

SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES 13 June 2021: (1 Samuel 8)

Although this book in the Bible is called Samuel, it doesn't tell us much about Samuel's life. But we know that he was the link between God and the people in two ways:

He was the *priest* who relayed messages to and from God

He was a *judge* who travelled around to each part of the land, helping people to apply God's laws so everyone could live peaceably together.

One of the things he set out to do was to bring people back to God. The first real example we see of this is when he encouraged the people to apologise to God for how they had forgotten about him. Samuel called everyone together so they could pray and sacrifice to God as a nation of God's people.

But the Philistines got the wrong end of the stick. They thought God's people, the Israelites were gathering to fight them. And they got ready for battle. The Israelites were terrified and begged Samuel to pray for them. God answered in an amazing way. With a thunderstorm! The lightning and noise and rain confused the Philistines and they were unable to fight. They went off home, terrified of the God of Israel!

Samuel set up a memorial to remind the people that God had always been there for them when they prayed. He called this: 'Ebenezer' which means God has always helped us in the past.

But the people quickly forgot that God was always there for them. They soon saw that Samuel was getting old and that his sons were just out to make money and they began to worry about the future. Although the people were not wrong to want a strong leader, they came up with the wrong solution. They could have left the future up to God but instead they asked for a king, like other nations had. They were meant to be different, to be God's people but ...

Samuel was sad. He had spent his life trying to show them that God was their king and they seemed to have learnt nothing. But when he talked to God about the people's request, God pointed out that this was just the same old story: the people were actually rejecting his rule *again*. This was nothing new.

So God told Samuel to make sure the people understood that they were being silly. Samuel went back to the people and reminded them that kings were going to want their sons and daughters and slaves to leave home and serve them. The kings would seize land and they would want taxes. The people would become poorer! They would be like slaves again. He warned them that they would cry out to God about this, but that, if they rejected God in favour of their king, they must not expect that God would sort all their problems for them! They must be careful what they asked for.

But nothing changed the people's minds. They were stubborn. They knew best! They wanted to be like everyone else.

We may find this stupid. But I suspect that we are often just like them!

Even when we pray we seem to think we know what we need. We tell God what to do! "Help me to pass this test/exam." "Make ... better." "Keep me safe." Compare this to how Jesus tells us to pray.

In Jesus' example of a prayer, he starts by reminding himself that God is like a Father cares about us enormously. God knows the best way for us. But we must be prepared to stop and discover his will, not just make demands.

Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 7: 3-6

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 7: 7-8, 10, 12

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 8: 1-4

Thursday: 1 Samuel 8: 19-22

Friday: Psalm 143: 8-10