

Reading Schedule for October 23-29, 2017

I have to admit to you that I know aspects of these stories because I've read them before, but I don't often remember the whole flow of each part, so I am excited to read them as well. I will identify an aspect of the story every day that I think is intriguing and worth contemplating for your own personal application. I want you to do the same. If there is an aspect of the story that intrigues you, think about it more so. Ask yourself, "why is God causing this to stir my heart?" I often read the scripture with the idea of listening for the Holy Spirit to stir my heart within. That's when I know God has a reason for me to slow down and hear his voice. I want you to do the same.

October 23 – I Samuel 8: "But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord." (v.6) The request of God's people for a king seems like a small adjustment to me. The judges had been rulers, and the prophet still would play a very important role in the united faith of the people. But there was this subtle shift from dependence upon God to a dependence on a human leader. You can sense that in the words that are used in this chapter. Remember the problems that the people were facing were human in nature. The people were not very united, and the future leadership was very weak, to say the least. Samuel's sons were not fit to lead Israel, for example. The people wanted to be like the neighboring nations. That is exactly what God didn't want. Having a human leader could most likely weaken their faith, rather than strengthen it. What do you think about this topic? How are you tempted to depend upon human leaders rather than on God himself?

October 24 – I Samuel 9: "Saul answered, 'But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?'" (v.21) I am actually attracted to this statement. I know something about Saul's journey, and he did not continue in a spirit of humility. We learn in Numbers 12 that Moses was the most humble man on the earth. We learn that Jesus was humble, even as the Son of God. Saul's reluctance could be humility, or an unhealthy focus on himself. It is probably the latter, because he then becomes enamored with himself. Although Saul was chosen by God, it seems that he struggled with jealousy, insecurity, arrogance, impulsiveness and even deceit. A deep relationship with God never was firmly rooted in Saul's life. How do you respond to this chapter?

October 25 – I Samuel 10: "So they inquired further of the Lord, 'Has the man come here yet?' And the Lord said, 'Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies.'" (v.22) I remember this verse from previous readings. It stuck in my mind. The Israelites assembled to choose a king, which had already been identified as Saul. Instead of coming forward, he hid among the baggage. This is another reflection of what could be humility, but may be just the fear of man. He even looked the part. But he did not follow through with the depth of integrity needed. It is interesting that this choice of God's could have very well been to show that the most impressive person among the Israelites would not be adequate enough to perform as a righteous king. I was wondering why God had chosen Saul, and I think this might be the main reason. Man is a very poor substitute for what God can do as the leader and caring shepherd we all need. Why do you think God chose Saul? What do you learn from this chapter?

October 26 – I Samuel 11: "When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger." (v.6) As I was reading through this, I really liked what the Life Application Bible wrote regarding Saul's response of anger:

"Anger is a powerful emotion. Often it may drive people to hurt others with words or physical violence. But anger directed at sin and the mistreatment of others is not wrong. Saul was angered by the Ammonites' threat to humiliate and mistreat his fellow Israelites. The Holy Spirit used Saul's anger to bring justice and freedom. When injustice or sin makes you angry, ask God how you can channel that anger in constructive ways to help bring about a positive change." I think that is a very powerful exhortation for us in light of our study on Saul. Are there aspects of Saul's life that we can apply to our lives? This might be one.

October 27 – I Samuel 12: "The people all said to Samuel, 'Pray to the Lord your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.'" (v.19) This might be a sign of genuine repentance. The people were sorry that they had disobeyed the Lord by asking for a king. It is amazing that God would be gracious when he was especially disappointed in the selfishness of his people. He definitely punishes, but he also gives his people a second chance. There is much in this chapter to contemplate. I know that Samuel will still play a key role in the life of God's people; even in David's life. The idea of him giving a farewell speech is a little confusing to me. It probably means that Samuel is relinquishing some of his authority to Saul – and that would be the beginning of the end, as we will read in the days ahead. How do you respond to this chapter?

October 28 – I Samuel 13: "But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command." (v.14) We read a famous statement that is used again in the Book of Acts about David. It never says these words directly about David when he was serving as king. But we all know that David is a man after God's own heart. This is a reference to what the Lord was about to do, even though he had been disappointed in the people for their desire to want a king. He would choose a king who would have the right heart. This would turn into being a high point for God's people. God would be please to have the people follow David, because he would always point them to their primary allegiance, which would always be to depend upon God. David wrote many Psalms that indicate his heart for God. We learn from Saul that God never delights in our excuses. If we try to hide our sins, he is completely aware of our dishonesty. Don't be like Saul, who had a deceptive heart and harbored secrets. God knew every one of them. How do you respond to Saul's dishonesty?

October 29 – I Samuel 14: "One day Jonathan son of Saul said to his young armor-bearer, 'Come, let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side.' But he did not tell his father." (v.1) I just used this verse to launch us into a chapter about Jonathan. We will meet a very courageous and genuine leader. You can sense his dependence on God and the quality of his life as we are introduced to him. This story is so fascinating to me. It is just Jonathan and his armor-bearer, making quite a ruckus, as Israel routes the Philistines. What can you learn from Jonathan? Are you facing a difficult situation and you feel overwhelmed by it? What steps can you take to move towards a solution? A few small steps may be just what is needed to begin the chain of events leading to a great outcome. Jonathan's courage encourages me. How about you?

Prayers: Pray for our strength to stand firm in the midst of spiritual attacks. As we approach Halloween, it seems to me that the devil's activity is increased. Put on the full armor of God, even as you pray.