

• *The ark in the temple of Dagon*

The Philistines placed the ark in the temple of Dagon¹. They were ignorant people and thought the ark was itself Israel's God. They thought that if they adopted the God of Israel as their God also, he might do wonderful things for them.

¹ 5:1-2

• *People who want God to serve their own interests*

But although they brought God into their temple, they did not put Dagon out! There are many people who think it is useful to have God on their side. In a way they want to honour God. They will go to church. They will say prayers. They will ask a pastor to bless a marriage or their new house. The kind of God they want is simply a God who will help them get their own way and win their own battles. They want God to be a servant to help them get things done, but they want to live their own lives and have their own views at the same time.

• *Discovering the living God*

What is needed in the lives of such people is that they should discover God as the living God. Sometimes God does something that, if we only take notice, will get us to see that he is the living God. The Philistines got up the next morning and found their idol fallen on his face before the ark of the LORD¹. God has a habit of knocking our idols down. But then we have a habit of putting our idols back up again, and this is what the Philistines did². The next day the same thing had happened again³, only now Dagon was without his head (a hint that he cannot rule) and without his hands (a hint that he cannot do anything). The God of Israel is not simply another god to be put alongside others. He is not simply someone we can take into our lives to be helpful to us when we need him. He is the mighty living God who will knock all our idols down when he feels like it.

¹ 5:3a

² 5:3b

³ 5:4

• *Sometimes God does things to help us see who he really is*

• *More superstition!*

The Philistines got to know that God is the living God. But they were so ignorant of God that it led them to add one more superstition to all the others. From that point on they 'hopped' over the threshold of their temples¹. (The custom is mentioned again in Zephaniah 1:9.)

¹ 5:5

• *No blessing while they kept their own idols*

While they were trying to have their own idols alongside the living God there was no blessing in their lives. Devastation came in the form of a plague of rats¹, and the rats brought sickness².

¹ 6:4-5

² 5:6

• *Muddled and yet almost right*

In their own muddled way they sought to be right with God. They did not have any clear revelation or guidance and yet they came to some conclusions that were almost right.

1. They came to see that they had to get right with God

1. They came to see that they had to get right with God. It had become obvious to them that the God of Israel could affect their lives and so now they wished to do something to be right with him. They recognized God's activity¹, and called a meeting to decide what to do².

¹ 5:7

² 5:8a

2. They knew that what they had done was offensive to God, but could not find a way to please him.

• Our ways of pleasing God are not acceptable to him

3. They were right in thinking that something had to be done about their past offensiveness to God

• Their instinct was right but – they did not have any understanding about the kind of sacrifice God requires

• The light of the Gospel – Jesus the sacrifice that brings reconciliation

2. They knew that what they had done was offensive to God, but could not find a way to please him. In their ignorance they struggled to find a way of being right with God. Did the God of Israel not like sharing a temple with Dagon? Then they would take him elsewhere. They took the ark to Gath¹ and then when that did not seem to help², they tried Ekron³. But the people of Ekron did not like the idea at all and the move still did not seem to please the God of Israel⁴. After seven months of experimentation they decided that God wanted his ark sent back⁵. The question was - how should it be sent back?

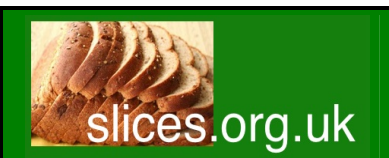
All of this is typical of people who have come to the conclusion that God is real but do not know how to get to know God. They struggle to find a way of pleasing God, but our ways of trying to please God are not acceptable to him.

3. They were right in thinking that something had to be done about their past offensiveness to God. The God they had offended would not simply ignore what they had done. They felt that if they were to be reconciled to God some kind of sacrifice would be needed¹. It had to be a sacrifice for their sins, so they made some valuable gold gifts in the shape of the rats and the tumours that had been troubling them, so that it would be clear this was a gift to atone for the sin that had brought those particular judgements². They found a way of deciding whether the whole affair was simply coincidence and the ark went back to Israel³.

In much of this their conscience and their religious instinct was right but hazy. They were right to think we cannot simply 'forget the past'. They were right to think that a sacrifice was needed before God would be reconciled to them. But they invented their own sacrifice, not knowing that God would provide a sacrifice of his own. The instinct many people have that a sacrifice for sin is needed is a right and true instinct. The truth is, God's sacrifice for sin is Jesus. God's law required sacrifices with blood in it. Only sacrifices which involved the shedding of blood were adequate to express what Jesus would one day do for sinners needing reconciliation with God. The Philistines were following the instincts of muddled consciences. When the light of the gospel came what they were looking for would be available in Jesus. He would be the sacrifice for sin that they needed but could not find.

1 5:8b
2 5:9
3 5:10
4 5:11-12
5 6:1-2

1 6:3
2 6:4-6
3 6:7-12



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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