

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## 1 SAMUEL 4-7

Another baseball season starts soon, and baseball players in particular are notoriously superstitious.

During a long winning streak the 1954 **New York Giants** refused to wash their uniforms. For over two weeks, the Giants chose to play in filthy uni-s. They didn't want to risk washing off their good fortune...

Colorado Rockies outfielder, **Larry Walker**, wore number 33. Three was his lucky number. He took three swings before stepping into the batter's box. In the locker room he showered under the third nozzle. Larry and his wife were married on November 3 at 3:33pm.

When Giants' infielder, **Jim Davenport**, hit two home runs in one game, he noticed he'd missed a button on his shirt. For the rest of his career Jim left that same buttonhole empty. It was Davenport's superstition.

A four leaf clover, a lucky penny, a chain and medallion, a horseshoe, a rabbit's foot are to some folks conveyers of good luck. *Of course, to me why put your trust in a rabbit's foot... it didn't help the rabbit!...*

But these are all superstitions. And superstition best explains what happened to Israel in 1 Samuel 4...

**“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines.”** During the period of the Judges the enemy that most troubled Israel were the Philistines, or **“The Sea People.”**

These were Greeks who came from Europe, the island of Crete. They initially tried to invade Egypt, but were repelled, and settled north on the Mediterranean coast in southern Israel. The Philistines organized into five city-states: **Gaza, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon, Ashdod.**

Israel fought the Ammonites and Moabites on equal terms, but the Philistines had a military advantage. They had iron weapons from Greece - armor, helmets, spears, swords, shields. The Philistines were the first people in Canaan to possess iron. And their advanced technology allowed the Philistines to subdue Israel.

Often, people confuse today's *Palestinians* with the *Philistines*, but they're two different ethnicities. Palestinians are Arab, and occupy the Middle East today. Philistines were Greek and are now extinct.

The name “*Palestine*” was invented by the Romans after burning Jerusalem in 70 AD. To further insult the Jews, they renamed their land after Israel’s ancient enemy, *Philistia*. “*Palestinian*” sounds like *Philistine*. The original Palestinians were actually Jews. There is no genetic relation between Palestinian and Philistine.

Well, Israel “**encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek.**” The battlefield was just east of modern Tel Aviv. “**Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel.**” The Philistines were definitely the aggressors. Their army had pushed its way from the sea into Israeli territory.

“**And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about 4000 men of the army in the field.**” This was a devastating defeat. “**And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies.”**”

A bloodied and beaten Israel calls for divine back-up, but rather than *appeal to the Lord*, they trust in *the Ark of the Lord*. They put their faith in the things of God, not in God Himself. I call it “**a case of misplaced faith.**”

“**So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.**” At the time the Tabernacle was in Shiloh, and its centerpiece was the Ark of the Covenant. It was the golden box that represented God’s throne. It contained the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and the staff that budded with almonds to confirm Aaron’s priesthood.

The Ark was plated with gold. Its lid - or “*mercy seat*” was solid gold, adorned with two cherubim or angels. **The Ark represented God to the people of Israel.**

But the men of Israel made a fatal mistake. They assumed the Ark had powers of its own. Recall the movie, “**Indiana Jones and Raiders of the Lost Ark,**” the power of the Ark burned the Nazi swastika off the side of a wooden crate. It melted the Nazis who opened its lid. The Ark was depicted as having its own power.

Yet don’t confuse the movies for the Bible. The Ark was just a box. The superstitious Hebrews treated it like a four-leaf clover, or a rabbit’s foot, or the number 33. *The Israelis viewed the Ark as a good luck charm.*

And this mistake is not unique to the Hebrews of old. Christians today can be guilty of putting their trust in *the things of God* rather than in *God Himself*. Faith can be

confused with superstition... Superstition is ascribing indiscriminate power to inanimate objects. But faith is confidence in a living God who has His own will, and orchestrates events according to His purpose.

Don't be guilty of misplaced faith! *Just carrying a Bible does you no good unless you read it... Attending church is only of value if you worship while you're there...* Christian symbols remind us of God and His power, but they don't take God's place. Don't mistake the **things of God** for **God Himself**. It's been said, "No one is so thoroughly superstitious as the godless man."

And this was Israel's error. Verse 5, "And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook." The roar of the crowd sounded like a thunder clap.

"Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp. So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!" The Philistines were as superstitious as the Hebrews. But they were pagans. They had no relationship with God. You expect this out of the Philistines, God's people should've known better.

"And (Philistines) said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness." The Philistines feared the God of Israel. When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He made a name for Himself among the nations. Egypt's neighbors woke up and took notice...

Yet here, the Philistines encourage themselves, "Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you." In other words *it's them or us!* "Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!"

Verse 10 reveals what happened when God's people misplace their faith. "The Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers." But if you didn't think it could get any worse, *it did!* "Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died."

This was a national tragedy! The sacred Ark of the Covenant, entrusted to Israel, had fallen into pagan hands. And the heirs of the High Priest were dead - judged by God on the same day - as predicted in 1 Samuel 2:34, "in one day they shall die, both of them."

As a side-note, in the late 1970s Israeli archeologists were digging in a grain silo,

east of Tel Aviv, when they found a pottery shard, [the Izbet Sartah Ostrakon](#), five lines of script. The writing recounts this story... and provides amazing evidence for the Bible's historicity.

“Then a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line the same day, and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his head.” These were signs of mourning. “Now when he came, there was Eli (the High Priest, Samuel’s mentor), sitting on a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God.” Eli had feared what would happen, but he’d done nothing to stop Israel’s foolish behavior. “And when the man came into the city and told it, all the city cried out.” News of defeat reaches Shiloh, and the town wails.

“When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, “What does the sound of this tumult mean?” And the man came quickly and told Eli. Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see. Then the man said to Eli, “I am he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line.”

And (Eli) said, “What happened, my son?” So the messenger answered and said, “Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured.” And it wasn’t the news that his evil sons had died that upset him. They had abused their position, and committed lewd acts in the Tabernacle. They got what they deserved. *It was news of the Ark’s capture...*

“...when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy.” The priest was old - his balance was gone. And he was so fat the weight of his body snapped his neck. As a result, Eli died instantly. And his obituary is at the end of verse 18, “He judged Israel forty years.”

And Eli was not the only person shaken by the news of the Ark’s capture. His daughter-in-law, Phinehas’ wife, was pregnant, and news of the tragedy triggered a premature labor. Just before she died she managed to name her son, “Ichabod,” which means “no glory.” And she said in verse 21, “The glory has departed from Israel!” because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband.”

She named her son “no glory.” “And said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.” What a tragedy when God’s glory departs from a life, a ministry, a church, even a nation. A light that burned brightly dims to a flicker. Yet God has been forced to write “Ichabod...” time and time again.

Here’s the results of a misplaced faith: [defeat ensues and glory departs...](#) Faith is

not superstition. God wants us to trust **in Him** - not in relics, or reminders, or rituals... Edmund Burke once said, "**Superstition is the religion of feeble minds.**" Real faith goes beyond the *things of God* and rests its hope in *God alone*.

Chapter 5, "**Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the temple of Dagon and set it by Dagon.**" Ashdod was one of the five Philistine city-states. Here they bring the Ark home to Ashdod to gloat over their victory and to mock Israel's God. In ancient times a battle was seen as not just a contest between two armies - it pitted *your god* against *my god*. In the minds of the Philistines their god, Dagon, had proven more powerful than Yahweh.

The Philistine god, Dagon, was literally the fish-god. His lower torso was a fish - his upper torso was a man.

And God is about to use His Ark to teach the Philistines, and us, a vital lesson. *Israel's army* had been defeated, but *Israel's God* is unconquerable.

Chapter 5:2, "**And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD.**" The priests of Dagon rose that morning, entered their temple, to find their god bowing before Yahweh's Ark.

This seemed *a little fishy* to them, but they interpret it as an accident... "**So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only the torso of Dagon was left of it.**" This time the idol's head and hands had broken off. Yahweh was obviously greater than Dagon... We often think it's up to us to defend God's reputation. But here, God is powerful enough to see to it He gets the glory.

Verse 5, "**Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.**" Rather than admit Yahweh's superiority, and bow to the one, true God; the Philistines glue their idol back together, and reinterpret the event. Like folks today, they refuse to open their mind and heart to the truth of what occurred.

Verse 6, "**But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod...**" The hands of Dagon had broken off - but the hand of Yahweh proved mighty.

*And here's the only time I've ever been tempted to feel sorry for a Philistine... we're told, "and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors both Ashdod and its territory."* Rather than the word "**tumor**" the Old King James uses "**emerods.**" The Hebrew term

means “*a mound,*” and it comes from a root meaning “*to swell.*”

And here Bible commentators fall into two camps. Some understand “*tumors*” to mean hemorrhoids. Others think it was the bubonic plague... Famous OT scholars Keil and Delitzsch write this, “*According to the rabbis (it was a) swelling of the rectum.*” Trapp puts it, “*(God was) beating Dagon upon his own dunghill, and smiting the worshippers on their hinder parts, paying their posteriors.*” Commentator Adam Clarke refers to the word as “*the disease called the bleeding piles.*”

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, verse 6 goes on to say, “*And the cities and the fields of all that region burst up, and mice were produced, and there was the confusion of a great death in the city.*” The plague may’ve been a combination of hemorrhoids and a rodent-borne disease such as the plague.

But let me just say, if this was a hemorrhoid plague this was a severe, serious, bare-knuckled judgment! And this was before the days of suppositories and Preparation H. Here, *God hits below the belt* - literally.

A few years ago, I clipped this story out of the newspaper... “*Dateline: New York. A woman bedridden after hemorrhoid surgery became infuriated with her husband for leaving her alone while he went fishing and shot him to death when he got home, police said. Authorities said seeing her husband, Edward, traipse off with a cooler of beer to spend Sunday afternoon with his friends was too much for Gail Murphy, who was obliged to remain in bed on her stomach. When she heard him return six hours later, she got up, walked to the porch with a shotgun and fired through the door, then called 911. Murphy, 47, died Monday...*”

If this woman was tried by a jury of her peers, *and I mean fellow hemorrhoid sufferers*, I’m sure Gail Murphy would’ve been completely exonerated... “*Not guilty.*”

Imagine, the whole city though, suffering from a pandemic of hemorrhoids - everyone crabby and crotchety. Sit baths are everywhere. The consensus was, “*we’re all outflanked... let’s get this behind us...*”

Now here’s what happens, the Ashdodites complain to the Philistine council. It’s time for another Philistine city to host the Ark. It’s sent to Gath, but the tumors follow. The suffering Gathites send it to Ekron, and look at what happens, verse 10, “*the Ekronites cried out, saying, ‘They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!’ And trust me on this, I have firsthand experience, a bad case of hemorrhoids will pretty near kill you...* So after three cities and thousands of sits baths the Philistines surrender...

“*So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not*

kill us and our people." For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven." Relief became all important!

Chapter 6, "Now the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months." It took just seven months for the whole Philistine nation to be *humbled by hemorrhoids* and surrender to the God of Israel. They decide to send the Ark back to Israel.

"And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it to its place." They didn't want to do anything else to offend the God of Israel, so they called in religious scholars to tell them how Yahweh would want the Ark to be transported.

"So they said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty..." Send the Ark back with a sacrifice. "By all means return it to Him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you."

Then they said, "What is the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?" They answered, "Five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land." The golden rats and golden hemorrhoids were the Philistine's acknowledgement that the plague was no accident. It came from God. They gave Him glory for His judgment.

They remind each other in verse 6, "Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart?" *Why be as stubborn as Yul Bryner?*

"Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. Then take the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side." In the book of Numbers God had instructed the Hebrew priests to carry the Ark on poles. It was never to be put on a cart. That idea was the plan of pagan Philistines.

"Then send it away, and let it go. And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us - it happened to us by chance." The Philistines are

still wondering if their troubles were coincidence or truly a divine judgment. They figure if the Ark goes home to the Israeli town of Beth Shemesh it'll confirm the tumors were from Yahweh. If not, it was just chance.

Verse 10... **“Then the men did so; they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home.”** They didn't want the calves to follow the mamas. **“And they set the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors. Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh (which sat right on the Philistine border), and (the cows) went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left.”** It was once and for all confirmation that the hemorrhoids and rats were sent by the God of Israel. **“And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh...”** To see for themselves.

Now imagine living in Beth Shemesh. You're busy with the harvest, when one day cows pulling a cart bring the Ark into your city. This is the Ark of God, and you've studied the Covenant enough to understand only the Levites can handle the sacred Ark.... You kill the cows, chop the cart up into firewood, and offer the cows as sacrifices to Yahweh. Then they open a chest and find five golden hemorrhoids and five golden rats. And you're wondering, *what in the world is going on?*

Now given the circumstances, I think we all can understand how easy it would've been, for the men of Beth Shemesh to get curious, and stick their nose where it didn't belong! This is what happens when they look into the Ark. Opening that Ark was forbidden!

Verse 19, **“Then He (that is, Yahweh) struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck 50,070 men of the people, and the people lamented because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter.”** Several Hebrew manuscripts give a different reading of verse 19. One possible translation could be, **“Seventy men were struck dead out of 50,000.”** The historian, Josephus, also lists the death toll at 70 - not 50,070.

Yet you've heard the expression, **“curiosity killed the cat”**? Well, it killed more than a cat in Beth Shemesh. This city's citizens let their curiosity draw them into sin.

They opened the Ark to gaze inside, and violated its sacredness - its holiness. The Ark wasn't a *jewelry box*, or a *hope chest*, or a *box of Cracker Jacks with a prize inside*. You didn't just pop the top to have a peek.

God's Law was clear – only priests of the family of Kohath were allowed to handle the Ark. And they never lifted the lid just to gaze inside... *Not everything about God is open to us. Some truths about Him are hidden.*

Tonight's chapters expose the two extremes to which we can go with *the things of God*... **First**, we can over-value them, and put our trust in the *things of God* rather than in *God Himself*. This is what the Israelites did when they took the Ark of the Covenant into battle.

But **second**, we can go to the other extreme, and fail to acknowledge what the things of God represent. We can be careless and flippant with God's stuff, rather than treating those things as holy - set apart unto God.

Here's an example, in one sense your Bible is just paper, print, and cowhide - *but in another sense it's a sacred book. It's literally, God's Word in our hand*... So, don't go to one extreme and think there's anything powerful or magical about the book itself. Don't turn your Bible into an idol... But don't go to the other extreme either, and throw your Bible around like a comic book - like it's not a special book. Let's strike a balance... **Trust God, but respect the things of God.**

Verse 20, "And the men of Beth Shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? And to whom shall it go up from us?" So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up with you."

Chapter 7, "Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and took the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years." The Ark stays in Kirjath Jearim, at the house of Abinadab (on top of the hill) for two decades, until David is crowned king, and brings it to Jerusalem.

*But why wasn't the Ark returned to Shiloh? We're not sure.* Jeremiah 7:12 implies the Tabernacle was damaged in the battle where the Ark was captured.

It also seems Eleazar, Abinadab's son, was somehow prepared to care for the Ark. It stays with him in Kirath Jearim 20 years, as Samson fights a vigilante war, and as Samuel rallies Israel to war at Mizpah.

Verse 2, "And all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD." As Israel discovered, carrying the Ark into battle didn't guarantee them victory, and getting it back didn't guarantee them blessing. The people of Israel were painfully aware that *they weren't right with God*.

Commentator Alexander MacLaren says of Israel's growing realization, "Lost blessings are precious. God is more prized when withdrawn. Often, darkness will brighten the Light, which brightens all darkness!"

So in verse 3 Samuel addresses the nation “Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.” Here are the keys to revival - either personal or corporate - *and in any era!* God revives...

When first, we **return** to God with all our heart. Exalt Him to His rightful place... Second, **remove** foreign gods. Rid yourself of all that rivals your devotion to God... Third, **ready** your heart. Stir up an expectation of what God will do... Fourth, **reserve** your efforts for God alone. “*Serve Him only!*” Here are the four keys to any revival... **return, remove, ready, and reserve.**

“So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.” *They obeyed!* And Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” Mizpah was seven miles north of Jerusalem - accessible from all Israel...

And at Mizpah Samuel holds **A National Day Of Prayer** and invites all Israel. Samuel will lead the nation against the Philistines, but he realizes that every victory for God is first won on our knees, in prayer.

Verse 6 “**So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD.**” Samuel performed a ritual to symbolize a new commitment. He pours out water... **and can you think of a more irreversible act than that?** Once liquid tumbles out of its container it can never be fully retrieved. When it’s gone - it’s gone. And this is the kind of commitment God requires from us. He wants an irreversible act. “*Lord, I give you my life, and I’ll never take it back.*”

Remember Twiggy Sanders of Globetrotter fame. His stunt was to pass the basketball only for it to snap back. Hidden from view... it was tied to a rubber band. Well, too many people I know have a Twiggy Sanders commitment to Christ. They give their life to Jesus, but they snap it back. Hey, a *poured out like water* commitment is the opposite of the *snap back* variety.

So “**They fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.”** They fasted and repented. And “**Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.**”

When the Philistines hear that Israel is at Mizpah they want to fight. And the Hebrews become fearful. They ask Samuel in verse 8, “**Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.**” Notice, the antidote for fear is **ceaseless prayer.** Don’t just pray, but keep an open ended dialogue - a continual conversation with God.

Don't misunderstand, I'm not talking about posture. You don't have to kneel to pray. Talk to God while you walk, work, drive, *not just bow. [Underneath the normal interactions of life, let there flow a stream of prayer.](#)*

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "[Pray without ceasing.](#)" When you pray, just never say "[Amen.](#)" Don't hang up when you talk to God... **stay on the line.**

Israel asks Samuel to pray for them, so he offers a sacrifice and cries out to God. Verse 10, "[As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel.](#)" And while he prays God comes to Israel's defense. "[The LORD thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel.](#)"

Remember **at Aphek**, *Israel sought the Ark and lost. Now at Mizpah, Israel seeks the Lord and wins. At Aphek, Israel shouted. At Mizpah, God thundered.*

The Jewish historian, Josephus, describes how God assisted His people. He triggered a mighty earthquake that shook the ground so violently the enemy lost their footing, and fell into fissures and chasms that opened up in the field. The earth swallowed up the Philistines.

Here's Josephus, "[He caused such noise of thunder to come among them and made fiery lightning shine so terribly round them, that it was ready to burn their faces; and he so suddenly shook their weapons out of their hands, that he made them fly, and return home naked.](#)" The earth shook and the lightning struck, and it caused the Philistines to drop their swords. Iron weapons are no good if they're too hot to handle. The lightning too must've burned their clothes, since they all went home naked. [And of course, you know what you call a naked Philistine?... An obscene Philistine.](#)

After finishing off the Philistines, Samuel sets up a stone, a memorial. In verse 12, he names it, "[Ebenezer \(which means "stone of help"\) saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us.](#)" And I love this thought. We've got a long way to go, but **thus far** the Lord has been our solid rock - our stone of help - a faithful Ebenezer.

Robert Robinson wrote the hymn entitled, "[Come Thou Font of Every Blessing](#) tune my heart to sing Thy grace; streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise." And the second stanza, "[Here I raise my Ebenezer; here by Thy great help I've come; and I hope, by Thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home. To raise an Ebenezer is to celebrate God's faithfulness.](#)

Verse 13, "[So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.](#)" While Samuel judged Israel, lands and cities were restored. There was even

peace with the Amorites. As a young boy and as an old man, Samuel remained God's prophet and Israel's judge.

Notice 16, "He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places." Samuel was the first circuit preacher...

In the 19th century, during America's westward expansion rapid growth and a shortage of pastors created a need for "circuit preachers." One man served numerous churches, making the rounds on horseback.

Well, Samuel made a loop within Israel each year among four cities: Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, and in verse 17 we're told, "He always returned to Ramah, for his home was there." Ramah was home base. "There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the LORD."