

Ebenezer

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[0 : 00] 1 Samuel chapter 7. 1 Samuel chapter 7 from verse 7 through 12. So feel free to read along with me. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpah, the Lord of the Philistines went up against Israel.

And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 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.

And Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord for Israel. And the Lord heard him. 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. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and smote them until they came under Bethkar.

And then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

[1 : 22] Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for your word again as we come unto it. Lord, minister by your spirit's power. Help us to be stirred spiritually to action, to blessing.

Lord, by your spirit's power. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Ebenezer is my message today. Ebenezer.

The Philistines were the main enemy of Israel. They were godless, idol worshippers. Israel suffered under them some 40 years.

And Ebenezer became a turning point for God's people. Why? Why so? Why was it so important? What happened at Ebenezer? Ebenezer, it had been a place of defeat and shame.

It was before at Ebenezer that Israel had lost 34,000 men and their faith in God at this same spot. 20 years before the Israelites had suffered a great defeat.

[2 : 21] They had been unfaithful. The people had turned away from the Lord and had followed idols. And the Philistines had taken the very ark of God from them. The place where God's presence came to them.

So here was Israel that had been attacked, overcome and defeated. Ebenezer was that place. The people heard that the Philistines were coming. And it says, verse 7, Israel was afraid.

Israel was afraid of the Philistines. Israel needed revival. They were in this state of disobedience. Verse 8, it says, the people cried.

They cried out for prayer. In faith they declared that the Lord would save them. Verse 9, it says, Samuel offered the lamb and he cried unto the Lord.

It was here that Samuel gave worship and sacrifice. He cried out to the Lord for help. And the Lord heard him. So here at Ebenezer it was a turning point.

[3 : 23] This is where God brought victory for the Israel people over the Philistines. And as the Philistines were beaten, they fled in terror before the army of Israel.

After 20 years of misery, now there was victory. After 20 years of misery, they faced that same battlefield, that same enemy, and God brought victory to them.

So here at Ebenezer, Samuel took a stone. Just a stone. It wasn't some idol or monument. It was just a simple stone. And he raises up that stone right there on that battlefield of Ebenezer.

It was a memorial, a sign, a marker. It was pointing the people to give thanks, to give glory. It was a memorial stone of victory, victory.

And it's also an altar of worship. It was here that the people got right with God. So revival is pictured here and we can all think, wow, what can I learn from that?

[4 : 27] Individually, corporately. How can we come to our own Ebenezer? Our moment of Ebenezer. Ebenezer, as it's defined here.

It's defined in verse 12. The name of it was Ebenezer, which means, hitherto hath the Lord helped us. Ebenezer, it literally means help stone.

It was a stone of help. It recognised God has helped. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. As we look back in our lives, we can think, yes, God was there all the time.

Amen. Can you say that? Believe that? And Samuel was acknowledging that help of God. In the time past, God's redeeming grace. And he sets up this stone.

Friends, God is our rock, isn't he? He is the helper. He is the rock, our stone of help. It was a time of praise. Ebenezer was a record of thankfulness.

[5 : 29] And for us as a church, as a people, we approach a new year. It's a little while ahead, but we think of what does God want for us in 2022, if we see it?

What does God want for us individually, corporately? As we look forward, God is still going to be there. He's still going to be our help. Maybe we're going to have some fears, like the people of Israel.

I know you read the headlines lately, and there's a lot of fear, isn't there? A fear of a new variant, a new scarian, new stories that could cause us to be fearful, afraid.

But we can cry unto the Lord. We can know his help. And God will hear our prayer, no matter what the situation around about. And we can give him thanks. We can come to that Ebenezer place.

Ask yourself, what has the Lord done for me? We heard some testimonies this morning. What God has done in the lives of people. And we've all got a different story to tell.

[6 : 30] But we can all say, the Lord has done some good for me. The Lord has been good to me. The Lord has helped me. Am I grateful? Am I grateful for that? Surely we can say, the Lord has helped me.

I look back and see where he's taken me from, and where I am now, and what he's yet to do. By his grace, surely we can say, the Lord has helped me. And it's good to take a moment in time, an Ebenezer moment, to Selah.

It means pause. The word Selah, see it in the Psalms. It means pause. Pause for a while. Think back.

What God has done for my soul. We recall his mercies, don't we? We remember the victories that he's won. The battles, yet the victories he has given to us.

We can reflect as we look back on the help of God, his mighty help. And we can thank and honour him, our Lord, for his great help. His saving grace for salvation.

[7 : 34] And all the benefits, we can't number them. His grace, it's by that we're here. His faithfulness, God is faithful. So, as we see Samuel, he set up an altar unto his name.

Ebenezer. It had been a place of shame, of reproach. There was sin, a tremendous failure. Hophni and Phinehas were two priests.

In 1 Samuel 2, verse 12, it shows how they were corrupt. They were priests. 1 Samuel 2, verse 12. And it says they did not know the Lord.

Imagine that. The priests, they should be the ones that should be more holy. But these ones, they did not even know the Lord. And we see the corruption, the failing, the reproach.

20 years before, in that same place, Hophni and Phinehas. The priests of the Lord. They were slain in judgment. And the ark was taken. The ark that represented the very presence of God.

[8 : 45] They lost all of that. What a reproach. The people of God had suffered a great defeat here. Now, we have that, don't we? I could look back and see times of defeat, of shame, things I'm not proud of, of backsliding, of loss, of weakness.

The people of God looked back and they saw their failings. They saw the unfaithfulness of the priests. They saw the ark had been taken. They saw the defeats.

The people of God had suffered a great defeat here. The glory had departed. Friends, we can look back at our spiritual life and think, what I used to be like. Maybe I should go back and get a bit of that old zeal back.

The glory had departed. Thousands had been slain in battle here. Right here, at Ebenezer, this very place. Thousands. And it had been a place of disobedience.

Yet, here now, it was a turning point. It was a time of rededication. And we can all have those moments when we say, yes, Ebenezer, God's helped me.

[9 : 53] And by his grace, I'm here. By his grace, I'm going to stand. The Lord can work in our own lives and replace our shame, our defeats, our loss with forgiveness, with victory, with praise.

And Samuel urged the people to repentance and restoration. We see that in verse 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 Ashtaroath 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.

Notice that word in verse 3, Samuel 7, verse 3. If. If. If we take spiritual action, it says, he will deliver you.

Return unto the Lord, he will deliver you. Return unto the Lord with all your heart. Put away the strange gods from among you.

You know, there's things we can hang on to that are strange gods. The things of the world, the attractions of the world, the diversions of the world, they're strange gods.

[11:18] Put them away. Prepare your heart unto the Lord. Serve him only. Have that wholehearted fixing your heart upon him. Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, says Samuel.

Serve him only. Now the good news is that the people did just that. In verse 4. 1 Samuel 7, verse 4. Then the children of Israel did put away Balaam and Ashtaroath. So the false god of Baal, Ashtaroath, the female counterpart of this false god, the popular false god, the common false god of Baal, that the Philistines worshipped.

It says, then the children of Israel did put away these and serve the Lord only. What a blessing for the preacher, man. Samuel, when the people of God acted upon the word of God.

Now I can preach and sometimes I don't know that the action doesn't follow. But these people, they heard the word and they acted upon it.

[12:25] They did put away the false gods. This was a turning point. The ark was back with God's people but it was here now. In verse 4 that was the turning point when they got their hearts right.

Here was that turning point that they needed. As they returned unto the Lord. Here was where everything changed. They had the ark back but their hearts were not right.

But now it says they put away the false gods and they served the Lord only. This is the turning point. This is the Ebenezer moment. This is what our nation needs.

Amen. This is what our world needs. Our people, our church, our city. They cried unto the Lord, it says, and they prayed. And Samuel was himself an answer to prayer.

Hannah's persistent prayer for a son. We've heard of such a thing today, haven't we? And God blessed that family, the Vela family, with a son. And Samuel was such a one.

[13:22] Hannah was the mum. She prayed and prayed and God gave her Samuel. And Hannah was so glad for this answered prayer that she gave her son Samuel wholeheartedly to God's service.

God answered Hannah's prayer. And God answers prayer, people. He answered the prayer of the people of Israel that cried unto the Lord. He heard Samuel's prayer. He cried unto the Lord.

And he can hear your prayer. Your prayer, brother. Your prayer, sister. As you cry unto the Lord. Don't neglect to pray. We mark Ebenezer. We remember our sin, our weakness.

Battles lost. Failure. Our sin. And like Samuel, we come. Where the lamb is.

We think of the grace of God. That pictures. We mark here the mercy of God. Samuel is saying, return unto the Lord with all your hearts. Isn't that something we ought to still do?

[14:24] To return to the Lord with all our heart? So here, this place, this battlefield of Ebenezer was the place of repentance. Of pleading for God. Of God's grace and goodness.

It was a turning point. And we mark that. We mark the joy of God's work of grace in taking our guilt. That's what they did. Wow. The lamb offered on the battlefield.

It was God's work of grace. Notice it says in verse 2 of 1 Samuel 7. All the house of Israel laments it after the Lord.

There's one little word there. All. Wouldn't it be good if everyone was touched? Wouldn't it be good if everyone was moved? Everyone was crying aloud. We had a corporate, a heart, a united mind, a united heart to seek after God.

Like all the house of Israel. They lamented after the Lord. The whole heart, every conscience, every soul, every heart. They knew that they needed the Lord to do a work.

[15:37] So they all sought after God. May the Lord likewise work in all of our hearts. All of our hearts today. That no one will miss this. That we'll all have that heart.

Not just some. Ebenezer was a place of revival. It was where the lamb was slain. Now in the context we see the enemy was right about to attack.

Here they were on this place of Ebenezer, the battlefield that was Ebenezer. And the situation at that very moment was the enemy was right about to attack.

But Samuel took the time to worship. Samuel took the time to sacrifice, to pray, to bring the lamb. It's very noteworthy, isn't it? When we think if there's a battle on, we've all got to, you know, action stations.

We've all got to put our armor on. Yes, we need to, but take time to focus on the lamb. Because without the lamb, we have no saving.

[16:41] It's the lamb of God that we have to know that saving grace of God. We see that verse 9 through 10 again. So here we are.

They could hear the Philistines' horses, I suppose, and the clanging of their shields and swords. You could imagine it as 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. So here's the Israelites, you know, marching almost into the camp.

But the Lord thundered with a great thunder. And Samuel didn't stop. He wasn't diverted from the lamb. Friends, when you turn to the Lord, as the people here did, we can expect to be attacked spiritually.

You know, I often say when someone trusts the Lord as their saviour, it's a good advice to give to a new Christian. You can expect to be attacked. Don't let that put you off.

[18:08] It's all the more reason to have that trust. Because the enemy won't worry about the ones who don't know him, the saviour. He'll come after the Christians.

And so this was the case here. As the people of God had faith, the enemy started on its war path to attack. The enemy was about to attack. But Samuel took the time to worship.

And when God is doing a work, expect the enemy to oppose. We can look back as a church. We see much times of testing, of spiritual attacks. And we know the enemy wants to destroy a godly fellowship.

Sad to hear of other churches closing down. The enemy wants that. He wants to shut down churches. Samuel prayed to the Lord. He gave sacrifice. He didn't let the enemy stop him from honouring God.

Yet I wonder sometimes, let's be honest today, what little reasons seem to divert us and hinder us and keep us from church.

[19:15] It's not the Philistines, but just as well, it could be some other enemy. It is the enemy, isn't it? That would want to hinder us from assembling.

Samuel cried unto the Lord and the Lord heard him. And the Lord thundered and brought a great victory. So peace was restored. And we see that verse 11. The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and smote them until they came unto Bethkar.

Interesting, Bethkar means house of the Lamb. So our victory is because of the Lamb. It's because of the Lamb. It's by the Lamb.

Let's just turn our minds to this occasion again and think some application. Notice firstly we see God's victory. You know, my first sermon point now. God's victory.

Ebenezer had been a place of trouble, a battle, of defeat, of hardship. The enemy was on the march again. And verse 8, the people asked Samuel to pray. Friends, if we want to get victory in the Christian life, go to prayer.

[20:17] Go to prayer. Depend upon the Lord for your victory. We're helpless without him. We must depend upon him. So Samuel cried out to the Lord. At Ebenezer, victory was won.

It was the victory of prayer. It was the victory of faith. The ark was regained. The people turned back to God. God gave revival. At Ebenezer, we celebrate victory.

It's the same for us in your Christian life. He wants you to live the victorious Christian life. It's a kind of phrase, isn't it? The victorious Christian life. That day by day, God helping you, you'll have victory.

You'll walk in that victory of the life that he wants for you to live. A victorious life. And it's by him, by his power, you'll have the victory.

We have a committed enemy, Satan. He's the adversary, but he is a defeated enemy. And friends, it's truly at Calvary that the victory was won. That's the victory.

[21 : 15] Even our faith. It's a decisive one. A resounding, eternal one. And it says that all enemies should be put under his feet. We've got enemies. They're not the Philistines today.

But we have the enemy of our soul. And even the last enemy is death. Some fear death. The Bible says that we as believers, we have victory over the last enemy, death.

Because Christ our Lord is the Prince of Life. And it says that through his death, he might destroy him that had the power of death. That is the devil. So our Lord's won the victory even over the last enemy that we're going to face.

Death itself. So at Ebenezer we see God's sin-destroying power. His Satan-defeating power. His soul-saving power.

And it was by the Lamb, Samuel offered it. Truly, this for us, it's Calvary, isn't it? Only because of the Lamb of God offered up for us can we know victory today.

[22 : 17] It tells us of the Lamb of God, our Saviour, who his own self bear our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness.

By his stripes he are healed. At the cross he battled for us. He endured the shame. Our very sin he bore on his own body.

He bore our load of sin. Our guilt, our shame, our death sentence. And there the Lord destroyed death and hell for those who believe.

At Ebenezer we mark God's victory. Also we mark God's mercy. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. They are new every morning.

Great is thy faithfulness. Think of the mercy. Here was Israel, this place of defeat, of shame, of reproach, of failure. The Lord didn't consume them.

[23 : 16] He saved them. God showed them mercy. They didn't deserve it. It's the same for us, isn't it? We don't deserve his mercy. We deserve his judgment. But as they fasted and prayed, verse 5, they confessed.

They cried out to God for forgiveness. God blessed them with his mercy. It's the same for you and me, isn't it? All we can do is cry out for his mercy. They knew every morning his mercies.

What hath God wrought? That's what they said. Ebenezer is where they realised God's hand on them. And we can look back, as we've heard a testimony today, of God's keeping, God's saving, God's mercies, God's grace.

We can look back to everyone that knows the Saviour today and say, Wow, hitherto hath the Lord helped us. God is faithful. Great is his faithfulness. Do we stop and think of the blessings?

The blessings of God on our life. Think of it, brother, sister. Think of it as you have that Ebenezer moment. Think, wow, God has led me by fire and by cloud.

[24 : 19] His mercies are new every morning. What hath God wrought? Ebenezer is that place that we think of how God has led us by his hand. And he's leading us forward. There's still more victories.

There's still more battles. There's still more mercies. There's still more grace. More trial. But more strength to overcome.

Through the defeats and the losses. They've all been there for a reason that we've been through. Even the sad things, as we all can think of some sad things that have happened.

Friends, we know it's the Lamb. The one who surely has borne our grace and he's carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem him, stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.

It says, yet he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him. We have peace today because of his chastisement.

[25 : 23] Because of his affliction. We have grace today because he took the very wrath. Friends, it's all thanks to his mercy. Have that Ebenezer moment to thank him for his mercy.

Think upon his mercy and grace. Of his loving kindness, none of us deserve it. But he's granted it. At Ebenezer we mark God's victory, God's mercy.

And thirdly, God's help. At Ebenezer we look forward to the future with faith. We look forward because our Lord has brought victory for us, gives us victory and will yet give us victory.

He will show his mercy. He has slain our enemies. Trust in the Lord. As Spurgeon put it, Do you dread sin? He has nailed it to his cross.

Do you dread death? He has been the death of death. Are you afraid of hell? He has barred it against the advent of any of his children. They shall never see the gulf of perdition.

[26 : 26] He goes on, Whatever foes may be before the Christian, They are all overcome. There are lions, But their teeth are broken. There are serpents, But their fangs are extracted.

There are rivers, But they are bridged or fordable. There are flames, But we have upon us that matchless garment, Which renders us invulnerable to fire. Because surely, Friends, Surely, God is our help.

God is our help. See the hand of God on your life, That he continues to help. And recognise how God has been at work, And continues to work. Set up your Ebenezer today.

Friends, We see God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore, Will not we fear? As I say, There's a bit of fear about the place, A bit of fear on the planet.

Friends, We don't need to have fear, But to believe, To have faith. Think of your hitherto. See, God has been there. Through the periods of pain, Of loss, Of test, Of cross, Know that God has been.

[27 : 34] Your stay, Your strength, Your shade, Your sustainer. As we look backward, Some, Days, Years, 10, 20, 30, 40, Hitherto, Hath the Lord helped us.

Amen. Through the poverty, Through the wealth, Through the sickness, Through the health, Through trials, Through triumph, Through troubles, Through joy, God has held you, And he's led you, And he still does.

Friends, See his loving kindness today, And know God's help today, His provision, His blessings. Give thanks for the hitherto, As in, What has been.

And, Look forward to his help, In the hereafter. Ebenezer is a place to stop, To pause, To think, To praise. Spurgeon said again, Ahead, Lies more trials, More joys, More temptations, More triumphs, More prayers, More answers, More toils, More strength, More fights, More victories, More slanders, More comforts, More deep waters, More high mountains, And then comes sickness, Old age, Disease, Death, Is it over now?

No, No, No, We will raise one stone more, When we get into the river, We will shout, Ebenezer, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us, For there is more to come, And he goes on, An awakening in his likeness, A climbing of starry spheres, Harps, Songs, Psalms, White raiment, The face of Jesus, The society of saints, The glory of God, The fullness of eternity, The infinity of bliss.

[29 : 13] Friends, Friends, When we face trouble, Or hardship, Or fear, There's a comfort for us, We have a friend, Who sticks closer than a brother, And he will help us, In whatever lies ahead for you, Maybe there's some, Hardness, Yet, Future, He'll help you through brother, Sister, Hang on, He says, I will never leave thee, Nor forsake thee, Let's get ready, For what lies ahead, With renewed faith, With renewed resolve, Stop and think, Give thanks, For the hitherto, And believe God, For the hereafter, God knows, He's helps, He continues to help, And Ebenezer is that reminder, We can make that, A moment, A pause, To say, Yes Lord, Thank you, For your mercy, And love, See the victories, He's won for you, Trust, His victory, Victory over your sin, Victory over temptation, See His mercy,

His delivering, His grace yet future, See God's help, Fighting you in the battles now, And yet to come, His shadow of protection, His care, His love, His provision, We may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, Can you boldly say that this morning, Let's say it together, We may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, Amen, Can you see the past, God's hand there, I wonder whether we stop, And thank Him, We see that parable, Of the ten lepers, And the Lord Jesus says, As one comes to thank Him, He says, Where are the nine, We can sometimes, Be like that, Can't we, Be like the nine, God's done something for us, We don't even stop to thank Him, Let's not make that mistake, Thank God for His help, And one day we'll sing, As the heavenly throng, Of Revelation 5, They'll be saying with a loud voice, Saying with a loud voice,

Worthy is the Lamb, Worthy is the Lamb, That was slain, And there's a seven fold blessing here, He's worthy, Worthy to receive power, Riches, Wisdom, Strength, Honour, Glory, And blessing, He's worthy, He's worthy, Give Him all the glory, And know that He's with you, His help is yet future, He will help you still, He'll help you through the tests, The trials, The triumphs, The future victories, The Lord is your helper, Praise Him, And He says, My grace is sufficient for thee, So, Whatever's happening, Even in the present, May not be comfortable right now, He says, My grace is sufficient for thee, And we can boldly say, The Lord is my helper, Amen, Let's pray, Lord we thank you, That you are still God, That you still fight for us, We know that worthy is the Lamb, That everything we have, Is all thanks to you, Lord help us not to neglect, As the nine neglected to thank you,

Lord help us to say thank you, For helping us, Helping us, Continuing to help us, Let us cry unto you, Let us come, By virtue, Of the sacrificed Lamb of God, To know that, We have entry, We have saving grace, Because our trust is in you, As saviour, As our deliverer, Lord as our helper, We pray, Each one might know that victory, That mercy, And that abiding strength, Lord that you give to each one, That puts their trust in you, Lord let it be, All to your praise, Lord, Each day, Each moment, Would be that, That thought of Ebenezer, That hitherto, Hath the Lord helped us, Lord we thank you for that, And help us to always be, Thankful, For your grace, That you give us, That keeps us, That we can know, That wonderful, Peace with you, Through faith, In Jesus name, We pray, Amen.