

Tuesday, March 31, 2020—1 Samuel 17-20

The cinematic world is filled with superhero movies and franchises. There is something about the human spirit that marvels at one who is like us yet is able to do remarkable things. Goliath was likely viewed this way.

The Philistines presented him as their champion, and he dared any of the Israelites to take him on (17:10). When David heard Goliath's taunts, he could not believe someone had not already engaged him for his brash defiance of Yahweh (17:26). The men of the army were more concerned with the size of their enemy than the size of their God.

Saul tried to have David wear his armor to fight Goliath, but it was too big. David trusted in the skills God had already given him, so he collected five smooth stones (17:40), declared his intentions in the name of Yahweh (17:45), and ran toward Goliath (17:48). David fought unconventionally in great faith and spurred the army to victory.

David's obedience did not please everyone. His brothers doubted him. Saul was jealous of him and feared him, so he tried to kill David and plotted ways for others to do so. Throughout the challenges, God was with David, working to protect him and bring him success. God was gracious to give him a good counselor like Samuel and a dear friend like Jonathan to provide encouragement and wisdom in difficulty.

Jesus came in a most unconventional way for a king. He was doubted and despised, and He defeated the greatest enemy in the universe by dying and coming back to life. Praise Jesus today for victory in Him alone!

Monday, March 30, 2020—1 Samuel 14-16

God's people will find themselves in difficult situations. He does not remove them, but He can insulate them so they can face the challenge but not be harmed by it. Jonathan was part of the army assembling for his father, King Saul, and he decided to scout out the enemy. He said, "Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few" (14:6).

God used Jonathan's faith and skill to strike fear into the Philistine army. Saul's poor decision-making led his son to break an oath he knew nothing about and tempted his hungry soldiers to sin against God Himself. Prayer for wisdom and open communication led to repentance and peace.

As king, Saul led the people to victory, but he was continually compromising on Yahweh's commands. He was to destroy totally the Amalekites, but he kept the best of their possessions (15:9). He blamed his soldiers when confronted by Samuel, and Samuel told him God was more pleased by obedient hearts than abundant sacrifices (15:22). Saul was rebellious, and God would not allow this to continue.

God grieved over His choice of Saul (15:35), and He sent Samuel to anoint one whose heart was right before God. David did not have the appearance of Saul, but he had God's approval (16:7). He was useful to Saul in his self-inflicted discomfort, and God was preparing him to lead Israel.

Praise God today for being wise, powerful, and caring. Pray for a life more concerned with inward righteousness than outward action.

Sunday, March 29, 2020—1 Samuel 11-13

God uses His people to bring glory to Him and blessing to others. Without Him, His people can do nothing. He is the source of all things.

Though Saul had been anointed king, he was still working the fields. When he heard of a threat to his people, the Spirit of God came upon him and stirred him with anger and power (11:6). He became someone he had never been before and led the people to victory.

Like the judges before, Saul delivered the people. Unlike the judges, Saul was a leader for the entire nation. Some doubted this, yet Saul was gracious toward them, and the nation celebrated. With Saul in place, Samuel knew his time of leadership had come to a close. He reminded the people of his faithfulness to them and then recounted the greater faithfulness of Yahweh to His people despite their unfaithfulness to Him (12:1-11).

Their calling under their king was the same calling God always had for them—fear Yahweh, serve and obey Him (12:14-15). Regardless of who has the earthly leadership, God expects the hearts of His people to be wholly His. A king was no substitute for God Himself.

Saul demonstrated his spiritual weakness when preparing for battle against the Philistines. He was to wait on Samuel but grew impatient and offered sacrifices only Samuel was to offer. His heart was not satisfied with God and trusting in Him, so Samuel said God would replace him as king.

Praise God for being the source of life. Pray for a heart wholly devoted to Him.
Saturday, March 28, 2020—1 Samuel 8-10

God puts leaders in place in order to equip His people for worship and service. The goal for those leaders is not to do all the work but to equip everyone to do his or her part. In equipping, the leader lays the groundwork for the next generation of leadership. The enemy knows that if he can corrupt the leaders-in-training, he can handicap the entire organization.

Samuel had learned from Eli, whose sons were corrupt and not able to lead after Eli. Samuel's son as well turned aside toward dishonest gain and perverted justice (8:3). The people of Israel demanded that Samuel appoint a king over them who could lead instead of his sons. Samuel was troubled because he did not want to do this, but God urged him to move forward. The people were actually rebelling against God's leadership, not Samuel's, and God had already prepared for this (see Deuteronomy 17:14f).

Samuel warned the people of the harsh reality under a king, but the people insisted, wanting to be like the other nations around them. They were willing to give up freedom under Yahweh in order to be like the pagans who surrounded them. Appearance undermined obedience.

As Samuel was reluctant to appoint a king, Saul was reluctant to become king. He had the outward appearance, but he lacked the heart (9:21, 10:21). Samuel made it clear to Saul that God had chosen him, and God showed the people that He had indeed picked this man.

Thank God for being the true King. Repent of trust in any other.

Friday, March 27, 2020—1 Samuel 4-7

God gives good things to use in life—people, possessions, pleasures, and more. Those good things lead us to praise Him as provider, protector, and master. Human nature makes good things ultimate things—turning created things into gods themselves. We no longer “need” God because we worship the things He gives.

Israel faced a terrifying enemy in the Philistines, so they brought the Ark of the Covenant from the Tabernacle. They were using the Ark as a good-luck charm, expecting the Ark to deliver them. In addition, the corrupt leaders, Hophni and Phineas, led the way.

This did not go well. The Philistines were terrified, yet they won the battle, and they captured the Ark. They quickly regretted their victory as God’s hand was heavy on them, and they suffered spiritual and physical difficulties while they possessed the Ark. They decided to return the Ark with a guilt offering to Yahweh himself! Israel rejoiced at its return, but some were not awed by its holy status and treated it as an object to be examined. The Ark was not an idol, but the Ark was holy.

About 20 years later, Samuel called the people to repentance. They had allowed foreign gods to creep in to their lives. When the Philistines attacked again, Israel had learned the lesson. They cried out to God rather than trusting in the Ark, and God helped them.

Repent of idols you trust and worship more than God. Praise God for created things He gives that lead to worship the Creator.

Thursday, March 26, 2020—1 Samuel 1-3

Because we are uncomfortable does not mean God is not at work. Hannah desperately wanted a son, but God had closed her womb (1:6). She prayed, but no baby came. Her husband’s other wife continually provoked her because being barren was shameful. Her husband tried to comfort her but proved he didn’t understand. Still, God was sovereign and good.

Eli, the priest, did not understand the depth of her grief and anguish, but once he did, he spoke a blessing over her (1:17). In the right time, Hannah conceived and named her son Samuel, which means “God hears.” She celebrated that God granted what she asked of Him.

Most would see Hannah’s next action as completely insane. When Samuel was weaned, she took him to Eli, dedicated him to Yahweh, and gave him as his servant. She prayed a powerful prayer of praise and deliverance (2:1-11). Her shame and weakness were gone.

While Eli’s sons were corrupt, Samuel was growing in usefulness to God and in benefit to others. Eli’s sons did what was right in their own eyes, bringing the curse of God on their family, but Samuel learned to hear the very voice of God. Few were able to hear such rich words, but Samuel said, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (3:10). Samuel faithfully shared the messages God gave to him, and the nation soon recognized that God had raised up a prophet for the people (3:20).

From the prayers of a humble woman came a powerful leader for God’s people. Praise God for answered prayers in His timing.

Wednesday, March 25, 2020—Ruth 1-4

When the judges ruled, the nation suffered spiritually. The people would sin, God would allow foreigners to oppress them, they would repent, and God would deliver them. Throughout the Promised Land, this pattern repeated itself. All the news was not bad, however. The story of Ruth is a bright light from those dark days, but its beginnings were bleak.

Elimelech and Naomi fled a famine with their two sons and went to Moab. There Elimelech died, the boys married local women, and the boys died as well. Knowing the famine had ended, Naomi prepared to return home but urged her daughters-in-law to stay. Ruth would not comply. She insisted on making Naomi's God and people her own (1:16).

They returned—two widows with absolutely nothing. Boaz, a relative of Naomi's, showed mercy to them by allowing Ruth to work for him and ensuring protection for her. Then, Naomi played the role of matchmaker so that Ruth could have a secure future. Boaz recognized the need and took the necessary steps to make Ruth his wife. He was willing to take on this responsibility (4:9) and honored she had chosen him (3:10).

God did remarkable things in this story. He transformed Naomi's bitterness into praise. He transformed a widow into a wife and mother. He wove the family line of Jesus, by way of David, through a foreign woman who willingly chose to make Yahweh her God. He illustrated the service and sacrifice of Jesus through Boaz. Thank God for his transforming power. Praise Him for His grace and mercy to those in need.