



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for October 15, 2006
Released on Wednesday, October 11, 2006**

"God Answered Samuel's Prayer"

PRINTED TEXT: 1 Samuel 7:3–13.

READ: 1 Samuel 7:3–13.

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 31:14–24.

TIME: 1047 B.C.

PLACES: Mizpah; between Mizpah and Shen

GOLDEN TEXT: "He [Samuel] cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him." (1 Samuel 7:9b NIV).

HOW TO SAY IT

ASHDOD. *Ash-dod.*

ASHKELON. *Ash-ke-lon* or *As-ke-lon.*

ASHTAROTH. *Ash-tuh-rawth.*

ASHTORETHS. *Ash-toe-reths.*

BAAL. *Bay-ul.*

BAALIM. *Bay-uh-leem.*

BETHCAR. *Beth-kar* or *Beth-kar.*

CAPHTOR. *Kaf-tor.*

CRETE. *Creet.*

DAGON. *Day-gon.*

EBENEZER. *Eb-en-ee-zer.*

EKRON. *Ek-run.*

GATH. *Gath* (a as in bath).

GAZA. *Gay-zuh.*

GILGAL. *Gil-gal* (G as in get).

JONAH. *Jo-nuh.*

NINEVEH. *Nin-uh-vuh.*

PHILISTINES. *Fuh-liss-teens* or *Fill-us-teens.*

LESSON TEXT

1 Samuel 7:3-13

3 And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." 4 So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.

5 Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you." 6 When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel was leader^[a] of Israel at Mizpah.

7 When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. 8 They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines." 9 Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him.

10 While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. 11 The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car.

12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, ^[b] saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us." 13 So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines.

Footnotes:

- a. 1 Samuel 7:6 Traditionally *judge*
- b. 1 Samuel 7:12 *Ebenezer* means *stone of help*.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Look at how God answered the sincere prayer of one godly man—the Prophet Samuel—for His people.
2. See that God often works in our world in response to the prayers of His people.
3. Demonstrate that when we cry out to God in our time of need, He hears and answers us.
4. See the importance in increasing his/her prayer life—personally and for others.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. CLEANSING—1 Samuel 7:3—4
- II. CLAMOR (*insistent public expression*, Merriam-Webster.com)—1 Samuel 7:5—8
- III. CRY—1 Samuel 7:9—13

INTRODUCTION

You may have heard someone say that he is the product of his mother or grandmother's prayers. What this means is that someone cared enough to lift that person up to God daily in prayer, and that God in His mercy answered those prayers.

Intercession through prayer is an important word in the Christian life. It implies that one or more people pleaded to God on behalf of another person's needs.

In the book of Acts we see where a group of believers interceded for Peter who had been thrown into prison (see Acts 12:5). God heard and answered those prayers.

In this week's lesson we see how God acted when the Prophet Samuel prayed. God delivered His people. Samuel's example shows us that the prayers of one solitary, godly person can be effective. We dare not undervalue what God will do in response to a faithful servant on his knees. James 5:16b says that "the prayer of a righteous [person] is powerful and effective" (NIV). For certain, there is power in prayer, and we must learn to regularly and unselfishly pray for others. There is a blessing in store for those who do.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The life and pre-life of the Prophet Samuel is an amazing one. His mother—Hannah—was unable to bear children (with her husband Elkanah; see 1 Sam. 1:1—2) so she made a vow to God that if He allowed her to bear a son, she would dedicate the child back to God for His service and purpose (see 1 Samuel 1:11). When God did answer her prayer (see 1 Sam. 1:19—20), she named her newborn, *Samuel*, which can mean *name of God* or *heard of God*.

Samuel grew up in the tabernacle at Shiloh under the guidance of Eli the priest. When he was a young boy residing with Eli, Samuel received a message directly from God (see 1 Sam. 3:1—14). The message related to God's displeasure at the household of Eli. To be exact, Eli's sons were running amuck and bringing shame to Eli and to God, and Eli had done nothing to address or correct this problem. God's speaking directly to young Samuel showed what great a ministry awaited him.

Beyond that of child prodigy, Samuel played several other roles in the Bible. He was a prophet—meaning that he was God's spokesman (see 1 Sam. 3:20). He was a seer—meaning that he received supernatural visions from God (see 1 Sam. 9:19—20). He was a perpetual judge over Israel and was in fact the *last* of the judges (see 1 Sam. 7:15; Acts 13:20, 3:24; 13:20). And finally, Samuel was a king-maker—meaning that he was the one who anointed both Saul (see 1 Sam. 10:1; 15:1) and David (see 1 Sam. 16:13) as kings of Israel.

Today's lesson is the aftermath of a horrifying incident in the history of Israel in which the Ark of the Covenant was used as a tool for war (see 1 Sam. 4:3—4). This ill-conceived plan resulted in the defeat of Israel and the capture of the ark by the Philistines (4:10—11). The Philistines are often seen as the traditional enemy of the people of God in the Old Testament. They occupied the seacoast area of Gaza in southwest Israel, south of Joppa. The Philistines had five strong cities in this area at the time: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron.

The Bible and other sources let us know that the Philistines were originally foreign invaders from the land of Caphtor (see Amos 9:7), which some scholars identify as the island of Crete. At the time of the exodus, the Philistines were already well established in their territory in Judges and 1 Samuel and are finally conquered by David.

After Solomon, however, the Philistines seem to have a small revival of independence and resume their role as the bane—*source of harm or ruin* (per Merriam-Webster.com)—of Israel. Although now gone, they left their name on the region for *Palestine* is a derivative of *Philistine*. In matters of religion, the Philistines are often pictured as polar opposites to the Israelites. There seems to be no more degrading title than to be called an “uncircumcised Philistine” (see 1 Sam. 17:26).

The recovery of the precious Ark of the Covenant is the occasion for Samuel’s call for national repentance. He challenged his fellow Israelites to put away their idol worship and serve the one true Jehovah God.

QUESTIONS

I. CLEANSING—1 Sam.7: 3—4

1. What three things did Samuel tell Israel to do in order for God to deliver them? (1 Sam. 7:3)

Samuel told Israel to do the following three things and God would deliver them “from the hand of the Philistines.” 1) “Return to the Lord with all [their] hearts,” 2) “put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among [them],” 3) and “prepare [their] hearts for the Lord and serve Him only.”

2. To what do “Baalim” and “Ashtaroth” refer (1 Sam. 7:3—4)?

“Ashtaroth” is the Hebrew plural for the goddess of fertility and sexual relations named Ashtoreth. The Babylonians called her Ishtar, and the Greeks called her Astarte. She was the consort or companion of the male god named Baal. The female goddesses that were lumped under the name Ashtaroth were therefore partners with the male gods collectively labeled Baalim (the plural of Baal).

3. What connection do you see between Joshua 24:18—20 and 1 Samuel 7:3?

Joshua pointed out to the Israelites that as long as they remembered and acknowledged that God was responsible for all of their good fortune, they should have no problem serving only Him. He told them that they had to make a decision and could not serve both foreign gods and Jehovah God at the same time because God is holy and jealous and will not allow this to come to pass. In fact, Joshua told the children of Israel that if they committed this sin of idolatry, God would turn around and do harm or consume them after He had blessed them.

The problem of worshipping false gods and even keeping idols around seemed to be a persistent one in ancient Israel. It was not that the Israelites wanted to abandon Yahweh God completely, but they had the notion that they could worship and serve other gods and goddesses at the same time. As stated earlier, Joshua made it clear that this was not acceptable. Nonetheless, later generations would continue to keep slipping back into this very practice.

4. What steps did Israel take to show loyalty to Yahweh in Mizpah? (1 Sam. 7:4)

To show their renewed loyalty to God in Mizpah, the Israelites “put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.” It was only by doing this that they could show that their penitence or regret was genuine.

At Mizpah, the Israelites assembled and drew water to pour out before the Lord. This was a ceremony to express penitence for sins committed. They also fasted—meaning that they abstained from food, evidently to show their sorrow for sin.

II. CLAMOR—1 Samuel 7:5–8

5. How did the Israelites react to the approaching Philistines? (1 Sam. 7:7–8)

When the Israelites heard that the Philistines were in attack mode and on their way to Mizpah to war with them, the Israelites were “afraid” (v. 7b). Immediately, they asked Samuel to step up his praying to God on their behalf. They might have reasoned that since they had repented of their idolatrous lifestyle and turned away from false gods that it was the perfect time for God to step in and intercept the approaching Philistines.

6. What did Samuel do before or at the same time he sacrificed a burnt offering? (1 Sam. 7:9–10)

While Samuel was offering up to God the “suckling” lamb—one that was at least eight days old—he also “cried unto the Lord for Israel.” The end of verse 9 tells us “and the Lord heard him.”

Samuel’s offering of repentance on behalf of the Israelites signified the nation’s consecration to God—as they were sincere in their sorrow over having sinned. We are reminded here of Psalm 66:18 that says “If I regard iniquity [or sin, wickedness, evil, etc.] in my heart, the Lord will not hear” my prayers. One of the things that hinders a Christian’s effective prayer is ongoing or unconfessed sin. The question that is then raised is why do we allow sin to block our prayer life and thus cut off our connection to God? Do we or do we not want open communications with our Father? Do we or do we not want to receive His full blessing and favor in our lives? This is a decision that we must make individually and regularly for we face sin regularly. Is anything more important to you than a closer fellowship with God?

III. CRY—1 Samuel 7:9–13

7. Why was Samuel so committed to praying for Israel (see 12:23)?

We can look at the following Scriptures to answer this question. First Samuel 12:23 shows us where Samuel took seriously his duty to never cease to pray for “the people” or the Israelites. To do so would amount to his sinning “against the Lord.”

First Samuel 7:5 in today’s lesson shows that Samuel might have inherited his prayer life from his mother Hannah—as she was said to have “prayed to the Lord and wept,” and “spoke in her heart” with “only her lips” moving, and “pour[ed] out [her] soul before the Lord” (see 1 Sam. 1:10–16). There is even the portion of Scripture known as “Hannah’s Prayer” whereby Hannah “rejoices in the Lord” as a result of God having heard her cries and granted her a son (see 1 Sam. 2:1–10).

Samuel's life was one of commitment through intercessory prayer. He would need to be in close communication with God for the guidance and wisdom required to deal with His people. (Refer to 1 Samuel 8:6; 12:19, 23; Psalm 99:6; and Jeremiah 15:1.)

8. What did God use to confuse the Philistine army? (1 Sam. 7:10)

While Samuel was still "offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel."

This thundering must have been something mighty loud and supernatural to cause confusion among the skilled fighters of Philistia. The Israelites probably immediately knew that God was working in their favor at this occurrence. They gathered their composure and began chasing the Philistines "out of Mizpah and pursued [them]... "and drove them back as far as below Beth Car" (vs. 11).

9. What memorial did Samuel set up after Israel's victory? (1 Sam. 7:12)

This verse says that "Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'" He immediately acted to consolidate the spiritual renewal experienced by Israel and supported by the military victory. The name *Ebenezer* more clearly translates "Stone of Help."

We are sure that Samuel never intended for the Israelites to mistake this stone pillar as if it were magical or worthy of worship. It had done nothing to cause the Israelites to prevail over the Philistines. It was merely a memorial to what God had done... a reminder of His works.

Likewise, our Holy Bible is sacred and precious too, but the physical book has no power in itself. The Ark of the Covenant and the Bible are means to an end, not ends in themselves.

10. What was restored to Israel? (1 Sam. 7:13–14)

These verses say "So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites (or Canaanites)."

There is nothing like having the hand of God on your side! He is in complete control and He does what He wishes with all of His creation.

CONCLUSION

Life in Israel returned to *normal*. Samuel continued to settle cases brought to him in Ramah—his hometown, and in Beth-el and in Gilgal. From year to year, he would function as a "circuit" judge in and around his home. He also built an altar to the Lord in Ramah. This exceptional man of God—given to God at birth, was able to continue his service as a prophet, priest, and judge. He made his sons judges as

well, but they were evil and took bribes to pervert justice. As a result, the people demanded that an earthly king reign over them. Samuel did not like this, but God told him to go along with it (see 1 Sam. 7:15–8:9).

While this lesson showed us how God answered Samuel's prayer when he pleaded on behalf of God's people, be sure that God *always* keeps His covenant with His children and often delivers His people in answer to prayer. He is the same God yesterday, today, and forever.

There is hope today for whatever you may be going through or for whatever you may be interceding to God for another person. You need only bow down in sincere prayer and wait to receive your answer. It has been said that there are three ways in which God will answer in response to our prayers: *yes*, *no*, or *wait*. May you be encouraged today to confess your sins and present yourself in earnest to God in prayer. He is there to hear your cries and to provide His divine and perfect answer. Trust Him today.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should not expect help from God if we are being disobedient and idolatrous (1 Sam. 7:3).
2. When we put away our sin, prayer will become effective and worthwhile (vss. 4–6).
3. Continued intercession is essential for our spiritual safety and well-being (vss. 7–9).
4. The Lord has unlimited ways of bringing deliverance and victory to His people in times of distress (vss. 10–11).
5. It is helpful to keep before us reminders of how the Lord has intervened and aided us in the past (vss. 12–13).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Intercessory prayer develops the church into a community of repentance and remembrance.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in Jesus' name we thank You for today's reminder that the Prophet Samuel was dedicated to a life of intercessory prayer—in addition to being a son, father, neighbor, priest, and judge. Thank you for letting us know through his example that ordinary people like ourselves also can unselfishly and regularly come to you in prayer and remembrance for others. We have *so* much to pray for today, Father: our government, our local leaders, our troops, our economy, other impoverished countries, our churches, the unsaved. Help us to discipline our lives to *make* time in our busy schedules to lift up others to You in prayer and to study Your Word so we will know what it is that we should pray and how. This is Your will for us—that we have compassion for the things and people that You have compassion for, and that we be a vessel through which You can speak and work. We are Your arms and legs, Your eyes and ears and mouth. We can make a difference one person at a time. Thank You for Your Holy Word and the faithful men and women that portray Your qualities of love and concern. Lord, we are available to You—for Your use and to Your glory, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Next week's lesson explores how God established His covenant with David. This covenant is important because it was out of the lineage of David that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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