

Ebenezer

1 Samuel 4:1; 5:1; 7:12

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FOCAL 1 Samuel 4:1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

1 Samuel 5:1 And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod.

1 Samuel 7:12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

We who belong to God must ever remember “**the Lord helped us**”. We are not blessed because we are oh so good. We are blessed because God is good – all the time – and all the time – God is good!

God alone can create from nothing, but Satan can only steal that which is God's. God always works in the light, but Satan always works in the dark. The devil loves the dark!

God raised up Israel from nothing. This nation, whose forefather Jacob was a thief and a liar, became great because she turned her eyes to the One True God. But over time she began to turn away from God, just as we have all done at times. When a person or a people turn away from God it never happens overnight. It starts with a small slip. Satan says, “Has God *really said* that you shall not eat of every tree in this garden?” Then the thief waits. Will you bite on the shiny hook? Will you nibble at the bait? “Oh yes, God said we not only *shall not eat* of this tree” (now here comes the lie) “*but we may not*

touch it either or He will kill us”. Satan smiles – the bait is in your jaw. He need only tug on the line and you're hooked!

Israel may have lost a battle at a place called Ebenezer, but her loss began long before she met the enemy that day. God's people always lose when they blend themselves with the world. Jesus Christ came into this world to seek and to save that which was lost. He came as the Great Physician, came to bring spiritual health to those who were sickened by sin and enslaved to Satan. But our Lord never compromised His righteousness in order to reach the world. He never allowed Satan to steal what was rightfully His. Unlike our foreparents – Adam and Eve – Jesus never debated with the Evil One nor with his henchmen the Pharisees. Jesus used the written Word of God each time He was attacked - “it is written” - and He never allowed Himself to be lowered to their evil ways.

Scammers and spammers seem to love to call me. Though I've put my phone numbers on the so called “National Do Not Call Registry” it doesn't seem to make any difference. Here's the scenario. The phone rings. I answer, “Brother David, may I help you?” The next thing I hear is a man or a woman who – valiantly but wrongly pronounces my name. “Is this David Buddylow?” I reply, “No, this is David Buffaloe. How may I help you?” Now I can tell this isn't somebody who is looking for the Lord, or for a great Church to attend (may I recommend ours?), but they *are* looking to make a sale. How do I know? Because at this point their tongue takes off like a hungry dog at a race track. They inevitably start talking *very fast* and in a very *confusing manner* – saying whatever they

can to keep me on the line. You know what I do? I politely, and quietly just hang up the phone. I realize that these people have a job to do, so I'm never ugly to them. But I just don't buy things or contribute money over the phone. Come look me in the face, or call me to where you are and I'll come. But I do not have the time – nor the money – to spend.

Just hang up.

There's an illustration for all of us in this insofar as evil is concerned. The devil – the Bible says - “**as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**” (1 Peter 5:8). Every day people hear his call, answer the phone, and then sit mesmerized while he sells them a bill of goods. The devil calls so that he can confuse, entrap, and snare you. He wants to get your eyes off of Jesus. He wants your local Church to get into a foolish battle over the color of the carpet, the tint of the wall paint, or the height that you mow the grass at. He loves it when we take our eyes off of Jesus and begin to focus on junk. The world, lost and already ensnared in Satan's web, watches our confusion. That lost man may go to a devil's hell because of our golden calves. That lost woman may spend an eternity bound away from God because we didn't tell her about Jesus, but we did tell her about the latest juicy bit of gossip from our local Church. That child, young and impressionable, wonders how true salvation can be if we do not show the love of Christ in our own midst, not just to the world beyond.

Beloved, just hang up. When the devil rises up and tempts you, just hang up. Keep your eyes on the Lord Who loves you. America will never experience a revival

of faith until we who are His just hang up on that old tempter. Tell others about Jesus. Tell them He is the Only Way unto God (John 14:6). Love Him with all your heart, for He first loved you.

One day a stone monument will stand over a place where your body rests. When people see that stone will they remember you as a blessed Saint of God, or a troublemaker and “joy sucker” who continually stood in opposition to the good that God would do. Let your “Ebenezer” always magnify God – if you belong to Him. Hang up on Satan, answer the call of God, and **“go ye into all the world preaching the Gospel of salvation”**.

May God touch your hearts with His Word.

1. Ebenezer Is Not Just “A Place”

FOCAL 1 Samuel 4:1 **And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer¹: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek².**

When Israel entered the Promised Land the Lord told them: **“you be careful not to compromise with the idolaters of this land. You are not allowed to worship their gods, you are not allowed to adopt their ways. I the Lord your God saved you, and I Am a Jealous**

1 H72, אֶבְנֵי הַעֲזָרָה, 'eben hâ'êzer, *eh'-ben haw-e'-zer*, From H68 and H5828 with the article inserted; *stone of the help*; *Eben ha-Ezer*, a place in Palestine: - Ebenezer.

2 H663, אֶפְהֵק אֶפְיֵק, 'āphêq 'āphîyq, *af-ake', af-eek'*, From H662 (in the sense of *strength*); *fortress*; *Aphek* (or *Aphik*), the name of three places in Palestine: - Aphek, Aphik.

God – My Name is Jealous – and I alone will be worshiped” (Deuteronomy 6:15). Israel initially did as God asked. She went into the land, pushing down the altars of the false gods and goddesses, and magnified the Name of the One True God. She kept the Lord's Word, doing as He said. She kept her eyes on Him. God blessed Israel.

Then the unthinkable happened. Israel ceased loving the Lord. She loved the *things* that God gave her. She loved the land, the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant. But she divided her love, and began to give her heart to another. **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9).** We humans need to constantly monitor our hearts, lest we give our hearts to evil. If we take our eyes off of God and focus on the baubles of this life too long before you know it your love for God grows cold. Like Israel you embrace the **Baalim and Ashtaroth** – little man-made idols – rather than embracing the Lord Who loves you so.

Our God will not bless those Who will not love Him first. Our Lord Jesus said:

Matthew 6:33 “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”.

If you seek God first, God will bless you in this life. If you love God first there is no good thing that He will withhold from you. David learned this truth while a lowly shepherd:

Psalms 84:11-12 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. {12} O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

God is the **Lord of Hosts**. He controls the armies of Heaven, and controls the human heart. God is **the Sun and Shield**. Those who love Him shall never walk in darkness, nor shall they be unprotected. Had Israel stayed her heart on God she would never have suffered defeat at the hands of the Philistines. Her heart – her focus – was not on the Lord Who loved her, but on the *things of this life*.

FOCAL Israel pitched beside Ebenezer...

Ebenezer is a place – but it is not just a place. These words are so applicable today. The word “**Ebenezer**” literally means “**Stone of the Help**” or “**The Rock My Helper**”.

The Bible often illustrates the Lord our God as The Rock. King David sang:

2 Samuel 22:2-4, 32-34 And he said, The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; {3} The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my savior; thou savest me from violence. {4} I will call on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.... {32} For who

is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God? {33} God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. {34} He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: and setteth me upon my high places.

God is the Rock My Helper, the Lord Who alone can give us victory in life. Israel **pitched her camp next to Ebenezer, next to the Rock of Help**. Like many in our day she sat next to God, but her heart was far from God. Her love had grown cold.

You can sit in Church, and follow every ritual, hear every sermon – but if your heart is not in love with the Lord you will not be able to overcome the trials of this life.

When the Philistines began to defeat Israel someone cried out,

“go and get the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark will save us just as it has always saved us in the past” (1 Samuel 4:3)

Beloved, no ritual will save you. No box – no building – no *thing* will ever give you victory in this life. The **Ark of the Covenant** – a small box carried by four men – *never saved Israel*.

The Ark, just like a wedding band, symbolized the love that God and Israel shared. Israel in love with God was unbeatable. Israel in love with herself was prey for anyone who came along.

To put faith in the Ark at the battle of Ebenezer was foolish. The wedding band means nothing without the love. Israel brought the Ark forth, marched on Philistia, and was soundly defeated. The Philistines took the Ark from Israel at Ebenezer.

If you will overcome the world, your heart must be fixed on God. The Bible says:

2 Thessalonians 3:5 ... the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Israel should have loved the Lord Who loved her, but forgot His love – and lost her way. **God is our Rock and our Fortress. He is our Savior. By Him and Him alone will we go out and win this land – not in our power – but in His power.**

On this special day may we all covenant together to love God and to love one another *before all else*. If you will do this, would you say these words with me:

OUR COVENANT READING “We who have been saved by faith in Christ Jesus – make this covenant together in one accord. We promise our Ebenezer, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we will do as He has commanded. We will love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. We shall love our neighbor as ourself – so help us God.” (Mark

12:30-31)

2. Ebenezer Is Not A “Thing”

FOCAL 1 Samuel 5:1 **And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod³.**

The Philistines – unbelievers all – took the Ark of God, the Ark of the Covenant, and carried it with them to a terrible place called “Ashdod” - the “Ravager”. I can hear them thinking even now:

“When Israel carried this Ark before them in battle, they defeated everyone who stood before them. If we take this “thing”, this “god” with us, we will be unbeatable!”

That was what they did. Rather than set fire to the Ark or bury it somewhere they took the Ark of the Covenant with them back to their home town. They set the Ark up in the Temple right next to their god Dagon, and then went to bed feeling pretty good about themselves. Israel was defeated, and Israel's “god” - the Ark of the Covenant – was under the eye of the clearly superior Dagon. What could go wrong?

The next morning the Ravagers went to their temple to worship Dagon and – to their horror – their stone god

³ H795, אַשְׁדּוֹד, 'ashdōd, *ash-dode*', From H7703; *ravager*; *Ashdod*, a place in Palestine: - Ashdod.

was lying in the dust on his face before the Ark of God. This disturbed them, but they set Dagon upright, worshiped him, and went about their business. Perhaps someone crept in at night and did this. Let's set a few guards in place. That's the problem – we'll take care of it.

The unbelieving mind always follows the same pattern. The unbeliever always thinks that Ebenezer – the Rock of our Help – is a *thing, a ritual, a symbol*. Ebenezer is the Lord our God. Blessing can only be found by surrender to our God. Our Lord expects nothing less than an *unconditional surrender to Him*. **What did the Lord Jesus preach?**

Luke 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Unbelievers try to mix the True God – the Ebenezer – with the Dagon. **What did Peter preach?**

Acts 3:19-21 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; {20} And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: {21} Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

You cannot blend Dagon and Ebenezer. You cannot hide the false gods in your heart and serve the Living God. The Philistines tried. They set their false god Dagon upright, rolling the stone into place, and like Pilate many

years later they set a seal and a guard on that place. “There, Dagon will be left alone. We've done away with their God – our god is more powerful!” What happened?

The next day they found that Dagon lay before the Ark of God, but this time his hands and head were *cut off*. All that was left of Dagon was “**his stump**” - the torso. God began to ravage the ravagers. The Bible says:

CONTEXT 1 Samuel 5:6 But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed⁴ them, and smote them with emerods⁵, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

God ravaged the ravagers. The Bible says that He devastated them, He astonished them, He stupefied them with the power of His fury! The text tells us that **God smote them with hemorrhoids, tumors, and ulcers.**

Deuteronomy 28:27 The LORD will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed.

The unbelievers tried to blend the True Faith with the

4 H8074, שָׁמַם, *shâmêm, shaw-mame'*, A primitive root; to *stun* (or intransitively *grow numb*), that is, *devastate* or (figuratively) *stupefy* (both usually in a passive sense): - make amazed, be astonished, (be an) astonish (-ment), (be, bring into, unto, lay, lie, make) desolate (-ion, places), be destitute, destroy (self), (lay, lie, make) waste, wonder.

5 H2914, טָחַר, *ṭ'chôr, tekh-ore'*, From an unused root meaning to *burn*; a *boil* or ulcer (from the inflammation), especially a tumor in the anus or pudenda (the piles): - emerod.

false faith, the Living with the dead, the Light with the darkness, the Good with the evil, the Holy with the defiled, Love with hate, Immortality with the creation of man's hands. God answered their impetuosity with poor health, sickness, disease, and death.

We can bring many things into the local Church, but we must *never ever bring false gods into this place*. There is but One Ebenezer – our God – the Lord Jesus Christ – and He must always be lifted up in *everything we do*. Our mission is always to keep Christ first.

Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10), but ravagers must not bring their sinful practices into this place. We encourage all to come, to repent, to believe on Jesus Christ unto salvation – but we maintain this place not for Dagon but for Christ.

This place was built – not on fighting, not on ravaging, not on me or you getting our own way – but on honoring the Lord our God in all that we say and do. We will honor Him. We will do as Scripture commands, and

Psalms 2:11-12 **Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. {12} Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.**

Will you covenant with me?

OUR COVENANT READING Our trust will never be in Dagon, nor in the way of the Philistine. Our trust will remain in the Jesus Christ, “Way, the Truth, and the Life by which we came unto God”. We will obey the command of Scripture to “withdraw ourselves from every brother who walks disorderly, who walks as a destroyer. We will not join with the ravager, but will encourage one another daily to love and good works. Our trust and our hearts will be on our Ebenezer, the Lord Jesus Christ! (John 14:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; Hebrews 3:13)

3. This Day And This Place Will Remind Us That God Is Our Ebenezer

FOCAL 1 Samuel 7:12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

Samuel took a stone, and set it ... and called it ... Ebenezer. How did Israel get the Ark of the Covenant back? The Bible says “all the House of Israel lamented after the Lord”. Israel had a change of heart. She stopped living for herself, and started living for the Lord. She stopped loving herself, and started loving the Lord. Samuel told Israel:

1 Samuel 7:3 ... If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and

Ashtaroth⁶ 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.

How far had Israel moved away from God? They had begun to worship **Ashtaroth**, which my sources tell me was – according to demon worshipers - a **powerful prince of hell**. Here is what sin and idolatry eventually lead to. The heart turned away from Jesus and turned to darkness finds itself worshiping *hell*. Samuel told Israel **“If you want to be blessed, turn your hearts from false gods. Put away Ashtaroth – this thing has no place among the people of God. Prepare your hearts unto the Lord and serve Him and Him only – then you will overcome the world!”**

How shall we overcome the spirit of this age? How shall we overcome Ashtaroth, and Dagon, the princes of hell and The Prince of Darkness? We have no power against Philistia – they have Darwin as their god, Evolution as

6 H6252, עֲשָׂתָרוֹת, עֲשָׂתָרַת, ‘ashtârôth ‘ashtârôth, *ash-taw-roth*’, *ash-taw-roth*’, Plural of H6251; *Ashtaroth*, the name of a Sidonian deity, and of a place East of the Jordan: - Ashtaroth, Astaroth. See also H1045, H6253, H6255. From *Wikipedia, the Internet Encyclopedia* “**He is referred to in The Lesser Key of Solomon as a very powerful deity. His main assistants are four demons called Aamon, Pruslas, Barbatos and Rashaverak. In art, in the Dictionnaire Infernal, Astaroth is depicted as a nude man with dragon-like wings, hands and feet, a second pair of feathered wings after the main, wearing a crown, holding a serpent in one hand, and riding a wolf or dog. According to Sebastian Michaelis he is a demon of the First Hierarchy, who seduces by means of laziness and vanity, and his adversary is St. Bartholomew, who can protect against him for he has resisted Astaroth's temptations. To others, he teaches mathematical sciences and handicrafts, can make men invisible and lead them to hidden treasures, and answers every question formulated to him. He was also said to give to mortal beings the power over serpents. According to Francis Barrett (occultist), Astaroth is the prince of accusers and inquisitors. According to some demonologists of the 16th century, August is the month during which this demon's attacks against man are stronger. He also goes by the name ‘Ashtart/Astarte which was rendered in the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible as Astharthe (singular) and Astharoth (plural)**”

their faith, Abortion as their mistress, Darkness as their shield, and they are sharpening the Law of the Land to be their sword. What hope do we have against a vastly superior enemy?

We have the Rock of Our Salvation, Jesus Christ our Lord. We **put away Ashtaroth from among us, and put our hearts on God our Savior.**

Once Israel confessed their sin before God the Bible says that Samuel **took a Lamb and offered it for a burnt offering whole before the Lord.** Jesus Christ – the **Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)** – is the Source of our blessing. We will keep our eyes upon Him. We will love Him and magnify His Holy Name. We will keep our hearts on the Mount of God where Christ reigns. We will sing in our hearts praises to Him:

**Here I raise mine Ebenezer;
Hither by thy help I'm come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood⁷.**

God has promised that – though Israel was disobedient – that He would never utterly forsake her. That gives me great comfort. Who is able to keep me from falling? It is

7 Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, Text: Robert Robinson, 1735-1790, Music: Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second, Tune: NETTLETON, Meter: 87.87 D

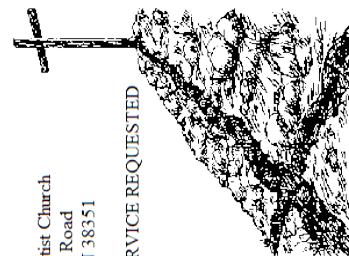
the Same God, the Precious Ebenezer, the Rock of our Salvation. Has He not told His Church:

Jude 1:24 {God} is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy...

Here is the Source of our Power – our Ebenezer – our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ. There is no power in the false gods of the world, no power in evil, but all Power in God.

Will you Covenant with me, dear Church?

OUR COVENANT READING We covenant with God and with one another that we will put away all false gods from among us. Our hearts belong to Jesus, our lives belong in His service. We will never stoop to evil, but will overcome evil by doing good. We believe that “greater is He that is in us, than He that is in the world”. We believe that our God, Jesus Christ, “is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and we who are with Him are His called, His chosen, and His faithful”. We will pray to the Word, live by His Word, love according to His Word, and overcome the world at His Word. We who are His shall live by our faith! (Romans 12:21; 1 John 4:4; Revelation 17:14; 1 John 5:4)



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