International Bible Lesson
International Bible Study Commentary
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What True Faith Does
1 Samuel 7:3-11, 15-17

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" (1 Samuel 7:3—ESV).

Though the LORD punished the Philistines until they returned the Ark to Israel, God's people did not return to the LORD with a total commitment to serve Him only. So, the Philistines continued to strike fear into the hearts of the Israelites and threatened them continually. They no longer trusted in the Ark to save them, and they would not turn from their idol worship to the LORD. Therefore, when the Philistines threatened Israel with destruction once again, the people finally listened to Samuel when he told them that to return to the LORD with all their heart they needed to put away their foreign gods. They also needed to direct their hearts to the LORD. They needed to show they had turned back to the LORD by the way they behaved, by obeying His Law, and by serving the LORD only. To reaffirm their return to faith in the LORD, Samuel gathered them together at Mizpah where they fasted and confessed: "We have sinned against the LORD." However, their confession of sin did not remove all their fear of the Philistines. So, in faith they cried out to Samuel to keep praying for them. With a sacrifice that pointed toward the coming of Jesus, the Lamb of God Who sacrificed Himself for us despite our sins, Samuel sacrificed a lamb and prayed for the people. Then the LORD answered Samuel. The LORD thundered, dismayed their enemies, and saved His people. Their fear turned to faith in God, so with the LORD's help they rushed into battle and defeated the Philistines.

Throughout the Old Testament, the LORD demonstrated His just punishment, grace, love, and mercy to people who repeatedly rebelled against Him. They sinned until His loving discipline and Spirit-led prophets led them to return to the LORD and renew their commitment to serve the LORD only. Many of the acts of God in their history and the words of His prophets point to the coming of God's Son into the world to save us from our sins and from the eternal consequences we deserve because of our rebelling against God. In John 1:29, we read, "The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" By grace, He will take away our sins and make us new people who love and obey God.

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