

What is Your Ebenezer?

1 Samuel 7:12: *Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the LORD has helped us.*



The world around us moves so fast that it's easy to forget to pause and consider just how profoundly God has blessed us. In the United States, somewhere tucked in between the massive Halloween parties and the exhilaration of Christmas, Santa Claus, presents and fun, is a holiday called Thanksgiving. While we won't take the time to discuss how it came to be, we do want to remember why. Thanksgiving's origin was actually simple. It was proclaimed to pause and consider just how profoundly blessed those settlers were to have lived through a hard winter and now to experience a harvest in preparation for the next hard winter. In short, the thanksgiving they gave was to God above, period. Today we'll talk about a similar thanksgiving to God but under the biblical name of "Ebenezers."

What is an "Ebenezer"?

In Hebrew, the name means "**stone of help.**" This word is only used three times in the Old Testament: twice in **1 Samuel 4** and **5** as the name of a place, and once in **1 Samuel 7** as the name of a stone of remembrance. So, it is both a place and a stone.

Let's look at the powerful connection between these two uses of this word.

There is a sad and difficult history in the connection of Ebenezers. Israel wasn't a godly nation at that time:

1 Samuel 4:1-2: *1 Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside **Ebenezer** while the Philistines camped in Aphek. 2 The Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield.*



Ebenezer was the name of the place where the Israelites camped out before a battle with the Philistines. The Philistines attacked and 4,000 Israelites died. In **1 Samuel 4:3**, they are trying to figure out how this defeat could have happened and decide to bring the Ark of the Covenant into the next battle.

The ark was in the room called the Most Holy in the Tabernacle of the Old Testament. It was a wooden box overlaid with gold and a physical representation of God's presence and power for the Israelites.

What was the Tabernacle? A portable temple that was part of the Law given to Moses. The description and details are found primarily in the books of Exodus and Leviticus.

Not only was it with them in the wilderness, it was also placed in the Jordan River when they miraculously crossed over dry land, and the walls of Jericho crumbled when the ark was carried around them. They were victorious when the ark was near, and this was definitely a time they needed a victory!

Israel then brought the ark into their camp and because of its presence they shouted for joy. The Philistines then came and attacked them there and the slaughter was even greater than before.

1 Samuel 4:11: *And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.*

Eli the high priest was a good man, but his sons were a disgrace, and Eli didn't discipline them. They misused their position as under priests. In addition, they practiced immorality and blasphemy, and they misled the people.

God never told them to bring this ark here. The battle did not last long – the Philistines gained a complete victory. They stormed Israel's camp and this time slew 30,000 Israelites.

1 Samuel 5:1: (KJV) *And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod.*

This was shocking and an absolute tragedy! The Israelites were stunned that the Philistines now had their most precious and holy object. When Eli heard about what happened, he fell backwards off his chair, broke his neck and died! This was a series of catastrophic events.

(Source: Biblical Commentary by Matthew Poole) 1 Samuel 4:11 - The ark of God was taken; which God justly and wisely permitted; partly, to punish the Israelites for their profanation of it; partly, that by taking away the pretenses of their foolish and impious confidence, He might more deeply humble them, and bring them to true repentance; partly, that the Philistines might by this means be more effectually convinced of God's almighty power, and of their own and their gods' impotency.

Stealing the ark turned out to be disastrous for the Philistines. The ark being misused by Israel by bringing it into battle was bad enough. But the ark taken captive by heathen individuals was NOT a good situation.

The Philistines had possession of the ark for seven months and were in utter disarray as a result of that possession. Disease or death came to any Philistine town it was moved to.

They lost many men to plague due to the ark and hastily returned it to Israel:

1 Samuel 6:21: *So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up to you.*

The Philistines loaded it on a cart with gold treasures to appease Israel's God and sent it into Israel.

Samuel was the prophet at this ungodly time in Israel's history. Let's see how he handles the peoples' change of heart:

1 Samuel 7:1-2: *1 And the men of Kiriath-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. 2 From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.*

The house of Abinadab was isolated and set on a hill far away. The ark was remote and distant from the people. It gathered dust not being used in the way it was intended.

Israel mourned because it seemed as though the Lord had abandoned them. The Israelites were starting to understand how unfaithful they had been and realized they needed to return to God.

Samuel perceived this change of heart in the people and acted quickly to arrange for a general mass meeting at a small mountain named Mizpah. To Samuel's delight, the Israelites responded in considerable numbers. They recognized their unfaithfulness and knew they were out of divine favor and wanted to do something to correct that.

After those 20 years, Samuel was finally getting Israel's attention. He then put the matter before them in plain and distinct terms:

1 Samuel 7:3-4: *3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines. 4 So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroath and served the LORD alone.*

There was a standing agreement between God and Israel. If they would obey God's laws and be loyal to Him, He would be their God and they His people. He would bless them. But if they did not obey His statutes and were not loyal to Him, then He would deliver them into the hands of their enemies and punish them.

God was keeping His part of the covenant. It was Israel who failed, and Samuel was properly bringing it to their attention and urging them to repentance. Israel finally took deliberate steps to re-establish their loyalty to God.

Samuel gathered the people at Mizpah and prayed for them as they fasted before God.

The Philistines gather for battle and the people beg Samuel to keep praying. The way they said this was significant:

1 Samuel 7:8: *Then the sons of Israel said to Samuel, Do not cease to cry to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.*

What a dramatic change in their attitude! They were learning to look for help in the right direction.

Twenty years earlier, they carelessly called for the ark of God to lead them into battle against the Philistines without reformation of character and without repentance for their sins. They substituted the ark for their lack of faith. But now they placed their trust in the living God, Jehovah.

There was a dramatic change in Israel. This wasn't just a little change – this was a paradigm shift for them to look at themselves as a nation and realize they had abandoned their God. Samuel brought them back to their God and they accepted his efforts on their behalf humbly. The humility of their helplessness shines through.

1 Samuel 7:10-11: *10 Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel. 11 The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car.*

Samuel was doing spiritual work - *offering up the burnt offering* - because Israel begged him to please pray to God for them because they repented of the wrong they had done before.





Samuel's immediate response to this resounding victory of God, who routed the Philistines, was to remember it in a unique way:


1 Samuel 7:12: *Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it **Ebenezer**, saying, Thus far the LORD has helped us.*


Their deliverance was not because of their military prowess. This was God's deliverance. God is back at the forefront of the nation where He belongs. Israel has recognized this. These events help us understand Ebenezers.



What are some basic lessons we can glean from Samuel and his Ebenezer experience?

-  Israel's spiritual life was definitely out of order. Sometimes our spiritual life can be out of order, and maybe we do not want to fix it.
-  Samuel stood firm and instructed the people to return to worshipping God. God's providence can show us the path back to godly order, but we have to choose to follow it.
-  Samuel's advice and warnings finally sunk in and the people took action. For us, time can go by, and we can finally begin to see what we have been avoiding and then take corrective action.
-  Right after the people rededicated themselves to serving God correctly, they were put to the test when the Philistines attacked. For us, God's providence will often provide testing grounds to see if our action is genuine.

 The Israelites changed their ways and God mercifully protected them. They gave Him all the credit for their victory. God can and will deliver us, and that deliverance can come within the context of our previous loss. We see the big picture and how far off the mark we have been.

 This victory against the Philistines was memorialized with a simple, unfinished rock. We, in turn, should mark His providence in our lives in a humble, yet unforgettable way.

These lessons are what we are going to be looking at as we determine the Ebenezers in our own lives. It is fascinating to see how this all came to be in Scripture.

How Samuel handled Israel's heartfelt pleading for God's protection is packed with lessons and applications for our own Christian experiences.

**This is an inspiring account of God delivering His people!
How do we make it a powerful personal lesson for us?**

As with any biblical accounts, we want the inspiration we receive to not only stay in our hearts and minds but grow and become a permanent resident in our lives. The first practical lesson we can draw from Samuel's Ebenezer example is that of simplicity. No surprise here, but simplicity is vastly underrated! There is a simplicity and power in what Samuel does to commemorate this event.

Let's examine why Samuel just used a stone for this marker and not something more elaborate, something more memorable:

1 Samuel 7:12: *Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the LORD has helped us.*

(Source: Biblical Commentary by Matthew Poole) Verse 12. A stone; a rude, unpolished stone, which was not prohibited by that Law, Leviticus 26:1, there being no danger of worshipping such a stone, and this being set up only as a monument of the victory.

A rude, unpolished stone. Why would Samuel pick this plain stone? Let's look at the Law.

Two renderings of the second commandment give powerful reasons as to why it was just an uncarved stone:

Leviticus 26:1: *You shall not make for yourselves idols, nor shall you set up for yourselves an image or a sacred pillar, nor shall you place a figured stone in your land to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.*

Notice the little details here. Do not do this, do not do that. No *sacred pillars*, no *figured stones*. God did not want anything that resembled something the Israelites would be tempted to worship.

This is the second commandment as it was laid out in Exodus:

Exodus 20:4-6: *4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

Simply put, worship the Creator, not the created. This is the wisdom and beauty of what Samuel does. He understands the Law deeply. Using a common, unpolished, uncarved stone was a powerful way to adhere to the Law while placing *a stone of help* (which is what Ebenezer means) for everyone to see.

This simple, unremarkable marker of God's deliverance taught that what is common can refocus us on the uncommon privilege of God's providence. This is a powerful lesson.

Ebenezers are not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, and yet stones were commonly used in the Bible. For example:

- God wrote His Law on tables of stone.
- Large stones were set up as markers for memorable events. (For example, see **Genesis 28:18** and **Joshua 4:2-4**)
- The prophet Isaiah refers to Jesus as a *precious cornerstone*.
- Solomon's Temple was built of stone.
- Nebuchadnezzar's image was destroyed by a stone.
- Peter speaks of the members of Christ's church as *living stones*.
- In the book of Revelation, overcomers are said to symbolically receive a name on a white stone.

There are many other examples of biblical stones, but only one stone of remembrance was called an Ebenezer. Can we apply this principle in our lives as Christians all these thousands of years later?

We do have evidence of the principle of remembering God's deliverance and help in several different ways. Let's look at something that illustrates this principle. It is not called an Ebenezer, but it uses the principle of simplicity to show the magnificence of God's power. This example is with Jesus.

Perhaps Jesus gave us an example of using simple things as a remembrance of great deliverance:

1 Corinthians 11:23-25: *23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. 25 In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.*

Jesus simply said to take the bread and wine which were already on their table and use them as symbols of his sacrifice for their deliverance. Human perspective would imagine creating some lofty and elaborate symbols to show appreciation for Jesus. Jesus' own perspective, as a man and as God's son, wisely chose differently, so the symbol itself would not overshadow the gift of God's son as deliverer!

Again we have the beauty and wisdom of what Samuel did, and then what Jesus did. Samuel used a regular stone to mark the spot God delivered them from the Philistines. The only reason the stone was there was so Israel could look at the stone, then look up and give thanks.

Jesus used the bread and the wine as simple pictures to remind the disciples so they (and we) could look up and thank God for Jesus' personal deliverance, his personal sacrifice. It was not about the symbols; they were unimportant, common things. It was all about what part they represented in God's plan.

There is no such thing in the New Testament as a "Christian Ebenezer," so there's no specific right and wrong as to how to remember or memorialize how God has led or protected us. But it is always appropriate, as a scriptural principle, to have gratitude and reflect on the blessings we have received to this point.

Our Ebenezer memories should have four elements:

1. Humility
2. Acknowledge our dependence on God
3. Appreciation for where He has led us, and
4. Thankfulness

There are lots of ways to devise a Christian version of an Ebenezer. Journaling can be one way.

Rick My wife Trish journals all the time. She journals her prayers and how God's deliverance and His presence in her life has always been there.

If we journal and focus on gratitude in our experiences, we are, in a sense, putting an Ebenezer in place that says, *God has delivered me*. This journal doesn't need to be neat or presentable to others. It can have mistakes or doodling – that doesn't matter. What matters is the content. It simply needs to reflect our embracing of God's providence in all things.

Julie I like that you said Trish writes out her prayers. I know several people who do that. I'm using simple index cards for each person I'm praying for, trying to set aside time each morning to review them and bring them before the Lord. It helps me not to forget anybody. Physically writing it out means I have a record of the prayer and can look back and remember to see how the Lord led me or how He led the person I prayed for. Often it isn't in the way I expected.

As we were preparing this episode, we were talking about isolating one Ebenezer-like experience we could share from our own personal background to give praise and honor to our heavenly Father.

Jonathan's Ebenezer Experience



A couple of years after 9/11, my wife and I were traveling to Chicago for a New Year's Bible convention. We were on a plane that allowed us to pick our seats as we entered. My wife put her bags down next to a man, but he quickly asked her not to sit there, so we moved back several rows.

There were two men sitting behind us and two men in the seats across the aisle from them. They were together. They appeared not to know the man ahead of us who asked us to move our seats. There was a long delay from when we were supposed to take off. The flight attendant kept walking up and down the aisle asking people if they wanted a pillow or a blanket. After a while, with everyone getting a little antsy because we had not left yet, they announced that everyone needed to get off the plane and take all of their luggage with them because they had to defuel the plane.

As everyone stood up to start to leave, the men behind us and the one single man ahead of us all jumped out of their seats and pushed everyone out of the way and ran down the aisle to exit the plane. As we stepped out of the plane, we saw all the men being put into police cars. Dogs were brought onto the plane to search. We were told we had to stay in the airport waiting area. Shortly after, the flight attendant, the captain of the plane and two men dressed in black approached us and asked my wife if the man had asked her not to sit next to him. She answered them, and they questioned her further with the captain and flight attendant. The flight attendant said all five men were together in the waiting area of the airport before they boarded the plane and were very friendly, but they appeared not to know the man who was sitting alone once they boarded. She found that very suspicious, and none would not look her in the eye when she asked if they needed anything.

It turns out, one of the men was on the Top 20 Terrorist Watch List. They asked my wife to identify the men by looking at them through a window.

We often look back at this experience on how the Lord protects us and overrules in our lives. To us, this is one of our most memorable Ebenezers, even though we don't have a physical touchstone for a reminder except in our minds and hearts.

This was a huge experience, *Thus far the LORD has helped us. We can see God's deliverance. Who knows what could or would have happened? What matters is recognizing the Lord's deliverance which is what the whole concept of Ebenezer is about.*

Ebenezers are for the sole purpose of giving thanks and praise to God.

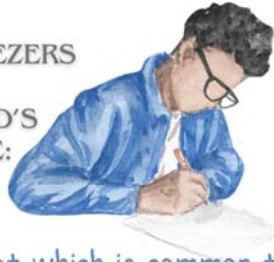
Let us proclaim out loud what our Ebenezer experiences have taught us:

Psalms 100:1-5: *1 Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Serve the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful singing. 3 Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. 4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. 5 For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.*

These scriptures make us look back and realize how God has blessed and delivered us beyond anything we could possibly imagine. This is what an Ebenezer is supposed to do. It is not a requirement for a Christian to set up Ebenezers, but it is a Christian principle that we need to look up in gratitude to God and God alone for His deliverance.

Those things that seem simply unremarkable – yet God’s presence is in them. This is what we want to see when we look at Ebenezers!

ENLISTING EBENEZERS
TO
EMPOWER GOD’S
PROVIDENCE:



Remembering God’s significant providences in our lives can be effectively accomplished by using that which is common.

WHY?

Because using that which is common to recall that which comes from God reminds us that God’s providences work through those things in life that most see as simply unremarkable!

We need to allow the simple, rough and unpolished symbols of our experiences to show us God’s abundant and grace-filled deliverance!

**We have just looked at the simplicity of this stone as a symbol.
The next question is why name it Ebenezer?**

The easy answer to this question would be that, as we have already discussed, the word means **stone of help**. This is a good answer, and it shows us a powerful appropriateness in being able to recognize the depth of God’s deliverance. However, further examination of this context will reveal deeper and even more significant meaning.



We just released a wonderful, animated video on our YouTube channel @ChristianQuestionsMinistries: **What was the Ark of the Covenant?** <https://youtu.be/Nl8-7tsiFXw>
This is a CQ Kids video, but it is good to remind all of us about the details.

Let’s go back to the elements of Samuel’s Ebenezer experience and connect some of the details that undoubtedly influenced Samuel’s naming of this stone. There is more to it than just the name.

Where was the ark when the Philistines took it?

1 Samuel 5:1: (KJV) *And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from **Ebenezer** unto Ashdod.*

Israel had brought the ark to their battleground encampment without God’s direction! When the Philistines returned it months later, it just sat under watchful eyes, but it was not in its rightful, holy place.

For 20 years, it was in the house of Abinadab, far away from the people. Finally, the prophet Samuel got Israel's attention. The people gathered at Mizpah mountain and acknowledged their sins with humility and honesty. They rededicated themselves to the Lord.

But in **1 Samuel 7:7**, the Philistines heard about this gathering at Mizpah and sent an army to crush them. Israel was trapped – they were here to repent and pray, not to battle. They had no weapons. They turned to Samuel, and in verse 8 it says, *Do not cease to cry to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines. God sent thunder that scared the Philistines away, leaving their weapons behind in their confusion. It didn't take long for the Israelites to recognize that this victory was not due to their military might or skill. The victory was totally the Lord's.*

That is the point of the Ebenezer. The victory is totally the Lord's. It took 20 years, but Samuel finally got through to Israel about their sinfulness. They repented and the door of deliverance was opened as a result of their faith and their contrite hearts.

God's victory followed:

1 Samuel 7:12: *Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the LORD has helped us.*

Why the name Ebenezer? Samuel's choice of a name for the stone was twofold:

1. Ebenezer appropriately meant **stone of help**.
2. Samuel was drawing attention to where the ark had been lost.

Ebenezer is the place where the ark had been seized by the Philistines. Samuel drew attention to the grave errors and disloyalty that brought God's disfavor upon them for all that time. In naming this stone, Samuel is drawing attention to the beginning of the problem.

The name Ebenezer symbolically demonstrates the problem of losing God's favor along with the solution of rekindled faith that enabled God's deliverance to be restored. It was a combination – they saw the error, God's deliverance and God's solution. The Ebenezer puts that all together and reminds them of their falling away, the consequences and their return to God. Samuel was really smart!

Let's go to a New Testament example. Remember, Ebenezer is not mentioned in the New Testament, but we are looking at the principle of remembering the error that caused God's deliverance.

The Apostle Paul had to learn a similar lesson. His recounting of his own experience was done with the insight of hindsight:

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: *7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.*

Q Is Paul suggesting that this thorn in the flesh from Satan is some kind of deliverance?

A He is suggesting that difficulty opens the door for deliverance.

Paul's hindsight: *I know that I was in danger of self-exaltation and therefore the hardship that Satan sent to beat me down was in fact able to be a tool of growth in the hand of God through Christ.*

9 And he has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

We can see the Ebenezer principle just jump out at us! Paul's "Ebenezer" was the publicizing of his experience to all Christians. While he originally wrote to the Corinthians, his words became one of the tools of Christianity for the last 2,000 years. He highlighted his weakness to demonstrate God's delivering strength. God's strength is big – *Look at what I was in danger of and look how God took that negative and taught me something so powerful. Praise be to God.*

Let's get practical again:

Julie's Ebenezer Experience



I had a high stress career that involved continual deadlines, managing and working with many different personalities, reading detailed contracts, researching data, managing a large website and basically sitting in front of a computer for most of the day. I was getting more and more disgruntled over the years and wanted to make a complete change.

Should I go to school to be a personal chef? A tour guide? How about a yoga teacher – that seemed low stress. I signed up to take a long and detailed aptitude test to guide me into my next exciting stage of life! After answering what seemed to be hundreds of questions to find out what I would be happiest doing based on my talents and interests, finally came the big reveal. It turns out, I was 100 percent qualified to be doing the exact job I was doing in the exact industry I was in! I was mad. I felt trapped and defeated. But then I realized, wait a minute...I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be! I looked at my work with fresh, new eyes and a renewed attitude.

Fast forward to the privilege of volunteering with Christian Questions since 2010. It involves continual deadlines, working with others, detailed work studying the Bible and its resources, working behind the scenes on a large website and sitting in front of a computer most of the day. The Lord was training me and teaching me with structure, deadlines and responsibility how to be qualified – cheerfully – to serve Him in this way. Because of this enormous privilege, believe it or not, the CQ logo with the little microphone is an Ebenezer for me, because thus far, the Lord has led me right to this place, so I can trust Him to lead me further. You may not know the "why" in your life until much later but watch what the Lord can do even in the mundane things of life.



Rick: How long after you took that aptitude test were you still in that industry before Christian Questions?

Julie: I was in the industry probably another five years, a much easier five years than the previous.

Rick: Then suddenly, after five years, slowly but surely you are introduced to exactly the same thing, but in the direct service of God and His truth – that sounds like a pretty good Ebenezer experience to me! The stress, trial and difficulty led to the knowledge that this is what you were cut out for and unbeknownst to you, became what God had in store for you. You kept working and let God show you His providence. What a wonderful experience in terms of growing into God's will.

Jonathan was protected from a danger he didn't even know existed. Julie was put in a position to have the past stresses actually be the fuel for present blessing. Those are two very powerful examples of Ebenezers through a Christian perspective.

Another way to bring Ebenezer experiences to mind is to talk about them, be it in a testimony or in a personal conversation. Sharing the plain hardship of an experience and how God's deliverance presented itself and delivered you can be faith strengthening for both parties. An Ebenezer does not have to be something tangible.

There are lots of ways to take this principle and have it help us in our gratitude on a daily basis. Ebenezers can also be places. We can go to a specific location that mentally or emotionally brings us a godly and peaceful perspective.

The Apostle Paul at Philippi:

Acts 16:13-14: (NIV2011) *13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*

According to historical accounts, there was no synagogue in Philippi, which would indicate there were fewer than 10 Jewish men present in the city. Paul had to go to where the people were who would be in the right frame of mind to hear the message. It's no wonder he found these women in a peaceful setting by a river.

Is there a specific place that might be considered your Ebenezer, where you especially slow down and recall how the Lord has led you up to this point?

 Rick

There is one place I use pretty much every day. It is the window in my office. When life is stressful and there are a lot of things to juggle and I need to reset, I get up, turn my back on the office and all its happenings and look out the window and pray. I look at the trees and the sky and it helps me reset on how to move forward. The stress and challenges brought me there, but when I walk away from the window, it is a renewal based on knowing that God is with me in those experiences.

Jonathan We walk out our back door and look at the sky and the pond with various birds and wildlife. It's a special place for reflection and prayer.

Julie We have spectacular sunsets where we live and it's always a great time to pause and consider.

We are all looking at the same context that Paul saw in Philippi. Go to a place where there is peacefulness, where spirituality can be found, where we can feel close to God away from the hubbub of life.



To truly remember God's deliverance, we need to also recall the depth of the issue that made His deliverance a necessity. Doing this reminds us of the journey we have already taken and teaches us how our Father has had it all under His care.

Our Father has it all under His care. It is so easy to focus on the feeling of "happily ever after" and forget the turmoil beforehand. To grow, we need to remember both!

**Ebenzers are transformative touchstones of remembrance.
Does the deliverance we've been given carry us forward?**

Here we need to make some important points. While the past and present deliverances we experience are powerful inspirations and motivators, they will NOT carry us through our next challenge. Why? We, as Christians, need to continually step up to each and every new challenge as we continually choose godly righteousness as our mindset. We need to put new challenges in perspective by drawing on the past so we can move forward.

Ebenzers put us in a frame of mind to take the next step. They are not a solution but an assurance; they help us to remember that, up to now, we've been delivered. *Thus far the Lord has helped us.*

Giving Thanks for Less Obvious Blessings - The author Fleming Rutledge writes: *The life of thankfulness—biblically speaking—is lived in view of the hard things of existence. As the life of thanksgiving deepens, we discover that the more mature prayers of thanksgiving are not those offered for the obvious blessings, but those spoken in gratitude for obstacles overcome, for insights gained, for lessons learned, for increased humility, for help received in time of need, for strength to persevere and for opportunities to serve others.*

How beautiful! We want to capture that combination of difficulty and deliverance. It is such a powerful learning experience to look at them together.

Back to Samuel for a moment as we glean one more fundamental lesson from his Ebenezer experience.

Samuel’s immediate response to God’s resounding victory was to plainly mark it:

1 Samuel 7:12: *Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the LORD has helped us.*

But it’s interesting that he says *Thus far*, or as the King James Version puts it, *Hitherto, hath the Lord helped us*. Where is the confidence of the Lord helping in the future? This timeline is marking from the past to right now.

Up to this point *the Lord had helped us*. Why did Samuel seem to proclaim God’s deliverance in such a hesitating manner? Israel’s track record was not good. They were humble, contrite and grateful now, but the question for Samuel was: would they stay that way?

Israel’s history at best was checkered. Here Stephen is speaking before he is killed by the Jews:

Acts 7:51-53: *51 You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the holy spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the righteous one, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.*

Stephen was stoned to death for telling the Jews the truth of their history, but what is the lesson we can get from Samuel and the Ebenezer experience?

Ebenezers can be an effective tool of remembrance to help avoid the up and down patterns of human imperfection by being reminded of those lessons. That is one of the reasons we are told of this. We want to learn from Israel what to do and what not to do!

Let’s look at our own deliverances in our lives. We should never feel that we have it all in control as a result of this or that past experience that may have ended well. We need to learn from our past and remember the errors that led us to needing deliverance, so we can avoid those errors in the present and prepare for our future.

Let’s repeat that. We need to:

- **LEARN from our past** - pay attention to our past difficulties.
- **APPLY in our present** – use those lessons to our current situations.
- **PREPARE for our future** – when we acknowledge the evidence of God’s deliverance up to this point in our lives, we can certainly have faith moving forward!

It is important to keep our minds in the right place:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22: *16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.*

In other words, never let your guard down!

In everything give thanks – we live in a strange time when everyone is a critic. It's too easy to complain often anonymously, on social media. We can get in this constantly disgruntled mindset, actively looking out for whatever isn't up to our standards, that doesn't meet our every whim and expectation.

Being overly critical of everyone and everything around us will cause us to miss the blessings in our experiences that God is overruling on our behalf. Most of the time we should *be still and know that He is the Lord*, watching to see what He is doing. By being a constant critic, we forfeit the observational power of seeing the Ebenezers in our lives. It can't work if it can't be seen.

Holiness and gratitude are fed by our hard learning experiences. We can think that if God gave us everything we wanted, we would be grateful. Well, we might, but not nearly so grateful as when He delivers us from the hardship of this or that experience!

Hebrews 12:7-11: *7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

Notice *the peaceful fruit of righteousness* is not mentioned up front. It comes after because our development and growth is what helps us to find and embrace that peaceable fruit of righteousness. God's fatherly discipline for us includes all life teachings for the purpose of rounding out the character of His children. The goal is that they become responsible, Christlike adults.

How often do we think about making our hard personal growth experiences into Ebenezers? Whether we write it, share it verbally or have a simple memento to remind us, we want to have a constant attitude of thankfulness, remembering how the Lord changed us, and building our faith and trust for the next experience. In this way, our Ebenezers become stepping stones, helping us get farther and farther to our destination of complete trust and faith in God.

Rick's
Ebenezer
Experience



This Ebenezer has to do with January 25, 2022. That's the day I was admitted to the hospital with blood clots throughout my lungs to the point where they told me if I hadn't come to the hospital that within a week, I would have just not awakened one morning. I would have stopped breathing. That's how bad I was. I had no idea. I keep the hospital band they put on my wrist as an Ebenezer. I keep it where I can see it every single day because it taught me a tremendous lesson. As I relay the lesson, I want to share an experience that happened this morning that really made me think that this is the Ebenezer experience I needed to talk about.

I had the privilege of talking to one of the CQ volunteers who is in the hospital as we speak for a DVT (deep vein thrombosis). That's what I had, and that's what she has. It's a scary experience to hear you've got blood clots in your lungs.

We got to talk this morning about our mutual experiences and the scariness of it all. She asked me very plainly, *Rick, if it's not too personal, can you tell me what you learned?* I was really glad she had the courage to ask that question.

Before that experience, I was feeling the burden of responsibility for the many things with which the Lord has PRIVILEGED me to do. But I was feeling like I just couldn't keep up and getting further and further behind.

One day without any real warning, I am sitting in a hospital bed and told I can't leave because if I leave, I'm going to die. I'm in this bed by myself, realizing I'm only there because my wife was so insistent that something was wrong with me, and she talked to my daughter Emily, who's an APRN (Advanced Practice Registered Nurse).

Emily said to me, *Dad, you have to go to the hospital, you have blood clots in your lungs.* She knew. Because of those two, I'm sitting there realizing life is so precious, and I have this deliverance right in front of me.

So, this is what I told the sister this morning, I remember I looked up in the midst of the threat of losing my life, and said, *Lord, what will You have me do? Just show me whatever it is. You have just granted me this incredible deliverance that I don't deserve. What will You have me do?* Well, within two weeks of leaving the hospital, he delivered three very big responsibilities that I truly believe before this experience would have been crushing. But after that experience, as each one came, I went, *Ahhhh*. And then I smiled and looked up and said, *Okay, I get it.* It was such a transformative experience.

So, that's the Ebenezer, that little hospital band I keep where I can see it every single day to remind me, to remember, *Lord, what would You have me do? You delivered me. I am Yours.*

Remember the hardship within the framework of the specific deliverance.

Here's something interesting: In the classic story, *A Christmas Carol*, it has been suggested that the author Charles Dickens called his main character Ebenezer Scrooge to reflect the help given to Scrooge to change his life. His name Ebenezer IS the "Ebenezer."

Now that we have seen the power of taking the time to be "Ebenezer conscious," we can seriously look at applying the results of that consciousness to our Christian lives. There is great ability to be inspired and lifted up higher so we can work harder in the future.

Thus far the LORD has helped us. What comes after is very much up to us:

Psalms 116:12-17: 12 What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? 13 I shall lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the LORD. 14 I shall pay my vows to the LORD, oh may it be in the presence of all His people. 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones. 16 O LORD, surely I am Your servant, I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid, You have loosed my bonds. 17 To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the LORD.

There is such joy of gratitude and service in this psalm and can be a result of our Ebenezer experiences. *What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I shall lift up the cup of salvation...* we show our gratefulness by how we live. This is the whole point of the Ebenezer exercise Samuel showed us so many centuries ago.



ENLISTING EBENEZERS TO EMPOWER GOD’S PROVIDENCE:

God has given us many ways to help us grow into the likeness of Jesus. Ebenezers can play a significant role in this journey. Let us intentionally remember the deliverances through God’s providence we are given and mark them with simplicity. Let us maintain those markers as visible reminders of God’s past deliverance as we face our future challenges.

Thanksgiving is not a day; it’s a lifestyle!

Using the concept of Ebenezers can change the way we look at the experiences of our lives. We can now look back and say, *Wait a minute. There is scriptural precedent to say, let me think about that. Let me remember that in a very simple way so I can use its reference to remind me how God brought me to this point. I can then look forward, watching to see how God will deliver me to the next point.* Use the principle of the Ebenezer.

**So, what is your Ebenezer?
From Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



Next episode

Join us next week on November 27, 2023
Episode 1309: What is the Biblical Process to Become Perfect? (Part I - the Church)



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Ep. 1308: What is Your Ebenezer?

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SHOW NOTES

1. What does the Hebrew word “Ebenezer” mean? How is it used in 1 Samuel chapters 4, 5 and 7? How is Ebenezer used specifically in 1 Samuel 4:1-2?
2. What was the Ark of the Covenant? Describe it. Where was it supposed to reside? How had it been used to gain success and victory in the past? Who told the Israelites to use the ark this way in these instances? (Exodus 25:10-22, Joshua 3:7-9, 6:2-5)
3. Why did the Israelites bring the ark to Ebenezer for the battle? Who told them to bring it into the battle? Did it protect the Israelites? Explain. Explain what happened to the ark while it was in Philistine hands. (1 Samuel 4:1-22, and chapters 5 and 6)
4. How long did it take Samuel to get Israel to realize they were sinful and idolatrous? What did they have to do to correct this matter? What did they do right this time compared to 20 years before? What did Samuel do to remind Israel of their repentance and subsequent victory? Why did he call this memorial stone Ebenezer? (1 Samuel 7:1-12)
5. In what way would an elaborate monument be a danger to the Israelites? What does the *simplicity* of the Ebenezer stone teach us? (Leviticus 26:1, Exodus 20:4-6)
6. How did Jesus use simple, everyday things to be used as a remembrance of his deliverance of mankind? What is important in the creation of an Ebenezer for a Christian? What is *not* important? What is the purpose of noting an Ebenezer moment in your life? Can you think of an experience that was an Ebenezer for you? (1 Corinthians 11:23-25, Psalms 100:1-5)
7. What did Israel finally acknowledge at Mizpah? How did the battle go with Israel not even armed? What did it take to open this “door” of deliverance?
8. What are the two reasons the stone was named Ebenezer? This embodies (and the stone reminds the Israelites of) what three essential lessons? (1 Samuel 7:7-12)
9. What can we use as an Ebenezer of our meaningful deliverances and experiences? List the possible tangible and intangible things we can set up to remind us of our Ebenezer experiences. What is essential to truly remember God’s deliverance on our behalf?
10. Do you any mementos that remind you of important times in your life when you felt God’s care over you? Do you have a place where you can meditate and remember God’s gifts, or to work out the tangles in your life? Is there a practice you have that helps you to remember these important milestones?
11. Why is it SO important we remember the errors that led to our need for the Lord’s deliverance and guidance?
12. What is the three-part process that make Ebenezers such an essential tool in our Christian walk?
13. How can you gain the “peaceful fruit of righteousness?” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, Hebrews 12:7-11, Psalms 116:12-17)