

The Compass

Week 19

OT Readings – 1 Samuel 1:1-14:52

NT Readings – John 5:1-7:53

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- 1 & 2 Samuel are an interesting and insightful read. See “How to Read 1 & 2 Samuel.”
- Remember that the events of 1 Samuel begin in the difficult days recounted in the book of Judges. God raises up a faithful leader, Samuel¹, to lead His people during these days.
- Watch for the interaction of God with individuals and with Israel as a whole. God’s heart and character are revealed as He works with people and situations as they are.
- 1 Sam. 7 marks a key time of national repentance; yet 1 Sam. 8 shows how fickle it was – they reject God for an earthly king.²
- Pay careful attention to the process of how Saul becomes king; clearly he was God’s choice.
- 1 Sam. 13 begins the narrative of Saul’s fall away from God and loss of kingship. Look carefully at 1 Sam. 13:14.³

New Testament

- The richness of John is undeniable, there is a great deal to think about and reflect on. Take your time with this book and ask God to speak to you.
- John 5:1 begins a section which Tenney calls the “period of controversy.”⁴ As you read see if you can feel the rising tension as Jesus teaches. The crowd, the religious leaders and His own disciples are all caught up with this remarkable person and these dynamic events.
- The miracles, “signs” according to John, give evidence to Jesus claims and confront all to decide about Him. Jesus claims are radical; even His own disciples are forced to consider and decide!⁵
- John 6:35 is the first of Jesus’ “I AM” claims in John. What is implied about who He is?

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

1 Sam. 8:4-9. Rejection is painful; even more so when one has invested deeply into the life of another. You can sense the disappointment in God’s heart. A personal and relational picture of God allows us insight into God’s character and heart. God is not an impersonal force. Nor is He divorced or distant from the pain of His creation of or from the personal pain His creatures cause Him.⁶

What we see, remarkably, is a God who remains faithful, patient and involved with people. Israel’s rejection of His rule and kingship over them, while seemingly not His will and painful to Him, is not the end of His purposes for His people; He will creatively interact with them to bring about His desire.⁷ They can have a human king, though they will discover that God was a far better king to serve!⁸ So God will now work with *king* and people to continue His redemptive purpose and plan. In the future, a King will come to the throne, of the house of David, whose rule will restore the kingship of God and bring healing, redemption and restoration – Jesus.

Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

John 5:19, 5:30, 6:38. Jesus serves as our *model* and *mentor*. Jesus’ human life and ministry were accomplished as He lived close to His Father and followed Him completely, “...to do the will of God...not to do my own will.” (6:38) Can we say the same? What does this mean for us?

We must begin by acknowledging that we cannot accomplish anything of *lasting value* unless we are doing His will. The real danger for those who walk with God is not that we will fall into some horrendous sin (though we should never underestimate that danger), but that we will mistake what we have accomplished on *our own*, in *our own strength*, as having done *His will*. Is our desire really to do only and fully what He wants? If so, we can and must learn to rest in that doing. (Matt. 11:28-30)

When we strive after our own will (all for Him of course) we succumb to the religious fallacy of “try harder, do more, do better.” It is exhausting and ends in failure and self-condemnation. Jesus was constantly busy, but always at rest. There was always enough time, energy and concentration to do the *Father’s* will.

Read 1 Sam. 3:1-14, 19-21 with this in mind. Samuel came to know⁹ the Lord as His word was made personal to him. And as a result, Samuel lived out a life of purpose and significance.

Difficult Question of the Week

1 Sam. 13:13-14. Q. Was it God’s will that Saul fail?

Saul was God’s choice.¹⁰ In fact, it was God’s intention to give Saul’s descendents the kingship “for all time.”¹¹ When he was chosen, he seems to have met God’s criteria for leadership and was a man of character.¹² God declared him king three times: in private w/Samuel (10:1), publically (10:24-25) and later confirmed him after the Jabesh victory. (11:14-15)

If anything can be certain, it is that Saul was God’s choice, God had confidence in him and that God intended for Saul to succeed. With the leadership of God’s people was at stake, would God do any less? Some have suggested that Saul was a “punishment” of some sort because the people asked for a king. Such a suggestion defames God’s character in numerous ways and makes Saul a pawn; or worse, God’s whipping boy for the people’s sin.¹³ So what happened? As we will see in next week’s readings, God rejects Saul. Saul is a case study of someone who began well with God and in the role God gave and then went dreadfully wrong. Saul’s choices were Saul’s own and Saul in the end opposed the will of God. God had no desire to see Saul fail and did everything to encourage his success.

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¹ Samuel will be the last judge, “leader-deliverer,” of Israel. 1 Samuel tells the story of the transition to kingship in Israel.

² While there is some debate about whether it was God’s intention for them to have a king, it certainly represented a dramatic shift away from the original tribal federation under the covenant law. In some tragic sense, they rejected their own uniqueness among the nations: compare Ex. 19:5-6 with 1 Sam. 8:20.

³ The NEB and TNK translations translate 1 Sam. 13:14, “will seek...will appoint...” A couple interesting things are possible here: 1. It is possible that God is still hoping that Saul will come around and that this is a warning. Regardless, Saul will retain the kingship for a season after this; the disobedience over the Amalakites will be the last straw. 2. It seems that Saul did qualify as a “man after God’s own heart” when God chose him, but that Saul has changed.

⁴ Merrill Tenney, *New Testament Survey* revised edition, 195. Tenney’s *Survey* has long been a standard introductory look at the NT.

⁵ John 6:66.

⁶ The idea of Divine impassibility (God is unchanging) is of course a Biblical one; however we must be careful to define it Biblically. Difficulties have come into theology when philosophical categories have intermixed with the text and distorted its face value meaning. Impassibility, Biblically speaking, cannot mean that God is unaffected by His creation. Such a view leaves us with an emotionless, impersonal and distant Deity. Rather, He is the one who became *incarnate* and entered fully into our pain and world. For a great read and reflection on this and related issues, see John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*. While **not** light reading, Sanders is helpful in laying out the theological and Biblical issues related to God’s nature and character in regard to His interaction with the world.

⁷ I love the term “omnipotent,” though I am not sure who coined it. God is great and awesome and able to deal creatively with any and every situation He faces and continue to bring forth His will and purposes for the world.

⁸ 1 Sam. 8. See also 2 Chron. 12.

⁹ “To know “is highly personal. He did not “know the Lord” until he learned to hear God for himself.

¹⁰ 1 Sam. 9:17. 10:24.

¹¹ 1 Sam. 13:13.

¹² It seems reasonable that 1 Sam. 13:14 and 1 Sam. 16:5-7 can and should be applied to Saul. He seems to have been self-effacing, responsible and a person of character. See 1 Sam. 9:2, 17-21, 10:16 (he doesn't mention kingship), 10:20-22. Saul shows no hint of vindictiveness against his enemies. (10:27 → 11:12-13) He recognizes that God is the one who wins his battles. (11:13)

¹³ If this is the way God works, I hope He never chooses me for a task! There is no indication anywhere in this text or anywhere else in the Bible that God acts in such convoluted and indiscernible ways. We must take the Bible at face value. God was at work to bring the very best out of this situation and chose the best person available in that moment for the job – Saul.