

1 Samuel 7:3-17 – “Samuel’s Ministry to the People”

(Pew Bible Page: 230)

Intro: We have been watching the development of this young man, Samuel, who was chosen by God to lead God’s people and to shepherd them through the transition from leadership by Judges to leadership by Kings. Much has happened since God called Samuel in chapter three. In the interim God has brought His judgement on the house of Eli. Eli, Hophni, and Phineas are dead, and the nation is without a High Priest. The temple of God has been swept away, destroyed by the Philistines; Shiloh is now a desolation. The Ark of the Covenant, the representation of God’s presence among His people, has fallen into the hands of the Philistines before being returned to Israel by the plague-ridden Philistines, who could not endure God’s presence among them. It now rests in the house of a man named Abinadab in the town of Kiriath-jearim. It has been there for twenty years, perhaps the twenty years that Samson was God’s instrument to keep the Philistines on their heels, until God’s prophet, Samuel, came of age. Samuel himself has not been mentioned since 4:1 said, *“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel,”*¹ informing us that the good news that a prophet was again among God’s people spread like wildfire through all of Israel. But evidently that good news carried very little weight with the people after the devastating loss of Eli, the Temple, and the Ark at the hands of the Philistines. Tonight, we pick up the story twenty years later in 7:3, where we find Israel once again following the pattern observed in the Book of Judges: Blessings, rebellion, lamentation, repentance, restoration. It was when Israel once again began to seek God that God’s man came again to the forefront.

Proposition: God sends guidance and restoration through His leader when His people turn to Him in repentance.

Billboard:	(vv.3-6)	Samuel led Israel to Repentance
	(vv.7-11)	Samuel saw Israel through Testing
	(vv.12-14)	Samuel pointed Israel to God
	(vv.15-17)	Samuel provided Israel Leadership

(vv.3-6) Samuel led Israel to Repentance – Verse two introduces us to the heart of God’s people seeking God again saying, **“1 Samuel 7:2 - 2 From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.** Typical of the pattern we observed in the Book of Judges, Israel once again sought God when the enemy’s oppression became unbearable. But where could they find Him? How could the people find God’s presence again, given that their spiritual leadership had been taken from them and their Temple was destroyed? Apparently, they remembered Samuel, *“And the word of Samuel came [again perhaps?] to all Israel.”* Samuel is evidently about 32 years old at this point, just about the age when God’s people considered a boy to have passed into manhood. They sought out Samuel and Samuel’s ministry began in earnest among them. The first thing Samuel did was to point the people to repentance: **1 Samuel 7:3–6 - 3 And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” 4 So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only. 5 Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” 6 So they gathered at 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.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.** Samuel’s ministry began with three commands and one promise:

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (1 Sa 4:1). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

1 Samuel 7:3-17 – “Samuel’s Ministry to the People”

(Pew Bible Page: 230)

- *“Put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you”* - Repentance begins by getting rid of anything taking the place of God in men’s minds, wills, and affections. Until all rivals have been removed, God can grant no restoration to His people.
- *“Direct your heart to the Lord”* – Having removed all idols from your hearts, restore the Lord to His proper place in your minds, wills, and affections. Turn your attention to Him and begin to *“fear the Lord”* (take God seriously).
- *“Serve him only”* – Put into action in your daily life all that He is and all that He says. Meeting these three conditions is evidence of genuine repentance in the hearts of men. When these conditions are met, a promise follows:
- *“He will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines”* – God delights to restore His erring people when we seek Him with all our heart: **Jeremiah 29:13 - 13** *You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Ministry begins with leading people to true repentance and faith in God.

[ILLUSTRATION] A properly made coin has different images on each of its sides. If you ever find a quarter that has George Washington’s face on both sides, HANG ON TO THAT QUARTER! It’s going to be worth a lot of money to collectors because that’s not the way proper quarters are made! In that same way, lives transformed by God have two different faces: repentance on one side, and faith on the other. Repentance and Faith are different and may be distinguished from each other, but they are also inseparable – the one never goes anywhere without the other.

[APPLIATION] Show me someone who is still hanging onto their idols, and I’ll show you someone who has yet to come to faith. God’s grace is so amazing when it comes that holding onto the world’s idols simply makes no sense to anyone who has received it. Look at the Apostle Paul’s testimony about himself in **Philippians 3:8–10 - 8** *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.* When a man or woman comes to genuine faith in Christ, all the other idols or the heart – anything that takes the place of God in the mind, will, or affections, is cast aside and left behind. Ministry begins with leading people to repentance and faith in God.

(vv.7-11) Samuel saw Israel through Testing – If ministry begins with leading people to true repentance and faith, it continues by seeing those people through testing: **1 Samuel 7:7–11 - 7** *Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8 And the people of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” 9 So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. 10 As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. 11 And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines*

1 Samuel 7:3-17 – “Samuel’s Ministry to the People”

(Pew Bible Page: 230)

and struck them, as far as below Beth-car. When God’s people repent and return to Him, the devil is quick to challenge their repentance, testing its reality. That is exactly what happened here. The Philistines, long recovered from their painful experience with the Ark and still smarting from Samson’s destruction of Dagon’s temple and worshippers, were in no mood to accept a revived Israel. Anxious to nip this in the bud, they went to Mizpah intending to attack the unarmed worshippers who had gathered there. The Philistines probably thought they had the best of the situation, but they failed to account for Samuel’s prayers. Samuel had promised to pray for the people who gathered at Mizpah, and Samuel was a man of prayer from before birth till the day of his death. Samuel knew the power of prayer, and so did repentant Israel, saying, *“Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.”* This saying proves that the repentance of the people was genuine, for if it had not been they would have had access to several options. They could stone Samuel. They could return to their idols. They could surrender to the Philistines. They could run for the hills. They did none of these things, but rather turned to God through Samuel’s intercession. **1 Samuel 7:9 - 9** *So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.... 11 And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.* Samuel’s intercession for the people was not based on his own thoughts or desires but was offered based on a sacrifice – a *“whole burnt offering.”* This reminds us of Jesus, who whole-heartedly offered Himself as our sacrifice and like Samuel’s lamb, is the basis for all our prayers. God answers the prayers of His people, not because of who we are, but because of Jesus. **1 Samuel 7:10 - 10** *As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel.*

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Ministry continues when we see people through testing by whole-hearted dependance on Jesus.

[ILLUSTRATION] It is a truism we’ve been saying around here for three or four years now: “Prayerlessness is my declaration of independence from God,”² which is just another way of saying that prayer is the measure of our dependance on God. The longer I serve in ministry the more I realize the truth of that statement. There is no power for ministry where there is no commitment to prayer.

[APPLICATION] From earliest days Samuel knew that fact. He was born in answer to his mother’s prayers. Samuel’s entire ministry was characterized by deep dependence on God through prayer, beginning with the simple child-like prayer, *“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”* When the people later demanded a king, Samuel’s first response was a prayer to God (cf.8:7;21). When the people needed a rebuke from God after receiving a king, Samuel called on the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain during the wheat harvest (cf.12:18); then dismissed the people saying, *“Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you”* (v.12:23). When King Saul sinned against the Lord by failing to obey, Samuel cried to the Lord all night for him (v.14:11). Samuel was a man of prayer because he knew the secret, though it wouldn’t be verbalized most satisfyingly until Jesus said to His disciples on the night He was betrayed, **John 15:5 - 5** *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* Samuel knew the secret of prayer – do you?

² Daniel Henderson

1 Samuel 7:3-17 – “Samuel’s Ministry to the People”

(Pew Bible Page: 230)

(vv.12-14) Samuel pointed Israel to God – After the victory was won, Samuel made a point of setting up a stone of remembrance so that the people wouldn’t forget who it was that gave them the victory: **1 Samuel 7:12–14 - 12** *Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, “Till now the LORD has helped us.”* **13** *So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.* **14** *The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.* Stones of remembrance were often used by the people of Israel to mark significant acts of God on their behalf: Jacob set up a stone of remembrance at Bethel to remind him of the promise God made to him there. Joshua and the people set up twelve stones on the banks of the Jordan so that they would remember God’s parting of the Jordan when they entered the land. The victorious eastern tribes of Israel set up an altar on the Jordan’s west bank after their conquest of the land to remind the western tribes that the easterners too belonged to the people of God. To set up a stone of remembrance is a way of reminding the people that God is our victory and our peace.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Ministry progresses when we point people continually back to the fact of God’s sovereignty.

[ILLUSTRATION] It is amazing how quickly we forget all that God has graciously done for us! God has given us “stones of remembrance” as New Testament believers: baptism, the Lord’s Table, and corporate worship.

[APPLICATION] The Lord has given us those “stones of remembrance” because He knows our weakness. He knows we need to look back to our baptism for reassurance when Satan tempts us to doubt our union with the Savior. He knows we need to regularly remind ourselves of His precious sacrifice for us by coming to the Communion Table. He understands that if we don’t gather with other believers regularly, we’ll fall into the habit of neglecting to meet with other believers for fellowship, communion, encouragement, and community. The wise minister, like Samuel, recognizes that a good portion of his duty is to remind the flock of the things they already know but are prone to forget. We need someone to point us back to God repeatedly, and a faithful minister will not tire of fulfilling this responsibility.

(vv.15-17) Samuel provided Israel’s Leadership – Verses 15-17 provide us with a summary of Samuel’s ministry among God’s people during the prime years of his life: **1 Samuel 7:15–17 - 15** *Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.* **16** *And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places.* **17** *Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD.* What are the elements of Samuel’s faithful ministry to the people revealed in these verses?

- *Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.* – Samuel’s commitment to the work endured the test of time.
- *And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places* – Samuel was active among the people. He was not “Inscrutable on Sunday and invisible the rest of the week.” He went out among the people to encourage, instruct, intercede, and correct.
- *And he judged Israel in all these places* – Samuel faithfully applied the Word of God to the situation of the people. The essence of ministry is to explain and apply God’s Word to life’s situations.

1 Samuel 7:3-17 – “Samuel’s Ministry to the People”

(Pew Bible Page: 230)

- *Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel* – Samuel was the same at home as he was on the road. He was *consistent* in ministry as well as *constant* in ministry.
- *And there he built an altar to the Lord* – Samuel never neglected the responsibility of worship. Samuel was not so busy in ministry that he failed to worship God personally.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Ministry is fulfilled by providing everyday leadership to the people of God.

[ILLUSTRATION] Some children are born to be leaders. If you’ve watched children grow up you know that some seem to be in charge of the world from the day they were born, while others are more comfortable being followers rather than leading the way. These tendencies are baked in by God, who knows best what part each one should play in the grand scheme of things. Some are leaders, others are followers.

[APPLICATION] Someone must lead if anything is going to get done, and the call to ministry is a call to lead God’s people into pathways that glorify God both now and for eternity. Leadership may sound glorious. Many aspire to leadership positions thinking that the call to lead is a call to a heroic life of dedication to Jesus. Perhaps sometimes that’s true but look at Samuel’s life again. Do you see it? There *were* extraordinary moments in Samuel’s life, without doubt, but most of Samuel’s contribution to the good of God’s people came through his everyday faithfulness to the work God called him to. The reality is that a productive life of leadership is less heroic and more prosaic than most imagine. It’s the everyday grind, the faithful service in this place and that, the consistency and persistency in leadership that makes the most lasting impact. Samuel was used of God in an extraordinary way beyond all doubt. But most of his life was one of simple faithfulness to the daily duties of leadership. What about yours?

Conclusion: Through Samuel, God provided exemplary leadership to the people of Israel. May God grant that each one of us would be useful to the Master however He chooses to use us.