

1 Samuel 7
April 10, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When do you think we are most vulnerable to falling out of favor with God? [Let people engage]

Transition: The return of the ark to Kiriath Jearim after 20 years seemed to be a tangible sign that God was once again among His people to bless them and deliver them from all their oppressors. However, the mere presence of the ark did not guarantee God's favor. The Israelites lived in a way that caused them to displease God. They discovered that their own sin and rebellion against God led to an attack by their enemy, which in this case was the Philistines. The Israelites did not have a complete devotion to the Lord, and they were paying a price for it. Let's read to find out how Samuel, their spiritual leader and judge, guides them to a new beginning by restoring the nation's relationship to the Lord. Let's begin.

BOOK:

7¹ So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the LORD.

Samuel Subdues the Philistines at Mizpah

² It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD. ³ And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." ⁴ So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths (many local shrines) and served the LORD only.

⁵ Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you." ⁶ When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel was leader (judge) of Israel at Mizpah.

⁷ When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. ⁸ They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines." ⁹ Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering (indicated Israel's complete dedication to God) to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him.

¹⁰ While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. ¹¹ The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car.

¹² Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, (means stone of God's help) saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us." ¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again.

Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines. ¹⁴ The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to her, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the power of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

¹⁵ Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. ¹⁷ But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also judged Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- Fasting as a discipline
- Samuel summoned the nation to Mizpeh for a prayer meeting!
- The power of prayer (James 5:16)
- Answered Prayer
- They called upon God
- Willing to confess sin
- God's deliverance of His people
- Duty to neighbors
- Role of Samuel as a prophet/judge
- As soon as they confessed their sin/fasted, God stepped in IMMEDIATELY to take care of the Philistines. God did not say, "I'll watch you for the next 30 days to see if you lapse into old patterns of behavior that were displeasing to me."

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

- Groups of people like the Philistines commit evil

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

- What was the significance of drawing/pouring out water before the Lord? [It was a symbol of the nation's repentance, i.e. their hearts poured out like water in humiliation and sorrow for their sins]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

God wants confession of sin to accompany cries for help. He defines repentance as turning away from all substitutes for Him and turning in obedience to Him. Upon our confession of sin, what spiritual resolutions do you want to make at this point of your life? What obstacles stand in the way?

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sam 7). Victor Books.

III. God's People Are Delivered (7)

The ark was not returned to Shiloh; it remained at the house of Abinadab for twenty years. What was God doing during this time? He was preparing His servant Samuel to defeat the enemy and establish the kingdom. No doubt Samuel was ministering to the people from place to place, giving them the Word of God. Verse 3 indicates that Samuel called the people to repent and return to the Lord. This meant putting away the gods of the heathen, and then preparing their hearts to serve the Lord. How tragic that the great nation of Israel had fallen into defeat and disrepute because of their sins! Had Eli been a faithful father and his sons faithful priests, this defeat would never have occurred. Baalim and Ashtaroth represented male and female deities. Their worship was celebrated with ceremonies of abominable filth.

Samuel summoned the nation to Mizpeh for a prayer meeting! Samuel must always be associated with prayer; see 12:23. He was born in answer to his mother's prayers (chap. 1); he prayed for his nation and defeated the enemy (7:13); he prayed when Israel defied the Lord and asked for a king (8:6); and he prayed for King Saul (15:11) even after God had rejected him. Someone has called Samuel "God's Emergency Man," and the name surely fits. Samuel stepped on the scene when the priesthood was decayed, when the nation was defeated, and when God's glory had departed. Certainly, Hannah must have realized how wonderfully God would use her son; see her song (and prediction) in 2:9–10.

The events at Mizpeh were these: (1) Samuel poured out water before the Lord as a symbol of the nation's repentance, their hearts poured out in sorrow for their sins; (2) He offered a burnt offering to indicate Israel's complete dedication to God; (3) He prayed for the nation while they were fearing the arrival of the Philistines; God gave the army of Israel a great victory. What a day that was! Samuel accomplished with one prayer a victory that Samson could not win during the entire twenty years of his leadership! From that day on (until David's great victory over the Philistines), the enemy kept their distance. Such is the power of a dedicated life, the power of prayer (James 5:16).

Samuel had a ministry as prophet and judge, traveling from city to city to minister to the people and settle their disputes. He was the last of the judges and the first of the national prophets. (Moses' prophetic office was of a different nature.) It is sad to see that Samuel's sons did not follow in their father's godly walk (8:5). Perhaps he was too busy with the affairs of the nation to train them. Eli had made a similar mistake.

These events show us the importance of a godly home. The nation fell into sin and defeat because Eli had neglected his home; but God saved the nation because of the prayers of a godly mother (Hannah) and her God-given son. As go the homes, so goes the nation.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 1 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 438-439) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

4. THE RESTORATION OF THE ARK (7:2–17)

The return of the ark to Kiriath Jearim seemed to be a tangible sign that God was once again among His people to bless them and deliver them from all their oppressors. The mere presence of the ark did not guarantee God's favor, however, as Israel had learned at the battle of Aphek. Rather, it was submission to the God of the ark that was essential (v. 4).

7:2. After **the ark** was at **Kiriath Jearim** for **20 years** Samuel addressed the Israelites (v. 3). In other words, the ark was in Kiriath Jearim for 20 years before Samuel undertook his first recorded public ministry. In actual fact the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim for about 100 years. It was taken there just after the battle of Aphek (1104 B.C.) and remained until David brought it from there to Jerusalem in his first year as king over *all* Israel (1003 B.C.; see 2 Sam. 5:5; 6:1–11).

7:3–4. After these 20 long years with the ark at Kiriath Jearim, **Samuel** challenged the people **of Israel** to prove their loyalty to **the LORD** by abandoning their **foreign gods** and turning to **the LORD ... only**. The plural **Baals** and **Ashtoreths** describe the many local shrines of those Canaanite nature deities. Baal, variously identified as son of El (chief of the Canaanite pantheon) or as son of Dagan (the Mesopotamian deity), was particularly recognized as the god of thunder and rain whose task was to make the earth fertile annually. Ashtoreth (or Astarte) was goddess of both love and war, as were her Babylonian and Greek counterparts Ishtar and Aphrodite respectively. She apparently functioned with Baal as a fertility deity and by their sexual union in some magical way the earth and all its life supposedly experienced annual rejuvenation and fruitfulness. (See the chart “Some of the Pagan Gods and Goddesses Worshiped in Nations Surrounding Israel,” near Jud. 10:6.)

7:5–9. **Samuel** next summoned the people to **Mizpah**, some seven miles north of Jerusalem, and there prayed for them and **offered** sacrifice to **the LORD** on their **behalf** (v. 9). This was a common place of assembly for Israel. In the time of the Judges the elders of the tribes gathered there to decide Benjamin's fate following the murder of a Levite's concubine (Jud. 19:1–20:1, 3; 21:1, 5, 8). Later, Saul was presented to Israel as king at Mizpah (1 Sam. 10:17). It was even the capital of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:23, 25). The town of Mizpah should probably be identified with modern Tell en-Nasbeh.

7:10–17. When **the Philistines** learned of the assembly, they attacked **Israel** at **Mizpah** but **the LORD**, in a mighty demonstration of power (by **thunder**), defeated them. In commemoration of this great triumph **Samuel** erected on the site **between Mizpah and Shen** (whose location is unknown), a monument which he called **Ebenezer**, literally, the “stone of [God's] help.” This apparently ended Philistine occupation of **Israelite** soil though **the Philistines** came later time and time again to harass Israel (13:5; etc.). **Amorites** (7:14) refers to the hill-dwellers of southern Canaan (see Num. 13:29; Josh. 10:5). Thereafter **Samuel continued to judge ... Israel** in a **circuit** (approx. 50 miles in circumference) including **Bethel ... Gilgal ... Mizpah**, and his hometown, **Ramah** (see the map “The Cities of Samuel”).

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 111). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Samuel's “Ebenezer” (7:2–17). Unlike the sons of Eli, who sinned, Samuel was faithful. He turned the people away from their worship of the Canaanite fertility deities, Baal and Ashtoreth. As in the Book of Judges, God responded to His people's repentance by raising up a judge or national deliverer. God honored Samuel's faithfulness by giving him victory over the Philistines. Samuel commemorated the victory by erecting a stone at the site. He named it “Ebenezer” (*stone*

of help), saying, “Thus far has the LORD helped us.” Samuel spent his life serving the Lord as an itinerant judge, priest, and prophet.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). 1 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (p. 167). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Samuel Delivers Israel (1 Sam. 7:3–17)

The passage—For some reason the Philistine advance stalled and little effort was made to follow up their victory at Ebenezer. Unfortunately, we are unable to reconstruct the practical factors which influenced Israel's political recovery. The recent plague among the Philistines, for example, must have restricted their hopes for territorial expansion. Beyond this, we are left with mere speculation. We are told nothing of the reorganization of Israel's army, the development of new leaders, or the reconstruction of her central government. Certainly, some of these measures must have been attempted.

In keeping with the author's theological perspective (see 5:1–11), stress is laid on the religious foundations for Israel's improved fortunes. Called upon to purge themselves of the pagan elements which had crept into their worship, the people of Israel renewed their covenant with the Lord. Thus, the primary source for Israel's national unity was restored (see comments on 4:1–22).

A crucial test of Israel's strength under Samuel's leadership came in a Philistine attack on a national gathering at Mizpah. As in Joshua's days during the conquest (Josh. 1:5–7), the Lord intervened in the battle and routed the Philistines (v. 10). A monument named Ebenezer (“Stone of Help”) was erected to commemorate the Lord's assistance (v. 13).

Special points—The Lord's use of thunder in routing the Philistines may be symbolic. Hebrew poets, for example, frequently pictured God's participation in battle in terms of natural cataclysm (Ps. 18:7–15).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 415). Holman Bible Publishers.

7:10 How could thunder confuse the Philistines and cause them to run away from Israel? When the Philistines heard the thunder, they interpreted it to mean that Israel's God was riding into battle on a storm cloud (see Ps 18:10–14), sending thunderbolts against them and their gods. They believed their army could not prevail against the Israelites unless their gods prevailed against the Israelites' God. When it became apparent that the Lord was aggressively advancing against their forces, and their gods as well, their only option was flight from the battlefield.

7:13 During the period of Samuel's active tenure as a judge of Israel there are no more recorded conflicts between Israel and the Philistines. That is the context for this statement, although the Philistines and Israelites fought against each other many times after the days of Samuel (13:5; 14:11–14; 17:1; 23:1, 27; 28:1; 31:1; 2 Sm 5:17–20; 2 Kg 18:8). There is no contradiction in the record on this point.

7:15 The phrase “throughout his life” (lit. “all the days of his life”) means that Samuel served as Israel's judge during the rest of his career—that is, from this time in his life until his retirement

in old age. He is not called a judge up to this point in the narrative; when he grew old he appointed his sons as judges (8:1), effectively transferring his responsibilities to the next generation. When the nation rejected Joel and Abijah as judges, the elderly statesmen helped Israel to eliminate the role of “judge” altogether, installing a king to lead Israel instead (12:2). It is worth noting that the term “judge” in the Bible carries a broad range of meanings. The earlier judges operated more as local military leaders or heroes; Samuel, on the other hand, functioned in a more magisterial capacity for Israel as a whole.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 7:1-17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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