

# The Repentance of Israel

## Introduction to the life of David Pt.2: Repentance 1 Samuel 7

Summary: Repentance is wholehearted returning to God. Israel mourned after God and expressed their internal longing for His return with external actions (gathering, confessing, fasting). So Samuel said, "If this is real repentance, forsake the idols and follow God completely" which they did. They then trusted in His intercession and sacrifice even right at the moment of attack, and God wonderfully delivered them.

Introduction .....	2
Definition of Repentance: wholehearted returning to God .....	3
I. Mourn after God.....	3
The altar without the ark – forms of religion without the presence of God .....	3
They mourn His withdrawal, not just their hardships .....	3
Mourning after God .....	4
External expressions: .....	5
A. Gathering .....	5
B. Confession .....	5
C. Fasting .....	6
II. Forsake false gods.....	6
Fellowship with God vs. partying .....	7
Repent of your boredom .....	7
III. Commit to Yahweh and serve Him only .....	8
Appealing to God’s heart vs. performing a ritual.....	8
Serve Him only .....	9
IV. Faith in Intercession .....	9
Samuel’s role as intercessor .....	9
The need for intercession .....	10
The need for Sacrifice .....	10
God’s Response .....	11

**1 Samuel 7** 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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." <sup>4</sup> So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only. <sup>5</sup> Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you." <sup>6</sup> 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 of Israel at Mizpah. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and

offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car. <sup>12</sup> Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us." <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. <sup>16</sup> From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. <sup>17</sup> 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.

## Introduction

We are beginning a study of the life of David, because God made it obvious in His Word that He wants us to know about the life of David. David is mentioned more often in Scripture than any other person (except for God Himself) - more often than Adam, Isaiah, Noah, Elijah, Paul, and Abraham combined. Sixty eight chapters of God's Word are devoted to the life of David. He is the standard for godliness in the Old Testament for all people. Understanding his life is the key to understanding the Psalms and messianic prophecy, and God called him a man after God's own heart. It is important that we know about the life of this man.

If you understand the title of last Sunday's sermon you understand the main point of chapters one to seven. The title of the sermon last week was, "Saving a nation by closing a womb." The LORD closed Hannah's womb and caused her to have a life of such unbearable misery that she cried out to God in great earnest for a son. And God responded to that earnestness by giving her a son who would rescue the entire nation - Samuel, the last and greatest judge, a priest, a prophet, and a king-maker. And the way Samuel ends up saving the nation is by leading them into true repentance.

One thing that is very, very important to understand in this book is the difference between David and Saul. Both men fell into sin and both men confessed their sin with exactly the same words when they were confronted. And yet Saul is rejected by God and David is held up as the epitome of godliness in the OT. There is a world of difference between the two men, and that difference has nothing to do with the seriousness of the sins they committed. It has everything to do with the nature of their repentance. If we are going to be men and women after God's own heart and live lives that are pleasing to Him, it is absolutely essential that we understand what true repentance is.

There are three descriptions of repentance in this book. First is this national, Samuel-led repentance in chapter seven, then Saul's<sup>1</sup> and then David's.<sup>2</sup> So we need to interrupt our introduction of the first 15 chapters by taking a careful look at chapter seven.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 15.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Sam.12.

# Definition of Repentance: wholehearted returning to God

I do not know of any better or more helpful definition of repentance than the one Samuel gave in verse three.

**<sup>3</sup> And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then..."**

And he goes on to describe how they can show it. So Samuel's definition of repentance is **returning to the LORD with all your heart**. Repentance is not a mere mental exercise. It is a revolution inside your heart that forsakes alternatives and turns back wholeheartedly to God.

Not all sorrow over sin is a returning to God with all your heart. So sorrow alone is not repentance. But nor is there any repentance without sorrow, because if your sin does not grieve you then obviously God does not have your whole heart. But in this case it turned out Israel's repentance really was a genuine turning to God with all their hearts. This is a wonderful (and rare) moment in the history of Israel. So let's see what we can learn about true repentance.

## I. Mourn after God

**<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim**

### The altar without the ark – forms of religion without the presence of God

For twenty years they left the ark in that house instead of putting it in the Tabernacle. When they went to worship during those twenty years they were content to have the altar without the ark. They were content to have the symbols of religion without the presence of God. That is easy to fall in to isn't it? We become content with the external vehicles of religion without really seeking God's presence. We read our Bibles just to gather information instead of to seek the presence of God. Or we pray just to get our praying done instead of to commune with the living God. We go church just because it is Sunday instead of because we want to be in the Holy Place of God where His presence is most profoundly revealed. We handle the vehicles of grace without really, truly seeking God Himself because our souls do not really hunger and thirst for Him. So now, after twenty years of that, the people realize God's presence is absent.

**<sup>2</sup> ...and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD.**

### They mourn His withdrawal, not just their hardships

That is the foundation for repentance. They finally understood the real calamity was not being dominated by the Philistines (as horrible as that was) – the real calamity was God's withdrawal of His presence from them. Psalm 78 recounts the history of Israel and God from the Exodus up to the time of David. It is a long psalm that describes how Israel kept being unfaithful and turning away from God over and over and over, and how God was incredibly patient and longsuffering. But their idolatry

in the beginning of 1 Samuel was so extreme it was the last straw. That language is as extreme as it gets. For the first time ever it says God **rejected Israel completely** (v.59).

**Psalm 78:58-62 They ... aroused his jealousy with their idols. <sup>59</sup> ...he rejected Israel completely. <sup>60</sup> He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men. <sup>61</sup> He sent [the ark of] his might into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy. <sup>62</sup> He gave his people over to the sword; he was very angry with his inheritance.**

The word “ark” in verse 61 is not in the Hebrew. It literally just says **He sent His strength into captivity, his beauty into the hands of the enemy.** The ark was only symbolic of what was really happening. Phinehas’ wife was right – the glory had indeed departed from Israel. In Psalm 63:2 David talked about the wonderful satisfaction of soul he experienced when he went into the Tabernacle and experienced the beauty and power of God. But that was not possible for Israel at this time. God removed access to His beauty and power. They could not behold them or enjoy them or benefit from them. There are a lot of consequences for sin, but the most severe of all is the removal of the nearness of God’s presence – the inability to see and enjoy God’s power and beauty.

Think of the implications of that. If you cannot see God’s beauty – you read about some attribute of God in the Bible and it does nothing in your heart, generates no real joy or delight in your affections – then it becomes impossible to increase your love for God. All the benefits of knowing God come from loving Him – desiring and delighting in the experience of His attributes. And so if you are unable to see what is so wonderful about those attributes, your entire relationship with God is stymied. When you have your devotions or prayer time or Bible study time, or when you come to church or carry out ministry, if you are unable to receive joy and peace and comfort and delight and rest and encouragement and strength from God’s presence through that, then you are in the same catastrophe as Israel was in when the ark was captured by the Philistines! It is a terrible disaster, to have God withdraw His favorable presence from you. That is the worst disaster that can happen. In fact, it is really the only disaster that can happen. Because if you have the benefit of God’s favorable presence so that you are full of joy and peace, you can hardly call your circumstances a disaster no matter how painful they are.

But if you do not have joy and peace and delight and satisfaction of soul then you are not experiencing the presence of God. And that was exactly the situation in Israel when God abandoned them and allowed the ark to be taken. A short time later the ark was returned to Israel. But the favorable presence of God was not. It came about not through the return of the ark, but through the repentance of the people twenty years after the ark had been returned.

## **Mourning after God**

The phrase **mourning after God** refers to a following after God that was motivated and driven by their mourning over all the consequences of their sin. Everybody mourns the consequences of sin. Murderers do not like being in jail, liars do not like getting caught - everybody mourns over the consequences of sin, but very few people mourn after God. Not many people respond to the pain of the consequences of sin by seeking hard after God. But, when the pain of your sin drives you to seek hard after the presence of God, that is the beginning point of true repentance. If you just want relief from the consequences you are no different from the world. But when your heart says, “I can’t take this anymore – I need nearness to the presence of God. If I don’t get grace from God I feel like I will die” - then you are mourning after God. When your soul is dried up and the only drink that sounds good to you is fellowship with God and nearness to His presence, then you are mourning after God.

And that is what happened in Israel at this time. This is Israel’s finest hour in the entire period of the Judges. They are more godly here, as they longed for the presence of God, than they were when the ark was in its proper place. It is better to lack the presence of God and mourn and long for it than

it is to have it and think little of it. It is better to groan because of the lack of grace than to have abundance of grace and despise it. It is better to be in a desert wasteland spiritually and long for the Spring of living water than it is to be right next to that Spring and to not take it seriously. When we think little of grace we provoke God to withdraw it in order to protect it from the dishonor of having His own children despise it.

## **External expressions:**

So now that they are mourning after God they gather together at Mizpah to express their repentance in external ways. Physical, external expressions of repentance are important. We all understand (I hope) that external expressions without an internal reality are hypocrisy. However I think in our tradition we sometimes fail to see the other side of the coin and miss the importance of the external expression. The physical expression alone, without the internal anguish, is worse than meaningless. But the internal anguish alone, without the external expression, is incomplete.

Your wife does not want hugs and flowers and kisses and gifts from you if there is no love for her in your heart. But nor does she want you to just love her in your heart with no hugs or flowers. If something is truly happening to you, it should be expressed with your body. Joy that does not cause smiles and laughter is weak joy. Sorrow that does not cause actually crying is weak sorrow. Fear that does not make you tremble is weak fear. Peace that does not relax your tight muscles is weak peace. And so these people gave outward expression to their inward repentance.

### ***A. Gathering***

The first thing they did was something I have never heard of any church ever doing - they gathered for the sole purpose of repenting.

#### **<sup>6</sup> When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted**

We do not know exactly what the pouring of the water meant. It might have been a kind of a drinking fast. Or maybe it symbolized their sin – once a drink is poured out on the ground it is gone. You cannot take it back. Whatever it meant it was some kind of expression of repentance. And it is significant that they packed their bags and traveled long distances to assemble together as a nation in one place to repent. Their repentance was not just an individual deal with each person in the privacy of his own home. This repentance was a very big deal to them.

### ***B. Confession***

Secondly, once they were gathered, they confessed.

#### **6 ...and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD."**

They did not try to make excuses, they did not soft-pedal what they did to make it sound less serious – they called it what it was: sin. And they realized the thing that made it so sinful was the fact that it was **against the LORD**. Sometimes people grieve over their sin, but really the main reason they are sad is because they failed. And they are upset with themselves for not being stronger. There is not a great sense of having offended a holy God. But these people knew exactly what the main issue is with sin – the fact that it is **against the LORD**.

## ***C. Fasting***

The third thing it says in verse six is that they fasted. Expressing grief over sin is a good reason to fast. When you laugh to express your joy, that very act of physical expression makes you even happier and more joyful. Expressing what is in your heart is the completion of the experience of having that thing in your heart. And grief is the same way. It is appropriate to express grief. And one very profound way is fasting. If you have no outward expression, you train your soul to minimize it, and you make the sorrow less profound.

When we sin, our tendency is to want to be done with the matter as quickly as possible. We want to confess it to God, ask forgiveness, receive full restoration, and be on our way in a matter of minutes. But, examples of acts of repentance in God's Word show people extending their expression of sorrow over sin for a long period of time. (Obviously - fasting for a few minutes would be a joke.) There is a time to laugh and a time to weep. There is a time to dance, and a time to mourn. (Ecc.3:4) I think many times I am much too eager to cut short the time to weep and go back to laughing prematurely.

**James 4:9 Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.**

Use external expressions of sorrow to assist your heart in properly grieving over sin. And continue in those expressions of sorrow until the Lord returns and allows you to experience His favorable presence to bless.

## **II. Forsake false gods**

So repentance begins with mourning after God. And that mourning leads to a turning from sin.

**<sup>3</sup> 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**

You cannot turn to God without turning away from idols. An idol is anything your heart prefers over God. So any time you prefer anything above God – whether it be a pagan god, or some earthly treasure, or a human relationship, or sexual pleasure, or all your stuff, or just the satisfaction of being in control of your own life – it is all idolatry. And if the sin is preferring something over God, then forsaking that sin and returning to God with all your heart will require preferring God over that thing you were preferring. You are not seeking God with all your heart if you refuse to let go of the thing that is keeping you away from God (or keeping God away from you). So if you are wondering if your sorrow over your sin is godly sorrow, step one is to let go of anything that hinders your walk with God. Like the guy in Matthew 13 who found a treasure buried in a field and in his joy sold everything he had to get that field. And anything in your life that hinders your ability to access that treasure you will not be able to unload fast enough. Susanna Wesley put it this way: "whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself."<sup>3</sup>

The question is not, "Do you desire God?" The real question is, Do you desire God more than you desire the world? Most people who claim to want to go to heaven refuse to get off the road to hell. If you are confused about the "Lordship salvation" debate, this should solve it. You cannot stay on the road to hell and end up in heaven. The Prodigal Son did not come back to his father's house dragging

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<sup>3</sup> Susanna Wesley (Letter, June 8, 1725)

the trough of pig slop with him. You have to make a decision – either stay in the pig slop or go home to your father’s feast. You cannot have both. God will not be a husband to you while you are still clinging to other lovers.

## **Fellowship with God vs. partying**

Some people wonder why it was such a temptation for Israel to bow down before pagan statues. Why was that such a temptation? First of all it was culturally acceptable, and so forsaking it would bring rejection and ridicule from the world.<sup>4</sup> God calls us to be different, and to be willing to be thought of as prudes or nerds or whatever. But we also need to understand that pagan worship was designed to be pleasurable and satisfying. Since there was no grace or satisfaction that came from actual communion with the pagan god (since the god was nothing), all the benefit had to be built in to the *form* of the worship itself. Pagan worship was designed to fulfill the desires of people’s souls. It was exciting and lively and pleasurable. It involved drinking and partying and revelry and all kinds of sexual pleasures. It was a party. And when you have been in a religion that says you can do all that and still be right with God, it is very hard to give up. The sensations of pleasure connected with sexual sin, or drugs, or alcohol, or just the party atmosphere itself are so intense that it seems impossible to imagine that fellowship with God, by itself, could even be as satisfying, let alone more satisfying.

The worship God had prescribed in the Bible was different. It had very little to attract the impulses of the flesh. If the worshipper truly worshipped, so that he or she found joy through personal communion and fellowship with God, the grace that came from God’s presence was far more pleasurable and satisfying and joy-producing than the pagan revelry. However, if there was no personal communion with God, and all the worshipper experienced was the outward form alone, worship of Yahweh, compared to pagan worship, was dull, boring, dry, harsh, and unfulfilling. To the soul that does not know God Himself and delight in His presence, it is impossible to really believe that doing things like praying or reading the Bible or sitting in church could give their souls even a fraction of the enjoyment and satisfaction that those other things give.

God made it that way on purpose. If all those fleshly pleasures were part of true worship we would never be able to discern if our joy were coming from the forms themselves or from true communion with God. So God made it so that there can hardly be any confusion. If there is no true communion with God there is almost zero pleasure in prayer. But when there is communion with Him and the experience of His presence there is nothing in this whole wide world more wonderful and satisfying than prayer! The same goes for Scripture, worship, fellowship and ministry.

## **Repent of your boredom**

That principle is convicting to me. Many of us need to repent of our boredom. I had to cry out to God this week for forgiveness for the sin in my heart that often makes prayer and worship and Bible reading and acts of service boring. To the degree I am bored with those things I am like the pagans. To the degree those things are tiresome and unexciting to me, it can only be because I am participating in the form apart from the reality - I have the altar without the ark. If I am bored, that

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<sup>4</sup>God was calling them to give up what was fashionable. Participation in the modes of worship of the day made the Israelites acceptable to the culture. Giving it up would make them appear prudish and strange and bizarre and would bring ridicule. No doubt the voices of liberal Christianity were heard also in ancient Israel: “Isn’t exclusive worship of Yahweh alone in one prescribed, traditional way unnecessarily narrow? Why not admit that in other religions there is an element of good, and all of them promote kindness and love, and that those who are sincere in their devotion to Asteroth or Baal are expression a profound and real religious sentiment? Who are we to judge them?” The call to repentance is a call to be different, and there is a price tag attached to that. The world will mock you.

means I am not seeing God's glory and communing with Him and experiencing His presence. The pagans are bored with true worship because the only thing enjoyable about true worship is the fellowship with God. And they do not experience any fellowship with God, so all there is for them is boredom. When my heart is not drawn to want to seek God in earnest prayer, or to delve into the depths of His Word, or to join in fellowship with His saints in His house on His day, or to experience His grace flowing through me in ministry – when the desire for those things is small it can only mean that either my desire for God is small or I am failing to experience God in those things.

### **III. Commit to Yahweh and serve Him only**

So repentance begins with mourning after God – longing for His presence. And that drives you to throw off anything that is hindering you from being in His presence. But you do not just throw them off, as though Christianity were mainly an issue of what you refrain from. You throw them off in preparation for the rest of verse three.

**... rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only**

That phrase **commit yourselves to the LORD** is literally **solidify your hearts to the LORD**.<sup>5</sup> The idea is to take your resolve to seek God and set it in stone. You are not really turning back to God unless you are serious about it. Jesus taught us to think through the costs, weigh all that this return to God will entail, and then make a firm commitment. Think through what it is going to be like to prefer God over this particular sin at the moment of temptation. Usually when people make a commitment and then bail out on it a short time later it is because they have not counted the cost, and so they did not really realize what they were committing to.

#### **Appealing to God's heart vs. performing a ritual**

It is important also to understand that this was a turning to a *person*. They turned not to an ideal or standard or law or rule, but to the LORD. Turning to the LORD is never a standardized, mechanized, formulaic process. You cannot just follow a series of rituals and have it automatically happen. When you are estranged from a person whom you have sinned against, returning to that person requires a direct, personal interaction and an appeal to that person's heart. There are no standardized words you can say, nor is there any way to force the whole process to be completed according to any set timetable.

**Joel 2:12-14 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'** <sup>13</sup> **Rend your heart and not your garments.**

Take some extended time alone and give some serious thought to what it means to rend your heart (tear it). Repentance involves ripping your heart.

**Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.** <sup>14</sup> **Who knows? He may turn and have pity**

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<sup>5</sup> I was only able to find 4 other places in Scripture where this word is used with the word "heart."

1 Chrn.29:18 O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you

2 Chrn.19:3 There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God."

2 Chrn.20:33 The high places, however, were not removed, and the people still had not set their hearts on the God of their fathers.

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

And if you tear your heart, and if you turn to God with all your heart with fasting and weeping and mourning, even then it is not automatic.

**Who knows? He may turn and have pity.**

He may, or He may just decide that the period of dryness needs to go on for a while longer. Repentance is not a ritual – it is an appeal to the heart of a personal God.

## **Serve Him only**

So you mourn the loss of closeness and intimacy with God, and you cast off the things that are hindering that and solidify the resolve in your heart to return to God, and you seek hard after Him out of a desire for renewed intimacy with Him, and you make Him your *only* Lord with a resolute commitment.

**serve him only**

Most people in our culture are like the Philistines. They do not mind serving God – they just do not like that word “only.” They want to put Yahweh their in their shrine right next to Dagon. “Look to God for my joy? Sure, as long as I can also look to my husband or my job or my recreation. That way if God does not pan out in a particular instance I can turn to another alternative. Listen to God’s guidance and wisdom? Fine, as long as I can have the freedom to choose between that and other sources of wisdom and guidance.” God will not accept us on those terms. You do not say to your boyfriend, “Marry you? Sure, as long as I don’t have to move out of my other boyfriend’s house.” It is all of you or none of Him.

## **IV. Faith in Intercession**

### **Samuel’s role as intercessor**

Back in chapter two when Eli was rebuking his wicked sons he asked a very important question:

**1 Samuel 2:25 If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?"**

Eli’s point was no one can do that. You cannot go find some person who has control over God who can quench the fire of God’s anger. And normally that was true. But in the time of Samuel, God did an amazing thing. He selected Samuel to be a person that He would always listen to and respond to in a special way. Samuel had influence with God that was almost unique in human history. Of all the godly men throughout the centuries in the OT, there was no one else (except Moses) that God listened to like He listened to Samuel. In fact, when God wanted to show how absolutely certain it was that He would not change His mind about the judgment in Jeremiah 15, He said:

**Jer.15:1 Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people.**

And the people knew that God answered Samuel’s prayers.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

## The need for intercession

Do you see the urgency in their hearts? Even after repenting and turning to God alone with all their hearts – even then they still did not take deliverance for granted. Instead they went to the one favored by God and begged him to beseech God on their behalf. They did not think of their own repentance and their own prayers as being adequate.

We should learn from their example. We do so much to hinder our own prayers that if we had to rely on them alone there would be no guarantee God would listen to them. God listens to the prayers of the faithful and the holy.

**1 Peter 3:10-12 "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. <sup>11</sup> He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."**

There are so many times when we fail to keep our tongue under control, we turn from good and do evil, and we fail to seek and pursue peace. And so we provoke God to turn His face away and ignore our prayers. We desperately need someone like Samuel to pray for us – someone God will *for sure* listen to. We need someone who knows exactly what God's will is so he knows exactly how to pray. We need a priest like Samuel to go before God on our behalf.

## The need for Sacrifice

And beyond that we need something to be done about our sin and guilt. Repentance alone does not make up for the fact that we have sinned against God. God's wrath against us must be satisfied, which means someone has to die.<sup>9</sup> Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him. The lamb Samuel slaughtered died a bloody death in the place of the people for their sin.

Samuel is a wonderful picture of Jesus Christ. Wonderful, but inadequate, because Samuel was himself a sinner, and did not have perfect knowledge of the mind of God. He was not really an ideal intercessor. And the lamb was just an animal. Its death *symbolized* the need for a substitute, but could not actually serve as the substitute itself. So what Israel had was a *shadow* of a priest, and a *picture* of a sacrifice. But what we need is a true priest and a real sacrifice. And that's what we have.

**Heb.4:14 since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.**

**Ro.8:34 Christ Jesus ... is also interceding for us.**

Hebrews 7:23-27 says that unlike priests like Samuel, who eventually die...

**Jesus ... is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. <sup>26</sup> Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup> Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.**

One of the important keys to true repentance is trusting in the provisions God has made to atone for your sin. The time for sorrow should probably continue a little longer than many of us realize. But others want to wallow in it indefinitely. And that's wrong. Weeping should remain for a time and then give way to rejoicing. If you just wallow in interminable, never-ending guilt feelings, you are failing to trust in God's provision for forgiveness – the sacrifice and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> A crucial part of repentance is trusting in that.

## God's Response

Let's close by taking a look at God's response to their repentance. Turning to God can have some hard consequences in this world, and that is what happened to Israel. Because of their gathering together for this repentance, the Philistines attack them. From an earthly point of view turning to God does bring on hardship. But instead of trusting their own ability they look to God to rescue them (even though God had never once done that for decades). So Samuel prays.

**<sup>9</sup> ... He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him. <sup>10</sup> (While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines...**

The writer gets really dramatic here – he interrupts himself. Before telling you what God's answer was, he stops to set up the drama of this scene. It is like when someone is telling you a story and right before they get to the climactic part they stop in mid sentence and say, "Now, you've got to picture this scene" and they go on to describe exactly the way it happened so you can really appreciate the climactic ending. That is what he is doing here. So the first sentence in verse ten should be in parentheses. "Before I tell you how God answered the prayer – you have got to appreciate this scene."

**<sup>10</sup> (While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle.)**

At the very moment Samuel is making this prayer and offering this sacrifice, the whole Philistine army is approaching! You are standing there watching this whole thing. The Israelites had no metal weapons and the Philistine did; so you are standing there with no sword, no shield, , and here comes this army, and they all have swords. Ever since you were a kid, every time you have heard that sickening sound of the approaching Philistines, it has been a horror. The few who can run fast or find a place to hide come back afterward to demolished homes and dead bodies strewn everywhere. They take your possessions, they rape the women, and lots of people die – every time. Israel has never defeated them once since you have been alive.

Now you hear they are coming, you join everyone in begging Samuel to pray for you, and as he starts praying, there they are – 100 yards away! Some of them are close enough that you can see their faces. They are running! You look back at Samuel. What is he going to do? Samuel does not organize a quick, makeshift battle line. He does not orchestrate a fast retreat to some safe ground. He just goes

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<sup>6</sup> When a heavy object is sitting still in the hand of a strong man there are two forces constantly at work. Gravity is pulling downward every moment, and yet the object does not move because the man is providing a counter balancing upward force that is exactly the same as the downward force. So the object does not move. God's wrath over our sin is like a constant force of gravity pulling us toward hell. And Jesus' intercession is like the force of the strong man's hand exerting force in the opposite direction. If we are born again He will never drop us. We are completely safe from hell. However even as believers sometimes we suffer God's anger over sin in a temporal way through chastisement. At any moment of any day it would be appropriate for Jesus to let us drop – not completely all the way into hell, but down just a little bit into the cold waters of God's chastisement. And every moment that that does not happen is due to the intercessory prayers of our great High Priest on our behalf.

about the priestly action of killing the lamb and placing it on the altar and offering it to God in worship. Now they are 50 yards! Some are winding up to throw their spears. The slaughter is just seconds away. And there's Samuel, praying with all his heart. That is the parenthesis. Now he is ready to finish his sentence in verse nine and tell us about the answer to the prayer.

**<sup>10</sup> ... 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. <sup>11</sup> The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way<sup>7</sup>**

Israel did fight, but it is clear from the passage that their victory was due to God's power and not theirs. This must have been some truly awesome thunder.

**<sup>13</sup> So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. ... <sup>14</sup> 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.**

Amorites is a term that refers here to all the rest of the Canaanite peoples. They had peace with everyone. This is amazing. That did not even happen under the reign of their greatest and mightiest king – David.

When you sin, mourn after God. Mourn the loss of nearness to God and seek diligently to get it back. Realize that the only calamity in your life is the loss of intimacy with God – nothing else is a calamity if you are enjoying closeness to Him. So realize the solution to your problem is the nearness of God. Forsake anything in your life you have preferred over God. Solidify the resolve in your heart to follow God *alone* and to look to Him only for your joy. Then trust 100% in the sacrifice and intercessory work of Jesus Christ on your behalf and zero percent in anything you are doing. And the peace and wellbeing and blessing you will experience will be far better than any pleasure you got or ever could get from any sin.

**Benediction: 2Co 6:14-7:1 what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or -what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? ...17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." ... 7:1Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.**

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<sup>7</sup> V.12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up .. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us." Most memorials are memorials to remember dead people. This was a memorial to remember the living God. I think we would do well to do something to help us remember specific acts of God's deliverance. Find ways in your life to help you and your children not forget God's wonderful acts of kindness and deliverance in your life.

# Devotionals

## Repentance

### 1 Samuel 7 Day 1

*Dear Father, thank You for a new week - Another fresh start. Dear Lord, I commit this week into Your hands. Let it be a week of seeking hard after You. Oh Father, let me get to next Sunday morning and be able to think back with great joy on these times with You in the morning. Let me be able to look back on a week of walking close by Your side. If I spent the whole week on a beach I would come to church and people would all be saying, "Wow, it looks like you've been in the sun!" Let my heart be such this Sunday that people think, "Wow, it looks like you've been with the Son!" Let a whole week of closeness to You change my heart this week, dear Lord God, my Savior.*

**1 Samuel 7:1-17** 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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." <sup>4</sup> So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.

*Dear Father, those people from Kiriath Jearim seemed to have no fear of taking Your ark. Every city among the Philistines was devastated by it, and now Beth Shemesh had 70 dead, and yet the people who would respect Your ark by honoring Your Word were not afraid to take it. Those who know their Father fear Him, but are not afraid to be near Him Let me be like that dear Lord. Let me be someone who fears You and trembles at the thought of Your displeasure, but who is also a son who deeply loves You and who longs to be in Your presence – and who is confident enough in his Father's love and compassion that when there is no willful rebellion in my heart there is no fear.*

After a long period of suffering the consequences of sin, the people began to mourn after the Lord. The pain of the consequences no doubt made them sad from the beginning, but it took a long period of time before that sorrow became godly sorrow – sorrow “after the Lord.”

*May all my sin generate godly sorrow in me, dear God. Teach me repentance. Show me how to forsake sin in the way that is pleasing to You. I know it is more than just sorrow, and more than just resolve to do better. Show me from Your Word, dear God – speak to Your servant and open my eyes to what real repentance is. Let me understand the difference between mere sorrow, and sorrowing after You.*

The core of sorrow is desire – desire for circumstances different from those causing the sorrow. Sorrowing after God is making God the object of those desires. Godly sorrow over sin is sadness over the dishonor done to God's name, sadness over not being what one wishes he was; sadness over the harm done by the sin, and sadness over the consequences of the sin. Sorrowing after God, then, is turning all that pain God-ward, so that my sorrowing is a longing for God to vindicate His name and to protect it from my sinning by taking away my sin; a longing for God to make me the godly person

I long to be; a longing for God to bring to an end the consequences – particularly the consequence of relational distance that sin places between us and God (Godly sorrow sees that consequence as the most painful and damaging of all).

*Each time I sin, dear Father, teach me to respond with proper repentance. Keep me from blowing it off as a small thing, just because there are no severe consequences that I can see. Help me to take all my sins against You seriously, and to grieve over them, and for that grieving to be a strong, powerful, aggressive movement toward You.*

*What an amazing thing it is, dear Lord, that You make Yourself available to sinners. While You do distance Yourself to some degree, You also provide a way for us to get back into intimacy with You through repentance. Teach me, dear God, to rend my heart, not my garments. Show me what it means to tear my own heart into pieces as You commanded in Joel 2:13. Show me how to use Your Word to crush and tear and rip until there is sufficient internal pain to drive me to Your throne of grace. And both in times of failure and in times of victory teach me to delight in and rejoice in the God who makes Himself available to broken sinners.*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** The God who makes Himself available to broken sinners.

**Promise to trust:** He will allow me to draw near to Him again if I repent.

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Gladness and joy, Encouragement and comfort, Restoration, Renewal and transformation, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

## Repentance

### 1 Samuel 7 Day 2

**1 Samuel 7:1-2 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. <sup>2</sup> It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim**

For 20 years they left the ark in that house instead of putting it in the Tabernacle. When they went to the Tabernacle to worship, they were content to have the altars without the ark - The symbols of religion without the presence of God.

*Oh Lord, how often I have been guilty of being content with the external vehicles of religion without really seeking Your presence. I've read my Bible just to gather information, prayed just to get my praying done, gone to church just because that's what I do on Sundays – all without seeking Your presence. What foolishness! It is so obviously foolish when I read of the Israelites doing that, but so often I don't even see it in my own life. Dear God, teach me to so long for Your presence that it could never happen that I would handle the external forms of seeking You without actually seeking You.*

**...and all the people of Israel mourned after the LORD.**

Finally, after 20 years, the people begin to mourn after God. They mourn His withdrawal and the absence of His presence. This is their finest hour in the whole period of the Judges. They are more godly here, as they longed for the presence of God, than they were when the ark was in its proper

place. It is better to lack the presence of God and mourn and long for it than it is to have it and think little of it. It is better to groan because of the lack of grace than to have abundance of grace and despise it.

*Father, keep Your servant from provoking You to withdraw Your presence by thinking little of the grace You are giving me. Let my appetite for Your nearness remain strong and increase, so that You don't have to remove it to protect it from the dishonor of my having it and despising it.*

**<sup>6</sup> 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."**

*Dear Father, I pour out my heart before You right now. Just as that water, once it was spilled out on the ground, could never be recovered; so I want it to be with the sins I confess to You this morning. Let my heart be like the containers of that water they poured out – rid of those sins for good. That is the desire of my heart, dear God. I don't want to offend You in those ways again, like a dog returning to its vomit.*

They fasted and did this act of pouring out water. They had remorse in their hearts, pain and grief and sorrow over their sin, and they gave physical expression to that grief. The physical expression alone, without the internal anguish, is worse than meaningless. But the internal anguish alone, without the external expression, is incomplete. Just as when there is joy that makes one want to sing or shout, the singing and shouting actually lifts the joy to a higher level, so it is with sorrow. It is good to give external expressions of our sorrow over sin, such as fasting.

*Father, if fasting itself would be enough to cause the sorrow that I should have in my heart, I would do it all the time. It is so hard, dear Lord, to bring my cold, hard heart to proper brokenness over my sin – especially since my sin is so frequent and so routine. I can't be completely crushed and broken all the time, even though I sin all the time. Teach me, dear Lord, when it is appropriate to be especially sorrowful, and generate that godly sorrow in my heart, because I can't generate it on my own. Give me sorrow over sin, dear God, that I might honor You with my repentance. Show me when I should fast. When I sin, I want to be done with the matter so quickly. I want to confess it to You, ask forgiveness, receive full restoration, and be on my way in a matter of minutes or even seconds. But examples of acts of repentance in Your Word show people extending their expression of sorrow over sin for a long period of time (fasting for a few minutes would be a joke). Enable Your servant to discern, dear God, the time to weep and the time for weeping to end; the time to fast and the time to feast.*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** Holiness so profound that repentance must be extensive

**Promise to trust:** He will draw near to me if I draw near to Him *with all my heart.*

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Motivation, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

## Repentance

### 1 Samuel 7 Day 3

## **1 Samuel 7:3 rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only**

This is not as easy as it sounds. It is hard for us to understand why it was such a temptation for Israel to bow down before pagan statues. It seems like it would be such an easy sin to give up. But it was not. Pagan worship was designed to be pleasurable and satisfying. Since there was no grace or satisfaction that came from actual communion with the pagan god (since the god was nothing), all the benefit had to be built in to the form of the worship itself. For that reason pagan worship was designed to fulfill the desires of people's souls. It was exciting and lively and pleasurable. There was a great deal of latitude and freedom, it involved drinking and partying and sexual pleasures. It was basically the same as the modern party scene except with a statue in the middle of it.

The worship God had prescribed in the Law, however, had very little to attract the impulses of the flesh. If the worshipper truly worshipped, so that he or she found joy through personal communion and fellowship with God, the grace that came from His presence was far more pleasurable and satisfying and joy-producing than the pagan revelry. However, if there was no personally communion with God, and all the worshipper experienced was the outward form alone, worship of Yahweh, compared to pagan worship, was dull, boring, dry, harsh, and unfulfilling. It was that way by design, so that the worshipper would be driven to seek God Himself and not the form. Pagan worship was structured the other way so that the form itself was what satisfied, since there was no actual god behind it.

So the call to give up the pagan worship was much like the call for a person steeped in a partying lifestyle, or sexual promiscuity, or drunkenness, or any kind of indulging in physical pleasure, to give it up and turn to what seems to the flesh to be incredibly dry and boring – abstaining from all that and sitting in church listening to a sermon or reading the Bible or praying. To the soul that doesn't know God Himself and delight in His presence, the forms of Christian worship could hardly be less satisfying.

Furthermore, God was calling them to give up what was fashionable. Participation in the modes of worship of the day made the Israelites acceptable to the culture. Giving it up would make them appear prudish and strange and bizarre and would bring ridicule.

Surely the voices of liberal Christianity were heard also in ancient Israel: "Isn't exclusive worship of Yahweh alone in one prescribed, traditional way unnecessarily narrow? Why not admit that in other religions there is an element of good, and all of them promote kindness and love, and that those who are sincere in their devotion to Asteroth or Baal are expressing a profound and real religious sentiment? Who are we to judge them?"

*Good morning dear Father,*

*Thank You that You are here with me right now, delighting my soul. Let me see more and more of Your glory as my time with You this morning progresses dear God. Open my eyes.*

*What wisdom there is, dear God, in Your decision to make the forms of true worship the way they are. The dullness and dryness that characterize those forms are such a wonderful safeguard against false worship. If the fleshly pleasures of the pagan worship were part of true worship, I would never be able to discern if my joy were coming from the forms themselves or from true communion with You. But You have made it so that there can hardly be any confusion. If there is no true communion with You there is almost zero pleasure in prayer. But when there is communion with You and the experience of Your presence there is nothing in this whole wide world more wonderful and satisfying than prayer! Thank You, dear God, for making it that way. Thank You for making the forms, when they are devoid of communion with You, boring, so that I will either seek communion with You or dispense with the charade of false worship.*

*Father, this makes me realize the seriousness of the sin in my heart that makes prayer and worship and Bible reading and ministry boring. To the degree I am bored with those things I am like the pagans. I am failing to see Your glory and commune with You and experience Your presence. To the degree those things are boring to me, I am participating in the form apart from the reality. The pagans are bored with true worship because the only thing enjoyable about true worship is the fellowship with You. And where there is not love for You, or where there is indifference to Your glory, or where there is blindness to what is so wonderful about You – there is no pleasure in seeking You. And so when my heart is not drawn to want to seek You in earnest prayer, or to delve into the depths of Your Word, or to join in fellowship with Your saints, or to experience Your grace flowing through me in ministry – when the desire for those things is small it can only mean my desire for You is small. Oh forgive me, dear God, for the smallness of my soul's desire for You. You have created me with a deep longing and appetite for You, and I have perverted that appetite into desires for things that can't ultimately satisfy it. Heal me, dear God. Oh the wretched disease of hungering for that which is not food and thirsting for that which is not drink. Heal Your servant, Oh Great Physician, that my desires would all be for You. Let me see You as the priceless treasure in the field and the pearl of great price, that my joy might drive me to "sell" all I have to obtain nearness to You.*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** The God who is worthy of total devotion

**Promise to trust:** He will make it worth my while if I "sell all I have" to obtain Him as my highest treasure.

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Gladness and joy, Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Safety Rest and refreshment, like water to a tree, Restoration, Guidance and clarity with regard to direction, Fullness and satisfaction A greater abiding presence of Christ in the heart

## Intercession

### 1 Samuel 7 Day 4

**1 Samuel 7:7-17** 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. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car. <sup>12</sup> Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us." <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. <sup>16</sup> From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging

**Israel in all those places. <sup>17</sup> 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.**

At this time Israel did not have metal weapons – no swords or spears. They did not have an organized military or even a military leader. They did not have chariots or anything even approaching the kind of weapons the Philistines had. But here they pull out the most powerful and most devastating and most reliable weapons in the whole Old Testament – prayers and tears.

Instead of thinking they could manipulate God, they approached God as a person and beseeched Him for help while pouring out their hearts in true repentance. And they did not even look to their true repentance as a means of manipulating God. Even after confessing their sin and forsaking their idols and turning with all their hearts to God alone and crying out to Him in prayer – even then they still did not just take deliverance for granted. Rather, they begged Samuel to intercede for them. Samuel did intercede and offered a sacrifice on their behalf.

Repentance alone does not make up for the fact that we have sinned against God. The problem of our guilt remains. To enjoy God's favor we need both a mediator and a sacrifice.

First, a mediator. We do so much to hinder our own prayers that if we had to rely on them alone there would be no guarantee God would listen to them. He listens to the prayers of the faithful and the holy.

**1 Peter 3:10-12 "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. <sup>11</sup> He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."**

There are so many times when we fail to be considerate and understanding with our wives, we fail to keep our tongue under control, we turn from good and do evil, and we fail to seek and pursue peace. And so we provoke God to turn His face away and ignore our prayers. We desperately need someone to pray for us – someone God will *for sure* listen to. Someone God favors and deeply loves and who knows exactly what God's will is so he knows exactly how to pray. We need a priest to go before God on our behalf.

And we also need a sacrifice. The guilt of our sin remains a problem even after we repent, and God's wrath against us must be satisfied, which means someone has to die.

The picture in 1 Samuel seven illustrates all this. Samuel was a man God had chosen to favor – to speak to and to listen to. And the people knew that God would listen to Samuel's prayers. And so they had someone who could intercede for them.

And the lamb Samuel slaughtered just as the Philistines were approaching died a bloody death in the place of the people for their sin.

But both of those are really inadequate. Samuel was himself a sinner, and didn't have perfect knowledge of the mind of God. And the lamb was just an animal. Its death symbolized the need for a substitute, but could not actually serve as the substitute itself. So what Israel had was a shadow of a priest, and a picture of a sacrifice. But what we need is a true priest and a real sacrifice.

**Hebrews 4:14 since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.**

**Romans 8:34 Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**

**Hebrews 7:23-27** Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; <sup>24</sup> but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. <sup>25</sup> Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. <sup>26</sup> Such a high priest meets our need-- one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup> Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

We have the ideal Intercessor and the perfect, sufficient sacrifice for our sin.

*It would be unthinkable, dear God, for me to expect anything from You except eternal damnation if it were not for a sacrifice that has paid that price for me and suffered Your wrath in my place. Oh dear God, make the awesome truth of that sink in. If it were not for Jesus' sacrifice I would not repent of my sin – but even if I did it would do no good, because my guilt would remain. Thank You dear Lord Jesus, for dying in my place!*

*And thank You for interceding on my behalf before the Father – constantly appealing to Him for favor on my behalf. Giving all kinds of reasons, reasons based on Your own righteousness and merit that is credited to my account, for why the Father should bless me. Just as those Israelites stood there that day completely vulnerable, and about to be slaughtered by the Philistines, and their only hope was to get someone to pray to You for them – someone who would for sure be listened to in heaven; so it is with me. My enemy is too strong for me and he rushes upon me every day. And I stand here completely vulnerable and helpless apart from Your special protection. And my only hope is for Someone You dearly love and whose prayers will always be heard to pray for me.*

*Help me to put my trust in that, and not in myself. Keep me from trusting in my own righteousness or my own prayers. Keep me from thinking I have a good standing before You in myself, as though there were anything in me that deserved this status I have as Your son. Keep me today from placing any confidence in myself. Show me what it means to place all my trust in the great High Priest who intercedes for me before Your throne; the One who turns Your judgment bench into a throne of grace.*

When a heavy object is sitting still in the hand of a strong man there are two forces constantly at work. Gravity is pulling downward every moment, and yet the object does not move because the man is providing a counter balancing upward force that's exactly the same as the downward force. So the object does not move. God's wrath over our sin is like a constant force of gravity pulling us toward hell. And Jesus' intercession is like the force of the strong man's hand exerting force in the opposite direction.

If we are born again He will never drop us. We are completely safe from hell. However even as believers sometimes we suffer God's anger over sin in a temporal way through chastisement. At any moment of any day it would be appropriate for Jesus to let us drop – not completely all the way into hell, but down just a little bit into the cold waters of God's chastisement. And every moment that that does not happen is due to the intercessory prayers of our great High Priest on our behalf.

*Dear Lord Jesus, thank You not only for Your intercession that keeps me out of hell, but also for Your intercession on my behalf regarding every single, specific sin I commit and what level of consequence and chastisement I will experience. I sin so much and receive so much mercy, dear Lord! Thank You! Teach me to feel a sense of desperate dependence upon that intercession.*

*Even these very prayers I am offering right now, Holy Spirit, if not for Your interceding with groans that words cannot express, would be detestable. Thank You for knowing the deep things of God and for presenting my prayers in an acceptable, pleasing way.*

Teach me to feel the same kind of desperation for Your intercession that the Israelites felt that day when the Philistines were approaching to slaughter them.

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** The God who intercedes for His own people

**Promise to trust:** He will intercede on my behalf

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Gladness and joy, Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Safety and protection, Confidence, courage, A sense of being attended to and cared for, Hope and rest, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

## Repentance

### 1 Samuel 7 Day 5

**Psalm 78:58-66** <sup>58</sup> They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols. <sup>59</sup> When God heard them, he was very angry; he rejected Israel completely. <sup>60</sup> He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men. <sup>61</sup> He sent [the ark of] his might into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy. <sup>62</sup> He gave his people over to the sword; he was very angry with his inheritance. <sup>63</sup> Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs; <sup>64</sup> their priests were put to the sword, and their widows could not weep. <sup>65</sup> Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, as a man wakes from the stupor of wine. <sup>66</sup> He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame.

Psalm 78 recounts the history of Israel and God from the Exodus up to the time of David. It shows how Israel kept being unfaithful and turning away from God over and over and over, and how God was incredibly patient and longsuffering. But their idolatry in the beginning of 1 Samuel was so extreme it was the last straw. That language is as extreme as it gets. For the first time God **rejected Israel completely** (v.59). The word “ark” in verse 61 is not in the Hebrew. It literally just says **He sent His strength into captivity, his beauty into the hands of the enemy**. The ark was only symbolic of what was happening. Phinehas’ wife was right – the glory had indeed departed from Israel. In Psalm 63:2 David talked about the wonderful satisfaction of soul he experienced when he went into the Tabernacle and experienced the beauty and power of God. But that was not possible for Israel at this time. God removed access to His beauty and power. They could not behold them or enjoy them or benefit from them. They could not even perceive them. It was as though, with regard to Israel, God was asleep (v.65). There are a lot of consequences for sin, but the most severe of all is the removal of the nearness of God’s presence – the inability to see and enjoy God’s power and beauty.

If you cannot see God’s beauty – you read about it and it does nothing in your heart, generates no real joy or delight – then it becomes impossible to increase your love for God. All the benefits of knowing God come from loving Him – desiring and delighting in the experience of His attributes. If you are unable to see what is so wonderful about those attributes, your entire relationship with God is stymied. When you have your devotions or prayer time or Bible study time, or when you go to church or carry out ministry, if you are unable to receive joy and peace and comfort and delight and rest and encouragement and strength, you are in the same catastrophe as Israel was in when the ark was captured by the Philistines!

A short time later the ark was returned to Israel. But the favorable presence of God was not. The restoration described in verse 65 did not happen until 20 years after the ark was returned. It came about not through the return of the ark, but through the repentance of the people described in 1 Samuel 7.

*Dear Lord God, when I sin against You, let my repentance not be a little two minute perfunctory asking for forgiveness that is really a non-event in my day. Teach me to take it seriously – especially when there is the terrible consequence of the removal of Your presence. Father, let the sorrow and tears and fasting and grieving continue until the time comes when You return Your favor and allow me to appreciate and delight in Your beauty and power once again. Why would I cease grieving when the reason for grieving is still in place? Teach me to groan in times when You withdraw Your presence, and to make wholehearted seeking after You my highest priority until I find intimacy once again.*

*Dear Lord, You are a God who is patient with His rebellious children. You wait and wait and bless and bless even as I continue to sin and dishonor Your name. You are so patient with me! You remember that I am but dust. You understand my weaknesses and limitations. And you are so patient. Thank You, dear Lord God!*

*And when I do finally push You to the point of withdrawing Your presence in some measure, You are not dead to me, but only asleep, as it were. Sleep is temporary. Even in the most extreme case of Israel's rebellion, Your departure was only temporary. Oh thank You, dear Lord God, for returning again and again to Your servant even after I have so provoked You. You see my distress, distress of my own causing, and yet You feel compassion for me and return to bless me again. Open my eyes today, dear Lord, to the beauty and goodness and power of this attribute: that You are a patient God who returns even after being provoked to the point of removing Your presence. Let me just revel today in the fact that I am the child of such a God!*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** longsuffering

**Promise to trust:** He will return to me when I repent

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Restoration, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey