

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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### From Ashes to Glory Part 1

#### Renewing Our Passion for the Lord

The expression “stuck in a rut” comes from the horse and wagon days when deep ruts would be worn in a road between destinations. If a wagon fell into one of these ruts it meant that you were stuck in that rut until you arrived at the next town. And hence the expression, “Stuck in a rut.”

Now brothers and sisters, when we were redeemed from our sin, we were given new life in Christ. And though the penalty and power of sin was dealt with at the cross, nevertheless the presence of sin still remains such that at times we can be found struggling in sin.

In fact, if we were to stir the proverbial pot, what types of sin would rise to the surface in this congregation?

I'm sure we would discover some of these sins:

- Anger problems that have been hidden for years.
- Lust problems.
- Self-control issues.
- Lack of trust.
- Boorish and rude behavior.
- Stubbornness.
- Selfishness.
- Carelessness.
- The lust for pleasure.

All these and more represent sin-struggles which have gotten the best of us. Truly, sin can produce ruts in our lives that are very hard to escape from. In fact, we see it in our passage 1 Samuel 7.

Prior to the discipline of the Lord of 1 Samuel 4-6, Israel had all kinds of problems. Its priesthood was corrupt. The prophetic word was absent. Hophni and Phinehas ruled on their own authority. And the people loved it! A view into a godly marriage revealed a self-centered competitiveness on the part of Peninnah which cared little for the things of the Lord. God's worship was compromised. God's honor was profaned. His word was neglected. But then after the discipline of 1 Samuel 4-6, the men of Bethshemesh still trampled underfoot God and His glory!

And yet our passage represents a huge shift in the lives of God's people. Far from the slavery and bitterness that had become so much a part of life for an Israelite at this time, in our text God's people break out of the rut of sinful living. They once again cling to the Lord. And they genuinely long for His glory and praise. And so they enjoy deliverance from the Philistines!

What's to explain this incredible shift? How is it that years of sin were conquered in such short order?

In the coming weeks we are going to answer this question as we gaze upon this very important passage.

## The Theme Introduced

However, I want to introduce you to the theme of this text. Accordingly would you notice that our passage begins with the people of God dwelling amidst the ashes of ruin and destruction on account of their sin.

1 Samuel 7:3, "And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth" from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand<sup>1</sup> of the Philistines.

This is an interesting promise since we know at this time; the Philistines were not attacking or even threatening God's people! So how is it that Israel was under "the hand of the Philistines?"

The answer rests with what is denoted by the expression, "hand of the Philistines."

At the outset most of you probably already know what this phrase denotes since the expression has been employed no less than 8 times in the first six chapters of Samuel.<sup>2</sup> The "hand" of someone or something is used in Scripture to reference the influence that is exerted upon another. So for example when the Ark was brought onto the battlefield the Philistines cried "Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods?" (1 Samuel 4:8a).

1 Samuel 5:6, "But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof."

Thus when in our passage Samuel promises deliverance from "the hand of the Philistines," the imagery of oppression, destruction, and slavery ought to come to mind. Think about this, the last time God's people interacted with the Philistines, over 34,000 Israelite homes were left without a father, a son, or a brother.<sup>3</sup>

So you can be sure that Israel was more than a little gun-shy when it came to the Philistines. The people of God lived in dread and constant fear. How many men and women could remember that awful day when the Ark was lost? Shiloh was sacked? Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas were destroyed? And the people of God were slaughtered?

In fact, many of the adults living at the time of our passage were children then. They no doubt would

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<sup>1</sup> יָד yad

<sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 4:8; 5:6, 7, 9, 11; 6:3, 5, 9

<sup>3</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 4:10

have suffered extreme duress as they witnessed the mourning, sorrow, fear and defeat. So “hand of the Philistines” was an expression that translated into REAL mourning, sorrow, weakness, fear, oppression, and defeat.

And yet that is not the whole picture here. For turn back with me to Judges 13.

Judges 13 is quite important to our passage. Notice that on account of their rebellion against the Lord, Israel was given over to the Philistines to suffer emotional and at times physical slavery.

Judges 13:1, “And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.”

Did you get that?

The forty year struggle detailed in the opening chapters of Samuel by which Israel lived under constant fear, dread, worry, and struggle was due to their love of sinning! In other words, the Philistine oppression during the opening chapters of 1 Samuel reflected a greater and more serious slavery on the part of God's people — their slavery to sin! The trials and difficulties of our passage ultimately is where their sin let them — not the Philistines!

Accordingly both of these types of bondage are in mind here when Samuel, no doubt referencing the slavery which began in Judges 13, promises deliverance “from the hand of the Philistines.”

And so that is where our text begins — God's people struggling in bondage to the Philistines, but more seriously to their sin!

## Freedom and Victory

And yet notice how this text ends with the people of God knowing the glory and freedom of victory.

1 Samuel 7:13-14, “So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines.”

You must see in this description far more than simply a political or military victory! What you and I are gazing upon here — on account of Judges 13:1 — is nothing less than a spiritual revival by which and through which the yoke of slavery which can accompany sin was thrown off. Notice the particular statements.

1 Samuel 7:13, “**So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more [as before] into the coast of Israel:** and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.”

This is not to say that the Philistines would never bother Israel again, because they would.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it is to say that never again would the Philistines exert the power that they had over Israel during their 40 year reign of terror and oppress Israel on account of Israel's sin. Never again would God use the Philistines as

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<sup>4</sup> In fact in just a few years the Philistines will position a garrison in Israel and use it to terrorize God's people (cf. 1 Samuel 10:5; 13:3).

a tool to wean His people from their sin. And so the Philistines — which were nothing less than the slavery that resulted from Israel's sin — were subdued!

1 Samuel 7:13, “So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: **and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.**”

Once again the heavy hand of the Lord was pressed upon the Philistine nation — but this time NOT simply in this city or that for the better part of a year BUT FOR THE ENTIRETY OF SAMUEL'S PROPHETIC CAREER!

## Restoration

Do you see what God's deliverance entails not only in the physical world but also in the spiritual?

God's deliverance not only brings with it victory over sin, freedom from oppression, BUT ALSO progress in our war to subdue and conquer the enemy. Yet one must be shepherded, held accountable, and in submission to God's word — as were the Israelites to Samuel here!

1 Samuel 7:14, “**And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath;** and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.”

I love this! Ekron and Gath were not insignificant towns amongst the Philistines. They were two of their five capital cities.<sup>5</sup> And thus we see here that God didn't just give Israel a token city or two. Rather, He restored to Israel two of the most important prizes of the Philistine empire!<sup>6</sup>

Do you see the glorious picture here when it comes to Israel's battle with sin?

On account of their rebellion against God, Israel literally lost ground in their walk with Christ. And yet through the working of God, not only were they freed from the oppression of sin, but they regained lost ground in their walk with God! In other words, it is never too late to walk with God!

1 Samuel 7:14, “**And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.**”

Quite frankly this is amazing. Prior to the Philistines, the Amorites were the prevailing power and threat in the land of Canaan. Yet with the arrival of the Philistines, the indigenous population of Palestine was forced to make peace with the Philistines. Yet on account of, the complete and total victory over the Philistines as detailed in this text Israel's new-found strength and authority made them a power with which to reckon. Now the local Amorite population was forced to make peace with Israel!

So not only did Israel's victory over the Philistines deliver them from oppression, it led to victory over other potential sources of slavery!

Now lest you think I am reading too much into Israel's victory here, once again understand that according

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<sup>5</sup> Recall according to Joshua 13:2-3, the capital cities of the Philistines were Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.

<sup>6</sup> Recall that Judah and Dan had formerly been given these cities during the conquest (cf. Joshua 13:3-4; 15:45-46).

to Judges 13 there was an inseparable bond that existed between Israel's sin and their oppression at this time.

Does that bond exist in our lives today? Not as a rule.<sup>7</sup> But that it existed here at this time there can be no mistaking.

And thus what we have here is far more than simply a military conquest but a spiritual victory in the lives of these people!

## **Sanctification: The Rule**

Now next time we are going to begin discussing how this spiritual victory was secured, but for now I want you to notice that this text indicates a pattern as to how sanctification occurs in the lives of God's children.

God generally places thorns and thistles in our lives to block us from an adulterous relationship with the world, nevertheless at times God removes the thorns and thistles giving us a fuller taste of our sin that in having our fleshly desire we might be bereft of Christ and so long for a closer relationship with our Lord.

## **The Rule Explained**

The common operation of God when it comes to our sin/sanctification is to place thorns and thistles in our lives to block us from an adulterous relationship with the world. On account of Israel's sin, God said this:

Hosea 2:6-7, "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now."

What a kind and merciful Lord is He who desires our love and affection. Who demands fidelity in our walks. Who will not allow us to destroy our lives with sin.

Yet I ask, what are the thorns and thistles that God places in our path?

In what way does God's love manifest itself in keeping us from the world?

In the context of Hosea, they are the struggles and daily trials which are given to remind us that this world is not our home. They are the hardships and burdens which so often annoy us. They are the deprivations of the things most precious in our eyes so that in our not having these things we might not be destroyed! Samuel Rutherford put it this way — speaking of this text:

"The world, and the things of the world, is the lover you naturally desire besides your own husband Christ. The hedge of thorns and the wall which God builds in your way, to hinder you from this lover, is the thorny hedge of daily grief, loss of children, weakness of body, iniquity of the time, uncertainty of estate, lack of worldly comfort, and fear of God's anger for old unrepentant sins. What do you loose, if God twists and makes the hedge even thicker? God be

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<sup>7</sup> Although there are exceptions, cf. James 5:13-16.

blessed, the Lord will not let you find your paths.”<sup>8</sup>

Now, one can submit to the deprivations of the Lord (viewing them as not as punitive discipline, but as Divine protection!) and allow them to draw you that much closer to Christ. And create a greater hungering and thirsting for His Second Coming.

Or one can kick against the goads and lament the trials of life and cry “Foul!” One can criticize the love of God and His plan for your life and yet there is another way in which God affects our sanctification — and it is not pleasant. In the event that you and I persist in our love of sinning and continue to gripe, complain, and accuse God when things don't go the way we want. God has been known to remove all thorns and thistles such that we have easy access to our sin.

Psalm 106:13-15, “They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

This details that time in redemptive history when God's people were in the wilderness following the Exodus. Now rather than delighting in the Lord and His victory, Israel very quickly began grumbling and complaining. They said that God wasn't good. They lamented their better life in Egypt. They felt that God's redemption was a trick so that the Lord could get us to die in this barren land. And they said that if God genuinely cared, why doesn't He give us better food?

Perhaps in our time we have these complaints:

- Why doesn't God give me a spouse?
- Why did He take my health?
- If God is love, why don't I enjoy better things in this life?
- Why did God take my child?
- So on and so forth!

When one questions God like this He removes the protection that the thorns and thistles of life provide for the Christian and lets Israel enjoy their hearts desire! And yet He also removed the sense of His presence so that in eating, they would not be full. So that in drinking, they would remain thirsty. So that in relaxing, they would grow weary. So that in sleeping, they'd find no rest. So that in working, there would be no peace. So that in marriage, there would be no companionship. So that in life, there would only be death!

This brothers and sisters was the experience of God's people under the Philistines and in the wilderness. And at times it is our experience when we prize the passing things of this world over God.

That is how God generally works to give us “the longing and the will” to serve Him, cling to Him, long for Him and fellowship with Him.

Now based on this you can conclude that God is not fair and that you don't like how He works salvation — but that only will reveal your rebellious and childish heart and make you all the more miserable. Or like the brothers and sisters of our text, work with the pain to effect a more efficient birth of a holy life!

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<sup>8</sup> *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, Letter IV, pg. 41.

So which will it be?

You say, “I don't want to serve a God like this?”

Then prepare yourself for more suffering. God loves you too much to treat you any other way.

You say, “I want the Lord, but I don't know what to do?”

In the coming weeks we are going to put feet to that desire. But for now, the desire is most important. Accordingly, approach God on your knees. Call off your war. By faith accept God's will for your life — confessing it to be good! Understand that the Lord is pleased to fellowship with you even though your sin has brought you into a far and distant country. And confess your desire to know, love, and serve Him all the more.

I want to close by reminding you of Isaiah 61, the message of the gospel.

Isaiah 61:1-3, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”

This passage is important for two reasons.

First of all it depicts the context in which the gospel is given.

- Affliction.
- Brokenhearted people.
- Captivity.
- Prison.
- Mourning.

This very context of our passage and, at times, our lives!

But secondly it provides the glorious news that must be proclaimed to all who are weary and heavy laden!

- Liberty!
- Freedom!
- Cessation of suffering!
- Comfort!
- Restoration!
- Healing!
- Joy!

Truly Christianity begins and often-times is lived in mourning, sorrow, suffering and ashes! But it always ends in gladness, rejoicing, relief and glory! In fact, it is from Isaiah 61:3 that the title for this section has

come: From Ashes to Glory!

May the Lord grant His grace that in the coming weeks our passion for the Lord might be renewed!

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 12, 2006. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.