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THE EARLY GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL

The Early Government of Israel

The story of Samuel ushers the account of the condition of the government of Israel. In 1 Samuel, God takes His covenant people away from the failing theocratic administration under the tribal judges and into theocratic administration under united monarchy. It is important to realize in the account of Samuel and the major kings of Israel (namely Saul, David, and Solomon) that God is fully aware of what He is doing, even if His response seems to be manipulated by or dependent upon the people of Israel. Despite the mistakes of the nation of Israel, God still orchestrates His sovereign plan among the people.

A Desire for a King

The most worthy of note in the early part of 1 Samuel is the people's desire for a king as seen in chapter 8. Prior to this, the book accounts to the "spiritual depression" of Israel presumably due to the failure of the judges and the wickedness of the household of the judge-priest Eli. God seemed silent to the people. Then God used Samuel to lead the people in place of Eli, and he ministered to the nation all the days of his life (1 Samuel 7: 15). In chapter 7, Samuel led the people into a genuine turning to God. Repentance and cleansing [of idols] throughout Israel were made. However, chapter 8 repeats the history with the fall of Samuel's sons in sin (verse 3). Given this condition of the leadership of the judges, it provided the people with a ready-made excuse to ask for a king similar to other nations. Being dissatisfied with the

present government and being anxious with their enemies (particularly the Philistines), the people wanted a king to lead them.

A Mistake: Trusting in Man

Although Samuel warned the people about the perils of having a king rule over them (1 Samuel 8: 10-18), the people insisted. It turns out in verse 19-20 that what the people also desired is that someone would lead them in their battles. They wanted what pagan nations around them have. They did not say, " Give us a judge that is better, wiser, and more righteous than your sons." Instead, they asked for their own thing. God gave Israel judges, but the people wanted something else. It was a denial that God can lead them in life and in battles far better than the other nations. Thus, it is clear that their request is a disobedience to God.

The Selection of Saul

The selection of Saul as the first king of Israel marks the " selfish" desires of the people. It was a matter of people's preference rather than God's. God looks at the heart, but 1 Samuel 9: 2 shows that these people based their selection on the outward appearance of Saul. The account of the coronation of Saul explains the displeasure of God over the people's decision. In fact, the people acknowledged their own evil request (12: 19). Moreover, Saul does not fit the promise of God that the redeemer of Israel would come from the tribe of Judah, for he is from Benjamin.

The Rejection of Saul

Although Saul had a good beginning of his reign, he failed to honor the Mosaic covenant, and his poor choices led to a rapid deterioration of his

kingdom. In chapter 12, Samuel continued to address the people and the king to be faithful to God. He warned them about the consequence of not fearing God and doing His commandments. If they do not remain faithful, the people and the king will be swept away (12: 24). However, Saul made a serious mistake in the battle against the Philistines in chapter 13. He became impatient, and offered burnt and peace offerings by himself - which he is never supposed to do. Samuel rebuked him, telling him that he acted foolishly and have disobeyed God (13: 13). Due to his action, his kingdom is bound to fall and his throne will be passed on to another man - David. The lack of God's presence with Saul was also manifested in his inconsiderate orders to his men (including Jonathan) in 1 Samuel 14: 24-46. Further, Saul disobeyed God's command to eliminate the Amalekites completely. He spared Agag, and took the best of the livestock, and all that they deemed good.

The Selection of David

Even while Saul was still reigning as king over Israel, the Lord anointed David king for His own people. He already prepared David as the appropriate man in the office of the king. In selection among the siblings, Samuel was directed by God not to look on the outward appearance of men. In contrast to Saul, David was chosen not by man's preference but by God's. Also, chapter 16 tells that the Spirit of God left Saul and empowered David. These clearly show that David's becoming king is the choice of God Himself. Moreover, David's selection was further confirmed through his victory over Goliath in chapter 17. Unlike Saul, who hid himself by the baggage (10: 22), David left his own baggage to face Goliath. Further, David refused to use Saul armor in

facing the giant. Unlike Saul, David relied on God's deliverance rather than on man. David refused to believe in himself but simply believed that the battle is the Lord's.

The Division of the Kingdom after Solomon

The division of the kingdom resulted after the death of King Solomon.

Chapter 11 tells of Solomon's folly of idolatry. Although it could be assumed that his political marriages, brought peace and security to the nation, his action led to the spread of idols in the lands. The division is a direct result of Solomon's idolatry. As Israel strayed further and further from God because of idol worship, the kingdom was weakened internally and Israel became easily devoured by their neighboring countries.

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