

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 7

Samuel Subdues the Philistines at Mizpah

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. 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 her, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the power of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. ¹⁵ Samuel continued as judge over Israel 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 judged Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.

7:1 *Abinadab’s house.* The ark remained in relative obscurity at Abinadab’s house until David brought it to Jerusalem (2Sa 6:2–3). Somehow the Tent of Meeting (and the altar of burnt offering) escaped the destruction of Shiloh (Jer 7:12, 14; 26:6). It apparently was first moved to Nob (21:1–9). In David’s and Solomon’s days it was located at Gibeon (1Ch 16:39; 21:29; 2Ch 1:3, 13), the city whose people had been condemned to be menial laborers at the Lord’s sanctuary (Jos 9:23, 27). Later, we are

told, Solomon brought the “Tent of Meeting” to the completed temple (see **notes** on 1Ki 3:4; 8:4). (CSB)

7:2 *twenty years in all.* Probably the 20-year interval between the return of the ark to Israel and the assembly called by Samuel at Mizpah (see v. 5). (CSB)

The time between the return of the ark from Philistia until the deliverance mentioned in vv 10–14. (TLSB)

Samuel began to take on a greater role in the leadership of Israel, “Samuel was leader [‘judge’] of Israel at Mizpah.” His greatest concern for his nation was that it return to God. What Israel needed was a thorough reformation. (PBC)

In the twenty years following Israel’s crushing defeat by the Philistines, others gradually began to share Samuel’s concern. They lamented the loss of the sanctuary at Shiloh and the deterioration of Israel’s worship life. If they had not valued the services of God’s house when they had them, they certainly felt the loss now. (PBC)

Israel lamented after the LORD. The theological point is that after oppression, the people cried out to the Lord and received deliverance. (TLSB)

6:1–7:2 Although the Philistines returned the ark with a guilt offering, and although the ark’s return was confirmed by a miraculous sign, the Israelites still had to learn proper reverence toward God’s holy things. Today, we should not assume that our status as God’s children through Holy Baptism means that we have the freedom to behave in an irreverent manner toward what God has set aside for holy purposes (e.g., the Lord’s Supper). Instead, God has set us free to live in humility, repentance, and faith. • Thank You, Lord God, for consecrating us as Your holy people and for sharing Your holiness with us. Amen. (TLSB)

7:3 *put away.* Laying something aside permanently. (TLSB)

Ashtoreths. Ashtoreth was a goddess of love, fertility and war, worshiped in various forms by many peoples of the ancient Near East, including the Canaanites (see **note** on Jdg 2:13). The worship of Ashtoreth is frequently combined with the worship of Baal (see v. 4; 12:10; Jdg 2:13; 3:7; 10:6), in accordance with the common practice in fertility cults to associate male and female deities. (CSB)

The first step in returning to God, said Samuel, is to give up every substitute for the Almighty. They were to break with everything associated with the worship of the Baals and Ashtoreths. (PBC)

Do any of us question our need to return to the Lord? Perhaps by the standards of society our sins appear tame. But by the standards of God they are more than enough to separate us eternally from His presence. There is a need for all of us to turn from the things we have tried to substitute for the Lord God and to return to Him. We have no option but to confess our sins and plead for mercy. And there is mercy. (PBC)

OUT OF HAND OF PHILISTINES – He was announcing His relation as covenant God to them by saving them from their enemies and once more establishing them as an independent people. (Kretzmann)

7:4 SERVED GOD ONLY – They restored His exclusive worship. Here again the fact is brought out that idolatry had been practiced, but in such a manner that the Jehovah worship had outwardly been kept up. It was the same mixture of true and false religion which is now found in so many parts of Christendom, where antichristian religious societies are existing in the very midst of so-called Christian congregations. (Kretzmann)

7:5 Mizpah. A town in the territory of Benjamin (Jos 18:26), located about seven and a half miles north of Jerusalem. It was here that the Israelites had previously gathered to undertake disciplinary action against Benjamin (Jdg 20:1; 21:1) after the abuse and murder of the concubine of a traveling Levite in Gibeah of Benjamin. Several other places bore the same name (see 2Sa 22:3; Ge 31:49; Jos 11:3, 8; 15:38). (CSB)

I will intercede. See 7:8–9; 8:6; 12:17–19, 23; 15:11. Samuel, like Moses, was later remembered as a great intercessor (see Ps 99:6; Jer 15:1). Both were appointed by God to mediate his rule over his people, representing God to Israel and speaking on Israel's behalf to God. (CSB)

7:6 they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. There is no other reference to this type of ceremony in the OT. It appears to symbolize the pouring out of one's heart in repentance and humility before the Lord. For related expressions see 1:15; Ps 62:8; La 2:19. (CSB)

Expressing sorrow and tearful repentance. (TLSB)

Samuel was leader. See NIV text note and v. 15; see also **note** on 4:18. (CSB)

judged. In this context, Samuel led Israel in repentance. (TLSB)

7:9 SUCKLING LAMB – The exact significance is unclear, but apparently this was an act total dedication of the people to the Lord (cf. 13:9-12). (TLSB)

7:10 the LORD thundered with loud thunder. The Lord had promised to be the protector of his people when they were obedient to their covenant obligations (see Ex 23:22; Dt 20:1–4; see also 2Sa 5:19–25; Jos 10:11–14; Jdg 5:20–21; 2Ki 7:6; 19:35; 2Ch 20:17, 22). (CSB)

7:11 Beth-car. Possibly 8 mi W of Mizpah. (TLSB)

7:12 Ebenezer. See NIV text note and **note** on 4:1. (CSB)

Exact location uncertain; not the place referred to in 4:1 and 5:1. (TLSB)

Twenty years earlier, Israel had suffered a painful loss at this site (4:1). Now that was all forgotten because of the memory of what God had done for them. (PBC)

Only the memory of what God has done for us can remove our painful memories of the past. As Paul wrote, "Forgetting what is behind...I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). (PBC)

The memory of God's help in the past is also our hope for the future. Will not He who helped us thus far also see us through every evil day? The poet Annie Johnson Flint wrote:

Hitherto the Lord hath helped us,
Hitherto His hand has led,
Hitherto His bounty fed;
Will His love desert us wholly,
Will His heart our need forget,
Will His presence clean forsake us,
Who hath never failed us yet?
(Hitherto and Henceforth)

For your own benefit, why not at those special times when help has been given erect your own Ebenezer stone? Take time to remember and thank God for His goodness. (PBC)

7:13 *did not invade Israelite territory again.* Some interpreters see a contradiction between this statement and subsequent references to the Philistines in 9:16; 10:5; 13:3, 5; 17:1; 23:27. This statement, however, only indicates that the Philistines did not immediately counterattack. See 2Ki 6:23–24 for a similar situation. (CSB)

Although the victory did not complete the deliverance from the oppression of the Philistines, yet it pointed to the fact that Jehovah was once more with the army of Israel, and therefore this token of thanksgiving in the name of the whole people properly expressed the sentiments which were stirring their hearts. (Kretzmann)

7:15 A summary statement marking the end of the author's account of Samuel's ministry as Israel's leader (see v. 6). (CSB)

7:16 *Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah.* Cities relatively close to Jerusalem (the future capital) and to Samuel's hometown of Ramah. (TLSB)

judging Israel. See **note** on 4:18. (CSB)

7:17 *Ramah.* See **note** on 1:1. (CSB)

C 5 mi N of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

7:3–17 With Samuel’s encouragement, the people of Israel turn to the Lord and cry out for mercy. This marks the beginning of a new era, in which the people of Israel subdue the Philistines, have their land restored, experience peace, and live under the leadership of Samuel the judge. Like the people of Israel, when we live apart from God, we experience frustration and defeat. As God leads us to cry to Him for mercy, He restores us and makes us whole in Christ Jesus. • Lord God, be merciful to us, for we have sinned against You. Give us Your peace, we ask, in Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)