

## The Sunday-School.

THIRD QUARTER,  
LESSON I.—July 5.

## ISRAEL ASKING FOR A KING.

1 Samuel 8: 1-10.

Study verses 1-22. Read Deut. 17: 14-20; 1 Sam. chaps. 4-8.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only.*—1 Sam. 7:3.

Learn by heart vs. 4-7; John 5:44; vs. 47: 2, 3.

THE LESSON.—A rapid review of the history of Israel under Samuel, 1 Sam. chaps. 4-7; and chap. 8 entire. Read in connection Moses' prophecy of the kingdom in Deut. 17:14-20.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.*—About 1079 B. C. Samuel was born about 70 years earlier. The chronology of 1 Samuel is uncertain by fifty or sixty years.*Place.*—Ramah, where Samuel was born, lived, and was buried, was probably four or five miles northwest of Jerusalem, and may be the same as the Arimathea from which Joseph of Arimathea came.

THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL. They are called the "Books of Samuel" because of his prominence in the history. Probably the work is largely a compilation, under divine inspiration, from the chronicles written by the prophets, Samuel, Nathan, and Gad, mentioned in 1 Chron. 29:29.

The books relate the whole of David's reign. The mention (1 Sam. 27:6) of "the Kings of Judah" would imply that they were written after the division of the kingdom in the reign of Rehoboam. They cover a period of about 130 years, B. C. 1145-1015.

The first Book of Samuel is divided into two parts. Chapters 1-7 relate the close of the theocracy and of the rule of the Judges. The remainder of the book, beginning with our present lesson, describes the establishment of the monarchy, the reign of Saul, and the rise of David. The time covered is little less than a century, and Samuel's life runs practically through the whole.

SAMUEL, THE LAST JUDGE.—Samuel was raised up to be the leader of the Hebrews in their transition to a form of government like that of the nations around them. To accomplish this transition was a great task—a task so great that Samuel should be ranked second only to Moses as founder of the Hebrew nation.

Samuel was also founder of the order of prophets. Before his time, prophecy had been spasmodic. With him began a regular succession of prophets, continuing till after the captivity. The priests had become degenerate, and the prophets were reformers as well as teachers. They were instructed and held together by the institution of "schools of the prophets," and they became a mighty power for good. Samuel was born, probably, B. C. 1149, and died at the age of ninety, about four years before Saul. Six months ago we studied his beautiful boyhood under the care of a loving mother, his service in the tabernacle, and the divine mysterious message which marked Samuel as God's chosen mouthpiece and at the same time warned Eli of the doom hanging over his house on account of his sons' misdeeds. Samuel became estab-

lished as a prophet, and all the nation held him in honor.

WHY THE PEOPLE WANTED A KING; FALSE PRETEXTS.—Vs. 1-5. At the time considered in our lesson, the nation was in a sad plight. The infirmities of age had compelled Samuel to hand over to his sons the management of affairs, people applied to Samuel for redress. But they asked for the wrong thing in the wrong way.

*When Samuel was old.* He was about sixty years old. *He made his sons judges.* They were to support their father in the administration of justice. *Now the name of his first-born was Joel,* signifying "Jehovah is God;" and the name of his second, *Abiah* (Abijah) "Jehovah is my father."*They were judges in Beer-sheba,* having authority in the south, while Samuel probably still ruled in the north (1 Sam. 7:15), making his headquarters at Ramah. *And his sons walked not in his ways.* Doubtless Samuel had often warned them by the example of Eli's sons. *But turned aside after lucre,* money wrongfully obtained. *And took bribes,* as judges. The same ills that ruined Eli's house, owing to the evil conduct of his children, threatened Samuel. Samuel was not lax with his sons, but deposed them from office; so he was not punished as Eli was. *Then all the elders of Israel.* Magistrates and other delegates from the cities and districts of Israel. *Came to Samuel,* showing their confidence in the aged prophet, notwithstanding they were to complain of his sons. *Unto Ramah.* Samuel's home.The people now urge three reasons why they should have a king. *Behold, thou art old.* He was about seventy years old, and had been judge for nearly thirty years. *And thy sons walk not in thy ways.* They knew Samuel would rise above personal considerations. *Now make us a king.* That is, appoint one. *To judge us.* Like all the nations. As the other nations had kings, so they desired one.

The three reasons urged by the people in their asking a king were all false pretexts. Samuel still had vigor enough for ruling; God would raise up a successor to him outside of his family, just as he had done in the case of Eli; the nation, with God alone for king, would easily surpass the kingdoms surrounding it, provided they obeyed God.

God shows the prophet that the pretexts are false, their action being prompted by restlessness under divine rule.

*The thing displeased Samuel.* Either because it was a personal slight, or because Samuel considered it tantamount to a rejection of God. *When they said, Give us a king to judge us.* Why was the request an evil one? Because the people should have waited for God's time, or merely asked Samuel if that time had not come. It was evil also because it was prompted by wrong motives. *And Samuel prayed unto the Lord.* He showed much wisdom in laying the matter before God.*And the Lord said unto Samuel.* God's reply is very tender towards his aged servant, and very sad in its abandonment of God's high hope for his people. *Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee.* God sometimes grants men's foolish requests as one of the ways of showing them how foolish they are. *For they**have not rejected thee,* as was proved by their coming to him with their petition. *But they have rejected me.* (1) by forming their own plans before consulting God; (2) by forgetting what God had done for them; and (3) by deliberately choosing to be like in their government the idolatrous nations around them. *That I should reign over them.* Probably the people did not imagine that they were rejecting God.*According to all the works,* etc. Samuel must at once have been reminded how often the Israelites had rejected Moses. *So they do also unto thee.* *Now therefore hearken unto their voice.* God had made trial of the higher form of government, but the people would not rise to the ideal rule of an invisible, heavenly king. Now, he will use another means of education, the method they themselves have asked for. *Howbeit, yet protest solemnly unto them.* God would give them one more chance to choose the best. *And shew them the manner of the king.* The method of the king—that is, his customary behavior.THE REQUEST GRANTED AND THE RESULTS PROPHESED.—V. 10, and to the end of the chapter. God's love for them was so great that he would not allow them to plunge into the worldliness and idolatry without a warning. *And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people.* That is, to the elders, the representatives of the people. Samuel had only to look at neighboring nations to learn the probable fortunes of the Hebrews under a king. In verses 11-18 he paints a faithful and vivid portrait of an Oriental despot. Samuel prophesied that the nation would be reduced to practical slavery by their greatly desired kings,—a prediction amply verified by later history.

With these solemn prophecies ringing in their ears, the elders refused to turn from their purpose. They insisted on a king. And so the Lord bade Samuel promise them the fulfilment of their desire.

THE LESSONS FOR US.—We often pray foolish prayers. Our prayers are foolish: (1) Whenever they do not put God's will first. (2) Whenever they are more for ourselves than others. (3) Whenever they look to the present and forget the future. (4) Whenever they are not based on God's promises.

God requires our supreme allegiance. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." God is not satisfied with half our lives devoted to him, and half to worldly ambitions. All good things are added to the life that chooses God first. All good things fall away from the life that refuses that choice. God or the world—which shall rule over you?

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