

Standing Tall, Falling Hard

The Story: part 10

November 13, 2016

The key this week is “distortion.” Webster defines distortion as follows: **“To twist something out of its original shape.”** We’ll watch five episodes of people distorting.

Unfortunately, we naturally assume God’s agenda revolves around our agenda. It takes decades to realize God is not our butler, but that we are His servant and child. It takes even longer to enjoy that plan!

The Larger Story is His Story. When we begin to understand that we are bit players in His Story, our lower story takes on added significance! If, instead we live for our lower story, we’ll make a mess of things.

DAY 1: Peninnah vs. Hannah: Relational Distortion

1. The book of 1 Samuel opens with Elkannah and his two wives. Peninnah (Wife #1) had children, but Hannah (Wife #2) had none. Notice how wife #1 treated wife #2.

1 Samuel 1:6 And because the LORD had closed her (Hannah) womb, her rival (Peninnah) kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷ This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.

2. How does Samuel describe Peninnah’s actions toward Hannah?

3. Why, besides being mean, would someone act like that? What reasons can you think of would drive the one with children to spitefully needle the other wife?

4. This kind of pain is awful. Why does God allow such things to continue? Perhaps there is a Larger Story in play!

1 Samuel 1:10 In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. ¹¹ And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

5. How does Hannah respond to Elkannah’s behavior?

6. How do you typically respond to the kind of behavior Peninnah dished out?

DAY 2: Religious and Leadership Distortions

1. Eli, the priest had two sons, Hophni and Phineas who worked as priests.

1 Samuel 2:12 Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD.

1 Samuel 2:13 Now it was the practice of the priests with the people that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice and while the meat was being boiled, the servant of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand.

¹⁴ He would plunge it into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot, and the priest would take for himself whatever the fork brought up. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh.

¹⁵ But even before the fat was burned, the servant of the priest would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."

¹⁶ If the man said to him, "Let the fat be burned up first, and then take whatever you want," the servant would then answer, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force."

¹⁷ This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD's sight, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt.

2. When anyone offered sacrifice, a peace-offering, the right shoulder and the breast of the animal belonged to the priest, the fat was burnt upon the altar, and the blood was poured at the bottom of the altar; the rest of the flesh belonged to the offerer. Under false pretenses, these two sons took the best of all they chose, and as much as they chose.

3. The effect was to minimize, and worse, trivialize the sacrifice for sin, and the worship of God. Over time, the nation fell back into worse sin.

4. There was more distortion!

1 Samuel 2:22 Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

23 So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours.

24 No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD's people.

25 If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death.

5. The sons were given fair and direct warning about their sexual sin. What was their response?

6. It's possible for Christians to distort the gospel by how they live? What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: The Distortion of Conformity.

1. Samuel's sons were leading Israel poorly. Though God was their King, the people demanded a human king!

1 Samuel 8:5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." ⁶ But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.

⁷ And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do."

2. We rarely think that when we reject legitimate authority in our life, we may be also rejecting God!

¹⁰ Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. ¹² Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. ¹⁶ Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. ¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day."

3. How does this list of warnings about a human king strike you? If you heard this list of warnings, how would you have responded?

1 Samuel 8:19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

4. What was driving this wicked and foolish request?

1 Samuel 8:21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. ²² The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king."

5. "Be careful what you ask for!" Can you relate to asking for something you believe you "have to have?"

6. God used the wickedness of the people for His Larger Story—a King would come!

DAY 4: The Distortion of Misrepresentation, Presumption, and Rebellion

1. The Philistines are about to attack Israel. King Saul has his army. They are waiting for the priest, Samuel to return, so that offerings can be made to the Lord. Samuel had communicated that he would be gone seven days.

2. The threat of the Philistines, and the absence of Samuel caused some of the army to begin to disperse. King Saul panicked!

1 Samuel 13:7 Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear.

⁸ He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter.

3. What should King Saul do? If we waited longer for Samuel, he might lose the army. If he didn't make the sacrificial offerings and begin the battle he thought he could lose the army. He reasoned that he *should* make the sacrificial offerings.

⁹ So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering.

¹⁰ Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.

¹¹ "What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, ¹² I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

4. What excuses did King Saul give for acting as the priest?

5. King Saul's decision to act as a priest was in direct disobedience to God's command. The consequences would be disastrous.

¹³ "You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

6. Saul tried to cover up his rebellion with presumption and "pragmatism."

7. Can you think of a time you have done something similar? In retrospect, what do you wish you had done instead?

DAY 5: The Distortion of Disobedience

1. Hundreds of years earlier, God had offered the opportunity to repent to the Amalekites. They never responded. Their nation degenerated into greater and greater depravity. Unless they were wiped out, they would eventually destroy Israel.

2. God commands King Saul to exterminate that wicked nation. NOTHING was to remain: not any human, and not any animal. It was to be a message to Israel and all the surrounding nations that wickedness would not be tolerated and would be fully judged.

3. Israel soundly defeated the Amalekites.

1 Samuel 15:8 He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. ⁹ But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs--everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

¹⁰ Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."

¹³ When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions." ¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

¹⁵ Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

4. Saul justifies his rebellion, and blames his troops. Samuel confronts Saul...

¹⁹ Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?"

²⁰ "But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. ²¹ The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal."

²² But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

²⁵ Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD."

²⁶ But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!"

5. What strikes you about King Saul's justification, blaming, and rationalizing? Did it fool God?