

1 Samuel 7:1-17

Samuel Calls on Israel to Repent

1 Samuel 7:1 - "And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD."

Josephus says Abinadab, an old man, was a Levite - displaced from his Levite city as many were in the turbulent times of the Judges. Their home was on a hill, and God had allowed worship on high places until the Temple was built in Jerusalem. Eleazar his son was a young man more suited to be in charge of the Ark and protect it from defilement by the curious to avoid what had happened to the men of Bethshemesh.

Kirjath-jearim (city of wood or forests) was earlier called Kiriath-Ba'al or city of Baal (**Joshua 15:60**).

The Tabernacle had traveled from Gilgal in the time of Joshua, then to Shiloh for 369 years. When Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines, Samuel erected it again at Gilgal, though without the Ark present. King Saul later moved the Tabernacle to Nob near his hometown of Gibeah. After Saul massacred the priests there he moved the Tabernacle to Gibeon, and it was there in David's time (**1 Chronicles 16:39**). It remained there until Solomon had it brought to Jerusalem (**2 Kings 24:13**).

During this time, the Ark was separate from the Tabernacle, located at Kirjath-jearim. David later brought it to Jerusalem. Once the Ark took its place within the Temple of Solomon, the Tabernacle was folded up and stored somewhere within the Temple grounds.

Sadly, the normal sacrifices and feasts were suspended during most of this time of chaos. Some sacrifices were offered at the Tabernacle altar. Perhaps the Yom Kippur sacrifices were performed separately by the high priest at the Ark. The situation reflected the degraded spiritual state of the people, who had fallen away from God.

But all this traveling around had a purpose.

Placing the Ark on a high place formerly used to worship Baal or Molech or Ashtaroth was a symbol of God's superiority over the false gods of the Canaanites. As the Ark and the Tabernacle moved around to different high places, they were symbolically proclaiming God's sovereignty over the old gods.

In a similar way, our own high places, where we used to worship and fear the gods of our own making, have been transformed and reclaimed by God. The idols have been overturned and marred, so we don't have to fear their power. Our first awareness of the true God occurs on one of our high places, when we are shown the idols defeated and toppled. Then He brings us to the New Jerusalem.

- **Isaiah 58:13** - "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." (quoting **Deuteronomy 32:13**)

Kirjath-jearim is elsewhere called Gibeah (**2 Samuel 6:2-3**) or possibly the two places were very near each other, about 3-4 miles north of Jerusalem. Recall that Gibeah was the location of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine (**Judges 19–21**), and the hometown of King Saul.

When David brought the Ark from there to Jerusalem, **Psalms 132:6** refers to this place where the Ark was located as "the fields of the wood," identified as Kirjath-jearim.

- **Psalms 132:4-8** - "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, Until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephrath: we found it in the fields of the wood. We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool. Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength."

The Targum is, "thou, and the ark in which is thy law."

In the same way the Law was inside the Ark, the Law was within Christ and was fulfilled by Him.

- **Matthew 5:17-18** - "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

And Christ, who embodies the Law fulfilled, dwells in us:

- **Jeremiah 31:33** - "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Jerusalem, or more specifically Mt. Zion, was to be God's chosen place to dwell:

- **Psalms 132:13-14** - "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."

The Tabernacle, the Ark and the Law

The Ark was the heart of the Tabernacle, and all the sacrifices and offerings pointed toward the Lord's dwelling place as the Shekinah glory on the mercy seat between the cherubim. This culminated in the sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat once a year by the high priest at Yom Kippur.

But the Ark and indeed the whole Law was a picture pointing toward Christ, who fulfilled it.

God showed Jeremiah a radical vision of a time when the Ark would no longer be needed.

- **Jeremiah 3:14-16** - "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more."

i.e. the people would no more delight in the Ark as the dwelling place of God, or visit the Ark to inquire of the Lord, nor would they bring out the Ark to go before them in war. The rabbis explain this would take place in the times of Messiah.

Instead:

- **Jeremiah 3:17** - "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart."

The Ark here stands for the whole Law. And Jeremiah says God will form a new covenant with Israel:

- **Jeremiah 31:31** - "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:"

The Jerusalem he mentions is the New Jerusalem:

- **Galatians 4:26** - "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."

- **Revelation 21:2-4** - "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

Christ becomes the mercy seat, whose own shed blood as a sacrifice on the cross becomes the Atonement, sprinkled by Himself as high priest. His dwelling place is among his people now.

- **Hebrews 9:11-12** - "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the

Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

["not of this building" = not part of this created world. It's part of the "new creation"]

Because He dwells in us, we are the Temple:

- **1 Corinthians 3:16** - "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

- **1 Peter 2:5** - "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

The Ark was missing from the Temple in Jesus' day. The rabbis note that also missing were "the Shekinah or divine Majesty, the Holy Ghost, which is prophecy, the Urim and Thummim, and the fire from heaven."

And yet the prophet Haggai says (2:9) "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts." He was talking about the spiritual Temple - the Bride, the people of God as the temple - and the New Jerusalem.

A Call to Repentance

1 Samuel 7:2 - "And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only."

"prepare" your hearts - *kûn* - prepare or direct your hearts properly, "correct" your hearts

A Solemn Assembly

1 Samuel 7:5-6 - "And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh."

Rashi - Targum Jonathan renders: "and they poured out their hearts in repentance, like water, before the Lord." And according to its simple meaning, it is merely a symbol of humility, i.e., they implied, we are like spilled water.

Threatened by the Philistines

1 Samuel 7:7-8 - "And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And

when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines."

They didn't ask God to *help* them fight. Instead, so great was their fear that they asked God to save them "without their participation."

An act of humility or faith or repentance on the part of believers always incites a counter-response from the enemy. Our personal Philistines arrive in the form of thoughts of doubt, fear, or self-interest.

- **Ephesians 6:16** - "Above all, take the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

A further explanation:

- **Hebrews 11:34** - The honor roll of the faithful, who: "Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the foreign enemies."

1 Samuel 7:9 - "And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him."

The suckling lamb (which Samuel is said to have taken from his own flock) reflected the vulnerability of Israel at that moment. Just as the lamb is dependent on its mother, Israel was placing their complete trust in God.

The burnt offering signified total submission of your whole self to God. Everything was consumed.

The Talmud says that Samuel "donned the cloak of all the Jews" - i.e. he acted as defense attorney for the people, and exclaimed: "Master of the worlds, do you demand more of a person than his admission, 'I have sinned?' The Jews are confessing 'We have sinned.' - won't you forgive them?"

Some rabbis explain that "God answered" means that fire came down to consume the offering. Others interpret it to mean God answered with the thunder.

The rabbis said it was important that the people had confessed as one congregation - "for the merits of the many are more potent than those of any individual." Every Jew must feel a sense of responsibility for another Jew's misdeeds, because "all Jews are guarantors for one another." In the same way, after a certain time on Passover, any leaven retained in a household becomes the responsibility of everyone in the community.

As Samuel was performing the burnt offering, with the Philistines almost upon the

people, God thundered against them.

1 Samuel 7:10-11 - "And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar."

This fulfilled part of Hannah's earlier prayer of thanksgiving, which foreshadowed the days of Messiah:

- **1 Samuel 2:10** - "The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed."

Josephus (Antiqu. l. 6. c. 2. sect. 2.) says this thunder was attended by lightning, which flashed in the faces of the Philistines, and shook their weapons out of their hands, so that they fled disarmed; and also with an earthquake, which caused gaps in the earth, into which they fell.

Other rabbis insist this was accompanied by fiery flames that burned the eyes of the Philistines, basing this on **Psalms 18:13-14** - "The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them." Although the Philistines heard the thunder as an intolerable disconcerting noise, Israel heard it at a lower decibel level to reinforce their faith.

Raise Your 'Ebenezer'

1 Samuel 7:12 - "Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us."

"*Ebenezer*" = "the stone of help"

The hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" has the line, "Here I raise my Ebenezer; Here by Thy great help I've come..."

Has the Lord helped you, has He rescued you from certain death? Has He miraculously intervened in your life in some way? Then set up an "Ebenezer," a mental "stone of help" - a spiritual sticky-tab at the very least - to remind you of His power and His willingness to hear your cry.

Tradition says that when those who had witnessed the miraculous victory passed by this "stone of help" they would recite the blessing: "Blessed is He who performed miracles at this place." Future generations would recite: "Blessed is He who performed miracles for our forefathers at this place."

This victory took place in the same place where the Israelites were 20 years earlier twice defeated by the Philistines (see **Samuel 4:1**).

1 Samuel 7:13 - "So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel."

The Philistines relinquished the cities and villages they had taken from Israel, and they and the Amorites (the remnant of the Canaanites) caused no more trouble for a while.

Still, though the Tabernacle was in Gilgal, God had not officially designated a place for it to be set up, and the Ark remained in Kirjath-jearim. Samuel - who was a Levite and a prophet but not a priest - was able to legally offer the suckling lamb as a burnt offering because the priesthood and Levites were scattered. A return to the Law's order of sacrifices and offerings waited until things could be fixed in their proper place.

1 Samuel 7:15 - "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life."

Samuel was a Nazarite from the womb. He was accounted to have judged Israel from birth, although this was literally not true. According to a Midrash (Midrash Tehillim 92), every Levite is enlisted in God's heavenly army while still in his mother's womb.

1 Samuel 7:16-17 - "And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD."

Samuel went twice a year to visit the surrounding cities of Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeh to hear complaints and judge cases brought to him, and teach the Law. He was based in Ramah, where his parents had lived.

The Talmud interprets "there was his house" to mean he would pitch his own tent and carry his own utensils, so as not to be a burden or benefit from others - as the sons of Eli had done. The Talmud notes that a prophet could benefit from the public if he wishes to, as Elisha did (**2 Kings 4**), or not, as Samuel.

This is similar to Paul's custom of supporting himself by tent making, so as not to be influenced or beholden to wealthy donors on his missions although he maintained he had that right as an apostle. It is difficult to rebuke or call out someone you are dependent on:

- Acts 20:33-35 - "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul declined to claim any higher status arising from his apostolic position, but rather he was stepping down the social ladder for the sake of Christ. We are all called to be

witnesses and to minister no matter what our job is or our circumstances.

As Samuel grew older, he was no longer able to travel around on his circuit to judge the people, and therefore the people began to slide back into sin. This resulted in a resurgence of the Philistines, which will cause the people to cry out for a king.