

SAMUEL, THE PHILISTINES, AND EBENEZER
1 Sam. 7:1-13

Intro: Alfred Edersheim describes Samuel as "perhaps the most majestic form presented, even among the heroes of Old Testament history (IV, 26). In some respects he is even greater than Moses, "more grand, unbending, and unapproachable" (Ibid.). Ewald calls him the Martin Luther of the OT. His certainly was a time of REFORMATION.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 picture the pathetic condition of Israel at this time.

The people were powerless to withstand the Philistines (cf. 1 Sam. 4:2). This same thing happened again (1 Sam. 4:10).

They were superstitious (cf. 1 Sam. 4:3). This frightened the Philistines, but they had no need to fear. Cf. vv. 7-9. The Israelites had to learn that there was more to being protected by God than merely having the ark of God with them even though it did represent the presence of God among His people.

They were humiliated, and this is indicated by the name of Eli's grandson, Ichabod (v. 21). Hophni and Phinehas were killed when the ark was taken. Eli died at 98 when he learned about his sons. Even his daughter-in-law died as Ichabod was being born. There seems to have been nothing left of Israel. THEY WERE NEVER BROUGHT LOWER THAN AT THIS TIME!

The Philistines moved the ark around, but it brought death everywhere it was taken. Then they returned to the Israelites, but the results were the same. Finally it was taken to Kir-jath-jearim and left for 20 years apparently because they were fearful about moving it and did not know where to take it.

All of this presents a very pathetic sight. The Philistines were still their lords, and within the nation itself there was very little evidence of spiritual life and blessing. All that could be said was that "all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord" (1 Sam. 7:2). This meant that they were people following the Lord around, intreating for help but not obtaining it. Nevertheless, they continued to intreat.

At this point Samuel again appears on the scene!

Cf. the Holy Spirit's testimony of Samuel in Psa. 99:6, "Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; ~~they~~ they called upon the Lord, and he answered them." The people had called, but God did not answer.

How did it come about? Let us notice, first of all,

I. WHAT SAMUEL SAID (v. 3).

For twenty years the people had been groping in spiritual darkness and confusion. Now one who had not been a part of that confusion, a Nazarite, a judge, a prophet, a priest, speaks out from his understanding of God and the word of God.

- A. The primary need: "Return unto the Lord with all your hearts."

Even Samuel had to learn this later in a deeper way. Cf. 1 Sam. 16:7, when Samuel went to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as the next king of Israel after Saul.

A little over 300 years later Isaiah is saying the same thing. Cf. Isa. 29:13.

And our Lord was vocal on this theme with the Pharisees in Matt. 23:27, 28.

NOTHING THAT I DO OUTWARDLY CAN PLEASE THE LORD IF HE SEES THAT MY HEART IS NOT IN IT. This is where we must start!

Solomon said, "Keep thy heart . . ." (Prov. 4:23).

- B. Meeting the need. For people like this you have to describe every point in detail.

1. "Put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth." V. 4 indicates that this meant "Baalim and Ashtaroth." These were gods prominent in Canaan, and so with the Philistines, and later with the Babylonians. HERE IT SHOWS COMPROMISE. It shows how they had sought to solve their problems with the Philistines, by serving the gods of the heathen. BUT THIS HAD ONLY COMPLICATED THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES AND DELAYED THEIR DELIVERANCE.

What fearless courage Samuel had to exercise in lifting his voice in opposition to the popular idea of the day!

Compromise is never the answer!

2. "Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only."

God will not share the affections of His people with anyone!

Cf. the temptation of our Lord, the third one, when the Lord quoted from Deut. 6:12-15. This was not a new revelation. It was written in the Word of God through Moses long before this. Samuel was a man of the Word and therefore knew what to tell the people.

- C. The promise: "And he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

In a moment the air was cleared. The way for the people was plain. Again, this was in the writings of Moses. God did not expect His people to live in bondage.

But now let us turn to see what Samuel did.

- II. WHAT SAMUEL DID. We must divide this into two parts: before the conflict, and after the victory.

- A. Before the conflict.

1. Re: the water (cf. vv. 5, 6).

Here we see Samuel as the judge.

There is little doubt from this verse itself but that the act symbolizes the confession and cleansing of the people of God from their sins. Cf. what the people did in v. 4.

Cf. John 15:3; Psa. 119:9; Eph. 5:25, 26. The ground of my cleansing is the blood of Christ (1 John 1:6-9), but the cleansing is experienced through obedience to the Word of God!

2. Re: the sucking (i.e., unweaned) lamb (v. 9).

This, according to Lev. 22:27, could have been a lamb just over 7 days old. It represented new life, a new beginning, God's willingness to start over with His people.

BUT NOTE! Before Samuel can do this, the people of Israel panic! Why? The Philistines were coming and the man of God was urged to stop what he was doing and pray!

But Samuel continued with what he was doing because THIS WAS TO BE A PART OF THEIR DELIVERANCE! The Israelites would never know that!

What did Samuel do with the lamb?

He offered it as a "burnt offering wholly unto the Lord." This represented the presentation of the people to the Lord.

Note that the cleansing was not complete without the other. There had to be presentation, dedication to the Lord that the life that had been living might cease--AND A NEW LIFE BEGIN.

What happened?

Read v. 10.

When our lives are right with God, He takes care of our problems. Do we believe that our greatest needs may be spiritual? Cf. 2 Chron. 20 and the victory of Jehoshaphat.

But now what happened

B. After the victory (cf. v. 12).

"Ebenezer." "Hitherto" means thus far (K & D, 74). Present obedience guarantees present blessing. Continued obedience guarantees continued blessing, but tomorrow is always another day.

Concl: But note that it was hitherto and after from what we learn in v. 13. How good it is to have our Ebenezers throughout life!

What can we learn from this episode in Israel's history?

Many things, but may I mention two:

- (1) There is no substitute for obedience to the Word of God. This is what it meant to put the Lord first. This would have kept them from the sin that had caused God to withhold His blessing. How we need to remember this every day that we live!
- (2) The answer to my problems is to be found in the Word of God. There was no need for the people to wait for twenty years, praying and ~~and~~ pleading with God. There was really no need for Samuel. The answer that they desired had been in the Word for almost 500 years, but they did not have the wisdom to look for it.

We need God's blessing today. The Church is crippled by various relationships without and corruption within. When we give ourselves to live the Word, the blessing of God will be restored upon us and through us to a needy world.