

## Ebenezer Who?

The beloved hymn “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” contains the line, “Here I raise my Ebenezer.” If you wonder who or what an Ebenezer is, read on.

Ebenezer is Hebrew for “the stone of help.” In 1 Samuel 4: 1-11 we read that the Philistines defeated the Israelites in battle (circa 1050 BCE), and in that battle they captured the Ark of the Covenant. The old priest Eli’s sons were killed in the battle, and he died of grief when he heard the news. In chapter 6 of 1 Samuel we learn that the Philistines returned the ark, as they blamed it for having brought a plague upon them. Some twenty years later, during Samuel’s reign as high priest, the Philistines attacked again. This time the Israelites defeated the Philistines, and after the battle Samuel took a stone and set it up (1 Samuel 7:7-13). He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far has the Lord helped us.”

Ebenezer and its diminutive Eben have been used as men’s names ever since. Perhaps Charles Dickens gave the old miser in A Christmas Carol the name to show that Mr. Scrooge received a great deal of help to change his life around!

Source: The Oxford History of the Biblical World, Oxford University Press, 1998.

The Student Bible, NRSV.

