

Spiritual Revival at Mizpah
1 Samuel 7:2-17
Key Verse: 7:3

by Dr. John Jun

"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 Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.'"

The blasphemy and sexual immorality (22:11-22) of the sons of Eli, the priest, and the people's idolatry provoked God to anger. God, who had been with the Israelites from the time of Abraham through Moses to Eli, stopped walking with his people and, as a result, they fell into spiritual darkness. The glory of God left the Israelites. Through today's passage, we can learn firstly, how Samuel began spiritual awakening (2-11); how did God's glory return to Israel? Secondly, we learn what it means that Samuel set up a stone, calling it, "Ebenezer."

I. Samuel's movement of Spiritual revival (2-11)

The Ark was a symbol of God's presence. This was an evidence of the covenant between God and his chosen people (Ex 25:22; 34:28-29). In the time of the judge Eli, the Israelites took the Ark from Shiloh when they went out to fight against the Philistines and the Philistines captured the Ark (1Sa 4:11). But God brought it back to the land of Israel. The Ark was taken to Kiriath Jearim through Beth Shemesh (1Sa 6:19-21). The Ark was left at Kiriath Jearim for twenty long years (1). It was because the altar of Shiloh was completely destroyed by the Philistines during the war at Aphek (1-2a).

At that time what change happened to the hearts of the Israelites? Look at verse 2. "It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord." For a long time the Ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, which was very close to the Philistine territory. So the people of Israel could not participate in worshipping God freely because of the Philistines' political pressure. Therefore, the people of Israel longed for God and their hearts began to warm up. It was because Samuel had taught the word of God and awakened his people. Even though Samuel was alone, he was not in despair but persistently challenged his people with the word of God.

Verses 3-4 talk about Samuel's repentance movement. The famous Korean scholar on church history, Dr. Myung Hyuk Kim, said that prior to all spiritual revival was a movement of repentance. There was a repentance movement before the great awakening by Jonathan Edwards in America. Also before the great revival at Pyongyang was a repentance movement. How were the Israelites and God spiritually until that time? Eli was old and his eyes became weak in sight. His two priest sons committed grave sins (2:17, 22). There was no vision because of his people's idolatry, and they were in utter darkness because the word of God was rare (3:1). God was angry and the Ark of God was captured by the Philistines at Aphek. Eli's two sons were dead, and the glory of God left Israel (4:21). The relationship between God and the Israelites was completely broken, and a spiritually dark era began. Politically, the Israelites were defeated and oppressed by the Philistines. They could not worship God freely and suffered with severe pain. At that time Samuel was 32 years old. (He was 12 at the time of Aphek battle.) He began to work as a spiritual leader. Samuel assembled all his people at Mizpah, and it became a big gathering(5). Samuel tried to help his people restore their spiritual relationship with God. What did Samuel challenge his people to repent specifically?

Look at verse 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 Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only.'" How did Samuel urge them to repent specifically? First, he urged them to rid themselves of the foreign gods (3a). Look at verse 3a. "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 Ashtoreths..." Here the foreign gods referred to Baals. The worshipped Baal as the god who gave them rain and harvest. They were equivalent to today's Mammon, that is, materialism. An idol refers to anything we love more than God. Today so many intellectuals live with materialism. They believe that money is the answer to everything. When we see things superficially, money seems to solve all problems. So in our actual lives we value money the most. So we are, in theory, God centered people, yet in reality, materialists. But money cannot solve the most fundamental problems of man: sin, death and life, the power of death, unhappiness, and the lack of truth. We have lived in the midst of materialism for a long time. Therefore, including

myself, we are influenced by materialism each and everyday. Unless we wash the yeast of materialism as we take a shower daily, we will get rotten and smelly by materialism. Not only by the yeast of materialism but also by the yeast of relativism, hedonism, we are being polluted. Like Apostle Paul, we must struggle with an absolute attitude toward the word of God and overcome the mainstream of this generation.

Ashtoreth, the goddess of heaven(Lev 44:19) was worshipped as the goddess of beauty and sex. The ritual of sexual immorality followed the worship of the goddess. About 300 meters from the church at Corinth was Aphrodite Temple. After worshipping the goddess, immoral group sexual rituals would follow. They say that there were about 1,000 priestesses. This was equivalent to today's sexual hedonism many young people seek. Many of today's people seek hedonism through the Internet. So many young people are heavily influenced by hedonism through lustful Internet sites. The general trend of today's worship is materialism, hedonism, relativism, and the idol of High-tech. The reason why we become idol worshippers is because we have contact with(Nu 25:16), think about, and keep a relationship with them (Lev 44:15-19). So what should we do in order to protect ourselves from the yeast of idolatry? First, we should not associate with idol worshippers (1Co 5:11). We should avoid them, and not eat sacrifices offered to the idol (1Co 10:8-22). Second, we must teach the fallacy of idolatry through preaching the word of God (Ac 14:15). We should not give in to the general trend of our time, but challenge it with the word of God.

Second, change your life direction and serve God only (3b). "Return to the Lord with your hearts and serve Him only." Samuel said "You commit yourselves to the Lord with your hearts." When we return our hearts to God from foreign gods and sins, we can serve Him. Then we can grow spiritually and bear fruit. We tend to think that our Bible students are changed 180 degree when they share their repentant testimonies. Some students say that they repent, yet in fact, it just means that they regret--like Pharaoh. But they are changed 20 degrees when they share their first testimony, 45 degrees by the second, 90 degrees by the third, and 180 degrees by their fourth testimony. And when we serve him actively, we can glorify God and, at that same time, we become happy and fruitful. What was the response of the people when Samuel urged them to repent? Look at verse 4. "So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only." The people accepted Samuel's challenge and thoroughly repented. This showed us that the Israelites accepted Samuel's spiritual authority as a prophet and trusted in him.

Verses 5-11 talk about the general gathering at Mizpah. The judge Samuel called on all the Israelites at Mizpah to pray for a spiritual revival (5a). How did Samuel help the people to repent on such a national scale? Look at verse 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.'" "Pouring water out" referred to "pouring one's sins out." it was a symbol of sincere repentance (Ps 22:14). Fasting referred to a sincere and humble attitude before the Lord. "We have sinned against the Lord (6c)." The prophet Samuel made an intercessory prayer for the sins of all people. An intercessory prayer means praying for the people's sin standing in between God and his people. As we repent through testimony writing and Daily Bread sharing, we are in a position to make an intercessory prayer. Like Samuel, we should make an intercessory prayer for campus intellectuals and for our people. In these days, we in the West are worshipping the idols of materialism and hedonism.

The glory of God is leaving this country. We must make a spiritual revival like the Israelites. Spiritual revival in one's life through the word of God, and furthermore, the work of repentance on a national level is desperately in need. We UBF missionaries and shepherds should repent personally before God daily and restore a right relationship. Each of us also should become a little Samuel and persistently struggle for a spiritual revival through 1:1 Bible study. We UBF shepherds also have to make an intercessory prayer.

Look at verse 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." After the Aphek battle, the Philistines stationed an outpost and its garrison (10:5) inside of Israel's territory. As they watched over them, the Israelites could not serve God freely. When the Philistines heard that all the Israelites had assembled at Mizpah, they thought that the Israelites would challenge them. So the Philistines set out to attack them. When they heard that all the people of Israel gathered under Samuel's spiritual leadership to repent, they thought Israel was united for a holy war against them. So they wanted to attack them first.

What did the judge Samuel do in this urgent situation? First, the people of Israel cried out to God through prayer (8). Look at verse 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.'" When the people of Israel repented their broken relationship with God and, by the

help of Samuel's encouragement, decided to serve God only, they heard about the Philistines' attack. There is always Satan's attack right after we repent and decide to serve God. In the past, they were under the Philistines' rule and suffered much. They were haunted by the Philistines and were terrified. They were not in despair by their weaknesses but cried out to God. After their repentance, they believed that the Mighty God would destroy the Philistines.

Second, Samuel offered a burnt offering (9-10a). "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." A suckling lamb is a lamb without defect, which was offered to God. "A whole burnt offering" means giving one's whole heart. A burnt offering is a sacrifice made wholly to the Lord (Lev 1:3-9) Burnt offering referred to their sincere repentance (6), and complete devotion to God. When we are attacked by Satan, we should come to the Lord and offer a sacrifice of sincere devotion and prayers to the Lord like Samuel. We also make an intercessory prayer. When Samuel was offering the burnt offering to God with his people, the Philistines armed themselves with iron weapons and advanced from the hill of Mizpah to the altar of Mizpah. The whole assembly and the altar of Mizpah would collapse with blood. But the judge Samuel did not even blink his eyes and only offered the burnt offering and prayed to God with his people.

How did God rescue his people who repented their sins? Look at verse 10. "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." God responded to Israel's sacrifices and prayer with loud thunder. God used the loud thunder as a weapon to defeat the Philistines (2:10, 2sm 22:14). God uses hailstones (Jos 10:11), darkness (Jos 24:7), and diseases (5:6) to punish his enemies. When Samuel and his people offered sacrifice and prayed with whole hearts, the Philistines were afraid that God would send ten plagues which had been upon Pharaoh in Egypt, and approached Israel very carefully. As they feared, God sent loud thunder against them which was like a nuclear bomb of 10 million tons. They were frightened and began to run away. When their prayers were heard by God, their morale was fully restored (11). They began to fight back against the Philistines. The God Almighty rescued his people with his power. Israel could participate in the glory of a great victory by the power of God. When they repented wholeheartedly and depended on God only, they could enjoy a great victory, the greatest since Samson had killed the Philistines (Jdg 14-15). God's glory that had departed returned to Israel. God became a shepherd of Israel and began to lead and protect them.

2. The God of Ebenezer(12-17)

In verses 12-14, there is a record of the people of Israel who built a monument after the Philistines had been cast out of Israel's territory. What did Samuel do first after the repentance movement at Mizpah and victory over the Philistines? Look at verse 12. "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the Lord helped us." Samuel set the stone up between Mizpah and Shen. Then why did he set the stone up between Mizpah and Shen? it was the monument of thanksgiving to God who gave them the victory. Look at verse 12 again. "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the Lord helped us." A monument of thanksgiving was to express their hearts of thanksgiving toward God who helped them in the time of their crisis. In order to express their thanks, they built a monument of thanksgiving. Noah built an altar of thanksgiving after the flood. He built a monument of thanksgiving and thanked God for having saved him and his family members from the flood. Joshua took twelve stones and built an altar after they crossed the Jordan. It was a monument of thanksgiving to God after crossing the Jordan River safely as on dry land. Likewise, Samuel built Ebenezer, a monument of thanksgiving. After building this monument, the Philistines could not attack Israel anymore while Samuel lived. Israel could enjoy peace while Samuel was in public service. Anyone who has received God's blessing, but does not know how to build a monument of thanksgiving in his heart, the blessing will soon be taken away.

Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon built a super-power nation by the help of God. But he became proud thinking that he built the great Babylon by his own strength and wisdom and power.(Dan 4:30-31). After saying this, in a few days he was driven away from the palace and ate grass like a cow in his madness and his skin grew feathers like those of an eagle (Dan 5:16-21). Aren't we also so proud after receiving God's blessing and his grace like Nebuchadnezzar? We should read our life-testimony again and remember God's grace. By his grace, we were invited to Bible study in UBF in our college days, and graduated and became shepherds, missionaries whom even the angels envy. It is time for us to build our Ebenezer, the monument of thanksgiving. We, human beings are like a dementia patient and easily forget God's grace. In order to renew his grace, we should build up our monument of thanksgiving at the entrance of each house. The monument of thanksgiving can be our life-testimony or Bible

testimony and it can be our souvenir of thanksgiving. If there is no thanksgiving monument of Ebenezer, we can be like Nebuchadnezzar who became a wild animal and wandered in the wilderness.

In verses 13-14, the Philistines were surrendered to Israel and all the land was restored which the Philistines had captured. Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the Philistine could not invade Israel and she could enjoy peace without any threat for 50 years. Verses 15-17 describe Samuel who continued as judge over Israel. As a judge, Samuel traveled from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah. He was diligent and sincere, and carried his duty as a circuit judge. We can learn the image of a good shepherd from Samuel.

In conclusion, let us have personal revival by repenting daily personally and let us make intercessory prayers for young souls like Samuel.