

Third Presbyterian Church
Midweek Bible Study
I Samuel - Chapter 7
The Stolen Presence of God

1 Samuel 7:1-17 (NIV)

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the Lord. [2] It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord. [3] And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "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. [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." And Samuel was leader 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. And 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 offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf, and the Lord answered him. [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 Car. [12] Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the Lord helped us." [13] So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again.

1. What are some ways we can get a false sense of security with our relationship with God?
2. What is a situational prayer life and what are the dangers of having one?
3. What does a person's life look like when they allow the Presence of God to be Stolen?
4. What are some things in life that people allow to steal the presence of God from their lives and how can you minister to someone regarding the stolen presence of God?
5. Samuel told them if they were going to come back to God, their relationship with God needed to be exclusive and they had to put their idols away. What does that mean and how can you explain that to someone today?
6. Discuss the following statement: The only reason someone should question our relationship with the Lord is to learn more about what they have already seen, Not to question if the relationship exists.
7. God has put us together in this church to be a help to one another. Why then is it so hard for many to see the help that God has for them right in the church that God sent them? What can we do individually and as a church to change this mindset?
8. When the Israelites were serious about coming back to God, the enemy got word and came to defeat them again.
 - A. How should we prepare for another attack of the enemy?
 - B. What are the benefits of encouraging the pastor to call out to God on our behalf?
9. Share your main takeaway from the sermon and the lesson?

The Ministry of Samuel and the Events That Closed the Era of the Judges: A Lesson on How to Live Victoriously, 7:1-17

(7:1-17) Introduction— Victory, over Enemies— Conquest, over Enemies— Victorious Life, Seeking: everyone desires to live a victorious, conquering life. Going through life depressed and discouraged—constantly feeling oppressed and defeated with no purpose or meaning to life—is not a pleasant picture. All of us yearn to be conquerors, to walk through life victoriously, triumphing over all the problems, temptations, and trials of life.

Living a life of conquest and victory is the subject of this great passage of Scripture. The Israelites had been defeated in war and subjected under the oppression of the Philistines. They were a downtrodden, defeated, and discouraged people. Even their worship center at Shiloh had been destroyed. The worst emotion that can grip the human heart had captured the spirit of the Israelites: that of being alienated, cut off, separated, and abandoned by God. The present passage covers a span of twenty-some years, years of mourning and crying out to God for deliverance. This is: *The Ministry of Samuel and the Events That Closed the Era of the Judges: A Lesson on How to Live Victoriously, 7:1-17*.

1. Samuel led Israel to repentance: A call for confession and total commitment to the Lord (v.1-6).
2. Samuel stirred the Israelites to defeat the Philistines: victory and deliverance from bondage through prayer (v.7-14).
3. Samuel closed the era of the judges and launched the era of the kings: a lesson on faithfulness (v.15-17).

1. (7:1-6) Repentance, Duty— Confession, Duty— Commitment, Duty— Ministry, Duty— Message, Subject of— Renewal, Example of— Israel, Renewal and Revival— Ark of God, Recovered— Ark, Location of: Samuel led Israel to repentance, calling upon the people to confess their sins and make a total commitment to God. What happened covered a twenty-year period of time.

1. The Ark was carried to Kiriath Jearim and placed in the house of Abinadab and his son Eleazar (1 Samuel 7:1). The son was actually consecrated, *officially set apart*, to look after and protect the Ark. This he did for over twenty years.

Why was the Ark not returned to Shiloh? Because Shiloh had evidently been destroyed earlier by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:10-11). Four facts seemed to point to Shiloh's destruction:

- ⇒ First, Shiloh is never again mentioned as a worship center in 1 or 2 Samuel after the Philistine defeat.
- ⇒ Second, the center of Samuel's ministry became his hometown of Ramah after the Philistine defeat (7:17).
- ⇒ Third, the Ark was not returned to Shiloh after its recovery from the Philistines (7:1-2).
- ⇒ Fourth, the book of Psalms and Jeremiah mention the destruction of the sanctuary at Shiloh (Psalms 78:60; Jeremiah 7:12-14; 26:6, 9).

However, there is a possibility that the Tabernacle escaped destruction even though the city of Shiloh was destroyed. The *NIV Study Bible* holds this position, pointing out that it was first moved to Nob (1 Samuel 21:1-9). And then in the days of David and Solomon, it was located at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29; 2 Chronicles 1:3, 13). Later Solomon brought the Tabernacle to the temple after its construction had been completed (1 Kings 3:4; 8:4). There is, of course, the possibility that the furnishings of the Tabernacle had been quickly removed before the Philistine invasion and had been taken elsewhere for safekeeping. But the tent of the Tabernacle itself had been destroyed. And then sometime in the future, the tent of the Tabernacle was reconstructed and placed in the city of Nob; later in David's and Solomon's days, it was moved to Gibeon. Whatever the case, the important fact to note is that the Ark itself remained under the care of Eleazar for twenty years. During these twenty years, the Israelites experienced revival, a renewed commitment to the LORD.

2. It was the shock of having lost the Ark and worship center that stirred the people to seek after the LORD with a renewed commitment (1 Samuel 7:2). With the loss of their central worship center and Ark, the people felt as though the presence of God had been lost. Remember that the Ark represented the presence of God among the people. Without the Ark, it was as though God were not present with them, as though God were

absent and unavailable to help, guide, and protect them. Consequently, the people began to mourn the loss of the Ark and their worship center and to seek after the LORD.

3. The renewed spiritual interest of the people aroused Samuel to preach one message for twenty years: the message of personal repentance and total commitment to the LORD (1 Samuel 7:3-4). Samuel challenged all Israel to repent by putting away their false gods and their false worship. The reference to "foreign gods" is synonymous with the false god "Baal" (1 Samuel 7:4; 12:10; Judges 2:13; 10:6). Baal dominated the false worship of the Canaanite nations. This false god's name means *master* or *lord*, and he was symbolized in the molten image of a bull. Baal was considered the god of fertility and of weather, being the Canaanite god who controlled the rain. He was thus responsible for the livestock of the farm.

Ashtaroth was the fertility goddess who was worshipped as the goddess of love (sex) and of war. Prostitute priestesses were a legalized part of the cult of this fertility goddess. She was closely associated with fornication and drunkenness.

Israel had forsaken the LORD, turned away from Him to serve Baal and Ashtaroth. This was an act of spiritual treason, an act that was reprehensible. It was gross idolatry, and such treachery had found its way into every part of Hebrew life. Thus, the message of repentance had to be preached by Samuel. He was forced to focus upon the utter necessity of turning away from false gods and false worship and of being totally committed to the LORD.

Note the promise that Samuel preached: if the people would repent and make a total commitment to the LORD, the LORD would deliver them from their enemies. He would even deliver them from that great enemy who stood so mightily opposed to them—the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:3).

Gradually, over the twenty-year period of focusing upon this one single message, the Israelites obeyed the challenge of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:4). They repented, put away their false gods and false worship. And they turned wholeheartedly to the LORD, serving Him and Him alone.

4. Once the mass movement of spiritual repentance had begun, Samuel immediately called for a nationwide assembly to be held at Mizpah. His purpose was to publicly confirm the people's decision to renew their commitment to the LORD (1 Samuel 7:5-6). In summoning the people to assemble, note exactly what Samuel said: he would pray, intercede for them. He would cry out for the LORD to accept the people's repentance, forgiving their sins and beginning once again to fulfill His promises to them, the promises of guiding and protecting them.

When the people assembled, three events of significance happened:

- a. The people drew water and poured it out before the LORD (1 Samuel 7:6). This was a ritual symbolizing the pouring out of a person's heart in repentance and commitment to the LORD (Psalms 62:8). For twenty years, the people's hearts had been bearing the burden of sin, mourning and seeking for the LORD's presence. Now, the people had come together in a great period of public confession and repentance, seeking for a revival of their relationship with the LORD. To symbolize their seeking, they observed this ritual before the LORD.
- b. The people fasted and confessed their sins, asking God to forgive and renew their relationship with Him. They stood in desperate need of His presence, provision, and protection against their archenemy, the Philistines. They cried out, "We have sinned against the LORD" (1 Samuel 7:6).
 - c. The people began to look to Samuel as their nationwide leader, as the judge of all Israel (1 Samuel 7:6). Beginning with this revival, Samuel took up the *mantle of leadership* and became the chief magistrate of all Israel. His nationwide ministry was now launched. Remember, the judge of that day and time not only rendered decisions and settled disputes among the people, but he was also the chief executive, the leader of the people. In Samuel's case, he became the judge of all Israel.

Thought 1. God demands repentance and wholehearted commitment to Him. If we sin, He demands repentance. If we worship false gods or become involved in false religion or false worship, God demands repentance. All idolatry and false worship must be renounced and abandoned. And we must return to

God, seeking His forgiveness and cleansing and the revival of our relationship with Him. Our hearts must be poured out before God, completely given over to Him, to serve Him only.

Once we have repented and turned wholeheartedly to God, God will forgive our sins and cleanse us. And He will renew His relationship with us. God will grant a sense, a consciousness of His presence and begin anew to guide, protect, and provide for us. Repentance and true commitment are the only way to salvation and the fruitful, overflowing life promised by God.

1) God demands repentance.

"And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

"Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

"And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:2-3).

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

2) God demands that we wholeheartedly commit our lives to Him.

"And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13).

2. (7:7-14) Victory, over Enemies— Deliverance, from Enemies— Bondage, Deliverance from, Through Prayer— Prayer, Results of— Philistines, Enemy of Israel— Israel, Victory over, Philistines: Samuel stirred the Israelites to defeat the Philistines. This is a dramatic picture of the believer's victory from bondage, a victory that comes through prayer. This was to be a decisive victory over the Philistines, so decisive that it would break the back of Philistine power as a major military force.

1. When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had assembled at Mizpah, they immediately mobilized their armed forces and marched to attack Israel (1 Samuel 7:7). Although the Israelites had assembled only for worship, the Philistines interpreted their assembly as a potential threat to them. Terror struck the Israelites, for they were not prepared for war. Many of them had traveled from the outer reaches of the nation and had neither weapon nor provision to engage in battle. Their assembly had been called for worship, not to mobilize for war.

2. Nevertheless, the Israelites did the only thing they could: they appealed to Samuel for continued, unbroken prayer (1 Samuel 7:8). They begged him to cry to the LORD for rescue and not to stop his praying. They were desperate, standing on the brink of being totally wiped out by the attacking Philistines.

3. Note Samuel's response, his appeal and prayer to God (1 Samuel 7:9). He approached God through the burnt offering, seeking reconciliation for the people, reconciliation through the blood of the substitute sacrifice. The burnt offering was the only way to approach God, the only acceptable way. Samuel knew that the people had to become acceptable if God was going to deliver them; consequently, he offered up the burnt offering just as God had instructed His people to do (see outline— Leviticus 1:1-17 and notes— Leviticus 1:1-17 for more discussion). Once the substitute sacrifice had been offered, Samuel cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD wonderfully answered him.

4. The prayer was miraculously answered by God and victory was significantly achieved (1 Samuel 7:10-12). Just as Samuel was offering up the sacrifice, the Philistines launched their aggressive attack (1 Samuel 7:10). But just as the Philistines struck, a terrifying thunderstorm broke loose upon the Philistines, a thunderstorm so fierce that it struck panic within them. Encouraged by the enemy's panic and flight, the Israelites grabbed what weapons they could and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them all the way to Beth Car. The victory was significant, so much so that Samuel memorialized it by putting up a stone monument

between Mizpah and Shen (1 Samuel 7:12). The memorial was named Ebenezer, which means "the stone of help."

5. The results of the victory were extremely important for Israel (1 Samuel 7:13-14). Three momentous events took place as a result of the victory:

- ⇒ The backbone of the Philistine army as a major power was broken during Samuel's leadership and judgeship (1 Samuel 7:13).
- ⇒ The territory formally conquered by the Philistine enemy was regained (1 Samuel 7:14). It included the cities stretching from Ekron to Gath, cities that the Philistines had originally conquered and taken from Israel.
- ⇒ The power of Israel struck fear in the surrounding Amorite nations (Canaanites), so much fear that they sought and made peace with Israel (1 Samuel 7:14).

Thought 1. Just as Samuel prayed and victory was given over the Philistines, so a triumphant life—victory, conquest, deliverance, and salvation—comes through prayer. It is God who delivers us and gives us victory, conquest over the enemies that confront and attempt to defeat us. Throughout life, enemy after enemy will attack, enemies such as...

- people who ridicule, slander, abuse, assault, or persecute us
- people or things that trap, enslave, or put us in bondage
- people who hurt us, causing pain and suffering, or who attempt to destroy us or to wreak utter havoc upon our lives
- people who act irresponsibly, involving us in accidents or bringing some disease upon us or death to a loved one

There are all kinds of enemies who attack us during life. In addition to people, there are other enemies in this corruptible world. There are enemies such as germs, diseases, drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. There are cravings of the flesh that enslave us such as immorality, adultery, and the resulting breakup of families that cause so much pain and suffering. Put simply, there are innumerable enemies that seek to destroy us as we walk throughout life.

The way of conquest—victory over the enemies of life—comes through prayer. God and God alone can deliver and save us from defeat, a life of enslavement to the flesh and the ways of this world. If we crave deliverance, prayer will arouse God to hear and save us.

1) God will hear prayer.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak" (Matthew 26:41).

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

2) God has answered the prayers of His people down through the ages.

a) God answered the prayer of Moses when the people were murmuring against Him.

"And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, *which* when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them" (Exodus 15:24-25).

b) God answered the prayer of Gideon when he feared the enemy and needed to know if it was God's will for him to attack the enemy.

"And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground" (Judges 6:39-40).

- c) God answered the prayer of Hannah for a child.

"For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him" (1 Samuel 1:27).

- d) God answered the prayer of Samuel in the present passage, a prayer beseeching God to deliver His people from their fierce enemy, the Philistines.

"And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered *it for* a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel" (1 Samuel 7:9-10).

- e) God heard the prayer of Solomon when Solomon asked God to pour out His presence upon the temple.

"And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (1 Kings 9:3).

- f) God heard the prayer of Elijah to prove that He and He alone was the LORD God.

"Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou *art* the LORD God, and *that* thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench" (1 Kings 18:37-38).

- g) God heard the prayer of Hezekiah when he prayed for deliverance from the king of Assyria.

"Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou *art* the LORD God, *even* thou only. Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *That* which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard" (2 Kings 19:19-20).

- h) God heard the prayer of Jehosophat when he prayed for deliverance from the enemy.

"And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him" (2 Chronicles 18:31).

i) God heard the prayer of Ezra.

"So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us" (Ezra 8:23).

j) God heard the prayer of Zacharias when he prayed for a son.

"But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" (Luke 1:13).

k) God heard the prayer of the early church when it prayed for the LORD to pour out His Spirit upon them.

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

3. (7:15-17) Faithfulness, of Samuel— Ministry, of Samuel: Samuel closed the era of the judges and launched the era of the kings. He stands as the pivotal figure between these two significant periods of Israel's history. This is exactly what Scripture declares:

1. Samuel was faithful as a judge (1 Samuel 7:15-16; 8:1-4). From year to year—through all the days of his life—he traveled as a circuit judge to four major cities in the tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. These cities were...

- Bethel: where Jacob had his famous dream (Genesis 28:10-22).
- Gilgal: a city close by Jericho, a city where the Israelites first camped after crossing the Jordan River to conquer the promised land (Joshua 4:19-20).
- Mizpah: the city where Israel's national repentance or revival had taken place (1 Samuel 7:5-6).
- Ramah: the home city of Samuel, the place where he had based his ministry since the destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:17).

Note that these verses are a summary of Samuel's life, covering his ministry throughout the remainder of his life. The point here is striking: Samuel is serving as the last judge. He is closing the era of the judges and opening up the era of the kings. In the very next chapter, the Israelites will begin their cry for a king "just like other nations" (8:5, 19-20). Samuel is being presented as the last judge; after him, the Israelites will be ruled by kings.

2. Samuel was also faithful as a prophet and priest or worship leader (1 Samuel 7:17). As we have just seen, Samuel called the people to repentance and wholehearted commitment to the LORD (1 Samuel 7:1-6). He was recognized by all the Israelites as a prophet and had a national influence (3:20; 4:1). From this point on, Samuel

served as the priest or worship leader of Israel (1 Samuel 7:17). He built an altar in his hometown which obviously became the worship center of the nation during his life and ministry.

Thought 1. God demands faithfulness. Whatever our profession or employment, God demands that we be faithful and do a good job. We are to work and labor as though we serve the LORD God Himself. In fact, when it comes to labor, God actually says that we do serve Him. In God's eyes, we are not working for an earthly employer but rather for the Creator of the universe, the Creator who placed the care and welfare of the world in our hands (Genesis 2:15; 3:23). We are therefore to labor ever so diligently, doing our very best and giving our best effort and energy. We are to be faithful no matter what our call or labor.

"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11).

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2).

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).