

THE CHOOSING OF SAUL

I Samuel 9; 10

All but the youngest children should be able to tell about the characteristics of the period of the Judges and why the people were always getting into trouble in that period. The teacher in his preparation for the lesson should reread I Samuel 8 and be able to give the class this background for the lesson. Be sure the children understand that Samuel is now an old man and a very great man, who speaks to the people for the Lord—a prophet or “seer.”

Doctrinal Points

The first principle under which we organize our adult lives in the Lord’s service is limited by our superficial judgment.

Notes for Parents

We have studied the history of Israel under several types of government. First they looked for direction to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then for a long time they were slaves in Egypt. Then they followed the two great leaders Moses and Joshua. During the period of the Judges we saw that they had no single ruler or leader, but looked to themselves and sought leadership only when they were in trouble. Most of the Judges were local and temporary leaders. Then came the last Judge—Samuel—who, because he proved to be the Lord’s chosen prophet, was eventually looked to for direction by all the people.

Samuel judged the land for many years and was always wise and just and wholly faithful to the Lord. But when he grew old, he turned over some of his duties to his sons, who abused their power. Then, as we learned in chapter 8, the people became dissatisfied and asked Samuel to give them a king so that they might be like other nations.

Samuel was unhappy, for he felt that the people were forgetting

all that he had done for them, but the Lord told him to let them have their king and that, because Samuel was known to be the Lord's prophet, it was really the Lord whom the people had rejected. And the Lord promised to show Samuel who should be king. Our lesson this time tells us how Saul was brought to Samuel, how Samuel first proved to Saul that the Lord had really chosen him, and then how the people were led to recognize and accept Saul as their first king.

We need to notice the reason why the people accepted Saul so willingly: "he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward." In other words, they judged him by his appearance. Is not this the common experience of all of us when we first look for a general principle to direct our lives? We judge by appearances. We know that young adults sometimes feel that they have the answers to everything: if only other people would do as they think they should, the world would be all right. They see only the surface of things and have not enough experience to recognize the deeper issues and forces involved and to take account of them. They are "well-meaning," eager, and energetic, but they are not yet wise.

Older people, however, should have patience with this state. There is a lesson for us all in our story. The Lord chose Saul. He knew that the people were not ready to accept and follow a really wise leader. They had proved it by turning against Samuel. They had to be allowed to learn by experience. So do our young people when they reject wise advice.



Primary

Tell the whole story very simply, explaining what "anointing" means, and then point out why the people liked Saul and were glad to have him for their king. Even little children need to be taught that we cannot always judge things by their appearance.

When Samuel grew old, he let his sons do some of the governing for him, and his sons were not good men. They did not govern the

people fairly, and so the people came to Samuel and asked him to give them a king to rule them as the other nations were ruled. Samuel was unhappy about it, but the Lord told him to let the people have what they asked for, and the Lord promised to show Samuel who should be king.

Who did the Lord show Samuel was to be the first king?

What tribe was Saul from?

What did he look like?

Saul was out looking for some lost asses of his father's when Samuel found him.

Samuel told him that the asses were found, and then that he was to be king.

A little later he "anointed" him.

This means that he poured olive oil on his head as a sign that the Lord was with him.

Then Samuel sent Saul home and called the people together at Mizpeh.

How did it seem to the people that their king was chosen?

Who really governed the way in which the lots fell?

Why were the people pleased with Saul?



Junior

The Juniors may like to trace on a map the wanderings of Saul and his servant in search of the asses. Stress the humility of Saul at the start, and the Lord's way of reassuring him and leading him to accept his office. Discuss the casting of lots and the part the Lord played in the choice of Saul. The Juniors also need the lesson concerning Saul's appearance.

Samuel was recognized as the Lord's prophet, and when he grew up, he was accepted as Judge by all the people. He served faithfully for many years, always obeying the Lord. But when he was old, he turned over some of his duties to his sons. They were not good men, but were greedy for money, and took bribes and did not judge the people justly. So finally the people asked Samuel to give them a king who would rule them as the other nations were ruled. Samuel was reluctant, but the Lord told him to let the people have their way, and that He would show Samuel who was to be their first king.

Who was this first king of Israel?

From what tribe was he?

What did he look like?

What was Saul doing when he first met Samuel?

We can see that the Lord was directing Saul's life. But Saul had to have some preparation before he was openly proclaimed king. He was very humble at first, for when Samuel told him he had been chosen, he answered that his tribe was the smallest in Israel and he himself the least in his tribe. After Samuel anointed him, the Lord gave him several unusual experiences to prove to him that he had really been chosen. We read about these in the first part of chapter 10. The Lord's providence is over each one of us just as much as it was over Saul. Each one of us was created to fill a particular place and to do some special work for the Lord, and nothing happens to us which cannot in some way help to prepare us for this work, if we use our experiences rightly.

Where did Samuel call the people together?

How was Saul chosen this time?

Samuel, of course, knew on whom the lot would fall, but all the people had to see for themselves that the Lord's choice was Saul. Saul knew also, and the fact that he hid himself showed that he was still in a humble frame of mind and thought himself unworthy of so high an office.

Why were the people pleased with Saul?

We shall find, however, that Saul was not as big a man inside as he was on the outside, and that his humility did not last; but the people did not know this. Do we ever, like the Israelites, judge things by their outward appearance without making the effort to look into them more deeply?

Even today kings are still consecrated by anointing, that is, by pouring oil on their heads. It is a very old custom and it comes from the knowledge of correspondence which the ancient peoples had from the Ancient Word. Oil is the symbol of love, and Samuel's act was a sign that Saul must rule from a love of serving the Lord and the neighbor. If everyone who had power used it with this

love in his heart, the world would be a different kind of place.

Intermediate

This class will be interested in the correspondence of the ass (remind them of the lesson on Balaam) and will be able to see what is meant by Saul's being called while he was hunting for his father's asses. Nothing in the Word is there by chance. Everything fits in when we see the internal meaning. The general meaning of Saul is not hard to teach to young people of this age.

In chapter 8 of I Samuel we learned that when Samuel was old, his sons—just as Eli's had done—became corrupt, and that the people became dissatisfied. So they came to Samuel, whose home was still at Ramah, and asked him to give them a king. They said they wanted a king so that they might be like all the other nations. A king represents truth ruling. A priest represents love. Samuel was a judge, but he was also a priest, so Samuel's government of the land pictures a state in which we are directed primarily by love to the Lord. If you think of this, you will understand what is meant by I Samuel 8:6-9. The Lord always leaves us free to choose our own way, but He does everything He can to protect and direct us.

Israel's desire for a king pictures our desire to choose our own ruling principle. We want to do right, but we want to understand why it is right and not merely to do as someone else—even the Lord—tells us to do. We think we are quite capable of judging. But the truth is that it takes many years of experience to become really wise. At first we judge according to appearances. The way which looks best on the face of it we believe to be best. We don't like to wait for results. We don't like to study a problem more deeply to see what really will be the best solution in the long run.

Saul pictures this first superficial standard of judgment. When he first came to Samuel, he was looking for his father's asses which had been lost. The ass pictures our "natural" reason, our common sense. It is a very sure-footed animal but very stubborn, and not at all willing to be guided. Saul's search for his father's asses pictures our attempts to find a "common-sense" solution of our problems,

one which will bring some immediate change in things, without waiting to see whether or not the change will really be for the better.

The people liked Saul for his apparent strength and size—they could “look up” to him literally, for he stood head and shoulders above everyone else. This is the way our own reason looks to us when we are young. We simply can’t see how the world could fail to improve if others would do what we think they should.

The Lord really chose Saul, first by telling Samuel to anoint him, and then by governing the lots which the people cast. The Lord knew Saul’s weaknesses, but he knew that Saul was the only kind of king the people would accept and follow until they had had more experience. In the same way He lets us try out our own judgment and do the things that seem to us right when we are young men and women, even though He knows our judgment is faulty.

The anointing of Saul by Samuel pictures the fact that in this first effort to set up a ruling principle there is a genuine desire to do right. Oil represents love. Any principle which is worthy to govern our lives even for a time must have love in it. If it has not, it is merely the old selfish desire to have our own way. Saul represents a genuine desire to serve the Lord and the neighbor, although not a wholly wise one. In all our first attempts to work out our lives for ourselves, we must be sure that our basic wish is to do good.

Most young people do want to do right. Their ideals are high. They want to do great things in the world for others as well as for themselves. And they mean to serve the Lord. Their ideals and enthusiasm are needed, and can be a great help to everyone so long as they do not assume that they are wise enough to direct affairs. So do not hesitate to offer your help and to try to “get into things” in your church as well as in other fields of activity. But try to be willing to listen to advice, remembering that real wisdom is acquired only by long and patient effort. Saul’s reign is a picture of the time of eager and impetuous youth, and we shall see that he won

some victories but also made some very serious mistakes.

Basic Correspondences

oil = love

a king = truth ruling

a priest = love directing

Saul = the rule of truth as we judge it
to be from external observation

Senior

In this class dwell especially on the meaning of the people's asking for a king and read Samuel's description of what a king would be like (I Samuel 8:10-18). This is a picture of what truth as a ruler does to our lives if we leave out love. The discussion of this and of the meaning of Saul as the first king will bring out questions and illustrations.

The story of Saul contains a lesson which is much needed both by us as individuals and by the world. We often hear it said that youth is the hope of the world, and of course in one sense it is. Those who are young now are the ones who will later control the destiny of the world. This is true of every new generation. But there sometimes seems to be a tendency to imagine that it is the young people who should be in control now. People—especially young people—say, “Look what a mess the older people have made of things! Youth has ideals; youth has energy. Let the young people take over the reins, and everything will be better.” The story of Saul's reign over Israel is the Lord's answer to this mistaken idea.

In our individual lives we all go through the stage—from twenty to thirty perhaps—when we think we know how everything should be done. It seems to us so simple. If everyone would do as we suggest, the world's problems would be solved. The Lord knows, as wise parents and older leaders know, that young people must go through this period, must have this experience. And the ideals and energy and dissatisfaction of youth are needed to keep things stirred up, to keep us from settling down in old ways, to keep our minds open to change. But the judgment of youth is hasty and

superficial. It is apt to ignore the deep problems presented by human nature in every situation, individual or social. It assumes that conditions can be corrected quickly by one or another external method, without the long, slow process of regenerating individuals.

That is, the first ruler we choose as young adults is chosen on the basis of external appearance—it is apparent rather than genuine truth, truth as our “natural rational” sees it. This is Saul as king of Israel. When Saul first came to Samuel, he was hunting for his father’s asses, which had been lost. The ass, sure-footed but stubborn, represents the natural reason, sometimes called “common sense.” When we are young, we exalt common sense—as we see it—and look for what we consider the obvious solutions for our problems. We jump at any solution which seems to make sense. We have no patience with anyone who suggests that our solutions may not in the long run prove really practical. They promise quick results; so they look good to us. The people welcomed Saul as king because of his appearance—he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.

Saul “meant well.” Samuel, at the Lord’s command, anointed him. Anointing oil is a symbol of consecration by divine love. Saul entered upon the kingship knowing that he was dedicated to the Lord’s service and under obligation to obey the Lord’s commands. Youth also means well and intends to serve the Lord. (There are vicious young people as there are vicious adults, but they are a very small percentage of the whole.) The Lord chose Saul as Israel’s first king because He knew the state of the people and that they were not prepared to recognize and follow a wiser leader at this time. We shall find that Saul was to lose his humility very soon—with his first victory—and was to make many mistakes and lose his right to rule because he came to think he knew better than Samuel, the Lord’s prophet. In much the same way young people, if given control, often make mistakes and learn by hard experience that lasting leadership must be based on deeper principles and more wisdom. And wisdom comes only slowly.

Adult

This lesson with the Adults may well be geared to improving the underlying attitude of the older people in the church toward the younger people. In many even of our own societies there is a cleavage between the two groups which is damaging to both and to the church as a whole, and which need not exist if the older people have understanding and patience.

With this lesson we enter a new phase of ancient Hebrew history, and we should have the general outline of the history to this point in mind, beginning with the patriarchal leadership of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which in the individual life pictures the period of infancy, childhood, and early youth, when we are under the control of our parents albeit with ever-increasing understanding and initiative of our own. After the sojourn in Egypt a new type of leadership is introduced in Moses, who represents the Law. This is a period of self-compulsion which lasts until, by experience, we are so convinced of the effectiveness of an orderly life and the disastrous results of disobedience that external obedience to the commandments has become a matter of course in all ordinary affairs. Then we are ready to take the next step and attack the evils in our inner lives. Joshua comes to the fore—the truth fighting—and we follow him until we feel that we are really established in the good life—until the Holy Land is conquered.

But the book of Judges shows us that the conquest is not complete. As soon as we cease to examine ourselves and to fight temptation, our enemies both within and without begin to gain strength again and our lives become a series of battles waged under the leadership of one or another truth, represented by the various Judges, with periods of rest between. Throughout all the time from Moses to the end of the book of Judges the office of priest is separate from the office of leader, the priest representing good and the leader truth. So far as they work together the leadership of the people is sound, but if they are out of harmony—if either is corrupt—disorganization and disaster result. In Samuel the two offices are for a time united, but presently we read: “It came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over

Israel.” And his sons were corrupt. Here we have the lesson of the necessity of constant watchfulness; our own ideas creep in and corrupt the divine order in which we think we are established. A new beginning must be made.

The desire for a king can be most easily illustrated from the experience of young people. They are often genuinely perplexed by their parents’ reaction to their conduct. “Why should my mother allow this thing and forbid that? I can’t see that there is more harm in the one than in the other. How can I tell what I ought to do?” It is the demand for a constant principle of action which will apply to all cases. They have reached the point where they wish to be able to judge for themselves what they ought and ought not to do. They do not want to be always asking permission. This is a natural development. The Lord foresaw its expression in the history of Israel. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20 it is foretold that Israel will demand a king, and the people are commanded to take the king whom the Lord shall choose.

There is an element of loss in this desire for independence from priestly authority. The celestial state desires nothing else than to look to the Lord as a little child to his parent. Self-dependence, even when the desire is to obey the truth, involves ignorance, mistakes, and disasters. Loving and wise parents often sigh when their children reach this stage, as Samuel disliked and feared the change. Yet it is a natural stage, and the Lord has provided for it. The Lord told Samuel to let the people have their way but to warn them that life under a king would not be easy. A king represents truth judging, apart from good, and truth apart from good is always a hard master. In AC 8770² Swedenborg makes an interesting distinction; he says that the kingdom of the judges represents the rule of divine truth from divine good; the kingdom of priests who were also judges (Eli and Samuel), the rule of divine good from which is divine truth; but the kingdom of kings, the rule of divine truth without divine good. In AC 1672, in making the distinction between the meanings of “nation” and “people,” he says: “Before the sons of Israel sought for kings, they were a nation, and represented

good, or the celestial; but after they desired a king, and received one, they became a people, and did not represent good or the celestial, but truth or the spiritual; which was the reason why this was imputed to them as a fault.” See also AC 2015¹¹ (below). The Lord tells Samuel, “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” The desire for independent judgment goes deeper than mere rebellion against parental authority; it is rebellion against all authority which is not felt to be self-derived. Parents cannot prevent it; they can only point out the dangers and try to give their children principles in accordance with divine order—the king whom the Lord shall choose.

Saul was the Lord’s choice as king. Not only did the Lord tell Samuel to anoint Saul, but the lot taken at Mizpeh fell upon Saul. Yet Saul’s time of favor with God was to last only a short time. His victories would be few, and he would prove wholly inadequate to save Israel from most of their enemies. Why did the Lord choose Saul? Why did He not at once choose a David or a Solomon? Because the people were not ready. They would have rejected a wiser leader, while, except for a few “sons of Belial,” they accepted Saul gladly. We have said that what young people demand is a consistent principle of action. There is only one such principle—the law of love—but they are not ready for it. We begin to understand and appreciate the law of love only after a lifetime of effort and experience. This may not seem to be so. We like to think we are acting from the law of love when we follow our natural good impulses, and many never outgrow this superficial idea of goodness. But the law of love is the law of divine love, which cannot be separated from divine wisdom. It has nothing to do with our natural impulses or with the outward appearance of things. The people accepted Saul gladly because of his external appearance of superiority. He stood head and shoulders above all the people. They had to learn by experience that he was not adequate to their needs.

Yet Saul had a measure of fitness for his office. He was to conquer some enemies. We cannot expect of young people the wisdom

of experience. We can expect them to recognize the Lord and to try to do the Lord's will as they see it. They will inevitably at first judge by appearances. They will often be misled by specious arguments and apparent results. They do not like to wait for their results. Saul's size and power appeal to them. They must learn by experience—their own experience—in many cases. But we can help to prepare our children for states and experiences beyond their present knowledge, especially by means of these stories from the Word. The Lord did this with His disciples: "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe." Saul represents divine truth in a natural and external form, suited to the needs and comprehension of certain states through which we all pass in youth and in which we sometimes remain long after we should have grown wiser. "By a king, or by the royalty which belonged to Saul, is signified Divine truth in respect to protection and judgment." (AC 10540⁷).

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 2015¹¹: "As the kings represented truths, which ought not to have command, for the reason . . . 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 [*jus*] of the king (1 Samuel 8:11-18); and at an earlier day it was commanded by Moses (Deut. 17:14-16) 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 [*scientifica*]. 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."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 8770²: "In the representative church among the posterity of Jacob, there was first a kingdom of judges, afterward a kingdom of priests, and lastly a kingdom of kings; and by the kingdom of judges was represented Divine truth from Divine good; by the kingdom of priests, who were also judges, was represented Divine good from which is Divine truth; and by the kingdom of kings was represented Divine truth without Divine good."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- I. Why, when Samuel was old, did the Israelites ask for a king? *his sons were evil*
- I. How did Samuel feel about it? *rejected*
- I. What did the Lord tell him? *they were rejecting Him*
- P. Who was the first king the Lord chose? *Saul*
- J. What was Saul doing when he first met Samuel? *seeking lost asses*
- J. How did Samuel prove to him that the Lord had chosen him? *anointed him (see also I Samuel 10:2-6)*
- J. What does anointing mean? *pouring oil on head*
- J. Where did the Lord call the people together? *Mizpah*
- J. How was Saul chosen there? *by casting lots*
- P. Who really governed the choice by lot? *the Lord*
- P. Why were the people pleased to have Saul for their king? *tall and strong*
- I. What does a king represent? *truth ruling*
- S. What does the rule of Saul represent, and why? *rule of truth as understood at “common-sense” level*