

1 Samuel 8:4-22

Aim of lesson

To show how God's people wanted to be like other nations, and to show Samuel's faithful obedience to God.

Background study

Deuteronomy 17:14-20, 1 Chronicles 6:31-34, Hosea 13:11

Suggested outline of lesson

This story could be introduced by discussing the ways in which different countries are ruled: some by a king or queen, some by a government, some by a president, etc. Explain that the people of Israel were ruled by God alone. It was he who had given them their land and their identity as a nation. It was he who had given them their laws and rules for living, which were explained to them by priests and judges. How sad it was that the first king of Israel came to power as a result of the people's desire to copy the godless nations around them. They realized that Samuel was getting old and that his sons were not following in his good ways. They could also see that their nation was disorganized and under constant threat from the surrounding nations. The Philistines, especially, had been a trouble to them for many years, as we know from the problems that the judges of Israel, such as Samson, encountered. Now they demanded a king of their own. They did not realize that they had no need of a human king; God was their king - the all-wise, all-knowing, holy, loving creator and sustainer - and they should have been thankful for this, and content.

They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me

Explain how hurt and disappointed Samuel must have felt when his sons had failed to obey God's laws and judged the people falsely. Now he was much more distressed and displeased that the people rejected the system of judges and repudiated God's kingship. Samuel gave the elders no immediate answer; he knew he must first talk to God. God's reply, no doubt, surprised him; it was probably far from what he expected. However, he did not hesitate to obey God and he faithfully carried his message to the elders.

These will be the ways of the king

At this point, it would be interesting to enter into discussion, by means of questions, about the reasons why Israel wanted a king, and then ask the children to consider what, if any, would be the advantages of having a king who had absolute power. On the other hand, might there be disadvantages in having a king? What would he need? Where would he live? What other people would he need to have at his command? Who would pay for all this? What if he were a bad or cruel king? When the children have considered such issues as these, go on to tell them how God instructed Samuel to warn the people of the

consequences of their request being granted. The people however, having made up their minds, were stubborn and unmoved by such warnings. They imagined only the military pomp and the glamour of a monarchy, whereas Samuel, in his wisdom, foresaw the many problems that would arise. Once again he turned to God in prayer and awaited instructions. God said he would choose a king and Samuel had the task of making the arrangements. In spite of his own feelings, he was obedient to God's commands.

Heman

As a postscript, you could point out that Samuel's grandson Heman was responsible for music in the house of God in the time of David, so whatever the wrong-doings of Samuel's firstborn, they were not carried on in the next generation. Our perspective on life is always limited - we cannot see what the years will bring, as God can.

Relevance to the children's lives

The people of Israel saw that other nations had a king - something they had not, and they felt this was unfair. They wanted a king, too. Have you ever looked at something somebody else has had and wished you could have the same? What sorts of things make you feel like this - clothes, toys, hairstyles, holidays, etc? What would be the best way to overcome this feeling?

Worksheets

The code reads 'Listen to the voice of the people: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us not to want everything we see, but instead to be thankful for what we have, knowing that you care for us and give us everything we need. Amen.

Memory verse

'And the Lord said to Samuel ... "they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."' (1 Samuel 8:7).