

# PROPHETS & JUDGES

IN THE PROMISED LAND

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“A sense of the power and wisdom of God, and of our inability to comprehend His greatness, should inspire us with humility, and we should open His word, as we would enter His presence, with holy awe. When we come to the Bible, reason must acknowledge an authority superior to itself, and heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM.”

*{Steps to Christ, p. 110}*

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## WEEK 13 - VICTORY AT EBENEZER

### I. The Victory at Ebenezer

1. What example do we see of grace and the principles of Christianity here in the Old Testament?

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2. Is there anything we must do to have God's favor, or is it unconditional?

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3. How are God's people today serving other gods as did idolatrous Israel?

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4. What do we need today to cleanse us from this idolatry?

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5. What causes us to often lose great blessings?

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## II. The Sons of Samuel

1. What kind of men were the sons of Samuel?

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2. But when they left home, what happened?

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3. What should we do any time we see a way to make money or apparently improve our lives or situations?

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4. What are the results of standing in opposition to the vices and errors of our fellow men? What happens to those who indulge these things?

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5. Why did the sons of Samuel fail?

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6. What is Christ's example for us in this area?

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**The Victory at Ebenezer****January 26, 1882**

After suffering the oppression of their enemies for twenty years, the Israelites “mourned after the Lord.” They repented of the sins which had alienated them from him, and sought to return again to their allegiance. Samuel counseled them, “If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods, and Ashtaroth, 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.” “Return unto the Lord with all your hearts;” “Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only”—here we see that practical piety, heart religion, was taught in the days of Samuel, as taught by Christ when he was upon the earth. The teacher is virtually the same in both dispensations. God’s claims are the same. Without the grace of Christ, the outward forms of religion were valueless to ancient Israel. They are the same to modern Israel. All the pleas of self-righteousness are unavailing; all hope is groundless except that based upon the sacrifice and victory of our Saviour. Obedience to God, required in the days of Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, was enforced by the world’s Redeemer. <sup>[1.1]</sup>

Samuel endeavored to impress upon Israel the fact that they themselves had something to do to secure the divine favor. They must repent of their sins, and put away their idols. The prophet had succeeded in arousing the people from the lethargy of sin, and he greatly desired that this awakening might result in a general and permanent reformation. With the co-operation of the heads of the tribes, a large assembly was convened at Mizpeh. Here a solemn fast was held. With deep humiliation the people confessed their sins, and poured out water before the Lord as a symbol of their supplications poured out for the divine favor, their tears of sorrow for sin, and of gratitude that the Lord was still gracious and merciful. As an evidence of their determination to obey the instructions they had heard, they invested Samuel with the authority of judge. <sup>[1.2]</sup>

Remembering how the prayers of Moses had formerly prevailed with God for Israel, the people entreated Samuel to intercede for them. Again the prophet exhorted them to renounce their idolatry and turn from their backslidings, and then as the servant of God he prayed for a blessing upon them. <sup>[1.3]</sup>

The Philistines interpreted this gathering of Israel to be a council of war, and with a strong force set out to attack and disperse them before their plans could be matured. The tidings that these powerful foes were approaching caused great terror among the Israelites. Unarmed and defenseless, they felt that their only hope was in God. If he went forth with their armies, they would be victorious; if he refused to help them, defeat was certain. Hence they entreated Samuel, “Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.” <sup>[1.4]</sup>

With great earnestness the prophet pleaded for divine help, and the people also sought the Lord. While Samuel was in the act of presenting a lamb as a burnt-offering, the Philistines appeared in the distance, ready for battle, and expecting to make an easy prey of the people whom they had so long oppressed.

<sup>[1.5]</sup>

Then the Mighty One who had descended upon Sinai amid fire and smoke and thunder; who had parted the Red Sea, and made a way through Jordan for the Hebrew host—the God of Israel, again manifested his power. Vivid lightning flashes and terrific peals of thunder struck terror to the advancing host. When the blinding glare had passed away, the earth was strewn with the dead bodies of armed warriors. Against such a foe, military skill was powerless. Paralyzed with fear, the Philistines looked only for utter destruction. {1.6}

During the raging of the elements, the Israelites stood in silent awe, trembling with hope and fear. When they beheld the slaughter of their enemies, they knew that God had accepted their repentance, and that he had wrought in their behalf. Though wholly unprepared for battle, they seized the weapons of the slaughtered Philistines, and fell upon the force they had so lately dreaded, and pursued the fleeing hosts to Beth-car. {1.7}

This signal victory was gained upon the very field where, twenty years previous, Israel was smitten before the Philistines, the priests slain, and the ark of God taken. Thus was again repeated the great lesson, that for nations as well as for individuals the path of obedience to God is the path of safety and happiness, while that of transgression leads only to disaster and defeat. {1.8}

It was the Lord's purpose so to manifest his power in delivering Israel, that they might not take the glory to themselves. He permitted them, when unarmed and defenseless, to be challenged by their enemies, and then the Captain of the Lord's host marshalled the army of Heaven to destroy the foes of his people. Humility of heart and obedience to the divine law are more acceptable to God than the most costly sacrifices from a heart filled with pride and hypocrisy. God will not defend those who are living in transgression of his law. {1.9}

All Israel recognized the hand of God in their deliverance, and gratefully acknowledged his great mercy. That the occasion might never be forgotten, Samuel set up, between Mizpeh and Shen, a great stone as a memorial. He called the name of it Ebenezer, "the stone of help," saying to the people, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us" This stone was to stand as a witness to all future generations, to testify of God's care for his people, and to strengthen faith in him as their deliverer. {1.10}

The Philistines were so completely subdued by this defeat, that they surrendered the cities which had been taken from Israel, and refrained from all acts of hostility for many years. Other nations followed the example of this powerful and warlike people, and the Israelites enjoyed peace during the whole period of Samuel's sole administration. {1.11}

The condition of God's people at the present day is similar to that of idolatrous Israel. Many who bear the name of Christians are serving other gods besides the Lord. Our Creator demands our supreme devotion, our first allegiance. Anything which tends to abate our love for God, or to interfere with the service due him, becomes thereby an idol. With some their lands, their houses, their merchandize, are the idols. Business enterprises are prosecuted with zeal and energy, while the service of God is made a secondary consideration. Family worship is neglected, secret prayer forgotten. Many claim to deal justly with their

fellow-men, and seem to feel that in so doing they discharge their whole duty. But it is not enough to keep the last six commandments of the decalogue. We are to love the Lord our God with all the heart. Nothing short of obedience to every precept—nothing less than supreme love to God as well as equal love to our fellow-men—can satisfy the claims of the divine law. {1.12}

There are many whose hearts have been so hardened by prosperity that they forget God, and forget the wants of their fellow-men. Professed Christians adorn themselves with jewelry, laces, costly apparel, while the Lord's poor suffer for the necessaries of life. Men and women who claim redemption through a Saviour's blood will squander the means intrusted to them for the saving of other souls, and then grudging dole out their offerings for religion, giving liberally only when it will bring honor to themselves. These are idolaters. {1.13}

Church-members expend their Lord's money in various forms of self-indulgence, and when means are needed to sustain the church, a fair, a theatrical entertainment, or a grand supper is given. Thus professed Christians unite with worldlings in mirth and frivolity, feasting and display—sometimes, far worse, in practices which in a slightly different form are denounced as crimes by the laws of the land. And all this to obtain means from those who have no interest in religion, and who are actuated only by a desire for sensual gratification! Is not this base idolatry? {1.14}

The history of our Saviour's life of humiliation, self-denial, and sacrifice, is looked upon as an old story, which has become distasteful to the refined imagination. It does not possess sufficient interest to stir the heart, to lead to self-denial for Christ's sake, or for the sake of souls for whom he died. A large proportion of the Christian world are saying by their practice, "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." Their religion has no elevating, ennobling influence upon themselves or upon society. Though all they have is the gift of God, they do not acknowledge it as such. {1.15}

Oh, how great is the mercy of our God; to bear thus with the perversity of his creatures! Every spring the earth is clothed with verdure, that its freshness and beauty may bring to our minds thoughts of the Creator. The fields of grain waving in the sunshine of summer, or the autumn breeze, tell us of Him who giveth to his children their daily bread. The trees bending under their burden of rich fruit, proclaim his mercy and benevolence. But men, blinded by selfishness and mammon, can discern only the amount of gain which shall fill their coffers. {1.16}

The cattle upon a thousand hills, could they but speak, would acknowledge the care of the Great Shepherd. The birds of the forest sing with sweetest strains the praise of God. The heavens declare his glory, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. The things of nature—earth itself, teeming with bounties and blessings—would call the mind away from self to honor and adore the Lord God, our Creator. And yet men feel no duty to return thanks to the Giver of all good. They appropriate the gifts of providence, and then too often hold themselves aloof from their fellow-men, as though worldly possessions had given them spe-

cial importance. They will yet learn that it is goodness of heart, integrity of character, not the riches of the world, which make a man worthy of honor. {1.17}

God must be worshiped in spirit and in truth. No other worship will he accept. There is need today of such a revival of true heart-religion as was experienced by ancient Israel. We need, like them, to bring forth fruit meet for repentance—to put away our sins, cleansing the defiled temple of the heart that Jesus may reign within. There is need of prayer—earnest, prevailing prayer. Our Saviour has left precious promises for the truly penitent petitioner. Such shall not seek his face in vain. He has also by his own example taught us the necessity of prayer. Himself the Majesty of Heaven, he often spent all night in communion with his Father. If the world's Redeemer was not too pure, too wise, or too holy to seek help from God, surely weak, erring mortals have every need of that divine assistance. With penitence and faith, every true Christian will often seek “the throne of grace, that he may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” {1.18}

Repentance is the first step which must be taken by all who would return to God. No one can do this work for us. We must individually humble our souls before God, and put away our idols. When we have done all that we can do, the Lord will manifest to us his salvation. {1.19}

And when the light of Heaven dispels our darkness, let us, like Samuel, evince our gratitude by making a memorial to God. We often lose great blessings by neglecting to praise the Giver. Let us make melody to him in our hearts and with our voices. The soul may ascend nearer Heaven, on the wings of praise. God is worshiped with song and music in the courts above. And as we thus express our gratitude, we are approximating to the worship of the heavenly hosts. “Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth God.” Let us with reverent joy come before our Creator “with thanksgiving and the voice of melody.” {1.20}

### The Sons of Samuel

February 2, 1882

Samuel continued to judge Israel all the days of his life. For many years he made an annual circuit to Mizpeh, Gilgal, and Ramah, for the administration of justice; at other times performing the duties of his office at his home in Ramah. With unremitting zeal and devotion he labored for the welfare of his people, and the nation prospered under his wise control. But with advancing years it became necessary to share with others the burden of judicial care. Hence while he continued to judge the people at Ramah, he appointed his sons to act for him at Bethel and Beersheba. {2.1}

These young men had received faithful instructions from their father, both by precept and example. They were not ignorant of the warnings given to Eli, and the divine judgments visited upon him and his house. They were apparently men of sterling virtue and integrity, as well as of intellectual promise. It was with the full assent of the people that Samuel shared with his sons the responsibilities of office. But the characters of these young men were yet to be tested. Separated from their father's influence, it would be seen whether they were true to the principles which he had taught them. The result showed that Samuel had been pain-

fully deceived in his sons. Like many young men of today who have been blessed with good abilities, they perverted their God-given powers. The honor bestowed upon them rendered them proud and self-sufficient. They did not make the glory of God their aim, nor did they seek earnestly to him for strength and wisdom. Yielding to the power of temptation, they became avaricious, selfish, and unjust. God's word declares that "they walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." {2.2}

In all this they were disregarding the will of their Divine Sovereign. The Lord had through Moses given special directions to his people that the rulers of Israel should judge righteously, deal justly with the widow and fatherless, and receive no bribes. It were well for the nations of the earth today, if these instructions were obeyed by the rulers and judges of the people. How important that all who are entrusted with the responsibility of government should be men who fear God, and labor unselfishly for the welfare of the human brotherhood. It is their work to judge with equity, maintaining the right of the stranger, relieving the oppressed, spurning every bribe to clear the guilty or punish the innocent. The well-being of society calls for men of moral integrity in legislative halls and courts of justice. Our churches are in need of those to minister in holy office who shall be men of honor, of piety, of purity; who shall be sanctified by the Spirit and by the word. {2.3}

A corrupting power stands in prominent places. How often are we painfully startled at the announcement that men of talent, men in positions of usefulness and honor, have betrayed their trust, and appropriated to themselves the public money, or worse still, the treasured pittance of the widow and fatherless. Had these men made the word of God their guide, they would not thus have fallen. That word contains plain, definite instruction, adapted to every possible complication of social and public interests. Every plan and purpose of life should be subjected to this unerring test. The word of inspiration is the wisdom of God applied to human affairs. However advantageous a certain course may appear to finite judgment, if denounced by that word it will be only evil in its results. {2.4}

It may be a difficult matter for men in high positions to pursue the path of undeviating integrity whether they shall receive praise or censure. Yet this is the only safe course. All the rewards which they might gain by selling their honor would be only as the breath from polluted lips, as dross to be consumed in the fire. Those who have moral courage to stand in opposition to the vices and errors of their fellow-men—it may be of those whom the world honor—will receive hatred, insult, and abusive falsehood. They may be thrust down from their high position, because they would not be bought or sold, because they could not be induced by bribes or threats to stain their hands with iniquity. Everything on earth may seem to conspire against them; but God has set his seal upon his own work. They may be regarded by their fellow-men as weak, unmanly, unfit to hold office; but how differently does the Most High regard them. Those who despise them are the really ignorant. While the storms of calumny and reviling may pursue the man of integrity through life, and beat upon his grave, God has the "well done" prepared for him. Folly and iniquity will at best yield only a life of unrest

and discontent, and at its close a thorny dying pillow. And how many, as they view their course of action and its results, are led to end with their own hands their disgraceful career. And beyond all this waits the Judgment, and the final, irrevocable doom, Depart! {2.5}

Samuel had labored earnestly to correct the erroneous customs introduced by the sons of Eli, and especially to counteract the spirit of greed and selfishness fostered by their course. The sons of the prophet should have employed their authority to carry forward the reforms instituted by their father. Instead of this, their own example greatly hindered the work of reform. Their promotion to office was the cause of their ruin. The love of gain controlled them. Bribes perverted their judgment, and smothered their protests against sin. How many, like these judges of Israel, enter upon their work with good purposes, but failing to make God's word their guide, they are flattered by worldlings, weakened by prosperity, until their moral power as reformers is gone, their hands nerveless to set things in order. {2.6}

The Son of God has set an example for all his followers. They are not to court the praise of men, not to seek for themselves ease or wealth, but to emulate his life of purity and self-denial at whatever cost. While preserving the meekness of Christ, they are to wage war with iniquity, and to push the triumphs of the cross. Selfishness will not dwell in the Christian's heart. He will not manifest a disregard for the rights of others. God's law commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to suffer no evil to be instituted against him which we can hinder. But the rule which Christ has given extends still further. Said the world's Redeemer, "Love one another, as I have loved you." Nothing short of this can reach the standard of Christianity. {2.7}

### Answer Hints

Section 1: | 1) 1.1 | 2) 1.2 | 3) 1.8–1.9 | 4) 1.12–1.14 | 5) 1.18 | 6) 1.20 |

Section 2: | 1) 2.2 | 2) 2.2 | 3) 2.4 | 4) 2.5 | 5) 2.6 | 6) 2.7 |

This lesson is from a 13-week (1-quarter) set of Sabbath School lessons for youth and young adults called *Prophets & Judges*, based on a series of articles by Ellen G. White in *The Signs of the Times*, 1881–1882.

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