



23 May 2025

## My Ebenezer

A standard hymn, a favorite of many, is *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. The hymn has been around for a long time, being written by English Baptist pastor Robert Robertson in 1757. That was a long time ago!

For perspective, the next year, 1758, here in Canada the British captured Louisbourg, a major French stronghold. In 1759 they defeated the French at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, which in effect brought French control in North America to an end. That was followed by France ceding most of its possessions in North America to the British, formalized in the 1763 Treaty of Paris. Yes, that was a long time ago. Apart from history books and buffs, most people don't talk about that very much.

But the hymn is widely and frequently sung today, 268 years later (#98 in our hymnal). The second verse opens, "Here I raise mine Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I've come." That may not be clear to all of us. What is *Ebenezer*?

This word appears only three times in the Old Testament, each referring to the name of a place. It comes from two words, *stone*, and *to help* or *support*. This word *stone* was the regular Hebrew word for stone with a broad range of uses. The verb *to help* was sometimes used in the Old Testament for military support, and also of God's help to His people. It was combined with the name of God to give us *Azarel*, or *God has helped*, which was a name given to some men in the Old Testament.

The significance of the word is seen in 1 Samuel chapter 7. Israel had been dominated by the Philistines because they had wandered away from God. The people now mourned their situation and came to Samuel who told them they must serve only God. He said,

"If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you, and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will save you from the hand of the Philistines."

The record then tells us, "So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and served the LORD alone" (4).



After this the Philistines gathered to go to war against Israel. The people asked Samuel to keep praying for them. When the battle was engaged, God sent a great thunder against the Philistines which confused them. God gave Israel a great victory. He *came to their aid*.

After the victory we read, “Samuel took a stone and placed it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘So far the LORD has helped us’” (12). The stone was to be a memorial stone, an ongoing reminder that God helped them, God gave them the victory. A memorial not just for a few days, weeks or years, but for generations.

The third verse of the hymn sings, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.” Pastor Robertson realized what Israel demonstrated — when we turn back to God after experiencing His great help, our old nature can still lead us to again wander away from God. So Pastor Robertson closed the hymn with a commitment,

“Here’s my heart, Lord, take and seal it; seal it for Thy courts above.”

Samuel raised *the Ebenezer stone* to mark and remind the people of not only God’s great deliverance, but also the importance of staying true to Him, not wandering away.

It is good to raise an Ebenezer to the victories and blessings God has given us. The foundation stone is looking back at, remembering that God saved us by His grace when we placed our faith in Christ. Then, as we continue with God, it is helpful to put up markers for ourselves of God’s provisions, blessings and victories. God can use them to encourage us to continue faithfully following Him, and also to warn and keep us from wandering.

This time in 1 Samuel was not the only time Israel set up memorial markers to remind them that God had helped them. When Joshua led the people across the flood stage Jordan River on dry ground by God’s direct, miraculous work, after they crossed he had them set up memorial stones, telling them,

“This shall be a sign among you; when your children ask later, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ then you shall say to them, ‘That the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’ So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever” (Joshua 4:6-7; context: chapters 3 and 4).

We are almost at the end of the first five months of 2025. How has God helped you in these months? As you review the months, take note of, record some Ebenezer markers which God can use to encourage you in the days, weeks and, yes, years ahead.

Pastor Lyle