

SAUL'S IMPATIENCE

1 Samuel 13

Samuel, his character and office, forms the link between the period of the judges and that of the kings. The difference between the time of the judges and the time of the kings can be brought out, and the children should get clearly in mind the difference in office between Samuel and Saul and the reason why Samuel really stood above the king and why he had to continue through Saul's reign and until David had gained the confidence of the people. The reason for the people's desire for a king should be pointed out, as well as Samuel's reaction to it and the reason for the Lord's permitting them to have a king even though it was in a sense a rejection of both Samuel and the Lord. In the older classes this should be discussed especially, as it brings out the necessity for our freedom of choice.

Doctrinal Points

Trust in the Lord instead of in self is the basis of spiritual progress.

Notes for Parents

Our lesson for today is about the first king of Israel. This, we recall, was a new kind of leadership. The first leaders were the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Jews then were really just a family, growing in numbers and developing several "collateral" branches, but still living together and recognizing as the head of their family its oldest male member. Then followed the period in Egypt when they had no leader, but were first protected and then enslaved by the ruler of Egypt. Then Moses was raised up to lead them out of Egypt and through the wilderness and to give them at Sinai the commandments and laws he received from the Lord for their guidance. Moses was the lawgiver. He died when they reached the border of the Holy Land, at which point Joshua,

the military leader, took command and led them in the conquest of the Holy Land. Then followed the period of the Judges, a series of local leaders, whom the Lord raised up to conquer particular enemies. This was a time of disorganization when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

The last of the Judges was Samuel. Samuel was the only one of the Judges who was recognized by all the people, and this was because he was seen to be a prophet also, and they had not had a prophet for a long time. But Samuel was not a military leader, and the people wanted a king who would gather an army and lead them against their enemies. Samuel did not lose his position when the first king was chosen. He represented the Lord to the people all his life, and the Lord gave him the duty of anointing the second as well as the first king.

The first king was Saul. The people were delighted with him because he stood head and shoulders above all of them and they felt that surely he would be a leader whom their enemies would respect. But like many strong, brave young people, Saul was more energetic than wise. He won his first battle against the Ammonites and that made him self-confident. So when he was to fight against the Philistines, who had become the virtual rulers of the land, he did not wait for Samuel’s help as he had been told to do. Samuel was to come and offer sacrifices, but Saul became impatient and offered them himself, afterward excusing himself to Samuel on the ground that his men were getting nervous and deserting, and he did not dare to wait. Most of us have had times when we were not willing to “wait on the Lord.” We really know that the Lord’s way is best, but in the stress of some difficulty we trust ourselves instead of the Lord. Saul was told by Samuel that his kingdom would not continue. We have to have a wiser leader than our own judgment. We have to learn patience and trust.

Primary

See what the children can remember of the story of Samuel’s call. Then remind them why the people wanted a king and go on to the story for the day.

There will be no difficulty here in teaching the whole story, and the lesson of Saul's impatience and its result can be understood even at this age. The children will also be interested in verses 19-22.

Who was the last of the Judges?

He was the last because the people decided they wanted a king, so that they could be like the other nations.

But Samuel would still be the Lord's prophet, the one who spoke for the Lord.

So the Lord told Samuel to anoint a man named Saul to be their king. The people were pleased with Saul because he was taller than any of the other men. The Bible says: "He was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward." So the fighting men were glad to have him for their leader, and he easily gathered an army.

But Saul did not turn out to be as good a king as they expected. You know we can't always judge things by their looks. Saul was big and strong and brave, but he was not very wise. Samuel was still the Lord's prophet and Saul knew that he ought to do what Samuel told him to do.

So Saul easily gathered an army, and he won a great victory over an enemy called the Ammonites.

Then a very strong enemy, the Philistines, prepared to attack Israel.

What had made them angry?

Jonathan was Saul's son.

Samuel had told Saul to go to Gilgal and wait for him seven days and he would then come and offer sacrifices.

Saul knew that Samuel spoke for the Lord and that he ought to obey.

So he waited seven days at Gilgal for Samuel to come.

What did he do on the seventh day when Samuel had not arrived?

Are you ever in such a hurry to do something that you forget to obey?

Saul had hardly finished his sacrifice when Samuel came.

What excuse did Saul give?

What did Samuel tell him?

What kind of man would the next king be?

Why did the Israelites not have swords and spears to fight with?

Junior

The Juniors will be interested in studying Israel's position in relation to the

Philistines, the relative size of the armies, and the reasons why the people wanted a king and were pleased with Saul. They should look up the Bible references and study the map. Saul's strength and weakness make excellent lesson material for this age.

For a time the people were satisfied to have no leader except Samuel. Read I Samuel 7:15-17, and find on your map Ramah, Samuel's home, and the three places where he went to hold court. Samuel was a great judge, but he was not a fighting man, and the enemies of Israel were troubling the people. So they asked Samuel to give them a king. They saw that the other nations had kings who led them in battle, and they wanted one to lead them against their enemies. Samuel did not like the idea—he knew they should have been satisfied to let the Lord lead them—but the Lord told him to do as the people asked, and he told him whom to anoint as the first king. It was Saul.

Why were the people so pleased with Saul?

In chapter 11 we learn that Saul won his first battle, which was against the Ammonites. The people were delighted, and went to Gilgal and “renewed” Saul's kingship there. Then (chapter 12) Samuel made a solemn address to the people at Gilgal. He reminded them how he had served the Lord from his childhood, and asked them to say if he had ever done a wrong to any man. The people agreed that he never had. Not many people could win this reputation, could they? Then Samuel told them that if they hoped to prosper, they must obey the Lord, and he called down a storm of thunder and rain as a testimony to the people's wickedness. The people were very much frightened and begged him to pray for them. He promised to do this, but charged them solemnly that both they and their king must obey the Lord.

What enemy now rises against them?

What had made the Philistines angry?

Jonathan was Saul's son. The Philistines were camped at Michmash and Saul's army was gathered around him at Gilgal. Samuel had told Saul (I Samuel 10:8) to wait for him at Gilgal seven days, and

not to go into battle until Samuel had come and offered sacrifices.

What did Saul do?

What excuse did Saul give?

We have seen before that people in the Bible are sometimes punished very severely for faults which seem to us not very great. But these faults always involve direct disobedience to the Lord, and that is never a small fault.

What did Samuel tell Saul?

In the Bible a king always pictures the principle, good or bad, which rules in our lives. A bad king is the principle that everybody else should do what pleases us; a good king is the principle that we should obey the Lord and help our neighbor. Saul, Israel's first king, was chosen for his looks. He meant well, but he was not very wise. Young people generally mean well, but like Saul they are sometimes in too much of a hurry. They do what seems right to them without taking time to think whether or not it is really right. It seemed to Saul that his men were leaving him and that if he did not hurry into battle, he would not be strong enough to conquer. Can you think of any stories in the Bible so far, that were in the history of Israel which Saul knew, which should have taught him better?

The Lord had often showed Israel that it was not their own strength which gave them victory. They could conquer only by means of the Lord's strength, as they obeyed Him. This is just as true of us. Whenever we think we know better than the Lord, we are headed for disaster. We have to make obedience to the Lord the first of our ruling principles. This was why Samuel told Saul that his kingdom would not continue.

What kind of man did Samuel say the next king would be?

Verses 19 to 22 tell us one of the ways in which the Philistines had been able to keep Israel in subjection.

What occupation did the Philistines keep in their own hands?

What was the result?



Intermediate

The relative correspondence of the earlier judges, of Samuel, and of the kings is the important study for this class. The correspondence of the Philistines should be touched upon and the reason why Saul was more successful against the Ammonites. The correspondence of weapons should especially be noted, as it will be important in later lessons.

Samuel was the only Judge whom all the people recognized as their leader. What do you think this means? It means that Samuel represents a truth which is meant to apply to every part of our lives. It is the truth that in every problem we have as the first thing to remember that we ought to trust and obey the Lord's commands, because our Heavenly Father is wiser than we can ever be.

The people should have been satisfied to obey Samuel, but they were not. The armies of their enemies seemed to them so strong that they could not quite believe in the Lord's power to save them. They wanted a king such as the other nations had, a king who would raise an army and lead them in battle. Samuel was displeased that the people wanted a king, because he felt they were rejecting him, but the Lord told him to let them have their way, and that the first king should be Saul. Samuel found Saul and anointed him and then, so that the people would be satisfied with the choice, he called them all together to cast lots, and the lot fell upon Saul. The people liked Saul as their king because of his appearance.

Saul was strong and brave, but he was not very wise. He meant well, but you know that people who mean well can make very serious mistakes if they act without thinking. Saul needed Samuel to guide him. Without Samuel he might have led the people into serious trouble. So Samuel lived and continued to be the Judge and the Lord's prophet almost to the end of Saul's reign.

The kings of Israel represent principles that rule our lives. They all represent the Lord's truth ruling, but we know that we see the truth in different ways at different times. For instance, when you read in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:39), "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also," your first thought is that

the Lord is giving you a command to be obeyed literally, and this is the way the early Christians took it. But presently you find that there are other statements in the Bible which show that we are certainly meant to resist evil, and you begin to try to find out what the Lord really does mean by this command. If you try hard enough, you will find that the word translated “resist” really means, in the Greek, to set something against itself, so that the thought is rather “oppose not evil with evil,” and what the Lord is telling us is that we should not try to “pay back” wrongs that are done to us by doing wrong in return. So even the Lord’s truth can be misunderstood by hasty and superficial judgment, and yet we have to read and learn the literal statement before we can try to understand it.

Saul represents the truth as it first appears to us. He won his first battle and that made him self-confident. So when Samuel did not come to Gilgal just as soon as Saul expected him, Saul went ahead and offered sacrifices himself. Read verses 11 and 12 to see how he tried to excuse himself. He was like the thing he represents. He judged by external appearance and did not wait to be sure he was doing the right thing. So Samuel had to tell him his kingdom would not continue. Whenever we make decisions hastily without taking time to be sure we are right, we are heading for trouble. We have to learn to think carefully and to wait until we are sure.

The enemy attacking Israel this time was the Philistines. They were a very strong and prosperous people who lived in the Holy Land along the Mediterranean seacoast. They had caused the Israelites much trouble, and at the time of our lesson were really ruling over them. We can see this in verses 19 to 22 of our chapter. Agricultural tools picture truths used in developing the mind and character. In the parable of the Sower the development of plants is explained by the Lord Himself as teaching about the growth of truth and goodness in our lives. Weapons picture truths used to overcome our weaknesses and bad habits, the spiritual enemies we all have. The Philistines are one of the most dangerous of these enemies—our tendency to be satisfied with knowing what is right

without doing it. Do you see how true it is that this enemy keeps us from possessing and using effectively our spiritual weapons? Even in the literal story this was a serious handicap. It meant that Saul not only had a much smaller army than the Philistines, but that his men did not have proper weapons. Saul should have known that his army was helpless by itself, and that his strength was not in his army but in the Lord. He did really know it, for he felt that he must make sacrifices to the Lord before he went into battle; but his fear made him forget that he and his people had been solemnly warned by Samuel (I Samuel 12:20-25) that they must obey the Lord in all things.

The story of Saul is given us in the Bible to teach us that we must never set up our own judgment above the Lord's command.

Basic Correspondences

the Philistines = the temptation to be satisfied
with knowing what is right without
doing it

Saul = truth from the Word understood
in its letter only

Samuel = childlike trust and obedience
to the Lord

weapons = truths used to defend us in our
temptations or falsities used against
truth

agricultural tools = truths used to develop character

Senior

The correspondence of Samuel and Saul, their relation to each other, and Saul's weakness and its results are particularly important for this age. The recollection of this lesson may save them from making serious mistakes after they leave home. They will meet the Philistine temptation very soon and need to recognize it for what it is and to be armed against it.

Samuel was the last of the Judges and the only one of them to be recognized by the whole nation as its Judge. The other Judges represent particular truths drawn up by the Lord from our memories to help us overcome particular faults that are bothering us.

When the fault is overcome, the particular truth drops back into our general knowledge. But Samuel represents a general truth which our experience with our faults and weaknesses finally leads us to recognize. It is the truth that in relation to the Lord we are always little children, weak and ignorant, and that we ought to look to Him as our Father and trust and obey Him whether we understand His commands or not.

This does not mean that we should not go on trying to understand. The Lord has given us our brains and He expects us to use them, even though He knows we shall make mistakes. So long as we try to do right and recognize Samuel as our Judge, the Lord can help us to profit by our mistakes and to understand more and more. This is what is meant by the fact that Samuel lived to anoint the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, and that he continued to judge Israel even while Saul was king. Read I Samuel 7:15-17. Saul is believed to have reigned nearly forty years, although the exact time is not stated in the Bible, and Samuel lived until about four years before Saul's death.

The three great kings of Israel represent successive ruling principles, the Lord's truth understood in three different ways. Saul represents a natural understanding of the truth, such as younger people are apt to have. It desires to serve the Lord and is eager for action but impatient under delays and, reasoning from appearances, is liable to set itself up as a better judge of what should be done than even the Lord. Saul was able to overcome the Ammonites, but not the Philistines. Chapter 11 tells about his first great victory. The Ammonites were descendants of Lot and picture external evils. Even a superficial understanding of the truth is able to show us that we must live outwardly moral and useful lives.

But the Philistine temptation is of a different kind. It is possible for a person to lead a very upright external life and still be inwardly selfish and self-satisfied and proud of his own intelligence. The Philistines represent the temptation to think that such an external knowledge and acceptance of the truth is all that is necessary. The only way in which Saul could have been successful against the

Philistines was by keeping constantly before him the remembrance that his power came from the Lord and that only as he obeyed implicitly the Lord's directions as they came to him through Samuel, the Lord's prophet, could he hope for victory. Saul did not have this kind of wisdom and courage. His real trust was in external strength and not in the Lord. So when he saw his army deserting him, he thought he must take things into his own hands. This is just what our first understanding does. It wants quick results. When things do not seem to be going well, it wants to hurry into some new course. It is not willing to trust the ultimate wisdom of simple obedience to the Lord.

Saul's punishment seems severe, but it simply means that our early understanding of the truth is not an adequate guide. It lacks depth of insight and patience. It must be superseded by another ruler, "a man after the Lord's own heart." Notice verses 19 to 22. Israel's dependence upon the Philistines at this period for all its weapons and tools is a clear picture of bondage to self-intelligence. This comes out in young men and women in their tendency to exalt the findings of natural science and humanistic reasoning and to think religion impractical.

Saul as king does represent the rule of truth, but it is truth seen and understood in an external and natural way. This understanding has definite weaknesses and limitations; so it is to be superseded by a deeper and more spiritual understanding. But it wins some victories, and it produces some genuine truth or doctrine. This true doctrine to which our natural reason can lead us is represented by Saul's son Jonathan, about whom we shall study later.

Adult

Here again the Philistine temptation is an important topic, as well as the various aspects of truth presented in the lesson: the Judges, Samuel, the kings, the weapons, and the agricultural implements. The note on verse 21 can well be tied in with the discussion of the meaning of the Philistines.

In I Samuel 7:15-17 we learn that Samuel judged Israel "all the

days of his life,” holding court in a circuit of three towns near the center of the land. Samuel, we recall, represents a necessary return to a childlike state of trust and obedience after we have experienced the unhappy results of trying to direct ourselves. Samuel lived to anoint David as the second king of Israel. His death (I Samuel 25:1) came before that of Saul but after David had risen to popularity. Samuel, as prophet and judge, represents the Word of the Lord, accepted in childlike faith, instructing and judging us as we pass from a state of reliance on our own ideas of right to one of intelligent acceptance of the Lord's guidance. Just as Moses had to remain in the land of Midian for forty years before he was prepared for his call to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, so Samuel had to retain the actual power in the Holy Land until the people had reached the point when they would accept as king a man “after the Lord's own heart.”

Throughout the Word a king represents truth (or falsity) ruling. Recall the Lord's answer to Pilate in John 18:37. The three kings of Israel all represent the Lord's truth ruling in our lives, but they represent that truth seen by us in three different ways, at three different levels of understanding. All three of these levels are adult states and they are necessary stages in our regeneration. Ideally we might live out our lives under Samuel's direction, and some few people do. We recall that when the people asked for a king, Samuel was displeased because he felt himself rejected, but the Lord told him that the people, in rejecting him, were really rejecting the Lord. The Lord then told him to do as the people asked. We are not in an ideal state and we must choose our leaders in freedom, but the Lord provides that with each person who truly wants to do right, the childlike trust represented by Samuel shall remain in control until he has come by the way of experience into the recognition of the higher rational as his leader. David would not have been accepted by Israel at first. Only their experience with the results of Saul's weakness made them see David's strength.

Saul was accepted immediately because of his appearance, because “when he stood among the people, he was higher than any

of the people from his shoulders and upward.” The shoulder corresponds to power. The people were looking for a strong man to lead them against their enemies. Saul as king represents divine truth in its hard, external aspect, untempered by mercy, as it appears to those who have not yet gained any depth of experience and wisdom; to young adults, for example, who are just beginning to form their own independent judgments as to conduct. Saul was completely victorious in his battles with the Ammonites (I Samuel 11) when they attacked Jabesh-gilead, because Gilead, in the territory of Gad across the Jordan, represents good works, and even a superficial understanding of the truth is able to recognize and repel the false arguments which would blind and enslave the affection for doing external good works.

But the Philistines, who are the attackers in our lesson today, were an enemy of a different and more subtle character, an internal enemy, the ever-present and powerful temptation to rest satisfied with knowing what is right without making the effort to do it. It is obvious that truth understood only superficially cannot overcome this enemy. Samuel had told Saul to wait at Gilgal seven days, until he should come and sacrifice to the Lord and assure victory. But Saul was impatient. It appeared to him that his men were leaving him, that the delay was weakening his military strength, and finally he took matters into his own hands and offered the sacrifice himself without waiting for Samuel. Young people almost always feel a good deal of sympathy for Saul in his impatience, which is good evidence of the truth of the correspondence. When we are young and active, we do not like to wait for the right time and way of doing what we believe ought to be done. We may know that we ought to wait, as Saul did, but things seem to be going from bad to worse. We judge by appearances and act before our remains of childlike trust have had time to fulfill their true mission. Actually we put our own judgment before the Lord’s. The failure which inevitably results shows us that the principle on which we have been depending is not adequate, that if our good intentions are to have good results they must have a new principle of a differ-

ent degree from the mere external judgment, something which goes deeper. The kingdom is to be rent from Saul and given to another. "The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

Judgment from mere appearances fails, and the first lesson learned is: "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." (Psalm 27:14) The strengthening of the heart is what the Lord is waiting for. Patience is a virtue which is developed only through trial. Saul was impatient. Young people are impatient, for example, with the slow advance of reforms. To them any action seems better than no action. They must learn by experience to wait as well as to work. Saul's whole strength was in the Lord's help. When he set his own judgment before the Lord's command through Samuel, his efforts were doomed to failure. So it is with us whenever we judge by appearances only and imagine that the Lord's providence is failing and that our own way will bring success. Whenever we act contrary to the Lord's commandments, even though we tell ourselves that we are doing it to hasten the accomplishment of a good purpose, we cut ourselves off from the only power that can bring about good. For our only real strength is the Lord's strength in us. The Lord knows best. "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in his time. (Isaiah 60:22)

Saul's accomplishments were sufficient to accustom the people to the rule of a king, to arouse their loyalty, to establish their courage, to teach them to meet the demands made upon them; and Saul was able to overcome external enemies and partially to overcome more internal ones. But Saul was impatient and self-assertive, superficial in his judgments, and prone to place these judgments above the explicit commands of the Lord. In the same way, the external understanding of truth is sufficient to accustom us to accept the truth as our leader and to develop our ability to stand up for it bravely as occasion requires. But it is not sufficient

to show us the necessity for delays or to get to the root of evils within ourselves and in the world. Verses 19 to 22 add an interesting thought. Tools of all kinds represent truths. Weapons of war are truths of use in fighting evils. Farm implements are truths necessary for developing and preparing uses, the “fruits and grains” to be made part of the life. The Philistines are those who like to know truths but have no desire to live them. In this passage they suggest the people who enjoy intellectual discussion—the sharpening of the mind—but are anxious to keep the “religious” people from doing the same thing except under their direction and control, and especially unwilling to have arguments developed which might expose their own weaknesses and selfish motives.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 700²⁰: “The Philistines represented, and thus signified, those who make no account of good of love and charity, and thus no account of good of life, placing everything of religion in knowledge . . . therefore they were like those at the present day who make faith alone, that is, faith separated from charity, the essential of the church and the essential of salvation. This is why they were called ‘the uncircumcised,’ for to be uncircumcised signifies to be destitute of spiritual love, thus of good. . . . This makes evident why the Philistines conquered, and sometimes the sons of Israel. The Philistines conquered when the sons of Israel departed from the statutes and precepts in not doing them; but when the sons of Israel lived according to these they conquered. To live according to the precepts and statutes was their good of love and good of life. At this time the sons of Israel had been conquered by the Philistines because they had gone away from the worship of Jehovah to the worship of other gods, especially to the worship of Ash-taroth, as can be seen from what Samuel said to them (I Samuel 7:3).”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Why did the people want a king? *to lead them in war*
- P. Whom did the Lord choose as the first king? *Saul*
- I. How did the people know that the Lord had chosen Saul? *drew lots*
- P. Why were they pleased to have Saul as their king? *tall, strong*
- J. What enemy did Saul first conquer? *Ammonites*

SAUL'S IMPATIENCE

- P. What enemy then attacked them? *Philistines*
- J. What was the relation at this time between the Philistines and Israel?
Philistines in power
- P. What had made the Philistines angry? *Jonathan's attack at Geba*
- J. How were the Philistines trying to keep Israel from making war? *allowed them no blacksmiths*
- J. Where was Saul's army gathered? *Gilgal*
- P. What had Samuel told Saul to do? *wait for him seven days*
- P. What did Saul do that was wrong? *offered sacrifice himself*
- J. What excuse did he give Samuel? *people were scattering*
- J. What did Samuel tell him? *he would lose kingdom*
- I. To what do the kings correspond? *divine truth ruling*
- S. To what particularly does Saul correspond? *natural understanding of truth*
- S. What is the correspondence of the Philistines? *faith alone*
- I. What were Saul's weaknesses? *impatience, lack of faith*