



## Sermon for April 11, 2021, “The Stone of Help”

**SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 7:3-12** <sup>3</sup>Then 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 Astartes from among you. Direct your heart to the LORD, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” <sup>4</sup>So Israel put away the Baals and the Astartes, and they served the LORD only. <sup>5</sup>Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” <sup>6</sup>So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the LORD. They fasted that day, and said, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. <sup>7</sup>When the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, and pray that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” <sup>9</sup>So Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD; Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. <sup>10</sup>As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel; but the LORD thundered with a mighty voice that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion; and they were routed before Israel. <sup>11</sup>And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as beyond Beth-car. <sup>12</sup>Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah, and named it Ebenezer; for he said, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”

### **Introduction: Christians who overcome the world with the help of the Lord**

When the prophet Samuel became the leader of Israel, the Israelites worshipped idols such as Baal and Ashtoreth. However, the Ark of the Lord, which had been stolen by the Philistines, returned to Israel. Samuel calls out that the Israelites have to repent and return to the Lord as faithful people of the Lord. Following Samuel's guidance, the Israelites renew their hearts and return to the Lord. As a result, they win the battle with the Philistines with the help of the Lord. Samuel erected a large stone and called the stone 'the stone of help'.

We had an Easter service last week with joy and gratitude. Jesus' resurrection shows that the Lord has overcome sin and death. Christians may fail from time to time in their lives, but they overcome the world with the help of the Lord.

Through today's sermon, we hope to see the Lord with us. Holy faith in our Lord and His mercy toward us bring victory to the children of faith.

### **Body: Why the Israelites were able to triumph?**

Ebenezer in today's text is a place name (1 Samuel 7:12) and has the meaning ‘the stone of help’. However, its exact location is unknown. In 1 Samuel 4:1-11, there is a war between Israel and the Philistines. In the first battle, 4,000 Israelite soldiers were killed by Philistines. In the second battle, a whopping 30,000 Israelite soldiers were killed. And the Ark of the Lord, the symbol of the Lord's presence, is taken away by the Philistines.

However, a remarkable thing happens that Israel, who had been repeatedly defeated, defeated the Philistines with the Lord's help. As a result of that fight, the Philistines, who were defeated in the fight against Israel, did not invade Israel while Samuel was alive (1 Samuel 7:12-13).

What was the reason why the Israelites, who were only defeated in the war with the Philistines, were able to triumph? There are two very important reasons for this.



## 1. The Israelites had a faith that showed determination as action.

Let's look at **1 Samuel 7:3**. Samuel says to the Israelites, **"If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart"** What is the meaning of **'with all heart'**? It means that the Lord demands of the Israelites truth and strong determination for deeds.

In fact, there are many times we pray and worship the Lord without worshipping in spirit and in truth. **So the Lord said in Matthew 15:8, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."**

Samuel tells the Israelites that deeds are necessary if they are sincere in repenting and returning to the Lord. The deed is to remove the idols the Israelites served. Surprisingly, however, the Israelites obey Samuel's command. To get rid of idols is to get rid of what one was more in love with than the Lord. We must remove the idols within us so that our hearts will turn to the Lord.

Baal and Ashtoreth, which the Israelites served in the land of Canaan, were both the gods of agriculture and the gods of abundance. The Israelites' service to Baal and Ashtoreth was to obtain material blessings. Also, Baal and Ashtoreth are idols that promote sexual obscenity. Therefore, the Israelites were sexually degraded while serving Baal and Ashtoreth. Samuel commanded the Israelites to return from idolatry to their service of the Lord. The Israelites responded to the command. So we were able to win the fight against the Philistines. We, like the Israelites, must present our bodies and hearts to the Lord in holiness. So, what other reasons could Israel overcome the Philistines?

## 2. The Israelites experienced the Lord's grace through prayer and repentance.

Samuel's second demand is to repent and pray. So Samuel holds an assembly for repentance. **Let's see 1 Samuel 7:5-6. Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you."(v.5)**

**"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."(v.6)**

The Israelites restored holiness to the Lord through prayer and repentance, their faith was strengthened, and their body and heart were filled with grace.

Dear brothers and sisters! The best and fastest way to solve life's complex and difficult problems is to return to God, the Creator of our lives. The Lord knows our problems and He knows the answers. If life's problems make it difficult, we hope to entrust our problems to the Lord and seek the Lord's grace.

However, 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, and the people of Israel said to Samuel, **"Do not cease to cry to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines."**

The Lord accepts the repentance of the Israelites and answers the earnest prayers of Samuel and the Israelites. So the Lord defeats the Philistines and brings peace to Israel. Samuel builds a monument to remember the Lord's grace with the Israelites. **And it was called Ebenezer. Ebenezer means "the stone of help"**.

In fact, as a child, Samuel saw the death of the prophet Eli and the death of the prophet Eli's two sons. Above all, he saw the Ark of the Lord being taken away by the Philistines. This is a sad memory for young Samuel. Time passed and Samuel grew. After holding a meeting of repentance at **Mizpah**, the Lord defeated the attacking Philistines for Israelites. The pain of defeat that Samuel suffered 20 years ago disappears. That is why a monument was erected to commemorate the victory.



Whenever the Israelites pass the monument, they think, "**Up to this point the Lord helped us.**" Also, even when it is difficult and there is suffering, they look at the monument and think, "**the Lord is our help.**" And they take courage.

We forget the Lord's love and grace very well. When we are in a difficult, suffering, and urgent situation, we earnestly seek the Lord, but when we get better, we forget the grace of Lord. Also, when we are poor and experience hard times, we seek the Lord, but when our life improves a little, we are busy with worldly affairs and leave the Lord.

So Samuel wanted people to keep the Lord's grace for a long time. He built a monument so as not to forget the Lord's grace, and declared that "Hitherto the LORD has helped us."

### **Conclusion: Let us build a stone of help in our lives.**

Now let's summarize today's sermon. **The meaning of Ebenezer (the stone of help) is, first, evidence that the Lord helped us when we repent to the Lord and live with true faith. Second, if we continue to rely on the Lord and live by faith, we will enjoy the Lord's protection, but if we live away from the Lord like the Israelites worshiped idols in the past, the Lord will not guarantee for future of us.**

Generally, we are very affected by the environment. Sometimes we suffer from unexpected difficulties. But when we are holy in the Lord, praying to the Lord, and relying on the Lord, the Lord Himself works for us.

**Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."** The Lord is the one who accomplishes great and unsearchable things that we do not know.

Dear brothers and sisters! Like Samuel and the Israelites who triumphed through worship and prayer to the Lord, I bless that 'Ebenezer', or 'the stone of help,' will be built in your life.

