

Samuel the Judge.

OCTOBER 14.

1 SAMUEL VII: 3-17.

Golden Text, 1 Samuel 7: 12.

AN important crisis in the history of the Children of Israel is at hand. For forty years they had been oppressed by the Philistines and sadly humiliated. They had relapsed into idolatry. They had lost the visible symbol of God's presence—the ark, which for seven months had been in the possession of their enemies. But all this discipline was needed to bring them to repentance. At length, out of the depths of their misery, "All Israel lamented after the Lord," v. 2. Vs. 3-4. Samuel, now fifty years old, enters upon his life's work as judge, prophet and reformer. He speaks with authority. *If ye do return*—True repentance is a turning from sin to God, and it is a condition attached to the promise of deliverance. *Put away the strange gods*—That is the first step towards reconciliation, for God must have no rivals, no divided allegiance, Exo. 20: 3-6. The strange gods worshipped by the heathen were *Baalim and Ashteroth*, the plural names of their chief deities, Baalam and Ashtereth. V. 5. *Mizpeh*—a city in Benjamin about 3½ miles north from Jerusalem. The object in gathering the tribes there was that they might solemnly renew their covenant vows to serve Jehovah, as their fathers had done at Shechem in the days of Joshua, Jos. 24: 14-29. *I will pray for you* from this and many other passages of scripture learn the duty and privilege of intercessory prayer, Luke 22: 32; James 5: 16. V. 6. *Poured water out*—an emblematic act to intimate that they were emptied of idolatry and that their promises had gone forth "as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again," 2 Sam. 14: 14. *They fasted*—in token of humiliation; and *said*—confession of sin to God naturally accompanies repentance, and is acceptable to Him, 1 John 1: 9. V. 7. The Philistines would naturally regard this gathering as a determination on the part of the Israelites to throw off their yoke. *Were afraid*—Well for them that they were so conscious of their own weakness as that they looked to the Lord for deliverance. Vs. 8-11. The whole record is a notable instance of the efficacy of prayer. At the same time it teaches that answers to prayer usually come in the use of appointed means. While the Lord thundered, the Israelites fought. V. 12. The deliverance which comes in answer to prayer should be commemorated. *Blowez*—stones of help—memorial of the mercy and faithfulness of God. The best recognition we can make of God's goodness to us is consecration to His service. Rom. 12: 1. Vs. 13-14. The deliverance was complete, and so it will eventually be with all who trust in the Lord, Ps. 34: 7; 103: 1-3.

Asking a King.

OCTOBER 21.

1 SAMUEL VIII: 1-10.

Golden Text, Psalms 118: 9.

TWENTY years of peace and prosperity followed the victory recorded in last lesson. We have now to notice a remarkable popular movement which Samuel was powerless to prevent, but which, wise man that he was, he endeavoured to control. The idea of having a king was not new to the Hebrews. All the surrounding nations were so governed. Before this they had invited Gideon to assume the functions of royalty, Jud. 8: 22. V. 1. Samuel was now about seventy years old. It seems he had appointed his sons to assist in the administration of affairs in the southern provinces. The office of Judge was not hereditary; neither were the good qualities of Samuel. V. 3. His sons were selfish, covetous, and unprincipled. Vs. 4, 5. *Ramah*, about four miles N. West from Jerusalem, was the birth-place, home, and burial place of Samuel. His sons were stationed at Beersheba, about forty-five miles S. West from Jerusalem. The demand for a king came from the representative "elders of the people," who, being dissatisfied with the administration of the young men, thought to find a remedy for their grievances in the establishment of a permanent hereditary monarchy. V. 6. Personal feeling might partly account for Samuel's reluctance to listen to the proposal. Old men do not like to be laid on the shelf. But it was principally on the ground that it was a revolutionary movement without any divine warrant for it. With characteristic deference to the will of God, he prays over it, see Ch. 15: 11. A fine example to Christians in every time of difficulty, Ps. 145: 18. V. 7. The answer of the Lord is full of grace and sympathy. It takes in the whole situation and goes to the root of the matter. In rejecting Samuel the people were virtually rejecting God, who Himself had been their ruler all along. The burden of their sin was not so much desiring a king, which in course of time they might reasonably enough expect, Gen. 17: 6-16; Deut. 17: 14-20, but rather because they went about it in the wrong way. They wanted to be rid of God's authority, and to have such a ruler as the heathen had. Their sin was *apostasy*, Heb. 3: 12. Their conduct was in keeping with their history. All along they had been fickle and ungrateful. V. 9. From what follows we learn that God sometimes allows people to have their own way in order that they may be convinced that His way is better. They had their desire granted, but were fully warned of the consequences; yet, with their eyes open, they said, "Nay, but we will have a king." (Read to the end of the chapter). We are taught by this lesson to trust in God, because he knows what is best for us, Ps. 125: 1; 1 Tim. 4: 10; and warned against trusting in man, Ps. 60: 11-12; Jer. 17: 5-8.