

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 7:2-17

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1 Samuel 7:2-17

Verses 2-4

²The ark remained at KiriathJearim a long time—twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to the LORD. ³So Samuel said to all the Israelites, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” ⁴So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.

- 20 years passed. During those years, the Ark of the Covenant remained at KiriathJearim. During those years, the corrupting influences of the priests who had rejected the word of the Lord and done what seemed right in their own eyes was removed. Under the guidance of Samuel, the people of Israel began to turn back to God and to His word.
- Samuel, seeing this change in the people, instructed them to **“throw away”** idols and to submit themselves to YHWH with all their hearts. They were to worship no other god but YHWH. He promised that if they committed themselves entirely to YHWH, He would deliver them from the Philistines.
- The Israelites obeyed Samuel in a limited way. Outwardly they appeared to be totally devoted to YHWH. But they did not **“throw away”** their idols. They **“PUT THEM AWAY.”** The word means that they put their idols out of sight. Probably because they were afraid of offending the gods represented by their idols, they did not get rid of them. They just put the idols in a secret place.

Verses 5-6

⁵Then Samuel said, “Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the LORD for you.” ⁶When 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.” Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

- Samuel called the people of Israel to worship at Mizpah, not at the place where the Ark was kept.
- The service at Mizpah was opened with the pouring out of water. The pouring out of water was a symbol of repentance. On the opening day of the service, they fasted and confessed that they had sinned against YHWH by worshipping idols and not obeying God’s word.
- Samuel was recognized by the people as their spiritual leader; the one who said unto them, “This is what God says.”

Verses 7-9

⁷ When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. 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.” ⁹ Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel’s behalf, and the LORD answered him.

- The Philistines assumed that the gathering at Mizpah was a sign that Israel intended to attack them. In response, they moved their troops into battle formation; a sign that they were ready to attack Israel.
- The Israelites were frightened when they saw the Philistines assemble for battle. They begged Samuel to intercede for them with God which he did.

Verses 10-11

¹⁰ While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. 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. ¹¹ The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar.

- While Samuel was offering sacrifices to YHWH, a great storm arose. The Philistines knew about what YHWH had done to the Egyptians (see 1 Samuel 4:6-9). They assumed that YHWH had awakened and was moving on Israel’s behalf. They panicked and ran away. The Israelites pursued them and slaughtered the retreating Philistines.

Verse 12

¹² Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”

- After the defeat of the panicked Philistines, Samuel set up a stone to commemorate the event. He named the monument “Ebenezer.” The word means “stone of help” in Hebrew. YHWH had helped Israel defeat her enemies.

Verses 13-17

¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and they stopped invading Israel’s territory. Throughout Samuel’s lifetime, the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines. ¹⁴ The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to Israel, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

¹⁵ Samuel continued as Israel’s leader all the days of his life. ¹⁶ From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. ¹⁷ But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.

- Samuel served as Israel’s “Judge” for the rest of his life. During his lifetime, the people of Israel remained faithful to YHWH on the surface. Their idols remained hidden. Their enemies either left them alone or were captured by them. The territories the Philistines had taken from Israel were returned to her. There was peace.
- Samuel traveled in a regular circuit to hear the troubles of the people and to resolve matters of dispute between them. His home was in Ramah and he held court there when he was not on his route throughout the land.
- He built an altar at Ramah for the worship of YHWH.

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