Preschool–Grade 6

# Dagon and the Ark

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

**Main point:** The LORD is the one true God. Idols can't stand before Him, and He won't share His place in our hearts.
**Bible passage:** 1 Samuel 5:1–12. Students read it out loud themselves.
**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)* and "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:" *Deuteronomy 6:4 (KJV)*
**You need:** a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
**Before class:** read 1 Samuel 4:1–11, 1 Samuel 5 and 1 Samuel 6:1–2. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses.

## 1. Opening game: Lucky or Trusting? (5–10 minutes)

Read each situation and let students vote with a thumb up (that's trusting God) or a thumb sideways (that's treating God like a lucky charm): 1) Carrying a Bible in your backpack so the test goes well, without studying or praying. 2) Praying before a game and then giving your best. 3) Keeping a verse card in your pocket so you win the game, without praying or practicing. 4) Reading your Bible because you want to know God. After each, ask: *What's the difference?* Say: "Israel once treated the ark of God like a lucky charm. Let's see what happened, and what God did about it."

## 2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

First give the background: Israel was losing to the Philistines, and the elders said, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD... that... it may save us" (1 Samuel 4:3). Israel lost anyway, and "the ark of God was taken" (4:11). **Read out loud: 1 Samuel 5:1–12.** Students take turns, a verse or two each. Old words in this passage:

- **the ark of God** (5:1): the gold-covered chest God told Moses to make (Exodus 25:10–22)
- **set it by Dagon** (5:2): put it beside their idol Dagon
- **arose early on the morrow** (5:3): got up early the next morning; **behold**: look
- **threshold** (5:4): the doorstep; **stump**: the part that was left
- **tread** (5:5): step; **unto this day**: still when this was written
- **emerods** (5:6): painful sores; **the coasts thereof**: the land around it
- **abide** (5:7): stay; **his hand is sore upon us**: his hand is hard on us
- **let it go again to his own place** (5:11): send it back home


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**Look closer.** Point out these details with the class:

- **Not a lucky charm.** Israel brought the ark so that "it may save us" (4:3), and lost. Then, in a Philistine temple, with no army to defend it, the LORD showed His power Himself. God can't be used; He is to be trusted and obeyed.
- **A "god" that needed help.** On the first morning, Dagon's worshippers had to pick him up: "they took Dagon, and set him in his place again" (5:3). Psalm 115 says idols "have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not" (Psalm 115:7). On the second morning, Dagon's head and hands were gone (5:4).
- **Fallen "before the ark."** Twice Dagon lay on his face before the ark of the LORD (5:3–4), the way a person bows down. The idol was brought low in front of the one true God.
- **They got the wrong answer.** The Philistines knew the LORD's hand was "sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god" (5:7), but they kept Dagon and sent the ark away (5:8–11). Seeing God's power isn't the same as turning to Him.

## 3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Israel trusted the ark to save them instead of turning to the LORD (4:3). How can people today treat God like a lucky charm?
2. Why do you think God let the ark be taken, and then showed His power in Dagon's own house?
3. The people of Ashdod had to "set him in his place again" (5:3). What things do people "set up again" and again, even after they fail them?
4. Psalm 115:8 says, "They that make them are like unto them." What happens to people who trust things that can't see, hear or help?
5. The Philistines saw God's power but sent the ark away (5:11). What should they have done instead?
6. What might be trying to take God's place in your heart right now?

## 4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

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; **set him in his place again** means stood him back up. In Deuteronomy 6:4, **Hear, O Israel** means listen, Israel, and **one LORD** means there is only one God.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say 1 Samuel 5:3 this week; keep working on Deuteronomy 6:4 next week too.


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## 5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "There is one God, and He is not a statue we carry around. He came to us Himself. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: '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) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-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 utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
*Pray with the students, 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.*

## 6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. What do I spend the most time thinking about, wanting, or looking at?
2. Is anything on that list taking God's place? What would putting God first look like?
3. Write a short prayer to the one true God, asking Him to have first place in your heart.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

**This week:** choose one thing from question 2 and give God that time instead: pray, read 1 Samuel 5 again, or read Psalm 115.

## 7. Prayer

"Dear God, You are the one LORD, and there is none else. Nothing can stand before You. Forgive us when we put other things first, and take Your place in our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen."

**Teacher note:** 1 Samuel 5:6–12 tells of emerods (painful sores) and of "a very great destruction" and deaths in Gath and Ekron. Preteens can read it as written; keep the talk on the LORD's power and holiness, not the details. What happened next (the ark's return on a new cart) is in 1 Samuel 6.


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