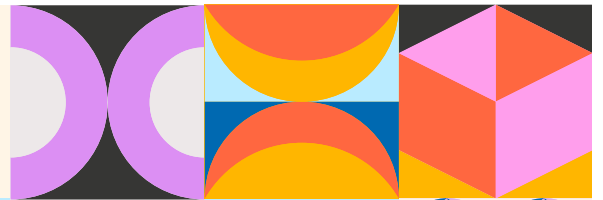
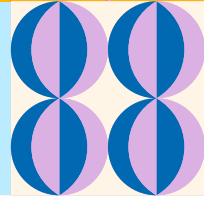
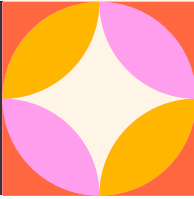


Reverence for God - Spiritual Landmarks



1 Samuel 5 - 7



Key Bible Texts

1 Samuel 5-7

Key Bible Verse(s)

“And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.” (1 Samuel 5:7)

“Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” (1 Samuel 7:12)

Background to the Study

The Israelites had gone to war with the Philistines without the blessing of God. They lost four thousand men. Instead of beseeching God to go before them, they arrogantly sent for the Ark of the Covenant and two priests to carry it out before them. God had set in place rules regarding how the Ark would be transported, and this involved four priests, not two. These two priests, Hophni and Phinehas, were the evil sons of Eli. They believed that the Ark was the winner of wars, rather than God, whose glory was represented by the Ark. Therefore, Israel lost the battle and the Ark. The Philistines were not unfamiliar with the God of the Israelites. They had heard stories of the Israelites escape from Egypt and their crossing of the Red Sea. They were aware of the power of God. When they heard the noise the Israelites made when the Ark entered into the camp, they were afraid, but they challenged themselves and chose to fight diligently. The result was that they killed thirty thousand Israelites and captured the Ark of the Covenant. The Philistines often brought the spoils of war to their temple as an offering to their god. Accordingly, they placed the Ark in the temple of Dagon, in the city of Ashdod. Dagon was the Philistines' primary god. Today, the image of Dagon might be referred to as a mermaid, with the upper body and head of a woman and the lower part a fish. At this time, the Philistines had five capital cities – Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza – and each city had a “lord.” The Ark was taken to three of these cities, and judgment came on the people in these places. Bible scholars feel the plague may have been the bubonic plague, perhaps spread by rats or mice. The “trespass offering,” which the Philistines made to stop the judgment, was typical of how they would have tried to pacify their gods when they thought they were angry. They incorporated another test to confirm whether or not Israel's God had really sent the plagues. Only God could cause cows to leave their newborn calves and go in another direction. Beth-shemesh was a priestly city, and the men there should

have treated the Ark according to God's directions. But some of them looked into it, and judgment fell on them also.

The departure of the Ark of the Lord (in chapter 5), captured by the Philistines in battle, signified that God had forsaken the people of Israel and would not help them. The Philistines quickly learned that the presence of God's Ark was not compatible with their idolatrous ways, and in time, they voluntarily returned it to Israel. The Ark eventually was taken to Kirjath-jearim, where it was put in the care of Abinadab and Eleazar and remained there until King David brought it to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). Having spent twenty years in a state of defeat and subjugation, the Israelites realized that they were in a pathetic condition. With the help of Samuel who exhorted and prayed for them, Israel turned back to the Lord. The nation repented and destroyed the idols. In the Canaanite religion, Baal was the son of Dagon, and the chief god. Baalim is the plural form of Baal, which indicates there were many statues of Baal at different places. Israel recommitted themselves to the Lord. Their confession, "We have sinned against the Lord" (v. 6) was crucial to God working for them. The glory of God returned to Israel. The power of God was once more upon the people, and they regularly gathered together to worship Him. The Philistines heard that the Israelites were gathering, and waged war against Israel. At this time, Israel did not have a standing army (a permanent army maintained in peacetime as well as war). Samuel and the people called upon the Lord, and God thundered on the Philistines, confusing them, and giving Israel a miraculous victory. The meaning of Ebenezer is "stone of help." It was placed as a memorial to remind Israel that they had only received victory because God had helped them. This memorial is referenced in the old hymn, *Come, Thou Fount*, by Robert Robinson, when it says, "Here I raise mine Ebenezer; hither by Thy help I'm come." Samuel was the last of Israel's judges. He was also a prophet, a priest, and a ruler. It appears that almost single-handedly, through God's help, he was instrumental in this national revival and in educating the people again in God's laws.

A TESTIMONY FROM OUR DAY

You have probably seen signs along highways that say, "Historical Marker ¼ mile ahead." The purpose of a historical marker is to point out a particular place where some significant event transpired, and to give a mini-history lesson. Something worth remembering happened at that place. We need to have spiritual historical markers — landmarks that we can look back to when we are facing spiritual battles. The experience of salvation is such a marker; sometimes people say, "I could take you to the very place where God saved me." One man in our congregation testifies, "In the tabernacle, right under the flagpole, that was my spot." Receiving sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Ghost are also landmarks in a Christian's life. Additionally, we need to have faith landmarks, times when God worked for us personally. When our son was a senior in high school, God made it possible for him to have a job-school arrangement that was different from any other in his school. His counsellor said, "I have never heard of this being done here before." We told our son that her comment was an additional confirmation sent by the Lord, so that when the enemy came and said the circumstances "just happened," we would have that verification of the miracle. That experience has been a reminder to our family that God can do the impossible. You and your family may have similar stories of times when the Lord helped financially, gave miraculous healing, or protected from danger. Some people write these experiences down to help preserve the landmark. In our focus verse, Samuel established a historical marker. He had Israel put up a memorial to commemorate the great victory that the Lord had won for them. They called it Ebenezer and said that the Lord had helped them to that point. We can benefit from the example of the Israelites. Just as they established physical landmarks, let us make certain we establish spiritual landmarks. Then, if we take time to review them periodically, our faith will increase in God who performed these miracles on our behalf.

A Closer Look

Question 1

The Philistines took the Ark of God and tried to humiliate the God of Israel by placing the Ark, which represented God's presence, before their god Dagon. How did the Lord prove to the Philistines that He was the true God? 1 Samuel 5

Question 2

When the Ark arrived in Beth-shemesh (1 Samuel 6:10-21), many people looked inside it and were slain by God. Why do you suppose the punishment was so severe?

Question 3

How would you behave differently in your everyday life if you believed someone was watching?

Question 4

What did Samuel tell the Israelites to do if they were serious about serving God? What do you think Israel expected would happen when they asked Samuel to pray for them as they faced the Philistines?

Question 5

We find a key to Israel's successful turn-around in 1 Samuel 7:3-6. What did they do, and what was the result?

Question 6

How can you preserve accounts of the extraordinary helps that the Lord has given you so you can pass them onto your family and friends?

Take Home

We want to remember the importance of showing reverence to God and His power. The primary way to do this is by living a life of obedience to Him.

God is our Helper. As long as we maintain our loyalty to Him and stay within His will, we can expect to have victories that will cause us to praise Him for His supernatural works.