

When our first child was conceived, we expected a human baby, not a baby elephant. We sent our children to school, expecting them to learn. When I peddled popsicles as a boy, I expected to get paid. Human reason and the experiences of life teach us what to expect under a certain set of circumstances. But when it comes to our circumstances in God's kingdom of grace, our Lord must teach us what to expect.

The Israelites had reason for high expectations. They had responded to the preaching of the Prophet Samuel. We read in the verse just before our text that **"Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and served the LORD only."** What did they expect? And

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT, AS YOU SERVE THE LORD ONLY?

I.

First, you can expect the Philistines!

That was a holy gathering at Mizpah. The entire nation of Israel had come together at Samuel's command. They **"drew water and poured it out on the ground before the Lord,"** symbolizing the vanity and wretchedness of their sinful lives -- like water poured out that cannot be gathered up again. They **"fasted that day"** and said: **"We have sinned against the LORD."** So the Israelites admitted their shame and gave glory to God. And Samuel **"judged the children of Israel at Mizpah."** That means that he assured them in the name of the LORD that their sins were forgiven.

But what happened immediately after this happy day of repentance and worship? Trouble came upon Israel! For when **"the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel."** Did Israel think that their enemies would leave them alone as long as they worshiped and served the LORD?

It has never been so. For when sinners repent of their sins, and begin to follow the Lord in faith and love, *then they must expect that Satan will gather his forces all the more against them!* You also should ***expect more trouble from your spiritual enemies,*** the more you are moved by the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord.

If you are a young Christian, you must expect that the devil will raise up the Philistines against you especially. If he can get you to fall from your faithfulness, think how he can use your fall to offend and discourage others! He will use your friends against you, tempting you to follow their sinful ways. He will try to establish in your life a pattern of self-centeredness that will make it extra hard for you to serve your Lord and others in later life as a husband or wife, father or mother, or neighbor to those in need.

We older Christians are attacked by the Philistines too! We try to serve our Lord in our marriages and as parents by serving the needs of our spouse and family before our own. But the devil is always troubling and discouraging our attempts with petty family

arguments, self-centeredness, self-righteousness, anxiety over money, and more.

We have peace in Christ and the hope of heaven, but Satan assaults us with the fear of growing old, suffering pain and death. He tries to make all our failures and guilt seem stronger than faith and divine grace, so that we become discouraged. He wants us to worry that we may be overcome by our circumstances and lose the battle of faith.

But if the devil can do so much to assault those who serve the LORD only, then we may as well give up and declare him to be the lord and master of our souls! But NO! For although ***we should expect more trouble from our spiritual enemies, we should also expect***

II.

greater help through our best Friend!

It is true that the more Israel worshiped and followed her Lord, the more fiercely she was attacked by her enemies. But Israel was well prepared. How Israel could have been so well prepared. We read in v. 7 that when the children of Israel hear the Philistines were coming upon them, ***“they were afraid.”***

Have you ever been afraid of Satan’s attacks because of the temptations that press upon you from every side? If you know Satan’s power, the weakness of your own sinful flesh, and the consequences of sin, then you have also been afraid of Satan’s attacks. But this is the blessed fear of the humble child of God, who feels helpless to save himself! This is that godly fear which looks, not to its own strength, but to the strength of the LORD, even as Israel did. ***“So,”*** the children 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.”*** (v. 8)

Then Samuel took a young lamb and offered to the LORD, and ***“cried out to the LORD and the LORD answered him.”*** Samuel responded to the cries of the children of Israel. This is what Israel expected from Samuel as the one whom God had appointed to intercede for them. He was not their High Priest. Neither was his sacrifice prescribed by the Law. Yet God accepted both his prayer and his sacrifice on behalf of the people!

What then should you expect from Jesus Christ, your best Friend? Christ came into the world: ***“to save sinners.”*** (1 Tim. 1:15) He was sent by God the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit to be our High Priest – to offer Himself as the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, and to daily bring the prayers of God’s children to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:14-16). By raising Him from the dead, the God of heaven has declared His Son to be our Savior from ALL OUR ENEMIES AND EVERY EVIL!

In the days when the American West was being settled, safety was only at the fort with the cavalry. The pioneers could only expect the army’s protection against Indians and thieves if they could get as far as the fort. But our Lord Christ has not told us to expect His salvation ONLY when we are close to heaven at our last hour.

Instead, He has taught us to pray: ***“But deliver us from evil.”*** What does this mean? ***“We pray in this petition, as the sum of all, that our Father in heaven would deliver us from***

every evil of body and soul, of property and honor, and finally, when our last hour shall come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.” And Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees!

The Lord answered Samuel’s sacrifice and prayer by **“thundering with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel.”** What should YOU expect whenever you cry to God with faith in your Savior’s sacrifice for you? You should expect the *“thunderings of your Lord upon your enemies!* For all the powers of hell cannot stand against the soul that is built on Christ! With great expectations you should pray as King David did when he was captured by the Philistines: **“LORD, you number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book? When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; This I know, because God is for me.”** (Ps. 56:8-9)

So Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and named it, **“Ebenezer,”** which means **“stone of help.”** And he said, **“Thus far the LORD has helped us.”** The Lord Jesus Christ, our best Friend, has also established a reminder of His saving help to this very day. That memorial is His Holy Supper, which brings us the **“Stone of help”** -- even his own body and blood. **“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”** -- I Corinthians 11:26.

Since you are true Christians, the Philistines will come upon *you, especially!* But as often as you cry out to your God through Jesus, He will bring your enemies to confusion so that you may have victory after victory and He may be glorified forever! Amen.