

A NEW YEAR'S EBENEZER

1 Samuel 7:12

INTRODUCTION

- At the changing of the year, it is a good opportunity to review our achievements over the last twelve months and give thanks accordingly
- But who are we giving thanks to?
 - ✓ Some attribute their accomplishments to their own efforts
 - ✓ Some attribute them to fate
 - ✓ And some attribute them to God
- The Christian looks back to all that God has done in the past year and cries with Balaam, "What hath God wrought!"
- It was a low time spiritually in the nation – the priesthood under Eli's sons was polluted, the people were engaged in idolatry, and as a result, they were a prey to their enemies, the Philistines
- In the fourth chapter Israel suffered two defeats at the hands of the Philistines; in the first they lost about 4000 men, and in the second they lost 30,000 men, including Eli's sons
- But even worse, they lost the ark of the covenant, which was taken by the enemy in the battle (4:11)
- Eli himself died upon hearing the news, and his daughter in law named her newborn son "Ichabod" – the glory is departed (4:18-22)

- The ark turned out to be a curse unto the Philistines, who eventually sent it back to Israel (chs. 5-6)
- But even then, a number of men at Bethshemesh were killed by God for desecrating the ark when they looked into it (6:19)
- So after twenty years, the people's hearts were humbled, "and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD" (7:2), and the prophet Samuel called the nation to repentance, which they did
- When the Philistines came again against Israel, God miraculously intervened (7:10), and the Israelites had a mighty victory
- At that place, Samuel erected a great stone as a memorial of the occasion, and called it "Ebenezer"
- It was the practice of the patriarchs to erect monuments in memorial of God's interpositions
 - ✓ Noah builded an altar upon leaving the ark (Genesis 8)
 - ✓ Jacob after beholding the vision of the ladder, called the place Bethel and set his stone pillow up as a pillar (Genesis 28)
 - ✓ When the children of Israel crossed Jordan under Joshua, they set up twelve stones for a memorial for future generations (Joshua 4)
- So when Samuel and the nation became the recipients of such signal tokens of love and help from the hand of the Lord they raised up the "stone of help" to perpetuate their gratitude
- And we too, at the opening of the new year, having received of God's hand continual help, are obliged to raise our own Ebenezer in grateful acknowledgement of his mercies

I. A MONUMENT OF THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE

A. God is man's only true help

1. Ebenezer is a compound of two Hebrew words: *eben* (stone) + *ezer* (help), meaning "stone of help", and is explained by Samuel: "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us"
2. The Scriptures reveal God as the Almighty Helper of man, and exhort us to leave all other helps, and trust in him alone
3. We can depend upon his help, as he is the Creator of all things (Psalm 124:8)
4. Vain is the help of man (Psalm 60:11)
5. God's help is faithful never and fails (1 Thessalonians 5:24)
6. The Psalms frequently describe God as the supreme Helper – fifty times the word "help" and its derivatives is used in Psalms (Psalm 28:7; 46:1; 116:6; 118:13)
7. God, by his common grace, is the helper of all mankind, both the just and the unjust (Psalm 145:9)
8. The help of God is most clearly revealed in his sending his Son as a Man to suffer and die for helpless sinners (Isaiah 49:8; Romans 5:6)

B. God's help is continual, and includes the trials of life

1. Note that Ebenezer was previously the site of Israel's defeat (1 Samuel 4:1-2)

2. Yet even in that calamity, God was chastening his wayward children, helping them to come to repentance
 3. God faithfully afflicts us for our good, and we are to be thankful for it (Psalm 119:67,75)
 4. “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things” (Romans 11:36)
 5. “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7)
 6. Job understood that we receive not only good from the hand of God, but evil (Job 2:10)
 7. Joseph understood that through all the bitter trials he suffered, “God meant it unto good” and was helping him (Genesis 50:20)
 8. Paul was given a thorn in the flesh by God for his spiritual good (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
 9. As we suffer according to God’s will, we must realise God is still faithfully helping us, and commit the keeping of our souls to him in well doing (1 Peter 4:19)
- C. It is our duty and obligation to render thanksgiving and praise to God for all his help toward us
1. We are commanded to give thanks “always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Colossians 3:17)
 2. Ingratitude to God is a characteristic of unregenerate sinners (Romans 1:21)

3. Those to whom Christ shows grace are expected to return praise to him (Luke 17:17-18)

II. A MONUMENT OF TEARFUL PENITENCE

- A. Meditating upon God's faithful help to us causes us to reflect upon our own unfaithfulness to him
 1. The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance (Romans 2:4)
 2. The more a man understands of God's holiness and faithfulness, the more he understands of his own depravity
 - a. Job: *"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* (Job 42:6)
 - b. Isaiah: *"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."* (Isaiah 6:5)
 - c. Peter: *"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* (Luke 5:8)
- B. Israel undertook a comprehensive process of repentance that each of us also must undertake
 1. They lamented after the LORD (v.2)
 - a. They lost the joy of their salvation and were miserable in their sin (Psalm 51:12)
 - b. The broken cisterns of the world and its idols hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13)

- c. Like the Prodigal, we must “come to ourselves” and with bitter lamentation for our sins, turn to the Father (Luke 15:17)
2. They returned to the LORD with all their hearts (v.3)
 - a. Repentance is a change of direction, from sin, unto God
 - b. It requires *all* of the heart (Jeremiah 29:13)
3. They put away the strange gods (v.3)
 - a. God is a jealous God who will not give his glory to another (Exodus 34:14; Isaiah 42:8)
 - b. No man can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24)
 - c. Light and darkness have no communion – there must be a clear separation (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
4. They prepared their hearts unto the LORD (v.3)
 - a. God call us to consider our ways (Haggai 1:5) – to examine our hearts and the sin that has grieved the Lord
 - b. God wants not mere outward reformation, but a true heart repentance (Joel 2:13)
5. They served God only (v.3)
 - a. Every person serves something – if it is not God, it is the world, the flesh and the devil
 - b. We are created to serve God, and the most blessed and fulfilled existence is the life given to the service

of Jesus Christ, for his yoke is easy, and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30)

6. They were reconciled to God through the blood of sacrifice (v.9)
 - a. Repentance is necessary, but God's justice requires a punishment for sin
 - b. Sin has brought God's condemnation and wrath upon us, and the only way we can be reconciled to him is by the blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24-26; Colossians 1:20)

III. A MONUMENT OF TRUSTING CONFIDENCE

- A. Ebenezer is not only a remembrance of past help, but a promise of future help
 1. Hitherto hath the LORD helped us – and henceforth he shall help us
 2. Therein lies the great power of an Ebenezer – it gives strength for the present, and confidence for the future
 3. God's past deliverances are encouragements to trust him for future deliverances, and ultimately eternal deliverance
 - a. David (1 Samuel 17:37)
 - b. Paul (2 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:17-18)
 4. *Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

CONCLUSION

1. Were we to begin to catalogue the occasions when God has helped us, it would consume the rest of our lives
2. How slack are we in neglecting to acknowledge God's help in our lives and render praise to him for it!
3. Today, will you raise your Ebenezer:
 - ✓ By renouncing sin and all those things that displease God
 - ✓ By recalling all God's benefits to you and thanking him for it
 - ✓ By relating to others that God is your helper
4. God has helped you for a reason, and it is not so that you can selfishly live unto yourself, but that you would live unto HIM, for HIS glory (2 Corinthians 5:15)
5. *Here, I raise my Ebenezer,
Hither by thy help I come
And, I hope by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.*
(Robert Robinson)