

1 Samuel 7 • The Deliverance of God's People

Introduction

In this section of Scripture we have one of the very first, sincere spiritual revivals in all of history. During the time of the judges revival was temporal at best, and none of those temporary respites describe the kinds of things that went on here. This is a really important story to keep in mind because it heralds a time when people's hearts are being prepared for the coming king, just as a similar earthly revival will take place in the days of John the Baptist leading up to the presentation of the King of Kings. It is also interesting to note that there are many organizations would classify themselves as "deliverance" ministries. What does it take for God's people to experience deliverance according to its biblical definition?

¹And 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. ²From 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.

³Then 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." ⁴So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the LORD alone.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: What does the ark always first and foremost represent?

A: The Word of God. Hence what is returning to Israel is not just a "thing" or icon, but is the greater representation of the Word having been absent from their lives and now returning to them.

Q: Why do you suppose the ark is not returning to Shiloh where it had previously resided for hundreds of years?

A: It's probably symbolic of the fact that God's Word had been rejected in that place and so it is returning to a new physical location reflecting the new spiritual position God's Word is once again being given.

Q: What might be considered very strange about who has been entrusted with the ark and by whom?

A: There is no mention of the Tabernacle itself being moved to Kiriath-jearim and placed around the ark. In fact, there is no mention of the priesthood or Levites doing anything at all. They seem to continue to operate everything else separate from the ark at Shiloh the whole time the ark is in Kiriath-jearim. It is the local residents of Judah who "consecrated Eleazar" Abinadab's son to "keep the ark".

Application: What lesson is probably being taught here that God is more concerned about the heart than earthly things like lineage, etc.? What happens when those God has called fail to carry out their God-given duties?

Q: What does it mean that "all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD"?

A: It indicates a prolonged period where the people sought the Lord with fasting, prayer, and tears. They were not merely seeking God with the words of their mouth but sincerely from the heart.

Q: How do Samuel's instructions reflect what is ALWAYS the very first step towards spiritual revival?

A: He instructs them to "return to the LORD with all your heart". (v.3) Revival always begins not just with a return to God's Word, but accompanied by sincere repentance of sins.

Q: What is the specific sin that must be dealt with?

A: "...remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you". (v.3) They must rid themselves of all false spiritual influences and "direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone". Repentance is followed closely by the pursuit of sanctification, to be exclusively devoted to God's Word and ways alone.

Q: What is the conditional promise God makes through Samuel?

A: “If you return to the LORD with all your heart...He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines”. (v.3) Deliverance is predicated on the biblical definition of repentance, which is to renounce one’s sins and strive to never revisit them again. That is, to live a changed life going forward. But earthly bondage is never addressed until spiritual bondage is first taken care of.

Q: What is significant about Samuel’s specifically mentioning that “Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the Lord alone”?

A: These represented both a father-figure (Baals) and a mother-figure (Ashtaroth) which they had previously substituted for God. It’s a picture of God’s children being reunited with God the Father.

Application: What substitutes for God might you need to address in order to effect a real return to Christ? How might these verses help us in how we pray for revival?

[Read v.5-6]

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

⁶They 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.

Q: What is significant about Israel assembling at Mizpah?

A: This seemed to be the de facto place for important assemblies. It’s the place in Judges 19-21 where Israel judged and went to war with Benjamin, and it will a place associated with Saul as king. It is one of the judgment seats utilized by Samuel during his ministry. After the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, the Babylonians will make Mizpah the capital for the Babylonian province of Judah. Mizpah literally means “watch tower” and seems to be a place where turning points in Israel’s history take place.

Q: How does Samuel continue to sustain the revival that has begun?

A: He convenes a prayer meeting.

Application: Revival began with sincere prayer in v.2 when Israel “lamented after the LORD” and continued not only with Samuel’s personal prayer for the people but gathering them together for this purpose. How might this apply today? Is the pursuit of programs or experiences sometimes sought in lieu of coming together in corporate prayer?

Q: How might Samuel be characterized as an ultimate biblical example of prayer?

1. Samuel is always associated with prayer. “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way.” (1 Sam. 12:23)
2. Samuel was born as an answer to his mother’s prayer. (1 Sam. 1)
3. Samuel prayed for his nation and defeated the enemy. (1 Sam. 7:13)
4. Samuel prayed when Israel defied God and asked for a king. (1 Sam. 8:6)
5. Samuel prayed for King Saul even after God rejected him. (1 Sam. 15:11)

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

James 5:16

Point: Samuel always turns to God from the heart before engaging in any of the external practices of worship such as sacrifices, festivals, etc.

Q: Why did Samuel pour out the water?

A: It was a symbol of the entire nation's repentance, of their hearts poured out in sorrow for their sins. It also typifies washing to make clean by the Word of God.

Q: Why did Samuel offer a burnt offering?

A: It indicated Israel's complete dedication to God. It's important to note that this took place voluntarily at Mizpah and **NOT** at Shiloh where the Tabernacle was located, the place where hundreds of years of their sacrifices were essentially meaningless because they did not reflect a right heart.

Q: What did the people do in response to these things?

A: They fasted in sincere repentance to the Lord.

Application: Note how revival is much more than just "returning" to God and how it sparks a continual change in attitude. What are the things essential to revival? How are they conspicuously absent from your present situation?

⁷Now 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. ⁸Then 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."

⁹Samuel 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.

[Read v.7-9]

Q: Why do you suppose that Israel's initial reaction to the Philistines' approach was fear?

A: From an earthly point of view, it was the perfect time for the Philistines to attack and for Israel to be defeated. All Israel was gathered to a single place, but not assembled in preparation for battle. The Philistines appeared to be operating from a position of strength whereas Israel was in a position of utmost weakness. (Note: What are the spiritual parallels?)

Q: What did Israel come to realize at this time?

A: That the only hope of deliverance could come from God. In asking Samuel to continue praying for them, they were seeking to align their new spiritual deliverance equally with their physical deliverance.

Q: What might be a little strange about the sacrifice Samuel performs given the Old Testament Law?

A: Normally if the sacrifice took place in the Tabernacle it would have had to have been a male animal – not a female as in this case, and it would not have been offered whole as certain parts were required to be given to the priests. In this case, however, he is making the offering on a private altar, not the one in the Tabernacle, and it most likely represents the sincerity of the entire nation to be wholly devoted to God's Word and ways alone.

Application: There is no guarantee that the physical conditions of our life and situation will change, but the only hope that such can come about is if the conditions of our spiritual life are first brought into alignment with God's Word and ways.

¹⁰Now 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. ¹¹The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car.

¹²Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." ¹³So 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. ¹⁴The 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.

¹⁵Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶He used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷Then his return was to Ramah, for his house was there, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the Lord.

[Read v.10-14]

Q: What is particularly ironic about the fact that it states, "But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day"?

A: It is a literal fulfillment from Hannah's prayer when prayerfully thanking God for the birth of Samuel.

*"Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered;
Against them He will thunder in the heavens,
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
And He will give strength to His king,
And will exalt the horn of His anointed."*

1 Samuel 2:10

Q: Why do you suppose Samuel erected the monument?

A: "Ebenezer" literally means "stone of help". They felt it important to publicly acknowledge God's deliverance and intervention. In reality there was nothing that they did personally to overcome the enemy but experienced victory only because God fought for them.

Q: What is the greater spiritual meaning of receiving their cities back from the Philistines and that "there was peace between Israel and the Amorites"?

A: These were the principle and worst spiritual influences who had seduced Israel to pursue other gods. The physical peace reflected a greater spiritual peace.

Application: Revival is not an opportunity for God's people to fight spiritual enemies, but one of the results of true revival is that God supernaturally overcomes them on behalf of His people.

[Read v.15-17]

Observation: Samuel is nearly unique, there only being one person like him in Scripture, that of John the Baptist. Just as John was the last Old Testament prophet and the first witness of the Messiah, so Samuel is the last judge and the first national prophet. Just as John would prepare men's hearts for the coming of the Messiah, Samuel prepared men's hearts for the coming of one of the major types of the Messiah, King David. Both John and Samuel preached in ways contrary to traditional expectations and possessed ministries completely unique and different from everyone else of their time. They were not bound by the things of the Law but worked at the level of the heart.

Overall Application

Q: Why should we never desire that revival is required in the first place?

A: Because it means that believers have backslidden so far from their relationship to God that they've actually begun worshipping other gods in His place.

Q: What things are necessary for revival to take place? Why do you believe it is needed? How will deliverance come about?