

The Story

Chapter 10 – Standing Tall, Falling Hard

1 Samuel 1-4, 8-13, 15

Major Events:

- Hannah, who is barren, prays to God for a son promising to dedicate him to God.
- Samuel is born to Hannah who gives him to the Temple priest, Eli, to raise.
- Samuel hears God’s voice calling him to prophesy to Eli – the beginning of Samuel’s prophetic career
- Israelites demand a king and Samuel anoints Saul at God’s request
- Israelites continue to struggle with worshipping other gods thereby incurring Yahweh’s anger
- Saul disobeys God twice in the course of battles and gets fired as king.

Major Themes and Questions to Consider:

- Israel is transitioning its form of leadership: from judges to prophets and kings
- Prophets like Samuel will now serve as check and balance to the power of kings
 - Why do you think God gives them a king even after having Samuel warn them of the perils of being subject to a king?
- The call of Samuel: God speaks to people more and more through dreams and auditory experiences rather than face to face or miraculous encounters
 - Can you think of a time when God has called you to do something?
- Saul’s selection demonstrates once again God’s preference for choosing the lowliest among us to be leaders when we least expect it (Saul is from the smallest tribe, the Benjaminites, and is found wandering in search of his lost goats when God identifies him to Saul to be king)
 - How do you interpret this theme in the Bible?
- Saul’s sins involve disobeying the Lord’s instruction and ultimately result in his dismissal as king
 - What were the two instances of this? What do you think of them? Was Saul simply being a pragmatic leader or an impulsive king?
- The Israelites are still learning what it means to be the people of this one God, Yahweh.
 - How are they doing; are they learning? What is the relationship like at this point?

Details to be aware of:

- Authorship of 1 Samuel is contested. There were likely two authors whose texts were combined by a so-called Deuteronomistic editor. Moreover, there does not exist a good Hebrew scroll for 1 Samuel so the Bible and scholars must rely on later Greek translations of this text (known as the Septuagint) to derive the current English reading. How much is lost in translation?
- This history was likely compiled several hundred years later during the time of Israel’s exile from the Promised Land under the Babylonian captivity. Naturally, these authors would have been suspicious of the monarchy that had resulted in their current exile. Where do you notice a prejudice against kingship in these stories?
- Poetic note: On page 131 we have what is known as “Hannah’s song.” This is an ancient poem probably pre-dating this text and inserted here. It bears a great deal of resemblance to the Magnificat, Mary’s song in the Gospel of Luke...another barren woman who is found to be with child by the power of God. Note how different texts of the Bible echo one another and connect these very distant stories of people of faith. As Mary’s story echoes Hannah’s, how might your story, for example, echo and connect you with Mary’s or Samuel’s or any other character in the Bible?

What do these chapters tell us about God? About humanity? About the relationship between God and humanity?