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THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Sunday, August 3rd
SAMUEL, JUDGE and PROPHEt
Golden Text.—Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only.—1 Sam. 7:3.

The Lesson as a Whole
God's notables have never been hot-house plants, sheltered from the blasts. Many of them received their training in environments which make one wonder how they ever retained their normal rectitude and preserved their faith. We think of Moses in the court of Egypt, and Daniel in the court of Babylon. One would think that the case of Samuel would be different, since he was brought up in the house of the Lord. But even here the influence was none too good for a growing boy. Eli indeed seems to have been a good and kindly man, but he was weak, and exercised no discipline upon his sons. Hophni and Phinehas, who polluted the priesthood with their greed, their overbearing ways, and their immoral practices. No doubt they did all in their power to corrupt the youthful Samuel, for such men are never satisfied to sin alone. But Samuel, like Daniel after him, "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself," and by the grace of God he maintained his purity and integrity despite his environment, and so became a fit instrument in God's hand to lead the nation through one of its sharpest trials and most acute crises.

There can be no doubt that the great factor in Moses' adherence to the ways of the Lord was the influence of his mother, Jochebed, who was hired by the Egyptian princess to be nursemaid to the child, and surely retained her contact with her son through all his growing years. So the prayers and piety of Hannah were certainly accountable, under God, for the steadfastness of Samuel. One so conceived in prayer, so dedicated to God, could not but be a man of God.

Verse by Verse
1 Sam. 7:1-4.—These verses must not be left out of the lesson, for they tell us the occasion of Samuel's breaking in upon the life of the nation as its recognized leader. Twenty years had passed since the sad events of chapters 4 to 6, and still the Philistines oppressed the Children of Israel. After this long discipline, the hearts of the people began to turn to the Lord (v. 2), and Samuel seized the opportunity to call them to all-out repentance, with assurance that God would intervene on their behalf (v. 3). The result was a national repentance and revival (v. 4).

Verse 5.—"Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you." A solemn assembly, in a time of national crisis. Mizpeh, in the territory of Benjamin, was on Samuel's circuit* (v. 16).

Verse 6.—"Drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted." We have sinned," Compare David's action in 2 Samuel 23:16. See also 2 Samuel 14:14 for the possible symbolism. It was part of their fast. It was a day of general confession and of afflicting their souls.

Verse 7.—"The lords of the Philistines up against Israel.... the children of Israel.... were afraid of the Philistines." So the prayers doubtless interpreted the gathering as being for military purposes instead of religious. When we begin doing serious business with God, the enemy will be on hand to oppose. No wonder Israel was afraid. They had long felt the weight of the oppressor. But see Romans 8:31.

Verse 8.—"Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us." They were in a chastened, humbled state of heart, and knew that deliverance could come only from God.

Verse 9.—"And Samuel took a sucking lamb... a burnt-offering... and the Lord heard him." Samuel apparently acted as priest as well as judge. A burnt offering represents that which is wholly acceptable to God, and so makes propitiation. So Christ is our burnt offering. The prayer is accepted on the ground of the sacrifice.

Verse 10.—"The Philistines drew near to battle... the Lord thundered... and they were smitten before Israel." Let us take our stand on the ground of Calvary, and the enemy shall not stand before us. The thunder was the Lord's audible answer to Samuel's prayer, and the panic of the Philistines the effective answer. Israel went out against an already defeated foe.

Verse 11.—"And the men of Israel... pursued the Philistines, and smote them." They followed up their advantage. So the sorrowful confessions of the morning gave place to the shouts of victory.
Verse 12.—"Eben-ezer... Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Eben-ezer means "the stone of help," that is, the stone which testifies to the help of God. It is good to raise up a memorial of God's signal blessings. "Forget not all his benefits." The China Inland Mission adopted "Eben-ezer" as half of its motto, the other half being "Jehovah-Jireh," an expression of trust for the future.

Verse 13.—"And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." Samuel was not a military leader, but his intercessions prevailed with God. We need more than prowess on the field; we need power with God.

Verse 14.—"And the cities... were restored to Israel." So long as these strongholds were in the hands of the Philistines, Israel was not safe. Nor are we safe so long as

we give vantage ground to sin in our lives.

Verse 15.—"And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life." Apparently Saul did not assume the duties of the judge when he became king.

Verse 16.—"And he went from year to year in circuit." Doubtless at stated times he made the circuit, so making easier the administration of justice.

Verse 17.—"Ramach; for there was his house;... and there he built an altar." The altar of God was at the very heart of Samuel's life.

The Heart of the Lesson
Josephus says that Samuel, at the time of his call, was twelve years old. The record does not show that he assumed leadership immediately on the death of Eli, although before this and after the Lord's revelation to him in the Tabernacle it is said that "all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel" (1 Sam. 3:20 to 4:1). After the capture of the ark and its return, the people "lamented after the Lord," and here Samuel appears again in the record. We can well believe that this stirring in Israel was an answer to his own yearning prayers. His prophetic voice now rings through the land in a call to repentance, the fires of revival sweep the nation, and in the flames the heathen altars and images are consumed.

Such a movement called for national recognition and confirmation, so the great assembly was called at Mizpeh. Confession of sin, with fasting and humiliation, was the order of the day, with Samuel directing and meeting out judgment. The Philistine overlords could not overlook such an assembly. They suspected insurrection, and it was a splendid opportunity to teach the stubborn Israelites a lesson. But they did not reckon on a man of prayer, and a sacrifice acceptable to God, and a people turned back to God, and God turned back to His people. The Lord spoke in the thunder. It was a word of assurance to Israel, and a word of terror to the army of the Philistines. While panic gripped the foe, Israel surged forward, "strong in the Lord." Not only was Israel's territory freed, but Philistine strongholds fell to the possession of Israel. Never again did the Philistines secure their former hold. They at times harassed Israel, and won some battles (1 Sam. 31), but never again able to keep Israel in thrall.

What is the heart of this lesson? I think it is this: a man prayed for twenty years; a nation turned to God; the cry of oppression gave place to the shout of triumph.

JUMPING PARSON COMING TO ONE

Sports Director George Duthie of the Canadian National Exhibition says the Reverend Bob Richards will take part in sports events at the big Toronto fair next month. The "Jumping Parson", as he's often called, is the top United States pole vaulter and holds several records. He plans to compete in the track and field meets at Toronto August 30th and on Labor Day, as well. Duthie says the athletic parson also will conduct the sportsmen's vespers at a service Sunday, August 31st.

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