

You Raised Your What?

What or who comes to your mind when you hear the word “Ebenezer”? In all likelihood, it is the miser created by Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*—Ebenezer Scrooge. Now a second question is, how long has it been since you talked about Ebenezer? You may not be aware of this, but this past Sunday you may have sung this very word! It is in the second verse of “O Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” Where we sing, “Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by Thou help I’ve come.” You told God that you had raised your Ebenezer. What on earth did you raise? What is an Ebenezer?

Before answering that question, let’s take a moment to consider what singing it is all about. If I do not understand the meaning of the words I am singing, I am “singing in an unknown tongue.” Paul said that he would not sing in a language which he did not understand. “I will sing with the spirit and the understanding” (1 Cor. 14:15). Yet, we often do. What is that Ebon Pinion that brooded o’er the vale? What is a vale? We sing about the Rose of Sharon—who or what is Sharon? What do we mean when we sing about “my pillow a stone” in “Nearer, My God, to Thee”? We really need to pay greater attention to the words as we sing.

What is my Ebenezer? The word certainly predates Dickens’ Ebenezer, which was published in 1843. It is a Hebrew word which literally means “stone of help” and was a geographical location in Palestine. That place was where the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and killed the two sons of Eli. The magnitude of the loss of this holy vessel is highlighted as we read that when Eli heard of this loss he fell over backwards, broke his neck and died.

Twenty years later, Samuel called all Israel to an assembly at that location in Israel. The Philistine army (who had returned the Ark to the Jews) assembled to attack the Jews. When the Jews repented and turned to God, Samuel took a stone and set it up as a memorial of their repentance and deliverance from their enemy. He called that stone “Ebenezer” and said, “Thus far the Lord has helped us” (1 Sam. 7:12).

The significance of the words “thus far” must not be overlooked. They look backwards to see the past where God helped the Jews, and by implication show the confident assurance that He would help them regardless of what adversity they faced. The Jews saw providence in that stone.

Thus, when we sing about our Ebenezer, we call upon the Fount of Every Blessing and verbalize what Samuel verbalized—my God has helped and will help me! It is an affirmation of praise to our Helper and our faith in Him. Never forget to raise your Ebenezer!

Dan Jenkins, Palm Beach Lakes Church of Christ