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# YOUR COMEBACK STORY

## I. We Love a Comeback Story

- a. These stories offer hope that life can turn around.
- b. Have you ever felt like you had walked so far away from God that you couldn't come back?
- c. The hope we have is that when we turn to God, we know that we will have His help.

## II. Israel's Defeat

- a. When Israel arrived in the Promised Land, they distanced themselves from God and chose to worship false gods like their neighbors.
- b. Because of their choices, the Israelites lived under immense pressure from their adversaries, especially the Philistines.
- c. In an intense battle, the Israelites suffered a stunning defeat.
  - i. **1 Samuel 4:3** (NET 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) *When the army came back to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why did the Lord let us be defeated today by the Philistines? Let's take with us the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh. When it is with us, it will save us from the hand of our enemies."*
  - ii. Their solution was to bring the Ark into the next battle.
    1. Not from faith, but from superstition.
    2. They had always won when the Ark was present.
- d. The second battle resulted in an even worse defeat.
  - i. **1 Samuel 4:22** (NET 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) *She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God has been captured."*
  - ii. The loss of the Ark was the single worst victory in the history of Israel up to that point.
  - iii. All hope was gone as they lived under Philistine dominance for the next 20 years.

## III. Israel's Victory

- a. Something happened in the people's hearts during those intervening years.
  - i. **1 Samuel 7:2** (NET 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) *All the people of Israel longed for the Lord.*
  - ii. Samuel challenged the people to act on their desire.

- b. **1 Samuel 7:3-4** (NET 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) *Samuel said to all the people of Israel, “If you are really turning to the Lord with all your hearts, remove from among you the foreign gods and the images of Ashtoreth. Give your hearts to the Lord and serve only him. Then he will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.” So the Israelites removed the Baals and images of Ashtoreth. They served only the Lord.*
  - i. The Israelites abandoned their idols.
  - ii. They took on an attitude of humility and repented.
    - 1. They poured out water as a symbol of their sorrow and tears.
    - 2. The people admitted their sins.
- c. Repentance
  - i. Repentance is more than just feeling sorry.
  - ii. It’s changing directions and following a new leader.
  - iii. Repentance is not just for when you’ve done something really bad. It should happen anytime your focus shifts from following God’s lead.
  - iv. When we repent, we’re confident God wants us back.
    - 1. **Revelation 3:20** (NET 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.): *Listen! I am standing at the door and knocking! If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into his home and share a meal with him, and he with me.*
    - 2. Jesus wants a relationship with us.
- d. The Philistines marched to stop the Israelites.
  - i. Samuel prayed for God’s help.
  - ii. God intervened and won the battle.

#### IV. The Ebenezer Stone

- a. **1 Samuel 7:12** (NET 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.): *Samuel took a stone and placed it between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Up to here the Lord has helped us.”*
- b. Ebenezer was the name of the village where the Philistines had defeated the Israelites and stolen the Ark.
- c. Samuel named this memorial stone Ebenezer.
  - i. Ebenezer meant literally “stone of help.”
  - ii. God had helped them and would continue to help them.

#### V. Our Comeback Story

- a. God can take your “Ebenezer” moment of failure and turn it into an “Ebenezer” moment of victory.
- b. Our God is a “Come Home” God.