Renewing The Covenant
1 Samuel 7:1-17

Introduction

I used to believe that all Christians want to live a victorious Christian life.

But I have been a Christian now for 35 years. And after 35 years of problems, trials, temptations, failures and successes; I have come to the realization that for some--bondage, depression, fear, discouragement, oppression, subjugation, addiction, slavery are what some people want.
The worst emotion that can grip a human heart is to live in constant fear, constant discouragement, constant bondage.

The people of Israel were discouraged, downtrodden, and defeated. The people of Israel felt cut off, separated, abandoned by God.

**You will never change until you are willing to change. But willingness alone will never result in permanent change. Change requires recognition of sin, repentance from sin, and a willingness to turn to the Lord.**

The book of Judge judges records a repetitive cycle. In Judges chapter 2:10-19 we have a kind of summary of the whole book; the cycle goes like this--blessing, disobedience, chastening, repentance, deliverance. Warren Wiersbe writes; “Judges is the book of incomplete victory; it is a book of failure on the part of God’s people to trust His Word and claim His power” (Old Testament Outlines; p.230).

Trusting God’s Word and claiming God’s power breaks the cycle of incomplete victory and provides long lasting deliverance.

Confession And Commitment (vv.1-6)

*1 Samuel 7:1; Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and took the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord.*

The word “consecrated” means to officially set apart. Eleazar had a special charge to keep the ark of the Lord. He did this for 20 years.

*1 Samuel 7:2; So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.*

Why didn’t they just return the Ark to Shiloh?
Some Bible scholars think the reasons may have been that the city of Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines.
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There are several clues; Shiloh is never mentioned again as the worship center in either First or Second Samuel. The center of Samuel’s ministry becomes Ramah after the Philistine defeat (v. 17). The very fact that the Ark is not returned—and the book of Psalms and the book of Jeremiah mention the destruction of the sanctuary at Shiloh.

Psalm 78:60; So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,
The tent He had placed among men,

Jeremiah 7:12; “But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.
13 And now, because you have done all these works,” says the Lord, “and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer,
14 therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

Some scholars have pointed out that the Tabernacle itself may have escaped total destruction even though Shiloh was destroyed; the NIV Study Bible holds that position pointing out that the Tabernacle was moved to Nob (I Samuel 21:1-9); and then in the days of David and Solomon the Tabernacle was moved to Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29; 2 Chronicles 1:3, 13).

There is also the possibility that the furnishings in the Tabernacle were removed before the Philistine invasion—and placed somewhere else for safe-keeping.

I want to draw your attention to the phrase; “And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord”.

What do you suppose that means? The word lament means to “cry out” but I think it means to cry out in such a way—that a realization takes place—the children of Israel began to realize that their spiritual condition and personal corruption and their economic ruin was caused by their unwillingness to serve LORD; it was because of their personal wickedness; corporate idolatry and cultural compromise.

1 Samuel 7:3; Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.

The prophet Samuel issues the people a challenge, a challenge to repent and reform. Samuel reminds them of their unique relationship with the covenant-keeping God. It would appear that the Lord gave Samuel one message; the theme was simple—repent of your sins; commit to the Lord.

Think about this for just a moment; for twenty long years Samuel preached a message of personal repentance and total commitment. His audience? The children of Israel--the message--
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put away your idols, strip away all your titles, commit whole heartedly, unreservedly, and experience deliverance.

Put away the foreign gods (Baal—the god of the storm and king of the Caananite pantheon; Ashterroth—fertility goddess—sex—war). Repent of your past attitude toward the Lord. Renounce the things that are hindering your spiritual life and rededicate yourselves to His service.

That might not seem like a big deal to you. But to put away the Baals and the Ashteroth; meant to abandon that which seemed fashionable, reasonable, dependable, agreeable, sensible and even rational.

It meant to turn away from the sensual—to the stark and sober. Worship of Jehovah was unattractive.

1 Samuel 7:4; So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.

1 Samuel 7:5; And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.

Samuel called on the people to gather, to go public—with their willingness to serve the Lord.

1 Samuel 7:6; So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

Mizpah is located on a high plateau. The people drew water and poured it out before the Lord. The idea was to symbolize the fact—that water poured forth and gathered on the ground—cannot be gathered again; it becomes a symbol and a sign—no turning back—no turning back.

We as Christians sing the song, the cross before me, the world behind me. The idea is to go public—and to go always—and forever—they are making the decision to follow God’s will forever—no turning back—

The people fast and pray. Samuel acts on behalf of the Lord—for those who are unsure of their standing before the Lord. It could be there was some issue or sin; or they are ignorant of what it is that God specifically wants an individual to do. Samuel stands in the position of counselor, priest, and judge.

Victorious Christian Living Through Prayer (vv.7-14)

1 Samuel 7:7; Now when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines.
The children of Israel were afraid of their captors.

The children of Israel faced an immediate threat from their former masters. The Christian who decides to repent, will once again be tempted by the secret sin (or not so secret sin); which held him or her so long in the grips of bondage. **But we must remain wholly dependent on the LORD.** Augustine faced this same kind of test and temptation; soon after his conversion. He writes about it in his book *Confessions*. He was walking down the street and saw his former mistress, she also saw him; he turned and began to walk away, but the woman who had lived with him for several years tried to catch up with him; “Augustine” she said. “It is I”. To this Augustine broke into a run.” “Yes, but it is not I”. He was a new man in Christ. He reckoned himself dead to the former things. **The very essence of Christianity is that God is able to give us victory where there was formerly defeat.**

The children of Israel prepared for worship; but not for war. Clearly the Philistines interpreted this convocation as a sign of rebellion against them.

Oppressive government gets suspicious when people gather in large numbers. They automatically interpret large gatherings as focus groups for rebellion.

For the Philistines--they would rather confront Israel in Israeli territory than in Philistine territory.

The children of Israel were not prepared for an unprovoked attack by the Philistines. They have only recently abandoned their wickedness, turned from their sin, turned to the Lord.

Does this sound familiar? Some people are likely to think-- “I am trying to get right with God--and this is how I am rewarded? Full blown war!” “Is this how God rewards repentance?”

The situation is not uncommon. When you embark on a course of getting right and staying right with God; expect difficulties. The difficulties serve as tests--to test the reliability of the new found dedication.

*1 Samuel 7:8;* So the children 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.

The children of Israel know how ruthless the Philistines can be--so they ask Samuel to pray for them.

*1 Samuel 7:9;* And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. Then Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him.
The burnt offering was given as a testimony of whole hearted consecration, worship, and devotion.

*1 Samuel 7:10; Now as Samuel was 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.*

The Philistines surround them even while Samuel is offering the burnt offering. Worship doesn’t make sense as a reasonable defense.

But God’s response is immediate and dramatic. The Lord thunders with a great thunder--what does that mean? We suspect it means hail. Large chunks of ice begin to shred the enemy. The Philistine threat is overcome by the Lord! The deliverance is supernatural.

*1 Samuel 7:11; And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth Car.*

Pray like it all depends on God. Work like it all depends on you. The Philistines leave and they never come back all the days of Samuel.

In the past God used the Philistines to discipline the people of Israel. But now the people have been restored to God’s favor. **The enemies of Israel become the enemies of God.**

*1 Samuel 7:12; Then 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.*

Do you understand what is happening? Samuel is celebrating and commemorating the victory.

Samuel establishes a memorial, a monument. The location chosen is the site where the Philistines lost! Ironically it is the place where 20 years earlier, thousands of Israeli soldiers were slain (see 1 Samuel 4:1, 2, 10-11). Samuel calls the place Ebenezer--or thus far the Lord has helped us”.

This is what it means to raise your Ebenezer. It means to mark the place of God’s victory in your life. It makes perfect sense--that the beginning of God’s grace, God’s mercy, be marked by thanksgiving. Sometimes as we experience the joy and intoxicating freedom of God’s deliverance; we forget to praise Him for His goodness towards us.

*1 Samuel 7:13; 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.*
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1 Samuel 7:14; 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.

One of the benefits of getting right with God; territory previously taken is restored. Another benefit of getting right with God; peace with your enemies.

The southern neighbors are unwilling to hassle the children of Israel; because even their enemies recognize God is strong on their behalf.

The benefits are in large measure due to one man; Samuel. Yet clearly the victory belongs to the Lord.

Lessons In Faithfulness (vv.15-17)

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

1 Samuel 7:16; He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places.

1 Samuel 7:17; But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there. There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

Conclusion

The most effective ministries are the ones where the man of God is there for the long haul.

Pastor Skip Heitzig, Pastor Chuck Smith, Pastor John MacArthur, Pastor Chuck Swindoll, the most effective ministries are the ones where the pastor is there for the long haul.

Twenty long years Samuel gives the same message; during the long hard years of oppression. The faithfulness of God was seen in the faithfulness of one man’s ministry. The life of Samuel proves that the character of one godly man; calling on people to recall the character of God, turn from sin, and turn to the Savior, matters.

The ancient people of Israel had walked away from the true and living God; and someone called them back to the core principles, to the core message of the Covenant keeping God.

What do we do when we live in a culture and dwell in a world where our government and the culture renounces the principles upon which our founding fathers established this nation?

The story of Samuel gives us hope--in a world that is headed downward--instead of upward.
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People are abandoning Christ and the Church--for a false science that holds out a false hope; and for a false society that promises happiness and hope apart from repentance from sin and commitment to Christ.

What should you do? Draw strength from the Lord. Samuel did. Continue--in the character of Christ and the content of the Bible message. Teach the congregation the whole counsel of God. Call them to repentance. Do the work of an evangelist. Renew allegiance to Christ based on the Scriptures, the Word of God. The Word of God was never meant to be simply a book for the scholar and the specialist. The Bible was always meant to be everybody’s book.

The source of your strength is the Lord.
The source of God’s promises is the Scripture.
The source of God’s favor is unwavering commitment.

Draw strength from the Lord.

Renew your allegiance to the Scripture.

Recommit your life to God.

When you do that--you will come to realize that sin has robbed you of God’s blessing; and God’s favor.

Repentance, Confession, Go Public, Go permanent, remain dependent.