

1 Samuel 07 - Samuel's Ministry as Israel's Judge; National Repentance and Deliverance

II. The Ark's travels (4:1b—7:17)

(3) God supernaturally guides the Ark back to Israel (6:1—7:2)

(D) Ark returns to Kiriath-jearim (6:21—7:2)

(4) Samuel's successful judgeship (7:3-17)

(A) Covenant renewal at Mizpah (7:3-6)

(B) Philistines defeated (7:7-14)

(C) Realm of Samuel's circuit (7:15-17)

1 Samuel 7

(D) Ark returns to Kiriath-jearim (6:21—7:2)

1 And the men of **Kiriath-jearim** came and took the ark of the LORD and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and they consecrated his son Eleazar to watch over the ark of the LORD.

1 And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the LORD and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.

1 The men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the Ark of the LORD. They brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill, and they consecrated his son Eleazar to care for the Ark of the LORD.

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

- "...Kiriath-jearim" - "the city of woods," also called Kirjath-baal (Joshua 15:60; 18:14; 1 Chr 13:5-6)

— It was the nearest town to Beth-shemesh and stood on a hill. This was the reason of the message (6:21), and why this was chosen for the convenience of people turning their faces to the Ark (1 Kings 8:29-35; Ps 28:2; Dan 6:10).

The return of the Ark to Kiriath-Jearim seemed to be a tangible sign that God was once again among His people to bless them and deliver them from all their oppressors. God was

ready to meet with His people once again because of their repentance. The mere presence of the Ark did not guarantee God's favor, however, as Israel had learned at the battle of Aphek. Rather, it was submission to the God of the Ark that was essential (v4). The Ark was not returned to Shiloh; it remained at the house of Abinadab for 20 years (before Samuel addressed the nation, see note on v2). What was God doing during this time? He was preparing His servant Samuel to defeat the enemy and establish the kingdom.

Samuel & Saul (1 Sam 7:2—15:35)

This major sub-section of 1 Samuel contains three subsections:

- Samuel's Ministry as Israel's Judge (1 Sam 7:2-17)
- The Kingship Given to Saul (1 Sam 8-12)
- The Kingship Removed from Saul (1 Sam 13-15)

The main theme is Israel's unjustified dissatisfaction with her sovereign God and its awful consequences. In spite of His people's rejection, the Lord continued to show them mercy and faithfulness.

Samuel's Ministry as Israel's Judge

The other judges before him had been important, especially Gideon and Samson, but they can hardly be put in a class with Samuel. In fact, when one recognizes the depth to which conditions in Israel had fallen at the time he stepped upon the scene, and then the remarkable change that was effected through him in a comparatively few years, one has to accord him a place among the greatest of the OT. He was God's man for one of Israel's most crucial hours, and he performed a task of major significance. He stepped into a position which presented discouraging obstacles, and he moved ahead in spite of them to accomplish what few would have believed possible.

2 From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel **mourned after the LORD**.

2 From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

2 A long time passed—it was twenty years—from the time the Ark came to reside in Kiriath-jearim, and all the house of Israel mourned because of the LORD.

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

- The Ark was in Kiriath-Jearim for 20 years before Samuel undertook his first recorded public ministry

— The Ark remained at Kiriath-Jearim for about 100 years. It was taken there just after the battle of Aphek (1104 BC) and remained there until David brought it from there to Jerusalem in his first year as king over all Israel (1003 BC; see 2 Sam 5:5; 6:1-11).

- "...mourned after the LORD" - they had forsaken God's Word for 20 years, so God ignored them

— After 20 years, they had become frustrated with the Baalim and Ashtaroth; they were ready to receive the Ark and get back into a right relationship with God

— They had been in deep idolatry, they had been defeated in battle so many times it had become old hat, and they were extremely discouraged. This is when they began to lament after the Lord.

— To restore their relationship with God, they had to go through the door of God's Word

(4) Samuel's successful judgeship (7:3-17)

(A) Covenant renewal at Mizpah (7:3-6)

3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you, and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will save you from the hand of the Philistines."

3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."

3 Then Samuel told the whole house of Israel, "If you're returning to the LORD with all your heart, then remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you, direct your hearts back to the LORD, and serve him only. Then he will deliver you from the control of the Philistines."

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

- After the Ark was at Kiriath-Jearim for 20 years, Samuel addressed the Israelites (v3)

- This section sounds more like the Book of Judges than most of the rest of 1 or 2 Samuel.

This section recalls the same cycle of religious experience repeated six times in Judges.

- Samuel's first act of recorded ministry is to lead the people in national repentance

— Samuel told the people what they needed to do to secure God's blessing and victory over their enemy: repent (Cf. Deut 6:13; 13:4; Matt 4:10)

— The people did, and the hope of deliverance revived

— After these 20 long years with the Ark at Kiriath-Jearim, Samuel challenged the people of Israel to prove their loyalty to the Lord by abandoning their foreign gods and turning to the Lord only. This meant putting away the gods of the heathen, and then preparing their hearts to serve the Lord.

— How tragic that the great nation of Israel had fallen into defeat and disrepute because of their sins! Had Eli been a faithful father and his sons faithful priests, this defeat might never have occurred.

4 So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and served the LORD alone.

4 So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroath and served the LORD alone.

4 So the Israelis removed the Baals and Ashtaroath, and served the LORD only.

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

- The plural Baalim and Ashtaroath (the Hebrew plural of Ashtoreth) describe the many local shrines of those Canaanite nature deities

— Baal, variously identified as son of El (chief of the Canaanite pantheon) or as son of Dagon (the Mesopotamian deity), was particularly recognized as the god of thunder and rain whose task was to make the earth fertile annually

— Ashtoreth (or Astarte) was goddess of both love and war, as were her Babylonian and Greek counterparts Ishtar and Aphrodite respectively. She apparently functioned with Baal as a fertility deity and by their sexual union in some magical way the earth and all its life supposedly experienced annual rejuvenation and fruitfulness. Hence, rites of a most licentious character were associated with her worship.

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

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

5 Samuel said, "Bring all Israel together at Mizpah, and I'll pray to the LORD on your behalf."

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

- Samuel could be dubbed "God's 9-1-1 Man," and the name surely fits

- He stepped on the scene:

— When the priesthood was decayed

— When the nation was defeated

— When God's glory had departed

- Samuel summoned the nation to Mizpeh for a prayer meeting

— Samuel was always associated with prayer (Cf. 12:23)

— He was born in answer to his mother's prayers (Cf. 1 Sam 1)

— He prayed for his nation and defeated the enemy (7:13)

— He prayed when Israel defied the Lord and asked for a king (8:6)

— He prayed for King Saul (15:11) even after God had rejected him

- Certainly Hannah must have realized how wonderfully God would use her son; review her song (and prediction) in 2:9-10

- Mizpeh was the meeting place of the national assembly on several other important occasions:
 - When the elders of the tribes gathered there to decide Benjamin's fate following the murder of a Levite's concubine (Judges 19:1; 20:1,3; 21:1,5,8)
 - When Saul was presented to Israel as king (1 Sam 10:17)
 - It was even the capital of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:23,25)

6 So they gathered to 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 sons of Israel at Mizpah.

6 They gathered to 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 sons of Israel at Mizpah.

6 So they came together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out in the LORD's presence. On that day they fasted there and said, "We have sinned against the LORD." Then Samuel judged the Israelis at Mizpah.

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

- True repentance returns to God as the center and source of life
- The pouring out of water symbolized the people's feeling of total inability to make an effective resistance against their enemy (Cf. Ps 62:8)
- The fasting showed that they felt a greater need to spend their time praying to strengthen themselves spiritually than eating to strengthen themselves physically
- The people repented, admitting that what they had done was a sin against God
- People of strong will may break bad habits, but God alone can change our hearts so we love Him more than our sin
- The desire and power for inward and outward change comes from God

(B) Philistines defeated (7:7-14)

7 Now when the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the governors of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the sons of Israel heard *about it*, they were afraid of the Philistines.

7 Now when the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered to Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

7 When the Philistines heard that the Israelis had gathered at Mizpah, the Philistine lords came up against Israel. When the Israelis heard this, they were afraid of the Philistines.

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

8 So the sons of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that He will save us from the hand of the Philistines!"

8 Then the sons of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines."

8 The Israelis told Samuel, "Don't stop crying out to the LORD our God for us that he may deliver us from the hand of the Philistines."

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

- The people sensed their continuing need for God's help and appealed to Samuel to continue to intercede for them

— Samuel prioritized intercession in his ministry because he realized how essential it was to Israel's welfare (Cf. 12:23)

— Their dependence upon God in prayer is in contrast to their dependence upon the Ark as a talisman (good luck charm) during the Battle of Aphek

9 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.

9 Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering to the LORD; and Samuel cried to the LORD for Israel and the LORD answered him.

9 Then Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Samuel cried out to the LORD on behalf of Israel, and the LORD answered him.

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

- The suckling lamb Samuel sacrificed represented the nation as it had recently begun to experience new life because of their repentance

— The burnt offering was an offering of dedication and to make atonement for God's people

10 Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines advanced to battle Israel. But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were struck down before Israel.

10 Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel.

10 While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines approached to attack Israel. But that day the LORD thundered against the Philistines and threw them into panic, and they were defeated before Israel.

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

- When the Philistines learned of the assembly, they attacked Israel at Mizpah; but the Lord, in a mighty demonstration of power (by thunder), defeated them

- Baal was the god of storms, but *Yahweh* humiliated him here

11 And the men of Israel came out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and killed them as far as below Beth-car.

11 The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car.

11 The men of Israel went out from Mizpah, pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as a point below Beth-car.

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

12 Then Samuel took a stone and placed it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it **Ebenezer**, saying, "So far the LORD has helped us."

12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us."

12 Then Samuel took a stone, placed it between Mizpah and Shen and named it Ebenezer. He said, "The LORD has helped us this far."

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

- "...Ebenezer" - "stone of help"; in commemoration of this great triumph, Samuel erected a monument which he called Ebenezer, literally, "stone of [God's] help"

— 20 years earlier, Ebenezer was where Israel suffered tragic defeat (Cf. 4:1-2)

— The Israelites used standing stones to memorialize significant religious experiences, but the Law forbade setting them up as idols (Lev 26:1)

— This memorial remembered the reversal of previous indignities (using the Ark as a talisman) and was a symbol of regeneration

- This apparently ended the 40-year Philistine occupation of Israelite soil (1124-1084 BC, Cf. Judges 3:30; 8:28), though the Philistines again become a problem for Israel later (9:16; 13:5)

The Events at Mizpeh

(1) Samuel poured out water before the Lord as a symbol of the nation's repentance, their hearts poured out in sorrow for their sins

(2) He offered a burnt offering to indicate Israel's complete dedication to God

(3) He prayed for the nation while they were fearing the arrival of the Philistines; God gave the army of Israel a great victory

[What a day that was! Samuel accomplished with one prayer a victory that Samson could not win during the entire 20 years of his leadership!]

The memorial stone bore witness to the effectiveness of trusting the Lord and His designated judge. If the Lord had helped the people thus far, what need was there for a king? This incident shows that the people should have continued following the leadership of the judges that God had been raising up for them. This was not the right time for a king.

13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

13 So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

13 The Philistines were subdued, and they did not continue to enter the territory of Israel. The LORD continued to oppose the Philistines all during Samuel's life time.

13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

- From that day on (until David's great victory over the Philistines), their enemy kept their distance. Such is the power of a dedicated life, the power of prayer (James 5:16).

14 The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and Israel recovered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. So there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

14 The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. So there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

14 The towns that the Philistines had taken from Israel were returned to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from Philistine control. There was also peace between Israel and the Amorites.

14 And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

- The Israelites gained back land previously lost to the Philistines
- Amorites refers to the hill-dwellers of southern Canaan (see Num 13:29; Joshua 10:5)
- In several passages in the Bible the name Amorite (Westerner) is used loosely of the original inhabitants of Canaan in general. Hammurabi was a famous Amorite.

God brought national stability and spiritual renewal through Samuel's persistence in calling the people to return to God.

(C) Realm of Samuel's circuit (7:15-17)

15 Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

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15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

- Samuel's ministry as a judge in Israel included regular civil, as well as spiritual, leadership
- He was similar to the other judges in the Book of Judges, all of whom served primarily in local regions

16 And he used to go annually on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places.

16 He used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places.

16 He went on a circuit each year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all those places.

16 And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

- After the destruction of Shiloh, Gilgal seems to have become one of the principal centers of the religious and civil life of the nation

— It was there that Samuel held his sessions, the national assembly was convened (11:14), and the army was mustered (13:4). The remoteness of this place from the Philistines may have been one of the reasons for the choice.

17 Then *he would make* his return to Ramah, because his house *was* there, and there he *also* judged Israel; and there he built an altar to the LORD.

17 Then his return *was* to Ramah, for his house *was* there, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the LORD.

17 He would return to Ramah because his house was there, and judged Israel from there. He also built an altar to the LORD there.

17 And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

- After the battle of Ebenezer (7:12), about 1084 BC (see comments on 7:2), the nation of Israel was content to follow Samuel's leadership for the next 30 years or so
 - Samuel had a ministry as prophet and judge, traveling from city to city to minister to the people and settle their disputes
 - He was the last of the judges and the first of the national prophets
 - Thereafter Samuel continued to judge in a circuit (approx. 50 miles in circumference) including Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, and his hometown, Ramah. Thus the stage was set for an encounter between Samuel and the people.

Samuel's personal faithfulness to God qualified him for spiritual leadership and resulted in God blessing Israel. He was God's man, calling the people back to faithful obedience to His will so they could experience His blessing. His ministry shows that the Israelites had no reason to demand a king. Samuel was an exemplary judge.