Speaker: Eric Naus  Series: Kingdom Come – The book of 1 Samuel

Passage: 1 Samuel 5:1 – 7:2

1. Read 5:1-5. The Philistines assumed that they had “captured Israel’s God” when they carried the Ark of the Covenant back to their territory. In placing the ark next to their national god, Dagon, they meant to communicate Dagon’s supremacy, yet Dagon kept falling over and eventually lost his head and hands! What does this portion of the story teach us about the supremacy of the one true God over every other “idol” or “counterfeit god” that our culture tends to worship? Can you think of times in your life when your idols failed you and toppled, but the God of the Bible proved himself faithful and supreme?

2. Read chapter 5:6-12. Notice that wherever the Philistines brought the ark, tumors and deadly plague broke out. They thought Israel’s God was just a “regional god” like all the rest, but they soon discovered that he would not be compartmentalized or pushed aside. Israel’s God was in charge over all things! In what ways do we try to “compartmentalize” God in our lives today? Theologian Abraham Kuyper once wrote, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” Do you agree? How do the Philistines’ experiences with the ark show us the total authority of Christ over all things?

3. Read 6:1-18. From the framework of their limited, pagan perspective, the Philistines come up with a plan to make things right with Israel’s God. They craft a valuable (gold) representative offering (golden tumors and mice representing the plague, and 5 of each to represent the 5 major cities of the Philistines). They put the ark and the offering on a cart pulled by mother cows who have been separated from their young. They wanted to see if these cows would pull the cart toward the nearby Israelite border town, neglecting their young and proving that God was directing them onward. Sure enough, the cows went straight to Israelite territory, and the cows were offered up as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. In your opinion, when it comes to approaching the one true God, what did the Philistines do right? What did they get wrong? How does the whole experience of the “captured ark” point us to God’s plan to save us through his Son, who would likewise be “captured” to set us free?

4. Read chapter 6:19-7:2. According to Numbers 4:1-20, the ark was to remain hidden when inside the Holy of Holies, and completely wrapped in curtains when being transported. It was not to be “looked upon,” lest the people die (see Numbers 4:20)! However, when the ark was returned to Israel, some men of Kiriath-jerim “looked upon” the Ark of the Lord (see 6:19). Apparently, they were inspecting, looking into, and even displaying the ark for all to see (note how they placed it on a large rock – see 6:15). In response, God killed 70 men of the city. What does this story teach us about the holiness of God and the extra accountability God’s people have considering the explicit teaching in Scripture, which shows us how God is to be honored and approached?