

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**July 1, 2012**

**Samuel Administers Justice**

Read 1 Samuel 7:3-11, 15-17

**Key verse: “Direct your heart to the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you” (1 Samuel 7:3).**

Brian Weatherdon tells about a town called Wabush, located in a remote area of Canada: “For some time,” Brian says, Wabush “was completely isolated. But recently a road was cut through the wilderness to reach it. Wabush now has one road leading into it, and thus, only one road leading out. If someone would travel the unpaved road for six to eight hours to get into Wabush, there is only one way he or she could leave—by turning around.

“Each of us, by birth, arrives in a town called Sin. As in Wabush, there is only one way out—a road built by God himself. But in order to take that road, one must first turn around. That complete about-face is what the Bible calls *repentance*, and without it, there’s no way out of town” (*Leadership*, Vol. 8, No. 2).

In 1 Samuel 7, Samuel calls the people of Israel to repent, turn away from idolatry, and return to the Lord. Samuel was the spiritual leader of Israel at this time, and he led an important transition in Israel’s history, from the rule of the judges to that of the monarchy. Though Samuel was a transitional leader, he clearly functioned as a judge as a part of his ministry (see vv. 15-17).

In chapter 7, Samuel gathers the people at Mizpah, and there Samuel leads them in a time of repentance and re-commitment to the Lord (vv. 1-6). This time of re-commitment includes “fasting,” as a sign of repentance (v. 6). Also included is a ritual act of drawing water and pouring it out before the Lord (v. 6). Although this “water libation” is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament, Bible scholars believe it symbolized the pouring out of one’s heart before the Lord in humility and repentance.

While Samuel and the people are gathered at Mizpah, the Philistine army marches against them. Samuel intercedes for the people. And God sends confusion and panic among the Philistine army, resulting in its defeat (vv. 7-11). The entire narrative demonstrates that God protects and blesses his people when they trust him and live in obedience to him.

1 Samuel 7:3 is key to understanding the entire passage. And it has particular relevance to Christ followers today. Verse 3 gives us these pathways to repentance and re-dedication:

**1. We must recognize any idols in our lives and turn from any form of idolatry.** For ancient Israel, idolatry came in the form of worshipping the Canaanite gods, Astartes and Baal. For us, idolatry involves whatever affections take God's rightful place in our hearts and lives—money, sex, power, or control, for example.

Ray Ortlund wrote in his blog: “You and I are not integrated, unified, whole persons. Our hearts are multi-divided. It's like we have a boardroom in every heart. Imagine: a big table, leather chairs, coffee, bottled water, and a whiteboard. A committee sits around the table in your heart. There is the social self, the private self, the work self, the sexual self, the recreational self, the religious self, and others. The committee is arguing and debating and voting, constantly agitated and upset. Rarely can they come to a unanimous, wholehearted decision. We tell ourselves we're this way because we're so busy with so many responsibilities. But the truth is that we're just divided, unfocused, hesitant, and un-free.

“That kind of person can ‘accept Jesus’ in two ways. One way is to invite him into the committee. Give him a vote too. But then he becomes just one more complication. The other way to ‘accept Jesus’ is to say to him, ‘My life isn't working. Please come in and fire my committee, every last one of them. I hand myself over to you. I am your responsibility now. Please run my whole life for me.’ ‘Accepting Jesus’ is not just adding Jesus. It is also subtracting the idols.”

**2. We must return to the Lord with all our hearts and determine to follow and serve him wholeheartedly.** God calls us to return to the Lord “with all your heart” to “direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only.” Real repentance is not just a matter of changing behavior, though it includes that. Real repentance is a matter of the heart. “Jesus relentlessly undermines all that is not God to make room for the God who has redeemed our hearts” (from Allendar and Longman's book, *Breaking the Idols of Your Heart*).

**3. True repentance and re-commitment result in freedom, deliverance, and joy.** For ancient Israel, repentance brought deliverance from their enemies and restoration to a right relationship with God. For the Christ follower, repentance is the gateway to a deeper, more liberating, and more joyous relationship with God through Christ.

Sometimes we fear and dread repentance, but true repentance is the helpful companion of grace: “When grace introduces us to repentance, the two of us become best friends. When anything else introduces us to

repentance, it feels like the warden has come to lock us up. But when grace gets involved, the truths of repentance reveal a fabulous world of life-freeing beauty” (from Thrall, McNichol and Lynch’s book, *True Faced*).

The call of God through Samuel to God’s ancient covenant people is for us too: “Direct your heart to the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you” (1 Samuel 7:3).

Thanks be to God!

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