

“From Ichabod to Ebenezer”
1 Samuel 7:12
(Preached at Trinity, September 4, 2016)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 4** we saw Israel experiencing a terrible catastrophe. They were defeated by the Philistines and the unthinkable occurred—the Ark of the Covenant was taken captive. **1 Samuel 4:10-11 NAU** - "So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent; and the slaughter was very great, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹ And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died."
2. Upon hearing the news that the Ark had been captured Eli fell back in his seat and broke his neck bringing to an end his service as priest and judge of Israel. In addition, his sons Hophni and Phineas were killed in the battle. Phineas’ wife was with child and hearing the news she went into labor. She would die in childbirth but before she died she named the child Ichabod, which she interpreted as “The glory has departed.” God’s glory had stopped shining upon Israel.
3. After the Philistines brought the Ark into their cities they suffered greatly. They brought it to Ashdod and then Gath and finally to Ekron. After thousands had died they finally sent it away, first to Beth-shemesh who also suffered because they failed to recognize the infinite holiness of God. Finally, it was sent to Kiriath-jearim. They treated the Ark with holiness and by the time we enter **Chapter 7** they had enjoyed its presence for over 20 years. It would remain under their care until David determines to move it to Jerusalem year later.
4. As we entered **Chapter 7** Samuel calls upon Israel to repent of their woeful disrespect of God and finally they repent. **1 Samuel 7:4-6 NAU** - "So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroath and served the LORD alone. ⁵ Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray to the LORD for you." ⁶ They gathered to 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."
5. Almost immediately after their repentance their faith was put to the test. They were attacked by the Philistines. They called upon Samuel to pray on their behalf as they looked to God to deliver them—and he did.
6. We are meant to recognize the great contrast in Israel. They were transformed from a people void of the glory of God to a people enjoying His rich presence and all-powerful provision. It is described using the name Ebenezer—stone of help. **1 Samuel 7:12 NAU** - "Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us."

7. I title tonight's sermon, "From Ichabod to Ebenezer."
- A. Several weeks ago I preached a sermon titled, "The Glory Has Departed" dealing with the fearful thought of God withdrawing His presence from individuals or churches. As we turn away from Him we lose the blessing of His countenance. There is no greater malady. William Blaikie wrote: "Tell us that the sun is no longer to shine, tell us that neither dew nor rain shall ever fall again to refresh the earth; tell us that a cruel and savage nation is to reign unchecked and unchallenged over all the families of a people once free and happy; you convey no such image of desolation as when you tell to pious hearts that God has departed from their community."¹
- B. In glorious contrast, how blessed it is when a people can declare, "The Lord is our Helper." Samuel sets up a memorial and names it "Ebenezer" as testimony to God's help.
- I. God's help is always at the right time
- A. Samuel declares the perfect timing of God's help
"Thus far the LORD has helped us."
1. He uses the word, הַנִּיחַ (*hannah*) which refers to the here and now. By saying God has been working "until now" Samuel is stating that God has been working the whole time up until the present.
 2. God is always present. He never fails to care for His people.
"Thus far the LORD has helped us."
 3. God is always present with His people. David called Him "a very present help."
Psalm 46:1-2 KJV - "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore will not we fear"
 - a. The word for "refuge" refers to a shelter, but as it applies here it is an impenetrable shelter.
Luther had **Psalm 46** in mind as He wrote a "Mighty Fortress."
 - b. God is always present – "a very present help"
Luther – "Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing"
 4. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that God will *never* cease being with us
Hebrews 13:5-6 KJV - "*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* ⁶ So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."
- B. But what about the terrible memory of Ichabod?
1. What about the devastating defeat of Israel? What about the terrible loss of life and the capture of the Ark of God?
1 Samuel 4:10-11 NAU - "So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent; and the slaughter was very great, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹ And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died."

¹ Blaikie, William Garden. (2005). *Expository Lectures on the Book of 1 Samuel* (p. 71). Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books.

2. Samuel knows all about this but is declaring that God was there then as well. He was teaching Israel of the consequences of sin. He was showing them that He must be treated as holy.
And this too was a testimony that God was their Helper.
 3. The same is true in our lives.
 - a. God is our Helper during fiery trials demonstrating His mighty power of deliverance.
 - b. But God is also our Helper during times of chastening, demonstrating His preserving grace. He is show us the power of remaining sin in us and bringing us to cry out in repentance.
LBC 5:5 – *Of Divine Providence* – “The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself; and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for other just and holy ends. So that whatsoever befalls any of His elect is by His appointment, for His glory, and their good.”
- C. No one would pretend that the periods of Ichabod and Ebenezer are the same
1. God is with His people always, during times of chastening when the display of His presence is dim, and during the times of Ebenezer then God’s mighty power shines forth in all its brilliance.
 2. But Ichabod is sorrowful. The tears are real. The anguish tears our heart. This period was etched upon their memories. It’s hard for us to see God’s helping hand when His glory has departed.
 3. Samuel says, "Thus far the LORD has helped us."
The implication is, but what about the future?
 - a. They had just witnessed God’s mighty deliverance from the Philistines. He sent a terrible thunder upon the Philistines that threw them into great confusion. There was no doubt this victory was all of God.
 - b. Would Israel continue to trust in God or would they return to their sad condition we witnessed in **Chapter 4**?
 4. Sadly, Israel’s history was a history of forgetfulness. How quickly they dismissed God’s mighty power and placed their trust in man. By the time we get to **Chapter 8** Samuel had grown old and his sons were not walking in his righteousness. Israel cried out for a king like all the nations.
God declared to Samuel:
1 Samuel 8:7-8 NAU - "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. ⁸ "Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day-- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods-- so they are doing to you also."

- II. It's a reminder to us of the importance of remembering God's tender mercies
- A. Israel was prone to forget.
1. Again the word, הַנְּחָה (*hannah*) "until now" implies a series of God's tender mercies. Their history has demonstrated a chain of Divine interventions.
 - a. God delivered them from Egypt. He sustained them in the wilderness. He crushed their enemies in Canaan.
 - b. They must not forget God. We see this in the preamble to the Ten Commandments.
Exodus. 20:2-3 NAU - "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before Me."
 - c. And we must not fail to recognize it was God who led them to this time of confession and repentance.
 2. God warned continually about forgetfulness
Deuteronomy 6:12 NAU - "watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."
Numbers 15:38-40 NAU - "Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. ³⁹ "It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, ⁴⁰ so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God."
1 Chronicles 16:11-12 NAU - "Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. ¹² Remember His wonderful deeds which He has done, His marvels and the judgments from His mouth,"
 3. When Israel crossed the Jordan to enter into the Promised Land God commanded Joshua to set up 12 stones as a memorial to God's help.
Joshua 4:21-24 NAU - "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' ²² then you shall inform your children, saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.' ²³ "For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; ²⁴ that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever."
 4. This is the heart of **Psalm 105**
Psalm 105:1-5 NAU - "Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples. ² Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. ³ Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. ⁴ Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. ⁵ Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth"

5. Samuel is setting up a memorial for remembrance
1 Samuel 7:12 NAU - "Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us."
 - a. Samuel set up a stone memorial. Ebenezer is from two Hebrew words meaning literally a Stone of Help.
 - b. Mizpah was where Samuel cried out in prayer on behalf of Israel. This is where the battle truly began.
 - c. The location of Shen isn't clear but it was likely the very place where the Philistines were defeated and Israel won the victory. The stone was likely placed between these two places—they place where Samuel battled in prayer and the place where God answered his prayer.
 6. Israel needed memorials because they were prone to forget.
- B. We are also prone to forget
1. Do you think often of God's wonderful care in your life? Do you consider often past times of His mighty deliverance?
 2. One of the purposes of the Lord's Supper is for us to remember.
Luke 22:19 NAU - "And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."
 Is there a greater remembrance than the cross?
 3. This is why coming to the Lord's Table flippantly is so dangerous. It is failing to remember.
1 Corinthians 11:27 NAU - "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord."
 4. He has been your mighty helper today. What about tomorrow? Will you continue to glory in His Ebenezer or will you sink under the sorrow of Ichabod?

Conclusion:

1. Ebenezer was a stone of remembrance so that Israel would remember God's wondrous deeds of help so that in the future they might look to Him in faith.
2. The same is true of us. We look to what Christ has done in us and continue to look to Him in faith.
1 Samuel 7:12 NAU - "Thus far the LORD has helped us."
Hebrews 12:2 KJV - "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith"