

People of the Promise: Samuel, Part 2: Return to Yahweh 1 Samuel 7

Introduction

NJFK—souvenirs for remembering special persons, places, and events—like the altar Samuel built and called “Stone of Help”—because the Lord had helped them to this point (“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”—“Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I’ve come.”)

Introduction

¹ And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. 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.

Historical Context

Last we saw Samuel God had established Him as prophet of the word of the Lord. 1 Samuel 4:1 notes that “the word of Samuel came to all Israel.” Then his name doesn’t show up again until chapter 7. In between God teaches the Philistines and Israel that you don’t treat Him or the ark of the covenant like a good-luck charm.

In chapter 4 Israel took the ark into battle against the Philistines thinking it would guarantee victory. Instead they lost miserably. The wicked sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and the ark was captured. On hearing the news aged Eli fell backwards, broke his neck and died. His daughter-in-law gave birth to a son she named Ichabod—the glory is departed—just before she herself died. Total disaster.

In chapters 5 and 6 the Philistines learned not to trifle with God or His ark. They put the ark in the house of their idol Dagan. Dagan kept falling during the night—and falling apart, head and hands cut off from body. The Philistines moved the ark to town after town, but everywhere it went plagues fell upon the people living there. Finally, they sent the ark back to Israel, along with a gift of golden tumors and mice as a guilt offering.

When the ark crossed the borders into Israel, some of the men of a town called Bethshemesh inspected its contents and were struck dead for their unholy treatment of the ark contrary to God's instructions in the law of Moses. So they sent it on to Kiriath-jearim a little over seven miles from Jerusalem. There it stayed until King David moved it years later.

All of these events had an effect on Israel:

“all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD” (1 Samuel 7:2b). They had the ark of God, but knew they were not right with the God of the ark.

1. Genuine Repentance (3-4)

³ 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 and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”

Return to the LORD with all your heart
Put away the foreign gods (Baals) and
Ashtaroath
Direct your heart to the LORD
Serve Him only

⁴ So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and they served the LORD only.

Genuine repentance does use God like a good-luck charm while living in sin (1 Samuel 4).

Genuine repentance does not just add God to your collection of idols (1 Samuel 5).

Genuine repentance does not treat God in common ways (1 Samuel 6).

Genuine repentance is from the heart.

Genuine repentance tears down every idol in order to worship God alone.

Baals and Ashteroth—powerful hold on this region; fertility of crops and families; indulgence in immoral pleasure God had forbidden

*The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.*

William Cowper

2. Intercessory Prayer (5-6)

⁵ 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.

Samuel prayed for Israel. They poured out their hearts like water before the LORD—pouring out water as a symbol of their desperate condition, fasted, and confessed we have sinned against the LORD. Thus Samuel established justice again—a right relationship between Israel and God.

Prayer makes total sense when no one but God can rescue you. Prayer calls on God to have mercy and to do what only God can do.

3. Hostile Threat (7-9)

⁷ 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. ⁸ And 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. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.

It is not uncommon for the enemy to take note and to go on the attack when God's people or even an individual believer gets right with God. That is not the time to think that it's no use to serve God. That's the time to lean harder in your trust in God. Burnt-offering symbolic of complete consecration. They would not need God to save them if they could do it themselves. "God meets us at 'wit's end corner.'"

4. Divine Victory (10-14)

¹⁰ As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty

sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. ¹¹ And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

God won the victory. Israel was then able to mop up.

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." ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ The 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.

5. Ongoing Ministry (15-17)

¹⁵ Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ Then 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.

These years were not as dramatic as the victory over the Philistines, but they were necessary. Maintenance of our walk with God is necessary and important to preserving the blessing of having repented and gotten right with God.

There will be extraordinary breakthroughs in our history, but in between there must be regular, ongoing, faithful patterns of walking with God: time in the word, prayer; assembling with God's people for instruction and worship; looking out for those in need; keeping connection with your brothers and sisters in Christ, encouraging and confronting one another. Taking care of the body isn't just for birthdays, graduations, and weddings. There's a lot of living in between those highpoints. By God's help you've reached this point. Keep serving Him.

Conclusion

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2. Intercessory Prayer (5-6)
3. Hostile Threat (7-9)
4. Divine Victory (10-14)
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