

# **BaptistWay Bible Series for March 19: Do not forget the Lord's provision for your life**

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### **Do not forget the Lord's provision for your life**

- 1 Samuel 7:2-17

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Gary Parrett recently lamented the changing of words and phrases in some long-favorite hymns in an attempt to update the text for modern worshippers ("Raising Ebenezer," Christianity Today, January 2006).

As the title of his article reveals, one change to which he takes particular exception is that found in the second verse of Robert Robinson's 1758 hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." The line reads: "Here I raise mine Ebenezer, hither by thy help I'm come."

Several substitutions have appeared, but of them, few correspond to the significance—both biblical and personal—behind Robinson's use of the term "Ebenezer." The rationale given for the change is that "Ebenezer," for many, means something very different from what Robinson intended.



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But what lies behind this change (and those found in other hymns) is not the phrase's failure to remain relevant for contemporary worshippers, but a lack of Bible knowledge on the part of those worshippers. This really is unfortunate, because it is just one example among hundreds in which hymns reflect direct biblical teaching and/or occasions on which the Bible's teaching became particularly meaningful for the writers.

This means that where there is a question about the meaning of a text, we should inquire as to the basis for the words and phrases used. In this instance, such inquiry would lead us to 1 Samuel 7, an account of Israel's deliverance by God.

Chapters 4-6 provide the background for the crisis described in this passage. Israel has been defeated in combat by the Philistines, their perennial foe. After assessing their losses, the Israelites (wrongly) determined the reason for the defeat was waging war without the ark of the covenant.

However, in a subsequent battle, despite the presence of the ark, the Philistines again defeated Israel. In addition, they captured the ark and, as prophesied, Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were killed.

Upon hearing the bad news, not of his sons' deaths, but of the capture of the ark, Eli himself fell over and died. While confidence in the ark did not result in victory for the Israelites, possession of the ark only provided

misery for the Philistines. So they returned the ark to the Israelites.

Chapter 7 then opens with the Israelites mourning and seeking the Lord. Enter Samuel, who challenged them that if their mourning and seeking were genuine then they should act accordingly. He diagnosed their problem as divided loyalty between the Lord and foreign (Canaanite) gods and challenged them to return to singular devotion to the Lord. If they did that, God would help them defeat the Philistines. 1 Samuel 7:4 tells us they did just that.

If this pattern of sin, oppression, repentance (crying out to the Lord) and the appearance of a deliverer sounds familiar, it should. What we read in these verses is reminiscent of the plight of the Israelites described in the book of Judges, which plays itself out in the same cyclic pattern. In fact, Samuel is described as judging them (7:6, 15).

Upon the Israelites' rededication to the Lord, Samuel gathered them at Mizpah (a significant meeting place prior to and during that time), and he interceded for them. For their part, the Israelites again expressed their repentance before the Lord in deed and word. They drew out some water, poured it on the ground and fasted. They then confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD" (v. 6).

The Philistines viewed this gathering as the perfect opportunity to attack Israel. Because of previous defeats, the Israelites again feared, but Samuel enjoined them to persistent prayer to God for deliverance. Samuel himself offered a sacrifice and "cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf" (v. 9).

The Lord was quick to respond in defending Israel. In a manner reminiscent of past battles, God employed a form of natural catastrophic event (here, he "thundered with loud thunder" v. 10) to throw the enemy into a panic (see, for example, Judges 5:4-5). Such confusion opened the way for the Israelites to pursue and defeat the Philistines.

To commemorate the victory, Samuel set up a stone monument between the towns of Mizpah and Shen, naming it “Ebenezer” (v. 12), from two words meaning “stone” (eben) and “help” (ezer). The reason for the name is clear: “Thus far has the Lord helped us” (v. 12).

In reality, the name was a bit of an understatement. God did more than help. Before the Israelites pursued the Philistines, verse 10 reports “they (the Philistines) were routed” in front of them. Israel pursued those that remained.

Previously, Samuel faithfully proclaimed the word of the Lord, stabilizing an internal crisis (chapter 3). Here he turned the people back to God, averting an external threat. The Israelites learned once again that reliance upon the Lord only and not upon foreign gods, or even objects designed to point people to God (i.e., the ark), was the “help” they needed for deliverance.

By erecting the “stone of help,” Samuel did his part to provide Israel with a constant reminder of God’s provision. However, that God kept the Philistines at bay as long as Samuel lived (v. 13) and that Israel later asked Samuel for a king (chapter 8) suggest this was a lesson Israel soon forgot.

Recently, we sang Robinson’s hymn at church. The original line was there. What an opportunity to recall this story of deliverance. May we not follow Israel’s example and forget how God has helped us.

### **Discussion questions**

- How often have you forgotten God's provision in your life?
- If you kept a record of God's provision and rescue in your life, what would be in there?

- What tangible thing can you do to remember what God has done for you?



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