*DEVOTIONS*

July 10 - 15

*People of God: Samuel*

**Monday, July 10 1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11**

*“She named him Samuel, for she said, ‘I asked the Lord for him’”*

 Hannah’s pain is more than she can bear. A barren wife was seen as an embarrassment in the ancient world. Children were gifts of God, but they were also important economically in the ancient social structure. They contributed to the family wealth through their work, they cared for their parents in old age, and they ensured the future of the family by inheriting the family wealth. When Elkanah follows social custom by having a second wife so that children can be brought into the home, that second wife proves to be a constant source of emotional pain to Hannah.

 Hannah’s earnest pray in the Shiloh sanctuary is the pivotal point in the story. There is a telling contrast between the Hannah who is too despondent to eat and the Hannah who emerges from God’s presence full of hope and confidence. Though her circumstances have not yet changed, she has found a peace with God, a peace that leaves her buoyant and capable of returning with her family. When the Lord answers her prayer, she responds by fulfilling her vow to give the boy over to the Lord.

*Like Hannah, Lord, our hearts rejoice in your love and goodness. Amen.*

**Tuesday, July 11 1 Samuel 2:12-36**

*“Now Samuel, though only a boy, was ministering before the Lord”*

 The first section (vv. 12-26) alternates between the sinful practices of Eli’s wicked sons and the innocent purity and righteousness of Samuel and his family. First, the unholy actions of Hophni and Phineas (vv. 12-17) are contrasted with the righteous conduct of Samuel’s family and the Lord’s blessing on them (vv. 18-21). This is followed by Eli’s unheeded rebuke of his sons (vv. 22-25), contrasted finally with a concluding statement of Samuel’s continued maturity, both physically and spiritually (v. 26).

 The second section (vv. 27-36) is the prophetic condemnation of the house of Eli. The prophetic announcement prepares us for the fall of Eli (in chapter 4) and the rise of the fortunes of Samuel (in chapter 7). Eli and Samuel are headed in opposite directions. Eli was meant to be the nation’s spiritual leader during this time. But his inability to control his wicked sons clearly removed him from that role. It is appropriate, then, that his replacement as spiritual leader and eventual kingmaker for Israel is Samuel.

*May my life be pleasing to you, Lord, as I seek to serve you faithfully. Amen.*

**Wednesday, July 12 1 Samuel 3:1-21**

*“’Here I am,’ Samuel replied”*

 God is still speaking to his people. He does not often speak audibly, as he does here to the young Samuel. But he continues to speak clearly through his written Word to all who will listen. In God’s appearance to Samuel, his Word functions in two ways: God speaks both to inform and to invite. His revelation to Samuel informs the young prophet of his intentions regarding the house of Eli. But God’s “Samuel! Samuel!” is also an invitation to enter into a new, deeper relationship with him. While Samuel did not know God well prior to this point, from now on he will.

 God’s Word in the Bible refers to things around us, but it also relates to us directly. God speaks both to *inform* us and to *form* us, both for *information* and for *formation*. God speaks not only to move us to do what he wants, but to enable us to know him so that we may love him. Therefore God’s Word comes to woo us as well as to instruct us; it not merely puts us in the picture of what God has done and is doing, but also calls us into personal communion with the loving Lord himself.

*You have called me by name, Lord, and I belong to you. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONS*

July 10 - 15

*People of God: Samuel*

**Thursday, July 13 1 Samuel 4:1-22**

*“The glory has departed from Israel”*

 The focus shifts away from Samuel, the one born and raised to lead Israel into the next great period of her history, and focuses on the story of the Ark. Built by Moses in the wilderness under the direction of God, it contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments and served as the center of Israel’s worship: where the Ark was, there was God’s glorious presence. The Ark, however, was about to depart from Israel for awhile. It was captured by the Philistines and moved about among their cities. But, the Ark caused them great problems and they eventually returned it to Israel.

 The purpose of these stories is to celebrate the power of God’s Ark, Israel’s greatest sacred symbol. At the same time they contain a warning about Israel’s deeprooted problems that led to the lack of respect and care for the Ark. Though Samuel returns in chapter seven to provide leadership for a national revival, Israel’s propensity to attempt to manipulate God will continue to present problems for the nation and for the kings who will eventually lead her.

*Our life with you, Lord, is all grace and you give it to us freely. Amen.*

**Friday, July 14 1 Samuel 6:19 – 7:17**

*“Samuel continued as Israel’s judge for the rest of his life”*

 Israel’s religious leadership has been wicked, and the people have tried to manipulate God and use him for military advantage over the enemy. In spite of this, God is still intent on being in relationship with his people, and through all Israel’s troubles God graciously continues to find a way to save her and draw her closer to himself. The Ark has been returned to Israel, but the Philistine military threat is still serious. Nothing has really been resolved, only now Samuel stands as a legitimate prophet to lead the people and reexamine their relationship with God.

 Samuel’s role is to explain the nature of repentance and call the people to it without timidity. He calls on them to turn their sorrow and remorse into genuine repentance. Such repentance works from the inside outward. It begins with a heartfelt turning to God, an internal commitment to make one’s relationship with God a priority over everything else. It moves from this to actions – either a rejection of wrongful deeds or a renewed commitment to righteous deeds. It is not enough to regret; one must also repent (turn) from sin.

*I am not merely sorry for my sin, Lord, but I turn away from sin. Amen.*

**Saturday, July 15 1 Samuel 12:1-25**

*“The Lord will not abandon his chosen people”*

 God was constantly giving Israel second chances. This is fortunate for Israel because she was in constant need of a second chance. The nation seemed unable to maintain a faithful and loyal relationship with God. Yet as fickle and undependable as Israel was, God seemed just as determined to provide grace to forgive and restore. Samuel’s national assembly in this chapter illustrates the undeserved grace of God.

 Israel did not merit a second chance. But in point of fact, this was more of a third, fourth, or fifth chance for the nation. Israel had rebelled under Moses and Aaron, they had failed to be faithful during the time of the judges, and now they had sinned again by demanding a king rather than accepting the authority of God. At some point, one would wonder if God’s grace might give out. When does one exhaust the mercy of God and begin to worry that God might withhold his forgiveness? The emphatic response of both the Old and the New Testament: never! There is no limit to God’s mercy.

*Your mercies are new each day, Lord. They never run out! Amen.*