

“Things Written Aforetime”

A Sample Kingdom

Ancient prophecies pointed to Judah as the ruling tribe of Israel (Genesis 49:10). But the first king was a Benjamite! Once the dominance of Judah was later established, God fulfilled His promise to continue the succession of David’s house (2 Samuel 7:12-13). But the previous dynasty of Saul ended abruptly only a few years after his death! Much speculation has been provoked by this strange set of events. If the Lord intended for Judah to be the reigning tribe, why did God choose a Benjamite as the first king of Israel? (1 Samuel 10:17-24). If He intended to establish a permanent dynasty, why did God close the first kingdom, after only one king?

Speculation on these questions will never die, no doubt, but we can see an “object lesson” in this puzzling chain of events. First, God permits the establishment of a Kingdom; He sets conditions on its continuation, and shuts it down when it fails! The Kingdom of David followed the same pattern, but its progress toward failure slowly developed over many generations. God set His conditions for supporting it, but it gradually drifted into persistent wickedness, until God finally dissolved its earthly existence, having run out of “remedies” (2 Chronicles 36:11-21). Thus, Saul’s Kingdom seems to be a prophetic example of the destiny of David’s.

Saul’s sample kingdom was ushered in on a sour note. God caused Samuel, the prophet-judge, to make a speech that expressed doubt as to the prospects of Saul’s Kingdom, and setting conditions regarding its permanence (1 Samuel 12:1-25). Samuel reviewed the experience of the ancestors of Israel, showing the great good that they had known under the reign of God. Yet, they had forsaken God on several occasions, suffering evil consequences from these failures. He showed that they should not expect that having a King would bring a magic stability to their existence. God would *still* expect obedience to His laws. It would be well for Israel, if they followed this condition, but if they failed, Samuel promised, “The hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers.” Samuel’s speech ended with the summary, “Only fear Jehovah, and serve Him in truth with all your heart, for consider how great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be consumed, *both you and your king!*”

After only a few days, the new King stumbled into his first violation of God’s conditions. A Philistine army threatened and terrified his own. He wanted desperately to invoke the blessing of God in a sacrifice. However, he did not have the patience to wait for the arrival of Samuel, so that the sacrifice could be made according to the commandment of the Lord. Samuel’s rebuke bleakly announced the brevity of Saul’s Kingdom. “You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of Jehovah your God, which he commanded you; for now would Jehovah have established your king-

dom upon Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue..." (1 Samuel 13:5-15).

In a later incident, Saul had specific orders to destroy the wicked remnants of the descendants of Amalek. Their doom had been smoldering for hundreds of years since the time of God's threat against them (Deuteronomy 25:17-19), and God now wished to use Saul as His instrument for their destruction. The incomplete obedience of Saul roused the wrath of God, and Samuel spoke for the Lord, saying, "Because you have rejected the word of Jehovah, He has also rejected you from being King" (1 Samuel 15:1-23).

God desired to reign as the true king in the hearts of Israel, and He exerted His rule in two ways. He gave them the Law of Moses, and He directed them through His prophets to accomplish His temporal goals. Saul violated the established Law in his first mistake, and did not completely yield to God's personal direction in the second. In terrible consequence, his kingdom collapsed, and his heirs were mostly destroyed, proving that the rule of God is not to be taken lightly.

For this lesson to take root, and become profitable to Christians, they would do well to honor the conditions of salvation which God has stated. Christians are saved by the gospel, *if* they "hold fast" to the Word (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). They are cleansed by blood, *if* they "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7). They shall never fail, *if* they "add" to their faith (2 Peter 1:2-11). They shall reap their reward, *if* they "faint not" (Galatians 6:9-10). Since God is at least as clear in stating His conditions of obedience today, as He was with Saul, we certainly cannot trample His Law or His leadership through indifference, or carelessness. The consequences would be unspeakable!

The Kingdom of Saul (or, later, the Kingdom of David) could have served as the ideal prophetic image of the Kingdom of Christ, but was marred by the tool of human frailty. Other foreshadows of the New Testament system, such as the ritual of the Temple, or the Priesthood, were similarly corrupted by the same means. So also the Kingdom of Christ is not immune to perversion by violent men who disrespect the Word of God. Consequently, men today should be warned by witnessing the destruction of Saul's conditional kingdom, and learn that they cannot hope to avoid the consequences of ignoring God's conditional salvation.