

ISRAEL'S REPENTANCE UNDER SAMUEL

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The Old Testament gives many detailed accounts of the rebelliousness of the children of Israel, from the idolatry practiced in Egypt, and the unbelief of the generation that came out of Egypt, to the cycle of sin and repentance for four centuries under the judges. The Israelites were repeatedly punished by God for their iniquities to bring them to repentance. God raised up the judge and prophet Samuel in a dark time in Israel's history, when the priests were leading the people into iniquity (1 Sam 2:12-17), and God's word had become "precious in those days, there was no open vision" (1 Sam 3:1). But 1 Samuel chapter 7 records the repentance of the people of Israel, giving us an excellent example to learn from.

The beginning of Israel's problem

From the days even before Samson's judgeship, into Samuel's time, Israel had persisted in wickedness and idolatry for several decades. Judges 10:6-7 says, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not him. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon." Judges 13:1 says, "And the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." Israel particularly turned to the worship of the idols Baalim and Ashtaroth, and that directly led to their problem with the Philistines, as that was God's punishment for their sins. As soon as they fixed that problem (i.e. repented), then their problem with the Philistines would end, as God would then give them deliverance (1 Sam 7:3-4).

Godly sorrow

Israel's punishment ultimately included losing the ark of the covenant to the Philistines, and enduring more than 20 years with it being away from its proper place in the tabernacle (1 Sam 4-7). After all of this, 1 Samuel 7:2 says that "*all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.*" Finally, Israel was sorry. But God tells us that there are two kinds of sorrow: 1) godly sorrow, and 2) the sorrow of the world (2 Cor 7:10). Many wicked people become sorry that they got caught, or sorry that they are suffering the

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(continued)

consequences of their deeds. But that kind of sorrow does not produce repentance. That is the sorrow of the world, which works only death. *Godly* sorrow is not equivalent to repentance, but it is one of the necessary steps to *work* repentance. What kind of sorrow did Israel have in 1 Samuel 7:2? The verses that follow make it clear that Israel's sorrow was truly a godly sorrow, because they sincerely repented. *"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only"* (1 Sam 7:3-4).

Serve the Lord only

Samuel told Israel to repent and put away their idols, and to prepare their hearts to serve the Lord only (1 Sam 7:3). Yes, the Israelites were required to serve God *only*. And God requires no less of Christians in the New Testament. The Lord says that no man can serve two masters (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13). A choice must be made between God and all other masters, including material things (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13; Jas 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17), our family members, and even ourselves (Luke 14:26-33; 2 Cor 5:14-15). We too must worship and serve *only* God (Matt 4:10; Luke 4:8; Rom 1:18-25). We are actually *constrained* by the love that Christ has for us to live only for him: *"For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again"* (2 Cor 5:14-15). And 1 Peter 4:1-2 says, *"Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."* Living the rest of our time doing God's will leaves no time at all to be spent for any other purpose. That is the mind of Christ (John 8:28-29), and that is what God requires of us all.