

When a Nation Turns to the LORD (1 Samuel 7:3-6)

1. The Proclamation of the Word of God to the People (v.2-3)

- The ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim for a total of 60 years until King David transported it to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6).
- It took twenty years for the house of Israel to lament after the LORD (v.2). This does not describe the nation as saddened for 20 years because the text does not indicate why they lamented after the LORD.
- Samuel is emerging as an itinerant preacher, urging the nation of Israel to repent and turn to the LORD. His goal was to make the nation sensible of their sins against God, and to show that their current condition is because of their idolatry of heart and lack of singular devotion to the LORD.

2. The Putting Away of Sin and Heart Preparation by the People (v.3)

In order for a nation to return to the LORD, certain conditions must be met. There must be an acknowledgment, confession, and repentance of sin.

- Acknowledgment: verbal/mental assertion that God's word is true and there is sin in my life that has compromised the intimacy of belonging.
- Confession: verbal/mental concession that I have sinned against God.
- Forsaking: the abandonment of anything that has caused sin.

Samuel's message is clear. The nation must:

A. *Rid themselves of the foreign gods (Baal and Ashtaroth).*

Baal: the Canaanite storm god and central deity in most Ugaritic myths. He was the source of fertility and also the provider of rain.

Ashtaroth: the plural form of Ashtoreth (Astarte), who was a Canaanite goddess. She was the supposed wife of Baal, who was not only a storm and fertility goddess, but also one of love and war.

- For over 20 years, the Israelites had adopted the fertility and sexual gods of the Canaanites.
- The religious prescription of Moses was not as attractive to the natural feelings of their carnal, fallen, corrupt hearts as the Canaanite religion was. The idol worship of Baal and Ashteroth was sensually appealing because it involved sexual ritual acts.
- Israel filled themselves with sexual carnality. Why didn't the people remove Hophni and Phinehas after the reported lechery? The nation as a whole were just as perverted.

B. *Commit themselves to the LORD and serve Him only.* They must be determined to be faithful and loyal to the LORD. They are to serve Him singularly, wholeheartedly.

This return is very personal. It is not mechanical, but relational and associating instead. While it is to be done as a nation, the message is to each individual.

3. The Penitence and Personal Responsibility of the People (v.4-6)

- Tears, weeping, wailing, and lamenting are not credible evidences of repentance within themselves.
- Samuel's message would have been difficult for the people to hear because they loved their sin. However, their condition has made them most miserable, and the Philistines have been oppressing them (v.8).
- True, unmitigated communion with the LORD can come only when there is a forsaking of sin. The forsaking of sin includes an acknowledgment and confession of sin. Acknowledgment and confession, however, are not always synonymous with genuine repentance.
- Giving in to temptation and sin will weaken the power of future resistance.
- Genuine repentance is always tangible. It does not stop with tears but moves to concrete action. It always moves beyond the emotions, which fluctuate, and change; it casts sin aside and clings to God.
- True repentance is not just the casting away of the idols (v.3-4) but also turning to the LORD (v.3). It involves the abandonment of sin (negative) and the returning to the LORD (positive).

Once the hearts of the people were ready, he called for them to assemble at Mizpah. They were of the same mind and same heart; reformation and repentance.

Drawing of water:

- the meaning of this rite is uncertain because there are no parallels in Scripture.
- Since it is paired with fasting and the confession of sin, it would be a total commitment to the LORD.
 - The drawing and pouring out of the water were symbols of humility, remorse, and the forsaking of sin (Lamentations 2:19).
 - The denial of liquids was to show that the LORD's favor was more important than life sustaining water (Jonah 3:7; 2 Samuel 23:16).

The LORD Jesus Christ poured out his soul unto death (Isaiah 53:12) at Calvary. Unlike Israel at Mizpah who cried out to the LORD in repentance, our LORD cried out as He bore the sin of many (Isaiah 53:12; 1 Peter 2:24).