

1st Samuel

Lesson 10

d) The Despair of Israel

(1) Israel Sought Samuel (7:7-8)

With verse 6 in place, we come to the despair of Israel and how Israel sought Samuel because he was most definitely the spokesman for the LORD at this time in Israel's history. Verse 7. *"Now 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."* ⁸ *Then 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."* (7:7-8)

The Ark had been returned, but the intent of the Philistines ruling over Israel was not diminished. Israel was in despair. Looking ahead, Goliath would come soon. Israel had to rely on Samuel, and that is why they said, *"Do not cease to cry to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines."*

(2) Israel Saved through Samuel (7:9-11)

Samuel knew what to do. For Israel to be saved through Samuel, an offering was needed. Verse 9. *"Samuel 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."* ¹⁰ *Now 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."* ¹¹ *The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car."* (7:9-11)

The offering of Samuel was not offered at Shiloh; it occurred at Mizpah. Fortunately, in the worship of the LORD, it was never restricted to one place and at certain times. Anywhere, and in any place, an altar could be set, and an offering could be offered. The same is true today. Right now, where you are, you can make an altar to the LORD and worship Him. In your kitchen, in your car, in your study, in your backyard, anywhere, you can and should worship the LORD. Samuel worshiped the LORD that day in favor of Israel, and the LORD answered. The coming of the Philistines to overthrow Israel was thwarted. The LORD fought for Israel, confused the Philistines, and struck them down.

(3) Israel Relied on Samuel

(a) The Setting of the Stone (7:12)

Israel relied on Samuel, who relied on the LORD. We come to the setting of the stone by Samuel. Verse 12. *"Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the LORD has helped us.'"* (7:12)

This stone was set in the same place that the Ark was stolen a little more than seven months before. Samuel used the name Ebenezer in chapter 4, verse 1. There we noted that Samuel had not named the place at that point in the story, but he would name it at this point in the story. By the time this book was circulated to the Israelites, the place of the stone of Ebenezer was well known, and the new generations would have immediately understood the location as they heard the story told over and over through the years. For Samuel, in chapter 4, it was the easiest way to explain where the battles occurred.

What does the name Ebenezer mean? It means *the stone of help*. It is where Samuel prayed to the LORD, and the LORD helped the nation of Israel push back the Philistines.

(b) The Protection of the Nation (7:13)

How long did the push back of the Philistines last? How long did the protection of the nation remain in place? Samuel told us. Verse 13. *“So 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.”* (7:13)

They were subdued all the days that Samuel was alive. That does not mean that they did not continue to try to conquer Israel. They did. But, as long as Samuel was alive, the Philistines were not successful. Here is another fourth clue that Samuel was not the writer starting in this chapter. How could Samuel have recorded *“And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel”* after his own death.

(c) The Return of the Land (7:14)

At the battle which occurred after Samuel set the stone of Ebenezer, what transpired as the Philistines were pushed back. We come to the return of the land from the hands of the Philistines. Verse 14. *“The 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.”* (7:14)

If you will remember, the Philistines had taken control of the majority of the tribal area of Dan. That was the reason the Danites searched out and found a new place to live in the far northern part of the Promised Land near Mount Hermon. It was not land deeded to them by the LORD at the time of the taking of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, nor did it become a godly part of the Promised Land for there, in the far north, the Danites worshiped, almost exclusively, false gods. But in this passage, Samuel indicates that the Philistines have also encroached on the tribal area of Judah. He did not mention Judah, but Ekron to Gath indicates the border between Philistia and Judah.

Our new writer ends this verse with an interesting sentence. *“So there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.”* The Philistines were not Amorites. The Amorites were Canaanites who should have been totally destroyed at the time of the taking of the Promised Land under Joshua. If you will remember, it was the Amorites who pushed the Danites up into the hills of Dan’s tribal area. The Danites never tried to push them or destroy them as ordered by the LORD through Joshua. The Amorites lived in harmony with the Philistines and were united against Israel many times in Israel’s history. What was Samuel saying to us in this last sentence? He was explaining that because the Philistines had been pushed out of the Promised Land, the Amorites, who were still alive and living on their original land in the original tribal area of Dan, no longer pushed the Danites into the hills and the Danites were able to move down into all its tribal area and live at peace with the Amorites. That point does not mean that the LORD was happy with the Amorites still being alive when He had ordered them dead more than three hundred years before in this point in the story. The LORD will take care of them later in His timing.

(d) The Judgment of the People (7:15-17)

Then the writer comes at this point in the story to tell of Samuel’s judgment of the people of Israel. Verses 15. *“Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ He used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ Then his return was to Ramah, for his house was there, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the LORD.”* (7:15-17)

For whatever reason, the writer sums up Samuel’s story as a judge over the nation of Israel at this point. He tells of his regular trips through the country, his home, since he no longer needed to reside at Shiloh because the Ark of the LORD was packed away in a house in Kiriath-jearim, and he tells of his altar where he worships the LORD. Is Samuel’s life and story over at this point? Absolutely not. He has much life left in him and many more things to do for the LORD. In Samuel’s style, and the new writer’s style, he will now begin a new story that actually should have

been included in some of the stories we have already walked through, but Samuel did not include it in those stories. It occurs during the same timeline of where we have been, but it is a new story for the people of Israel who have concluded that they need an earthly king so they can be like all the surrounding nations. He will begin the next chapter in his story with his great misery. We do not think about Samuel being married and having children, but he was. And, at this point in the story, his Levitical sons were old enough to be judges in Israel. But, like the sons of Eli, Samuel's sons followed suit and brought great misery to him. In addition, because of Samuel's age, Israel will look for a reason to get around his sons judging them, and that will be by asking for a king.

Chapter 8

4. Samuel's Misery (8:1-24:22)

a) The Status of His Sons (8:1-3)

In the first section of the book of First Samuel, we are dealing with the Nation of Israel with Samuel. We looked at Samuel's mother, Samuel's ministry, Samuel's memory, and now, in chapter 8, we come to Samuel's misery. In this part of Samuel's story, we will deal with the status of his sons, the selection of a king, the search for a king, the surprise of a king, the suffering of a king, the start of a king, the sending of a king, and the summons of a king. We start with the status of his sons, Samuel's sons. Chapter 8, verse 1. *"And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. ² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. ³ His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice."* (8:1-3)

The children of the Godliest parents in this world do not always hold the same values as their parents, and that was the case with Samuel's two sons, Joel and Abijah. Both were worthless men, even as Eli's sons were worthless. Nevertheless, for some reason, Samuel placed his sons in positions of authority over the people in Beersheba, the southernmost city in the Promised Land. It was also the least populated because of its remoteness to the south and on the edge of the desert territory.

b) The Selection of a King (8:4-5)

At the time, Samuel's misery was kindled more with the request for the selection of a king. Verse 4. *"Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; ⁵ and they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.'"* (8:4-5)

It is important to note that the elders went to Samuel's home in Ramah. As we have seen many times, it was customary for important meetings to occur at Mizpah. However, because this was just the elders of each tribe and not all the men of Israel, the elders simply gathered at Samuel's home, where they made the excuse that because of Samuel's age, the nation needed a king to judge *"like all the nations."* What the elders said about the surrounding nations was true. Every group of people who lived around the Promised Land, who were not Israelites, had kings. In fact, every city that controlled its surrounding villages had kings even though the city may have only been one of many for the foreign people groups.

One interesting that we might insert at this point is that, later in this book, Samuel will reveal that the elders did not tell Samuel the truth. Their purpose for wanting a king was not truly because of Samuel's sons. The walk of Samuel's sons was a good excuse. The reality will be revealed that an area of the Promised Land was being challenged by an Ammonite named Nahash. Samuel will chastise these elders for not being truthful in chapter 12, verse 12.

(1) The Concern for the LORD (8:6)

The request startled Samuel, and he had great concern for the LORD. Verse 6. *"But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed to the LORD."* (8:6)

What did Samuel do? He did the proper thing. He prayed.

(2) The Commentary of the LORD

(a) Rejected by the People (8:7)

The concern for the LORD led to the commentary of the LORD to Samuel. The LORD knew exactly who was being rejected by the people. Verse 7. *"The LORD said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.'"* (8:7)

The LORD revealed to Samuel that it was Samuel who felt the rejection when he heard the request of the people. The people knew that Samuel could keep his sons under wrap, and that was probably the reason they were in one of the most remote places in the Promised Land. But the elders were smart enough to know that if Samuel died, the sons would attempt to take control of the entire land, and they were worthless men.

The LORD knew what the elders meant. The LORD knew what Samuel really thought. Therefore, the LORD corrected Samuel so that he might know that the elders still had full faith in Samuel, but they did not have full faith in the LORD himself. *"... they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."* In short, they did not trust that the LORD could keep the future judges in check after Samuel's death. The people wanted a worldly king to take the place of Samuel when he died.