**FAITHFUL REGARDLESS**

***STONE OF REMEMBRANCE***

R. Giglio 6/10/21

We are studying the Book of 1st Samuel and following the life of Samuel.

He is a stellar example of someone who was “Faithful Regardless”.

All around him were very bad and evil influences from the time he was a young boy, he grew up under the poor mentorship of Eli the High Priest.

He watched Israel suffer defeat in battle by the Philistines, and the Ark of the Covenant get captured by the enemy.

*Yet he was “Faithful to God, regardless of the circumstances”*

He was the last Judge in the time of the Judges and the First Prophet to the Kings in the time of the Kings.

He was raised in the house of Eli the High Priest of the tabernacle during a time where there was so much evil and corruption in Israel and the priesthood, that God allowed the Philistines to defeat Israel in battle and steal the Ark of the Covenant, to get their attention and lead them to repentance.

The Ark did so much damage in the cities of the Philistines, that they sent it back with an offering of gold in hopes that God would relieve them of their sudden tumors and rat infestation.

The Ark was received in Beth Shemesh, and sent to Kiriath Jearim (all cities in the vicinity of *future Jerusalem*, where it would eventually stay).

Samuel was on the rise. His reputation was spreading throughout Israel as one who hears from God, and Judges wisely. He was recognized as the leader of Israel, the last leader before they began anointing kings.

**1st Samuel 7:1-17**

**1**So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord. They brought it to Abinadab’s house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the Lord. **2**The ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time—twenty years in all.

**Samuel Subdues the Philistines at Mizpah**

Then all the people of Israel turned back to the Lord. **3**So Samuel said to all the Israelites, “If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” **4**So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.

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**5**Then Samuel said, “Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the Lord for you.” **6**When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the Lord.” Now Samuel was serving as leader[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+sam+7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-7359a)] of Israel at Mizpah.

**7**When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. **8**They said to Samuel, “Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.” **9**Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel’s behalf, and the Lord answered him.

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**10**While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. **11**The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar.

**12**Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

**13**So the Philistines were subdued and they stopped invading Israel’s territory. Throughout Samuel’s lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines. **14**The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to Israel, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

**15**Samuel continued as Israel’s leader all the days of his life. **16**From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places.

**17**But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the Lord.

Israel was delighted and relieved to have the Ark back in their possession. I’m sure many were disturbed and or grieving over the devastating loss of life that had just taken place at the hands of the Philistines AND allowed by God (34,000 lives).

But instead of becoming bitter and faithless and running from God, they turned back to the Lord (which is exactly what He’d hoped they would do).

**7:2-4** “Then all the people of Israel turned back to the Lord. **3**So Samuel said to all the Israelites, “*If* you are returning to the Lord *with all your hearts*, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and *commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only*, and *he will deliver you* out of the hand of the Philistines.” **4**So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.

God takes no delight in allowing calamity to fall upon his people, but He also is very serious about not allowing them to drift away from Him indefinitely. He cares very much that they stay close to Him and is willing to let them know how important it is for us to remain in Him.

Samuel led his people to turn back to the Lord, and it was the beginning of a time of blessing that these people had never known before.

For them, “turning to the Lord with all their hearts” meant ridding themselves of foreign gods and committing to serve The Lord ONLY.” (not Baals, Ashtereths, etc.)

Somewhere in the midst of being led by their own evil priests, having a history of corruption among their leaders for centuries, being oppressed by the Philistines in battle, and having not heard from God through a prophet in many years, they turned to their own devices for comfort, distraction and diversion.

Instead of finding their satisfaction in the Lord, and the things of God, they pursued all that the “world” had to offer and indulged in that.

God loved them too much to let them wander off endlessly into oblivion. He did what He had to do to get their attention and get them to repent.

Do you ever feel this way?

Perhaps you do today.

Perhaps all the turmoil over the past 16 months has brought you to a place of despair or indifference. Perhaps you’ve sought out diversions and distractions that are not of God instead of *trusting Him and pursuing Him with all your heart.*

Just like he did with Israel, he wants you to turn to Him wholeheartedly, so He can bless you and protect You.

When Samuel saw the people’s repentance;

**7:9-10 “**He cried out to the Lord on Israel’s behalf, and the Lord answered him…**.**that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites.”

This is much like what happened to the Israelites when they were finally freed from Egypt. They were not an army, they were barely a nation, they were 2 million newly freed slaves wandering in the desert and being chased and pinned up against the Red Sea by the most powerful army in the world, the Egyptians!

Yet God did not fail them, He told them;

**Exodus 14:14** “The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

*(We all know what happened next.)*

In the case of Samuel and the people of Israel, God did not just defend them in battle, he restored the cities that were captured, He kept His hand against the Philistines and allowed them to make peace with their neighbors, the Ammonites.

**7:13-14 “**So the Philistines were subdued and they stopped invading Israel’s territory. Throughout Samuel’s lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines. **14**The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to Israel, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.”

Samuel took a moment to honor God for all this. He did it in a unique and special way,

He set up an “Ebenezer”.

*(so far we’ve met both Ichabod & Ebenezer in this book)*

**7:12**Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

Ebenezer - “stone of help”, to remember God’s help for us.

God brought them through tremendous hardships and suffering.

He did not forsake them even though their leaders did and the enemies took advantage of them.

This was a time of transition, from the hard days of oppression and defeat, to a new season of victory and peace.

Samuel wanted to mark the moment, and declare that;

*“Thus far the Lord has helped us.”*

WE are in a time of transition right now.

Not just Spring into Summer,

Or Pandemic into post-pandemic (although that is very significant)

But spiritually, it is a new day, a new season and those who have been faithful, have persevered, remained steadfast and not turned away will be rewarded.

**Rev. 3:12** “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.”

It’s important however to take a moment, *just as Samuel did*, to recognize how God has *helped* you. You who have overcome will be “Pillars”, to help strengthen others.

Question:

How has God helped you?

You may think he has not helped you,

You may think God has deserted you, or abandoned you,

*But the opposite is true.*

You are alive,

You are loved by God and others,

You have grown and matured through this time,

You are stronger and wiser than you were before,

You have been given gifts,

You have been given time,

You have been given Salvation, the free gift of God through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

You have every reason to say “*Thus far the Lord has helped me.”*

Today we are going to do something different.

We are going to take a moment to reflect on the recent past.

Meditate on the times and ways God has helped you through this season.

And just as Samuel did, we will hold on to an Ebenezer, a stone of remembrance as we remember and offer gratitude for how God has helped us in these days.

A STONE OF REMEMBRANCE

*(Find a stone or something durable that you can hold onto and remember.)*

As we reflect on the words of the Hymn

“Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” (Robert Robinson 1758)

*(verse 2)*

*Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Hither by Thy help I 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,
Bought me with His precious blood.*

Let’s hold on to our “ebenezer” and remember *God’s Help to us these hard times,*

*God has brought us through hard times, sustaining us protecting us providing for us, and in spite of the challenges, has done GREAT THINGS!*

*Let’s remember this in our hearts and not forget to thank Him and praise Him for it!*

(Come Thou Fount)