

ASKING FOR A KING

I Samuel 8

In all classes the difference between Samuel and all the Judges who preceded him should be made clear, and Samuel's birth and call should be covered briefly.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord adapts His treatment of us to our states.

The Word always shows us clearly the transition from one spiritual state to another.

It is natural and right for us to wish to understand the principles which the Lord gives to guide us, but we must be willing to recognize the difficulties if we are to enjoy the benefits of such knowledge.

When we try to have our own way in anything, it is always to some degree a rejection of the Lord.

Notes for Parents

We learned recently that it was said of the time of the Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This led to weakness, to compromising with the enemies in the land, and often to defeat at their hands. Finally, however, a Judge was raised up who was devoted to the service of the Lord. Samuel was promised to the Lord by his mother before he was born, and was brought up in the tabernacle at Shiloh under the direction of the aged high priest Eli. While he was still a young boy, the Lord called him in the night and gave him a prophetic message for Eli. And as he grew, the Lord continued to be with him so obviously that "all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." So Samuel, who was the last of the Judges, was a religious rather than a military leader, and was recognized throughout the

land instead of in just one part of it, as his predecessors had been. He lived at Ramah in the center of the land, and from there went about from place to place much as our circuit court judges do today.

But our lesson for today tells us that when Samuel became old and had to delegate some of his duties to others, the people became restless under his direction and asked him to give them a king. They were never long satisfied with the government of their unseen God, but wanted to be like the people around them. Samuel quite naturally was displeased, but the Lord told him to let the people have their king, only first to tell them plainly how many sacrifices a king would require of them.

Most of us mean to be good people. We believe there is a God and that we ought to do right. And most of us believe that the Bible is in some way the Word of God. This is like the people's recognition of Samuel as the Lord's prophet. But this world and its demands seem very important to us, just as they did to the Israelites, and we cannot quite be satisfied to go on just obeying the commandments from day to day without seeing just what they are accomplishing for us. We want some big striking principle to follow which will make us powerful with those around us in the world. This is asking for a king. And the Lord never interferes with our freedom of choice. He understands all our weaknesses and does His best to lead us in the right direction, warning us of the difficulties ahead, and helping us to learn even by our own mistakes.



Primary

Point out why the people wanted a king and, if you have time, read them verses 11 to 18. Be sure they make the distinction between the names *Samson* and *Samuel*. See how much they remember of the Samuel story. In the lesson itself, stress the Lord's words to Samuel.

Samuel was not only the last of the Judges, he was the greatest of them. The others had been leaders over one or two of the tribes, but Samuel was recognized as leader of the whole people. For by Samuel's time the Israelites were beginning to see that they were

strong only when they looked to the Lord for guidance, and Samuel was a religious instead of a military leader.

Do you remember where he was brought up?

Do you remember the story of how the Lord spoke to him in the night?

Because of this all the people recognized Samuel as the one through whom the Lord would speak to them and direct them—a prophet of the Lord.

His home was at Ramah near the center of the land.

From there he went about hearing the people's problems and judging them.

When he was old, what did he do which displeased the people?

What did they ask him to do?

Was Samuel pleased?

What did the Lord tell him?

If you would like to find out what Samuel told the people their king would be like, read verses 11 to 18 of our chapter.

Did the people believe Samuel?

What reason did they give for wanting a king?



Junior

This is a good opportunity to review briefly the history of the Israelites, with emphasis on their type of government, and it is also possible to relate this changing government to the life of the individual, as a preparation for later instruction in the spiritual sense of the Word. While we do not go deeply into the spiritual sense with the Juniors, foretastes of it can often be given.

The last of the Judges was Samuel, and he was very different from the others. He was not a military leader. By the time he was born the Israelites were beginning to realize that they could not get along without the Lord. Some of the people, of course, had been faithful all the time. There are always good, sensible people who remember that the Lord is wiser than men. So the worship had gone on in the tabernacle at Shiloh all through the centuries. At the time when Samuel was born, the high priest was a very old man named Eli. You have had part of the story of Samuel before and so you may remember how, before he was born, his mother promised that she would give him to the Lord, and how she brought him, when he was still a little boy, to Shiloh and gave him to Eli to bring up. And you remember how the Lord called Samuel in the night and gave him an important message for Eli.

I Samuel 3:19-20 tells us: “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.” So Samuel came to be recognized as Judge not just in one part of the land but by all the people; He was a very good and just man. Read I Samuel 12:1-5. But in our lesson for today, which is in the time of Samuel’s old age, we find that the people are becoming restless under his leadership. The last few verses of chapter 7 tell us that he lived at Ramah, which is a city not far from Jerusalem, and went regularly in circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpeh to judge the people, very much as our circuit court judges do today. But he could not cover the whole land in his own circuit.

Whom did he make judges under him?

Where did his sons judge?

What wrong things did they do?

What did the people ask Samuel to do?

Was Samuel willing to give them what they asked?

What did the Lord tell him?

What did Samuel tell the people a king would do to them?

Did the people change their minds?

Let us think back to the beginnings of the Hebrew nation. You remember that their first leader was Abraham. Abraham heard the voice of the Lord telling him to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees and go to the land of Canaan and establish himself there. After him, Isaac and Jacob both received confirmation directly from the Lord of their right to govern their people. During the long sojourn in Egypt the Israelites had no leader of their own, but were under the rule of Pharaoh.

Who was their next leader?

How was he chosen?

Who followed Moses?

Did Joshua also have a call from the Lord?

How were the Judges chosen?

How was Samuel himself chosen?

You can see why Samuel was displeased at the people’s request for

a king, and also why the Lord says to him: “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” They wanted someone from among themselves, whom they might accept freely, to rule them instead of someone put over them by the Lord. They wanted to be like other people.

This long history is really a picture of your own life. All through your infancy and childhood and the time when you are growing up your life is controlled by others, by those chosen by God—your parents, guardians, and teachers. But there comes a time when you want to be ruled by your own judgment and not by someone else. This is like the time of the Judges. Then after a while you find that your own judgment often gets you into trouble and that it is safer to listen to the Lord. This is the time of Samuel. But after all you are not a little child anymore and you want to stand on your own feet and choose how to govern your own life. You mean to be good but you want to understand and choose the principles by which you will be led. This is asking for a king. Soon we shall see what kind of king the Israelites first chose to obey.

Intermediate

The important lesson for this class is the meaning of the transition from the period of the Judges to that of the Kings, with Samuel as the connecting link. The teacher may draw on the Senior and Adult notes for material to illustrate the correspondence of a king.

You remember the story of Samuel. His parents were among the few faithful souls who still went regularly to worship at the tabernacle in Shiloh. Hannah, Samuel’s mother, prayed there for a son and promised that if her prayer was granted, she would devote the child to the Lord. So when Samuel was still a little boy, she brought him to Shiloh and gave him to Eli, the old high priest, to bring up in the service of the tabernacle. Then in the night the Lord called Samuel, and gave him a prophetic message for Eli. And as Samuel grew up, the Lord continued to be with him, so that “all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.”

Samuel, therefore, unlike most of the Judges who had preceded him, was a religious and not a military leader and was accepted by the whole nation. You remember that the Judges represent particular truths recalled to our minds by the Lord to meet particular temptations. But this last Judge, Samuel, represents the Word as a whole. We may go along for some time turning to the Lord for help only when we find ourselves in real trouble, but the troubles pile up, and we must finally come to see that we can have no safety and peace unless every part of our life looks to the Lord for direction. Under Samuel the life of the nation became centered again in the tabernacle at Shiloh.

Samuel ends one period and begins another. His life ties the two together. The Lord is always at work in our lives preparing us for the changes He sees are coming. It was necessary for the Israelites to go back for a time to dependence upon an individual who obviously spoke for the Lord just as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Joshua had done. So when we, after the period of indifference pictured by the time of the Judges, come back to whole-hearted worship of the Lord, we at first are satisfied with the simple dependence and obedience which we knew as children. But this satisfaction does not last. We are grown up now, and, although we are willing to admit that we need the Lord's constant direction, we want to understand and adopt that direction in our own way. This is asking Samuel for a king.

A king represents truth ruling—not a single truth but a great general principle under which everything in our lives can be organized. The Israelites told Samuel the reason why they wanted a king: "That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." All the other nations had kings. Everyone has some general principle which rules his life. It may be a selfish principle such as, "Everyone must take care of himself first," or even, "The world owes me a living." Such principles are represented by the kings of the enemies of Israel in the Holy Land. The Israelites wanted a king who could put up a strong opposition to their enemies. They were not content just to

obey the Lord's commands from day to day as they received them from the lips of Samuel. That was why the Lord told Samuel, "they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me." If we are faithful, the time comes when we are satisfied to look to the Lord as little children look to a wise and loving parent for daily guidance, but this state does not often come in our youth.

The Lord understands us all the way and does the best He can for us from state to state. He told Samuel to let the people have a king, but we shall see that, all unknown to them, He directed their choice so that they would finally learn by experience what kind of ruler they really should have. One of the cardinal teachings of the New Church is that the Lord never interferes with our freedom of choice. He tells us plainly what is right and He warns us of all the things we should avoid, and then He leaves us free to choose His way or ours. So He told Samuel to tell the people "the manner of the king" that should reign over them, and Samuel did tell them just how much the king would demand of them. When we choose a certain principle—no matter how good—to rule our lives, we must expect to have to give up many things we have enjoyed. Truth is a hard taskmaster until we have learned to love it. We may have to make over our whole way of life. And then we may find that our first understanding of the truth was faulty and that we have made mistakes which add to our problems. We shall study this possibility further in future lessons.

Basic Correspondences

Samuel = the Word of the Lord as a whole
a king = a ruling principle

Senior

The meaning of asking for a king comes close to the thinking of the Seniors. Stress the correspondence of the leadership of truth separated from good and the hardships it imposes. Prepare the way for later lessons by suggesting that we may find that our first understanding of truth is not altogether reliable. Be sure they understand the continuing function of Samuel.

Samuel was dedicated to the Lord even before he was born, and while still a small boy was brought by his mother Hannah to Shiloh to be brought up in the service of the tabernacle under the direction of the old high priest Eli. When the Lord called Samuel in the night and gave him a prophetic message for Eli, Eli recognized that Samuel was the Lord's messenger, and we are told that as Samuel grew up, "all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." So he came to be Judge over all the nation instead of over one tribe or another, as his predecessors had been. His home was in the central part of the land at Ramah, about midway between Shiloh and the city which was later to be Jerusalem, and like some of our judges today he went about in a circuit to hear and judge the people.

For a time under Samuel the Israelites went back to simple acceptance of the Lord's direction as it came to them through the individual chosen by the Lord to lead them. The earlier Judges represented particular truths needed to meet particular temptations. Samuel represents the Word as a whole. When we, after trying out our own spiritual judgment and strength and finding them inadequate, return to dependence upon the Lord, we are content for a time to accept His direction from day to day as in childhood we accepted the direction of our parents. This is, of course, the ideal attitude and the one which we must eventually adopt. "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." But when we are in the full strength of our young manhood and womanhood, our natural disposition is not satisfied to obey the Lord as if we were children. We want to participate actively in the determination of our spiritual as well as of our worldly destiny. This is pictured in the Bible story by the Israelites asking for a king.

Swedenborg tells us that the office of divine good in our lives is represented by a priest and the office of divine truth by a king. Good and truth are one in the Lord and proceed from Him as one. They are meant to be received by us as one, as they were united in the person of Samuel. But because of our tendency to exalt self

and to think in terms of this world, we will not steadily receive them in this way. Truth is not always what we want it to be. We do not always love to do as truth teaches, even though we think we want the truth. Again we have to learn by experience.

The Lord knows our nature and makes provision for it. So, although the people's rejection of Samuel—the Lord's prophet—was really a rejection of the Lord, as our chapter tells us, the Lord told Samuel to let the people have their king, and we shall find that He knew the kind of king the people would first be willing to obey.

The separation of the office of king from that of priest marks the beginning of another period in the history of the Jews, and you remember that in each period we have seen a representative of this same separation of good and truth or charity and faith. The Lord recognizes that because of our nature we must be led by truth until we come to love it. And truth is a hard master. So the Lord told Samuel to tell the people what treatment they must expect from a king. Whatever principle—good or bad—we may choose as governor of our life, we have to make many sacrifices in its service. All the things which Samuel mentions in verses 11 to 18 of our chapter represent such sacrifices—unwilling adjustments which we shall have to make in our feelings and thoughts and conduct to meet the demands of principle. For truth is hard and unbending, and condemns what is contrary to it. Read Matthew 19: 24-26.

Samuel lived possibly another thirty years after he anointed the first king of Israel and anointed the second king also. He continued to be the religious leader of the nation through whom the Lord spoke to the people. This was a provision of divine providence over the Israelites, and it represents the provision which the Lord makes for our protection and guidance through the difficult years when we are finding our way to a true understanding of our religious principles. Samuel is the hold which the simple trust of our innocent childhood retains upon us after we come to adult years.



Adult

The quotations given with the Adult notes should provide ample discussion material. We shall continue our consideration of Samuel in lessons which follow, but his relation to the proposed king—the fact that he continued to be the Lord’s prophet, so recognized by all the people—should be stressed.

Our spiritual life advances in cycles. Our lesson for today marks another beginning—a transition from one cycle to another—characterized by the familiar choice of truth rather than good. In this story we do not have the simple picture of the older and younger brothers. The choice is more subtle and complex, for Samuel retains his actual control even though the king apparently supplants him.

We are all very familiar with the story of Samuel’s birth and call, but we do not always stop to think of his actual position in the Bible story. Because his story does not begin in the book of Judges, we are likely to forget that he was actually the last Judge. And because we think of the period of the Kings as immediately following that of the Judges, we forget that Samuel overlapped the period of Kings, that he lived to anoint the second King, David, and that the second book of Samuel takes us almost to the end of David’s reign. This is an illustration of the fact that changes are never sudden either in the Word or in life. They may sometimes seem sudden to us, but on the Lord’s part there is always foresight and preparation, and the Lord helps us to adjust to new conditions.

It is rather curious that, in spite of the fact that two books of the Word bear Samuel’s name, there are only a few brief mentions of Samuel in the writings. We are told in AE 750²¹ that Moses and Samuel “in the representative sense signify the Word.” This confirms a point which seems obvious from the letter, since Samuel was Judge over the whole nation, whereas his predecessors—who, as we remember, represent particular truths—were local Judges. We also recognize easily from the letter that Samuel’s influence was religious rather than military, although he was the spokesman of the Lord in the battles fought during his lifetime.

The writings do give us, however, in two places a clear picture

of Samuel's function. In AC 6148 we read: "The Divine good was represented by priests, and the Divine truth by kings . . . In the Ancient Representative Church the priesthood and the royalty were joined together in one person, because the good and truth which proceed from the Lord are united, and in heaven with the angels are also joined together . . . Moreover as a representative church was instituted with the posterity of Jacob, therefore in one person conjointly was represented the Divine good and the Divine truth which proceed united from the Lord. But on account of the wars and of the idolatry of that people, these two offices were at first divided, and they who ruled over the people were called 'leaders', and afterward 'judges'; while they who officiated in holy things were called 'priests', and were of the seed of Aaron, and Levites. Yet afterward these two offices were joined together in one person, as in Eli and in Samuel." It is evident, therefore, that Samuel, although not a Levite, was considered a priest as well as a Judge. We know from I Samuel 3:20 that he was early recognized by all the people to be a "prophet of the Lord."

The period of the Judges culminated in Samuel. The people, after a bitter experience during about two hundred years of trying to get along without divine leadership, had finally come back to united worship of the Lord. Samuel, as we know, was brought up in the tabernacle at Shiloh, and his later home was at Ramah, also in the center of the land. From there he went out to other towns in a circuit to judge the people. Yet we recall that in Samuel's childhood the ark had been taken out of the tabernacle and had been captured by the Philistines in battle; and that although it had been returned to Israel, it had never been replaced in the tabernacle. This suggests the hollowness of the worship which the people now offered. This is confirmed in the continuation of AC 6148⁵: "But because the people were of such a character that a representative church could not be instituted among them, but only the representative of a church, by reason of the idolatrous disposition which prevailed among them, therefore it was permitted that the two offices should be separated, and that the Lord as to Divine

truth should be represented by kings, and as to Divine good by priests. That this was done at the will of the people, and not of the Lord's good pleasure, is manifest from the word of Jehovah unto Samuel (I Samuel 8:7 ff. and 12:19, 20)." The people wanted to worship the Lord not in childlike trust and obedience—which the sole leadership of Samuel represented—but in order that they might be "like all the nations" and overcome their enemies by their armed strength.

AC 6148⁶ gives us further light on our chapter: "Divine truth separated from Divine good condemns every one; whereas Divine truth united to Divine good saves. For from Divine truth man is condemned to hell, but by the Divine good he is taken out therefrom, and is elevated into heaven. Salvation is of mercy, thus from the Divine good; but damnation is when man refuses mercy, and thus rejects from himself the Divine good; wherefore he is left to judgment from truth." And AC 2015¹¹ (see below) uses this same thought to explain why the Lord told Samuel to tell the people "the manner of a king" they would have if they persisted in their desire. All the demands which are mentioned in verses 11 to 18 of our chapter picture the demands which truth separated from good makes upon us.

The explanation of this chapter given us in these passages from the writings is given as to the internal historical sense, showing the application of the chapter to the history of the Jewish Church, but it is not difficult to transfer this explanation to our individual lives. We have seen that the period of the Judges pictures the time in our lives when we believe ourselves to be established in the regenerate life and think we can rest on our oars and enjoy ourselves without further struggle against temptation. The results are disastrous and in time we have to return to the admission of our own evils and weakness and our dependence upon the Lord. This admission, in its first form, takes on the appearance of a return to our childhood state of simple trust and obedience. Samuel, the Lord's prophet, becomes our leader. But we are not actually children. The time of the innocence of ignorance is long past and we still have a long

way to go before we attain the innocence of wisdom. We want to see and understand for ourselves the religious principle we shall follow. And the Lord never interferes with our freedom of choice. He adapts His unseen government to our wayward state and lets us have our king, but with a clear warning of the sacrifices which will be required of us by the principle He foresees we will adopt.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 2015¹⁰⁻¹¹: “As ‘a king’ signifies truth, it may be seen what is meant in the internal sense when the Lord is called a King and also a Priest; and also what it was in the Lord that was represented by kings, and what by priests. Kings represented His Divine truth, and priests His Divine good . . . government from truths alone would condemn everyone to hell; but government from goods lifts every one out thence and uplifts him into heaven . . . But as the kings represented truths, which ought not to have command, for the reason, as before said, that they condemn, therefore the desire to have kings was so displeasing as to call for rebuke, and the nature of truth as regarded in itself was described by the rights of the king (I Samuel 8:11-18); and at an earlier day it was commanded by Moses (Deuteronomy 17:14-18) that they should choose genuine truth which is from good, and not spurious; and that they should not defile it by reasonings and memory-knowledges. This is what is involved in the directions concerning a king, given in Moses in the place just cited; which no one can possibly see from the sense of the letter, but yet is evident from the several points contained in the internal sense; so that ‘king’ and ‘kingship’ evidently represented and signified nothing else than truth.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who was the last of the Judges? *Samuel*
- J. Where was he brought up? *Shiloh*
- J. Who was the high priest when Samuel was a child? *Eli*
- J. How did he and all the people learn that Samuel was to be a prophet?
Lord spoke to Samuel
- J. What was the difference between Samuel and all the earlier Judges?
religious leader, accepted by all
- J. Where was Samuel’s home? *Ramah*
- J. In his old age what did he do which made the people dissatisfied? *let his sons judge*

ASKING FOR A KING

- P. What did they ask him to give them? *a king*
P. Was Samuel willing? *no*
P. What did the Lord tell him? *give them a king*
J. What did Samuel tell the people a king would be like? *harsh*
J. Did they change their minds? *no*
I. What does a king represent? *truth ruling in our lives*
S. What does Samuel represent? *the Word as a whole restoring order to our lives*