

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

1 SAM. 7:1 And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.

2 And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.

5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.

6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

7 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

9 And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.

10 And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car.

12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

Samuel's Leadership Brings Victory

Lesson Text: I Samuel 7:1-12

Related Scriptures: Deuteronomy 30:1-10; I Samuel 12:16-24;
Psalm 18:7-15; Joshua 4:19-24

TIME: 1047 B.C.

PLACE: Mizpeh; between Mizpeh and Shen

GOLDEN TEXT—“And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines” (I Samuel 7:8).

Lesson Exposition

RECOVERY OF THE ARK—I Sam. 7:1-2

Although our trip through the book of Judges has concluded, our study of the period of the judges has not. Samuel, in fact, is the last of the judges and the first in a line of prophets (Acts 3:24). Born to Elkanah and Hannah, Samuel was dedicated to God at birth (I Sam. 1). He was taken to the tabernacle and raised by Eli the priest. At a young age, Samuel was called by God to his special ministry (chap. 3). The Philistines defeated Israel in battle and captured the ark of the covenant. When Eli learned that his sons had been killed and the ark captured, he fell from the place he was seated and died (I Sam. 4:16-18). The Philistines soon learned that the ark was not the boon they had expected (chap. 5), and they sent it back to the Israelites several months later (chap. 6).

Retrieving the ark (I Sam. 7:1).
Men from Kirjath-jearim were asked to

retrieve the ark from Beth-shemesh, where the Philistines had sent it (6:14, 21). So, they came and “fetched up the ark of the Lord” (7:1) as requested. The ark was taken to the home of Abinadab, and his son Eleazar was consecrated as the ark’s caretaker. Since we know nothing of Abinadab and Eleazar, we do not know why they were given charge of the ark. One suggestion is that they were from the tribe of Levi and chosen for that reason.

Israel turns to the Lord (I Sam. 7:2).

The ark’s twenty years in Kirjath-jearim probably refers to the length of time it was there before Samuel addressed the people.

The people “lamented after the Lord” (vs. 2). This means they mourned and sought Him.

REPENTANCE REQUIRED—I Sam. 7:3-4

Israel called to repent (I Sam. 7:3). True repentance does not just include sorrow for sin, though that is an essential part (II Cor. 7:9-10). It also means that people live differently and forsake sin (Isa. 55:6-7).

“All the house of Israel” (I Sam. 7:3) does not mean every single individual in the nation but representatives from the various tribes. These were the people to whom Samuel spoke. These leaders could then relay his message to the people in their respective towns and villages.

Samuel’s message was fairly simple: if they truly wanted to return to the Lord, that meant the removal of the “strange gods” among them. “Strange gods” means foreign gods, that is, the deities of the nations around them that were a source of temptation.

Israel turns from false gods (I Sam. 7:4). Among the most popular false gods in that region were the “Baalim and Ashtaroth.” While they were worshipped under various names with localized distinctions, these were the premier fertility gods of the region. Baal was the male god and Ashtaroth his female counterpart. Ritual prostitution was often associated with their worship.

If the people were really going to return to the Lord, they must “serve him only” (vs. 3), as they had been directed in the Ten Commandments. False gods must be “put away” (vs. 4), or completely removed. If they did this, Samuel promised that God would deliver them from the Philistines. Israel in fact took Samuel’s exhortation seriously and complied with his request.

RESTORATION BEGUN— Sam. 7:5-8

Confession (I Sam. 7:5-6). There are various places in the Bible named Mizpeh or Mizpah. The name simply means “lookout” or “watchtower.” This particular Mizpeh was less than ten miles north of Jerusalem and was a frequent gathering place for Israel. It was here that Samuel summoned the people for a time of spiritual renewal. He promised that he would intercede for them at that time.

Important during any time of spiritual restoration is an acknowledgement of guilt. Hence, the people declared, “We have sinned against the Lord” (I Sam. 7:6).

The fact that Samuel “judged the children of Israel” (I Sam. 7:6) meant that he led them. He was both a spiritual and military leader.

Consternation (I Sam. 7:7-8). When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had gathered at Mizpeh, their leaders saw this as a serious challenge, no doubt thinking that Israel was gathering for battle. Apparently, the Philistines decided it was to their advantage to attack first while the Israelites were still gathered at one location.

Clearly, the Philistines possessed military superiority. Having suffered defeat earlier at the hands of the Philistines, the Israelites were afraid when they heard of their advance.

In spite of their fears, the Israelites properly asked Samuel to keep praying for them. It is to their credit that they recognized that the Lord was their ultimate Deliverer. Far too often

people seek the Lord only when all other avenues have been pursued. This does not mean there is nothing we can do to alleviate fears or problems, but we should not view God's help as a last resort. He, in fact, should be our first option.

REQUEST ANSWERED—I Sam. 7:9-12 A sacrifice offered (I Sam. 7:9). During the Old Testament period, animal sacrifices were common in religious ceremonies. The fact that the people had admitted their sinfulness (vs. 6) made it appropriate to offer a sacrifice at this point. While some sacrifices were shared by both people and priest, with only a portion burned on the altar, this was a "burnt offering wholly unto the Lord" (vs. 9).

The people's repentance was symbolized in the animal sacrifice, and Samuel cried out to the Lord on their behalf. Moreover, Yahweh "heard"—that is, He answered—Samuel's prayer on their behalf.

A prayer answered (I Sam. 7:10). The Philistines had already made their way to Mizpeh and were on the verge of attacking the Israelites when "the Lord thundered with a great thunder" (I Sam. 7:10). Exactly what this entailed is unclear. It may be that the thunder was so loud and long the Philistines concluded this was an ominous sign of their defeat. Since the Philistines and many others in antiquity believed their gods controlled the weather, this would be an audible demonstration of the power of the Lord. God's voice is also depicted as thunder in the Bible (cf. Ps. 29:3-9; John 12:27-30).

The Philistines were "discomfited" (I Sam. 7:10), meaning they were panicstricken and confused. This led to their defeat by the Israelites, who responded with an immediate counterattack.

A memorial erected (I Sam. 7:11-12). Instead of just defending their position, the Israelites left Mizpeh and pursued the Philistines, who were already demoralized by the Lord's thunder. This pursuit continued as far as Beth-car. While Beth-car's precise location is unknown, this indicates that the Israelites had the Philistines on the run, back toward their own territory. Moreover, this battle had long-term consequences: "So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel" (vs. 13).

As a memorial of their victory, Samuel set up a stone between Mizpeh and a place called Shen, a location unknown to us today. It may be that this place was where something significant occurred in the battle between Israel and the Philistines.

Samuel named this memorial "Eben-ezer" (I Sam. 7:12), which means "stone of help." After all, this was where the Lord helped the Israelites triumph over the Philistines. In Robert Robinson's hymn, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," he writes, "Here I raise mine Ebenezer; hither by Thy help I'm come."

What we must realize is that the Lord is with us. Having helped us in the past, He will do so in the future. To be sure, we may not always experience instant victory over our fears, foes, and

failures, but we can be certain that the forces of evil will one day be crushed.

—John Alva Owston.

QUESTIONS

1. What do we know about Samuel prior to this week's text?
2. What had happened to the ark of the covenant?
3. What did Samuel call upon the people of Israel to do?
4. What were two well-known fertility cults at that time?
5. How did the Israelites show their repentance?
6. Where did Samuel have the people gather? What does this place's name mean?
7. While Israel was gathering, what did the Philistines decide to do?
8. What was the significance of the thunder?
9. What was the outcome of the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines?
10. What was the significance of the name given to the memorial of Israel's victory?

—John Alva Owston.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God has prepared a plan that restores our broken fellowship with Him (I Sam. 7:1-2).
2. We are to worship the Lord, and He is the only one we are to serve (vss. 3-4).
3. True repentance prepares the heart to return to the Lord and obey His Word (vss. 5-6).

4. Satan will attack believers during times when they are most vulnerable (vss. 7-8).

5. God delivers His people, but we should not take His goodness and grace for granted (vss. 9-10).

6. We should keep memories of God's mercies alive and fresh (vss. 11-12).

—Wardell Miller.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is it necessary for believers to have leadership that stays faithful to God (I Sam. 7:1)?
2. What do believers do that often makes them feel God has abandoned them (vs. 2)?
3. How can God's Word be used by Christian leadership to bring us to repentance (vs. 3)?
4. Why is it important that spiritual leaders pray unceasingly for believers (vs. 5)?
5. Why is church-led intercessory prayer needed for the saved and unsaved today (vss. 6-9)?
6. When God answered your prayer requests in the past, what did you do?

—Wardell Miller.

Golden Text Illuminated

“And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines” (I Samuel 7:8).

Samuel had called a gathering of the Israelites to Mizpeh for the purpose of purifying them from their idols and judging them, so that the presence of the Lord in the ark of the covenant might once again dwell among them.

But while they were assembled, the Philistines heard about their gathering and decided to attack them at this most vulnerable time. When the Israelites realized that the Philistines were coming, they cried out to Samuel to intercede for them.

Samuel, ever faithful on behalf of his people and before their God, did

as they asked, and the Lord honored Samuel’s intercession by routing the Philistine army.

To commemorate this great victory by the Lord on behalf of His people, Samuel raised up an Ebenezer, which means “stone of help.” It was evidently a prominent stone that stood out from the surrounding landscape to remind all who came that way of the Lord’s glorious triumph for His covenant people on that day.

Have you raised any Ebenezers to the Lord in your own Christian life?

Do you remember the anniversary of your new birth in Christ? Or maybe you remember a special day when the Lord gave you an answer to prayer that changed your life in some other important way. Remember the faithfulness of our God and praise Him!

—John Lody.