

# The Story: Standing Tall...Falling Hard

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning we're continuing in our series on the story and we find ourselves in the book of 1 Samuel, which follows the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. The writer of the book of Psalms encourages us to meditate on scripture day and night.

And this word meditate that is used is translated from the Hebrew word haggah. I love Hebrew. The word haggah carries with it the intensity of a dog chewing on a bone.

So it's not open your Bible, read some stuff, maybe it'll touch you, but open your Bible and chew on what you find. That's the kind of ferocity, that's the kind of intensity with which we should approach the Bible every time we open it to read.

So let's dive into the story this morning and see what we can find to really chew on together. And our story section, the sermon this morning is titled Standing Tall and Falling Hard.

We're going to look at a few stories and our key idea this morning is distortion. Distortion. Distortion. And Webster defines distortion as to twist something out of its original shape.

[ 1 : 21 ] I remember going into carnival fun houses. Do you remember those as a child or even this past summer at Klondike Days? Oh, I always say Klondike Days. K-Days. But going into a fun house as a child and standing in the hall of mirrors.

You experience that? I can remember laughing my head off at some of the bizarre images that were reflected back at me. Images of myself and yet, eh, not so much.

But I also remember finding some of them to be quite scary. Quite disturbing. And not what I expected at all. And so those images, good or bad, were distortions of reality.

And this morning as we come to the story in the book of Samuel, we'll examine three major distortions of the perfect picture that God set before his people.

So first let me set the stage for these three distortions. In 1 Samuel chapter 1, we learn about a man named Elkanah in a place called Ephraim.

[ 2 : 28 ] Ephraim. And Elkanah had two wives. Their names were Hannah and Penina. Or Penina, as they say sometimes. Not Panini, which is the Italian sandwich.

And Hannah was barren. Which means she was childless. She was unable to have children. And she was, not surprisingly, heartbroken. So the Bible talks about Penina in 1 Samuel 1, 4-7.

And let's read that together. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of meat to his wife Penina, and to all her sons and daughters.

But to Hannah, he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.

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.

[ 3 : 37 ] Wow. Have you ever been bullied? I was bullied at times as a child. And believe it or not, I've actually even been bullied by other adults who sought to control me somehow, or for some unknown reason to hurt me.

Bullies generally try to step on other people. To step on their ideas, their input, or their individuality. To make themselves feel powerful, or that they are in control. Bullies push for their way in situations. They deflect blame by taking responsibility rather than taking responsibility for their actions.

And so Penina was a bully. We read a little bit later in the chapter that Hannah had been praying earnestly for God to bless her with a child.

And ultimately, we read that after Elkanah made love to his wife, she gave birth to a son, and she named him Samuel.

[ 4 : 53 ] Hannah's prayer is recorded in 1 Samuel 2. And I encourage you to read it for yourselves because it is beautiful. I've shared with you before how much I enjoy learning the meaning behind words and expressions.

And the meaning of the name Samuel is generally recognized as God heard, or God has heard. Hannah had also promised in her prayers that if God gave her a child, Hannah stood tall and trusted God in a bad situation, and her faith was rewarded.

We read that God hears Hannah's prayer, and Samuel, God has heard, is born. And he is dedicated to God in service at the tabernacle.

So now that we've set the stage, let's look at the first of three distortions. The distortion of phoniness. At a place called Shiloh, where the tabernacle rested, the priest's name was Eli, and he had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

And these two men, boys, abused the sacrificial system, and they committed sexually immoral acts. Isn't that great?

[ 6 : 30 ] And the Bible says in 1 Samuel 2.12 and 1 Samuel 2.17, we'll read these together, they're on the screen. Eli's sons were scoundrels.

Great word. They had no regard for the Lord. The sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.

Eli chose to honor his sons and ignore their sin. And he refused to reprimand them for their sinful and rebellious actions against God.

So, not surprisingly, God judged them all with death. And then the Ark of the Covenant itself was stolen from Shiloh, was stolen from the people.

That distortion of phoniness, perhaps it might be familiar. Because you can't just have an outward appearance of religion or faith in God.

[ 7 : 37 ] That's what it is to be phony. We're one way on the inside and different on the outside. But, my friends, God knows our hearts. You must seek to be genuine on the inside as well.

Because your words or actions, guess what? They reflect your true nature. How you speak, how you behave, that will betray or reveal your heart.

We're called to be authentic and to live what we believe. So, remember, the child Samuel was dedicated to the Lord and placed into the care of Eli the priest.

Throughout his life, Samuel grew in wisdom and became a prophet and a great Israelite leader. And he eventually even became one of the judges over his people.

And we talked about the judges a few weeks ago. But unfortunately, Samuel's sons, Joel and Abijah, who had been chosen to succeed Samuel as judges over the people, were corrupt.

[ 8 : 53 ] So, the people realizing that Samuel was at the end of his tenure and they didn't really want his sons to succeed him, they demanded a king.

And this is where we come to the second distortion, the distortion of conformity. The people asked Samuel to anoint a king over them so that they can be like all the other nations.

Do you see the envy there? The sense of wanting to blend in. The sense of wanting to be just like everyone else. To have what they have.

Is it familiar? It's human nature, isn't it? Do you remember that phrase I mentioned when we talked about the attitude of the people during the time of the judges? No king doing their own thing.

Do you remember that? The people were following their own path. But at least by this time they'd come to recognize the need for someone to lead and govern them.

[ 10 : 10 ] Even if the reason ultimately was to just be like other nations. We read about Samuel's reaction to the request in 1 Samuel 8 verse 6.

Let's read this together. But when they said, give us a king to lead us, this displeased Samuel. So he prayed to the Lord. 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. As they have done from the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day.

Forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them, but warn them solemnly, and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.

God tells Samuel that in asking him to appoint a king over them, the people are not rejecting Samuel. Don't take it personally, Samuel.

[ 11 : 18 ] But they're rejecting God, which is a bigger, bigger issue. So what can we learn from that? Don't aim to be like everyone else.

Because what someone else has is maybe not what you need. Don't aim to blend in. As God's people, we are called to be distinct.

We're not called to be like other people. We are called to be God's unique people. Called to be set apart for him.

If you're different, you're supposed to be. The way we act, the way we speak, the way we live, should be different.

And all those things that are different are that way so that they draw attention. Not to us, but to the God who made us, the God whom we serve.

[12:37] Now we come to our third distortion and that's the distortion of misrepresentation. Two big words in one phrase, sorry. The distortion of misrepresentation.

God allows the people to have a king through his permissive will, but not his perfect will. Huh?

But what's the difference? God's will is God's will, isn't it? Well, not exactly. You see, God's perfect will is what we experience when we consciously turn our back on what may be our selfish choice. and we seek God's will in a situation. God's perfect will for us is, not surprisingly, just as it sounds, perfect.

God's permissive will I experience most of my life as I've shared with you before. God, I want to do that. I want to do this.

[13:48] I'd really rather do that. And God just said, can't, okay. Can't, okay. Can't, okay. And then finally, God said, are you done yet?

Because I can wait, but I'm ready when you are. God's permissive will is at work when he allows something.

Even though it may be a sinful or rebellious choice on the part of his people. an example, God allowed Joseph's brothers to betray him.

He allowed them to deceive his father, their father, so that he might bring attention to the Israelites in Egypt, bring attention to the Egyptians, bring attention to Pharaoh.

He put them in a situation where God would spare them and they would greatly multiply. So God, through his permissive will, allowed the people in the book of Samuel to have a king.

[15:02] And as God told Samuel, he warned the people in advance and in detail, as you read in the book of Samuel, what it would be like to have Saul, who would be their king, rule over them.

And this will go wrong and that will go wrong and this will go wrong and he'll want this. But the people refused to listen to the warning. They wanted what they wanted. They didn't care what it meant.

They wanted to be like everyone else. And we read in 1 Samuel 11, 1 to 11, you can read about that yourself.

The events surrounding Samuel's anointing of Saul, the Benjamite, as the first king of Israel. And in 1 Samuel 15, we read that God commands Saul and his army to destroy the Amalekites for their sin.

But not surprisingly, Saul's greed and pride take over. Saul and his army, Saul and his soldiers keep some of the spoils of battle.

[16:11] that was not what God asked. They take hostages. Not what God asked. They choose their own outcome in that battle, in that situation, versus what God commanded them to do.

And so, not surprisingly, we read that God rejects Saul as king. He rejects him for misrepresenting God to the nations around them.

And we learn about that rejection in 1 Samuel 15, 23 to 26. Let's read this together. Samuel says this to Saul, for rebellion is like the sin of divination and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.

Because you have rejected the Lord, he has rejected you as king. Then Saul said to Samuel, I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions.

I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me so that I may worship the Lord.

[17:29] 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.

Saul. Saul who once stood tall. Commentators talk about him being an attractive guy. He was tall, he was powerful, he was charismatic, he was a great leader from one perspective.

He stood tall as the leader of the Israelites but ultimately he fell hard. And why? Because he chose his own will and his own path over what the will of God was for him and for the people.

And so Saul's will reflected a distorted picture of God and his perfect will for the world. So this morning we've seen what a strong and amazing contrast between Hannah and Saul.

Two examples of behavior. Two examples of attitude. one selfish and one faithful.

[ 18 : 53 ] One standing tall and the other one falling hard. So what does that mean for us this morning?

we are also representatives of God. You know that. We're representatives of God in our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools, in our relationships, with our friends and family, or with anyone who knows that we call ourselves Christians, and who knows at least in a basic sense what we say we believe.

my friends, when we disobey God, we distort him to the world. We distort that perfect perspective, that perfect picture that God has for us, and for all of creation.

When we're phony, people notice. People see that what we say is somehow very different from how we behave.

and that's usually not in a good way. So let's be people who stand tall. Let's be people whose actions and words match what we say we believe, and the God whom we serve.

[ 20 : 19 ] Because when we conform to the world, we lose our qualities of light and salt. we blend in and no longer reflect the God who has come to change the world and redeem it.

My friends, don't be afraid to stand out. What have you got to lose? And don't misrepresent God to others by selfishly seeking your own way in your life.

But rather, seek the perfect will of your Father who loves you deeply. Let's pray. Oh God, thank you for the many, many examples you give us in Scripture and your word.

the examples of how to do and how not to do. Father, thank you for your faithfulness to us.

Thank you for your grace and your forgiveness when we make wrong choices, when we make selfish choices and we distort your will. And Father, thank you for your mercy and your grace which allow us to return to you over and over when we've messed up.

[ 21 : 49 ] Father, thank you for this day and the opportunity to come together as a body of Christ before your throne. We love you and we worship you for who you are, to the universe and to us.

And we pray these things in your name. Amen.