

## Message #15

## I Samuel 7:1-6

During the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln wrote an address that was, in my opinion, more important than the Gettysburg Address. He decided to set apart April 30, 1863 as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. What he basically did was stop the war to focus on God. The speech that President Lincoln gave reads as follows:

“It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord. The awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity too proud to pray to the God that made us. It behooves us, then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins and to pray for clemency and forgiveness” (Abraham Lincoln, *Proclamation for Prayer and Fast Day*).

Abraham Lincoln knew the importance of national repentance and so did the prophet Samuel. There are times in all of our lives when we need to go to God and humble ourselves and totally and completely repent. There are times when we need, as God’s people, to check our personal relationship with God and rededicate ourselves to that which is true, pure and sound.

When the events of this text occurred, Israel had been in a 20-year-old spiritual rut. She had sinned against God and she was not moving forward in her relationship with God. She was just existing, which is basically where Israel is today.

These were God’s people and they had backslidden into a depraved and sinful condition. They were miserable and it was time for them to get right with God. The reason they are in this condition is because the word of God (the Ark of God) was missing. But as soon as the word of God came back, it prompted conviction and repentance.

This is an amazing passage. It shows that God is a gracious God. He is a God who will restore and bless and give victory to those who have done terrible things against Him. But one must face the wrong. One must be willing to confess the wrong and turn from the wrong. That is clearly a point to see here:

**GOD’S PEOPLE, WHO HAVE SINNED AGAINST GOD, CAN EXPERIENCE GREAT VICTORY AND JOY AGAIN IF THEY WILL REPENT AND GET THE SINFUL THINGS OUT OF THEIR LIVES AND GET THEIR FOCUS BACK ON GOD.**

Proverbs 28:13 says, “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”

**Before Israel would have physical victory, she needed spiritual victory.** This is exactly why Israel is not in her land right now being blessed by God. God will not pour out His blessings on Israel physically until she is right with Him spiritually. It will take the Tribulation to back Israel into a corner where she will finally turn to Him.

This is exactly a point we need to grasp as an individual and a church. **Before an individual or a church is given all the wonderful blessings of God, they need spiritual victory.** There needs to be a real turning to God and a real repentance.

It is the honest admission and honest repentance that leads Israel to these physical blessings and victory once again. This is the way it always works. God gives blessings to those who are right with Him. God showers faithful people who honor Him and His word with His blessings.

Perhaps you have been at a real low in your life. Perhaps you don't sense any victory anywhere. Honestly check yourself in light of Scripture and perhaps the reason why there is no victory is because some things need to be confronted and eliminated.

We may recall that the Philistines sent the ark back to Israel. Well the people of Beth-shemesh held a big parade so people would march by the ark and take a look at it. As a result, there was a "great slaughter" (6:19) caused by God. So the Jewish people of Beth-shemesh sent messengers to Kiriath-jearim to request that they come get the ark.

So in this text there are two responses to this:

**RESPONSE #1** – The response of the men of Kiriath-jearim. **7:1-2**

Why would the men from Beth-shemesh contact the men from Kiriath-jearim? They knew that they had a deep reverence from the word of God. These were not perfect men, but they had a reverence for that ark and the word of God and they had a good view of Samuel. You do not have to be a perfect leader to see God work, but you must reverence His word.

Kiriath-jearim was located about 7-8 miles north of Jerusalem. This location was in the infrastructure of the land of Israel, so it would not be a border city that would be captured by the Philistines.

By taking the ark to this city, two things would be accomplished:

- 1) The ark would be protected.
- 2) News of the ark would spread throughout all of Israel.

The ark was brought to the house of Abinadab, and his son Eleazar was set apart to take care of it. We don't have any genealogical information about either one of these men, but Eleazar was a priestly name in the Old Testament and probably both men were Levites (Ex. 6:23; I Chron. 9:20; 23:21; Ezra 8:33).

Abinadab was the name of one of David's older brothers (I Sam. 16:8; 17:13). It is also the name of one of Saul's sons (I Sam. 31:2). The only thing we know of this Abinadab is that he had a house on a hill in Kiriath-jearim.

According to Josephus, Abinadab was a Levite and as was his son, Eleazar, who was given the task of guarding the ark of the LORD. They had lost the ark once and they were serious about not losing it again.

From the time the ark got to Kiriath-jearim, until the time David would take it to Jerusalem, was a long 60 year span. So for the next 60 years there was no tabernacle worship and no ark in the Tabernacle and, as a result, the people were given to idolatry. In fact, the Philistines would dominate them until David would become king.

This whole situation was due to the fact that Israel rejected God leading the nation through His chosen spiritual leader. We may remember Israel wanted a King. Having God lead was not good enough. Well, the process of getting the King was not starting off on the right foot.

## **RESPONSE #2 – The response of Samuel. 7:3-6**

Twenty years of silence from God went by between **verses 1** and **2**. God was not speaking to the nation. But at about year 20, something happened. Israel finally started to realize they had lost their relationship with God. The text says in **verse 2** that “all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.” They had not lamented for twenty years; it took twenty years for them to lament.

So when we come to **verse 3**, we come to an adverb “then.” Finally Israel wanted a relationship with God and it was “then” that Samuel spoke.

If people don't want a relationship with God, God won't speak to them. If people want God to leave them alone, He will. But when people finally get tired of the drought that exists and they finally lament the fact that they need a relationship with God, He will once again speak.

For 20-plus years, Samuel had been left out of the picture. He is now in his mid-30's. When the people wanted God back in their lives, God sent them His man to reveal His word.

There are two main admonitions that Samuel gave to the people. The admonition given by Samuel proves during the twenty years these people had very little concern for God and His word. They had drifted away in life:

## **Admonition #1 - The admonition to repent. 7:3-4**

Now it is clear that “lamenting” and repenting and returning to the Lord are two different things. This whole Samuel admonition starts with an “if” clause (**verse 3**). Do not overlook the “if” clause.

The if clause introduces us to conditions and actions that are connected to getting the blessings of God back into the life of the nation. **Even though the nation had the blessing of the ark in the land, they did not have the blessings of God in their lives.**

Now there are four specific actions that Samuel presents to Israel if she wants God to pour out His blessings. These are actions every believer needs to take when they have been in some spiritual drought.

**(Action #1) - The admonition to return to the LORD. 7:3a**

God is not interested in some half-hearted commitment to Him. The idea of returning to the Lord with “all your heart” presupposes that there has been a major drifting away from the Lord in the heart. John Woodhouse said God wants “exclusive, single-minded, wholehearted commitment” (*I Samuel*, p. 128).

It was time to get back into a right heart relationship with God and this does not come by some half-hearted turning. God is very much interested in our hearts, so whatever we do for God, we need to put our whole heart into it.

Any nation, church or individual who really wants the blessings of God, needs to say Lord, take over my heart. I yield it all to you.

**(Action #2) - The admonition to remove foreign gods. 7:3b**

Baal was the male deity and Ashtaroath was the female deity in the Babylonian worship. In fact, to this day, in Israel’s museums, there are artifacts which depict this worship and this idol. Most of these worship services not only promoted idolatry, but also immorality.

Now Samuel says if you want God’s blessings, get rid of godless things. Get them out of your world. As Israel would begin the process of removing the evil idols, she would begin the process of receiving the blessings of God.

**(Action #3) - The admonition to direct one’s heart. 7:3c**

True repentance is not just about getting rid of things, but also directing and focusing one’s heart on the God of the Bible. People in Christian circles have at times burned albums, books and other things, but the thing often lacking is focusing one’s heart on God.

As the people decided to redirect their lives and focus to God and His word, God would give them the blessings and promises of His word, which would include victory over enemies.

**(Action #4)** - The admonition to exclusive service. **7:3b**

**God want's first service and God wants full service.** God is a jealous God and He does not want His people partially committed to Him and partially committed to some other deity.

It would seem from the end of **verse 3** that one of the things that drove Israel back to God was the threat of the Philistines. What amazing grace is seen here. Israel has been spiritually AWOL from God for over 20 years and now the pending threat of the Philistines was causing her to rethink life. God, in amazing grace, offers her victory again.

Now if one is willing to do these things, God will give complete deliverance from the most intimidating enemies that are in existence. God's grace is available to His people who have wandered away for years.

According to **verse 4**, the sons of Israel actually listened to Samuel. This was one time in history when Israel listened to God; she listened to the word of God being communicated by a man of God.

**Admonition #2** - The admonition to gather together at Mizpah. **7:5-6**

Samuel, for the first time in the book, is now seen as a leader and spokesman for God. Israel knew he was a prophet, but now they realized they needed to listen to this man.

Samuel told them to go to Mizpah and there he would intercede for them.

Mizpah was a city located about seven miles north of Jerusalem. It was a city located in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18:11, 26). It became a place for some national gatherings.

For example, when Saul was elected King, he called them to Mizpah (I Sam. 10:17). It was a plateau located about 500 feet above the surrounding area. It was a good place to meet. Certainly no one could give some surprise attack.

According to **verse 6**, the people gathered together and drew water and poured it out before the Lord, denying themselves, which was a sign of deep repentance. These were real acts of self-denial. They not only didn't drink the water, but they also fasted and acknowledged that they had terribly sinned against God. It was real honest confession.

Dr. McGee said there is no other way back to God than via prayer and confession (*I Samuel*, p. 136). This is what Israel needs to do. This is what this country needs to do and this is what individuals need to do. They need to pray and confess their sins.

Robert Bergen said this action of Israel is "unparalleled in the Old Testament" (*I, II Samuel*, p. 107).

These people were hungering and thirsting after a right relationship with God and they were finally confessing their sins, and any who do that will find the blessings of God.

At the end of **verse 6** we learn that Samuel was not only a prophet, but a judge. Samuel was a very effective judge and leader. He turned Israel back to God, just as Eli's sons had turned Israel away from God.

Samuel got Israel to refocus on God and His word and he led them back to the blessings of God.