Let God Be True!

Ebenezer: Stone of Help

July 5, 2020 · AM · https://letgodbetrue.com/sermons/2020/ebenezer-stone-of-help-1/

Introduction:

1. We recently passed the 40th anniversary of our church from its beginning with nine souls in 1980, such dates and events cause us to reflect on God's goodness and leading to get us where we are today.
2. We recently heard Psalm 132 explained well about David's zeal to restore the Ark to Jehovah's house.
3. Yesterday was the Fourth of July (2020), which is an annual time to reflect on the start of this nation.
4. This sermon will combine various elements of these factors in light of Bible history for our application.
5. Everything good that you are or you have, especially in spiritual blessings, is by God's gracious help.
6. We should learn seven words – name *Ebenezer* – and description: *Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.*
7. Implied in Samuel's words and declared plainly by Paul, we finish our races intensely (Phil 3:12-14).

The BACKGROUND (I Samuel 1-6)

1. Samuel is clearly one of God's favorite men by following him in the record of scripture.
    1. He was a Nazarite, at least in the issue of hair; no razor touched him (I Samuel 1:11).
    2. He worshipped God after his weaning, alone at the tabernacle in Shiloh (I Sam 1:28).
    3. The Bible identifies him growing in favor with God and men like Jesus (I Sam 2:26).
    4. God revealed Himself to very young Samuel with prophecies (I Sam 3:19-21; 4:1).
    5. He is one of the five great intercessors that God identified (Jer 15:1; Ezekiel 14:14).
    6. David and Paul identified him as one of the great Jewish heroes (Ps 99:6; Heb 11:32).
2. I Samuel 1-3 … Hannah's gift son Samuel and his replacement of Eli as prophet/judge.
    1. Hannah was barren, so God gave her a special son for her vow to give him to God.
    2. She was a great mother; when she left him in Shiloh after weaning, he worshipped.
    3. Hannah's prayer is one of the Bible's best: it shows a woman of great faith and zeal.
    4. God sent a prophet to warn Eli about coming judgment for honoring sons over Him.
    5. God revealed the judgment to Samuel, who in turn told Eli, and he became a prophet.
3. I Samuel 4 … Israel foolishly took the Ark to battle against Philistines, who captured it.
    1. The first battle in Eli's final days was a loss that cost Israel 4000 men (I Sam 4:1-2).
    2. The second battle cost 30,000 men, the Ark, Eli's two sons, and Eli (I Sam 4:3-18).
    3. From Moses' brass serpent to the temple to phylacteries, the Jews adored relics, etc.
    4. Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was perfect by naming her son Ichabod.
    5. God does not care about His ordinances or furniture or symbols without godliness.
4. I Samuel 5 … God mocked the Philistine's Dagon and punished them with hemorrhoids.
    1. The Ark would prove to be far more potent against the Philistines in their temples.

2. Most Christians do not know the story, but God loves this story (Psalm 78:58-66).
3. Mice overran the nation, likely with pestilence; they are included in the next chapter.
4. God's judgment was severe – killing many – and the rest got terrible hemorrhoids.
5. They moved the Ark from Ashdod to Gath to Ekron with terror at each destination.

5. I Samuel 6 … The Philistines sent the Ark back to Bethshemesh with a gold sin offering.
    1. God inspired the Philistine priests to call for the most humbling of religious icons.
    2. Greater judgment for greater knowledge … so Philistines were not killed by the Ark.
    3. There was a command (Num 4:18-20), and we never know all God has in His mind.
    4. How could there be so many in little Bethshemesh? Unbelieving commentators change the Bible to 70 … or 50 of a thousand … or 45,000 … and other guesses.
    5. How could there be so many people in Bethshemesh? Israel and Judah were very populous (II Sam 24:9); God killed of the people in general, not just men of Bethshemesh; God used key words for a large number – *even*, *many*, and *great*; when Israel offended God later, He killed 70,000 (II Sam 24:15); the novelty of the Ark would have drawn a large crowd from everywhere; God delayed judgment – He did not kill the first looker – so they kept on; He could easily have smitten many that did not look, but wanted to look (Rom 1:32); Bethshemesh had suburbs (Josh 21:16); pagans also still lived there (Judges 1:33).
    6. Not all the above are facts – they are assumptions or suggestions to defend the Bible.
    7. Textual critics, read Edward F. Hills, Believing Bible Study, and then I Cor 1:19-20.
    8. Let every reader tremble before the awesome holiness of God Jehovah of the Bible.
6. I Samuel 7 … Samuel led a revival in Israel, defeated the Philistines, and judged Israel.
7. What a difference between I Samuel 6:19 and II Samuel 6:19 … Bethshemesh vs. David.

The CONTEXT (I Samuel 7)

1. Samuel is clearly one of God's favorite men by following him in the record of scripture.
    1. He was a Nazarite, at least in the issue of hair; no razor touched him (I Samuel 1:11).
    2. He worshipped God after his weaning, alone at the tabernacle in Shiloh (I Sam 1:28).
    3. The Bible identifies him growing in favor with God and men like Jesus (I Sam 2:26).
    4. God revealed Himself to very young Samuel with prophecies (I Sam 3:19-21; 4:1).
    5. He is one of the five great intercessors that God identified (Jer 15:1; Ezekiel 14:14).
    6. David and Paul identified him as one of the great Jewish heroes (Ps 99:6; Heb 11:32).
2. This chapter begins the record of Samuel as Israel's great judge and civil magistrate.
    1. He was introduced by his mother, his birth, and his prophecy to Eli (chapters 1-3).
    2. The last word about him was God's prophecies to him under Eli (I Sa 3:19-21; 4:1).
    3. The next chapter recorded Eli as the priest, judge, and main character (I Sam 4:18).
    4. The previous two chapters are about the Ark and the Philistines, ignoring both men.
    5. Now it is Samuel's turn to take over the nation as its great prophet, judge, and leader.

3. **7:1-2** … inspired narrative about Israel's neglect of the Ark and time until Samuel leads.
    1. The Philistines wisely kept the Ark but seven months before returning it (I Sam 6:1).
    2. Bethshemesh celebrated its return, but wanted it no more (I Samuel 6:13-15,19-21).
    3. The survivors in Bethshemesh would not move it, so Kirjathjearim men fetched it.
    4. Men of Kirjathjearim moved it to Abinadab's house and charged it to his son Eleazer.
    5. The inspired historian records a 20-year gap between the Ark's return and Samuel.
    6. After these 20 years, shamefully long, the nation lamented God's desertion of them.
    7. If they had lamented earlier, God would have answered; Samuel speaks of it as fresh.
    8. Samuel was young; add seven months of the Ark in Philistia and 20 years to his age.
    9. The Ark was there over 60 years in total, for David took it from Abinadab's house.
4. **7:3-6** … Samuel took charge of Israel that God had prepared for his multi-role ministry.
    1. The people were in dire straits by the Philistines, but God granted them repentance.
    2. If they had lamented earlier, God would have answered; Samuel speaks of it as fresh.
    3. Samuel told the church – to repent, flush idolatry, set their hearts on Jehovah only.
    4. God Jehovah of the Bible is Jealous, and He will never share His glory with another.
    5. With true godly repentance, defined by the prophet of God, He would crush Philistia.
    6. Verbal repentance means little to God or pastors – actions prove it (II Cor 7:10-11).
    7. When pastor and people are both prepared by God – they obeyed the sermon exactly.
    8. Ashtaroth = the chief Phoenician goddess worshipped by Philistia = Astarte = Ishtar.
    9. Baalim = plural Baal = chief male idol of Canaan and Tyre, neighbors of Philistines.
    10. The church responded as they should by getting rid of false religion (Acts 19:17-20).
    11. As Israel's prophet, judge, and leader, he filled the role of intercessor (Job 42:7-10).
    12. The solemn occasion involved fasting and pouring out water as a sacrificial symbol.
    13. Is it poured out and lost … or in pain … or in prayer (II Sam 14:14; Ps 22:14; 62:8)?
    14. Or was it a simple offering of water that their fast had denied them (II Sam 23:16)?
    15. Words of repentance – *we have sinned against the LORD* – were matched by deeds.
    16. All the evidence is that Samuel here takes up the role of judge and civil magistrate.
    17. What did Israel do after Eli? – what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25).
5. **7:7-9** … Samuel burned a sucking lamb to God as intercessor for Israel against Philistia.
    1. Scouts found all of Israel gathered to the place of their previous battles (I Sam 4:1).
    2. The lords of the Philistines – their five cities with kings – assumed they wanted war.
    3. Do not let animosity or trouble after obedience surprise you, like Jesus after baptism.
    4. Israel was afraid of the Philistines – they last lost twice – and nothing had changed?
    5. Repentance works; leaving the Ark helped; they were helpless; Samuel trumped Eli!
    6. Israel begged Samuel to keep praying to *their* God Jehovah to save them from defeat.
    7. There is no way with such repentance and exchange of deities for God to stand still.

8. God honored Samuel as one of His great intercessors right here (Jer 15:1; Ps 99:6).
9. Lambs are born weighing 9 lbs.; they nurse for two months; they then weigh 45 lbs.
10. The lamb this church bought to show the children was much older and much larger.
11. Samuel did not do any dividing of parts like some sacrifices – he offered it whole.
12. This sucking lamb was at least eight days old for Moses' law (Ex 22:30; Lev 22:27).
13. Mercy is greater than sacrifice. Where was the priest, tabernacle, ark, altar, etc., etc.?
14. The LORD heard Samuel. The LORD will hear you as well or better in Jesus' name.
15. One lamb was enough with the repentance and righteousness here. He rewards faith.
16. Matthew Poole apparently got confused and connected the wrong verse (Ex 23:19).

6. **7:10-12** … the LORD Jehovah gave Israel a great victory and destroyed the Philistines.
    1. The answer to his prayer was immediate, powerful, supernatural, with long effect.
    2. He thundered upon the Philistines. It was not ordinary thunder, and it was directed.
    3. Discomfit = To undo in battle; to defeat or overthrow completely; to beat, to rout.
    4. Discomfit = To defeat or overthrow the plans or purposes of; to thwart, foil. To throw into perplexity, confusion, or dejection; to cast down utterly; to disconcert.
    5. The men of Israel now chased the terrified Philistines and destroyed them for miles.
    6. There were plenty of weapons as the Philistines threw their arms down to run faster.
    7. Samuel set up a stone and named it Ebenezer, which name means, The stone of help.
    8. He added a fuller explanation for the stone … *Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.*
7. **7:13-17** … Samuel was exalted as God's man by victory over the Philistines for his life.
    1. In this way – thunder then arms – Jehovah subdued Philistia for Samuel's lifetime.
    2. The victory extended beyond killing most or all of their army – they recovered cities.
    3. This signal victory confirmed Samuel as their prophet, judge, intercessor, leader, etc.
    4. Samuel's judgeship was as long as his life, and he had a circuitous route to judge.
    5. His home was in Ramah, his hometown, where he could be near his mother if alive.

The TEXT (I Samuel 7:12)

1. The stone here was not for idolatry, so it was not prohibited by Moses' law (Lev 26:1).
2. Israel used stones or piles of stones to remember God's blessings or their commitments.
    1. Joshua set twelve stones at Gilgal for the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 4:1-2,20-24).
    2. Moses commanded Israel to set up plastered stones with God's law (Deut 27:1-10).
    3. The tribes living on the east of Jordan set up an altar as a witness (Joshua 22:21-34).
    4. Joshua set up a great stone in Shechem for the promise to obey God (Josh 24:13-28).
3. This event and stone was located near the Philistine capture of the Ark (I Sam 4:1; 5:1).
    1. The inspired writer recorded the Philistine battle was beside Ebenezer (I Sa 4:1-2).
    2. The Philistines captured the Ark and took it to Ashdod from Ebenezer (I Sam 5:1).

3. As in other places, a future name is used before it was given (Gen 12:8; 13:3; 28:19).

4. **Ebenezer** = stone of help = (*eben* = stone + *ezer* = help); with article, stone of the help.
    1. The name does not include all Samuel's words, but includes *help* in the stone's name.
    2. There is no prefix or suffix involving Jehovah's name – no *Jeho* or *Jo,* no *iah* or *jah*.
    3. There is no prefix or suffix involving Elohim's name – neither *Eli* or *el*, as in Joel.
    4. It is found two other times only by anticipation (prolepsis) of here (I Sam 4:1; 5:1).
    5. A stone we do not have, but God has been our help all the days of our lives on earth.

5. Let us focus on the full meaning of the memorial – *Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.*
    1. **LORD** = Jehovah from I AM THAT I AM = God of Moses for Israel (Ex 3:14; 6:3).
    2. **Hitherto** = up to this time, until now, as yet; to this place or point in space; thus far.
    3. Sense of time (Ex 7:16; Judges 16:13; etc.) … of place (II Sam 7:18; Job 38:11; etc.).
    4. We pick timing by (a) time in the next verse and (b) Israel pursued beyond Ebenezer.
    5. Samuel's inspired wisdom chose words to praise the victory and imply future help.
    6. And we trust the God of past mercies, for every former mercy is a pledge of a future.
    7. They were in Mizpeh for a revival, opening Samuel's judgeship, after Eli's death.
    8. The first two verses of the chapter are narrative material pertaining to the Ark only.
    9. Their lamentation was of lost battles, lost Ark, and lost priests, proving Ichabod true.
    10. Samuel seized the opportunity as Israel's shepherd to call for repentance and revival.
    11. This is the beginning of Samuel's ministry, and God confirmed it by a signal victory.
    12. God did defeat the Philistines for them, but He also prepared the hearts and Samuel.

6. Contrast the great loss by Eli's compromise with a great victory by Samuel's leadership.
    1. Where there had been great loss (think) … now there was great victory (domination).
    2. Where they had foolishly presumed on God … now they pursued by God then rested.
    3. Where they had presumed on furniture … now they trusted separation and dedication.
    4. Where they had accepted wicked priests … now they trusted one established by God.

7. We must always identify God's gracious help and remember it with perpetual efforts.
8. We must connect the dots to see the basis and cause of God's return after our repentance.

The CONFIRMATION

1. The Bible has other examples and passages that recall past deliverances to build faith.
    1. God gave Israel the annual Passover to recall (Ex 12:1-2,14,17,24-27,42; 13:3-10).
    2. God had laws, like dedication of firstborn beasts, to recall the victory (Ex 13:11-16).
    3. God gave laws and statutes that separated Israel from other nations (Deut 6:17-25).
    4. Children should ask fathers and elders what God did for us (Deut 32:7; Ps 78:1-8).
    5. Joshua did gather twelve stones from Jordan to build a memorial (Josh 4:1-8,20-24).
    6. Joshua before dying set up a stone for Israel's history and covenant (Josh 24:24-28).

2. Remembering is good (Ps 77:10-12; 145:4-7) … forgetting is evil (Ps 50:22; 137:5-6).
    1. David used past deliverances to build his faith and hope for the future (Ps 116:1-9).
    2. We can say with Isaiah that God has carried us and will always carry us (Is 46:3-4).
    3. Paul in a capital trial was confident in God's past help to continue (Acts 26:21-22).
    4. He knew by past deliverances God would deliver him in the future (II Cor 1:8-10).
3. Jesus gave churches His Supper to remember specific parts of His glorious death for us.
4. Has the LORD helped you in the past? How do you remember? Does it keep you going?
5. It is good for us to remember Bible deliverances, those of others, and those of our own.

The APPLICATION

1. Samuel's inspired words apply well to each of us – *Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.*
    1. If you are converted and baptized into Jesus Christ, He has helped you very much.
    2. If you believe the body of truth that this church holds, He has helped you very much.
    3. If you are a member of this church body of believers, He has helped you very much.
    4. If you are convicted today to fear Him, love Him, and obey Him, He has helped you.
    5. He has helped you this far, there is every reason to trust Him to help you yet more.
2. Samuel's inspired words apply well to our church – *Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.*
    1. This church began and continued for its 40-year history to follow the LORD only.
    2. As Samuel to Israel, we turned from compromising Christianity with all our hearts.
    3. God and Jesus then saved us from many enemies i.e. false doctrines, false brethren.
    4. God and Jesus then showed us many victories i.e. correction, revelation, conviction.
    5. We have an extensive slide presentation of God's grace in our history in these ways.
    6. We have at least four crossings of the Red Sea by His grace with many, many details.
    7. He has not stopped or slowed helping us; a recent study of Isaiah had many blessings.
    8. Each time we get to exclude compromisers to add zealots, our quality leaps upward.
3. We do not need to set up a large stone like Samuel, for there are others way to remember.
    1. Unless our member construction company used its heavy equipment to bring us one.
    2. Our anniversary is a good event to trigger righteous reflection annually like a stone.
    3. Praise and thanksgiving services, comparable to Thanksgiving Day, also help recall.
    4. Taking every new membership candidate through the history slides is a good event.
4. David wrote, *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits (Ps 103:1-5).*
    1. The Bible repeats often to remember the works of God to praise Him and tell others.
    2. The Bible says to not forget His works as many, for it deprives Him and hardens us.
5. But we must not rest on remembering past mercies, for we want to press higher for Him.
    1. We should forget our past achievements and press to the finish line (Phil 3:12-14).
    2. With our faith and zeal, God will most certainly perform what He began (Phil 1:6).

3. His faithfulness, power, and plans will sanctify us for Jesus' return (I Thes 5:23-24).
4. We trust and pray for God and Jesus' grace to fulfill His will in us (II Thes 1:11-12).
5. The God of grace that called us to heaven by Jesus will perfect us (I Peter 5:10-11).

6. What is our Ebenezer? Our 40th church anniversary is to remember countless blessings.
7. What is our water to pour out? The acceptable sacrifice of praise of our lips (Heb 13:15).
8. Who is our Stone of Help? Our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18; 21:42-44; Acts 4:11; Romans 9:33; I Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 2:20; I Peter 2:4-8; Ps 118:22-23; Is 28:16)!
9. Who is our Intercessor like Samuel? The One with a priesthood far above Samuel by office, oath, perpetuity, and sacrifice (Romans 5:10; 8:34; I Timothy 2:5; Heb 7:25-28).
10. What is our Sucking Lamb for God? Jesus the Lamb of God's body wholly offered up.
11. What is our Ebenezer? Communion services to remember our Stone, Intercessor, Lamb.

Further Study:

1. Eli and Sons.
2. The Danger of Ichabod.
3. Emerods and Mice *(I Samuel 4-6)*.
4. The Prophets of God.
5. Rude Preachers.
6. Instant Preaching.
7. Never Forget.
8. Ending Your Life Well.
9. Name Above Every Name *(Jah)*.
10. Reversal of Fortune *(Bible, Others, You)*