Quarter Theme: Generations—From Canaan to Jerusalem

November Theme: From Judges to Kings

November 15, 2026 "Israel Recommits to God" 1 Samuel 7:3-11, 15-17
Lesson 3

Intro

In last week's lesson, the Ark of the Covenant was captured by Philistines. In the next 7 months, it was moved to three different cities, each time resulting in disaster for the Philistines. They realize it's not a good luck charm, so they send the Ark to an Israelite settlement of Beth Shemesh. Seventy Israelites there look into the ark and die. They had violated God's holiness by looking on something which only the high priest was to see, and that only once a year. It was supposed to be placed in the "Most Holy Place", not be left out as a tourist attraction. So the people of Beth Shemesh also wanted the ark gone, and asked the people of Kiriath Jearim (about 7 miles west of Jerusalem) to take it. They did, with the ark remaining there for 20 years. During this time, the Israelites repented, turning their hearts back to the Lord.

Read 1 Samuel 7:3-11

1. vs. 3: Samuel's first instruction words are an "if / then" statement
    - IF they have returned to the Lord, THEN get rid of the foreign gods in their houses
    - They are then to serve God only
    - Samuel is connecting worship to service
        - If they are to serve God, they must worship Him only, not false gods
        - Right hearts require the active pursuit of holiness
    - The Philistine victories over Israel have caused a lack of faith in God for the people
    - God promises to protect them, to deliver them from the Philistines
    - He will do this if the people will live in the covenant relationship with Him

2. vs. 4: The Baals refer to all the Canaanite gods of crops, fertility, weather, and so on
    - Putting these gods away means placing trust in God for crops, weather, and all else
    - The people must make and "either / or" decision; it can't be "both…and"

3. vs. 5: Next, Samuel tells the people, all of Israel, to go to Mizpah
    - This town is very close to Samuel's hometown of Ramah
    - Samuel says he will intercede with God for the people of Israel
        - To intercede is to mediate between two parties, here between God and Israel
    - Samuel is going to help reconcile the people's fractured relationship with God
    - To intercede is one of the most important functions of an OT prophet

4. vs. 6: Israel does several things here, all following what Samuel tells them to do
    - First, they do gather at Mizpah, as he told them to do in vs. 5
        - This is the first gathering of the whole nation in over 200 years
        - This is a reconnection of all Israel, rather than just tribes
    - Second, they pour out water before the Lord
        - Idol worshippers also poured out water, but in order to give care to their gods

The water here isn't something God needs, but the people need it to survive
This offering is an act of penitence and proof of their sincerity
Third and fourth, the people fast and confess their sins
Fasting means not eating/drinking in order to focus on spiritual matters
Fasting also means no time is needed to prep a mean—more time for focus
This event marks the first time Samuel functions as a judge for Israel
The word "leader" is used in Judges to describe the judges and their actions
This is the first time the word has been used to describe Samuel

5. vs. 7: The Philistines hear about this gathering and decide to attack
Mizpah is high visible in all directions; Israel is vulnerable to an attack
The gathering of Israel means something different to the Philistines than to Israel
It was common for religious gatherings to precede a battle
Israel gathers on a day not connected to a known holiday or festival
The Philistines, seeing no obvious reason, assume it is prep for a battle
They decide to attack before they get attacked by Israel

6. vs. 8: Israel has come for religious purposes; they are not ready for battle
They ask Samuel to continue to intercede for them with God for safety
Here, they appropriately place their faith in God to "rescue" them

7. vs. 9: Samuel performs a sacrifice of a "whole burnt offering"
This type of offering indicates a full, complete surrender to God
It is also used here to cleanse the people of their guilt and to mediate their prayers
The sacrificial animal is a "suckling lamb" indicating it still nurses; it's quite young
Normally, performing a sacrifice is only done by priests, from the tribe of Levi
Samuel isn't a priest, and he's from the tribe of Ephraim
Nevertheless, he performs this sacrifice and offers prayers on behalf of the people

8. vs. 10: While Samuel is doing the sacrifice, the Philistines are closing in on Israel to attack
But God has heard the prayers, seen the change in heart, and He now answers
He makes it thunder so loudly that it terrifies and confuses the Philistines
The verse says it "threw them into…a panic"
The Philistine God Baal was the god of storms
But this thunder scares them—it's beyond what Baal could do in their eyes
Instead, the Philistines are filled with fear

9. vs. 11: The Israelites, seeing God's help, rush out against the Philistines
This is the opposite of the last battle, when Israel fled when the ark was taken
Now they chase down the Philistines and slaughter them
This is the last recorded battle between Israel and the Philistines

Read 1 Samuel 7:15-17

10. vs. 15: The victory noted in vs. 11 is decisive; the Philistines don't attack Israel again
    Peace in the land is the result
    Also, Samuel is called "Israel's leader all the days of his life"
    This indicates he was a political and military leader, as well as administering justice
    There isn't a specific time frame given for Samuel's leadership
    This shows his complete devotion—he served Israel and God all his life

11. vs. 16: Previously, Eli lead by having people come to him at Shiloh
    Samuel travels around the country, using a circuit visiting the same cities each time
    This shows that his influence is felt in many places, not in just one town

12. vs. 17: Samuel ends his circuits by finishing in his home town of Ramah
    Eli has passed, and the ark is now in Kiriath Jearim
        There is no need for Samuel to remain in Shiloh, as he once did
    Samuel establishes a new place of worship in Ramah near his home
        This could be for either of two reasons
            Either Shiloh was destroyed in war, or it's no longer home

Application: Under Samuel's leadership, the people of Israel demonstrated honest repentance and renewal. They identified themselves with the Lord and He responded quickly with the help they asked for. A story that began with defeat and despair ended with recommitment and victory. This brings up a key point for us today. Hearts and lives attuned to God and purified from unrighteousness are ready to see God's deliverance. But righteous living requires sacrifice. God still asks His people to reject the idols that the culture offers. God still wants our whole hearts. So we need to reflect on our status: are we living in right relationship with both the Lord and the community of faith? Are we asking humbly for help when danger arises?

Prayer: Father God, we return to You with all our hearts, minds, and strength. We confess our sins and ask You to help us set aside anything that separates us from You. We humble acknowledge our need for Your grace and provision. Protect us, Lord, and deliver us from our enemies. In Jesus' name, Amen.