dagon’s hands are cut off, the Lord’s hand is heavy against the people.

They are afflicted, terrified, and in a deathly panic. *[pauseeeee]*

While the Israelites thought that the Philistines were a very strong army, who just destroyed them in battle...

...God showed that when He is at work, he doesn’t even need an army to force the Philistines into submission, and make them tap out. *[pauseeee]*

This whole situation of the Philistines capturing the Ark, but then God causing all of this craziness to happen kinda reminds me of a dad wrestling his 2 year old son...

At the beginning, the dad let’s his son think that the son is winning, as he plays along.

But then all of a sudden, the dad uses his full power, wrestles his son, and pins him easily.

The son thought at first that he was stronger than his dad, only to realize the true and full power of his father.

And in that situation, the son realizes, “I never actually had a chance.” *[pause]*

So also, the Philistines come to realize the full power of God, and understand that they never truly “captured” the Ark, for the Lord was in control the whole time. *[pauseeeee]*

The Lord’s power is *unrivaled!*

And the truth is: no human scheming will thwart his power.

The Philistines tried to scheme their way out of this affliction by moving the Ark from Philistine city to Philistine city, but it did no good.

God was forcing them to do his bidding, and his bidding was to return the Ark to Israel. *[pause]*

So this shows us that no human scheming will foil what He plans to do. *[pauseeee]*

Shouldn't this give us comfort and peace in our lives?

If God can do this, and show that no human scheming frustrates his plans, then we should have utmost confidence in what He says He will do.

We can rely upon His sovereignty.

He will bring His enemies to their knees, as they cry out, "Send Him away!" *[pausee]*

No situation is impossible. No enemy is too big. No circumstance too hard.

Any enemy that He wants to destroy, will be destroyed, for His hand is mighty. *[pauseeee]*

What situation are you facing that you think is too big for God to handle?

What temptation are you facing that you think is too strong for God to work in you and help you to resist?

What adversary are you facing that you think is just too powerful for God?

Think again.

And if you have any doubts, you can think, "I remember what He did to the Philistines."  
*[pauseee]*

Now I'm certainly not saying that God will *always* change or defeat those situations, for He has a purpose and plan, but if it's His will, He has the absolute power to do so.

And so in every circumstance, we trust and believe that He has the power, and that He can if he wants, but we also say like Jesus, "Not my will, but yours, be done."<sup>2</sup> *[pauseeeee]*

So what happens next in the story?

Let's READ 1 Samuel 6:1-18. *[pause]*

The Philistine priests and diviners gather together and decide what to do.

So they tell them not to send the Ark back empty, but to give a guilt offering.

They do this because they understand that they have sinned against God in some way, and want to make it right, in order to get rid of their affliction.

So the guilt offering they decide to give is 5 golden tumors and 5 golden mice.

Kinda weird, right?

---

<sup>2</sup> Luke 22:42.

Well the number 5 was based on the 5 main cities of the Philistines, so this represents the whole of Philistia.

The tumors obviously reflect what they were afflicted with, and the mice are a unique addition.

Some believe that it was mice that God used to bring in the plague of tumors upon the people, as they say that the mice ravage the land.

Either way, this is their guilt offering, and the religious leaders of the Philistines tell the people to give glory to God. *[pause]*

Isn't that amazing?

God used this incident to make a pagan nation give Him glory, and it's like their own religious leaders are preaching to the people, telling them to give glory to God. *[pause]*

What a God we serve!

Yes! He truly deserves glory from *all* people! *[pauseeee]*

They then encourage the people not to harden their hearts like the Egyptians and Pharaoh did.

And they devise this plan to make sure that it was truly God that did this to them, or to see if it was mere coincidence. *[pause]*

They put the Ark on a cart with two cows that have never been yoked, and take away their calves.

They used this method because if the cows go to Israel, it is truly a divine thing that happened because of a couple reasons...

First, the cows have never been yoked, so for two cows, who were never yoked, to work together and just go straight to Israel would be a miracle.

Secondly, it would be a miracle if both cows worked together and went to Israel since their calves were taken away from them, and they would want to be with their calves.

So as you can see, everything was up against the cows going to Beth-shemesh, yet that's what happens!

They don't turn to the right or left, but go straight to the Israelite city.

They were even lowing after their calves, yet going in the opposite direction of them.

This was truly a work of God, and it was like an invisible hand was directing them to exactly where it wanted them to go. *[pauseeee]*

It's amazing that the Philistines needed such evidence to prove that it was the Lord who did this to them, especially after going through it for 7 months.

**They had plenty of evidence that it was God.**

Yet isn't that the natural tendency of sinful people? We want more and more evidence of God before we believe.

People think, "Was it just a coincidence?" and they don't believe clear signs of God's existence or work.

But God showed with absolute clarity that He was behind it all in what the cows did, when they went against every natural cow inclination. *[pauseeee]*

If you have doubts about the existence of God, or have never trusted in Christ, what more evidence do you need?

Do you need more and more evidence?

**As Christ said to Thomas, so I say to you today, "Do not disbelieve, but believe."<sup>3</sup> *[pauseeee]***

So the Ark arrives in Beth-shemesh, and the people rejoice.

The cart comes next to a big stone and stops, so they use the cart and the cows to offer a burnt offering to God.

And the Philistines see what happens and return home. *[pauseeee]*

In this story, did you notice the similarities between this account and the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt?

It's like this story is telling us about the Ark's exodus from Philistia.

**Both stories involve plagues that lead the nation to send the people or the Ark out.**

Both stories involve either the Ark or the people leaving with treasures of the nation.

The people of Israel leave with silver and gold jewelry,<sup>4</sup> while the Ark leaves with golden tumors and golden mice.

Both stories are meant to show God's glory, as here the Philistines tell their own people to give glory to God...

...And in Exodus, God says that the Egyptians will know that He is the Lord, when he gets glory over Pharaoh.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> John 20:27.

<sup>4</sup> See Exodus 12:35.

<sup>5</sup> See Exodus 14:18.

And the Philistines even mention the Exodus when talking about their own situation in verse 6.  
[pauseeee]

All of this shows the Lord's sovereign power and control!

God shows off His glory in returning the Ark to Israel, for He brought victory out of apparent defeat.

So also, God produces victory out of any situation that He wants - that's who He is and that's what He does.

He was in control the whole time, He wasn't worried at all.

So it reminded the people (and us) that if He can rescue His Ark on his own, then he can rescue His people at any time. [pauseeee]

God can take care of Himself.

He doesn't need us to watch over Him or protect Him.

And even though Israel lost the Ark, God didn't need to be rescued. [pauseeee]

So often we think, "I need to help God out a little bit here," but God does not need us!

He can do as He wishes, and has full control and power over every situation, yet He *desires* to use us! [pause]

Praise God! Our God is the Great Sovereign One!

Even His enemies must bow to Him and give Him glory when He determines to work.

All things are under His control, pagan nations are under his sway, and even untrained cows do his bidding. [pause]

What a God we serve!

What do we have to fear when we have such a God, who is Lord and King over all? [pause]

*Stand in awe of His glorious sovereignty...but also...*

## **II. Stand in awe of the glorious holiness of the Lord! (6:19-7:1)**

As we ended the last section of the story, all was well, as the Ark was back in Israelite territory, and the people rejoiced over its return.

But Beth-shemesh becomes a mere layover for the Ark, as the people treat the Ark in an incorrect way, and death ensues.

Let's READ 1 Samuel 6:19-7:1. [pause]

Here we find many men of Beth-shemesh struck down.

And the reason is that they looked into the Ark of the Lord.

To many modern-day readers, they might be thinking, “Well, what’s the big deal? They just wanted to see in it.”

But to those entrenched in Old Testament Law, they would pick up on this right away.

Back in Numbers 4, God gave instructions to the people about what to do when the Ark was not in the tent of meeting.

Aaron and his sons were to come in and cover the Ark with three different coverings, so that no one could look upon it when it was outside of the Tabernacle.

And the Ark was so holy that God said they would die if they looked on the holy things.<sup>6</sup> [pause]

So here we find the Ark uncovered, and looked into by the people.

This was a serious violation of what God commanded, and that’s why God strikes them down.

He was showing His people that He was holy, and His ark must be treated with honor. [pause]

Just because the Ark was back in Israelite territory didn’t mean that Israel could treat it flippantly.

God is a holy God, and His commands must be followed. [pauseeee]

Do we remember this when we worship God?

Do we remember that we serve a holy God, who should be honored and obeyed? [pause]

Now since Christ has come, we don’t have to follow the Tabernacle and Ark regulations, but we are called to remember His holiness.

We don’t come to Him flippantly, but we present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship.<sup>7</sup>

We seek to live holy lives, not being conformed to the passions of our former ignorance, but remembering that our God is holy.<sup>8</sup>

We are to honor Christ the Lord as holy in our hearts.<sup>9</sup> [pauseeee]

---

<sup>6</sup> See Numbers 4:5-6, 20.

<sup>7</sup> See Romans 12:1.

<sup>8</sup> See 1 Peter 1:14-16.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Peter 3:15.

The Israelites despairingly said, “Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?” because they understood that they as sinful people couldn’t stand before a holy God.

And that’s true, but the problem was what they did next - they pushed him away. *[pause]*

Isn’t that what some people do when they hear of a holy God? They push Him away.

Maybe they feel the guilt of their sin, and the absolute holiness of God - and give up.

Maybe they simply rebel against God because they think, “I can’t measure up anyway, so I might as well keep living this way.”

But for us, God’s holiness doesn’t make us despair, give up, and push him away, for we know the answer to the question...

...It’s through Christ, the perfect mediator, who allows us to stand before the Holy God.

It is because of His death on the Cross for our sins, and His righteousness credited to our account that we can stand justified, forgiven, and able to have a relationship with the Holy Father.

*[pause]*

So don’t let God’s holiness become an obstacle to worship, but a *reason* for worship. *[pauseeee]*

What’s your response to the holiness of God?

To push away God in fear, or to bow before Him in genuine repentance and worship, clinging to Christ your Mediator? *[pauseeeee]*

In the end, the Ark found a resting place in Israel, as it went to Kiriath-jearim.

And the truth is, that was pure grace on God’s part.

They didn’t deserve the Ark back, for they sinned against Him when they lost it to the Philistines.

They didn’t deserve the Ark back, for they sinned against Him even right away when they got it back.

But that’s God...generously giving us what we don’t deserve. *[pause]*

So also, we sinned against God, we continue to sin against Him at times, yet in pure grace, He sent His Son to take our place, pay our penalty, and give us life.

And like the Ark, Christ went through what seemed like defeat, but came out victorious.

Through His death and resurrection, sin and death became like Dagon, face down with their head and hands cut off.

*And all of this was to show off His glory, Kingship, and grace - just like he did here in these chapters. [pause]*

**God is truly the sovereign and holy Lord over all!**

You may think God is inferior, but He will always show His supremacy in the end, for anyone else is powerless against Him. [pause]

Is there any person, group, or institution that you think is powerful?

Maybe a government, a person, or the secular world system?

Don't fret, they are like Dagon.

Someday they will be toppled over, and bow before the King of kings and Lord of lords. [pauseeeee]

There is no one genuinely threatening God's Kingship! He reigns!

And He will someday defeat all of his enemies and make all things right! [pauseeee]

Oh, what a God we serve!

What security, what comfort, what peace knowing that our Lord is supreme, and he has no true rival. [pauseeee]

Even when our enemies seem powerful, and even when the world seems as its worst - God still reigns over all.

God is still the God who made Dagon bow before him, and cut off his head and hands.

He should be revered! He should be worshipped! He should be served!

Do you?

Where does your confidence lay? In something else or in the Lord over all?

Do you have any idols in your heart that you worship over God, which need to be thrown to the ground? [pauseeee]

He is King alone!

He is the all-powerful Lord, and he doesn't need us to secure victory from defeat, for He did it on the Cross and in the Grave.

His glory shone forth from a wooden cross, and His glory burst forth from the empty tomb. [pause]

Praise God that though He didn't need us, yet He chose to save sinners like us.

The sovereign and holy Lord over all chose to shower grace on us, undeserving sinners.

What else can we do but bow the knee to Him?

What else can we do but serve Him with our whole lives?

And what else can we do but love Him more?