

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

The Books Of Samuel: God's Shift Of Israel From Apostasy Under The Judges To David's Reign

I. 1 Samuel: From Samuel To The Death Of Saul

G. God's Potent Discipling Of Men Even Amid His People's Apostasy

(1 Samuel 5:1-7:2)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

A Christian can easily be tempted to become discouraged at the spiritual darkness of today's unsaved world, not to mention the great spiritual weakness that often afflicts large swaths of the professing Christian community:

(1) One of the promotions for Brannon Howse's book, The Coming Religious Reich, 2015, p. iii was a piece written by Justin Peters, the radio and TV host of Justin Peters Ministries, and in his promotion, he claimed, "(T)here is much uncertainty in the world and an almost palpable sense of foreboding . . . The wheels seem to be coming off in so many arenas of life. International tensions seem to be on a hair trigger, once mighty economies are now fragile, and the social and spiritual fabric is being rent . . . [but] (i)ronically, many of those in the Religious Right and many evangelical celebrities who claim to be fighting these troubling trends are actually contributing to them by their dilution of biblical doctrine and standards."

(2) Ken Ham of Answers In Genesis ("Steadfast in the Midst of Scoffers," Answers, April-June, 2016, p. 53) recently wrote that "generations of young people from church homes have been indoctrinated in the secular education systems to believe in an evolutionist view of origins. Much of the church has been lulled into complacency" over the matter while evolutionists "have captured the hearts and minds of many in the coming generations."

Need: So, we ask, "How do we offset the temptation to be discouraged over spiritual darkness in the lost we seek to evangelize and over the spiritual weakness that often afflicts much of the professing Christian community?"

- I. We learned from 1 Samuel 4:1-22 that due to Israel's spiritual compromise with Canaanite pagan beliefs, the ark of the Lord was seized by pagan Philistines to the dismay of many people in Israel.**
- II. This event marked an historical spiritual low for mankind: God had given His Abrahamic Covenant to bless the world's families through Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:1-3), but Abraham's descendants had become corrupted with the lost world's paganism, seemingly blocking the progress of God's agenda.**
- III. However, at the time of this spiritual low itself, God Himself potently disciplined men, 1 Samuel 5:1-7:2:**
 - A. God potently disciplined the pagan Philistines to learn of His omnipotence and omnipresence, 1 Sam. 5:1-6:16:
 1. After capturing the ark from Israel, the Philistines took it to the temple of their god Dagon in Ashdod, one of their five major cities, and set it down by the image of Dagon, 1 Samuel 5:1-2. They believed Dagon had defeated Israel's God, so they set the ark down before him as a trophy, B. K. C., O. T., p. 436.
 2. God does not give His honor to another (Isaiah 48:11b), so early the next morning, the Philistines found the image of their god Dagon had fallen face down before the ark of Israel's God, 1 Samuel 5:3a.
 3. The Philistines set Dagon up again on his "pedestal" (*miptan*, Ibid., p. 437), but the next day his image was again fallen face down before the ark, but this time with his head and hands broken off, lying on the pedestal, so the Philistines never again treaded on Dagon's pedestal there at Ashdod, 1 Samuel 5:3b-5.
 4. However, God then struck Ashdod's people with a plague to critique their worship of Dagon, 1 Sam. 5:6:
 - a. 1 Samuel 6:5 explains that this 1 Samuel 5:6 plague was spread by rats, producing a classic symptom of bubonic plague where large "bubo," or swellings of the lymph glands occurred especially in the groin, Zon. Pict. Ency. Bible, v. Four, p. 307; Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1965, s. v. "bubo."
 - b. Since Dagon was a weather and grain god who was therefore also a fertility god (Ibid., Z. P. E. B., v. Two, p. 3), the swelling of the lymph nodes near the reproductive organs demonstrated God's supremacy over Dagon as a fertility god along with God's judgment on the worshipers of this pagan deity.
 5. Thinking as typical pagans that Israel's God was a local deity and had supremacy over Dagon only in Ashdod, the Philistines sent the ark to Gath, another major Philistine city, but its people also suffered the bubonic plague, showing God's sovereignty over the Philistine god Dagon in Gath as well, 1 Samuel 5:7-9.
 6. When the Philistines sent the ark to a third major Philistine city of Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out for fear, urging their rulers to send the ark back to Israel lest it kill them all, 1 Samuel 5:10-11a. God still slew many of Ekron's Dagon worshipers with the plague and gave survivors swellings, 2 Sam. 5:11b-12.
 7. The Philistines finally sent the ark back to Israel on a cart pulled by two milking cows, using a divining test typical of paganism: they placed gold images of the mice and tumors associated with the plague on the

cart as a guilt offering to Israel's God, they kept the cows' calves at home and hitched the cows to the cart to see what where they would go, 1 Sam. 6:1-8. If the cows went to Israel against their natural desire to return to their calves, the Philistines would know Israel's God had struck them with the plague, but if not, then there was another explanation for the plague, 1 Samuel 6:9; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., O. T.

8. The cows went directly up to Beth-shemesh in Israel, lowing in objection as they walked since they desired to return to their calves, so God clarified to the Philistines that He had caused the plague, 6:10-12.
 9. The men of Israel at Beth-shemesh gladly received the ark, sacrificing the cows and using the wood cart as fuel for the sacrifice, and this convinced the onlooking Philistines that the God of Israel Who had shown his sovereign rule over the ancient Egyptians at Israel's Exodus (1 Sam. 6:6) had shown his omnipresence and omnipotence over the Philistines, 1 Samuel 6:13-16.
- B. God then potently disciplined His apostate people Israel to learn of His holiness, 1 Samuel 6:17-7:2:
1. After the men of Israel in Beth-shemesh sacrificed to the Lord, some of them looked into the ark, a capital offense according to the Mosaic Law for all except the Kohathite family of the Aaronic priests (1 Sam. 6:17-19a with Numbers 4:4-5, 15, 20), so the Lord killed those who violated this law, 1 Samuel 6:19.
 2. Thus, the rest at Beth-shemesh asked, "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this **holy** God?" (1 Samuel 6:20a ESV) "Holy" is from the Hebrew word *qadosh*, meaning "separate from human sin" (B. D. B., A Heb.-Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 872), so where God taught the Philistines about His omnipresence and omnipotence, He taught the men of Israel at Beth-shemesh of His separation from violations of His Word!
 3. The men of Israel arranged for dwellers in Kiriath-jearim to receive the ark, so it was sent to the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim, and his son Eleazar was given custody of the ark, 1 Samuel 6:20b-7:2 ESV.

Lesson: *When Israel in compromise with paganism lost the ark to the pagan Philistines, the Lord Himself by way of severe trials taught the Philistines about His omnipotence and omnipresence in contrast to their views, and He also taught Israel by a severe trial about His holiness, His separation from man's violations of His written Word.*

Application: *(1) May we believe in Christ to have eternal life, John 3:16. (2) As believers, may we never doubt that God is always willing and able to utilize intense trials to disciple both the lost and even His apostate people, and thus may we remain steadfast in our own obedience to the Lord that we be blessed of Him and not have to suffer His severe discipline for spiritual laxness in our own lives!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

The current issue of Answers magazine that we cited in our introduction repeatedly illustrates this message:

(1) On page 12, the article, "Fickle Sticklebacks" (Ibid., p. 12) reports: "A little fish in Alaska is astonishing evolutionary researchers . . . [In] (a) surprising report published in December 2015 . . . biologists observed sticklebacks that were trapped in Alaskan ponds cut off from the ocean by the massive earthquake in 1964. When the salt filtered out of the ponds, the sticklebacks diversified into freshwater species within a few generations. The study also verified that no freshwater sticklebacks lived in the ponds during the earthquake, so the freshwater species must have descended from saltwater species trapped there during the earthquake."

Now, "(c)reationists have argued . . . that the original created kinds, or *baramins* [in the Hebrew Bible text], of fish diversified rapidly after the Flood into lots of species, by the Creator's design . . . Evolution can't explain this by random changes and deaths over thousands of generations . . . The humble stickleback shows God's design for animals to adapt to specific new environments rapidly, not over millions of years of wasteful, random change and death" as is held by evolutionists, Ibid. (brackets ours)

Thus, amid the great promotion of evolutionary thinking in today's world and even among many Christians, God is still testifying of the error of the evolutionary model and the truthfulness of His written Word!

(2) Dr. Georgia Purdom's article, "DNA's Hidden Codes," Ibid., p. 75-78, reports that "(c)hildren in public schools are bombarded with claims that random processes can explain the messages encoded in DNA, and this creates doubt in the Bible's claims about the Creator" (Ibid., p. 75), but scientists are finding "that some genes are dual-coding--they code for more than one protein" having "different structures and different functions," Ibid., p. 77-78. Dr. Purdom writes: "The title to one section of an article on dual-coding genes" in a scientific journal "says it all: 'Dual Coding Is Virtually Impossible by Chance,'" Ibid., p. 78. The Creator keeps signaling His existence even in our era!

May we see God as omnipresent, omnipotent and holy so as to AVOID getting discouraged over the waywardness of the world or even of other believers around us, realizing that God is able and willing to disciple ALL men. Thus, may we focus on staying true to His calling for us and leave the rest to God!