

1 Samuel 7:2-17: How the Lord Helps His People

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Samuel chapter 7 verses 2 through 17. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-Jerim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. 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 Ashtoreth 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 Ashtoreth, and they served the Lord only. Then Samuel said, Gather all Israel at Mitzpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you. So they gathered at Mitzpah, 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 Mitzpah. Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mitzpah, the Lord 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. 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. 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.

And the men of Israel went out from Mitzpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them as far as below Beth-kar. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it up between Mitzpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer. For he said, Till now the Lord has helped us. So the Philistines were subdued, and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistine 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. Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mitzpah, 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

[2 : 5 1] Good afternoon. It's good to be in God's house again, to be able to proclaim to you God's word. Let's pray, and then we'll get into what thus saith the Lord on this afternoon. Father, thank you for this marvelous summer that you have given us, this point in our journey, the text that's before us. I pray that you would be honored today through the preaching of your word.

May it land on fertile hearts. May we see demonstrated in our lives, speaker and hearers, the power of your word. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

This is the last in our summer series that we've entitled Raising Up Leaders. And one of the things that I really want you to see from today's text is that the Lord helps his people through godly, courageous, faithful leaders.

That's one of the things that sort of blinks at us from this chapter. And as you will hear as we walk through this, seems like the narrator, in a very specific way, continues to set in contrast the sons of Eli and the sons of Hannah. We'll see that very clearly. Think of where we've been already in first Samuel this summer. A childless wife cries out to the Lord, and eventually she conceives a son. This new mom then dedicates this son to the Lord's work.

And her son grows up to be a powerful instrument in the hands of God. One of the things that he does, and primarily what he does, is that he fills a leadership void in the nation of Israel.

[5 : 02] And eventually, this same Samuel anoints two kings, one of whom would be the archetype for the leader par excellence, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Leaders come and go in various sizes, shapes, and colors. And leaders leave legacies.

Some good, and some not so good. Think of the world leaders in today's news, even this past week. Muammar Gaddafi continues to be right in the centerpiece of world news.

And then, our own former Vice President, Dick Cheney, just to name a few of those leaders that have come to our attention even recently.

The deaths of two Christian leaders recently caught my attention. The circumstances surrounding their deaths could not be more different.

[6 : 14] Several weeks ago, as I was on the internet, an article caught my attention, and it read something like this. The heading was Pastor of Mega Church Found Dead in a New York hotel.

A 42-year-old pastor from Florida was found in his room dead, and had a white substance in the garment that he was wearing.

This same leader, 2009, was divorced by his wife after carrying on a year-long affair with a stripper.

What a tragedy for anybody, but it is heightened when it is a person who is supposedly, allegedly, representing God on high.

Not long after reading of this situation, I learned of the death of 90-year-old John R.W. Stott.

[7 : 25] John Stott, no stranger to the Christian world in general, and the evangelical world in particular.

His was a very clear voice of sound biblical reason. A lifelong single man, authored over 50 books, 30 years, he was chaplain to the Queen of England, and we could go on to speak of the decades of his faithful, godly, service, and courageous living in this world.

What were the circumstances of John Stott's death? He died of complications related to old age, and check this out, folks.

At the time of his death, he was surrounded by his longtime secretary, close friends, and guess what they were doing even as he was leaving here?

Reading scripture and listening to Handel's Messiah. What a contrast in these two servants of God.

[8 : 47] Two leaders, two legacies, and by the time that we arrived in chapter 7 of 1 Samuel, Eli and his sons had left their legacies, and Samuel was well on the way to leaving his, and what we see in the count before us was a part of that legacy, right at the heart, right at the center of the legacy that he would leave.

Look at the text with me. We haven't seen Samuel, even though this book is named after him, we have not seen Samuel since the end of 1 Samuel chapter 3, the beginning of 1 Samuel chapter 4.

And here in chapter 7, he re-emerges under, and check this out, friends, that under the sons of Eli, Eli and his sons, under their leadership, God's people, were left very vulnerable.

And that's what happens when leaders do not honor God. God's people that are under their shepherding care are left vulnerable to the wolves of whatever sort of this world.

And that was the case with Eli and his sons. Israel had suffered defeat on the battlefield. The ark had gone into exile. And from what we gather in today's text, worship of idols in that day was very pervasive.

[10 : 24] And even though the ark had returned to the land, the central shrine at Shiloh was not re-established. And given these prevailing conditions, we see what we do in our first verse of today's text.

Look at it with me again. from the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath Jerem, a long time past, some 20 years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

No wonder Israel was in lamentation, huh? The ark is back in the land of Israel in the hands of a Levitical caretaker. And though the ark is back in the land, it appears that the people of God had still not recovered from being under less than the best of spiritual leadership.

From what we can tell, the cycle that characterized the era of the judges was very much in play. And you may say, well, Pastor Jackson, what was the cycle?

You can see it in judges. It appears at various times, particularly you can see it in chapter 2, verses 11 through 18, but just let me abbreviate it and capsulize it for you.

[11 : 45] Here was the cycle. Disobedience, discipline, and then there was desperation that led to their crying out to the Lord, and then there was deliverance through a God appointed leader.

Let me say that again. And you may hear on this afternoon, find yourself at one of these points along that cycle. Disobedience, discipline, desperation characterized by God's people calling on him, and then there was deliverance through this God appointed leader.

So Israel here is under the disciplining hand of God, and she's lamenting. There is a sense of mourning and longing. The discipline of the Lord was working, wasn't it?

Isn't that what you want to happen if you're a parent here? You want a child to feel the effects of waywardness and going away from the path that you perhaps have ordained for them or laid out for them.

You want them to feel the internal weight of disobedience? Like the prodigal son in the pigpen, Israel was being punished and the chastisement of the Lord was moving them to long for the Lord.

[13 : 21] Isn't it true that hard times sometimes have a way of causing hard heads to rethink their way?

Hard times have a way of doing that, nudging you back in the direction that you need to go, hopefully creating a sense of mourning and a measure of grief and sorrow that may send you back home.

These kind of times can cause prodigals to think of their good homes or their good parents and the good old days. discipline has a way of doing that.

Does not scripture teach us that the Lord uses discipline for our good and for our growth, for our health, for our well-being and maturity?

And given those good things that come from discipline, it should not be despised. The writer of the Hebrews put it well, my son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.

[14 : 48] I mean, you can go on and read it for yourself in Hebrews chapter 12, but that's what was going on here. Why were the people of God lamenting? Why was there a sense of mourning?

Because the Lord had allowed the hand of the Philistines to oppress them and to defeat them. I don't know where you are.

Feeling a little wheat? Or the nudge of God's hand? God has a way of taking his own children and his own people to the woodshed and exercising a measure of correction upon them to get us back where we need to go.

Israel's lamentation verse 2, Samuel's exhortation verses 3 and 4. You see that? Notice what he says. He 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 astra that are from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only.

And notice what he will do. He will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines. Here's Samuel. He's back on the scene. And he's exhorting them.

[16 : 17] Mourning on the one hand was a good thing, but Samuel let them know this and hear this, that a change of the present condition then demanded a change in their devotion.

Huh? If they wanted their situation to change, there needed to be a change in the affections of their heart and the devotions of their souls.

It needed to be changed. stuff. Tired of your feet being in the muck and the mire? Tired of being under the, perhaps the disciplinary hand of God?

A change in your situation demands a change in your devotion. Perhaps some of you need to come home. Some of you need to make some adjustments. Some of you need to do some changes in the context of your lives.

The devotion of your souls. The foreign gods had to go. That was what was being said. Because the gods of the people of the land had become the gods of God's people.

[17 : 24] And you see those deities are named in verse 4. Baal literally means master or owner or husband. The god of fertility and fittingly symbolized by a bull.

he was worshipped widely and was the most important and most powerful god of the Canaanites. And then Ashtarothe, the goddess of the evening star or the planet Venus was closely associated with Baal, goddess too of fertility and love and war.

But a change in their situation demanded a change in their devotion. Not only were they to put away these strange gods, they were to dedicate themselves to the Lord alone.

When those things are done, the Lord would deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. In verse 4 shows that in fact, that is what happened. I was on the west side this morning, worshipping and a song really represented well what's going on here.

And perhaps this would have been a song that Israel would have sung in their rededication ceremony. We bow our hearts, we bend our knees, O Spirit, make us humble.

[18 : 38] We turn our eyes from evil deeds, O Lord, we cast down our idols. Anything that usurps, that displaces God in our affections, whether it is people or places or professions or whatever, it is that has displaced our affections, has to go.

has to go. Samuel's exhortation, but then look at Israel's rededication in verses 5 through 11.

What we see there, it's a rededication ceremony. They present themselves, notice verse 5, Samuel said, gather all Israel at Mitzpah, and I'll pray to the Lord for you.

So they gathered there, huh? They gathered at Samuel's urging, and they symbolized their grief by the outpouring of water before the Lord and fasting and confessing, huh?

In this scene, we see Samuel ministering, he's ministering there as a judge, providing correction and guidance, that's what the judges were to do.

[20 : 01] The judges in that day, these were the civil or the military leaders of God's people who administered justice based on God's law. They also led God's people to victory over their enemies in an external way, so there was an internal function for them as well as an external role as far as leading God's people in victory.

And Samuel did that. Here he is, we see him. He is faithfully, friends, exercising his role as a judge of God's people rather than taking advantage of them and exploiting them as the sons of Eli did, huh?

He is praying for them, he is protecting them, he is ministering to them, huh? Isn't this the kind of spiritual leader that God's people deserve?

It is. Nothing less than this. They need that kind of leader and they deserve that kind of leader. God help us if we give ourselves in ways that don't lend themselves to that kind of shepherding care for his people, huh?

Huh? This contrast so with what we see of Eli's sons, huh? The ark is in exile. The people's devotion is displaced.

[21 : 22] The hand of the Philistines is strengthened under their leadership, under their role. people. And it makes you want to ache for the people of God when such is the case, huh?

Verses 7 and 8, God's people are making things right with him, but notice what happens, the enemy, I mean, they're turning their hearts to God and along comes the enemy. Isn't that often the way that it is?

it's sort of like when you resolve to go on a diet, huh? And the opposition of, in my house, pound cakes and other kinds of things begin to invade, huh?

We had a pound cake made this week, a chocolate chip cake that went with my grandson. I didn't taste it, y'all. I did have my pound cake. But the opposition has a way of coming in when you resolve to do what is right and honorable, all of a sudden when you want to end a relationship, you get a call, huh?

Or you get an invitation, or some other opportunities come along just when you have made the right kind of resolve enter the opposition, huh?

[22 : 34] In their fear, notice what they do, and oh, this is such a beautiful scene of what we see here. They cry out to Samuel. You see that there?

Look at verse 7, when the Philistines heard that the people of God had gathered at Mishpah, let's go on to verse 8, the people of Israel said to Samuel, do not cease to cry out to the Lord for us, that, notice this, that he may save us, rescue us, deliver us, what, from the hand of the Philistines.

This perennial enemy of Israel was threatening them again and again. That's the way life is.

These kind of cycles that come and go. The chains are off, the enemy is threatened, next thing you know, the chains are back on.

But as we look at this, it appears that the narrator wants us to think back to what has happened in chapter 4, where there was a scene of their own devising.

[23 : 47] You remember what they had said back then? Bring the ark in, so what? The ark can save us. Huh? That plan backfired. But here we see this appeal to the man of God to pray for us and intercede to the Lord that he would come and save us.

Huh? I loved when we were at the lake on a few weeks ago and we were baptizing and interviewed little Sam Martinez and he quoted a scripture, one of my favorite, Psalm 27.

And this really pictures what we have here. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

We're not looking to the ark or the ephod or any of these other things. We're looking to the Lord himself that he might save and he alone.

Oh, isn't that the way that it is? We're not bringing even in our Christian era nothing in our hands we bring, but simply to your cross we cling.

[25 : 03] Naked, empty, we come bankrupt. That's the way you come before God. He may meet you at the point of your need, not trusting in the mystique of the ark, we're trusting in the Lord himself.

No gimmick, nothing fantastic. God's leader simply trusts in God. He offers sacrifice, he offers prayers, and he cries out, he is an intercessor.

Sons of Eli, they didn't even know God. Samuel not only knows him, but he prays to him, talks to him, and guess what? God answers him. See the contrast?

See what the narrator is doing here? Samuel's mom has already predicted the fate of Enid. As a matter of fact, turn back over to chapter 2 and verse 10, one of the main verses, I believe, in the entire book itself.

She's already predicted their fate. We see that the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken, and against them he will thunder in heaven.

[26 : 11] The Lord will judge the ends of the earth, he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointing. Look back over here, look at verse 10 in our text today, but the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were routed before the Lord.

Mama said it, son saw it, God was doing his thing. And in this view of this, this particular place is dubbed Ebenezer Stone of Help, because the Lord up to this point had helped them, left to their own devices.

Then they were led into battle with the ark, but now they're led into the battle by the divine warrior himself. And notice, so we could go on, but look at verses 13 and 14.

Under Samuel's leadership, God's hand was constantly against the Philistines. Cities previously taken were restored, territories were expanded, peace with the Amorites, it's all there.

God's leader, courageously leading, God's people, faithfully, and you see in verses 15 through 17, you see Samuel's legacy.

[27 : 42] It's a legacy of faithfulness. Look at verse 15. Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. Look at verse 16.

And he went on a circuit, when? Year by year, to Bethel, Gilgal, Mitzpah, and he judged Israel in all of these places. He's faithful, that's his legacy, that he's leaving.

His leadership in contrast to the sons of Eli, but not only that, it provided a model for the coming monarchy that was to come as far as faithfulness and courageous leadership.

Through Samuel, God led his people to repentance and rededication and restoration. And just like decline and apostasy had characterized the era under the leadership of Eli and his sons, soul, repentance and rededication and restoration and renewal.

Oh, wow. What a legacy for a minister, for a pastor, Dave. If those kinds of things would characterize the body that God has given us the privilege of shepherding, and I speak even to our elders, huh, and deacons, wow, isn't this what we want?

[29 : 02] Huh? What a difference the right leader makes, huh? God uses godly leaders to help his people, huh?

So, what do you do? Number one, pray for your leaders, huh? Pray for your pastors, pray for your elders, pray for your deacons, we need your prayers to lead well, huh?

And then, pray that the Lord from amongst us, from amongst our homes, would raise up other leaders who will faithfully serve him in the present as well as the future.

On yesterday, I had the occasion to stop by Encore Thrift Store. It was just good being there, seeing Megan was there leading, David Hart was there serving, folks were coming again, I mean, there were sales, I saw the money being exchanged, I saw the clothes going in bags, I saw the inventory, all of it back there.

But then, I thought about the dream that God had started. I thought about one, a grant in college now, but when we was in high school, product of a godly home that God raised up, I mean, that business launch, and all that God would use godly homes to raise up godly men and women and children who would serve well.

[30 : 48] Pray for them, pray that God would raise up leaders, but also heed your spiritual leaders. According to Hebrews, we watch for your souls as those who will give an account.

We want to be able to give a good account for those that God has entrusted to us. We're headed to the table on this afternoon, but there are few things that I want to say that will help get us there.

Our text on this afternoon refers to an Ebenezer, a place where God helped his people. The ultimate Ebenezer for the people of the world, of course, is the cross of Calvary, isn't it?

That's where God helps us. It's the place of the greatest help, where the greatest leader of all times, Christ, laid down his life for us.

There, God provided the greatest help against our greatest enemy's sin that separates us and keeps us from having peace with God.

[32 : 05] There. And this table is a reminder of what God has provided, the help that he's provided for you and me and the person and the work of his son.

For some of you, the table today may be a place of repentance. Some of you, it may be a place of rededication and restoration.

Your devotions, your affections have strayed, they've gone to other things. Be reminded that a change in your situation demands this afternoon, and perhaps this could be it, a change in your devotion.

You've longed to return to a place of peace and fellowship you used to enjoy, but presently it seems like those things are so elusive for you. Hey, this could be a place of help in that regard, even the communion table on this afternoon.

Rededication is always in order, isn't it, friends? May it not be cheap, simply words alone, but perhaps your heart, like the children of Israel, needs to be poured out like water, huh?

[33 : 24] Really to express yourself in ways that really befit genuine brokenness and repentance, and only God can do that in you and in me, huh?

But you need to see that your help ultimately is only in the Savior. So, may this communion table on this afternoon for you be a place of fresh dedication, surrender, and release.

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