

**INTRO:** Destroying statues is a symbolic act of power. It says “We will not stand for a statue that stands for a person or practice that has done us wrong and made us angry.” But what would it mean if God were to destroy a statue? We find out in 1Samuel 5. One of the founding principles of the country we live in is that all people are created equal—equal in human essence, human value, and human dignity. That is true, and the Bible teaches it. We are all made in God’s image with equal value and dignity. But the popular inference to make today is that all religions are also created equal, and that to worship in one of those religions is not to reject God, but simply to pursue Him in the way that comes most naturally to us. So does God think all religions are created equal? And if we do reject God, do we defeat Him? The answers to these questions and more await us in 1Samuel 5.

**The Setting. 5:1-2** “*When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.*” We’ll remember from chapters 2-4 that God is judging the Israelite priesthood. Eli and his sons were totally corrupt, guilty of extortion, embezzlement, and sexual misconduct. Samuel was now a nationally known prophet, but apparently ignored up to this point. God had told Eli his sons would die on the same day, it happens in this battle with the Philistines in chapter 4, even though Israel brings the ark of the covenant to save them like a lucky charm. In fact, the Philistines even take the ark. The Philistines are not mentioned in Joshua, so most of them may have arrived in Canaan after the Israelites. They are the reason the region is sometimes called Palestine. They seem to have had a history in Asia Minor and then Egypt before arriving in Palestine, maybe as Egyptian mercenaries for control of the trade routes between Egypt and Assyria.<sup>1</sup> The Philistines, then, are military people. They’re iron-age people who were really good at weaponizing iron.

These Philistines appear to be in complete control. They’re the subject of all the verbs, making all the decisions, taking all the action, controlling even the ark itself. They capture the ark, brought it to Ashdod, took it, brought it, set it up—total control. They are doing things to the ark that make us think, “If God is God—holy, sovereign, all powerful, in control, faithful, and good—then he would never let THAT happen to the symbol of his own presence.” The Philistines act; the ark is acted upon. And in the worst indignity an Israelite could imagine, they set the ark up beside *their* god, as if they can treat the true God as an equivalent or even a servant of a false god. The first commandment is being violated physically, spatially. You shall have no other gods before/above me, yet now the ark is placed beside Dagon. This was military custom. When you won a war, the victor took the loser god and placed it in the temple of the winner god. We beat you. Therefore, our god beat your god. Therefore, your god serves our god. And your people now serve our people. Simple as that.<sup>2</sup>

Dagon isn’t mentioned much in the literature of the time. You’ll read on the internet that he was a fish god, which is tempting to believe because the Hebrew word for fish is *dag*. You’ll also read he was a grain god, because the Hebrew word for grain is *dagan*. But don’t believe the hype. The best evidence from the time confirms Dagon as the mythological father of Ba’l, the storm god.<sup>3</sup> He was probably understood as a rain-maker, in an agricultural economy. So the Philistines steal the ark of the one true

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Baldwin, *TOTC* 78.

<sup>2</sup> “Evidently they intend Yahweh’s footstool to reside in Dagon’s house as an emblem of the ascendancy the latter has established, as they suppose, at Ebenezer..., as palpable evidence of the subordination of one divine being to another, thus imputing authority to the claims of one people upon another” (McCarter, *AB*, 124, 125). “In this way the Israelite Yahweh was supposed to have come under the control of Dagon, the god of the conqueror” (Tsumura, *NICOT*, 204).

<sup>3</sup> “Medieval Jewish commentators (Rashi, Kimchi) connected his name with a common Northwest Semitic word for ‘fish’ (dagg-/dig-...); but this has seldom been maintained in recent scholarship. Instead the name is now identified with a Semitic root (*dgn*) having to do with clouds and rain... [S]ince he was regarded as the father of the great storm god Ba’l Haddu, the identification is attractive. Evidently the common Northwest Semitic term for grain (Hebrew *dāgān*) is derived from his name..., [but] the biblical form of the name reflects Phoenician *dāgōn* and not Hebrew *dāgān*” (P.K. McCarter, *AB*, 121-122). So also Tsumura (*NICOT*, 205).

God, put it in the temple of their idol, as if they'd beaten Yahweh and Yahweh was now Dagon's boy. This is demoralizing, degrading, defeating. Philistines are declared winners by unanimous decision.

**The Story 5:3-5.** *“And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold [watch this, stick this in your pipe and smoke it], Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. The Philistines were early risers, but God had gone to war while they were sleeping. They get up to do their devotions to Dagon, only to discover that Dagon had been doing his devotions, to Yahweh. Unbeknownst to the Philistines, there was a title match at midnight, and Yahweh submitted Dagon. Dagon was literally “before the face of the ground before the face of the ark.” The phrasing is repeated for emphasis, and it's the same preposition as in the first commandment, Ex 20:3 *no other gods before the face of me*. You put another god before the face of Yahweh, and Yahweh puts him face down in his own house. Dagon is doing deference to the one true living God—face down, toward the ark, worshipping Yahweh. There's a true God in town.*

Now look at what happens to the subjects and verbs in v.3. *“So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.”* You gotta love the irony of understatement. The ark is all alone in a foreign land, in the enemy's house, separated from its people. But Yahweh doesn't need his people to set him up. It's Dagon who needs his people to set him back up, like a kid with a GI Joe. Comic strip. The rainmaker, the god of fertility, the god who makes our crops and kids grow—he needs a hand. It reminds you of how Isaiah will make fun of idols and those who make them in Isa 41:7 *“they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved”* (cf. Jer 10:4). Or Isa 46:1 *“these things you carry (idols) are borne as burdens on weary beasts.”* What good is an idol if you're the one who has to carry it around? (cf. Isa 46:7 *They set it in its place*).

So the Philistines are eating supper that night and everybody's like, “well that was weird what happened this morning at The Dagon temple. Must have been a stiff wind blew Dagon down.” But they go to bed thinking nothing more of it. *“But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord (exactly the same repetitious phrase as in v.3) AND the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.”* Now Dagon needs more than a hand. He's lost both hands! TKO. Unanimous decision by decapitation and amputation. The winner and undisputed champion is, Yahweh. But this was not just a title bout. This was a military style execution. This is what ANE armies did to their vanquished enemies. They cut off their heads and hands (Tsumura, *NICOT* 205). Notice the sequence of what just happened. The Philistines win the military battle and, true to custom, they took the ark into their own god's temple. But then Yahweh went to war, and after two nights he cuts off the head and hands of their purportedly victorious god. **Don't call it a comeback.** This was strategic conquest. Winner winner, chicken dinner.

To add insult to injury, Dagon's stone-cold head and hands are laying there on the threshold, the floor of the doorway into the temple. What's the meaning of that? It may a sign that Yahweh kicked Dagon out of his own temple! No head—ignorance of idols. No hands—impotence of idols. Mindless, powerless, lifeless, useless, worthless. Thus says the Lord, I'll beat you in your own house, and then I'll kick you out of it. That is what God thinks of our idols, whether they are masonry or mindsets, statues or worldviews.

But with such a clear symbol of Yahweh's superiority and victory, what do the Philistines do? They venerate the threshold! *“This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.”* They ignore the obvious and go on worshipping their ignorant, impotent god. They acknowledge what happened. They know it. They remember it. They

even commemorate it. But they don't repent of their false worship. They double down on Dagon, glue him back together, carve another image...don't step on the threshold. The aftermath comes in vv.6-12.

**The Aftermath 5:6-12.** *“The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said...”* Stop right there. *“The hand of the Lord.”* Yahweh cut off Dagon's hands, and now Yahweh's hand, still healthy, presses heavy against the people who imagined, created, and worshipped Dagon.<sup>4</sup> The text says his hand is heavy against them, and it's true. These tumors are nasty.<sup>5</sup> They're infected blisters everywhere you don't want them, and they're deadly. They're like the plague of boils God sent on Egypt (Dt 28:27 *the boils of Egypt*). Now look here. They saw how it was. They felt the pain of the blisters. They had a real experience of the real God. They saw what happened when the real God came to town. God determined “how things were” for the men of Ashdod, even though they never had trusted in him, and never would. God changed things for them, and they knew it. This is how things are now. You're dealing with Yahweh now, cowboy. Your move. What'll it be? We find out in v.7.

*“They said...”* Here's the moment of truth. What will they say about what they saw? What will they do about how things are? We want them to say “We've been worshipping the wrong god. Dagon is dead, let's worship Yahweh instead. What must we do to be saved?” Common sense, right? You see the ark come in, next day Dagon is worshipping toward the ark, maybe begging for his supposed life, and the day after that Dagon is decapitated and evicted. Two plus two, right. Ah, if only humanity were reasonable.

*“When the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said ‘The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god.’ So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, ‘What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?’ They answered, ‘Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath’ [another Philistine city]. So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there. But after they had brought it around the hand of the Lord was against the city, causing a very great panic, and he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. So they sent the ark of God to Ekron [another Philistine city]. But as soon as the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, ‘They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people’ [by this time God's reputation had preceded him]. They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines [round two of the congressional hearings on Yahweh] 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.’ For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there. The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.”*

Hot potato. It would be comical if it were not so tragic. They can't get rid of this thing fast enough. They don't reject God because he's not enough for them. They reject God because He's too much for them. But their rejection does not signal Yahweh's defeat. It signals his victory. Ashdod, Gath, Ekron. Three cities. No contest. It's like God is taking a victory lap around the major cities of the Philistine.<sup>6</sup> Philistia

<sup>4</sup> Tsumura confirms (or at least entertains) this contrast, *NICOT* 206.

<sup>5</sup> See Bergen, *NAC* 98 n.67 for diversity of interpretation. Tsumura *NICOT* 209 rightly observes that MT doesn't mention “mice” until 6:5, even though LXX includes it here, and then concludes “The golden mice were then probably made, not because mice or rats were the cause of pestilence, but because ‘tumors’ and ‘mice’ have a similarity in form.” He follows Geyer's observation, *loc. cit.*, that the mice would become “offerings to the deity” but never ‘a plague.’” McCarter (*AB* 119) wrongly follows the LXX's inclusion of “mice” here, based on the conjecture that MT's mention of ‘mice’ in 6:5 assumes a prior mention here, and so wrongly identifies mice as “the agent of the spread of the disease,” but still rightly concludes that “the narrator...credits the afflictions of Israel's enemies solely to Yahweh” (*AB*, 123).

<sup>6</sup> “The story begins to read like a parody of a victory tour, in which the roles of victor and vanquished are reversed” (Tsumura, 210, quoting R.P Gordon).  
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was a pentapolis, 5 cities in solidarity. But Yahweh doesn't even make it to Ashkelon and Gaza before the Philistines tap out. They want nothing to do with the real God. "We're in over our heads, and unlike Dagon, we'd like to keep our heads. But we don't know how to make it stop." So they call another emergency congress of the kings to figure out how to get the ark back where it belongs. And that political meeting quickly turns religious as "the cry of the city went up to heaven," and that's where we leave the Philistine lords, in Ekron, wailing to whatever gods are in the sky to get rid of their skin sores and leave them alone so they can save face and get back to worshipping their ignorant, impotent god. Dagon is defunct; yet it never occurs to them that their worldview was wrong. Instead, they try to send the ark back, as if it were big of them to "let" the Israelites have their God back after defeating Israel's army.<sup>7</sup> But we know better...and so does God.

## POINT

**Humanity's rejection of God only furthers His victory.** Eli's sons rejected God. They held God and his sacrifices in contempt. All Israel repeatedly rejected God in this period of the later Judges, in favor of Canaanite idols or a combination of gods that included Yahweh but was not limited to Him. And now the Philistines reject God. Yet neither apostasy nor unbelief changes God's objective reality, His holy character, His sovereign supremacy, or His purpose to glorify Himself. God simply IS—in all His triune glory—independently of whether we acknowledge Him in Christ or rage against Him in resentment. He and His truth are marching on.

Now this text, and this point, may feel like we're preaching to the choir. But when you don't preach to the choir, the choir forgets what to sing. And that is happening today. According to Ligonier Ministries' 2020 State of Theology Survey, 42% of professing American Evangelicals agree that "God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Islam." Another 9% of American Evangelicals are not sure if they agree or disagree with that statement. So, half of American Evangelical Christians in 2020 at least entertain the idea that God accepts the worship of religions that have nothing to do with Christ. So when half of American Evangelicals read 1Sam 5 (if they read it at all), they don't believe it. "God is not like this," they would say. "God doesn't reject Christ-less religions, he accepts them and even reveals Himself through them." But what did Yahweh reveal about Himself during this encounter with Dagon? He revealed that he dispatches gods like Dagon. He rejects Dagon as a pathetic excuse for a so-called god. He revealed that He makes quick work of the Christ-less gods men worship. And he revealed that he punishes people who worship such so-called gods. He reveals that their rejection of Him does not weaken Him in any way, but only affords Him a more dramatic opportunity to display His unique supremacy. (McCarter references God's word to Pharaoh in Ex 9:15-16).

## APPS

**1. The true and living God is supreme over every culture.** The Philistines were not exempt from God's authority just because they didn't believe in Him. The whole "what's true for you isn't true for me" line did not work for the Philistines. "*They saw how things were.*" The true God is free to judge those who

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<sup>7</sup> "A victorious army regarded the capture of its enemy's gods as a demonstration of the superior power of its own gods. Accordingly the captured images would be placed in the temples of the victor's gods as spoils of war, a gesture that evinced the inferiority of the enemy's gods. Moreover, the images might be returned home in an act of magnanimity that showed the superiority of the victor's gods even more pointedly than the original capture itself. In the reports of the defeated army, however, the same events were described from a different theological viewpoint. ...The reported events provide a reaffirmation of the power of Yahweh in a time of apparent defeat...[T]he narrative makes it clear at every stage of the journey—the capture of the ark, the sojourn in Philistia, the return of the ark—that Yahweh is in complete control of every event... It follows that his audience was one for whom the theological problem raised by the Philistine victory described in the narrative was still a burning issue....This implies that the AN was written before David's defeat of the Philistines reported in II Sam 5:17-25 in which the former situation was reversed, the Philistines' own idols capture (v21), and the issue resolved" (P.K. McCarter, *AB* 24, 25).

do not know or acknowledge him, and this is just as true under the New Covenant as it was under the Old. **2Thess 1:8** Jesus will “*inflict vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction.*” But don’t get the wrong idea. We don’t preach that because we delight in other people being condemned to hell. We preach that because we want other people to realize that God is real, objective, holy, righteous, and he is not just the God of those who trust him. He is the Judge of those who don’t. We want you to know God as savior, not judge. There is an exclusivity to real spiritual truth. Jesus says this Himself. “*I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). It is not loving to lie about that just because it’s convenient.

Of course, there are many different versions or interpretations of Jesus on offer today; but that has been true ever since Paul told the Corinthians they were too quick to listen to preachers who proclaimed to them “another Jesus” and “a different gospel” (2C 11:4). There has only ever been one Jesus who saves, and you find Him nowhere else but in the Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments. If Dagon were just another good way to get to Yahweh, then why did Yahweh destroy him and go after his worshippers? He reveals these things to us as warnings. The first commandment will always be in effect. No other gods. Non-Christian, rejecting this God does not falsify Him. You are accountable to worship this God whether you agree to that accountability or not, because He created you without your permission. We don’t give God a space in our world. He gives us a space in His world. The Philistines found that out the hard way.

The true God is not contingent on humanity, and this goes not just for the world but for the church. God doesn’t need us to carry Him or His cause. He fared better-than-fine without his people in Dagon’s temple. You don’t need to carry God; you need God to carry you. And He does. **Isa 46:1, 3** “*...their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts... Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.*” Christian, swallow that sweet encouragement into your soul. God carries us, not the other way around.

**2. God’s holy presence is a deadly problem for sinners (5:8).** “*What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?*” As soon as God comes to Ashdod, Philistines start dropping like flies. That makes God look mean to us, angry, judgmental. But why is this happening? It’s because God is holy and people are sinful. Our version of religion is much like the Dagon cult—use God to get rich and have a good family. So when Yahweh shows up, when we’re confronted with the real God, He is not what we assumed He would be. We don’t know who we’re dealing with. We can’t control him. We cannot please him. We cannot even appease Him. Our natural thoughts of God are twisted, manipulative, self-excusing, and presumptuous. He might be angry with other people, but surely I’m exempt, because I’m the victim, or I’m not a murderer, or I’m faithful to my wife and I don’t cheat on my taxes...much. What those excuses minimize is God’s holiness. His wrath is his holiness breaking out against sin anywhere he finds it. This is why Philistines die and suffer when the ark comes near. This is an embarrassment, but it is true. We don’t know how to worship him in a way that pleases Him. We don’t know how to live before him or relate to Him in a way that doesn’t draw down his wrath. We don’t know what to do with this God. So we reject him, because we find him impossible to please. But praise God, Jesus pleased Him for us.

**3. Jesus’ rejection resulted in His victory.** Here again, we see the gospel pattern of reversal, an apparently final defeat leading to ultimate triumph. An apparent death, you might say, only to result in resurrection. The ark, as a symbol of God’s presence, suffers a seemingly final downfall, only to clutch

victory from the jaws of defeat. And Jesus, our Immanuel, God with us, suffered a seemingly final death, only to rise victorious 3 days from the depths of the grave. As the Philistine Lords set themselves against the ark, so in Psalm 2 *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed...* The early church applied that to the Jews and Gentiles who executed Jesus in **Acts 4:28** *For truly in this city were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.*” Why did people reject Jesus? The same reason the Philistines rejected God. People don’t reject Jesus because he’s not enough for them. They reject Him because He’s too much for them. Too righteous. Too holy. Too sovereign. Too authoritative. Too different. Too demanding. Too divine. Yet it was by their very rejection of Him that He defeated death by death, rose from the grave, and ascended to the father’s right hand to rule as King, Priest, and Judge.

**4. Jesus’ death atones for our idolatry if we repent of it.** We are all idolaters. Our hearts manufacture idols like GMC manufactures trucks. We break the first command by worshiping ourselves and others in our selfishness, consumer indulgence, lustful imaginations, financial fortunes, political utopias. And we break the second commandment by reimagining God in our own fallen image, and preaching another Jesus and a different gospel to our hearts. But if we turn from our idolatry, then Jesus’ blood will cover it. Jesus suffered this death that we deserved for our own idolatry. It was his hands that were pierced, his head that bled under the thorns, his blood shed for the sins, his body buried in the grave of our own guilt. Friend, sinner, whether you have worshipped yourself, or someone else, or some ideal, or some wrong image of God or some distorted Jesus, there is hope for you in the cross of Christ. Repent from your idolatry, and look to the light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ, who is Himself the One True Image of God, the radiance of his glory and the exact imprint of God’s nature.

**5. Seeing is not believing, fear is not faith, not all prayer is promising, and sorrow is not repentance** (5:7). *“When the men of Ashdod saw how things were...”* The Philistines saw their idol dismembered. They felt the boils on their backs. They saw their loved ones die. Yet they still remained devoted to their Dagon, sworn enemies of Israel and her God, all the way until David finally defeated them. Goliath will be a Philistine...from Gath! Goliath himself would have heard some of this lore. Goliath would have been taught that you don’t step on the threshold of Dagon’s temple in Ashdod. Goliath would have heard whispers of the ark’s exploits and the plague of infected cysts in his own hometown. But he is the one just 12 chapter later who is defying the Lord of Hosts who decapitated his own Dagon! Humanity is remarkably recalcitrant when it comes to believing the truth about God’s power and character and glory and its implications for us and the idols of our hearts.

They saw, but still they didn’t believe. They feared for their lives, but that’s not saving faith. They cried to heaven, but it doesn’t say they cried to Yahweh and ground Dagon to dust and then cast in their lot with God’s people. They were sad. But sadness is not repentance either. Turning from your sin, turning from your idols, confessing your wrongs rather than projecting them onto others, giving up your old gods—that’s repentance. Just yelling at the sky to stop the pain so that you can go back to worshipping self and sin and a false idea of Jesus is not prayer. Friend, when God sent Elijah to preach judgment against Israel’s most sinful king, Ahab, in 1Kings 21, Ahab humbled himself before God, repented, and God forgave him. If God forgave Ahab, he can forgive you too, no matter what you’ve done.

**6. Mere religious freedom does not guarantee a church’s moral or doctrinal freedom.** Religious freedom is very good. We should want it, advocate for it, work and pray to keep it. But we should not trust in religious freedom. After all, Israel had religious freedom in Canaan. God had redeemed them from

slavery in Egypt. They were free now to worship God in a way that was acceptable to Him. That was the whole purpose of the exodus, “let my people go that they may serve me.” Yet here they are, defeated on the battlefield, the army disbanded, and on the brink of slavery to the Philistines—in the middle of the Promised Land, a wilderness away from Egypt. And God has to perform for them here a second exodus as it were. Another round of boils on their enemies. Religious freedom isn’t worth much if you’re not going to use it to obey the Lord and worship him in spirit and in truth.

**7. Pastoral corruption and abuse does not falsify God.** We will remember that all this happens because of Eli’s complicity in the corrupt priesthood of his own sons. There are corrupt pastors and preachers out there, no doubt. They preach for money, power, even seduction for sex. That’s exactly what Eli’s sons did. But their corruption did not make God in Christ any less pure, powerful, supreme, or strong to save. You’re right, Mr. Cynical. Pastors shouldn’t do that stuff. Shame on them. If that’s what God is like, then you shouldn’t want to worship him. But 1Samuel 5 is here to tell you, that is NOT what God is like. And if you let corrupt pastors disillusion you about faith in Christ and the Bible, they will lead you straight to hell with them. Don’t be disillusioned about God because of the corruption of an Eli that you have known. God can manage his reputation in spite of them, and without them.

But maybe you’re not disillusioned about corrupt pastors. Maybe you’re disillusioned about a God who actually judges people like this. What does God have to say to you? Well, He is honest with you, and he loves you enough to warn you ahead of time that He is not the pushover you thought he was.

**8. OT Judgments are God’s gracious warnings to us that a greater judgment is coming.** God’s judgment of the Philistines, and their unwillingness to repent, is a historical and even a gracious warning that stands for us today, about the judgment that is coming. Those things happened to them as merciful warnings for us to repent in a way that the Philistines did not. The plagues of war, disease, famine, death, are all characteristic of the whole time between Jesus’ resurrection and return. Revelation 8-9 symbolize these things in the imagery of the exodus plagues. But look what happens. **Rev 9:20-21** “*the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immoralities or their thefts.*” What happened to the Philistines is happening to people now, who refuse to take these gracious warnings to heart. Every natural and moral disaster in this age is a warning to repent, and all too many people refuse to listen. Yet the winner of all history in the book of Revelation is not the people who refuse to repent and believe these things. It’s the Jesus who is now commanding all people everywhere to repent.

**9. The gospel of God is rejected-but-victorious from city to city in Acts and still today.** Much like the ark God did a victory lap around Philistine Pentapolis, so the gospel of Jesus made a victory lap over Judea, Samaria, and Asia Minor in the book of Acts. The gospel is rejected by at least some people in every city it goes to, and yet people are still converted, churches are still planted from city to city, and the word prevails. **Acts 6:7** *The word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.*” **Acts 12:24** *The word of God increased and multiplied.*” **Act 19:20** “*the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.*” It concludes in **Acts 28:31** with Paul “*proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.*” And it’s still going strong today. Just our own church has gospel missionaries in Dubai, Zambia, Cape Town, and Taiwan. We even have some gospel fruit in the far east and elsewhere through pastoral training seminars for local church leaders. Is the gospel rejected all over the world? Yes. Is the gospel increasing all over the world? Yes. Even amid all the rejection and violent opposition, the gospel runs its

victory lap around the globe. And so we pray as Paul instructed the Thessalonians *that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you*” (2Th 3:1-2).

## **CONCLUSION**

Friends, we should not fool ourselves. There is no God but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rejecting this God does not negate or even frustrate Him. Rejecting the truth of His gospel does not falsify it. And preaching this truth is not unloving. This God does not need to be defended or carried; but He does deserve to be proclaimed and praised; feared and obeyed, loved and trusted. And Jesus is His only authorized image. Do you worship Him as He reveals Himself in Scripture? Or have you imagined a different image of God to worship?

