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# Sermon Notes

October 30, 2016

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

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## Ebenezer

1 Samuel 7:1-12

<sup>1</sup> And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. <sup>2</sup> From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

<sup>4</sup> So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and they served the LORD only. <sup>5</sup> Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." <sup>6</sup> So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

<sup>7</sup> Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. <sup>8</sup> And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines."

<sup>9</sup> So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. <sup>10</sup> As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel.

<sup>11</sup> And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car. <sup>12</sup> Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us."

## Ebenezer

- ❖ *"Till now the LORD has helped us."* (1 Samuel 7:12)
  - the LORD has been with us all the way "to this place"
  - the LORD has been with us all the way "to this hour"
- ❖ We are where we are today by God's grace and as a result of His providence
- ❖ The LORD has guided us, led us, sustained us, and encouraged us every step of the way

## Disaster at Ebenezer

- ❖ Ebenezer is a place where Israel camps out prior to a major battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:1)
- ❖ The Philistine threat
  - a hostile people and an ever-present enemy of Israel
  - they are also a spiritual threat as Israel is enticed to worship the false, idolatrous gods of the Philistines
- ❖ The battle
  - day 1: Israel is defeated and 4,000 of her soldiers are killed
  - day 2: Israel is defeated again and the Ark of the Covenant is captured by the Philistines
  - *The glory has departed from Israel* (1 Samuel 4:21-22)

## Repentance and Revival

- ❖ After 20 years there is repentance and revival among the people of Israel, and they *lament after the LORD* (1 Samuel 7:2)
- ❖ The people obey Samuel and put away their idolatrous, foreign gods (1 Samuel 7:4)
- ❖ Samuel calls the people to gather at Mizpah for a great service of repentance, fasting, and rededication (1 Samuel 7:6)
- ❖ Just when God's people are getting back on track with Him, the Philistines launch another attack (1 Samuel 7:10)
  - Israel responds with fear and panic
  - Samuel responds with prayer
  - the LORD responds with a supernatural, thunderous sound that throws the Philistines into a panic

## Ebenezer

- ❖ Samuel memorializes this victory by setting up a memorial stone that he calls: Ebenezer (A Stone of Help)
- ❖ This stone serves to memorialize both the past and the present
  - Ebenezer is the place where Israel previously experienced a crushing defeat when they trusted in a symbol of God's presence rather than in God Himself

- Ebenezer serves as a reminder that when God's people turn to God by humbling themselves, seeking His face and turning from their wicked ways, God hears from heaven, forgives their sin and heals their land
- ❖ What was lost through sin at the battle of Ebenezer is restored by God's goodness in response to the repentance and humility of His people at the battle of Mizpah
- ❖ Today we rejoice, but we must remember
  - not to mistake the symbol of God's presence (a building) with the reality it represents
  - our hope and faith
    - is not in a building
    - it is in the living God (Isaiah 46:10)
- ❖ God's actual dwelling place is among His people (Ephesians 2:22)
- ❖ We are building for eternity
  - this building will not last for eternity
  - BUT, it is intended to be used to make an eternal difference in the lives of those future generations of believers who will gather to worship here and scatter to serve in our community and abroad
- ❖ As it was in 1715, our goal is to stay the course and remain true to the awesome stewardship entrusted to us that we both know Christ and partner together to make Him known