

Names of God from the Bible

60 – Ebenezer

“Thus far the Lord has helped us”

Reading: 1 Samuel 7:1-14

Israel was not in a good place spiritually. Eli, the high priest, was getting old and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who should have continued the priestly line had disqualified themselves by treating the holy as common. Although Eli had tried to rebuke and reform them, they had completely ignored his pleas.

The Philistines attacked the Israelites and about 4,000 soldiers were killed. As the Ark of the Covenant had not been brought with the army, the Israelites concluded that was the reason for their failure. So, with the approval of Eli's sons, the Ark was brought up from Shiloh to the battlefield. The soldiers were emboldened by the presence of the Ark and shouted in relief.

However, when the Philistines heard the Israelites rejoicing, although fearful at the beginning, they nevertheless encouraged themselves and continued to press on with their attack. The Philistines successfully overpowered the Israelites, killing 30,000 soldiers, and both Eli's sons died. When Eli heard that the Ark had been captured by the Philistines, he broke his neck as he fell backwards off his chair and died.

God caused havoc in the Philistine camp during the time the Philistines held the Ark and so they sent the Ark back to the Israelites.

After over 20 years, Samuel challenged the people to fully return to the Lord and to get rid of their foreign gods. Consequently, there was a huge gathering to sacrifice and worship the Lord. When the Philistines heard that, they came and attacked Israel once more. BUT GOD – yes, this time God worked on the Israelites' behalf and sent thunder. so The Philistines panicked and the Israelites were able to defeat them.

Samuel recognised that the victory was gained through the miraculous Hand of God, and erected a stone pillar and called it *Ebenezer* – *“Thus far the Lord has helped us.”*

As we begin a new series and a new year, I have been challenged to consider this name. It was the name of a physical place; however, it took on a spiritual meaning when Samuel erected a stone pillar at the site. As we read the Old Testament and particularly consider the lives of the patriarchs, we find that they would often erect a pillar or altar when they had a spiritual encounter with the Living God.

It is good to establish some physical sign of a special moment in our spiritual journey. For many, the experience of Water Baptism is such an event.

As I look back on my life, there have been many times when I have had the real privilege of experiencing God's presence, power or love in an overwhelming way.

I haven't raised many 'physical' altars; however, I have thousands of spiritual memories of the goodness of God.

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I have also had the tremendous privilege of witnessing the transforming power of God working in the lives of our guests on every Alpha Course that I have been involved over the last 14 years. People, who have come on the course discouraged, hopeless, sceptical and sometimes even hostile, have had a dynamic encounter with the Holy Spirit and been totally transformed by that experience.

Additionally, the Lord has been so merciful, gracious, kind and loving to me and to my family over the years. I recall those times with gratitude, and here and now raise my *"Ebenezer"* and tell the world that *"thus far the Lord has helped us."*

So we will discover with all of God's names – they give us a demonstration of the character of God that will bring forth, from our hearts, both thanks and praise.

What does that name mean for us today

At least two things:

Firstly, we are where we are today because of the Lord's faithfulness and care watching over us.

Secondly, we need to be a thankful people, recognising all God has done for us to bring us to this point in history.

Prayer

Father, thank You so much for all You have done to bring me to where I am today. I acknowledge that, without You, I am nothing and would have nothing. It's only Your mercy, grace and love that have sustained me through the years. Thank You that because of the past I can trust You completely for the future. Until I see You face to face. Amen.

Additional Readings

- 1 Samuel 4:1-11
- Lamentations 3:21-26
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Questions

1. What made the difference between the accounts of 1 Samuel 4 and 1 Samuel 7?
2. What are the instances in your life that cause you to say, *"Thus far has the Lord helped us"*?
3. How does Jesus fulfil that name?