

Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 5, 1 Samuel 7

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This is Dr. Robert Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 5, 1 Samuel 7, Repentance and Victory.

In our next lesson, we're going to be looking at 1 Samuel 7. I've entitled this Repentance and Victory. You can tell from the title that this chapter is going to be somewhat upbeat. It's going to be a good experience for Israel in this particular chapter.

They're going to genuinely repent and they are going to win a great victory, or the Lord is going to win a great victory for them. The theme, if we could summarize the theme of the chapter, I would state it this way, repentance and renewed allegiance to the Lord are foundational to a renewed relationship with him. So let me repeat that, repentance and renewed allegiance to the Lord are foundational to a renewed relationship with him.

We last saw Samuel way back in chapter three, where he had been called as a young boy to be a prophet of the Lord and he begins to function as a prophet and Israel recognizes his prophetic status all the way from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. Everything that he prophesies comes true and he is verified and confirmed as a prophet of the Lord, but then he sort of disappears because remember in the early chapters there is this contrast between Samuel and Eli and his sons. Samuel represents the new Israel of the future that's going to be restored and re-established in a proper relationship with the Lord and Eli and his sons, they kind of represent those who have rejected the Lord.

Eli and his sons die in chapter four, the ark is captured, and so we take a journey down to Philistine territory and then back again to Beth-Shemesh and that's the ark narrative. But here in 1 Samuel 7 Samuel is going to reappear on the scene. We read in 1 Samuel chapter 7 verse 1, actually this verse goes with the ark narrative, so the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord.

They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the Lord. So that wraps up the narrative. I think the chapter division probably should have been after that verse, not before it.

And then verse 2 we read, it was a long time, 20 years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim. So that's where the Lord's presence is. And all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord.

So, the people as a whole sense that there's something wrong in their relationship with the Lord, and so they mourn and they seek him. And Samuel, there he is, he's back. I don't think he ever left, it's just literally we haven't heard from him because the focus has been on the ark and its travels.

And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, if you are returning to the Lord, with all your hearts, in other words, sincerely returning to the Lord, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. So we discover here that the Israelites are worshipping foreign gods. Later in the book of 1 Samuel, Samuel is going to mention that they were worshipping the gods of the various peoples all around them, including Baal.

They're also worshipping the ashtoreths, which probably were images of a goddess known as Astarte. And he's saying put all of those foreign gods away. And he's referring to their images, because in pagan thinking the god does in a way come and take up residence in the image, and it becomes very, very difficult to separate the god from the image.

We've learned in the ark narrative that's not the way Yahweh relates to his people. Yes, the ark is a symbol of his presence, but he doesn't live there and you can't control him by controlling the ark. And so, commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

So, the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths. They took their images of Baal, their images of Astarte, they threw them away, they got rid of them, and they served the Lord only. So, they turned back to the Lord.

And it's not just an emotional thing. There's some substance here. They get rid of those idols.

Then Samuel said, assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the Lord for you. When 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.

And Samuel was the leader of Israel at Mizpah. Let's talk about a few of the details in the text at this point. The Israelites pour out water before the Lord.

What's the significance of that? Interpreters aren't really certain what's going on there, but there are some good ideas that have been presented. Perhaps it symbolized their repentant spirit. It's as if they were pouring their hearts out before the Lord, just as this water is pouring out, indicating their willingness to deprive themselves of the bare essentials of life.

We're not even going to drink any water today. And that makes some sense because right after this it said they fasted. So perhaps they took the water and poured it out as if to say we are going to deprive ourselves of food and water for a time to show how focused and sincere we really are about all of this.

Also, in this section that we've just read, Samuel says that he will intercede for the people if they truly are repentant. And that's an expression that is used only of Abraham and Moses prior to this. And so, it's possible that the narrator is kind of casting Samuel in the role of a Moses.

And of course, Moses had said, the Lord will raise up a prophet like me for you. And of course, Jesus is ultimately that prophet. But in the historical development, Samuel is initially that prophet.

And there may be an allusion back to Numbers 21.7 where Moses intercedes for the people. And the people on that occasion said, we have sinned, just as they declare here in 1 Samuel 7. So, this idea of Samuel as the new Moses is beginning to emerge. And of course that gives him tremendous authority and credibility in the eyes of the Israelites and certainly in the eyes of the reader.

And remember we said that's an important theme in this early part of 1 Samuel, the credibility of Samuel as a prophet because he is the one who will remove Saul from office essentially and who will anoint David as the chosen king. And so, Samuel has authority and what he does really counts. The Lord is working through him and so the fact that he would tell Saul you are rejected and tell David you are the new chosen ruler of the Lord is very, very significant and contributes to the author's pro-David theme in the books of Samuel.

So, it's looking pretty good here. But then verse 7, when the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines.

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. Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf and the Lord answered him.

Now we're not quite sure what it means when it says the Lord answered him. Does that mean the Lord came and spoke to him, an oracle assuring him that everything would be all right, that he would deliver the people from the Philistines? So, is this some kind of verbal message that the Lord gave Samuel prior to the battle? Or is it simply saying the Lord answered him by defeating the Philistines and now we're going to tell you about that? Maybe it's both. At any rate, the Lord responds to

Samuel's intercession on behalf of Israel, just as he did Moses when Moses interceded.

And so, while Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. And it's very interesting how the text portrays this. It's like simultaneous action.

As Samuel is sacrificing, the Philistines are drawing near. And so, the tension in the story is mounting. 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.

And so, the Lord does exactly what Hannah had prayed that he would do. She had anticipated a time when the Lord would thunder against his enemies. And he does that here.

The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beit Kar. And then Samuel took a stone and he set it up between Mizpah and Shein. And he named it Ebenezer.

We know that name from Ebenezer Scrooge. But like Ichabod, these names sometimes have their origin in the Bible. And they're actually Hebrew names.

Ebenezer says, thus far the Lord has helped us. He has been here to deliver us and empower us. And the name Ebenezer, Ebenezer, means stone of help.

And so, it's that help idea. The stone is there. It's the Eben.

And the Lord has ezer. He has helped us, Samuel says. So once again, this stone is going to be there for future generations.

And when they come by, they can look at it and say, you know what happened here. It's also interesting that he names it Ebenezer because you will recall in chapters four and five, or four in particular, the Israelites had fought the Philistines at Ebenezer, at a site called Ebenezer. Now this is a different Ebenezer.

This placement of the stones in a different place. But isn't it interesting that Samuel gives it this name, not only to commemorate the fact that the Lord has helped us, but also it kind of reverse the defeat that occurred in chapter four. The Philistines had defeated the Israelites at a place called Ebenezer.

Now the Israelites have turned the tables on them. The Lord has turned the tables by coming down and thundering against the Philistines and giving the Israelites the victory. And so, Samuel says, we've got a new Ebenezer right here.

Kind of cancels out the old one. We're going to remember this one because the Lord has given us victory. He has replaced defeat with victory.

So, the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. I don't think that means forever because later we have accounts in 1 Samuel of Philistine invasions. I think it means in this more immediate context.

They didn't launch a counter attack. So, the Israelites were for a time the dominant force over the Philistines. And it says throughout Samuel's lifetime the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines.

So, the Lord was intervening on behalf of his people. And the towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to her. And Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the power of the Philistines.

So, the Israelites are able to recover territory that they had lost to the Philistines prior to this. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. The Amorites are native Canaanite peoples who live in the land in the Transjordan area as well.

And so I think probably what happened, was the Amorites recognized the Israelite power and decided they better make treaties with them. So, a peace of a sort has come to the land. And Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life.

And I think in this case he's not just judge in a general way as we see in the book of Judges, but he is actually adjudicating cases. That's suggested by what is said about his sons here in a little bit. From year to year, he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, more the central region of Israel, judging Israel in all those places.

So, he would just move around from place to place. People would bring legal matters to him and he would make a wise and fair judgment. And I'm certain he consulted the Lord in doing so.

But he always went back to Ramah where his home was. And there he also judged Israel. And he built an altar there to the Lord.

So, Samuel is bringing justice to the land and he is bringing a proper form of worship to the land. The Lord is doing some significant things through Samuel. So, let's talk about a couple of other matters that arise in this chapter, this very positive chapter.

When the Lord thunders against the Philistines and defeats them, that's quite significant, especially in light of what happens earlier in the story. Remember when the Israelites said, we are ready to repent. And Samuel says, well prove it by getting rid of all of your idols.

And they throw away their Baals and the Astarte symbols and they get rid of all of this. And remember what we said about Baal. We discussed him in an earlier lesson.

Just to review a little bit, he's a fertility god. He's responsible for bringing the rain. And so, if you want a lot of crops and you want a lot of kids, you worship Baal.

And the Israelites were doing that. Remember Hannah refused to. She remained loyal to the Lord and was vindicated.

But many of the people were worshiping Baal, so they decided to throw these Baal idols away. Well, Baal is a storm god. As a storm god, he supposedly controls the elements of the storm.

He controls the thunder and the lightning. And in fact, in these Canaanite texts, the thunder is his voice. They refer to it as the holy voice of Baal.

Not holy in the sense of righteousness, but a voice that's unique and different and set apart. And Baal speaks through the thunder, and he comes as a mighty warrior against his enemy. See, when the storm god's on your side, he can make crops grow, but he can also use the elements of the storm to defeat your enemies.

And so, Baal is a storm god who comes and thunders, and he also hurls the lightning. And the lightning is viewed as his spear. So in their thinking, Baal controls the storm.

But isn't it significant that when they throw away their Baal idols, the Lord then comes in the battle against their enemies? And how does he reveal himself? In the storm, he thunders against the enemy. As if to say to the Israelites, you know, you made a wise decision when you got rid of the Baal idols because despite what the Canaanites say, he doesn't control the storm. I control the storm.

And Yahweh is not saying, I'm a storm god. No, he's bigger than that. But he controls all things as the creator.

He controls all the elements of nature. He's sovereign even over death. And he controls the storm, and he comes in the storm to defeat the Philistines.

And this is really the final example of this in the books of Judges and Samuel. There is a pronounced polemic against the god Baal, beginning in Judges and then carrying on through the first part of Samuel here. It seems like, after this event, Baal worship is not so much of a problem in Israel.

But so let's go back and kind of review how that polemic has developed. If we go back into the early chapters of Judges, we read that the Israelites were idolaters, and Baal was one of the gods that they worshipped. They worshipped the Baals.

It's usually plural. That's because the god Baal would manifest himself supposedly in different shrines around the land, and he would be represented by these idols. He would kind of take up residence in these idols.

And so sometimes in the Bible, they'll refer to the Baals to emphasize that it's the images that the people were worshipping. But there's a god behind that in the thinking of the people. Well, remember in the story of Deborah and Barak in Judges chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 is the narrative of what happened on that occasion, and chapter 5 is a poem that's written reflecting on the victory that the Lord has given.

The prophetess Deborah told Barak, the Lord wants you to go out and fight. By the way, Barak's name means lightning bolt, which I find interesting in this context. He was anything but initially.

He was hesitant. He didn't want to go out. He said, only if you go with me.

He wanted to have a prophet with him so that he could get a message from the Lord. But Deborah is telling him, basically, the Lord wants you to go and fight and win a victory. Of course, the Canaanites have a general by the name of Sisera, and he's got all these chariots, hundreds of chariots, iron chariots, which doesn't mean they're made out of iron, but they're strengthened with iron parts, as it were.

And so they're especially good chariots. And so the Israelites don't have chariots. In fact, the Lord says in the law, I don't want you to have chariots.

I want you to go out and fight and trust in me. Sort of be at a disadvantage when you go into battle, and that'll prove that I'm the one who gives you the victory. So Barak and his forces go out against the Canaanites, but it doesn't look good.

The Canaanites have all these chariots, but the Lord wins a great victory. He causes the Canaanite forces to be confused. And some have asked, well, what exactly happened in that battle? Well, the poem in chapter five gives us some insight into what happened on that occasion, I think.

And I'm going to go back there and read some of the verses in chapter five of Judges. There's this song that Deborah and Barak are singing, and, O Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, so the Lord is pictured as marching from the southeast from the direction of Sinai, which of course is a holy mountain that he inhabits. The earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured

down water, and the mountains quaked before the Lord, the one of Sinai, before the Lord, the God of Israel.

So, they seem to be suggesting that there was a storm, there was water that came down. And then later in chapter five, we read, from the heavens the stars fought. From their courses, they fought against Sisera.

So the stars of the heavens were fighting on Israel's behalf. And actually, in this culture, there is some evidence that they believed the stars were sometimes sources of rain. At any rate, there's this angelic assembly that fights on the Lord's behalf.

And then verse 21 says, the river Kishon swept them away. The age-old river, the river Kishon, march on my soul, be strong. So, it sounds as if there was a flash flood of the Kishon.

And so I think what happened is the Lord came in a storm in Baal-like fashion, demonstrating against a Canaanite army that he's the one who controls the storm. And he caused it to, a downpour to occur. The Wadi Kishon flash flooded.

And you know, in the middle of a storm when there's flash flooding that occurs, chariots don't work too well. And so, what happened in the story, Sisera got down from his chariot and he ran away and the Israelites won a great victory. So, in addition to celebrating the great victory of the Lord over the Canaanites, there's a Baal polemic here.

It may be a little subtle, but it's present. The Lord demonstrated to his people as they faced Baal worshippers, that he was the one who controlled the storm. They need not fear the Canaanites and their chariots and their god Baal because the Lord is the one who controls all of that, not Baal.

And he gave them a great victory. A little bit later, we move on to the Gideon story. And the Baal polemic is more pronounced and it's more obvious and direct in the Gideon story.

Remember, Gideon lives in an Israelite town, but in that town, they have a Baal altar and they're worshipping the god Baal. And Gideon's own father is running this. And the Lord tells Gideon, I want you to tear that altar down.

He does it in the nighttime. I think I would have to, to be able to do it. You probably have to do it at night, because otherwise, people are going to say, what are you doing to our altar? And they're going to rush up there.

But they find out that Gideon has done this and they're ready to kill him. He's doing what the law says you're supposed to do. Tear down pagan altars and get rid of pagan deities.

He is obeying the Lord and he's doing what the law says you're supposed to do. And Israelites are ready to kill him for that reason. We talked about this a little bit in an earlier lesson, but Gideon's father steps in and he says, I don't think we should be fighting Baal's battles.

He might get offended. I'm paraphrasing now. He might be offended.

Let's let him fight his own battles. I think he may have said this also to save his son. At any rate, he says, we'll give him a new name, Yeruv Baal.

So, Gideon now has the name Yeruv Baal. And as you're reading through the story, sometimes Gideon is the name Gideon is used, sometimes Yeruv Baal. I think when Yeruv Baal is being used, it's highlighting the polemical dimension of this a little more.

So, what that means is to let Baal fight. Let Baal strive. And so, Gideon now has a name that's a challenge to the god Baal.

And so that would make me a little nervous. If I'd grown up in a town where everybody believed in Baal and worshipped him, I think you're going to be impacted at least at an emotional level by that. And so, I think Gideon's concerned.

And so, the Lord then tells him, rally the troops and you're going to go out and fight. But Gideon then is hesitant again, and he wants to conduct a test. And so, he does this strange test that involves dew and sheep's fleece.

What in the world is going on there? There are these couple of tests that he runs to see if the Lord can control the dew, basically. Well, it makes perfect sense if you understand the Baal mythology because Baal not only controls the rain, he controls the dew. Dew is viewed as a source of agricultural fertility, and Baal controls the dew.

In fact, in one text, Baal's daughters are named. And one of his daughters is named Talia, which means dewy. So, she's dew-like.

So, the very name of one of his daughters suggests the fact that he's in control of all of this. So, what is Gideon doing? He's making sure, before he goes into battle, that Yahweh, the God of Israel, who has recently revealed himself to Gideon, really does control the elements that Baal supposedly controls. And so, the Lord, very patiently, demonstrates to Gideon, I control all of this, not Baal.

And so, then the question develops as the story unfolds, will Baal fight back? And lo and behold, Gideon goes through his life. He wins victories. He makes some foolish decisions, by the way.

Doesn't really finish well. But at no point in Gideon's life does Baal strike back. But then you come to Judges chapter 9, and Gideon has a son named Abimelech.

Oddly enough, he named this boy Abimelech, my father is king. What does that suggest about Gideon's view of himself? This boy was birthed through a concubine. He has all of these half-brothers.

So, Gideon is living like a king. Remember, he refused to be made king by the Israelites, which was wise, but he took their money. And he began to accumulate wives.

And so, he was living like a king, even though he didn't want the responsibility of being one. And he piously said you have a king, the Lord. Well, why then act this way? But he had accumulated all of these wives and sons, and Abimelech decides it would be better for at least the town of Shechem to have one king.

And so, they form an alliance with him, and they finance this operation from a Baal temple. And so Abimelech is apparently a Baal worshipper, and the Shechemites are worshipping. And if you study Shechem, it's really confusing.

Who lives in Shechem, Israelites or Canaanites? I would say yes. When you intermarry with the Canaanite population, genealogies get real confused. And so some texts seem to indicate Israelites are living there.

Some seem to indicate no; Canaanites are living there. Well, both are living there. And the populations have been blended to some degree.

And so, Abimelech kills his 70 half-brothers. He murders them in order to be king. You want monarchy with me in charge, not an oligarchy with these sons.

And so, it looks as if Baal is fighting back. It really does, by eliminating Gideon's fertility, as it were, by taking away his sons through Abimelech, who's apparently a Baal worshipper. But by the end of the story, what happens? The Shechemites and Abimelech get at odds, and that is the Lord's doing, because the one surviving brother, Yotam, prayed that the Lord would intervene and bring justice, that he would vindicate his murdered brothers.

And the Lord does that. He sends an evil spirit that creates hostility between Abimelech and the Shechemites. By the end of the chapter, the Shechemites' towns have been burned, and I assume any Baal temples that were in those towns.

And also, Abimelech is killed, oddly enough, by a woman. He gets too close to the wall, and a woman throws a millstone down and cracks his head open. And he is dying, but he asks his armor bearer to run him through, so it won't be said that a woman killed him.

But there's the story right there in the Bible. Sorry, Abimelech, a woman killed you. The suicide at the end can't undo that fact.

So, if indeed Baal struck back through Abimelech and the Shechemites, by the end of the story, who wins? The Lord wins, and he demonstrates his superiority to Baal. I'm talking about Baal as if he really existed. And that may seem odd to you, because we're monotheists.

We believe there's only one God. But I think in the ancient Near Eastern world, and the Old Testament, they don't have this modern notion of monotheism as much. There is a reality behind the pagan gods.

They are not simply a figment of the imagination of those who worship them. Now, the idols are nothing. Isaiah lampoons idols.

Idols are just man-made, and the gods are no more powerful than the idols that represent them. But they did believe that there was a reality behind these gods, because there really is. As the Bible unfolds and we get more revelation about these matters, we know that there are spiritual powers in high places.

Paul talks about them. In fact, our spiritual battle that we are in as the church is not against flesh and blood. It's not against the human enemies of the church as much as it is against the spiritual forces that empower them.

And you see this in the Old Testament. God delegated authority to angels over nations. You read about it in Daniel.

There's the prince of Greece and the prince of Persia. We're not talking about human princes in those contexts. We're talking about angelic forces that are in battle with Michael, one of God's archangels.

And so, there are spiritual forces that are behind these pagan gods, I'm convinced. And so, when the Bible talks about them as if they exist, it's accurate. It's accurate.

And so, the Lord is engaged in battle against Baal, as it were. But really, when we look at it in its larger canonical or biblical context, it's really a battle against Satan and the angels who were delegated authority but rebelled and turned to the dark side. And they're kind of enslaving these worshippers in these surrounding nations.

I can show you a passage in 2 Kings 3 where Chemosh, the god of Moab, seems to fight back against the Israelites. That shouldn't have dissuaded the Israelites from taking that Moabite town, but it did, unfortunately. So, there is a Baal polemic that's going on.

Of course, when we get to Samson, the polemic is against Dogon, who, recall, we said in the prior lesson, is the father of Baal, a fertility god as well. And so the Lord is also against him. Then we get into 1 Samuel, and what we've seen is Hannah, in her song of thanks, is celebrating the fact that the Lord has vindicated her.

She did not become a Baal worshipper in order to have a child, like so many would have done. She didn't do that. She trusted the Lord, and the Lord eventually gave her that son and vindicated her.

We pointed out in her song of praise and thanks that we looked at in a prior lesson that there is a Baal polemic running through that. The Lord is the only one who is holy. Well, the Canaanites believed Baal was holy.

No, not so, says Hannah. And the Lord is sovereign over life and death. And you will recall an earlier discussion about Baal that we had.

Baal has to fight two primary enemies, Yam, the god of the sea, whom he defeats, and the god of death, Mot. And there's this violent struggle that goes on, and Baal actually loses on one occasion and has to descend into the world of the dead. He gets resurrected thanks to the help of Anat, who kills Mot, but Mot reappears and Baal and Mot struggle, and this all reflects the seasonal situation.

When Baal is in control, everything happens in its proper time. The rain comes in its proper time, and things grow. But when there's prolonged drought, that's a sign down here in the world of men that Baal has been defeated in the world of the gods and Mot is in control now.

Well, in the Hebrew Bible, the Lord never dies. And even though death is an enemy, the Lord always is sovereign over death, and Hannah recognizes that. The Lord controls life and death.

And in Baal, though, he can die. Not so the Lord. So, I think there's a polemical dimension to that as well, because Hannah has trusted the Lord for life and fertility, and the Lord has proven himself.

And then at the end of Hannah's song, she does anticipate a time when the Lord will thunder against his enemies, and he will vindicate his anointed one. She looks forward to the coming of a king. The Lord has thundered against his enemies here in 1 Samuel chapter 7. And so, there's a Baal polemic in the Hannah story.

And then, of course, we looked earlier at how the god Dagon was humiliated by the ark of the Lord when the Philistines took the Lord to their temple. And so that dimension, polemical dimension, is continuing. And now here it kind of culminates in 1 Samuel 7, where the Israelites decide, we really do intend to repent, and we are going to throw away our Baal idols.

And the Lord comes, as we pointed out earlier in this discussion, the Lord comes and basically says, very wise decision, because I control the storm, and I am going to come and thunder against the Philistines and defeat them. So, all through this section, Judges, and on into 1 Samuel, the Lord is demonstrating to his people that he is sovereign over all, and he is infinitely superior to these pagan gods Dagon and Baal. There's also a cultural dimension to this, because if you're an Israelite and you're experiencing so many defeats at the hands of the Philistines and the Canaanites or whatever, now Israel wins their share of battles, but they also lose a lot in Judges.

They are defeated, and these foreign nations take over control of them. There might be a tendency, if you're not spiritual and not really focusing on the real reason why you're losing, you might conclude their gods are stronger than ours. But Judges and Samuel emphasize, no, no, when you are defeated, it's because you have sinned, and the Lord is punishing you.

It does not mean that these gods are stronger than the Lord, and therefore you need to worship them. No, no, no. It means that you have not worshipped the Lord, and he is punishing you.

But the Lord along the way demonstrates he is more powerful than all of these deities, Dagon, Baal, and the whole lot of them. So that's the purpose of this polemic as we see it in these texts. I want to also talk about repentance.

I think there's something to learn about repentance in this story here in 1 Samuel 7. I said earlier that one of the themes is that repentance and renewed allegiance to God opened the door to deliverance and a renewed relationship. But I think there are some lessons we can learn about what repentance is from these stories. Several observations.

The first one I've articulated this way. God's wayward people are responsible for initiating repentance. That was true for Israel.

It's true today. Moses anticipated in Deuteronomy chapter 30. Moses had lived with these people.

He had struggled with these people. He had been insulted by them. His patience had been tried many a time, and he anticipated that Israel would indeed disobey God.

It would come to that, and they would experience exile according to Deuteronomy chapter 30. But he also made it clear that restoration was possible. But in describing Israel's reconciliation to God, he stresses the people's responsibility to make the first move, as it were, as they reflect carefully on their sin.

They realize we have sinned, that's why we're in exile. Then they must return to the Lord and seek to obey him with all their heart and all their soul. Then the Lord would respond in compassion, restore the people to their land, and transform their character, which would then make it possible for them to sustain their renewed commitment to the Lord.

That seems to be the pattern and the order of events. And you see that in this story. But let's go back briefly and look at that Deuteronomy chapter 30 passage because it lays out the pattern that we see in 1 Samuel 7. When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you, and you take them to heart, wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations.

That hadn't happened in 1 Samuel 7, but it ultimately happened to Israel. They go into exile, the northern kingdom and then the southern kingdom. And when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, as the people did in 1 Samuel 7, they said, we want to seek the Lord, we want to come back to him, we repent of our sin.

And to prove that we are genuinely repentant, we are going to throw away these idols. Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. If you show him you mean business, he will step in and he will bring you back.

Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts, not just your flesh, your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live. And then the Lord is going to put these curses on your enemies

and you will then obey the Lord and experience his blessings. That's the pattern that we see in Deuteronomy played out and it's kind of assumed in Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well.

When the people repent, the Lord is going to, through a new covenant, re-establish his relationship with them. He's going to transform their hearts and minds. But there's always a balance in the Bible.

You know, Arminians want to emphasize human responsibility. Calvinists want to emphasize divine sovereignty. But the two are held in balance and you see that in this passage and in our passage in Samuel.

We are responsible. We are responsible to repent and turn to the Lord. I think the Bible, when viewed as a whole, teaches us that we can't really even do that without divine prompting.

But regeneration does not precede faith, in my theological understanding. The Dallas Theological Seminary doctrinal statement that I adhere to makes the point, that faith precedes regeneration. Some theologians would argue the opposite.

What we see here is the people are coming back to God. And then when they do that, the Lord knows they could never sustain this. And so that's why Jeremiah and Ezekiel have this vision of the new covenant.

That's why God has given us the gift of the Spirit. We could never sustain any repentance without the gift of the Spirit. God empowers us to be obedient.

But there is this important theme that we are responsible for initiating repentance and that God will then respond to that in a positive way. You see this with Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, don't you? He demands his money and he leaves. He's a wayward son.

Eventually, he's exasperated by the consequences of his sin. He realizes this is no fun. Sin is not what it's cracked up to be.

And so, he decides to return home to his father. The father didn't go off after him, didn't have to go and do some magic in his mind to bring him back. No, his son has decided to come back.

But the father is waiting with open arms and he rushes to meet him. He greets him with open arms, with great rejoicing. And the Bible says that's the way it is with God and sinners.

When sinners decide to repent and come back, God is there. He's ready and willing to embrace the sinner and welcome him back. So, it's very important that we take ownership of our lives and our sin.

When we have sinned and we recognize that, we need to repent. We need to return to God and show him in tangible ways that we really mean business. And he'll take care of that.

He'll meet us there and he will transform us and fill us with his spirit if we're already believers. Give us the gift of his spirit if you're not. What we also see here is repentance can have a corporate dimension.

When the individual members of the covenant community have participated together in the same sins, repentance isn't just something that individuals do. But sometimes a group of individuals can collectively come together and say we have sinned against the Lord and as a group we share these certain sins. We are collectively going to repent.

And that's what Israel does before the Lord. And I think there are times when it's appropriate for the church to do the same thing. The church may recognize we've sinned in certain ways and collectively we are going to acknowledge that.

A third point that I see here is repentance begins with sincere motives. But it also involves action, not just emotion. We've touched on this as we went through the passage.

The substance of repentance is changed behavior, which often involves a radical repudiation of your former behavior and allegiances. Symbolic rituals, and confession of sin may accompany repentance, but they're just formal expressions of it. Changed behavior is really what God is going for.

John the Baptist said this when he was appealing to the people to repent as he was baptizing in the Jordan. He said you need to show the fruit of repentance, righteous deeds. And this is something that we see in the New Testament.

Another principle that I think we see here is repentance results in exclusive worship of the one true God. That may not be as much of a problem for us living in a modern western situation where we don't see a lot of polytheism. A lot of people just didn't believe in God or they were ignoring him, but in their view, there's one God and they repent and come to him.

It doesn't mean repudiating other gods, but the West is unique in some respects. Out there in the big wide world there are people out there who when they turn to the

one true God they have to repudiate other gods that they have been worshiping. They have to get rid of all of that.

And so, when we take the gospel into those kinds of areas we make sure they understand that. There's no room for syncretism. We're not saying you worship Yahweh, the one true God, and you can also worship these other gods along with him or you can somehow fuse what you believe about them into him.

No, no. You have to reject these other gods. And that may mean rejecting your family because they don't understand and they're not going to appreciate what you're doing.

You have to turn to the one true God and reject all other contenders for the title of God. And then finally, fifth, repentance doesn't insulate you from trouble. You don't repent in order that you'll have a good, happy, carefree, trouble-free life.

No. Sometimes when you repent things get worse because if you are genuinely repenting and becoming loyal to God and God alone there are going to be people who don't like that. You're going to have enemies.

And we see that in this story. As they're repenting and Samuel is interceding for them and coming in a formal way before the Lord to kind of seal the deal, who shows up? The Philistines. The Philistines start attacking.

But repentance and reconciliation with God do bring divine help and support in the midst of trying circumstances and protection from enemies if God so chooses. And that's what we see here. They repent, but the Philistines attack as they're doing so.

But the Lord intervenes on behalf of his people. So, this is a really interesting passage that gives us some insight into the nature of repentance. And we see themes emerging in this chapter that we also see throughout the Bible.

So, it's a good passage to address that particular theme. Well, I wish that Israel had maintained this strong faith in the Lord that we see in 1 Samuel chapter 7. But the reality is sometimes people do genuinely repent, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be sustained. When trouble comes, sometimes there's a temptation to not trust in the Lord as you should.

And we're going to see that happen in 1 Samuel chapter 8 in our next lesson.

This is Dr. Robert Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 5, 1 Samuel 7, Repentance and Victory.