



Standing Tall, Falling Hard

1 Samuel 1-15

RECAP

Blessing. This was meant to be the distinguishing mark of the people of God. God's covenant with Israel required obedience and promised ultimate blessing. Yet, the period of the judges is anything but a time of obedience and blessing in Israel. More fitting descriptions are Barrenness, Blindness, Battles, and Bereavement. Blessing was hard to come by in those days. God's people had abandoned God Himself and "everyone did as they saw fit." (Judges 21:25) Few remembered God's commands. Even fewer obeyed.

This week's focus: Obedience matters.

But God always has a few who followed and obeyed. One was a woman named Hannah. She had long endured the grief of childlessness and poured out her heart first in desperate prayer vowing that she would dedicate her child to the Lord.

God did give Hannah a son. She named the boy Samuel and took him to serve in the tabernacle under the High Priest, Eli. Eli's sons were disobedient and rebellious. Their own absence of obedience went unnoticed. God then told Samuel 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. Israel lost the ark in a battle against the Philistines. 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 of covenant left Eli dead on the spot.

Samuel took Eli's place, but Israel was dissatisfied and asked for a king. The nation rejected God as their king and wanted to be like their pagan neighbors. God warned that their demand for a king would be costly and that he would exploit them to the point of slavery. 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. He fought the Ammonites and gave God credit for their victory.

Saul's honeymoon as king was short-lived. During a battle against the Philistines, Saul took his authority too far and took matters—and offerings—into his own hands, violating the role God had reserved for the priests. Samuel confronted Saul; he 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 longer by the year and more twisted with every step.

God 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.



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SHARE (5-10 min)

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when you had to admit you were wrong. Was this easy or hard?

STUDY (about 30 min) Read ruth 1-4

1. Reflect on last week's reading and the sermon. Is there any truth that stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?
2. What can we learn about a mother's love from Hannah's story? What does the remark in 1 Samuel 2:19 tell us about Hannah's love for Samuel?
3. Samuel was probably about 12 years old 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 been in this position?
4. Samuel is hurt when he sees that the Israelites want a king like other nations, instead of recognizing God as their king. Do you ever struggle with a desire to be like the culture around you, instead of letting God rule your life?
5. You are on the search committee for the first king of Israel. What would you look for in your applicants? What were Saul's actual qualifications?
6. How do you think Samuel would have described the "state of the union" at the end of his time as judge? Where do you see God's grace in his statement after the battle with the Ammonites?
7. Imagine you have a friend like Saul, who keeps taking matters into his own hands and ignoring what God's word teaches him. What advice would you give him/her?
8. Chapter 1 Samuel 1 opens with the beautiful story of Elkanah's love and leadership of his family. Chapter 15 closes with the story of Saul's poor leadership of Israel and his self-love. Compare and contrast the leadership styles of these two men. In what ways is your leadership style like either one? In what areas can you improve?

SUPPORT (15 min)

Break into groups of 3 or 4. Saul shows us that ignoring God's direction is disobedience and disobedience to God always brings consequences upon ourselves and others.

Share: What areas of your life have you been ignoring God's direction? (Time, finances, service, relationships, sexual integrity, etc.)

Pray for one another: Ask God to forgive you for any disobedience that you have identified. Ask Him to give you a desire to walk in obedience with Him.