

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Samuel to King David

1 Samuel Ch.7 – Israel Restored

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Welcome to our Truth for Today talk on 1st Samuel chapter 7, Israel restored. Scriptures quoted will be from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated. Let us remind ourselves of earlier talks on 1st Samuel.

Chapter 1, Hannah's answered prayer, her son Samuel is born.

Chapter 2, the problems at Shiloh with Eli and his sons, the priests of the LORD.

Chapter 3, the Lord speaks to Samuel announcing judgment to come upon Eli and his sons.

Chapter 4, the Ark of God is taken in battle and Eli and his sons die.

Chapter 5, God punishes the Philistines because of the Ark.

Finally, in last week's broadcast, Chapter 6, the Ark returned to Israel.

Chapter 6 ends with a note of fear among the people of Beth-shemesh. They had behaved in a wrong way by looking into the Ark and some of the people died. So the people of Beth-shemesh sent messengers to Kirjath-jearim asking them to come and take the Ark away. It is at this point we take up the events in chapter 7.

A new home for the Ark of the Lord, vv.1-2

Let us read these verses,

“And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD” (1Samuel 7:1-2).

In these two verses, we have both implied and explicitly stated how to handle the Ark of the LORD. The Philistines might in their ignorance, put the Ark on a cart but once back in the land of Israel, it needed Levites to carry the Ark in the God appointed manner. We may ask why the house of Abinadab? We assume that he was a Levite of the family of Aaron. All the people in Kiriath-jearim came to consecrate his son Eleazar to look after the Ark. This is the opposite of what happened at Beth-shemesh, where they had no godly reverence for the Ark of the LORD. Although the house of Abinadab would no doubt consider it a great honour to be caretakers of the Ark, yet it was not in its correct place. So for 20 years the Ark stayed there, and the nation of Israel lamented after the LORD. First, the necessary groundwork was for Samuel to teach the nation the right way to live and to start the restoration process. It was king David who eventually brought the Ark to Jerusalem and then many years later before a suitable house was built for the Ark and the re-establishment of the God ordained forms of worship.

Lessons to learn

We do not have a special priestly family as the nation of Israel did, all Christians are called “to be a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). As Christians we can learn the lesson to give the Lord a place in our homes and in our hearts. Then we can listen to His word and appreciate the teaching of Scripture.

We might also identify with Israel lamenting over the state of affairs in their day. We, too, can lament when we consider the decline of Christianity in our own country, sometimes it is referred to as living in a post Christian country.

Remove your idols, vv.3-4

Let us read these verses.

“And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and they served the LORD only” (1Samuel 7:3-4).

In these verses we can see how much Samuel was held in respect by the nation. As far as the Scriptures are concerned, Samuel has been silent until the return of the Ark. Now he speaks with godly authority to the nation. Samuel gives them four challenges. The first challenge is, are you returning to the LORD? The second flows out of the first, then put away the idols, the foreign gods that they had accumulated from the surrounding nations. God will not share His place in the lives of His people, He needs to be their only One True God. Third, it had to affect the heart of the people, their affections had to be solely centred on the God of Israel. Finally, linked with godly heart affection, it would show itself by serving Him only. Then Samuel states a simple promise that God will deliver them from their enemies. Samuel’s message has the desired impact, Israel put away their gods and commenced serving only the LORD.

Lessons to learn

In these two verses we see that it was not simply lamenting the sad state of decline, there needed to be positive action. It is the same today, we might moan about how things are going from bad to worse but that is not enough. There needs to be action and refocus upon the Lord. Do we in our day have idols in our lives that need removing? Do we need a closer walk with the Lord? Are we reading the Scriptures enough? Are we implementing in our lives what we read for godly Christian living? These are challenging questions for us today, just as Samuel challenged Israel.

A call to come together, vv.5-6

Let us read these verses

“Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah” (1Samuel 7:5-6).

It would be a reasonable assumption that the people went home to rid themselves of their idols and having done so, Samuel calls them to Mizpah, a near location to Ramah where he lived. It was a good way to test their hearts, would they return to Samuel? They did and Samuel prayed for them as he promised and then offered a drink offering to the LORD. Once the drink offering was poured out there was no going back, no change of mind. To doubly emphasise their commitment to the LORD, the whole of Israel fasted on the same day. There was also an acknowledgement that

they had sinned against the LORD. This gave Samuel the wonderful opportunity to judge the people and to commence the process of putting things right before the LORD.

Lessons to learn

There are some beautiful lessons here. We do not have a Samuel, but we can all pray for one another. It is true that the Lord is our great Intercessor before the Father, but that does not stop us caring about each other as fellow Christians. The drink offering being poured out was a form of worship, that the Lord is worthy of our total commitment to Him.

Fasting is a denial of fleshly indulgences, so that we might be totally occupied with the Lord. This may involve confessing sins, which have been dominant in our lives, or wasting the time the Lord has given us to serve Him. Finally, we might look at Samuel judging the people as a picture of sound Christian teaching which helps to strengthen believers to understand God's word.

The enemy comes, vv.7-8

Let us read these verses,

“Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the people of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines” (1Samuel 7:7-8).

Samuel had just recovered the people to depend upon God and rid themselves of idols. One of those idols was a Philistine god. So it is not surprising that, when the people gathered at Mizpah to worship and commit themselves to the God of Israel, that the Philistines saw an opportunity to attack and once again exert their power over Israel. They seemed to have forgotten the power of God when the Ark had caused destruction among them.

The Philistines were a worldly and warlike people, who were continually the enemy of Israel. If they were not kept under control, as in the days of David and Solomon, they endeavoured to be the lords and masters over Israel. As soon as Israel received news of the Philistines' intention to come to battle, Israel felt threatened and afraid. So they turned to Samuel to pray for them, to the “LORD our God” that He may save us from the Philistines.”

Already the nation had learned that Samuel was God's prophet and that God listened to Samuel. They knew his intercessory prayers would be the only way to defeat the Philistines. May be for the first time for many years they called the LORD “our God.”

Lessons to learn

As Christians, we do not have to go through the agony of being afraid of Satan's attacks. With the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we can call upon the Lord at any time, whenever we feel that the enemy of our souls has become active against us. The Lord in heaven intercedes for us in our times of need and He will bring us through whatever trial we experience. It may be a long and bitter trial, but we know that Satan is a defeated foe.

Not a time to give up, v.9

Let us read this verse,

“So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him” (1Samuel 7:9).

Samuel harkens to the people and responds with worship by offering a lamb for a burnt offering. Then Samuel calls to the LORD on behalf of the nation of Israel. Samuel did not know how the LORD would answer, but he was confident that the LORD would do so. The nursing lamb would remind us of the helplessness of the animal being offered. But the lamb offered as a burnt offering would also remind us that it was a sacrifice totally for the God of Israel, no one shared in that sacrifice. We can see that Israel felt their helplessness in the face of their enemy and required Samuel to intercede on their behalf. But Samuel's starting point was worship by offering a sacrifice. We should notice that the LORD took account of Samuel for the LORD answered him.

Lessons to learn

Christians should proceed from the point of worship before we mention our petitions. The Lord's example prayer starts in that way before getting into our wants and needs, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9). So when the enemy raised his head against God's people it was not a time to give up. We are to stand fast and hold on to all the truth that has been committed to us. Remembering the Lord in His death on the first day of the week is the best way to start our week for it is a service which is full of worship. Do not forsake meeting together because we are all part of the one body in our local churches.

The enemy defeated, v.10

Let us read this verse,

"As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were routed before Israel" (1Samuel 7:10).

This verse shows that the enemy was approaching Israel while Samuel was offering the burnt offering. We see Samuel's confidence and that he had his priorities right. We can imagine that the nation watched both Samuel and the approaching Philistines. But they did not move until the LORD gave His answer. The voice of the LORD thundered with a mighty sound causing confusion in the ranks of the Philistines. Only then did Israel take advantage of what the LORD had done, and the Philistines were defeated.

Lessons to learn

As Christians we know that Satan is a defeated foe, but he still tries to cause havoc among God's people. Every time we worship a risen and glorified Saviour, we remind ourselves of the victory accomplished on the cross. We are told to resist the devil and he will flee from us. We resist by having put on the whole armour of God (see Ephesians 6:10-20).

Israel pursues the Philistines, v.11

Let us read this verse,

"And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car" (1Samuel 7:11).

This verse shows how far the Philistines were chased and driven back into their own land. This is the only mention in Scripture of Beth-car, which may have been in Israel or Philistine territory. Wherever the location it seems as if the distance was great. Israel did not give the enemy time to regroup or recover.

Lessons to learn

Just as Israel gave a serious blow to the Philistines, we too need to take decisive action against Satan to ensure he is not going to attack time and again. We must finish with the issue that Satan is trying to use to trip up believers in order to reduce our effectiveness for Jesus.

Thankfulness, v.12

Let us read this verse,

“Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, “Till now the LORD has helped us”” (1Samuel 7:12).

It is wonderful to see Samuel responding in this positive manner by setting up a memorial stone to the victory that the LORD had given to Israel. Shen may well have been the place where the Philistines were brought into disarray when the voice of the LORD thundered and caused confusion in their ranks. As the Philistines turned to flee in their confusion, Israel commenced their pursuit to slay their enemy. Samuel setting up a stone and giving it the name, “Till now the LORD has helped us” would be a very physical reminder to Israel of how the LORD had helped them. It was intended, no doubt, to be a reminder in years to come of the faithfulness of their God.

Lessons to learn

It is not that we should need reminders to remember what the Lord Jesus has done, nevertheless each Lord's Day is an opportunity to remember the Saviour's great sacrifice. It is a very physical thing with bread and wine. It is one of only two physical things connected with Christianity, the other being baptism. The early Christians came together to break bread on the first day of the week as we find in Acts 20. This has been a good tradition for many believers down through the years. Primarily, we meet together to remember the Saviour's sacrifice in the way He appointed, but it also gives us opportunity for worship and praise. Remembrance, worship, and praise naturally go together on such an occasion.

Recovery, vv13-14

Let us read these verses,

“So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites” (1Samuel 7:13-14).

Here we have an indication of Samuel's relationship with the LORD. He was a godly servant who lived close to his God. The Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israel again because the hand of the LORD was against them all the days of Samuel. No doubt, Samuel prayed concerning the matter of the Philistines, so that Israel had a measure of rest from warfare and peace came to the nation.

Additionally, the territory that the Philistines had taken from Israel was restored. This further enhanced the victory that Israel had over their enemy. So powerful was the victory that the Amorites were at peace with Israel. The Amorites were another foe that was almost continually at war with Israel. This gave Israel a measure of peace for many years from these two foes and allowed Samuel to fulfil his role of judging the people.

Lessons to learn

When we start dealing with the sin in our lives and live, as Samuel did, close to God, we can also have a sense of peace in our lives. This does not mean that Satan will not try to find other ways of disturbing that peace. But knowing how to deal with any new situation that arises does help us in our Christian pathway. It is essential to depend upon God at all times. As we bring Him our petitions, let us commence with worship as shown in the Lord's example prayer, “Our Father in heaven hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9).

Maintaining recovery vv.15-17

Let us read these verses,

“Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD” (1Samuel 7:15-17).

Once peace was restored to the nation of Israel Samuel was able to continue his work as a circuit judge, judging the people of Israel so that they stayed strong. There were four centres which Samuel visited all central to the nation, but his visits gave the people opportunity to seek godly judgment about matters that they could not resolve themselves. This may well have included the reading of the law relevant to the given situation that Samuel was dealing with. If so, it was important to show the people that he was speaking God’s word and not his own.

Samuel’s home was at Ramah and as well as receiving the people for judgment he had built an altar for worship. The altar was obviously an important part of Samuel’s life. He had been brought up at Shiloh where the Ark was before the Philistines captured it in battle, but it was now residing in the house of Abinadab (see 1Samuel 7:1). We see Samuel’s home life was important to him and no doubt it supported his public life as a circuit judge.

Lessons to learn

We do not have a ‘Samuel’ today, but we do have the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. In addition God has appointed teachers in the gatherings of God’s people to encourage and build up fellow believers in the truth. At the same time there is the individual responsibility to study the Scriptures for ourselves and to hold fast to the truth we have gained. It takes effort and energy to hold onto what we have gained. It takes no effort at all to let go and then we will soon forget what we have learned in the past. Christianity is an active living faith in which each one is expected to make progress. Paul is a good example of active living for he said in 2Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Conclusion

The Old Testament has many lessons for us today if it is correctly applied. The Lord used the Old Testament to speak to the people while He was here. After His resurrection He spoke to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, using the Old Testament, about things concerning Himself. Let us not confine the Old Testament to the dust bin of history as not being relevant today. However, we must guard against seeking to apply everything in the Old Testament to ourselves. We have the New Testament, with its fuller revelation of the ways of God, for believers today. The main truth that has come to light is that of the church, the body of Christ. The church is not confined to one nation, Israel, but is composed of believers from every nation around the world.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on 1st Samuel chapter 7, “Israel restored”, talk number T1294.

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