

# 1 SAMUEL Bible Reading Schedule

## 4 Weeks

The narrative of God's activity among his people in 1 Samuel is abundant with the characters that fill this Book and a storyline that will get us turning the pages with anticipation. When neighboring nations are hostile, the right leadership can give people a sense of safety. In Samuel's time, Israel faced external threats and internal discord. The judges did not satisfy the people's desire for leadership and security. Israel wanted a king. We will read about the transition of Israel from a federation of tribes to a centralized kingdom. Israel's first king, Saul, was not faithful to God. However, God's plan to save Israel—and the world—began to unfold in the person of King David. Let's get started...

### WEEK 1

DAY 1 – 1 Samuel 1 & 2

In the New Testament, we were reading one chapter a day and that was plenty because we were reading the truth of God outlined in the principles of his Word. But we will now enter the record of God's people as their story unfolds. It is meant to be read in bigger portions. Read slowly but read more to feel the events and episodes of these exciting and challenging days for God's people. The book begins with Hannah. Hannah comes from the Hebrew word meaning "grace." You notice that she is only one of Elkanah's wives. Hardly an instance exists in Scripture where a man's simultaneous marriage to two wives did not produce serious friction. Obviously, this was never God's best because he clearly outlined marriage in Genesis 1 & 2 as a husband and a wife, just one of each! Hannah is the focal point as she longs for a child. She pleaded with the Lord and even promised to give the child to the Lord's service. Such a promise can often be forgotten after the child is born. But not Hannah, she followed through in verses 24 – 28. I also notice that Hannah's prayer reminds me of Mary's prayer in Luke 1. But Hannah's prayer was offered 1000 years before Mary's. It seems that Mary was inspired by Hannah's devotion and gratitude. By the close of chapter 2, we read about Hannah having more children in verse 21. Hannah has been an inspiration to my wife and me, as we named our third child, Hannah. Hannah was faithful with a little and God blessed her with much. Do you remember that principle? Jesus told the faithful servant, who had 2 bags of silver and added two more bags to honor the Lord, these words in Matthew 25:23 ESV, "You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much." Hannah is an example of this, in my opinion. What might that look like in your life?

## DAY 2 – 1 Samuel 3 & 4

Verse 1 tells us that God was more silent in those days leading up to the arrival of Samuel who was to be regarded as one of the greatest prophets in the history of the Old Testament. The period of judges was dark and the results were a scattered people. But this chapter brings hope as Samuel learns to listen to the voice of God. I am drawn to this subject because I believe in God's whisper. I believe I have heard his whisper a few times in my life. Elijah heard God's whisper in 1 Kings 19. Job affirms God's whisper in chapter 26. Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 10, to proclaim the whispers they hear from God. I read this poem in Bill Hybel's book, "The Power of a Whisper": "Oh! Give me Samuel's ear, an open ear, O Lord, alive and quick to hear each whisper of Thy Word; like him to answer to Thy call and to obey Thee first of all." Samuel was an open, innocent young lad who learned quickly to hear the voice of God. This represents his call from God and God's challenge to him to be God's mouthpiece even when the message wasn't easy to deliver. But there is something else that comes to mind regarding God's judgment on the sons of Eli. They had been disobeying the Lord for some time and obviously knew what they were doing was wrong. So, God warns them through the people of Israel and even through their own father in chapter 2, verses 23 – 25. At any point, Eli's sons could have repented but they didn't. Sometimes people will read these stories and suggest that God is harsh. But I see him being very gracious and even patient. However, God is a just God and could not allow Eli and his sons to continue. The word of prophecy from Samuel would be fulfilled as Eli falls back (4:18) and dies symbolizing his family's fall from the priesthood and the end of the abomination that his sons began in chapter 2. How have you heard the whisper of God? Many times, whispers come with a nudge from the Spirit or a prompting that is divine. We are invited to be led by the Spirit. How important is that to you? Why? What stands out to you in these two chapters?

## DAY 3 – 1 Samuel 5 & 6

As I read through these two chapters, I notice a theme that happens in our present world as it did then. The Philistines were given firsthand experiences regarding the power of God. So much so that they were terrified but demonstrated no genuine faith in the One who gave the Ark power. The Ark served as a sign of God's presence. It was carried around Jericho before the walls crumbled. (Joshua 6:6-7) The Philistines likened the Ark to their images and idols. The Ark of the Lord was thought of as God's footstool and temporary residence rather than his image. Nonetheless, the Philistines had plenty of opportunities to repent and declare their allegiance to the God of the Israelites, but they didn't. They were without excuse; God gave them a clear view of his power and even his presence. The Philistines were mighty warriors but they would die separated from God forever because of their rejection of the One True God. The Apostle Paul wrote these words in Romans 1:18-20. These verses speak to the wickedness of the Philistines. "But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God." We will meet the Philistines again and again. But they will never repent. Their destiny is determined by their rebellion against God. What do you think about the truth that God has revealed himself to the world and yet much of the world turns their back on the Lord? How do you respond to the hard hearts of so many in today's world?

#### DAY 4 – 1 Samuel 7 & 8

Samuel is firmly established as a leader, judge, prophet, and seer. His victory over the warring enemy people known as the Philistines would go a long way in elevating his status among the people. The Israelites were “badly frightened” as the Philistines advanced to Mizpah. But Samuel remained steadfast and pleaded with God for his help. Samuel was a refreshing change after the inconsistent leadership of Eli, the priest. But Samuel was offended on behalf of the Lord when the Israelites asked him for a king. But God eventually said, “Do as they say, and give them a king.” (V 22) One reason the nation of Israel wanted a king was to be “like all the other nations.” The institution of kingship in other ancient Near Eastern nations was almost 2,000 years old by the time of Saul and David, especially in the Egyptian and Babylonian empires. Other much smaller nations—such as Philistia, Moab, and Edom—also had kings with permanent bureaucracies and standing armies. Kings were believed to be chosen instruments through which deities governed human affairs, so kings reigned either as gods or for the gods. The Israelites envied other nations and were not interested in the long-term implications of monarchy, in spite of Samuel’s warnings (8:10-18). Several hundred years of monarchy would prove that Samuel’s apprehensions were justified. Wicked kings eventually led God’s chosen nation into foreign domination and exile. Yet the monarchy would also provide the Messiah through David and his dynasty. We see that God used monarchy, in spite of its shortcomings, to fulfill his purposes which we have come to know about our Sovereign God. Nothing is more important than the arrival of the Messiah who was a descendant of David, of course. What might God be saying to you through this part of the story?

#### DAY 5 – 1 Samuel 9 & 10

We are introduced to Saul in these chapters. We will observe Saul’s upsides and downsides in many ways. First, he is seemingly humble and reluctant to accept God’s invitation to be king. This is similar to other key characters in the Old Testament as Moses and Jeremiah come to mind and don’t forget Gideon, right? These two chapters seem hopeful because Saul is God’s choice and God would help Saul grow and lead well as the Lord develops his character. But it won’t take long for us to see the holes in Saul. Had it not been for the prophet Samuel and Saul’s son Jonathan, Saul’s reign might have been marked by complete disaster. I continue to be inspired by Samuel and his close walk with the Lord. He knew God so deeply that every decision and insight was in step with God’s will. The Greek version of 10:1 elaborates in a fuller way than just saying you are appointed ruler over Israel. “And you will rule over the Lord’s people and save them from their enemies around them. This will be the sign to you that the Lord has appointed you to be leader over his special possession.” God was patient with Saul as he was with Moses. In 10:22-23, Saul is hiding among the baggage. But when he is introduced, the people shout, “Long live the king!” Saul stood head and shoulders above anyone else and earlier we learned that he was very handsome. The people immediately affirm that Saul definitely looks like a king. This must be part of the lesson God is teaching his people because, in chapter 16, we will read that God does NOT look at the outward appearance as man does, God looks at the heart. We will see the shallowness of Saul’s heart next week. What seems positive about this story and what concerns you? How might you apply this to your life?

## WEEK 2

These next ten chapters are fascinating with the judgment of God on Saul's disqualification and David's honorable character. We anticipate the arrival of David because of Samuel's words in chapter 13, "But your kingdom must end, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart." (Verse 14) I hope you will enjoy these chapters and the unfolding of God's plan for his people. He is always faithful and his ways are always right.

### DAY 1 – 1 Samuel 11 & 12

Saul is an interesting young man. He is hiding behind the luggage in chapter 10 but in this chapter, he is emboldened to lead the armies of Israel into battle. He is so intense that the Israelites are afraid of him. The victory reaffirms the announcement of Saul as king. (11:14-15) But there is something shallow about their perspective. Originally, they like Saul because he looks like a king. Now they appreciate him because he has the "power" of a king. It seems to me that they are as shallow as Saul would prove to be. I mentioned this already but let me remind you that God cares about the heart more than how we function on the outside. Tyler emphasized that as he spoke on the definition of wisdom, "inside over outside." Another interesting aspect of the reading today is Samuel's farewell speech. I think of a farewell speech as something given near the end of your life. But Samuel will live several more years as his death isn't recorded until chapter 25. However, there is a sense of farewell because the people asked for a king, not a judge or prophet, like Samuel. His farewell is predominately a warning about faithfulness and allegiance to God. Samuel assures them of God's forgiveness in the past but the future is yet to be determined. "Make sure NOW that you worship the Lord with all your heart, and don't turn your back on him." (12:20) The farewell speech is clarified for me in verse 23 as Samuel reassures the people that he cares about their spiritual well-being and will continue to serve them in that way, "As for me, I will certainly not sin against the Lord by ending my prayers for you. And I will continue to teach you what is good and right." Samuel is older at this point in the story but he is not quitting. His desire to serve remains strong and his insights are so helpful because God has taught him deeply and profoundly. For Samuel to keep it to himself would be a sin. I want us to follow Samuel's example. Many of you who participate in my reading schedule are older like me (and Samuel). But that's not an excuse to ride off into the sunset. God had several significant tasks for Samuel to do before he went to heaven. The same is true for you. What is your pledge to God that might be similar to verse 23?

### DAY 2 – 1 Samuel 13 & 14

Even though my attention is squarely on Jonathan as I anticipate his connection to David, I can't skip the unfortunate decline of Saul. This is the beginning of Saul's fall from favor. His decline might be summarized in a threefold sequence: First, He offered the sacrifices himself and did not wait for Samuel; second, he made a rash oath that put Jonathan's life in danger; third, he failed to obey God by eliminating the Amalekites and their belongings in chapter 15. Jonathan's introduction is a breath of fresh air. He is strong, courageous, godly, and fearless. Jonathan is portrayed as a mighty warrior and a confident leader from the moment we meet him. But nothing matches his story in chapter 14. To me, it is similar to David and Goliath. Jonathan says, "Perhaps the Lord will help us, for nothing can hinder the Lord. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few." (Verse 6) Sometimes the

definition of a few is more than two but not in this case. Jonathan believed in God's abilities and probably remembered the way God used Gideon with a small band of soldiers in Judges 7:2-8. There is a note of concern from Jonathan about his father. This might be the first time we notice Saul's oldest son questioning his father's decisions but it won't be the last time. "My father has made trouble for us all!" (Verse 29) This coincides with Saul's poor judgment in other situations and reveals Saul's lack of godly wisdom. As much as I admire Jonathan and his courageous faith, I am also mindful of his servant. He displayed similar courage with amazing loyalty. In 14:7, the servant said to Jonathan, "I'm with you completely." This Sunday night I am speaking on the importance of our partnerships as servants of the Lord. We live in a very individualistic culture. There's no doubt that Jonathan gained faith and courage as his servant was with him to the end. We are meant to serve the Lord side by side. What stands out to you from these chapters?

#### DAY 3 – 1 Samuel 15 & 16

Chapter 15 is another example of complete destruction when a people, like the Amalekites, have an ongoing severe offense against God, such as worshipping false gods. But this intense judgment is most often tied to how the pagan people mistreated God's chosen people. Those who curse God's family are, in turn, cursed. Saul did not follow through with the Lord's instructions. This was the last straw, so to speak, as God would raise up another king who had the right character and devotion to the things of the Lord. A repeated principle is presented in this chapter that the prophets announce again and again. "Obedience is better than sacrifice." (15:22) David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Micah will all proclaim this clarifying declaration about what God wants. Along with this, Isaiah said that "you honor me with your lips but your hearts are far from me." (Isaiah 29:13) We read that God changed his mind which is a hard concept to understand because God is unchanging. However, the Bible speaks of God in ways that we as humans can understand. Saul's disobedience severed God's favor and the Lord redirected his plan to anoint David which we read about in chapter 16. All along God knew what was coming but to show us that our choices have consequences, we can describe the situation as God changing his mind. But God's unfailing love, mercy, and compassion, his power and wisdom are unchanging. David actually fulfills the purposes of God because he would be the godly leader who would carry on the messianic promise through his descendants. We are introduced to David who really is the main character in God's story. Humanly, he is not your first choice as even Samuel would have chosen Jesse's oldest son. But God's choice would be delayed as Jesse presents son after son until the youngest is identified as the one. Isn't that just like our God?! But even in this chapter the character and talents of the young boy David are affirmed. Strong character traits as well highlighting that he is a warrior with good judgment and handsome features. We will get to know this man who is described as a "man after God's own heart." Why are we so prone to look at the outside of a person and overlook the inside? (16:7) serves as a timeless principle that is always true.

#### DAY 4 – 1 Samuel 17

You can easily understand why I chose for us to read just one chapter; it is long and exceptional. Amen?! This really is a high point for us as David is elevated in the eyes of the people. The encounter of David and Goliath is one of the most well-known stories in the Bible. I used the familiarity of this story to speak into the lives of some high school basketball players when I served FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes).

This was several years ago, of course, but I remember it well. The high school boys were big underdogs to a strong team. I told them to envision shooting the ball, defending the opponent, running the court, and winning the game just like David did against Goliath. It felt risky to me but I also felt led to do it. In this chapter, David envisions God helping him defeat the giant. (VV 45-47) It seemed very bold of David to announce that he would defeat the Philistine hero by “cutting off his head.” His courageous words would have been shallow if it weren’t for the confidence he had in the Lord. This is not about him but about God’s credibility. He told Goliath, “This is the Lord’s battle, and he will give you to us.” I remember the boys on the team looking intently at me. Could it be that God would help them win? They were playing the first-place team and they were only a team in the middle of the pack of their conference. But they were home, thus, I was given permission to share these thoughts with them before the game as I had befriended the players previously and even joined their practices a few times. You know the end of the story for this basketball team because it matches David’s outcome. The Chesterton Trojans won their last game of that season and I bet all of those guys still remember it today. I like David’s example of faith and believing that God will do great things for us. David dedicated his battle to the Lord and that was the most important aspect of his victory. Do you envision God using you to bring his life to others? How does this familiar story speak to you this time?

#### DAY 5 – 1 Samuel 18 & 19

There are two aspects of our reading that surprise me. First, I am surprised by how quickly Jonathan and David develop a deep friendship. It might not have happened as quickly as it seems in the text, but they display an allegiance to each other that is especially strong. Second, I am even more surprised at how quickly Saul turns on David. I wasn’t expecting that nor did I remember that from my previous readings of this story. The explanation might be that David needed Jonathan’s loyalty to remain hopeful because Jonathan’s father is out to get him. In my Sunday night class on relationships, I challenged people to be a “Jonathan.” Clearly, Jonathan takes the initiative to befriend David. Jonathan loved, spent time with, made a commitment to, and gave of himself to David. We are often reluctant to take the first “risky” step toward another person. (18:1-4) But you will never know what God might have in mind for you relationally if you always wait for the other person to step toward you. David will appreciate Jonathan and reciprocate in a like manner. Their relationship will soon become mutual and the blessing of friendship will be strong until Jonathan breathes his last breath. (Sorry to give the end away.) Also, David will need Jonathan as the conflict with Saul intensifies. We will read about David on the run for a whole week as this part of the story occupies chapters 20 to 30. However, as difficult and disappointing as this situation is and will be, David grows stronger and God teaches him much through it. Isn’t that the pathway to growth so often?! The hardest stuff refines us. Peter wrote these words, “There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.” (1 Peter 1:6-7) The Lord had big plans in mind for David and these chapters are the preparation for this high calling. Why are trials and suffering the pathway to growth? How has that been true for you? What might God be saying to you through these two chapters?

## WEEK 3

I am quite sure our thoughts about Saul will decline and our affection & support for David will grow this week. All of our reading this week will be about David on the run. He begins just north of Bethlehem, his home town and makes his way south which is wilderness terrain. He was not safe enough near Jerusalem, so he had to roam in the barren territory just west of the Dead Sea. I visited that area on my trip to the Holy Land and there are hundreds of caves along the Dead Sea. It shows how intense the situation was for David and his men as Saul wanted to kill David.

### DAY 1 – 1 Samuel 20

This one chapter presents the situation with interesting details as well as a test for Jonathan and David's friendship. These 42 verses will give us ample info that is sure to stimulate our thinking and response. You can sense David's urgency and even fear as he is all alone against the most powerful man in his country. He could also easily wonder about Jonathan's loyalty because Jonathan's father is so determined to kill him. It is interesting to read about their renewed commitment to each other. I think of a married couple going through some big challenges; enough to question the stability of their relationship. I will often encourage couples to renew their love and commitment to each other. Friendship is not that different, in my thinking. Both David and Jonathan needed to be reassured. David needed Jonathan to be honest with him. And Jonathan needed to know that David would not ever turn his back on Jonathan's family. "And may you treat me with the faithful love of the Lord ("hesed") as long as I live. But if I die, treat my family with this faithful love, even when the Lord destroys all your enemies from the face of the earth." (Words of Jonathan in verses 14-15) In the next scene, we again see the courage of Jonathan. He was faithful to support his friend in spite of his father's anger. Jonathan also seemed to accept God's plan for David even if it meant he wouldn't be king. This will be very clear in chapter 23. I couldn't be more impressed with the sacrificial love of Jonathan as a friend (Proverbs 18:24). It reminds me of the challenging words in Philippians 2:3-4, "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too." This really fits Jonathan's posture as a friend to David. What else do you learn about loyal friendship in this chapter?

### DAY 2 – 1 Samuel 21 & 22

These two chapters easily tie together. Every subtitle in this section says, "David flees to..." The first thing I notice is that David deceives the priest by telling him he is there on official business, so to speak. The pressure of the moment got to David as he lied to conceal his outlaw status and to put Ahimelech at ease. But you have already read the outcome for Ahimelech and the other priests who served with him (22:9-19). Though David normally acted as an upright man, the Bible does not hesitate to record honestly David's instances of wrongdoing. David was very much in the mode of survival so he was less discerning. Later, he would realize his oversight as Doeg the Edomite tells Saul that David had spent time with Ahimelech (22:9). It is a sad and violent story of revenge and massacre. These episodes do not make sense to me. The sacredness of life is so expendable. Saul did not eliminate the pagan people (Amalekites) who worshiped idols and abused God's people (chapter 15) but here he does not hesitate to wipe out the godly leaders of Nob and ravage their possessions. These atrocities do not go unnoticed

by our God. There will be devastating consequences that will leave the name of Saul decimated. Unfortunately, these consequences do not transpire as quickly as we might desire which is also a lesson for us. Two weeks ago, I spoke on Ecclesiastes 8 with this disturbing verse that is impossible to ignore. "In this life, good people are often treated as though they were wicked, and wicked people are often treated as though they were good. This is so meaningless." (ECCL 8:14) But that is what is happening in 1 Samuel between Saul and David. By the end of 1 Samuel, Saul will get his just conclusion which will continue in eternity. However, sometimes that fact does not satisfy our strong desire for justice in this life right now. But it was enough for David to continue to put the situation in God's hands. Several Psalms are written during David's life on the run. Many of them have been helpful as life can be very challenging. These are some of his writings while on the run: Psalms 7, 27, 31, 34, and 52 seem most likely to be written during this period. Please take a few more minutes and read one of these Psalms. How might David's writings while on the run help you? What might you take away with you from our reading today?

#### DAY 3 – 1 Samuel 23 & 24

I neglected to highlight the fact that David's band of soldiers was quite the crew. They could be referred to as a "motley crew," right? (22:2) His band of brothers is growing as we read (23:13), there were now 600 men with him. Yesterday I mentioned several Psalms that come from David as he is on the run. There is a specific one that highlights his escape from Saul in a cave. You might want to add this one to your reading today: PSALM 57. We know that God will protect David until he is made king but the story is miraculous because Saul has more troops as well as the power of his position to take care of David. Of course, the odds are against David but that doesn't matter in God's economy. In fact, the tables will turn as "Saul went into a cave (the same cave where David is hiding) to relieve himself." (24:3) The Bible tells it like it is. David could avenge his enemy but, instead, he honors the king. It says, "David's conscience began bothering him..." (24:5) David would listen to his conscience even though his band of soldiers told him to take revenge. David displays self-discipline and strong leadership: "So David restrained his men and did not let them kill Saul." (v 7) Something confuses me about this story. After David and Saul speak to each other, it seems like they might be ready for a truce. But nothing seems to change. Saul has been embarrassed in front of his men so he won't attack David at this point. But he won't let David go free either. Putin reminds me of Saul. In other words, there might be some sense of negotiation but not in his heart. Saul was in the devil's grip and his selfish motivation would continue. That's how I interpret Putin's disposition. By the way, this is the last time David and Jonathan will see each other: "Jonathan went to find David and encourage him to stay strong in his faith in God." (23:16) That fact is also a sad result produced by a man controlled by the devil. Jonathan must have felt powerless to help his friend. What stood out to you in these chapters?

#### DAY 4 – 1 Samuel 25

There is so much to this story that reading just one chapter seems like the right amount for us today. These 44 verses are packed with practical applications, in my mind. The point of the story that gets my attention centers around David's response to this mean and crude man named Nabal. He sounds like Saul in many ways and that's exactly what triggers David's intense response. "Get your swords!" (v 13) David has been running for his life and seems to take it all in stride until he is treated poorly by a man he has never met. David is NOT thinking clearly. He has been tied up in knots as Saul pursues him. This extra



explosion over Nabal is surely connected to his feelings about Saul deep within. His intense words are found in verses 21 & 22. David plans to kill Nabal and all of his household who are innocent, right!? David is an upright man who has given in to the desire for revenge. Things can happen in your life that are hard to take but you seemingly work through them. Yet, what if you don't? What if there are fragments of pain and anger below the surface? There had to be for David. He seemed to manage his emotions with Saul fairly well but not in this chapter. David would owe Abigail a debt of gratitude. So, he marries her because she is noble and she saved him from great heartache. She said, "When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, don't let this be a blemish on your record." (Verses 30 – 31) Guess what? Revenge is never God's directive for us. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 in Romans 12:19: "Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord." David was so close to sin but it took someone godly to intervene. Thank the Lord for Abigail's courage. How are you tempted to take revenge? How might God be asking you to speak the truth in love to someone who is dishonoring the Lord through revenge? These are very important principles to live by. Amen?!

#### DAY 5 – 1 Samuel 26

Next week we will finish 1 Samuel and get ready for 10 days of preparation for Easter. Late next week I will launch readings from the Gospel of John that leads us to the resurrection of Jesus. So, today we read one chapter that is not necessarily long but is one event in the life of David as Saul will finally end his pursuit of David. The main point of this chapter is about the risky move of David and Abishai sneaking into Saul's camp. We have already learned that Saul brought 3000 soldiers who are described as the "elite." What David did seems impossible. But we read that "the Lord had put Saul's men into a deep sleep." (V 12) So, David not only needed courage but he demonstrated faith. God had taken care of him to this point and he would continue to do so. The fearlessness of David and his warrior partner is impressive to me. We frequently notice this quality in David since his encounter with Goliath. This is an important quality strength for the next leader of Israel. At every turn, David is confident that God would judge rightly between him and Saul. In verse 13, we read that David climbs a nearby hill and shouts out to Abner and Saul. That too seems risky to me. But David has shown the Israelites that God is on his side. I think the message is so clear that Saul would not defy God any longer by pursuing David. This is the end of Saul's plan to take out David. Other significant events are just around the corner showing even more evidence that God had removed his help for Saul. He was on his own. We can anticipate how well that will go. In chapter 27, David is still not convinced that Saul will set him free. He will go to the extreme by living among the Philistines. David has felt pressure for so long that Saul's confession seems empty. But I would suggest that David isn't making his best decisions either. Sin begets sin and the situation is dark for David but especially dark and ominous for Saul. It is easy for me to say that David's move to Philistia is unwise and that even though David announced his confidence in God, he didn't act on it. "Now may the Lord value my life, even as I have valued yours today. (says David) May he (God) rescue me from all my troubles." (V 24) There is tension for David. He knew he could trust God but he was not sure about Saul. When we struggle to trust God alone, we can make poor decisions. Do agree? How has God spoken to you through this chapter which marks the last time we will see David and Saul together?

## WEEK 4

This week we will wrap up our readings from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel. This book closes with tragedy because we have learned to appreciate Jonathan. He was a marvelous friend to David. If any of us have friends like Jonathan, we are blessed. Our last reading this week in First Samuel has David mourning over the life of Jonathan. But you might wonder what comes next. We are getting closer and closer to Easter. I have 10 readings preparing for Easter beginning on April 1<sup>st</sup>. I will send those readings separately.

### DAY 1 – 1 Samuel 27 & 28

As I ended my comments last week on David escaping to the Philistines, I suggested this was a bad move. In fact, David thought, “Someday Saul is going to get me.” (Verse 1) His move was based on fear. The whole situation is taking a toll on David. So, he escapes to Gath and befriends the enemy. In this first chapter, we will read about David lying as he pretends to defeat small towns in Israel, while all the time he is attacking other pagan cities instead. “No one was left alive to come to Gath and tell where he (David) had really been.” (V 11) Obviously, the Bible does not commend David for lying to the foreign king but it doesn’t condemn it either. King Achish might have trusted David but, for whatever reason, the other Philistine leaders did not, which is how the story unfolds in chapter 28. Maybe these other leaders could sense the deception with David. But nothing compares to the darkness and desperation of Saul as he does something he has already outlawed. It is suggested the word used might even mean that Saul had the mediums executed. Saul tried so hard to get the favor of the people by doing what he thought they might like even when he didn’t live it himself. This hypocrisy grieved the heart of God and pointed to the sure tragic conclusion of Saul’s life. The practice of calling up the dead is forbidden in the Old Testament (Deut. 18:9-12). This is actually the only known exception in the Bible as Samuel speaks to Saul. According to 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, this is the final straw to the disappointing life of Saul. There is never any justification for seeking advice from the dead when we have the living word of God to guide us (2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12-13). Tomorrow we will read about David’s challenging days on the run again, with the anticipation of God using war to judge Saul and in turn, punish his sons. I am giving you a “heads-up” because what happens is especially sad. How are you responding to these interesting but disappointing chapters?

### DAY 2 – 1 Samuel 29 – 30

There is a short sentence in these two chapters that catches my eye: “But David found strength in the Lord his God.” (30:6) In this same verse, it says David is in great danger/trouble. In 1 Samuel 28:15, it says Saul was “in deep trouble.” It is the same Hebrew expression. Saul went to a “Medium” in his distress and David sought the Lord in his distress. That difference summarizes the whole story of Saul compared to David. With all of David’s men ready to avenge David in their sadness, David is asking the Lord for help and guidance. “Should I chase after this band of raiders? Will I catch them?” (30:8) The Lord responds, “YES!” That is all that David needed. He might be outnumbered and the wives and children might be in danger, but if God says “go,” this is a green light that David could count on and he did! David’s example of devotion to God is inspiring, for sure. But he also is a great example of how to treat people. 200 of his men are exhausted and cannot go any further (Verse 10). David graciously allows them to stay behind and rest. The Lord blesses David’s rescue mission and he returns to the brook Besor JOYFULLY greeting

the 200 exhausted men. This did not go over well with the 400 men who risked their lives to retrieve the women and children. Beginning in verse 23, David tells them not to be selfish because it was the Lord who gave them favor and fought on their behalf. He announced, as a courageous leader, “We share and share alike—those who go to battle and those who guard the equipment.” (Verse 24) David continued to point his men to the Lord and God’s victory on their behalf. David was also extending his appreciation to the many towns that helped him and protected him. He was wise enough to know that he would need their continued support in the days ahead. David models for us a love for God and a love for people. He honored the greatest commands as Jesus recites them in Matthew 22:37-40. What stands out to you? What does it mean to love God and love people as the summation of God’s commands?

### DAY 3 – 1 Samuel 31 & 2 Samuel 1

The continuation of the story from 1 Samuel to 2 Samuel is why I included chapter 1 today. David learns about the death of Jonathan and Saul in chapter 1. Reading through 2 Samuel 1 is a better break point than the close of 1 Samuel. We will go back to the New Testament for our days of preparation leading up to Easter next. You are probably like me as you read chapter 31. When you read that Jonathan is dead your heart sinks. But Saul’s death is to be expected because of his selfishness and disobedience. This Book ends in a similar way as the Book of Judges. There was no king in Israel. The Philistines are in control. There is darkness in the land. David had befriended the Philistines and this could jeopardize his standing among his own people. David’s path will be challenging but God has a plan. After Easter, and reading from the Gospel of John for several days, we will return to 2 Samuel. But first, David’s tribute to Saul and Jonathan shows how David can overlook the pain caused by Saul in his life and remember him with respect because he was God’s anointed. It is hard to believe but Saul reigned over Israel for 40 years. Both Saul and Jonathan were mighty warriors. David’s eulogy is impressive to me. What line in David’s poem are you noticing? Of course, David’s affection for Jonathan is not surprising. They had a very meaningful and loyal friendship. David would have many women in his life but a friend like Jonathan would never surface again. That is why David felt such a great loss. I have mentioned the qualities of friendship seen in their relationship. Commitment is the biggest and loyalty is right there with it. But both risk and sacrifice make it the strongest friendship recorded in the Bible. One other thought about grief: In my readings about the impact of grief on our lives due to the many significant losses we experience in life, we tend to ignore it or deny it. It is seemingly easier to push grief away. But it turns into hurt, then bitterness, and eventually into depression. Talking with others about the losses we go through helps so much. Praying with others adds to the possibility of healing. Grief cannot be healed alone. We need God and people who care, listen, support, walk alongside, etc. Don’t minimize grief. Pursue the support of friends and family. How has God helped you through a loss? What might God be telling you to do with those emotions that you might have buried so that healing happens?