

Samuel as Judge – 1 Samuel 7:2-17

Introduction:

In 1 Samuel 6:20 the people of Beth Shemesh ask a very important question, “Who can stand before this holy God?” This question follows the slaying of at least seventy men in that city after they defiled the Ark of God. Prior to that we read of the Philistines on the losing end of a battle with Yahweh. The Philistines may have won on the battlefield, but they certainly were powerless before the God of Israel.

Who could stand before the holy God of Israel? Chapter 7 reintroduces us to Samuel. The book bearing his names starts with his story, then goes silent. Samuel is not mentioned in chapters 4-6, and through those chapters we see chaos and defeat and destruction. The purpose is to highlight the fact that God has prepared someone who can stand before a Holy God on behalf of the nation, someone who will bring the people back to God, who will bring direction to the lost nation, and will even bring victory on the battlefield. That someone is Samuel. As Samuel enters the story again, watch what God is able to do because one man is faithful.

The Nation Repents – 1 Samuel 7:2-6

1. In verse two we read that the nation mourned and sought after the Lord. Knowing what has happened over the past months in Israel, how do you understand this passage?
2. Samuel reappears on the scene, and he challenges the people to do two things if they are serious about following the Lord. What must the people do (v. 3)? If the people do what Samuel says, what will God do?
3. According to verse 4 how did the people respond to this challenge?
4. What was Samuel planning to do according to verse 5? Is it still important for leaders to pray over the people?



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5. Mizpah was the traditional meeting place of the tribes (cf. Judges 20:1-3, 21:1,5,8). What action did Samuel do before the Lord at Mizpah (v. 6)?
6. What did the people do at Mizpah (v. 6)? How might this change the fortunes of the people?
7. Verse 6 ends with a note of Samuel's role. What was it?

The Philistines Attack – 1 Samuel 7:7-11

8. The Philistines heard about the gathering of the Israelites – a religious gathering. These people would not have come prepared for war. So what do the Philistines plan to do (v. 7)? How do the Israelites respond? Why?
9. What do the people of Israel ask Samuel to do (v. 8)? How is this different from what they did in 4:3?
10. What action did Samuel take at this point (v. 9)? How successful was Samuel? What might this tell us about Samuel's relationship to God?
11. The Philistines are watching the proceedings, and when everyone is engrossed in the act of worship as Samuel presents the sacrifice to the Lord, the Philistines make their move. Why would they attack then? (cf. v. 10)
12. It appeared the Philistines had the upper hand – attacking an unsuspecting people. However, something happens that turns the tables on the Philistines. What was it (v. 10)? Who was responsible? What was the result?
13. After the intervention of God how did the battle turn out (v. 11)? What was the lesson Israel was to learn at this point?

Ebenezer – 1 Samuel 7:12-14

14. What action does Samuel take after the defeat of the Philistines (v. 12)? What was the significance of this action? What was the significance of the name?

15. What in verse 13 indicates that this was more than winning a single battle? What seemed to have turned the tide against the Philistines?
16. Verse 14 tells of the extent of the victory. Describe what God did through the leadership of Samuel for Israel according to these verses.

Samuel the Judge – 1 Samuel 7:15-17

17. In verse 15 Samuel is described as a judge. What was the role of the judge? What was their place in Israel's history? How long was Samuel judge?
18. Looking at what Samuel did in verse 16, his circuit between the three cities, what might be part of his duties as a judge?
19. According to verse 17, why did Samuel continue to return to Ramah? What did he do there?

Conclusion:

“Baal was the main fertility deity in Canaanite religion. Often depicted with a lightning bolt in his hand, Baal was responsible for making it rain and bring fertility to the land.”¹ Yet when the people who bowed before Baal attempted to destroy the children of Israel, the God of Israel shows up with thunder and lightning and sends the Philistines into panic. How can a foreign god take over the skies ruled by Baal? Only one can be the true God....

That day Israel was reminded, once again, of the power of God. Their enemies were driven out and destroyed not by their military might or prowess, but because of the hand of God. How many times had God rescued Israel so that they could have a home in Palestine? Samuel knew the people would be quick to forget that it was through repentance and faith in God that the battle was won, so he sets up a marker, a stone of remembrance. He gives it an appropriate name: Ebenezer. God has helped us this far, He will continue to do so.

¹ Kevin J. Mellish, *New Beacon Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), p. 77.

The hymn writer Robert Robinson wrote a hymn for Christians capturing the theme of this story for us. God has helped us, delivering us from our enemies through Jesus Christ. May we raise an Ebenezer; may we never forget that God is our deliverer.

Here I raise my Ebenezer,
Hither by thine help I've come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me, when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God,
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.