

1 Samuel 5:1-5 ¹ And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. ² When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. ³ 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. ⁴ And when they arose early on the morrow morning, 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. ⁵ Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

Zephaniah 1:9 In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

THE PHILISTINES:

- The Philistines were the most fierce and enduring foes faced by the ancient Israelites; the pages of the Old Testament are filled with the accounts of their bloody clashes for nearly 600 years.
- The Hebrews were largely denied access to the Mediterranean seacoast by the strategically-placed Philistine Pentapolis, five city-states with strongholds at Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath and Gaza.
- The Philistines also had a tactical advantage over Israel because they alone possessed the ancient technology of iron-making (1 Samuel 13:19-22), making their chariots and weapons superior.
- The fact that the Philistines were uncircumcised (outside the covenant) figures prominently in OT.
- Many of these foes were slaughtered by Samson with a donkey jawbone or crushed in his suicide. Their champion Goliath was vanquished by a shepherd boy's slingshot, and much of their army was annihilated when David killed his "ten thousands." Yet, like a cancer on the countryside, the Philistines reappeared to kill King Saul and his son Jonathan, and desecrate Saul's body.
- The Philistines survived to outlast the Northern Tribes of Israel, and remained a painful thorn in the side of the Southern Tribes of Judah until they were taken in captivity.
- The country of Philistia was finally terminated when it was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, but even today lives on through the names "Palestine" and "Palestinian" as the fiercest enemy of modern-day Israel! The Philistines are among us still!

THE STORY:

- At the Battle of Ebenezer (1 Samuel 4), God allowed the Ark of the Covenant (the visible symbol of His Presence) to be taken by the Philistines and 30,000 Hebrew soldiers to be slain.
- When Eli the Priest heard the news, he fell backwards and broke his neck. He was grief-stricken, not because his sons died, but because they had a part in allowing the Ark of God to be captured.
- His daughter-in-law, dying in childbirth, gave the name "Ichabod" to her son. It means, "The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken," or simply, "Where is the glory?"
- The Philistines, as was their custom, took the captured Ark to the Temple of their god Dagon at Ashdod to celebrate their victory. In their religion, Dagon (from the Hebrew word for "fish") was the god of agriculture and the father of the great god Baal. He had the upper body of a man and the lower body of a fish. His image was often carried into battle by the intensely religious Philistines.
- It was in the temple of Dagon at Gaza that the Philistines offered thanksgiving when Samson was captured (Judges 16:23-24). It was in the temple of Dagon at Beth Shean that the Philistines fastened the decapitated head of King Saul (1 Chronicles 10:10).
- Now, the Ark of the Covenant is set before Dagon in his temple as a visual representation that Dagon is victorious and Jehovah is inferior. However, it did not turn out that way!
- On the first morning, the people of Ashdod find Dagon prostrate before the Ark of God.
- They set the idol back in its place again (**there is always someone around to pick up an idol!**).
- On the second morning, they found Dagon broken before the Ark of God. Only the lower fish part remained; the head and the hands were broken off. Cutting off the hands was a common sign in ancient times that the enemy was indeed dead and thus powerless (2 Samuel 4:12).
- At the same time, "the hand of the Lord was heavy" against the Philistines! (1 Samuel 5:6)
- Because the head and hands of Dagon fell on the threshold, the Philistines would not tread on it. This developed into a superstition throughout their culture, so that thresholds were jumped over.
- **God later has to judge Israel because they have adopted the same custom!** (Zephaniah 1:9)
- **WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THE DEVIL SAYS JUMP?!**

WHEN GOD BRINGS US TO THE THRESHOLD OF THE SUPERNATURAL, HAVE WE ADOPTED THE LOGIC OF THE WORLD WHICH SAYS IT CAN'T HAPPEN? ("JUMP OVER IT")

THE THRESHOLD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 7:13-14 ¹³ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴ Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

THE THRESHOLD OF HEALING

Acts 3:2-11 ² And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; ³ Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. ⁴ And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. ⁵ And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. ⁶ Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. ⁷ And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. ⁸ And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God: ¹⁰ And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. ¹¹ And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

THE THRESHOLD OF DELIVERANCE

Acts 12:5-10 ⁵ Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. ⁶ And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. ⁷ And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. ⁸ And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. ⁹ And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. ¹⁰ When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

THE THRESHOLD OF ANSWERED PRAYER

Acts 12:11-17 ¹¹ And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. ¹² And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. ¹³ And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. ¹⁴ And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. ¹⁵ And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

THE THRESHOLD OF ETERNAL LIFE

Revelation 21:23-27 ²³ And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. ²⁴ And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. ²⁵ And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. ²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. ²⁷ And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

THE THRESHOLD OF WORSHIP

Psalms 100:4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.