

“Ebenezer” (1 Samuel 7)(7.18.21)

1 Samuel 7 (NIV84)

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

Samuel Subdues the Philistines at Mizpah

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

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

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

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

¹² Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, **“Thus far has the Lord helped us.”** ¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again.

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

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

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Ebenezer”**

INTRODUCTION:

The Ark of the Covenant represented and in many ways presented the Presence of God. When the Israelites went out to battle their enemies and the enemies of God, the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the forefront of the army. God went with them. But because of the nation’s apostasy, which means falling away from the One true God, the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. The Israelites fell under the rule and oppression of the Philistines. And, they continued their wayward ways of worshiping the foreign gods of the land. Even in this fallen state, they knew in their hearts what must be done. They must return to the LORD. They must return to the LORD with all their hearts and serve Him only. They must be wholehearted and singlehearted. SO MUST WE BE.

You might rightly argue that the Ark of the Covenant had been returned to Israel. It was returned because the Lord God had inflicted the Philistines with plague and death and not because of any merit on the part of Israel. For the Israelites the Presence of God seemed to have been withdrawn. The Ark of

the Covenant was parked out of the way. The people were not blessed by the presence of the LORD Almighty.

When the people have lost their love for God, when they have lost their fear of God, the Almighty will not be with them. When we kick God out of our courts and out of our schools, we should not be surprised when evil triumphs. Witnesses no longer swear on the Bible to tell the truth, “so help me God.” The Ten Commandments are being removed from the public sector. Even in our churches, we have created a new god to replace the perfectly holy and righteous God of the Bible – the God that hates sin and the wicked. Yes, God is love; but, that is not all God is.

What will it take to bring our nation back to our senses? What will it take to wake us up? Fires; deadly building collapses; COVID-19 and its variants; ever increasing violence in our streets; and, moral decay, may all be signs that God is displeased.

We need to have prophets like Samuel. 1 Samuel 3:19–21 (NIV84) ¹⁹The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. ²¹The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. We need prophets who know God and who preach God’s word.

Because of Samuel, and God working through Samuel, the whole house of Israel heard and responded. All the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord. So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only. Notice how critical it is that we cannot worship the One True God along with anything else. This was a problem for the Israelites, and it is a problem for many Christians today.

BODY:

In today’s scripture, we find Samuel leading his nation in acts of penitence and restoration. Five things are done to bring this about. Water is drawn and poured out on the ground before the Lord. They fasted. They confessed. As an intercessor, Samuel cried out to the Lord. Think of this crying out as fervent prayer. And, a suckling lamb was sacrificed. Remember that these things are done after repentance – turning away from idols and turning to the Most High God.

Before we look at each of these actions, let us review the reflection questions in the bulletin. They are from the book *Praying with Fire: Seeking His Presence through the Revival Passages of Scripture* by Mark D. Partin.

Reflection Questions

1. No amount of tears, prayers, or protests is a substitute for honest confession. In confession, we get honest with ourselves and God. Why is such honesty difficult?
2. Is there any known sin in your life? Pet sins, willful sins, hidden sins? Things you tolerate but know are wrong. Why? What are they?
3. Do you engage in selective obedience? What does God want you to do about these situations?
4. When was the last time you confessed your sin to others?
5. When was the last time you asked anyone to pray for you, being specific about an area of need?
6. Be quiet before the Lord. What is He saying to you today?

These questions are tied directly to the actions of Samuel and the people. They are part of our getting right with our God. Remember how important confession is to Spiritual Breathing – it is our exhaling – getting rid of the CO₂, the carbon dioxide, the waste product, the impure. We cannot inhale without exhaling; and, inhaling is being infilled by God the Holy Spirit. Both of these are required and conducted by faith.

Mark Partin writes:

“Confession is an experience God allows us to go through so we can walk in communion with Him. In revival, confession of sin becomes the norm. In Scripture, we are told to confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9), to confess our sin (1 John 1:9), and to confess our trespasses to one

another (James 5:16). In the Greek, “to confess to God” means “to agree with God,” or “to say the same thing.” It means not merely confessing intellectually, but rather a confession wrought by the convicting of the Holy Spirit, knowing we have wronged our God. Confession of sin is not easy. Our flesh fights against it. Our pride wants to hold onto our dignity or even our sin. To walk with God, however, we must learn to daily confess sin.”

What is the meaning behind pouring water out before the LORD? First we must remember how important water was in that geographic region. It was in short supply. Its availability depended on the seasons; it depended on rain from heaven.

The second chapter of Samuel helps us to understand: 2 Samuel 14:14 (NIV84) Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.

J. P. Lange explains, “It is rather a *symbolical act of penitence* that is here described. Water, which is poured out and disappears, is a frequent image of the state of dissolution and melting away which characterizes human life, especially on its *inner* side, and is used sometimes of particular aspects of life, sometimes of the whole personality.”

Our prayer station over by the choir loft has water pitchers and a large bowl. While each of us pours out a little into the bowl, we should consider what we are holding back from God. What needs to die, to be poured out, that would give the Lord full access to our hearts?

The fasting mentioned in our text most likely refers to fasting from food. The average person then did not have an abundance of food like we do in our culture. Giving up any food was a serious sacrifice. Most of us would likely benefit physically and spiritually from fasting from food, but it wouldn't be that much of a sacrifice for us.

Let us do a little self-examination. What would you have to give up that would be something of a sacrifice? What do you spend a lot of time doing that could be spent in activities to enhance your faith walk.

Our fasting prayer station is over by the organ. There are post-it notes for us to write from what or how we will be fasting this week. Then stick the post-it note inside the crossed circle. You may write on the sticky side of the post-it note so what you write is not visible.

As Christians, we see Samuel's sacrificing the suckling lamb in a different light than the Israelites. They did not have the blessing of God's revelation through Jesus. The Philistines are representative of all that opposes God, they are oppressive idolaters and enemies of God's Chosen People. In the midst of Israel's national repentance, the Philistine gathered to strike them down.

While the men of Israel must take up arms and do their part, there can be no doubt that Yahweh, the God of Israel brought the victory. Yes, sooner or later, God will thunder against those who oppose Him.

(1 Samuel 2:10 (NIV84))

those who oppose the Lord will be shattered.

He will thunder against them from heaven;

the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.

“He will give strength to his king

and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

While the Philistines represent evil, the Lord Jesus is the goodness, mercy, and love of God. John 1:29 (NIV84) The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” He takes away our sin and replaces it with His righteousness.

1 Corinthians 15:56–57 (NIV84) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. You can see on the altar area a wooden cross with a lamb to remind us of what the Son of God has done for us. Let us make prayers of

confession. When we are at the altar rail, be reminded of Christ's sacrifice. See the Ebenezer's along the altar floor.

CONCLUSION:

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." Ebenezer means Stone of Help.

Hymn: Here I'll Raise My Ebenezer

1. Here I raise my Ebenezer,
Hither by thine help I've come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Hallelujah! O Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! I love the Lord.
Hallelujah! O Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! We are on our journey home.

One commentator wrote, "Creating occasions for remembering is important in life. Often we receive stability in our present and hope for our future as we are reminded how God has dealt with us in the past. This is why one aspect of worship should always be remembering what God has done for us. This creates praise that fortifies us against temptation. Often an individual can work out of a time of discouragement simply by stopping to remember all the blessings God has brought into his or her life." This is why I prepared these 30 sample Ebenezers. If you remember when we had our Tuesday Free Community Dinners for three and one half years, these stones were where the current sidewalk up to the ramp is now. They were brushed; sprayed with a hose; wiped with a bleach based cleaner; and, then the laminated cards were glued onto them. Each family can take one home and put it someplace they will be often reminded that God is our Stone of Help. The Lord has been our help in the past and the Lord will be our help in the future.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.

Now, in the same manner that Samuel prayed as an intercessor, let me offer a **Scriptural Prayer for Revival from Praying with Fire:**

"Faithful Father, just as in Samuel's day, it seems as if Your word is rare. There is so much media-weakened gospel, but Lord, we long for a fresh word from You. Father, to lament means to feel or express sorrow or regret. Just as Israel lamented after You, teach us to mourn aloud, to lament after You (1 Samuel 7:2).

And teach us what it means to return to You with all our heart. Teach us what we must put away, what we must put off and put on. Father, show us how to prepare our heart for You (v. 3). Oh Father, send revival. Stir honest confession in our souls. Teach us to deny ourselves, so we can spend time seeking You in prayer. Teach us to fast, not only from food but from time robbers, such as television and the Internet. Intensify our desperation for You. Oh God, we miss You. WE are the ones who have moved away. Restore us, Lord. Show us our sin. We confess our sin; WE confess our indifference to You. Show us how to return to You with all our heart. Show us the things of the world that we have embraced that are sin (v. 6). Lord, let us not be afraid of the world as Israel was, but let us be wise, discerning, and cautious of the world (v. 7). Let us know the great need we have to be open and honest with others, to ask others to pray for us. It is pride when we fail to do this. Forgive us (v. 8). Father, as Samuel offered a sacrifice and cried out to You, let me truly understand Jesus Christ was the Lamb sacrificed, and by His blood we have access to You (v. 9).

Teach us what it is to sacrifice unto You. Lord, move mightily on behalf of Your people. Answer us as we sacrifice to You (v. 10). Father, we pray You will consume those who oppose You, just as You did the Philistines in Samuel's day. Teach us to acknowledge Your mighty acts. Let us set up stones of remembrance, markers of Your help, deliverance, and Your great faithfulness (v. 12). May we recognize

Your voice, Your promptings, and help us obey quickly. Show us anyone we need to go to and seek forgiveness or to make restitution. Father, hear our confession and restore us.”

In Jesus’ name, amen.