Samuel, God's Prophet and Judge

Lesson Scripture: 1 Samuel 7:3-17
Focus Scripture: 1 Samuel 7:3-11, 15-17

Key Verses: *Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. 1 Samuel 7:15*

1 SAMUEL 7:3-11, 15-17 (NRSV UE)

3 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."

4 So Israel put away the Baals and the Astartes, 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. They fasted that day and said, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the Israelites at Mizpah.

7 When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

8 The Israelites 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."

9 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.

10 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

1 SAMUEL 7:3-11, 15-17 (KJV)

3 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.

4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only.

5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord.

6 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.

7 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.

8 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.

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.

10 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,

confusion, and they were routed before Israel.

11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them down as far as beyond Beth-car.

15-17

15 Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

16 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 come back to Ramah, for his home was there; he administered justice there to Israel and built there an altar to the Lord.

and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar.

15-17

15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

16 And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

17 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.

KEY TERMS

- **Mizpah** – A Hebrew word meaning *watchtower* or *lookout*; original biblical context was one of mutual suspicion.
- **Beth-car** – Mentioned once in the Bible in 1 Samuel 7:11. It is described as the geographical limit of a decisive military pursuit. Hebrew: *Bêyth Kar* literally translates to *House of the Lamb*.
- **Ebenezer** – A stone placed by Samuel meaning *Stone of Help*; considered a proclamation that God is our help.
- **Ramah** – *High place, lofty;* also used to mean *a high level*, as in *excellence*. Ramah in the area of Benjamin was the birthplace and burial site of Samuel.
- **Reconciliation** – A restorative process of rebuilding trust, acknowledging harm, and fostering repentance.

INTRODUCTION

In the initial verses of 1 Samuel chapter 7, the children of Israel are without the Ark, experiencing the grief of losing God's presence for over 20 years (1 Sam. 7:1-2). But through the leadership of Samuel, the people are convicted of their sins against God and their nation is revived. This passage teaches that restoration begins with repentance and a renewed focus on God. Israel's victory in physical battles of war relied on God's presence, which was symbolized through the Ark of God. For the people to feel God was present, they also needed to commit their ways to the Lord, pursue God wholeheartedly, knowing that his power and presence bring transformation and triumph over adversity. The recovery of the Ark of God represented more than just reclaiming a

sacred object. It also symbolized Israel's desire to restore their relationship with the almighty. After years of spiritual decline and the loss of the Ark, Samuel urges the people to turn away from idols and seek the Lord. This victory ended a 40-year period of Philistine oppression and led to a season of peace. Immediately after this event, Samuel erected the famous memorial stone, to commemorate God's intervention in their lives.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In verses 3 and 4, Samuel confronts the people about their idolatry. He commands them to put away the Baals and Ashtaroth and serve the Lord alone. He then instructs them to gather at Mizpah and seek the Lord's forgiveness. In verse 5, they draw water, pour it out, and fast as signs of repentance, humility, and complete surrender to God. As they confess their sins, Samuel judges the people (v. 6). When the Philistines hear about the gathering, they prepare to attack, and the Israelites become afraid. Samuel responds by offering a nursing lamb as a burnt offering and crying out to the Lord. God answers with a mighty thunder that throws the Philistines into confusion (v. 10), and Israel defeats them. Samuel then sets up a stone between Mizpah and Shen and names it *Ebenezer*, meaning *the Lord has helped us*. This battle marks the restoration of Israel's territory and demonstrates the fruit of national repentance. Israel's victory comes only after the people turn from their idols and return to God. Their prayers are answered with divine intervention and supernatural victory. The stone at Ebenezer serves as a lasting reminder of God's faithfulness and of how far he had helped Israel. Theologically, it points to God's enduring power and steadfast covenant with his people despite their disobedience. As a memorial, it marks not only a military victory but also a spiritual one brought about by God's intervention. Samuel's roles as priest and prophet overlap here, and verses 15 through 17 further show his work as a judge traveling throughout the region.

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SANKOFA

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

One observation to the story found in 1 Samuel chapter 7 is Samuel's return to his home in Ramah. Although Samuel appears to have served God well, he was compelled to return to his roots and build an altar to bring sacrifices to God. Animal sacrifices are no longer required nor are they sufficient to cover the sins of this world. God seeks true humiliation and repentance. The image that comes to mind when considering a repenting soul led to God are the characters found in the powerful book and film *The Color Purple*. Most viewers recall the moment that the beautiful woman and songbird named Shug entered the scene. She was the daughter of a preacher, but she spent most of her young adulthood living a fast-paced worldly lifestyle in juke joints singing and drinking prohibition liquor. Her rejection of her father and the church was considered an abomination and disgrace by her earthly father. But the heavenly Father of all creations is still loving and forgiving, even when his children are at their worst. It appears repeatedly in the Old Testament, as the children of Israel embrace false gods and worship idols like Baal and Ashtoreth, even perform sacrifices to them. Yet they repented and God repeatedly forgave them and gave them victory over their attackers. For the fictional character known as Shug, she can be described as the lost wanderer. Yet she, too, was gripped with a spirit of repentance and turned back to God. The beauty of the Gospel is that God provides a path to reconciliation through Jesus. This reconciliation is a ministry that everyone can participate in and share with a fallen world. No one can claim to have lived a perfect life without sin. But thanks be to God that the entire world has a path of reconciliation to God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

"But the heavenly Father of all creations is still loving and forgiving, even when his children are at their worst.

CASE STUDY

The human condition found in many nations and societies is often filled with conflict and discord, particularly when resources are scarce. Poverty can abound when limits are applied to a specific race, ethnicity, gender, or class and particularly, when these same groups are exploited. The pain and suffering of those who have been abused, marginalized, and disenfranchised are frequently overlooked, with justice only considered a fleeting dream. Thus, there is sorrow and pain when considering the historical backdrops of indigenous people throughout the world, whose colonized lands were taken and stripped from their ancestors. The cries can still be heard in the historical tragedy of the African slave trade that stole millions of able-bodied Africans from the continent and forced them and the children they bore to brutally perform free labor called slavery. How does one reconcile the atrocities of these historical events? And why has there not been more progress in forming a true and intentional plan for the equitable and just restorative process? Barring the real issue of racism in America, a moral plight in this country, the primary obstacle is lack of repentance to restore justice. To repent means to accept one's faults and turn away from the past behavior. One model to consider is to adopt Restorative Justice (RJ), a social justice model. RJ is a system that views wrongdoing as a violation of people and relationships rather than just a breach of the law, particularly when laws are unjust. Unlike traditional punitive justice, which focuses on determining blame and imposing punishment, restorative justice prioritizes repairing harm through dialogue involving the victim, the offender, and the affected community. The person responsible for harm must acknowledge their actions and take active steps to make amends. In a country called the United States where the historical evidence of wrongdoing to persons of color is being erased from textbooks and schools, the opportunity

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for restorative justice and ultimate reconciliation is becoming increasingly short-lived. It is obvious why the discussion of reparations is dismissed or the true story of Christopher Columbus, native Americans, and the Trail of Tears is silenced. Acceptance of wrong must occur and be accompanied by repentance and a desire to repair the breaches that have ensued. The model is there and one can only pray that this country will one day use it.

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LIFE APPLICATION

The themes of 1 Samuel 7 resonate with modern believers facing challenges and uncertainties. Just as Israel needed to recenter their lives around God's presence, we are reminded to seek him in times of trouble and spiritual dryness. The victory over the Philistines encourages us to reinforce our prayer life and build up our faith, trusting that God can overcome any problem we face. God's presence is most obvious when obstacles seem insurmountable, but we are still victorious in the end. Whether personal, relational, or societal, the need for God's presence is as vital now as it was in ancient times. Let us pray for God's presence to guide the church and our community.

Questions

1. What can the church do to encourage a spirit of reconciliation within families and a community?
2. Share your thoughts on reparations and specific cases where it could be applied.

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: *AMEC Hymnal* #82, "O for a Closer Walk with God"

Closing Prayer: "O Thou, in whose presence my soul takes delight. On whom in affliction I call. My comfort by day and my song in the night. My hope, my salvation, my all!" As we consider the sins of humanity and rebellious actions against you, Lord, we confess our wrongs and pray for forgiveness. In our wounds we respond with pain and need the healing balm of forgiveness and reconciliation to restore us and make us whole. Let us recommit ourselves to you,

oh Lord, with joy and gladness, trusting in your holy plan and drawing near to you in faith through Jesus Christ. This we pray in his name. Amen.

AMEC Hymnalal #93 – "O Thou, in Whose Presence"

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
November 16-22

Monday	Proverbs 29:1-14 (Blessings of a Righteous Ruler)
Tuesday	Daniel 2:16-22 (God Deposes and Sets Up Kings)
Wednesday	Luke 4:14-21 (Anointed for God's Service)
Thursday	1 Samuel 15:10-23 (God Rejects Saul)
Friday	Matthew 12:14-21 (God's Righteous Servant)
Saturday	John 7:14-24 (Do Not Judge by Appearances)
Sunday	1 Samuel 16:4-13 (God Looks on the Heart)