

An Ebenezer way of living

1 Samuel 7

Samuel was born during a difficult time in Israel's history. They worshipped God but also a number of foreign gods. The Philistines, their enemies, were strong and aggressive. After being victorious in battle, these had captured the Ark of the covenant.

Eventually something happened: "All the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD" (v.2). Recognition of sin and a seeking of the Lord always mark a turning point. Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "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" (v.3). Conversion is a change in direction. You and I cannot convert another person. Not even God can convert a repented sinner. We can explain and encourage and God's Spirit can bring conviction, but conversion is something each person must do themselves. "So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only" (v.4).

The Philistines attacked again. This time the Lord thundered with loud thunder against them and caused them to panic, allowing the Israelites to defeat them. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up and named it **Ebenezer** saying "Thus far has the LORD helped us" (v.12). This stone was a monument with a message.

The Hebrew word Ebenezer means 'stone of help', combining the words 'eben' (stone) and 'ezer' (help). There are significant moments in our life, such as a birthday, an anniversary, the end of project or the beginning of a new year, that invite us to stop and cry out: "Thus far has the LORD helped us". We could call these Ebenezer moments. We look back in order to look forward. We allow our past to influence our future.

1. Past – Ebenezer is a call to remember

Samuel placed that stone at the precise point they had reached that day, "Thus far". The Lord had done much for the Israelites. He had just given them a victory. But they had a long history with God before that day. He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, He had protected them from many enemies, He had provided for them, strengthened them and guided them into the Promised land.

What has the Lord done in your life? When facing difficulties, a crisis or a new challenge, it is so easy to forget what the Lord has done in our lives over the years. We were also lost, and He found us, slaves

and He freed us. He has protected us and has faithfully provided for our various needs. His good hand has been with us every day until today. He has been at our side and faithfully accompanied us in our lonely and busy moments, in our joys and sorrows, in our successes and mistakes. And He has done so up until the place in life where we now are, until "Thus far".

How you feel about where you now are (your family, your work, your age, your health, your living arrangements, your church, your ministry, etc), depends on how you remember and understand the Lord's involvement in your past. Samuel's idea behind raising an Ebenezer stone was to help the Israelites not to forget God's faithfulness in their past. Perhaps now is a good time to take a moment to look back on what God has done in your life.

2. Present – Ebenezer is a call to be thankful

Those who do not believe in God, give themselves or other humans the credit for their success. Some believe in good and bad luck. Once we remember and recognize the Lord's good hand in past events, we have good reason to be thankful. The Israelites had a tendency to complain and grumble (Psalm 106:25). We can also slip into that negative mode of thinking and talking. That is why Paul exhorted his readers, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." An ungrateful spirit can "put out the Spirit's fire" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19). Gratitude and joy are strongly connected.

3. Future – Ebenezer is a call to continue trusting

When you invest in the stock market, you are always warned that past performance is no guarantee for future performance. They are right. But we are told that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). Our Lord's faithful involvement in our lives in the past fills our hearts with gratitude but also with hope, peace and courage as we consider the future. That beautiful hymn, '[Be still my soul](#)' written by von Schlegel in 1752 has often helped me to continue trusting in Him, in dark moments and when facing new challenges.

"Be still my soul the Lord is on thy side...
In every change He faithful will remain...
Be still, my soul, thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past..."

Frequent Ebenezer moments make an Ebenezer way of living. Such moments are a good investment!