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Prayer meeting address given by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham
on Saturday evening 17.11.73

Hymns 961, 1009

Reading 1 Samuel 7.5-14

These verses recall one of the many striking experiences of the children of Israel, and there are one or two points that may profitably be noticed.

The first is there was earnest prayer - the children of Israel were in a great distress, for they had been defeated by the Philistines before and feared that the same might apply again. It is recorded that the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines". And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. This is but one of many striking instances that we have in the Scriptures of those who cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and they are particularly recorded in Psalm 107 of those that were gathered out of different lands that they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and each time they cried unto the Lord in their trouble the Lord heard them. This may be some encouragement unto us, for He is the same God still and has promised to regard the prayer of the destitute.

Prayer is often referred to as "crying" unto the Lord in the Scriptures, indicating a matter of great urgency. Those who knew the Lord cried unto Him, indicating that it came from the heart and was a matter of urgency. Some of you may know something about this. You may possibly remember one or two occasions at least when you have feared an enemy as the children of Israel did, in this instance, and when you reflected it may be upon some former adverse providence that filled you with apprehension, and you cried unto the Lord. This seems to go through the Scriptures and is often mentioned by the Psalmist, "I will cry unto the Lord most high". Is it not a wonderful mercy to be brought to this place in our troubles, to cry unto the Lord and take the trouble to Him.

The second point here is a divine interposition. These Philistines were not to be overcome by any particular power the children of Israel possessed, but it was purely a divine intervention. "The Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel", so that the children of Israel had no need to fight in battle but to pursue and smite them in their flight. The Lord dealt with their enemies and discomfited them. It may be that in your life you have been a witness to some divine interposition where the Lord has appeared to you and discomfited an enemy. These Philistines were smitten before Israel.

The third point is a timely acknowledgement. Samuel did not just let it pass and take no further notice. "He took a stone and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer," in the very place where before they had been beaten by their enemies "Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen". This appears to have been a practice; Jacob did this when the Lord appeared to him at Bethel, he took a stone, and set it up for a pillar, poured oil upon it, and made his vow. Jacob set up a stone when he made a league with Laban, and they agreed together not to continue any further strife between them; they set up a stone and named it Galeed. Here Samuel took a stone and called the name of it Ebenezer - "The stone of help". Some have named their children this, as feeling that they would be among the Lord's people, and in some cases it has proved to be so; but this means "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us", a stone of help. It was a timely and acceptable acknowledgement according to the practice of those days, and it can be that some of us in our humble little way on looking back can say "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us"; This may strengthen and encourage us to continue, for "He who has helped us hitherto, will help us all our journey through. " Amen.

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