

The Story – Chapter 10 – Standing Tall, Falling Hard

Introduction

This week we look at the first half of the First Samuel, as the Israelites are led by their last judge and then their first king. The nation gets the king it wants, but as we all know, getting what you want doesn't necessarily mean that things will go smoothly. If you don't have The Story book, you can read Chapters 1-4, 8-13 and 15 of First Samuel.

Chapter 10 – Standing Tall, Falling Hard

Even as Israel's disobedience increased and “everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25) at the end of the book of Judges, some people remembered God and his promises. One was a woman named Hannah, who had long endured the grief of childlessness and prayed to the Lord for a son, vowing that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate her son to the LORD. God did give Hannah a son and she kept her word. She named the boy Samuel and took him to serve in the tabernacle under the High Priest, Eli.

God spoke to Samuel one night and told him that Eli and his sons would be judged and his priestly line would soon end. And as it always does, God's word came true – this time in a battle with the Philistine army in which the ark of covenant was captured, Eli's sons were killed, and the Israelite army defeated. Eli had grown old and blind, and the devastating news of Israel's defeat, the death of his sons and the loss of the ark left Eli dead on the spot.

Samuel took Eli's place, but Israel was dissatisfied and asked for a king. Samuel expressed his opposition, but Israel knew only that they wanted to be like their pagan neighbors (the very people they were not to emulate). God warned that their demand for a king would be costly, but the people insisted on having an earthly king to fight their battles. Saul was anointed by Samuel and began well. He was affirmed by miraculous signs from God, and gave God credit for military victories, but . . .

Saul's honeymoon as king was short-lived. During another battle with the Philistines, Saul got nervous because Samuel was late. So Saul took matters into his own hands by making an offering himself and violating the role God had reserved for the priests. Samuel confronted Saul; Saul backpedaled, made excuses, and tried to justify his sin, but wound up losing a dynasty. Saul's path of half-hearted obedience and fear-based leadership grew worse over the years.

By the end of Chapter 10, God has rejected Saul as king. Saul's reign was Israel's opportunity to see that monarchy is no better than anarchy when a man after God's own heart is not on the throne. God had already chosen such a man, an unlikely shepherd boy who would one day become Saul's successor. His throne would endure and would point God's people again to the Shepherd King who was yet to come.

Discussion Questions

As you read, remember there are discussion questions for each chapter beginning on page 473 of the book and also questions that can be found on The Story bookmark (which is also on our website). Also, feel free to consider some of the questions below:

1. Hannah wanted a child so badly she promised God that she would give the child over to him. And when God gave her a child, she kept her promise, bringing Samuel to live with Eli when he was about three. Have you ever been in a situation where you made a bargain with God? What happened?
2. How did Eli help Samuel know when he was hearing the voice of God? How can you tell when God is speaking to you? Who has helped you to be more faithful in listening to God? How did they help?
3. Samuel was probably just a boy when God called him to be a prophet to Eli and all of Israel. He was required to speak the truth in love to his mentor and friend. Have you ever had to speak truth in love to a friend? What did you do and how did God show up in that situation?
4. If you had been on the call committee for the first king of Israel, what characteristics would you be looking for in a "perfect" candidate? What were Saul's actual qualifications? What are the characteristics that you would look for in a good leader today?
5. One of Saul's primary issues was constantly taking matters into his own hands and ignoring God's word. If you had a friend like Saul, what advice would you give him?.
6. Why do you think it was hard for Saul to admit to Samuel when he had disobeyed? (p. 142-143) Rate yourself from 1-10 on your ability to own up to your mistakes. What in your life is keeping you from admitting your mistakes and asking for forgiveness?
7. What questions came up for you while you were reading this chapter?