

# Into The Wilderness || A Series Through Lent

## Fasting

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**Sermon Synopsis:** The wilderness, is often the best place to make room in our hearts for God, by fasting and turning to him. We can trust that he will show up, even when we encounter resistance, because he is faithful.

### 1 Samuel 7:3-12 (ESV)

**3** And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." **4** So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only. **5** Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." **6** So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. **7** Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. **8** And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines." **9** So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him. **10** As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. **11** And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car. **12** Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the Lord has helped us."

### **illust: Jude packing toy trucks in his backpack ("There's not enough room!")**

And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "**If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only,** and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only. (1 Samuel 7:3-4, ESV)

**This is a story about making room in our hearts for God.** [4 movements: returning, resistance, rescue, remembering]

### **RETURNING**

Returning to God = turning away from idols

**Idols** = anything other than God that has your allegiance (**winnie the pooh**)

Israel's idols: their human ingenuity & superstition; being co-opted by pagan worship<sup>1</sup>

**Repentance** – Metanoia; μετάνοια: a change of mind (think of a U-turn)

**What is taking up room in YOUR heart that God might want to replace?**

Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at **Mizpah**, and I will pray to the Lord for you." So they gathered at Mizpah and **drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted** on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. (1 Samuel 7:5-6, ESV)

**Pouring out of water:** an act of self-denial

**Fasting.** Is this some kind of magic or manipulation to get something from God? No. Fasting is a powerful means of repentance. Doesn't affect God ...it reorients OUR flesh.

"The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background"<sup>2</sup> (Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas)

**Returning means turning away from that which occupies your heart more than God**

**Mizpah:** outpost.<sup>3</sup> A military position away from camp, used to guard from surprise attack  
**Vigilance**—not messing around. **Church in SB needs a Mizpah!**

Practical fasting: give up something you crave, and redirect that craving to God.

**What in your life is pulling you away from God that he might be calling you to release?**

What we have here is such a strong, vigilant desire to turn to God, that one is willing to suspend anything that is distracting from that end goal.

- We may encounter resistance...

## **RESISTANCE**

Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, **the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel**. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. (1 Samuel 7:7, ESV)

Isn't it just like the devil to attack you right when you're turning to God?

Here's a biblical principle: the moment you press in to God, is the moment that you encounter resistance.

**When breakdown happens instead of breakthrough, we need good news to see us through.**

## **RESCUE**

As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. **But the Lord thundered** with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and **threw them into confusion**, and they were defeated before Israel. (1 Samuel 7:7, ESV)

1. God thundered<sup>4</sup>
  - Interesting: Baal was often depicted holding thunderbolts.
2. The enemy was confused
  - Our enemy is not the philistines, but the devil and his lies, enticements, deception.

**Good news: God fights for us!**

This isn't the only place we see God fighting for his people...

2 Chronicles 20:3-22 (NIV)

**3** Alarmed, **Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.** **4** The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

**5** Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard **6** and said:

"Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. **7** Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? **8** They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, **9** 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'

**10** "But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. **11** See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. **12** Our God, will you not judge them? **For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.**"

**13** All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.

**14** Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

**15** He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! **This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.** **16** Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. **17 You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'**"

**18 Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. 19 Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.**

**20** Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." **21** After consulting the people, **Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:**

**"Give thanks to the Lord,  
for his love endures forever."**

**22 As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.**

God fights for us!

What then are we to do if God is the one fighting? WE TURN TO HIM!

**Some of you have been listening to the enemies lies for far too long;  
you need to start hearing the thundering voice of God**

## REMEMBERING

**Then Samuel took a stone** and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and **called its name Ebenezer**; for he said, **“Till now the Lord has helped us.”** (1 Samuel 7:12, ESV)

It was common practice to use stones to mark off boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

Proverbs 22:28 (NASB)

Do not move the ancient boundary

Which your fathers have set.

**Ebenezer**: Stone of help. “Till now the Lord has helped us.”

Note: there’s another Ebenezer in 1 Samuel 4:1. It’s likely a different place because it’s 20 miles away. Worth noting that the first Ebenezer was marred by disobedience, defeat, and discouragement. But the second Ebenezer is marked by God’s victory and God’s faithfulness. GOD REDEEMED IT! *\*not nostalgic*

## **I think there’s some old rocks in your life that you don’t want to think about.**

Places of defeat.

But God wants to bring you back there. Not to replay it, but redeem it.<sup>6</sup>

1. Thank of a recent and significant act of God’s faithfulness in your life
2. Come up with one word to describe it
3. Write it on a rock

Rocks: this represents your life. Your life may make you think of defeat. But we’re gonna adopt a new script today. I want you to set up a new Ebenezer.

4. Stack it with these rocks (our Ebenezer) – He didn’t bring you this far to leave you
5. Let’s SING ABOUT HIS FAITHFULNESS

<sup>1</sup> Says Baldwin: “*Foreign gods and the Ashtaroth* were adopted by Israel from the population around. Ashtaroth (pl. ‘Ashtaroth’) was worshiped over a wide area as the goddess of fertility, love and war (Gk. ‘Astarte’), and plaques of naked female figures from the Bronze and Iron Ages in Palestine are numerous. The *Baals* were the corresponding male deities. This depraved cult had become widespread at this period, involving Israel breaking the first and second commandments, and resulting in loathsome sexual indulgence.” Joyce G. Baldwin. *1 & 2 Samuel*. (TOTC; IVP Academic, 1988). 84

<sup>2</sup> IVP, 290

<sup>3</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews & Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. (IVP Academic, 2000). 289

<sup>4</sup> See also Psalm 29:3 “the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.” (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> IVP, 290

<sup>6</sup> Dale Ralph Davis comments that there is a “whole chain of mercies remembered” in the statement, *till now the Lord has helped us*, that goes beyond just commemoration. For “at the same time he looks to the future and marshals its hope, for his “up to this point” implies that what Yahweh has been for his people he will also be.” *1 Samuel: Looking at the Heart*. (Christian focus, 2000). 77