

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

A True Repentance

I Samuel 7

Intro: YHWH's just given instruction on the finer points of "Ark-eology," both 2 the Philistines & the Israelites. They discovered the supremacy of YHWH in that He's no *helpless* God. On the business end of the severity of YHWH, they learn that He's no *hidden* God but 1 who clearly proves He's at work, even if He must use noisy cows 2 do it. Finally, when the Israelites are reminded of the sanctity of YHWH at Beth-Shemesh, we also come 2 realize that the casual god we've been worshipping does not exist. Benefit of the science of Ark-eology: destroys our graven images. The Levites of Beth-Shemesh had just about enough of the Ark as they could stand so, just like the Philistines, they called 4 the men of Kirjath Jearim 2 come & take it away. "The Ark's back. It's great! Come get it." They did!

1- Abinadab- No record of anything bad happening the entire time the Ark was here b/c these men treated the Ark w/ respect & honor. Why didn't they just take it back 2 the tabernacle? It's believed that when the Philistines routed the Israelite army in **ch4**, they pressed their victory & advanced all the way to Shiloh, destroying the town & tabernacle. Now, they consecrate Eleazar as custodian of the ark. We don't know if he's of priestly descent but the entire episode reflects at least a *desire* on their part 2 do the right thing by the Ark & YHWH. The Ark would remain at this location 4 over 100 yrs, until King David successfully carries it into Jerusalem during his reign.

2- lamented- gives us a point in time & context of **ch7**. After ark had been back 20 yrs, all Israel was *lamenting*. W/ all the crying & moaning that occurred in ch4 when ark was taken, you'd think they'd be happier since the ark was returned. Well, the ark may be back but things weren't really set right. Israel discovers that they are no more right w/ God now than they were when the ark was taken from them. On top of that, their *cities were in ruin*, their *armies were defeated* & they were *under severe / restrictive Philistine domination* – all *b/c* they were not right w/ YHWH. Just b/c they had His furniture back didn't automatically mean that they had His blessings as well!

There are 2 new developments here: **1) Israel finally realizes something's missing**. That in itself is not new, that *something* has been missing since the end of Joshua. What's new is that Israel as a whole now realizes it's missing but the greatest miracle of all: **2) Israel's actually missing it!** Its 1 thing 2 perceive something is wrong but quite another thing 2 finally recognize that your own actions may have played the largest role in creating the bad situation.

3- Samuel- Haven't seen or heard from him since ch3, where's he been? Author doesn't say directly but it's quite probable that during those 20 yrs, Samuel's been going from place 2 place; preaching anywhere he could gather an audience; warning the people of their sin & stirring them up 2 seek their God; trying 2 infuse some spirituality back into the national life of Israel again. A guess? It's what he does here & continues 2 do 4 the rest of his life (**15-17**).

spoke- Samuel's preaching 2 Israel here & in his sermon, he addresses their great longing & deep remorse. This is the culmination of 20 yrs of ministry. Now, it appears Israel's repentance is genuine & the time is right 4 the nation 2 finally "go public" w/ their repentance – *officially & corporately* renewing their covenant relations w/ YHWH.

Its good 2 have tears & sorrow over sin (**v2**). Repentance usually begins w/ grief & a consciousness of misery. But true repentance consists of something *more substantial*. It's also good 2 express repentance thru public ceremonies (**v6**), as long as those ceremonies represent *spiritual realities* & aren't just *religious charades*. The problem is that people can often be *moved* w/o being *changed* (*shaken* but not *stirred* – 9/11, churches were filled, but not 4 long).

Samuel's preaching was meant 2 prevent any such *flimsy repentance*. He presses Israel 2 go beyond a simple emotional response. Samuel calls Israel to: **1) return; 2) put away; 3) prepare; 4) serve**. Why these 4? B/c Samuel knows: *genuine repentance* = *tangible repentance*. It doesn't stop w/ tears & weeping but moves 2 concrete action: "*put away...foreign gods*" (Jacob-**Gen 35**; Joshua-**Josh 24**). True repentance will always meet YHWH's demand 4 exclusive worship w/ whatever it takes 2 obey it. Samuel's just restating the **1st Commandment (Ex 20:3)**, the same demand J makes in **Matt 10:37-38**; same demand Paul makes of Christians in **Rom 12:1** & it will continue 2/b the constant need of the church until the Lord returns (**Rev 2:4-5**). Samuel's also calling Israel 2 a *difficult repentance!*

Israel had 2 renounce all the deities of the Canaanite fertility cult. This religion exerted a powerful appeal over Israel w/ the sexual rites that were part of its worship. I'm sure the fun-loving Canaanites found the combination of liturgy & orgy very accommodating, not 2 mention the convenience of having your church & your brothel in the same place. It was no easy task 2 peel the Israelites out of the grip of that sensually pleasing cult & no superficial repentance would ever break such a severe bondage, only a super-natural repentance could do that.

Samuel says: "If you do these 4 things, YHWH will deliver you from the Philistines." *Genuine repentance* is the only *proper preparation* 4 God's mercy. But don't make the mistake of thinking repentance *coerces* that mercy. On the 1 hand, there's no human merit in true repentance; while on the other, there's no saving help w/o it. Repentance is never the *cause* of God's mercy – it's only the *condition* of it. True repentance *hopes* in God's mercy, not *demands* it. True repentance will move beyond wet eyes & stirred emotions & will cast down idols & cling 2 the only true God.

4-6- Israel did it! = greatest period of repentance since Moses' day; the whole nation responds 2 Samuel's preaching. 2 nail it down officially, Samuel calls 4 an assembly at Mizpah, the place where Jacob separated from Laban & where a repentant Israel gathered in **Josh 20**. This location was remembered as a place of separation & repentance. Here, their national repentance was made public thru religious rites & ceremonies: water poured out – a picture of one's soul being poured out b/4 the Lord; an expression of humility & commitment. How so? Pouring water on the ground is basically an irreversible act. Once it hits the dry dirt – It's gone; you're not going 2 retrieve it! That's exactly how we should offer our lives 2 the Lord – completely poured out w/ no intention or ability of taking it back. Ps 118:27 "**bind the sacrifice w/ cords 2 the horns of the altar**" 2 often we give God our life just 2 take it right back again after. **Fasting** – what can you say, if you go a whole day w/o eating = you must be serious about the things of the Lord! It showed that nothing else really mattered 2 them except getting right w/ God, an expression of sorrow over their sin.

We have sinned – Israel finally gets 2 the heart of their problem. Oh, how **YHWH** must have been pleased 2 hear this confession – it was centuries in the making! Taken together: it's a straightforward confession of guilt & responsibility.

7-8-heard- they always hear; the enemy always knows. Granted, Philistines suffered greatly when they had the ark & since then, during the next 20 yrs, Samson delivered his final blow 2 them when he took out the temple of Dagon. The Philistines are understandably nervous b/c they fear that their strangle hold over Israel may be slipping away. What about Israel? They arrived at Mizpah w/ broken hearts, they didn't bring any weapons (didn't have many). So, Philistines think Israel's rallying 4 a fight & Israel knows Philistines are out 4 blood ("**Thanks, Samson!**"). Both wrong?

Not really! This is a different Israel than the 1 they faced in **ch4**. They don't cry out 2 Samuel, "**Quick, go get the ark & put it between us & them.**" They're done w/ that kind of thinking (no God in a box). No, they beg Samuel 1 not stop praying 2 **YHWH** 4 them! They now see that if **YHWH** is able 2 take care of His own furniture, He can take care of His own people. Don't stop praying! Philistine should rightly have been afraid of a repentant, God-seeking Israel b/c w/ **YHWH** fighting 4 them, Israel was now invincible. Was Israel right 2 fear the Philistines? Yes, but only b/c their fear drove them 2 use the only real weapon they had: **prayer!** In her helplessness & utter lack of resources, prayer is her only recourse. What seems like a terrible situation is actually the mercy of God b/c **YHWH** is taking all their props away & forcing them 2 rely wholly on His hand 4 support. Likewise, God's people today must walk the way of desperation (**prayer**) it is our only rational activity, the only logical response 2 the uncontrollable tide of sin around us.

9-10- Israel is trembling, Samuel is praying & the Lord is listening (what a picture)! When you get your heart right w/ God, when you confess & repent – just know that the enemy is going 2/b right there, threatening 2 take it all away. But always remember, desperation is never in trouble when it rests on **omnipotence**. The Philistines are pouring in, Israelites are knock-kneed & Samuel – is sacrificing! He seems oblivious 2 the physical realities around him b/c it's the spiritual realities that are most important. Yes, the enemy is at the door but **YHWH** can handle them. What **YHWH** can't handle is His people living in rebellion, resistance or idolatry (all same). Samuel called Israel 2 repent & turn 2 God & they responded 2 his message! Now, **YHWH** responds 2 them in their hour of desperate need.

thundered- Israel heard the same thunder but by it the Philistines were made confused & overcome but Israel was made confident & courageous! This was obviously a special work of God! While Samuel is worshipping, God is working, the enemy is defeated & God's people advance His kingdom. There's a lesson in that 4 Grace Chapel!

11-14- subdued- Israel got her courage back. This is the way it should have been from the very beginning! They should have soundly defeated all their enemies long b/4 this & they could have defeated them in just the same way but they were distracted from it w/ pursuing the lusts of their own flesh. Oh, what a price they paid 4 their rebellion! Now, Israel beats back & subdues their oppressors, recovers lost territory & makes peace w/ the Amorites! Wow!

Ebenezer- "Thus far" – hither to: this encompasses a long list of mercies that **YHWH** had blessed Israel w/ from Abraham, Moses, Joshua even the Judges. But this isn't just nostalgia, it's a history lesson w/ a purpose. What **YHWH** has been 4 His people in the past, He also w/b 4 them today & in the future. Samuel knows that a good memory keeps gratitude fresh & gratitude keeps faith faithful! Jacob raised up a stone of memorial at Bethel; Joshua set up memorials all over Canaan. Do you have any memorials? Do you remind yourself of what God's done in past? We stand in the present but dwell on the past in order that we can be steadfast 4 the future. Ebenezer – thus far!

15-17- judged- summary of Samuel's career: last of Judges but his judging is less administration of justice & more religious activity. He didn't only decide legal disputes, he offered reproof, instruction & counsel on living 4 **YHWH**!

Judges 3:2 - enemies were left in Canaan so that Israel could be taught "**2 know war.**" Not swordsmanship, martial arts or battle tactics but 2 teach them 2 fight the way Joshua fought: on his knees. Every physical victory manifested in our lives is secondary; 1st victory = heart being right w/ God! Falling on knees in prayer: that's where the battles were won & lost in Joshua. Every other victory was secondary 2 that. **YHWH** wanted the next generation 2 know they could come 2 Him, fall on their knees & cry out 2 Him b/c He's the same yesterday, today & forever. No change! Here, a new generation's awakening 2 the fact that they can cry out 2 God & gone thru terrible times getting there. What about our nation? What if the economy tanks? Will there be a young generation of kids who will have 2 learn 2 live w/ much less than we have today? Will they learn 2 pray in earnest then, become desperate b/4 God? Is that

what it will take? We desperately want 2 protect all we've acquired in life but if it's not being used 4 the furtherance of the gospel, what's the spiritual benefit of having it? If it's not being used 2 advance the kingdom of God it's probably hindering it. If that's the case, it's only right that God should remove it from our lives. It has become an idol – a substitute 4 God – anything in our lives that we trust & serve in place of the Lord.

If you're currently not walking w/ the Lord properly; if your relationship w/ Christ is not what it should be (could be); if you're struggling in life & desperately seeking God's help – what do you think He's going 2 help you do? Continue 2 live a nominal, stand-offish Christian life, a defeated Christian life? **He will not!** He may very well allow your current physical situation 2 continue as a reflection of your true spiritual situation. Until the heart is made right (turned from self 2 God) any assistance from the Lord will only enable a continuation of an unacceptable position b/4 Him. We are His children & He desires 2 fellowship w/ us openly & consistently but when we allow everything else 2 take precedence over our relationship w/ Him it's idolatry & we've already seen how God likes 2 remove our idols. He won't brook any rivals!

