

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## From Ashes to Glory, Part Five

### Gospel Preaching and Renewal

Was it the best of times or the worst of times? It was hard to tell. But this we do know, it was a spiritually dead time for the people of God before and during the first century A.D. After God's people returned from the exile in 538 BC, the Word of God was powerfully proclaimed and upheld by Ezra and "The Great Men of the Synagogue."

But soon the zeal that God's people had for the Lord faded. By 444 BC, God was exhorting His people again on account of their spiritual lethargy. They had become bored with the things of the Lord. Speaking of His worship God said this:

Malachi 1:12-13a, "But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it!"

In fact, God's people had grown so cold in their love and affection that by the first century AD they were criticized with these words:

Matthew 15:7-9, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

And that is why when the Gospel of Christ was once again heralded amongst God's people, we are not surprised at how it was phrased:

Acts 3:19, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing [or renewal] shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Oh how we need this "refreshment" today. Our hearts are cold. Our walks are mundane. Our passion is non-existent. And that is why as we approach a passage which NOT ONLY describes a time in the history of God's people where they went from compromise in their walk to a diligence and fervency BUT ALSO indicates the specific elements that were involved in their Spiritual Renewal we ought to take notice.

Let us continue our examination of the elements involved in spiritual renewal picking up on the fourth

component, submission to God.

## Submission

1 Samuel 7:6, “And they gathered together to Mizpeh, 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<sup>1</sup> the children of Israel in Mizpeh.**”

This is quite a significant statement. Yet on account of our unfamiliarity with the concept of a Biblical “judge” we tend to read past this statement. And yet, that would be a mistake. The concept of judge gives us a key element to spiritual renewal!

So what is denoted by this statement?

As the book of Judges overlaps the first seven chapters of Samuel, we conclude first that Samuel — though an established prophet and priest — was the last judge in a long line of judges through whom God was pleased to deliver His people at this time in redemptive history. Accordingly, understand the concept of a “Judge” in the Book of Judges and we will have unlocked the idea here.

So what is conveyed by the concept of a “Judge” in the Old Testament? And what essentially is a judge?

When we take up the inquiry as to what was a judge in the Book of Judges we discover that the office — and it was an office — was multi-faceted according to the culture of the day. “Judges” were not exclusive to Judaism. The word for “Judge” has many semantic parallels in the various nations surrounding Israel. The New Bible Dictionary put it this way:

“Texts from Mari (c. 1800 BC) describe the activities of leaders termed shaphitum, generally similar to the work of Israelite `judges'. These acted as local provincial `governors' working with other neighbouring `governors' under the Great King... Their responsibilities included the exercise of justice, maintenance of order, collection of taxes and tribute, and provision of information and hospitality. Thus the Hebrew shaphat should probably be better translated `governor' than `judge' since the latter describes only part of his function. Similar officials are named in the earlier tablets from Ebla.”<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly notice — speaking in the broadest of contexts the word *judge*<sup>3</sup> simply means to exercise government. And yet this definition is fraught with misunderstanding in our day. In our system of government, we make a distinction between legislative, executive, and judicial functions; the ancients didn't! Accordingly to translate this term as *judge* is to convey today the idea of a judicial function — which is but a third of the meaning. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* put it this way:

“Since, however, the ancients did not always divide the functions of government, as most modern governments do, between legislative, executive, and judicial functions... the common translation, 'to judge,' misleads us. For, the word, judge... in modern English means to exercise only the judicial function of government.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> jשפ shaphat

<sup>2</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1982, pages 636-637.

<sup>3</sup> שפ shaphat

<sup>4</sup> *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, By R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, Volumes 2, page 947.

From this we conclude first that a Judge in the ancient Near East was someone that exercised all three aspects of governing. He created law — legislative. He interpreted law — judicial. And he upheld law — executive.

Secondly, inherent in the office of judge was an authority that was understood to be over the law. The ancients had a different way of viewing authority than do we. For example, we understand that the law of the land is that which governs us. Accordingly, a policeman as a law enforcement officer cannot come into a home, make a law, and hold us to it. His authority is limited by the law; he can only uphold it. Likewise our president is governed by the same law as are we. However, in ancient civilizations <sup>5</sup>a judge/prince/king was viewed as above law since he was responsible for creating it. The Theological Wordbook explains it this way:

“The meaning of shaphat is further complicated by the fact that although the ancients knew full well what law... was, they did not think of themselves as ruled by laws rather than by men as modern people like to suppose themselves to be. The centering of law, rulership, government in a man was deeply ingrained.”<sup>6</sup>

From this we conclude that in the ancient Near East a Judge was viewed as the highest of authority. Since he created law, he was above the law.

Now all of this would be true of someone who had the status of “Judge” in most of the civilizations at the time of Samuel.

Did this hold true for Samuel? Our text identifies him as a “judge,” what is being implied?

## **Responsibilities**

When we consider the office from Scripture, we discover that a Biblical Judge had primarily three responsibilities:

1. He ruled — i.e., he could lead an army and he decided cases; in many ways, he resembled a king. Consider this reference to Gideon:

Judges 8:18, “Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king.”

After conquering the Midianite army, Gideon and his forces were in hot pursuit of their kings — Zebah and Zalmunna. And when they caught up with them they likened themselves to Gideon, a judge, whom they call a king!

After his father-in-law questioned Moses as to why so many people gathered around him, Moses said, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor, and make known the statutes of God and His

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(Note : this book is now only available as one volume.)

<sup>5</sup> This is true in some nations even today.

<sup>6</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, Volume 2, emphasis added, p. 947.

laws” (Exodus 18:15b-16 NAS).

So the idea of “rule” was appended to the concept of “judge.”<sup>7</sup> Thus when we read here that “Samuel was judging Israel” we conclude that he would have been leading God's people and directing them.

2. Secondly, a judge at this time also established law. For example, think of Jephthah in Judges 11. After defeating the Ammonites and being welcomed back as a ruler, we read this:

Judges 11:11, “Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head [this is the idea of shepherd] and captain [which denotes the idea of a king] over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.”

In other words, it is clear from this text that Jephthah as a judge was proclaiming decrees of one sort or another. And this was another facet of the Biblical Judge. He legislated. And he issued forth decrees. Now as Samuel was a prophet, we understand that his “judgeship” would have involved proclaiming God's word — he was forth-telling via the prophetic word — and exhorting God's people to uphold it.

In other words, the laws that Samuel “created” would have been by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. Thus his “judgeship” would not have been arbitrary, but in submission to the Divine Judge!

1 Samuel 3:21-4:1a, “And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.”

3. A third characteristic of a judge was that he executed or upheld the law — which he himself either established or proclaimed. For example, when David was fleeing from King Saul, Saul went into the cave to relieve himself, and it just so happened that David and his army were hiding in the very same cave. After Saul left, David called out to him essentially saying, “If I was the threat that you think I am, I could have killed you; but I didn't!” Then David said this:

1 Samuel 24:15, “The LORD therefore be judge [this is the first use of the term- judge as ruler], and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand.”

From this we see another facet of a judge — he is a deliverer, a protector, a warrior who upheld that which is right. And thus when we read that Samuel was “judging Israel,” we conclude that he was making sure that justice was upheld at this time. The most graphic example of this in Samuel's life is found in 1 Samuel 15 where Saul disobeyed God's word and spared the Amalekite King, Agag,

1 Samuel 15:32-33, “Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.”

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<sup>7</sup> Compare also Exodus 2:14

With this we have a better understanding of what Samuel was doing in Mizpeh as a Judge- and therefore what God's people were doing. When we read that Samuel was “judg[ing] the sons of Israel at Mizpeh,” we conclude that he was ruling over God's people to ensure that God's word was upheld. And he was upholding that which was right by either vindicating the weak and helpless \*\*or by\*\* punishing the evil-doer. He was also proclaiming the word of the Lord.

## Submission to the Judge

Now as this is what Samuel was doing, we understand as well what God's people were doing. They were submitting to the Lord as He led through their judge! Not anyone could serve as a judge neither in the ancient Near East nor in the Bible. A judge had to be accepted by the people — sort of like in the New Testament when it came to an officer in the church.<sup>8</sup> For example when Jephthah became a judge the people agreed to this move.

Judges 11:9-10, “And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.”

Accordingly, that this text declares that at this point Samuel had become a judge tells us something of the people's response not just to Samuel but ultimately God! And from this we glean the fourth element to Israel's Spiritual Renewal- Submission!<sup>9</sup> Had the people not submitted to Samuel's judgeship here, there is no doubt that they would not have known the renewal described in this text!

## Submission Today

Now though thousands of years separate us from the people of God in this passage, nevertheless submission is still an important part of spiritual renewal. Submission NOT to new revelations BUT to the word and will of God as proclaimed and worked out in our lives.

The book of James is addressed to “the [Jewish Christians of the] twelve tribes which are in the Diaspora” (James 1:1). These Christians clearly were under the dual pressures of poverty and persecution. Accordingly, the temptation was strong to grow depressed, bitter, and impatient. And so to these Judaic churches James wrote this Epistle to encourage them in the faith!

After confronting the church on account of its worldliness<sup>10</sup> James transitioned into an exhortation consisting of four verses and ten progressive commands!

James 4:10, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

To a worldly group of people loosely hanging on to Christ, James entices them with the prospect of God

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Acts 14:23. The word rendered ordained (KJV) or appointed (NASB) χειροτονεω cheirotoneo literally means to vote by stretching out the hand, to appoint.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, the heart of submission pervades this entire passage. In their brokenness, God's people submitted to the word of God as spoken through Samuel in 7:3, they submitted to the command of Samuel to meet at Mizpah in 7:5-6a, and they willingly allowed Samuel to pray with and for them in 7:6b.

<sup>10</sup> Compare James 4:1-6

exalting them! And thus we see that James 4:7-10 is an exhortation that ultimately had in mind the church's spiritual maturation and growth in grace!

Yet how do we get there?

Notice that which sets it all in motion is this:

James 4:7, “**Submit yourselves therefore to God.** Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

If you desire to know spiritual maturation and growth in grace, health and vibrancy in your walk with Christ, and you want God to raise you unto maturity then that which starts this whole process is a submissive heart to the Lord! In fact, the heart of submission is that which pervades the entire passage of 1 Samuels 7.

In their brokenness, God's people submitted to the

- Word of God as spoken through Samuel in 7:3.
- Command of Samuel to meet at Mizpah in 7:5-6a.
- Offer of Samuel to pray with and for them in 7:6b.
- Authority of Samuel as he here is revealed as a Judge, 7:6c.

In fact, so consistent was the people's submission to Samuel that it would take another twenty years at least before the people showed any sign of rebellion.<sup>11</sup>

## **Our Flesh's Greatest Desire**

Oh how we need submission if we are to know vibrancy in our walk with God! For you see this is a key issue in the life of the child of God! The apostle Paul clues us into one of our flesh's greatest desires:

Colossians 1:21-22, “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.”

One of the chief characteristics of the non-believer is that they are hostile to God! They don't like God! In fact, so great is our enmity with God that it is not even quelled by death. Christ speaking of the non-Christian said this:

Matthew 8:12, “But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Recall the metaphor of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is not an expression of pain and misery, but of anger and rebellion.<sup>12</sup> What this means is that even in death, the flesh's lust is the destruction of Christ! It couldn't be any clearer than in this verse:

Romans 8:7, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

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<sup>11</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 8:4-5

<sup>12</sup> Compare also Job 16:9; Psalms 35:16; 112:10; Lamentations 2:16; Acts 7:54

The greatest desire of the flesh is the destruction of God. And therefore this passage says that our flesh does not subject itself to the law of God.

Our flesh's passion is a refusal to submit to God!

Is it any wonder therefore that one of the keys to vibrancy in our walks with God is submission?

Trace the path of the mediocre Christian, and you will find an issue with submission! They will have

- Questions concerning God's goodness.
- The down-playing of the importance of obedience.
- A criticizing of His providence.
- A calling into question His will.
- An unwillingness to serve.

Truly, spiritual lethargy always is accompanied by this arrogance! And that is perhaps why James summarized his exhortation to the persecuted church with these words:

James 4:10, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

## **Spiritual Renewal in our Walks**

Truly if we would know spiritual renewal in our walks we must first submit to God and embrace the will and word of the Lord!

Yet how do we do this? After all rebellion is in our make up and our flesh's desire is to control and/or manipulate God.

The passage before us gives the answer. Submission occurred after the people were brought to the end of themselves. It was after God's people began to "lament after the Lord" that Samuel stood up and spoke.

Accordingly, if we would know submission in our walks with God, it will only come as we first are broken! Strive for brokenness in your walk with God. Become a student of your brokenness. Know your wretchedness. Know your arrogant and vile thoughts which are raised against the knowledge of God. Learn its deceitful tricks.

And with a new-found hunger and thirst for God, protect your heart. If any will is up for grabs, it must be our own. If any motive is to be questioned, let it be ours.

Now, the only way you and I will be able to do this is if we are assured of Christ' love and undying devotion to us. So let us gaze upon the cross of Christ!

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## **About the Preacher**

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