Preschool–Grade 6

Dagon and the Ark

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: The LORD is greater than any idol. Nothing should take God's place in our hearts.
Bible passage: 1 Samuel 5:1–12. Read it before class.
Memory verse: "And when they of Ashdod 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." *1 Samuel 5:3 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the board.

1. Opening game: What Can It Do? (5–10 minutes)

Write two columns on the board: *Can do* and *Can't do*. Hold up an everyday object (a toy figure, a picture, a pencil) and ask the class: Can it hear you? Can it see you? Can it help you? Can it stand up by itself if it falls? Put each answer in a column. Then ask the same questions about God, and look up Psalm 115:5–7 together: idols "have mouths, but they speak not." Say: "Today we will see what happened when a statue people called a god came face to face with the ark of the LORD."

2. Bible story: Fallen Before the Ark (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to 1 Samuel 5. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

The ark is taken. The **ark** of God was a chest of wood covered with pure gold, made the way God told Moses (Exodus 25:10–11). God's testimony, His law, was kept inside (Exodus 25:16). Israel took the ark into battle as if it could save them (1 Samuel 4:3), but Israel lost, and the ark of God was taken (4:10–11).
Look up 1 Samuel 5:1–2. The **Philistines** brought the ark to **Ashdod**, into the house of **Dagon**, and set it by Dagon, their idol.

The first morning. Look up 1 Samuel 5:3. "They of Ashdod **arose early on the morrow**," got up early the next morning, and **behold**, look: Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. They had to take Dagon and set him in his place again. Their "god" needed people to pick him up!

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The second morning. Look up 1 Samuel 5:4. Dagon was fallen upon his face again, and his head and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the **threshold**, the doorstep. Only the **stump** of Dagon was left. Because of this, the priests of Dagon would not step on that threshold (5:5).

The hand of the LORD. Look up 1 Samuel 5:6–7. The hand of the LORD was heavy upon the people of Ashdod: God sent great trouble and sickness on them. The men of Ashdod said, "The ark of the God of Israel shall not **abide** with us": it can't stay here, "for his hand is **sore** upon us, and upon Dagon our god." They knew the LORD was stronger than Dagon.

Send it home. The lords of the Philistines sent the ark to **Gath** (5:8), and the LORD's hand was against that city too (5:9). Then they sent it to **Ekron** (5:10). **Look up 1 Samuel 5:11.** The people of Ekron said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place." After seven months in the country of the Philistines, they sent it back to Israel (6:1, 6:12).

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. The people of Ashdod had to set Dagon in his place again (1 Samuel 5:3). What does that show about their idol?
2. Israel thought the ark itself would save them (4:3). Why is it important to trust God Himself, not a thing?
3. The men of Ashdod said God's hand was "sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god" (5:7). What did they learn about the LORD?
4. What are some things people today can love more than God?
5. How can you keep God first in your heart this week?

Recall questions

1. In which city was the house of Dagon? *(Ashdod, 1 Samuel 5:1–2)*
2. What was cut off on the second morning? *(Dagon's head and both the palms of his hands, 5:4)*
3. Which two cities did the ark go to after Ashdod? *(Gath and Ekron, 5:8, 5:10)*

4. Memory verse: Erase a Word (5 minutes)

Explain the old words: **they of Ashdod** means the people of Ashdod, **arose early on the morrow** means got up early the next morning, **behold** means look, and **set him in his place again** means stood him back up. Read the verse on the board together. Erase two words and read it again. Keep erasing two words at a time until the board is empty and the class can say it alone. Then kids say it to a partner.

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5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "Dagon fell, because there is only one true God: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD' (Deuteronomy 6:4, KJV). This one God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."
Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.
This week: notice what you think about and spend time on the most. Give God the first part of each day: pray before anything else.

6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. 1 Samuel 5:1: Where did the Philistines bring the ark from? *(From Eben-ezer)*
2. 1 Samuel 5:2: Where did they set the ark? *(In the house of Dagon, by Dagon)*
3. 1 Samuel 5:3: When did they find Dagon fallen? *(When they arose early on the morrow)*
4. 1 Samuel 5:4: What was left of Dagon? *(Only the stump)*
5. 1 Samuel 5:5: Who would not tread on the threshold of Dagon? *(The priests of Dagon and anyone who came into Dagon's house)*
6. 1 Samuel 5:7: What did the men of Ashdod say about the ark? *("The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us")*
7. 1 Samuel 5:8: Where was the ark carried next? *(To Gath)*
8. 1 Samuel 6:1: How long was the ark in the country of the Philistines? *(Seven months)*

7. Prayer

"Dear God, You are the one true God, and there is none else. Nothing can stand before You. Help us keep You first in our hearts every day. In Jesus' name, amen."

Teacher note: 1 Samuel 5:6–12 also tells of emerods (painful sores) and of many deaths in Gath and Ekron. The lesson says only that the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them and that He sent great trouble and sickness. Read the chapter yourself before class.

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