

Message #16**I Samuel 7:7-14**

There is probably not a believer in this sanctuary who cannot testify of the reality of this text. There are those moments when everything seems right in your relationship with God. Everything seems good and then “wham” you get hit or blindsided with some negative and threatening thing you never expected. It comes at you from an angle you were not expecting and it attacks your spirituality and your focus.

When we make concrete choices to obey God and draw close to God, and when we make concrete choices to do what is right, we may expect that the enemy will attack us. If we choose to remain faithful to God during those times we may expect that in the end, God will grant us great victory. That is the story of this passage of Scripture.

The Israelites finally had the Ark of the Covenant back and they were finally in the process of getting right with God. They had returned to the Lord and they had removed idols from the land (I Sam. 7:4). They were finally worshipping and serving the God of the Bible. They were listening to Samuel and they were acknowledging their sin (I Sam. 7:6). Things were moving right for the first time in a long time. Israel was truly moving in a way that would lead her to the blessings of God.

Satan saw that and, as a result, he stirred up the Philistines to immediately come up against Israel. Satan did not want Israel right with God. He did not want this nation repenting and worshipping God. He certainly did not want God to bless her. If Satan could keep her in a spiritual depravity everything was fine, but the moment Israel started to move in a right way before God, he took action. He stirred up the Philistines to come up against Israel in a well-organized attack.

This would intimidate Israel; it would scare her and hopefully defeat her. But it didn't work. God sovereignly saw to it that it didn't work. What we learn from this text is this:

WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE PURPOSE TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD BY DEALING WITH SIN AND WORSHIPPING HIM, GOD WILL DEFEAT AND DESTROY THOSE ENEMIES WHO ARE ATTACKING HIS PEOPLE.

When we find ourselves under attack and we are faithful to God, we may expect to see God give us a great victory. When we decide to be faithful to God, we may expect attacks, but if we will draw close to God and continue to move forward in our relationship with Him, we will see Him give us great victory. That is the lesson to learn from this text.

We may notice that **verse 7** begins with the conjunction “now.” That connects us to the preceding context in which Israel was returning to God with all her heart (**v. 3**). She was putting away false idols and she was worshipping God and she was confessing her sin (**v. 4-6**). This was a great national revival. This was one of the great moments in the history of Israel.

So these next verses are a contextual series of responses to all of the good things that are happening. There are five interactive responses to see:

INTERACTIVE RESPONSE #1 – The response of the Philistines. **7:7a**

The last time we saw the Philistine leaders, they were heading back to Ekron after they had got rid of the ark (I Sam. 6:16). That had happened some twenty years before this event.

According to **verse 7**, the Philistines heard about the national gathering of Israel at Mizpah. Mizpah was located about 10-12 miles northwest of Jerusalem and about 25 miles northeast of Ekron, which was the nearest Philistine city.

Now Israel was having a national gathering for national repentance and recommitment to the LORD. She was in the process of doing honest business with God. She was having a spiritual revival. The Philistines did not view it that way.

They invented their own interpretation to all of this. Their interpretation was a complete lie. They viewed it in two ways:

Way #1 - They viewed this as a national threat.

The Philistines got word of this national meeting and they interpreted to mean this was a major political move against them. They viewed this as a national gathering for the purpose of revolting against the Philistines.

Their interpretation of Israel's national gathering was pure imagination and fictitious. This shows us how Satan works. Satan does not ever work within the context of truth, he convinces people to imagine things that aren't true or are half true.

Way #2 - They viewed this as a national opportunity.

As the Philistines simmered on this, they decided to go up against Israel. They figured since Israel was nationally gathered at Mizpah, they could attack and destroy the entire nation.

All of this is based in the emotional, Satanic imagination of the Philistines. They are inventing things that are not true and they have revved themselves up based on a delusional lie. What they don't know is that they are about to run into Almighty God.

When one purposes to get right with God, one may expect there will be some attempt to prevent it and stop it. If that happens, don't worry about it. God is sovereign and your enemies will be destroyed.

INTERACTIVE RESPONSE #2 – The response of the Israelites. 7:7b-8

When Israel heard of the movement of the Philistines, there were two responses:

Response #1 - The emotional response. 7:7b

When the Israelites heard of the movement of the Philistines, their emotions surged and they became afraid. I don't think this is a bad thing. In fact, I think this is a good thing. We may recall that years earlier they were not afraid and had a real confidence in themselves. In fact, it was the Philistines who were afraid and the Israelites got the Ark and assumed they would have victory (I Sam. 4:1, 7). Being afraid is a good thing, when it keeps us dependent on God.

Truth is there are times when God's faithful people are afraid. In fact, if you are truly moving right in a relationship with God, you will find yourself in threatening and intimidating situations. There will be times when you are afraid.

Later in this book King David will surface and in the Psalms he wrote there are many times when he was afraid. But he also came to terms with the fact that God was with him.

Response #2 - The spiritual response. 7:8

This shows us that the sons of Israel were right with God because they went to Samuel and they asked him to pray for them. They asked him to “keep crying to the LORD” on their behalf. We may recall that earlier they never even consulted Samuel but just went and got the Ark to fight the Philistines (I Sam. 4:3). Now they are consulting Samuel and begging him to pray for them.

Notice they now identify God as “our God.” Jehovah is Israel's God. They have finally come to terms with the truth that the God of the Bible is Israel's God. Samuel's job was to oversee the spiritual welfare of Israel and finally they had figured this out.

They had learned a key lesson of life. When they took the Ark to the battlefield, they never consulted Samuel. When the Ark first came back to Israel, they never consulted Samuel. Now they are finally right with God and they realize Samuel is a key spiritual leader and they asked him to pray for them. Samuel had communicated to them the importance of prayer to God and they finally believed him. Tremendous victory comes when godly people pray.

It is very wise to realize that one of the best things those who are threatened may do is to get godly people praying for them.

INTERACTIVE RESPONSE #3 – The response of Samuel. 7:9-10a

When the people came to Samuel and submitted to him, he took immediate action. In order for God to hear prayer there must be a blood sacrifice so he took a young lamb and offered it as a burnt sin offering to the LORD.

According to Leviticus 22:27 the lamb that was sacrificed, had to be at least 8 days old. What this shows us is that Samuel was carefully following the word of God. This also clearly shows us that it is the shed blood of Jesus Christ that makes it possible for us to approach God in prayer.

After Samuel offered the lamb, he prayed and cried to the LORD.

As Samuel was doing this, “the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel.” But the truth is Israel is doing the right thing as this battle is forming; they are worshipping God. Going to church to worship God is one of the best things anyone may do when facing warfare. Great strength and blessing comes from this.

INTERACTIVE RESPONSE #4 – The response of God. 7:10b-11

When the Philistines drew near to battle against the Israelites, God literally roared thunder from heaven against them to the point that they were very confused.

We may recall that Hannah praised God because He controlled everything in the world (2:8). Weather is not controlled by “mother nature”; it is controlled by the sovereign God of the Bible. In fact, later in this very book, it is stated that God controls thunder and rain (I Sam. 12:17-18).

In David’s song of deliverance found in II Samuel 22, he specifically mentioned that God did send thunder and lightning and aimed it straight at the Philistines (II Sam. 22:14-15). So we may safely assume that as the Philistines were coming up against Israel, God was roaring thunder and shooting lightning bolts at the Philistines to the point that they were totally confused and routed by the Israelites.

Just this past week in Florida, a man was killed and seven were injured with lightning strikes. Witnesses said that as they heard the thunder and saw the strikes, they took off running. That is what happened here to the Philistines.

As Israel was fighting, God was thundering and sending lightning bolts and all of this led to the total defeat of the Philistines. God has His own arsenal that He may use for His sovereign purposes.

There is a minister who told me the story of a woman he had in his church who was a deadly viper with her speech against him. He said her goal was to verbally rip him to shreds and chase him out of the church. He had taken an honest Biblical stand and it rubbed her the wrong way and so she went on a vendetta against him. My pastor friend said it looked like she would win. He prayed but she was on the attack and he thought this woman is going to get me thrown out of this church. Well the woman got cancer in her throat and my pastor friend said she can no longer talk to anyone. Her ability to speak is gone.

God has His own ways of intervening and in this case with the Philistines, He used thunder.

By the way, don't overlook this point. This all started at a worship service and prayer meeting. When you purpose to be right with God, you may expect to see God do some wonderful things for you. You can expect to see victory and you may expect to see your enemies routed.

Verse 11 tells us that the Israelites tracked the Philistines as far as below Beth-car. Not certain just where Beth-car is located, but it is assumed it was somewhere south-west of Mizpah, as the Philistines fled back toward Ekron.

INTERACTIVE RESPONSE #5 – The response of Samuel. **7:12-14**

According to **verse 12**, Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen. The location of the city "Shen" is unknown but the word would indicate it was a place near some jagged rock. In fact, the Hebrew means "the tooth."

They named a memorial stone there and gave it the name "Ebenezer." It is ironic that the very place where Israel camped and was defeated by the Philistines years before was "Ebenezer" (4:1). It is possible that this was the same place.

This word is comprised of two Hebrew words: 1) "Eben" means stone and 2) "hatzar" means help. So Ebenezer means "stone of help." Literally, "the stone of the help."

This stone was a reminder that this was the place where God helped Israel. The very name of a place where Israel had once been defeated was now the very place where Israel had experienced a great victory.

According to **verse 13**, the Philistines were subdued and as long as Samuel was there, they knew the hand of God was on him and they did not dare to attack.

According to **verse 14**, the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored from Ekron in the north to Gath in the south.

There was peace between Israel and the Amorites, who were the original inhabitants of Canaan-Joshua 10:5. We learn from Judges 1:18, 34-35 that there were remnants of these Amorite Canaanites in the land.

Clearly when the Amorites saw that the Israelites defeated the Philistines, they wanted no part of fighting with the Israelites.

It is just like Proverbs 16:7 says, when a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.