

### Reading Schedule for October 16-22, 2017

It has been two years of reading less verses per day in the Bible, with a more concentrated effort to apply them to our lives. I have enjoyed the more reflective approach to reading God's Word, but I want to launch into some very significant stories in the Old Testament. For us to retain a train of thought, we should read a chapter a day. These chapters are called narratives in the Bible because they are a record of the lives and events of people affected by God's call and presence. I am confident you will enjoy these readings and they will help you grow spiritually.

**October 16 – 1 Samuel 1:** "I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord there." (vv.27 & 28) We begin our reading in 1 Samuel about Samuel. Israel has been ruled by judges for 200 years. Eli and Samuel are the last of those judges. Samuel's birth is especially significant as Hannah could not have children. But God granted her prayer and she dedicated her son to the Lord. He would serve the Lord in a very significant way. Samuel is much more significant as a prophet than he was a judge. Hannah is a great example of being blessed by God and showing her gratitude by giving back to the Lord. She knew that her son was a gift from God and that he was meant to make an incredible difference for God's people. I am inspired by Hannah. What inspires you about this first chapter in our story about God's people?

**October 17 – 1 Samuel 2:** "This sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt." (v.17) We can understand that Eli was a godly man. But it clearly says that his sons were wicked and had no regard for the Lord. It really is upsetting to read this story because the credibility of a spiritual leader is connected to his leadership in his home. Eli knew that his sons were evil, but he did little to correct or stop them, even when the integrity of God's sanctuary was threatened. This is an upsetting scenario that warns us about the importance of our connection to our children. Hannah has an inspiring song to begin this chapter, but I am affected most deeply by Eli's neglect. What stands out to you?

**October 18 – 1 Samuel 3:** "The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'" (v.10) I love these kind of stories because they remind me that God wants to speak to me. He may not do it in an audible voice, but he desires to reveal himself to me. This event reminds me of a book I read by Bill Hybels entitled, The Power of a Whisper. The Bible makes several references to God whispering to his people, as well as nudging them by the Holy Spirit. This began a very special connection that Samuel had with the Lord. He will be able to lead well because he will be led by God. The best promise in these words is that the Lord was with Samuel as he grew up. I want that for you, for me and for the young people of our church. How do you respond to this inspiring event?

**October 19 – 1 Samuel 4:** "When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years." (v.18) This is a sad message about Eli and his death, as well as the death of his sons. This may sound judgmental, but Eli may have not been a very disciplined man, as he was overweight, and did not confront his sons. Also, the nation of Israel had mostly ignored God during this time of Eli's leadership. The Lord would begin to turn around his people through Samuel, and then eventually David, which is always hopeful. Even when things seem in dire straits in the

society in which we live, the Lord has a plan. However, how do you see the decline of God's people in this chapter? How does Ithobal illustrate that fact? What else do you notice in this chapter that you might apply to your life?

**October 20 – 1 Samuel 5:** "But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained." (v.4) This could have been an opportunity for the Philistines to recognize the God of Israel. God gives people evidence of his presence and power, and yet oftentimes people ignore it, just like the Philistines. The Lord then would bring punishment and avenge their rebellion. Today, many people do not respond to the truth that God is real and powerful. After they experience the kind of pain that the people of Ashdod and Ekron did, they realize that they are fighting against the power of God. This whole chapter is compelling because it reveals to me that God wants to get the attention of pagan people. He cares about the people of this world. I remember witnessing the eclipse and thinking that this was such a marvelous event that people should realize the creator in this event. This would give them pause to consider the God of the whole world and seek him out. The Philistines had the same opportunity and they did not seek God out, but actually pushed him away. What do you notice in this chapter that gets your attention? Why?

**October 21 – 1 Samuel 6:** "But God struck down some of the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they looked into the ark of the Lord. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the Lord had dealt them." (v.19) I'll bet you wonder why people were killed for simply looking into the ark. It might be similar to the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark," when they looked into the ark, trying to harness its power. The motives of those who died were exposed because they wanted to use God's power for their own purposes. God would not allow the people to think they could use his power for their own end. He could not permit them to disregard his warnings or come into his presence lightly. We oftentimes have a small concept of God. This was true even with the Israelites, even though they had seen him work in magnificent ways. You cannot put God in a box, and you will not be blessed by using what he offers selfishly. Does that make sense? I have tried to explain something that is often challenging to read. How has God blessed you in the reading today?

**October 22 – 1 Samuel 7:** "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'" (v.12) Maybe the only reason I picked this verse is because the word, "Ebenezer." We recognize the name Ebenezer from the story "A Christmas Carol," with the infamous Ebenezer Scrooge. But we discover that Ebenezer means "stone of help." From that point on, every time an Israelite saw the stone erected by Samuel, he would have a tangible reminder of the Lord's power and protection. The "stone of help" marked the spot where the enemy had been routed and God's promise to bless Israel's repentant people had been honored. You might also remember singing it in the hymn, "Come Thou Fount." I hope that is encouraging to you and you are able to recognize how God has helped you. I might suggest you write about an "Ebenezer" in your life. How have you enjoyed reading the first seven chapters of this inspiring book about stories of God's people?

**Prayers: Pray for our ministry to the community, as we have our Food Bank, our After School Program, and our Reading Buddies connection to Hallman Elementary begins this week.**