

Sunday Night Message

May 19, 2019

The Ministry of Samuel

Topics – Philistines; the Ark;

Series – *1 Samuel*

Text – 1 Samuel 7

Introduction

In chapter six, we saw the ark of the covenant expelled from the land of the Philistines and returned into Israel. It was placed on a cart pulled by two “milch kine” who, against nature, without being driven, took the ark, away from their calves and into the city of Bethshemesh. At first the people of Bethshemesh are thrilled about the return of the ark, but they violate the law of God by looking into it. 50,070 people are killed for looking into the ark. At the end of the chapter, we discovered that the people of Bethshemesh sent for the people of Kirjathjearim to come and get the ark. Like the Philistines, the people of Bethshemesh wanted God out of town.

In chapter seven, the focus will shift from the ark to the ministry of Samuel. Samuel is one of three key figures in 1 Samuel.

I. The Place Where the Ark Rests (vs. 1 – 2)

The ark was seven months in the land of the Philistines, and will remain in Kirjathjearim, at the house of Abinadab, for twenty years. Eventually David will attempt to bring it to Jerusalem, again on a cart, but after Uzza is slain for touching it (2 Samuel 6:1 – 19), it is moved to the house of Obededom (also in Kirjathjearim - 2 Chronicles 1:4). Eventually, David successfully moves it to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15).

Notice that Eleazar, the son of Aminadab was given responsibility to “keep the ark.” We do not know for sure who this family was, but we do know that “Eleazar” was a common priestly name. It is likely that this family belonged to the Levites. Eleazar was “sanctified,” meaning that he was set apart for the task. The people of Kirjathjearim did not want a repeat of what happened at Bethshemesh. They made sure that Eleazar was equipped for the task.

The Bible indicates that Israel lamented after the God of Israel during this twenty year period that the ark was in Abinadab’s house. It seems that when God came back to Israel twenty years earlier, the people were not yet ready for Him. But now the people were ready to turn back to the Lord and receive Him.

II. The Preacher that called God’s People to Repent (vs. 3 – 6)

v. 3 – Samuel demands that the people “bring forth fruits meet for repentance” (Matthew 3:9). In other words, if the people were really serious about serving God, they were to put away the idols that they were worshipping. God demands exclusivity. He will not share His glory with anything. God wants to be Lord of all (See Luke 3:7 – 14).

v. 4 - McArthur states that Baal represented the male sky god who fertilized the land (6:25, 28).¹ Baal and Baalim are used interchangeably. Baalim is a plural form of Baal. The idea is that there were many images and altars set up throughout Israel that had to be removed.

According to Ryrie, Ashteroth (plural form of Ashtereth) was the Canaanite fertility goddess and the female counterpart of Baal.² The worship of these gods of the Canaanites was a problem throughout the period of the judges:

"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."

(Judges 2:11-13)

The plural Baals and Ashtoreths describe the many local shrines of those Canaanite nature deities. Baal, variously identified as son of El (chief of the Canaanite pantheon) or as son of Dagan (the Mesopotamian deity), was particularly recognized as the god of thunder and rain whose task was to make the earth fertile annually. Ashtoreth (or Astarte) was goddess of both love and war, as were her Babylonian and Greek counterparts Ishtar and Aphrodite respectively. She apparently functioned with Baal as a fertility deity and by their sexual union in some magical way the earth and all its life supposedly experienced annual rejuvenation and fruitfulness.³

vs. 5 & 6 – Israel gathers at Mizpeh, which becomes one of the cities that Samuel would travel to in his circuit ministry. Saul would become king at Mizpeh (1 Samuel 10:17). It was about seven miles north of Jerusalem, and about 8 miles NE of Kirjathjearim, where the ark was located.

There the people confess their sins to the Lord.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." (1 John 1:9-10)

Notice also that Samuel prayed for the people when they were gathered together at Mizpeh. 1 Samuel frequently records Samuel praying, or the people calling on Samuel to pray (7:8, 9; 8:6; 12:19, 23; 15:11).

¹ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 387.

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: King James Version*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 438.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 438.

Samuel also poured out water unto the Lord, which was a sign of repentance (See 2 Samuel 23:16).

All of these actions by Israel and Samuel indicated that the revival taking place at Mizpeh was genuine. The people were sincerely sorry for their sin and were seeking the Lord.

III. The Persecutors of God's People Return (vs. 7 – 12)

You can mark it down – when God's people begin to do right, the devil will come and attack. The Philistines hear about the revival going on in Israel and they want to put a stop to it. Remember, when the Israelites brought the ark out into the battle at Aphek, the Philistines were afraid. Why? Because they had heard about all of the miraculous victories that God had given Israel in the past when Israel was faithfully serving God (i.e. Egypt, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, Canaanites).

However, it is the Israelites who were afraid of the Philistines. Remember, they were living defeated and faithless lives for so long; and they had been beaten up multiple times by the Philistines. This life of faith was new to them, and they were fearful. They had yet to experience for themselves the victory that God brings to a people that love and serve Him.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14:34)

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance." (Psalm 33:12)

Samuel prays for them, and offers a sacrifice unto the Lord, and God was pleased; and as Samuel was offering the sacrifice, God began to do a work on the Philistines. The word, "discomfit," means to move noisily and to confuse. The Philistines who were much stronger militarily begins to panic, and begin to flee from Mizpeh, but are chased down by the Israelites where they are crushed them "under Bathcar."

Samuel sets up a memorial stone and named it "Ebenezer," meaning "the stone of help." Interestingly, Ebenezer was the name of the place that the Israelites put the ark when they went into battle against the Philistines years earlier, and it was the place that the Philistines had taken the ark from (1 Samuel 4:1, 5:1).

IV. The Places that Once Belonged to Israel are Returned (vs. 13 – 14)

The rest of the time that Samuel had judged Israel, the Philistine problem was contained. They would later become a problem for King Saul, but during the judgeship of Samuel. Israel was even able to take back some of the cities "from Ekron even unto Gath." The Philistines had given Israel a hard time for a long time, but with the help of Samuel ministry, the people of Israel were victorious over their long-time foe.

Notice also that the Israelites were at peace with the Amorites. The Amorites were the people that the tribe of Dan could not drive out (Judges 1:34). The Amorites were a little to the west of Israel, but not quite to the coast where the Philistines were.

V. The Prophet who ruled (judged) from Ramah (vs. 15 – 17)

The altar that Samuel built at Ramah was not the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle itself was at Shiloh, but after Shiloh was taken by the Philistines, it goes underground for a while. It ends up in Nob, and was later moved to Gibeon).

Conclusion

This chapter shows what can happen when the people of God decide to do right. They separated from their idols; they supplicated fervently to the God of Israel and submitted themselves to Him.



