

Thanksgiving Day
1 Samuel 7:12
November 25, 2010

The LORD has just rescued Israel from the Philistines. Already, at that time, the people had made a habit of ignoring God's Word. Then, not surprisingly, they began to substitute false gods for God, the God who had rescued Israel from Egypt, had provided for and protected them during the wilderness years and had given them Canaan as promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After the time of Joshua, during the years of the judges – Samuel would be the last of the judges, and perhaps the greatest one, -- the LORD lovingly needed repeatedly to discipline His people. They wandered away from Him. Through repeated hardship and then rescue, the LORD of grace, mercy and love, kept pulling them back to Himself for forgiveness and blessing. This time it had been the Philistines God used to discipline them. Philistine control had been long and cruel. The people repented of their sin and sought the Word of God through Samuel, also a prophet. The LORD quickly and dramatically rescued Israel from the Philistines, with Israel's army almost unnecessary. And the people thanked God. Samuel did not want them to forget God's help. Samuel wanted them always to thank the Lord.

Always Be Thankful for God's Help.

Samuel set up a great stone near the site where the LORD had routed the Philistines. It became a monument. He named it Ebenezer. That means Stone of Help.

As one reads through the Book of Joshua, one hears of seven stone monuments of several types set up during Joshua's lifetime. All of them had the purpose of helping God's people remember so that they'd keep thanking God for His help. Ebenezer was at least an eighth stone.

As one reads about these stones, one sees how each of them was to remind people of promises God made or of God's power used on their behalf or of God's Word and the disaster of not listening to it. Several of them reminded them of enemies God had defeated for them.

Well, the LORD has helped us, too. He has promised salvation from sin, guilt, condemnation, death – including hell, and the devil's hateful slavery. The LORD Himself has provided that deliverance. Jesus accomplished it by His life, death, and resurrection.

God has used His almighty power, especially in the Gospel, to bring Jesus and all of His blessings to us. God guides and provides for us all through these wilderness years while we are on our way to our promised heavenly home. By His Word, through faith, God always protects us from Satan and his allies.

We have good reason to erect our Ebenezer stones so that we remember, too. When we remember what our Savior has done for us, we will give thanks.

Why did Joshua and Samuel use stones? Because they last a long time. Because the Israelites were sinful inside with their old nature, they forgot easily and needed constant reminding.

We have old, sinful natures, too, don't we? Besides the sin in us, certainly the devil and the world also want us to forget the Good News and all of God's help.

This is one kind of stone God wants us to set up in our hearts. Often when the Bible talks about stones and hearts, it's not good because the heart itself is becoming stony and hard. That is a picture of impenitence and unbelief. Instead, let us do set up such stones of remembrance in our hearts so that we will not forget God's countless blessings to us, not only His greatest spiritual blessings but also His abundant and continuous blessing for our present body and life, many connected to this country, its resources and its government, too. We set up such "stones of remembrance" in our lives by listening to, trusting in and following God's Word and availing ourselves of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Another thing that goes along with reminding and permanence is passing on the memory.

As those stones stood there decade after decade and maybe even century after century, dads and moms could point them out to their children and tell what the LORD had done for them or remind them of God's Word. They could do the same thing for strangers passing through. These stones were great teaching tools. They made outreach easy.

So, let us not only thankfully remember all of God's blessings to us, but also thankfully spread the news that God wants to bless everyone every day for time and eternity, for body and soul, also with Jesus blessings of forgiveness, new life and eternal heaven.

Thankfully pass it on. Pass it on actively, deliberately always to your children and grandchildren. Teach them God's Word, show them how much Scripture means to you. Reflect God's truth to them in your life. Do the same for all those people who still do not rely on Jesus. There are very many such people. Tell them how much the Lord Jesus has done for you and for them. Doing this clearly reflects our thankful attitude.

Thankfully remember what God has done and does for you and the world. Thankfully keep remembering. Don't forget. So, keep yourself in God's Word. And thankfully pass God's abundant blessings on. Tell others what our Savior has done! Amen.