

July 3, 2022

“Samuel Administers Justice”
Lesson 41 of Unit

I Samuel 7:3-17

Intro

“Out of order” signs are frustrating. Some glitch has caused the thing we need to not work. That’s an appropriate label for the world—“out of order”. God made everything perfect in the beginning, but sin has caused a world of disorder compared to the Creator’s original plan.

“Out of order” also fits Israel during the period of the Judges (about 1380-1050 BC). Last quarter we studied God’s definition of justice, which provided order for His people. With the laws He gave them, He also made it very clear that disobedience to those laws would bring serious negative consequences—disorder.

To correct the moral and spiritual disorder, God raised up judges as deliverers for the nation. The last of these judges was Samuel, who judged from roughly 1067-1043 BC. During Samuel’s ministry, God’s word was proclaimed and upheld throughout the land of Israel.

Read I Samuel 7:3-17

1. vs. 3: Samuel speaks to “the whole house of Israel”

He is probably speaking to the elders/leaders of the tribes of Israel

The command Samuel gives leaves no room for variation

“Rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths”

The people seem sincere in realizing they have strayed from God and want to return

Samuel tells them the only way is to forsake all other gods

“Serve Him only” is the way back into a favorable relationship with God

If they do this, God will “deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines”

The Israelites have caused their own problems here

Their true enemy wasn’t the Philistines

It was their own lack of respect and obedience to the God who delivers them

2. vs. 4: The people obey

They “put away their Baals and Ashtoreths”

Even though Baal wasn’t mentioned in vs. 3, there is a connection

Ashtoreth was a goddess of sex and war

She was a companion and love of Baal

If Israel gets rid of their Ashtoreths (all images of her), they get rid of their Baals also

3. vs. 5: Samuel then takes a further step

He tells “all Israel” to go to Mizpah and he will “intercede with the Lord for you”

All Israel likely means the elders and tribe leaders, like in vs. 3

Interceding is a most important function of OT prophets and leaders

Samuel and Moses are acknowledged as great intercessors for Israel

See Ps. 99:6 and Jer. 15:1

4. vs. 6: Here the people are doing what they were directed to do
They come to Mizpah, but then they do something not directly commanded
They pour our water “before the Lord”
This is not commanded in the Law of Moses
It seems similar to the drink offering that accompanies the burnt offering
Num. 28:1-7
Pouring out the offering represents pouring out one’s self as an offering
The people then fast, avoiding eating (and possibly drinking)
Time used for meal prep and eating are now devoted to prayer and worship
The people then confess: “We have sinned against the Lord”
Their actions prior to this confession show a sincere heart and acknowledgement
A confession like this is necessary before there can be renewal and revival
5. vs. 7: The Philistines hear of Israel gathering at Mizpah and come to attack them
This group has long been an opponent of Israel, and has defeated them many times
The Israelites are, not unexpectedly, afraid of the Philistines coming toward them
6. vs. 8: Samuel said in vs. 5 that he would pray for Israel—be their intercessor with God
Israel now turns to him: “Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us!”
7. vs. 9: Samuel doesn’t pray first—he offers a burnt offering to God initially
A suckling lamb is one that is still nursing, and must be at least 7 days old
Perhaps this type of offering shows the weakness and vulnerability of Israel

Samuel then prays (“cried out to the Lord”) and God heard him
The following verses show how God answers this prayer
8. vs. 10: Even while Samuel is praying (in vs. 9), God is at work to defeat the Philistines
The Philistines are close enough to engage in battle
But God causes loud thunder, and the Philistines went “into...a panic”
God helps Israel by creating chaos in their enemies
Israel is then able to rout the Philistines
This is remarkable—they were terrified of them in vs. 7-8
Now they are victorious in battle—because of God’s intervention
9. vs. 11: God has caused the defeat of the Philistines, but now the men of Israel have their tasks to do
They pursue and kill the Philistines as they attempt to get to a place of protection
10. vs. 12: Samuel now creates a memorial for this event
Stone have been used many times to commemorate a significant event
He places a stone somewhere between Mizpah and Shen
The exact location of Shen is unknown, so where this stone was placed is unsure
He called the stone “Ebenezer”
Ebenezer means “stone of help”
This stone reflects not only what has just happened, but God’s constant help
“Thus far” says Samuel
This means, “God has guided Israel from the beginning up to this very time

The hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” uses this “Ebenezer” concept
Vs. 2 begins: “Here I raise my Ebenezer...”

This is an acknowledgement that God has done things for us

The Ebenezer is whatever we use as a commemoration of God’s help

Somewhere in the 1970’s, the line was altered, but kept the same concept

In our brown hymnal, the line now reads, “Thou my glad commemoration...”

11. vs. 13: This victory lasts for quite a while

“The Philistines were subdued”

They don’t invade Israel again during Samuel’s reign as judge

12. vs. 14: This verse describes some of what happened when the Philistines were subdued

Towns that the Philistines had captured from Israel were returned to them

Israel also helps neighbors who have also been under Philistine control

This led to peace between Israel and the Amorites, which isn’t common

13. vs. 15: Samuel is acknowledged to be a judge over Israel for the rest of his life

This is in the role of judge as we think of the term today

He listens to cases, and he makes sure justice is administered rightly

14. vs. 16: From this time, Samuel has a judging circuit

His home town is Ramah (see vs. 17)

He goes to Bethel, then Gilgal, and then to Mizpah

He then goes back to Ramah

The entire circuit is about 25 miles, so not a huge circuit in his later days

There are other judges in Israel, but all of them have a fairly local jurisdiction

This is maybe why the nation asks for a king in I Samuel 8

15. vs. 17: Samuel’s home is in Ramah, where he administers justice

He also builds an altar there

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also built altars

All these altars, Samuel’s included, are used to mark a spiritual milestone

Samuel’s milestone appears to be as a thanksgiving

He has been allowed to return home after serving in the tabernacle most of his life

Application: This passage has a direct application to our lives today. We too must acknowledge our own sins and do away with anything that comes between us and God. We cannot genuinely confront a sin-stained world until we have properly confronted and addressed the sin in our own lives.

Once the Israelites dealt with their sin, God provided an amazing act of deliverance. God is willing to do the same in our lives when we present ourselves to him—with no strings attached.

Prayer: Father God, help us take a good hard look at ourselves today in light of Your word and Your holiness. Forgive us when we fail to take seriously the power and influence of sin. Remind us that we cannot influence the world around us until we ourselves have been surrendered to you—something we are called to do each and every day. In Jesus' name, Amen.