



6 | 1 SAMUEL 7

LIVING IN VICTORY

Living in the fear of God is the safest and happiest way to live.

Outline

1. **HEART CHANGE (7:2-4)**
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 - Reconciliation
 - Calling
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 - Give God the Glory
 - Live in Spiritual Stability
 - Insist on Godly Leaders

Call to Worship

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah. ² that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. ³ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!—*Psalm 67:1-3*

Songs

Goodness of God

And Can it Be

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

All Glory Be to Christ

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

GIVING: You can give over Zelle through your bank with no fees (use secretary@livinghopechurch.net). We also have a collection box on the Welcome Center. Malachi 3, "Test me in this" Proverbs: "**Give of your first fruits.**" We believe blessing comes by putting God first.

Introduction

We are in a series in the book of 1 Samuel called "Exalting God's King." We are learning how to exalt Jesus Christ as King in our lives. Our title this morning is: "Approaching God."

My mother always told me, "Be careful what you wish for." Marilyn Monroe at the height of her fame was asked, "Are you generally happy in life with all the fame and fortune?" She answered, "If I'm generally anything, I'm generally miserable." I read an article years ago about Madonna and after she had achieved a wealth of 800 million dollars she realized how miserable she was.

People wish for things to be happier, and I say, be careful what you wish for. Israel wished for their own prosperity, and in seeking it, they lost everything for twenty years.

Key Thought: The ultimate place of happiness for anyone on earth is knowing Christ as we live in victory over sin and intimacy with God.

It had been twenty years without the ark of the covenant at the center of national life. The tabernacle had been burned down by the Philistines after 369 years at Shiloh. So intensely had they and their leaders offended God that he departed from them by sending away the ark of the covenant to the outskirts of Israel for *two long decades* (7:1).

The Lord set the people aside, so that the name *Ichabod* (meaning "the glory has departed") was rightly spoken of them. Remember they had lost 4,000 soldiers at the first battle of Ebenezer. They returned with the ark and lost 30,000 more. They mishandled the ark and lost 50,070 men throughout Israel. That's 84,000 total soldiers dead. That's a lot of widows. That's a lot of orphans. God moved the ark away from anyone, into the south in Kiriath-jearim so that for twenty years there was no Passover, no Pentecost, no Feast of Tabernacles.

The fact that the ark was taken to Kiriath-jearim and not back to Shiloh is because the Shiloh temple-tabernacle had been burnt down by the Philistines during their great defeat at Ebenezer.¹ In fact, in the 1980s, the burn layer for the Shiloh temple was discovered. From that time until the latest dig in 2019, they have found layers upon layers of large deposits of sacrificial animal bones. In 2013, archaeologists discovered the very foundation holes in the rock where the wooden beams would have stood from the temple-tabernacle there at Shiloh.² Previous research at the

¹ I. Finkelstein, "Shiloh Yields Some, But Not All, of Its Secrets," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (January/February 1986, Volume 12, Number 1), 22–41.

² Dan A. Borschel, (2020, January 16). *At Shiloh, Archaeologist Finds Artifacts Hinting at Biblical Tabernacle*. The Times of Israel. Retrieved October 24, 2021, from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/listen-at-shiloh-archaeologist-finds-artifacts-hinting-at-biblical-tabernacle/>.

site also found the bathing pools where the high priest (Eli and those before him) would have cleansed himself in preparation to enter the tabernacle.

In 2017, discovered ten ancient jugs dating from the period with petrified figs inside, which were on display in the museum that was on site when I visited there that year. They also found two tiny ceramic pomegranates (Exo 28:33-34) that would have been attached to the priests' garment.³

So yes, these are real places. And for twenty years while the ark was in Kiriath-jearim, there were no annual celebrations. The people were given over to their sin. The glory departed. They had abandoned the true God for idols, indulging in gross sins, and they lived with their bondage for twenty years. So it ever is with sin.⁴ It's just as our Lord says. We are either servants to God or slaves to sin.

John 8:34 | Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

Is there hope for these sinners in Israel who had so offended God? **How can a sinner return to the holy God?** The answer is always **the mercy of God**, who forever welcomes sinners back when they come humbly seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Our Lord calls out even now.

Isaiah 45:22 | Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other (NKJV).

It is here we see the pathway to true joy in God. Let me remind you of our key thought.

Key Thought: The ultimate place of happiness for anyone on earth is knowing Christ as we live in victory over sin and intimacy with God.

Many in Israel know the word but disregard it. They've lived in the light, knowing God's word, while also living in sin, and they are miserable. They have **one foot in the world and one foot in the church**. They are "sinning in the light" if you will. How do self-righteous sinners return to God? They come to the Lord like we all do, through a change of heart.

1. HEART CHANGE (7:2-4)

Whether you have drifted as a Christian from the center of God's will for you, or whether you are coming to Christ for the first time, the first step back to God is a change of heart.

1 Samuel 7:2 | From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

The chapter begins by telling us that after twenty years of wandering from the Lord, "all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord" (7:2). This was the first step of a kind of conversion, not just of an individual, but of an entire group of people. They had lost all those years. When they could have been serving God, they were serving themselves. But I'm so glad that God is able to restore "the years that the locusts have eaten" (Joel 2:25).

Here we see at least five marks of heart change.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 120.

REPENTANCE

1 Samuel 7:2b | All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

We must first notice how corporate repentance moves the heart of God. Each soul is important to God. He certainly will leave the ninety and nine to go after the one. But glorious things happen when whole groups of people seek after the Lord. How vital it is that we seek the Lord together. Our corporate gatherings should be first priority in our lives. Seeking the Lord together is vital. The key to great movements of God is that we each seek the Lord individually and corporately.

RECONCILIATION

It was with God's infinite grace in mind that Samuel spoke to Israel about returning to the Lord:

1 Samuel 7:3a | And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods.

God welcomes the backslidden, the emboldened sinners if they will humble themselves, to come to him.

Zechariah 1:3 | Return to me, ... and I will return to you.

James 4:8 | Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

To be right with God, he requires your whole heart. This means that you are no longer holding on to any vestige of sin. You are willing to give everything up for the Lord. Come with your whole heart to the Lord, and he will forgive you. This is the appeal that God always makes to those who are fallen in sin. Be serious. Be humble. Christ will receive you.

Matthew 11:28-29 | Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

CALLING

1 Samuel 7:3b | Then put away the foreign gods.

Set aside your idols or even anything questionable and return to God fully with your whole heart.

The story implies after the defeat at Ebenezer (ch 4) the Israelites' abandoned Yahweh to see if serving other gods would work out better. Now many years had passed, and they were more miserable than ever. They are now "lamenting after Yahweh," but not in such a way as to give up their recourse to other gods.⁵ **There needs to be a transformation of heart that results in the rejection of idols.** God calls sinners to turn from the gods and idols of this world that do not satisfy. Have you been called? Have you responded to his call?

FREEDOM

1 Samuel 7:3c | He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

⁵ John Goldingay, *1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, Old Testament for Everyone (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011), 43.

As long as Israel served idols, they would be under the heavy hand of the nations. Wherever there is sin, there is slavery. When we surrender to God, he brings a promise of freedom from idols and the enemy when we surrender to the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:17 | Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

John 8:36 | Whom the Son sets free shall be free indeed.

Romans 6:14 | Sin will have no dominion over you.

We are **no longer under the law or under sin, but under grace**. That means you can be a legalist in your heart, and still be a slave. You can be a great sinner, and you are a slave. But if you are under grace, you are truly free. That is, your heart is changed, and you long to do the will of God, and you are totally free to do it! You are dead to sin but alive to God!

RIGHT WORSHIP

What we come to next is the true manifestation of transformation. Do you have the power to put away the habits of sin and idolatry? When we turn to the Lord and his word in faith, God brings with faith his omnipotent power over sin. If you are lacking power, you are lacking faith.

Israel must give up their idols in order to know and serve God. This command involved far more than throwing a few statues into a ditch. Idolatry, then as now, **involves the heart, and their whole way of living**. They had worshipped “the Baals and the Ashtaroth.”

1 Samuel 7:4 | So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only.

These Canaanite “foreign gods” were linked to the vital matter of prosperity and fertility, so that through their worship people hoped to secure comfort and food through rains and abundant crops.

They must go beyond mere emotion (7:2). Lamenting is good. Weeping is good. But there must be something even deeper. Repentance must touch the will, where actual hatred for sin and idolatry overtakes the heart and is seen in the life. **When we forsake idols from the heart, it is the main indication of heart change**. Our heart has stopped loving idols and started hating them and despising them because we love the living God.

Samuel realized that the power for repentance comes from a new fervor for the Lord. We not only forsake the darkness but come to walk in the light. The power to turn from sin comes from seeing the glory of the Lord as the true God and the blessing of his salvation as our only true hope.⁶ Don't tell me you are a true Christian unless you are worshipping and treasuring God from your heart.

When we know God intimately, we have what Thomas Chalmers called **the expulsive power of a new affection**. With the joy of Christ comes the power to forsake the pleasures of this world. They become dull compared to the joy that we have in Christ. We have the power to forsake anger and fear, lust and pornography, bitterness and despair. We no longer look to people and things to fill the void of our happiness. We look to Christ alone. God is calling us dear saints to forsake our Baals and Ashtaroth.

When God had brought about a true conversion in Israel, Samuel directed them **to publicly confess their sins through ceremony** and word.

⁶ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 122.

2. CONFESSION (7:5-6)

There is a time for **private mourning of sin, and there is also a time for public confession**. Samuel instructs the people of Israel to gather at Mizpah for prayer, a purification ceremony, and a time of public confession of sin.

1 Samuel 7:5-6 | Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." ⁶ So they gathered at Mizpah 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 people of Israel at Mizpah.

There are four beautiful displays of affection for Yahweh in this passage.

THE CHURCH GATHERED

1 Samuel 7:5 | Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you."

First, I love that the people of God are willing to gather. This is something we are called to do as Christians. They were gathering for a specific purpose. To pray. To fast. To consecrate themselves. We cannot live the Spirit-filled life alone. We together are God's temple. In fact, as our society grows colder and colder, the church should gather more and grow hotter and hotter for the Lord. When the church gathers, watch for the Spirit of God to do something powerful.

Hebrews 10:25 | Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

HUNGER AND THIRST FOR GOD

1 Samuel 7:6ba | So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day.

Second, they hungered and thirsted after the Lord. They fasted, which is always an expression that God is more satisfying than physical food. The denial of water and pouring it out on the ground in a desert climate shows that they thirsted for the Lord more than water.⁷ They were saying, we've turned from sin, and we were miserable—poured out like water. We come hungry, because the world doesn't satisfy. God is our bread and water. To know him is life! We confess Yahweh as our only Lord and Savior. Yahweh is our exclusive object of worship!

SHAME FOR SIN

1 Samuel 7:6b | So they... said there, "We have sinned against the LORD."

Their confession of sin is **not penance**: not then and not now. We do not confess our sin in order to atone for it. For believers then and now, **our sins are already atoned for in Christ**. We say with David.

⁷ William G. Blaikie, *Expository Lectures on the Book of First Samuel* (1887; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 2005), 91.

Psalm 51:4a | Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

They knew Yahweh alone could forgive and atone for sin. They looked forward to Christ in the sacrificial system, and we look back. Our confession is to say that sin has no place in the heart of a Christian who is filled with the love of God. We know the beauty of his holiness. We want to live a life unspotted from the world.

One way we confess our rejection of our previous life is through **baptism**. In Israel they participated in a ceremony of pouring out water upon the ground and fasting. Today, we make our repentance and faith in Christ public and known through baptism. If you have been born again, I ask you, if Christ is real to you, to confess your love for him publicly through baptism.

Confession of sin is vital. When the Spirit of God is working, **the sewers of our hearts** get opened up and cleaned out. We continue to have those times of reconsecration when we confess our sins one to another in more private situations, perhaps with a mentor, a pastor, or a friend. We do this publicly as well during testimony times.

SUBMISSION TO GODLY LEADERSHIP

1 Samuel 7:6c | And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

Samuel was the mediator for Yahweh. He represented God's lordship over Israel. This judging included the wisdom of preaching and directing Israel, settling cases, and pointing the nation back to the law of Moses, God's word.

In the church today, we are all "priests of God." We are all responsible for one another. No one can live the Christian life alone. **You must be attached corporately to God's forever family.** To live in accountability to fellow believers is counter cultural. Christians are to be submitted to humble pastors and elders know how to live the life of faith in victory and power over sin and with the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit.

There must **be a living vitality and integrity in the lives of leaders in God's flock.** Let those leaders who have disqualified themselves remain disqualified. If a man is unfaithful to his wife, let him never preach the word. If he cannot live a life that is self-controlled, he ought not to be a shepherd of God's church. Let the men of God be examples of humility, rich faith, and victory over sin.

3. CONSECRATION (7:7-9)

What we find in verse 7-9 is as soon as the people of God begin turning to the Lord in repentance, the enemy starts coming after them. As soon as we repent, we as God's people get a target on our backs.

What does Israel do? When the enemy is chasing after them, they consecrate themselves under the direction of Samuel. Israel needed an intercessor, and they had one in Samuel. They call upon Samuel for prayer.

CONSECRATION BEGINS WITH PROPITIATION

1 Samuel 7:7-9a | Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. ⁸And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry

out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.”⁹ So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD.

I love the picture of the whole burnt offering in Scripture. It points to propitiation: the satisfaction of God's wrath over our sin. This is always the attitude of victory. Do you want victory and power? You need the assurance of Christ's love for you, demonstrated at the cross of Calvary.

This offering from Israel is a picture of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Because of Jesus, God's justice is satisfied. All sin is against God and deserving of death and must be atoned for. The Bible encourages us that the blood of Jesus truly washes away our sins.

Hebrews 9:2 | Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

1 John 2:2 | He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Like the hymn says, “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

The “whole burnt offering” is an offering where nothing is eaten, but it is entirely consumed in the fire. It has a sweet-smelling aroma that all can enjoy. It points to the fact **Christ has fully paid for our sins.** This is how we today consecrate ourselves. We surrender and remember that Christ has paid for our sins fully. He has held nothing back for us, so we should hold nothing back for him. Will you make that commitment to Christ right now? Hold nothing back.

CONSECRATION GROWS WITH PRAYER

1 Samuel 7:9b | And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.

Many times, the people of God had cried out to Samuel and to God for deliverance, but to no avail. **God did not answer**, whether it be when they lost the 4,000 against the Philistines, or when they lost the 30,000. God was silent. And to make things worse, remember that while the Philistines took the lives of 34,000 souls in Israel, God took over 50,000 when they would not fear the Lord, but looked upon him as a curiosity. **When we cherish idols, God does not respond.**

Psalm 66:18 | If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Finally, **now that they have forsaken their idols, God hears them**, and he hears Samuel. This is perhaps one of the most important lessons of these tragic chapters. If you do not sense a vital, living relationship with you and the Lord, examine your heart for idols. Be willing to forsake anything that is questionable. Cast yourself on the mercy of the Lord with deep humility, and God will hear you. He hears and he answers! I love the fact that we hear that “the Lord answered” Samuel. We don't know how beautiful the answer will be, but before anything happens, the Lord has already answered.

4. VICTORY (7:10-17)

Israel has been greatly humbled, languishing in their slavery to sin. As a result, they find repentance and enter a seven-year period of revival before they fall off the wagon again and decide

to impeach the kingship of Yahweh and elect a king like the nations, Saul of Ramah, from the tribe of Benjamin to be their king. Sad story, I know. But let us take time to savor and celebrate this most special time in the life of Samuel, who leads them to repentance and revival. Their national conversion turns into a great deliverance for all Israel.

We as believers should be living a life of incredible victory over sin. If you are a believer, you should be heading in a direction where sin no longer controls you and dominates you. Is there a peace in your heart? Do you experience God's peace in your home life? Do you see his presence working in you and through you? Let's look at a few steps toward the victorious Christian life that we see in what happened to Israel when they surrendered to God.

EXPECT SPIRITUAL ATTACK

Whenever you start serving God, the enemy is at hand. You should expect satanic attack. Just as Samuel is offering up the burnt offering and the beautiful aroma wafts into the air, the enemy smells the praise of God's saints, and he comes attacking.

1 Samuel 7:10a | As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel.

For Israel, this was the Philistines, but behind every physical enemy is the invisible enemy: Satan. Satan's aim is to rip Christians off their feet unexpectedly. He wants them to be down and grovel. There is an enemy always attacking you. He never stops. You must not rest for a moment. It's a tricky war because it's invisible.

Ephesians 6:12 | For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Satan is puppeteering the masses. Our enemy is not those who break our hearts, inflict spiritual and emotional pain upon us. Those who attack us spiritually are just the pawns of Satan. "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood." Then who do we wrestle against? Paul describes them as satanic rulers and authorities. Our enemy sends in his best thugs. Satan and his demons are the enemy, not our dear family and not even any other human being. **The Lord will fight for us** if we yield to him and consecrate our lives to him.

LET GOD ENGAGE THE ENEMY

The Philistines rightly perceive that the Israelites' gathering in this way means trouble. They decide to attack Israel with a surprise attack. God's people are afraid and panicked (7:7b). The **Philistines think** (as in the first battle of Ebenezer in chapter 4) **this is going to be another easy victory against Israel**. They can just taste Israel's humiliation and utter defeat. How wrong they are. Thankfully, the fear of God's people doesn't make God give up and go off.⁸ When we turn to God, he fights on our behalf.

1 Samuel 7:10b-11 | But **the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day** against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. ¹¹And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

Our strength has a divine location: *in the Lord*. Lack of victory in the spiritual battle reflects a lack of understanding of our divine resources. This says the **battle is the Lord's, not ours**. God

⁸ John Goldingay, *1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, Old Testament for Everyone (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011), 43.

is the mighty divine warrior. God supplies the strength, not us. Our job is to “dress for success” by putting on the armor God supplies.

Ephesians 6:10 | Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Let God thunder from heaven for you, just as he did with the Philistines. Remember when the advice of the apostle James: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas 4:7). Thankfully, Satan is not stronger than God. He is a limited, created, finite being.

1 John 4:4 | Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Hebrews 2:14 | Christ came to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Colossians 2:15 | Christ by his cross spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

1 John 3:8 | For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Satan has no power over the believer whatsoever unless the believer yields to Satan. He was defeated at the cross, and he has no power whatsoever over you as a believer, unless you give it to him. Any sin, especially sins of the spirit like anger, anxiety, and despair, will give the enemy access to your heart to harass you.

Ephesians 4:26-27 | Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.

Yield to the Lord, and he will fight your battles and lift you up for useful service (Jas 4:10). God's people in Samuel's day had yielded to God. In their weakness they panicked, but that was a non-issue. God would fight for them since they had already surrendered to him.

GIVE GOD THE GLORY

Now look what Samuel does. He sets up a stone of remembrance. He called its name Ebenezer, which means “stone of help” or “sign of victory.”⁹

1 Samuel 7:12 | Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, “Till now the LORD has helped us.”

By erecting a memorial stone, Samuel was following in the footsteps of prior believers, especially Joshua. When God opened a way through the Jordan River for Israel to pass through, Joshua built a pile of stones to mark the event (Josh 4:20–24).

There's an irony here because it must be in the forefront of Samuel's mind that twenty years earlier, they had lost 34,000 men at the town of Ebenezer. It should have been a victory at the town called “victory.” The Ebenezer stone that Samuel sets up is redemption for Israel and for us. *Ebenezer* means “stone of help,” yet God refused to help Israel because of unbelief. Now, acting in faith, Israel had experienced God's help and gained a decisive victory.¹⁰ Faith truly is the victory that overcomes the world (1 Jn 5:4). Because of Israel's surrender to God, all that was lost through

⁹ Perry J. Oakes, “Ebenezer,” ed. John D. Barry, et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 128.

sin in the first Ebenezer event was restored through repentance in the second.¹¹ Let us shout, "Till now the LORD has helped us" (7:12b).

No matter what failures you have had, get up, and surrender to the Lord. He promises you the victory through faith. God gives us the victory, and he gets all the honor and glory. He did it all. God's people didn't add much. They were weak. They were panicked. It wasn't until God thundered from heaven that God's people got some courage. All glory be to Christ!

LIVE IN SPIRITUAL STABILITY

The history of revivals shows that when the gospel is advancing, sin is subdued in society. We see that **as they stopped worshipping the gods** and idols of the Philistines, **Israel prospered** in the strength of the **Lord**.

1 Samuel 7:13-14 | So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. ¹⁴The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

For the Israelites, the peace that followed the victory meant God had been an extraordinary and decisive help to them reach their destiny of God reigning in the land.¹²

INSIST ON GODLY LEADERS

The activity of Samuel in his latter years shows a leader with resolve, energy, and ambition.

1 Samuel 7:15-17 | Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD.

It's likely that this meeting at Mizpah marked the beginning of Samuel's public ministry to the whole nation of Israel, so that from that time on he was a focal point for political unity and spiritual authority.¹³ **Samuel traveled around the country training the elders**, deciding difficult cases; and teaching the people in various cities. Today, the pastors and teachers in God's church are to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph 4:11-12). **Building an altar** in his home city suggests he stands in the tradition of Abraham, Moses, and Joshua, in being personally dedicated to the Lord. Samuel had a powerful, personal walk with God.

Church leaders today must also have that personal walk with God. God's people must insist on godly leadership. The Bible is not a mere textbook, but it is the record of the oracles of God. God's people must insist on their leaders having a vital and encouraging walk with God.

Conclusion

Just imagine when the people of God heard the thunderous presence of God as he defeated the Philistines. "The Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day" (7:10b). What a victory!

¹¹ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 108.

¹² John Goldingay, *1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, Old Testament for Everyone (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011), 44.

¹³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Successful*, "Be" Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 2001), 44-45.

I have a friend who when he was a kid, he had these ponds out back on his farm. And there were snapping turtles in there. Now snapping turtles are not nice, cute little turtles. They're mean, ugly, ferocious turtles that can kill small animals and snap with powerful jaws at anything that gets close. Well, somewhere he heard that snapping turtles taste like chicken. So he took some rope and tied it to a post at the edge of the pond and on the other end we tied a milk jug. Hanging from the milk jug was some fishing line with a hook on the end and on the hook was some meat. And he waited a couple days for the milk jug to be submerged, indicating that a snapping turtle had been caught.

And it was and so he reeled it in and his dad took his axe and chopped off the turtle's head and began to cut out the meat to put in the crock pot for dinner. But meanwhile his little brother began to play with the severed turtle head to the side. And as they were looking observing this, all of a sudden the reptile eye on the side of the head opened up and it snapped down on his brother's finger. He started crying.¹⁴

But what a picture of what has happened to that ancient serpent who is the devil or Satan. By Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension he has been defeated. We have the victory! His head has been crushed by the cross of Jesus. He has been slain. But yet until Christ comes again, he is still biting people and inflicting pain and harm on the church. There is still evil in this world and pain and suffering, but they are just last ditch attempts by a defeated foe.

Like Israel we have an Ebenezer stone, a stone of help. We can never forget it! The Ebenezer stone for the Christian life is the stone they rolled away at the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is risen! He has conquered. And because he is victorious, so shall we be victorious. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son (Rom 8:29). Let us walk in that glorious victory!

¹⁴ Nathan Carter, "The Four Beasts" (Sermon, Immanuel Baptist Church: Chicago, 17 June 2007), Daniel 7:1-28.