

DAGON ... who reappears in other temples
DAGON ... who reappears in other temples (I SAMUEL 5: 4)

The priests were dumbfounded; their faces were masks of incredulity! They were absolutely horrified as they surveyed the wreckage scattered across the floor of their sacred house. Such vandalism had never been known. " . . . behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord ; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold ; only the stump of Dagon was left to him." The ark of the God of Israel was silent, somber, and still ; but every Philistine realized that its apparent impotence was misleading. That ark had struck terror to the heart of their god-that is, if he had a heart!

PROPOSITION 1. How strong. God is quite capable of looking after Himself

The conquest of Israel and the resultant capture of the sacred ark had made the Philistines delirious with joy. Their ancient enemies were now at their mercy ; their god was in captivity. Dagon would be triumphant for ever ; the captured ark had been placed at his feet. It was wonderful ; and the heathen danced for joy. But "when they arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again " (v. 3). When the god fell the second time, the priests were demoralized and lost their desire to serve in his temple. Their position was intolerable. The power of the captured box beggared description. Had a true prophet been present, his eyes would have smiled from a face grimly inscrutable. The priests should have known on the first morning that Dagon's tumble was but a precursor of coming tragedy. God was very capable of fighting His own battles wherever the enemy was found.

PROPOSITION 2. How sensitive. Sin can stay His hand

It is sometimes difficult to recognize God's invincibility when temporary defeat overwhelms His cause. If the ark represented eternal might, why were the Philistines permitted to seize it? The answer to that question might have been found in the sanctuary. " Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial ; they knew not the Lord . . . the sin of the young men was very great . . . for men abhorred the offering of the Lord " (I Sam. 2: 12, 17). Deliberate sin had ruined Israel ; their respect for the ark amounted solely to idolatry. Thus God decided to teach His people a most painful lesson. He permitted the conquest by the Philistines, that in defeat Israel might learn the lessons which they ignored in victory. These are age-long principles. Neither man nor movement need fear when their cause is just in the sight of God. " No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly."

PROPOSITION 3. How significant. God never finally forsakes His people

Dagon's fall was followed by other disasters, for wherever the Philistines took the ark, the people were smitten by death and disease. Ultimately the wise men diagnosed the cause of their trouble, and advised that the ark should be returned to Israel. Yet, to remove any doubt in the matter, the ark was placed upon a new cart, to which were harnessed two milch cows whose calves were left in the stall. "And the kine took the straight way to Beth-shemesh, and went along

DAGON ... who reappears in other temples the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left . . . " (1 Sam. 6: 12). Thus God returned to His people, who by all known laws had forfeited the right of His favor. God's kindness is always greater than man's sin, and every phase of religious history demonstrates the fact. God permitted His people to go into Egypt, but He brought them out again. God allowed the Babylonians to subjugate Israel ; He allowed the stricken nation to remain in captivity for seventy intolerable years, but in the fullness of time He brought them home again. Mankind may grieve and forsake God, but God never forsakes His children.

PROPOSITION 4. How safe I may be if my Dagon is smashed!

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty " (Psa. 91: 1). Dagon's mutilation suggests that God enjoys select company. He can be exceedingly jealous, and resents the presence of other deities. I cannot expect His blessing when my own idols are permitted to stand on their feet! If I emulate the example of the priests of Ashdod, if I ignore God's initial warning, His second stroke will be far heavier than the first. It is always easier and wiser for man to smash his own idols- this relieves God of a task.

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