

1 Samuel 7: Here I Raise My Ebenezer

Introduction and Summary

Children of God, remember the cycle repeated throughout the book of Judges. Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baal's and Ashtoreth's. This led to their oppression until they cried out for deliverance, and God raised up a savior. In 1 Samuel, Israel is in this cycle with the Philistines, who have been oppressing them for 40 years. Samson, over his 20 year career, *began* to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

Full deliverance, however, took longer. Unfortunately, in many cases, repentance is not quick. Too often we love our idols and don't want to give them up no matter how destructive they are. So God patiently waits until we come to the end of ourselves and we are ready to call out for deliverance.

And so chapter 7 begins. After the ark had been in Kiriath-Jearim for 20 years, Israel finally lamented after the Lord. 40 years of Philistine oppression had taken place, Samson had begun to deliver them, Samuel had also been faithfully ministering the word, teaching Israel how to follow the LORD whole-heartedly, and using the law as a mirror showing them how Philistine and Canaanite culture had corrupted them. Their worship of Baal's and Ashtoreth's had made their glory depart, and turned their glory into shame.

Reformation and revival comes only when the Word of God is faithfully preached. God's discipline and Samuel's preaching produced a humbled Israel, softened by the shame of their sin, and made them finally ready to turn back to the LORD.

Overview of 1 Samuel 7

When Israel lamented, they were not merely complaining about external hardships of their oppression, but rather they grieved over their sin and idolatry. They saw sins devastating effects on their souls and nation. And just as God heard Israel's cry in Egypt and so sent Moses to deliver his people, now He sends Samuel, a prophet like Moses, to call them out of spiritual bondage, saying:

"Put away the foreign gods—the Baals and the Ashtoreth—and direct your heart to the LORD. Serve Him only, and He will deliver you" (7:3-4).

Israel responds by turning away from their idols. They came together at Mizpah where they poured out water before the LORD, they fasted, and they confessed their sins. By pouring out water, Israel was declaring their trust in the LORD alone to provide the rain.

Baal was the rain god, and water was a precious commodity in the region. God promised in Deuteronomy to be the one who would give them the early and latter rains, and take care of the land to water it.

They also fasted, demonstrating their understanding that man lives not bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The text then says that Samuel judged them, which means he instructed them in true repentance, much like John the Baptist did who told the people to bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:10-14).

When the Philistines hear of Israel's gathering, they march out to attack (7:7).

In a land filled with many gods, the only thing truly intolerable is the exclusive worship of the one true God. Polytheism allows people to indulge their desires, making them easier to control. Israel's act of repentance and its turning away from the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth signaled a renewed unity and commitment to their God, which would have led to their resistance against Philistine rule. The Philistines aimed to suppress this movement before it gained strength.

Let this serve as a lesson for us. The quickest way to prevent a people from acting in unison is to strip them of their exclusive religious identity. When Christians tolerate the worship of other gods, they lose both their spiritual and political strength. Those who benefit from our idolatry will do everything in their power to prevent us from rejecting these false gods.

This explains the negative reaction to Christian nationalism. The powers that be cannot survive if Christians in America stop tolerating multiculturalism and cast off the false gods that plague our land and people.

Those who serve Christ alone are self-governing individuals who are quick to reject both spiritual and political tyranny. These are the people that tyrants fear the most.

The last time Israel fought the Philistines, they foolishly brought the ark as a lucky charm, thinking that it would deliver them. This time, they rely fully on the LORD, pleading with Samuel: “*Do not cease to cry out to the LORD for us*” (7:8). Samuel intercedes and offers a lamb as a burnt sacrifice.

As the Philistines advance, God thunders from heaven, throwing them into panic and terror. The men of Israel pursued the Philistines and struck them down (7:9-11).

This victory is the LORD’s alone, fulfilling the words of Hannah’s prophetic song, which says: “*The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them He will thunder in Heaven*” (2:10).

To commemorate the victory, Samuel sets up a stone—an Ebenezer—declaring, “*Thus far the LORD has helped us*”

(7:12). There is a song we sing called *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, and there is a line in it which says:

Here I raise my Ebenezer, here by Thy great help I've come.

An Ebenezer is a memorial stone that a person stands up as a reminder of God's help and faithfulness. God fought from Heaven that day against the Philistines, and the people erected a stone of remembering, that they not forget that the Lord had been their help, saying, "Till now the LORD has helped us."

Meaning, everything Israel had been through, from the call of Abraham, to the Exodus, the wilderness wandering, the conquering of the land, and through all their spiritual wanderings and adultery, and the chastisements of the nations upon them, and their new found repentance and victory – all of it is from the Lord's helping hand.

With victory comes peace. The Philistines retreat, and Israel regains lost territory. Even the Amorites who are still in the land, seek peace with Israel. Samuel continues his leadership, ministering the Word to the people, traveling in a circuit to judge and instruct the people in righteousness (7:13-17). Under his faithful guidance, Israel prospers in covenant obedience until he grows old.

Baal and Ashtoreth: Ancient Idols and Modern Shadows

How can we apply this passage to ourselves today? The demonic forces behind Baal and Ashtoreth still haunt us today. Samuel's plea to "Put away the foreign gods" (1 Sam. 7:3) is just as relevant now as it was then. But in order for us to turn from these false gods, we must understand who they are and what is their dark influence.

Baal was a Canaanite storm and fertility god, often associated with rain, thunder, agriculture, and prosperity. He was considered the god who brought life-giving rains and ensured the fertility of the land. People worshiped him because he promised abundant crops, prosperity, security, and fertility. But to get it, you had to sacrifice a child.

Ashtoreth, or Astarte, was his female counterpart. She was a goddess of fertility also, but also the goddess of love, and war. She was adored for fruitfulness—in childbirth, family, flock, and harvest—but her cult twisted God's gifts. Fertility in flock, family, and harvest, like Baal, was also purchased through the sacrificing children in the fire.

She was also the goddess of love, but her love was twisted into lust and sensuality, with temple prostitutes, both male and female, and licentious rites that mocked the sacredness of marriage, and the natural order.

And she was also the goddess of war. Thus her worship promoted the idea that women could embody both seductive power and military might. The idealized Astarte was both a temptress and a warrior, blending eroticism with aggression and violence.

Together, Baal and Ashtoreth formed an ancient power couple—Love and Thunder, like Thor and Jane Foster. They offered life, prosperity, abundance, pleasure, sensuality, and power through a perverse rebellion against God's holy design of the natural order.

Today, the spirits of Baal and Ashtoreth are alive in modern American idols like materialism, sexual immorality, and feminism.

The Worship of Baal Today: The Idol of Materialism

In ancient times, people believed that Baal controlled rain, crops, and wealth, thinking he dispensed prosperity like a vending machine. They believed that if they made offerings to Baal, he would reward them with a good harvest—more grain, more livestock, and more money in their pockets. It was a transactional relationship: "I give you this, and you give me that." Offer a sacrifice, and receive an abundant yield in return. Baalism revolved around acquiring tangible benefits—grain, goats, gold, and more—and worshippers trusted Baal to deliver these rewards.

Today's consumer culture reflects a similar spirit to Baalism, albeit without the stone altars. Corporations act as modern "priests of Baal," promoting a doctrine of individualism and consumption. They promise personal fulfillment, security, and happiness through material goods—buy the latest phone, car, or fashion, and your life will feel complete.

This mirrors Baal's transactional promise: invest in the system (spend money) to reap the rewards (status, comfort, happiness, fulfillment, and acceptance). Like the worshippers of Baal, we can be tempted to sacrifice what truly matters—time with family, moral integrity, and devotion to God—for the illusion of prosperity. In today's world, materialism is the new Baalism, just without the altars.

A society that is less constrained by Christian values often prioritizes the individual over the community and personal pleasure over selfless sacrificial love. Traditional Christian values—such as contentment, family, and stewardship across generations—help limit excessive spending. However, as our exclusively Christian identity weakens, individualism flourishes, driving people to seek fulfillment through purchases rather than through faith.

A single person, seeking self-gratification, might spend more than a family pooling their resources wisely. This is

also the driving force behind woke capitalism – corporations don't actually care about LGBTQ stuff. Rather, homosexuals are high impulse buyers who do not have the responsibilities of families. So these corporations have just been catering to their biggest supporters.

Thus, corporate Baalism profits from our willingness to trade eternal glory for temporary goods, echoing Baal's empty promises.

As we worship this idol of consumerism, we risk becoming spiritually bankrupt. We may find ourselves growing distanced from our families, filled with more anxiety, and lacking a sense of transcendent purpose and fulfillment. It can feel as though the more we possess, the less we truly have. Scripture reminds us, however:

"6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."

Consumerism seduces us into believing we should never be content; it leads us to find fulfillment in endless purchases, whispering that acquiring more equates to greater happiness. Yet, this pursuit enslaves us, leaving us restless and forgetting the Lord as the true source of our joy.

The Idol of Ashtoreth Today: Sexual Immorality, Feminism, and Power

Ashtoreth, the goddess of love and fertility, also demanded worship that revolved around sexuality and personal power. Her cult promoted the use of sexuality for personal gain, and her followers engaged in ritual prostitution in the belief that such acts would appease her and bring fertility and blessings.

Today, Ashtoreth's spirit continues to influence us, but now it's woven into the fabric of sexual liberation and the empowerment movement, where freedom means doing whatever we want with our bodies—regardless of the cost.

One way Ashtoreth's worship shows up in our world today is through the idolization of self-gratification. Our culture teaches us that love, in the eyes of the world, is self-centered, a matter of personal fulfillment rather than sacrificial giving.

Pornography has become one of the chief expressions of Ashtoreth's spirit—promising fulfillment and love, but leaving the heart stained with shame, guilt, and a deep hunger that can never be satisfied.

Just as the ancient worship of Ashtoreth promised fertility through sexual rites, today's culture has made sexual indulgence a means of gaining personal power and

freedom—but it leaves those who follow it feeling empty and ashamed.

Just as Ashtoreth was worshipped as a goddess of empowerment, modern feminism that seeks to equalize women with men at any cost. Today's feminism has pushed women to fight battles not just in the workplace, but in the family, as well, creating division and strife among husband and wife, where there should be unity and peace.

Women are told they must compete with men to be valuable, to rule over their husbands to be equal, to be freed from the bondage of domestic life so she can serve another man in the work force.

We have been trying to erase the natural distinctions between men and women, and so we embraced this rivalry between men and woman. We send our daughters to fight in combat, both in the military, and in martial arts, in the workplace, and at home.

We celebrate the female superhero like Wonder Woman, who looks sexy while knocking-out grown men. As a result, we have sacrificed the beauty of godly womanhood and femininity, and a nurturing motherhood for a fruitless pursuit that leaves many women feeling exhausted, unfulfilled, and burned out.

Modern Ashtoreth worship creates a distortion of womanhood—turning what should have been the nurturing, life-giving role of women into a perversion of masculinity.

The Idolatry of Abortion: Sacrificing Children for Personal Gain

But there's another sacrifice we must speak of, one that goes hand in hand with both Baal and Ashtoreth—the sacrifice of children. In ancient times, worshippers of Baal and Astarte would offer their children as burnt offerings, believing that by killing their own flesh and blood, they could secure blessings of prosperity and fertility.

Today, abortion serves as a modern-day parallel, where children are sacrificed to the idol of convenience, freedom, and personal success. The children of our society are sacrificed not for fertility, but for the false promise of prosperity—so that we can have the career we want, the freedom we crave, or the financial security that we think will bring us happiness.

We tell ourselves that the timing isn't right, or that our goals are more important, and in doing so, we offer our children on the altar of personal choice and self-determination.

Abortion also is a bloody parody of the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, the mother offers here child and says, “Your life for mine,” in contrast to Christ who died on the cross and said, “My life for yours.” And just as it was in ancient Israel, so it is still today, abortion is an abomination that fills our land with shame and bloodguilt.

The Thunder of God and the Triumph of the Lamb

The story never ends with the shame of our idolatry. Israel turned from Baal and Ashtoreth and pleaded with Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 7:8).

As our enemies seek to keep us enslaved to the idols of consumerism, feminism, and abortion, Samuel offers a lamb in sacrifice and prays. As the enemy approaches, God thunders from heaven! The Philistines collapse in terror, and Israel triumphs—not by their own power, but by God’s alone.

Beloved, this is the gospel. That lamb foreshadows Christ, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). When Jesus prayed in John 12, “Father, glorify Your name,” God thundered in response, affirming that Christ’s sacrifice would defeat Satan and save His people

(John 12:28, 31). Through His death, Christ disarmed every demonic power, breaking the chains of idolatry by His blood (Colossians 2:15).

Christ is the Lamb slain for us, bearing our shame and absorbing the curse of idolatry on the cross. He was sacrificed not for our material prosperity but for our spiritual redemption. In Him, we are restored to glory, just as Israel was restored to victory.

When we turn from idols, Christ removes our shame and clothes us in His righteousness. But we must turn with our whole heart. As the greater Samuel, Jesus prays for us and grants victory over the idols of this world.

Repentance is more than regret; it is rejecting false gods and returning to the living God. In Christ, we are not only forgiven—we are renewed. The shame of prosperity-seeking, immorality, and sacrificing the innocent is lifted from us and placed on Christ, who bore it on the cross to give us His glory.

This is the hope of the gospel. Our glory is not in wealth, power, feminist rivalry, or promiscuity—it is in Jesus alone, who restores Eden's lost beauty.

To those seeking Baal's wealth, Christ says: Lay down your idols. "Seek first His kingdom" (Matthew 6:33). To those bound by Ashtoreth's lust, repent and be healed by His love. To those chasing feminism's autonomy, repent of

trading nurturing beauty for strife. To those who have sacrificed children, turn from abortion's idolatry and seek mercy.

Repentance turns us to Christ—not just for forgiveness, but for life. Freed from false promises, clothed in holiness, we stand under God's thunder—not in judgment, but in victory, for Christ has conquered sin, death, and every idol.

The Ebenezer: God Our Rock and the Lord's Supper

After Israel's triumph, Samuel sets up a stone, calling it Ebenezer—"Stone of Help" (1 Samuel 7:12). He declares, "Thus far the Lord has helped us," affirming that even Israel's past oppression was God's discipline, leading them to repentance.

God is their true Rock of Help, the one who crushed their enemies when they turned to Him. Scripture calls Him our Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 18:2)—steadfast, strong, and the foundation of salvation. This stone is a witness to His past mercies and future faithfulness.

For us, the true Ebenezer is found in the Lord's Supper. As Samuel's stone marked deliverance, the bread and cup proclaim Christ's victory on the cross. When we partake, we remember, "Thus far the Lord has helped us" (1 Corinthians 11:24–25). The Supper connects us to His

past faithfulness and assures us of His coming glory—a living monument to the God who will complete His work in us and never let us go.

Conclusion

Dear People of God, 1 Samuel 7 is a mirror for us. Like Israel, we've chased the Baals and Ashtaroath of our time and felt their bitter chains. But God, in His steadfast love, calls us back through Samuel's voice: *"Return to Me with all your heart."*

He invites us to pour out our lives before Him, to confess our idolatry, and to trust the Lamb slain, who thundered victory from the cross. And when we do, He sets up an Ebenezer for our souls—a steadfast hope that declares, *"Thus far the Lord has helped us!"* Let trust in Him to help us again, today, now, and always. Amen.

The purpose of this sermon is to call God's people to repentance and exclusive devotion to the Lord by demonstrating how Israel's idolatry and oppression under the Philistines parallels modern cultural sins, and how true deliverance comes only through rejecting false gods and submitting wholly to Christ.