

April 2-8

## **Week 14**

This week we will move into Act 2, scene 5 in the biblical story, focusing on kings and prophets. The beginning of 1 Samuel continues the story of ungodliness and chaos we saw in Judges, now epitomized by Eli's sons, who were rogue priests. Yet God was about to do a new thing by raising up Samuel as a leader. Notice the emphasis on "all Israel," first mentioned in 1 Samuel 3:20, as a contrast to the fragmentation we saw in Judges. The solid foundation laid by Samuel and the anointing of Saul and then David as the first two kings of Israel advance the story from chaos to the time of Israel's greatest ruler. We will also read one of the most loved and recognized of all stories in the Bible, David and Goliath, and one of the most tragic, as Saul's leadership crumbled under the weight of his shallowness and disobedience. These stories give us the characteristics of a great king, personified by David. Eventually, Jesus would come as one of David's descendants to rule over a new kind of kingdom.

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## **Scene 5**

### **Kings and Prophets: God shapes a Kingdom People**

What could be better than God's covenant people following God's laws while living in their own land? Though a kingly dynasty was not God's original intent for Israel – because in asking for a king the people were actually rejecting God as their King – when the people insisted on having a king, God directed in the setting up of that dynasty, and the building of the glorious temple. This scene shows how these things come to be. We follow the ups and downs of the three kings of a united Israel. First is Saul, who wastes his potential and is rejected by God. Second is David, with whom God makes a covenant for an eternal dynasty. Third is Solomon, who builds the glorious Jerusalem temple. Israelite power and influence are at their peak. Israelite literature flourishes with writings such as Psalms and Proverbs.

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**Day 1****Read 1 Samuel 1-3****Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 1**

Today we read the beginning of how God would craft a nation for himself from the chaos of the time when the judges ruled. It started with a barren woman named Hannah. In ancient Israel barrenness was seen as a curse on a married woman since she could not provide children who would help provide for the family and pass on the family name. In Hannah's story and song (see 1 Samuel 2) we see the theme of a powerless person helped by the Lord. From Hannah's anguish and weakness the Lord brought about change in Israel, judging chaotic ungodliness and raising up a godly leader. As you read today, watch for contrasts between Samuel's and Eli's sons. Certain elements also anticipate the coming of Jesus (read 1 Samuel 2:26 in light of Luke 2:52; Hebrews 2:17-18).

*In what areas do you feel barren or weak today?*

*Call on the Lord for help and watch for him to work in your life.*

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## **Day 2**

### **Read 1 Samuel 4-8**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 2**

Today's reading describes a significant time of transition in the history of Israel.

1. In the stories of the capture and return of the ark, notice echoes from the time of the exodus. Israel's God still dwelled among his people and sent plagues on his enemies.
2. You will see the transition from Eli's leadership to Samuel's and from Samuel's leadership to Israel's desire for a king. Watch especially for the people or events that triggered these transitions.

With Samuel moving into leadership and the ark of God (representing God's presence) moving back to the heart of the nation, the chaos of the book of Judges was left behind. Yet in their desire for a king, the people wanted to be like the other nations rather than maintain their distinctiveness.

*In what ways are you tempted to follow the ways of the world instead of living distinctly as a follower of God?*

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**Day 3****Read 1 Samuel 9-12****Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 3**

Today we read about “an impressive young man” (1 Samuel 9:2) who served as Israel’s first king. Notice elements of the story demonstrating that God works with flawed people (a common theme in the Bible); in Saul’s story we see a mix of the Spirit’s anointing and human foolishness.

The context of the story is Israel’s rejection of God as their king, so we anticipate that problems will arise.

Notice passages in which Saul and the people had to wait for Samuel to show up and offer a sacrifice (see 1 Samuel 9:13-14; 10:8). This waiting will play a very important role as Saul’s story develops.

*Spend time today thanking God that he works in and with flawed people—even you!*

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**Day 4**

**Read 1 Samuel 13-16**

**Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 4**

Focus on the introduction of the reign of Saul in 1 Samuel 13:1-2 and the conclusion of chapter 15, just before the introduction of David, who would be Israel's second and greatest king.

The tragedy of Saul lay in large part in his lack of care in following God's commands. He had a general, surface commitment to the God of Israel but did not concern himself with the details of obedience. He was a good-looking, gifted, but shallow man. Watch for elements of the story that point to Saul's character, especially his lack of patience in waiting on the Lord's timing.

As the story shifts to David, notice that the qualification for a king has shifted to an emphasis on heart and character.

*In what areas of life are you most likely to be careless with the Lord's instruction?*

*In what areas are you impatient for the Lord to act?*

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**Day 5****Read 1 Samuel 17-20; Psalm 59****Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 5**

In today's reading David moved from obscurity to fame as the champion of Saul's army. At the same time, Saul moved from respect for David to being threatened by him and finally to violent attacks on him and his supporters.

In the 1 Samuel passage watch for contrasts between David and Saul as God raised up his anointed and prepared him to be king. As God's person, filled with God's Spirit, David accomplished great things for God's people.

Read Psalm 59 in light of Saul's attacks, noticing how this lament moves from a cry for help to hope to confidence in the future.

*If you are being unfairly attacked, use Psalm 59 as a prayer. Ask God for courage and effectiveness in a great or small challenge you face.*

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**Day 6****Read 1 Samuel 21-24; Psalm 91****Act 2 - Scene 5 - Reading 6**

A great contrast between David and Saul was their discernment between right and wrong, good and evil. Both used religious language to speak of the circumstances around them. Yet as the passage from 1 Samuel shows, David's conscience was very sensitive to the Lord and to doing what was right in various situations. Saul, on the other hand, was so spiritually insensitive that he could order the execution of the priests of the Lord.

*On a scale of 1 to 10, how sensitive is your conscience to sin?*

*Are you more like David or Saul in this regard?*

As you read Psalm 91 concerning protection from enemies, think about how we should read such a psalm in light of Scripture as a whole. For example, does Scripture promise that God will always protect his people from sickness or death? It is interesting that Satan used this psalm to tempt Jesus in the wilderness (see Luke 4:9-12), saying, in effect, "God won't let you get hurt, will he?" Evaluate this idea in light of the cross to which Jesus would eventually be nailed.

*Join the psalmist in thanking God for protecting you in many ways and at various times in your life. Trust him to bring great things from your times of suffering.*

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**Day 7**

**Reading Summary for Week 14**

Samuel occupied the biblical stage at a pivotal time. As the last of the line of judges, he helped Israel hold together religiously. As the one who anointed both Saul and David, Samuel looked ahead to the time of the kings. Saul's reign began well but before long became a bitter disappointment. Although David was chosen by God, that did not spare him from many hardships and brushes with death. Struggles to survive Saul's jealousy took him through many adventures as a renegade.

**Prayer/Meditation**

O Lord, I praise you for the wonderful examples I've read about this week, like Hannah who dedicated her child to you, and David who followed you at great cost. Thank you too for the examples to avoid, like Saul who willfully disobeyed God's word. Above all, thank you for continuing to develop your great plan to shape the destiny of your people, even as you worked through the likes of Samuel and Saul and David. Amen.

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