

The Government of Saul – Brief Remarks

“I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath” (Hos 13:11)

The times of the Judges were characterised by a persistent and pervasive failure in government. In the latter days of Samuel, the people wanted a king to rule over them. But not just any king. They wanted one that “was like all the nations” (1 Sam 8:5). Their desire for a king like unto the nations was foretold by Moses, who was well aware of the fleshly hearts of the people. He had warned them against it (Deut 17:14-20). Despite this warning and the warning from Samuel, they insisted on having a king – and this king was Saul.

Saul the man

Saul was from the tribe of *Benjamin*, the son of Kish. He had four sons, *Jonathan*, *Abinadab*, *Malchishua* and *Ish-bosheth*; his daughters were *Merab* and *Michal* (who married David). Scripture testifies to Saul as “a choice young man, and goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.” He was also marked by humility. When Samuel spoke of Saul becoming king, he replied, “Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?” He was also careful to give glory to God for the victory over Nahash the Ammonite (1 Sam 11:13). But despite his early virtues, Saul soon became a very different man and his government a dismal failure.

The reign of Saul properly begins in chapter 8 of First Samuel.¹ Prior to this time the land under Samuel enjoyed peace. The Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel. The hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. Cities lost to Israel were restored and there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. Samuel raised a stone between Mizpeh and Shen, and called it *Ebenezer*, meaning, “Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.” But all this was about to change for the worse as the rule of Samuel drew to an end and failure in government set in under Saul.

The nature of divine government

Divine government is a *theocracy*. It is to be distinguished from an *autocracy* – the rule of one man who is answerable to none but himself. It is also to be distinguished from a *democracy* – rule by the people for the people. When we study divine government in Scripture, we find that as a theocracy it involves two vital elements – the *sanctuary* of God and the *throne* of God. The former speaks of the seat of divine government – the heavens; the latter speaks of the administration of God’s government. And so we have in Psalm 103, “The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Ps 103:19).

Then we have the instruments of divine government in the *sceptre* and the *sword*. The former speaks of the sanctuary in regard to its scope and righteous authority. The latter speaks of the execution of that righteous authority. “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre” (Ps 45:6). We find it prophetically in Genesis 49 in regard to the millennial government under Christ. “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen 49:10). The prophecy in Numbers also makes reference to the sceptre and sword of government in regard to the Lord. “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth” (Num 24:17). In Revelation 19 we have the sword proceeding from the Lord’s mouth to smite the nations: and His sceptre of rule will be a rod of iron.

The failure of governmental under Saul

The failure in all governments headed up by man, can be traced to failure in regard to the sanctuary and to the throne. We rightly value the validity and vitality of the sanctuary and the throne when it comes to our worship of God and our personal lives before Him. But, there is a tendency – as history and present days testify, to place little emphasis upon them in regard to our responsibility in government. The matter of assembly discipline for instance, has often been compromised because of a failure to appreciate that it is a matter of divine government involving the sanctuary and the throne – the sceptre and sword. Disciplined offenders are given sympathy, which serves to present them with options. These options hinder them from seeking the sanctuary in confession. And so government breaks down and all ends in fleshly disorder! “Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard” (Pro 13:15).

In the day of Noah we have the beginning of the dispensation of government. Man failed under conscience, and the flood brought divine judgment because of his corruption. In Noah, man was given the sceptre and sword of government. But he failed in regard to them. Failure in the sanctuary and the throne was evident in the reign of the kings of Israel in Scripture. Later, when in captivity, the sceptre and sword were taken away from Israel and they passed into Gentile hands. There too the governments failed! It also failed in the times of Samuel and Saul, as we now observe.

Failure in regard to the sanctuary

The failure within the sanctuary in the days of Samuel and Saul, is seen in the spiritual poverty of the priesthood. The sons of Eli – Hophni and Phinehas, sinned and caused the people to transgress. At one stage the Ark of the Covenant – the symbol of God’s dwelling had been captured by the Philistines and the glory of God departed from Israel. “And she [the wife of Phinehas] named the child Ichabod, saying, the glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law [Eli] and her husband” (1 Sam 4:21). The Ark was returned later – but not to the sanctuary. It was taken to the house of Abinadab in Kirijath-jearim. The sanctuary was therefore devoid of its essential glory and power. Where there is no sanctuary there can be no theocracy. Hence, the quest by David in his days on the

throne to restore the Ark from within a tent to the sanctuary.¹ Before this took place, we see David as the anointed king prepared to come within the heavenly sanctuary before God and seek His will and ways.² “And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts” (2 Sam 6:17-18).

Failure in regard to the throne

There was no king over Israel and so no throne in the land. There must be a king and a throne in order to have a kingdom. The people had rejected God as king and in so doing they rejected His throne and kingdom. God brought in a series of judges to rule in Israel. Their failure is seen in Samuel’s sons. “And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.” The hope and piety that came in answer to Hannah’s prayer in her son Samuel, had degenerated into spiritual poverty and pollution through his own sons.

Reformation not repentance

Rather than repentance, the people sought reformation, which was to set up their own king and government. In this action they completely side-stepped the sanctuary and the throne of God. In this we have the difference between repentance and reformation. Repentance seeks the sanctuary in self-confession; reformation shuts it out in self-promotion. This is what we often find when the responsibility for government is given to man. Rather than seek the sanctuary in confession, there is self-promotion abetted by the voice of the people to bring about a reformation. “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Sam 8:4-5).

The contradictions and calamities of Saul as king

Against this sad background we are able to identify some of the specific failures of Saul and of man in government, where he seeks to serve himself rather than to submit to God and serve Him. Saul’s reign was “in the flesh.” “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after

¹Eli, the high priest must share some of the blame for his son’s iniquities. “He retrained them not” (1 Sam 3:13). “Judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Pet 4:17). It serves as a vital lesson to all in responsibility, who would refrain from exercising discipline where needed. Failure to correct means shared responsibility for the sin. The local assembly is the sphere of divine government and that government takes place within the sanctuary. Men have polluted this divine principle with their ecclesiastical courts, church boards and edicts. They seek to bind matters before a clerical bench, rather than before the bar of God’s throne. It is no longer of course, the Ark of the Covenant in the midst, but the great Antitype – Christ the mediator of the New Covenant, seated in heavenly places. And so we read in Matthew 18, “Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

² “And David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.” “And when David enquired of the LORD, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees” (2 Sam 5:19, 23).

the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5). Saul lived and reigned after the flesh because he was a debtor to it.

The flattered flesh

The coming of Saul as king was energised by the flesh and, sad to say, so was his rule. In his early days when the Spirit of God was upon him, he had victory over the Ammonites and was careful to attribute the victory to God. “For today the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel” (11:13). It was, at first sight, fitting that he renewed the kingdom at Gilgal – the place that marked the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt and the cutting away of the flesh. But the flesh is never far away. “And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly” (11:15). But observe the audacity of the flesh! “*They* made Saul king before the LORD.” Saul accepted this worldly acclaim from men without hesitation or any qualification. He and his government was even then, at Gilgal, the product of the people and the flesh. We do not read here of any rejoicing in Samuel!

This is an all too common failure within the professing church. It reflects among other things, the desire for reformation rather than repentance. Men set themselves over churches and administrations according to their own interests, and *then* they invite the Lord to give them His sanction. Samuel saw the failure. He discerns the spiritual poverty of the people, declares the restorative purposes of God and sets forth a promise. “Now therefore behold the king whom **ye** have chosen, and whom **ye** have desired! and, behold, the **LORD** hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God” (12:13-14). The promise here is for order and peace that comes from following the rule of God’s law.

But have we observed what is *not* promised? That peculiar blessing which was to be coveted by Israel and granted by divine covenant. It was the *dwelling* of the Lord among them from within the sanctuary! This had to wait for the movement of the man after God’s own heart – David. It could never be so under Saul, a man who was after the heart of the people. It if were so, it would mean God’s approval of the people’s choice, of the flesh that coerced it a contradiction of His judgment, in that “they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them (1 Sam 8:7). The Lord would indeed be present in Israel – but He would not be “resident.”³ And so the greater blessing that comes from His dwelling among His people could not begin until the reign of David, in which the Ark was destined to be returned to the sanctuary. And so we have in the reign of David’s son, Solomon, a lovely figure of the millennial government of Christ, in which the sanctuary and the throne are brought into divine harmony through the sceptre and sword of righteousness. Such that “the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kings 8:11). “But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (Heb 1:8).

³ Such is the sad case with the denominational administrations set up by men.

The flawed flesh

Why did Noah fail in government? It was because he failed the first principle of righteous government; he was unable to rule himself – he became drunk and abased himself! How like the priest and the sons of Samuel; how like Saul, who failed this first principle of self-rule time and again – as noted in his self-serving jealousy of David and the curse he placed upon any should they stop to eat while the enemy was being pursued. True, we do not read of Saul erecting idols; he did not need to, because he was himself the idol which, no doubt was in part cultivated by the flattery he received from the people. Propriety and piety in self is a divine standard even today, where the sceptre and sword of righteous government have been assigned to the local assembly. We have it in Paul's exhortation to the elders in Acts 20. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). We have it too in the qualifications needed for oversight – especially in that "if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim 3:5).

The unrighteousness of the people in the reign of Saul was, as it was in the day when their true King was presented. One in whom the first and every principle of rule was inviolate. He was and is the perfect man in whom there is no sin, who knew no sin and did no sin, the Son of God. He was not of Saul, but of David – the man after God's own heart. But they shouted with one accord, "We have no king but Caesar." "We will not have this man to reign over us." How true the contrast drawn by Paul and placed before the carnal Corinthians! "Howbeit [therefore] that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Cor 15:46). It was so with Saul and David; it was so with Jesus of Nazareth and Barabbas – and, it will be so with that same faithless generation in regard to the antichrist and the coming King of glory. God will raise "unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth" (Jer 23:5).

The foolishness of the flesh

In chapter 13 we see Saul act in wilful opposition to the commandment of Samuel, the prophet of God. He does not wait for Samuel to arrive at Gilgal, and takes it upon himself to present offerings to God (1 Sam 13). The flattered, flawed and now wilful flesh, strives against the Spirit and asserts itself. Saul is rebuked by Samuel and a judgment is pronounced upon his government. And, with it, as often happens – a prophecy is announced. "And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee" (1 Sam 13:13-14). Saul did what was right in his own eyes, but it was foolishness! How often after the flesh is flattered it becomes flawed to the extent that it becomes wilful, runs away and commits a foolishness through presumption! We are reminded that God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:24). "A flattering mouth worketh ruin" (Pro 26:28).

There is a typical application to be noted. In the Tribulation, Israel, save for the faithful remnant, will set their affections upon another king foreshadowed by Saul. For them, as the unfaithful remnant, Gilgal is a

relic buried under the mountainous sands of self-will. The antichrist, flattered and favoured by the people will be their chosen man. He is the “wilful king” mentioned in Daniel 11, who like Saul will exalt himself.

The faithlessness of the flesh

We now see the flattered, flawed and foolishness of the flesh degenerate into a failure in faith. In chapter 14 we see that Johnathan steels away from Saul to engage the spoiling Philistines. Saul, with his six hundred men, lay faint and faithless under a pomegranate tree in the uttermost parts of Gibeah. His lacklustre companions and the presence of Ahiah the priest, reflect the failed priesthood and the absence of the glory of God. The ephod is there, but in muted presence, for there is no communication between Saul and God.⁴ Johnathan had what Saul lost: a belief in the power of God and an appreciation of God’s righteous judgment against the “uncircumcised” Philistines. He had the heavenly sanctuary and heavenly throne in view. “And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few” (1 Sam 14:6). Flattery feeds the flesh and breeds self-will which is found out by foolishness. They combined to cast Saul into a sphere of unbelief.

The fascination of the flesh

Through the Lord Johnathan wrought a great success over the Philistines. When he came to know of the success, Saul was grieved. Fascinated with himself and his fortunes, Saul wanted the victory for himself. The Philistines were taken to be his own enemy – not the uncircumcised spoilers, the enemies of God and of His people. “Till *I* have avenged *myself* upon *mine* enemies.” He takes over and, in his desire for “hot pursuit” he pronounces a curse upon any who would compromise it by stopping to eat. “And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food.” His fascination with himself imperilled his son Johnathan. Unaware of the king’s curse, Johnathan ate honey from a tree; yet Saul insisted on his death. However, the people saved the day. Johnathan was reprieved. Such is the rash fascination of the flesh. The rules and rituals that we have in the governments of Christendom are fascinations of the flesh, which seek to further the status and standing of men. They stumble and imperil the spiritual welfare of the saints of God. The object of the battle – the glory of Christ and His cross – is lost to the fortunes of men.

The fear of the flesh

There is an abiding fear of the flesh. It lies in what others think and do, and governments fall prey to it when they are conducted outside the sanctuary. The flesh is vulnerable to the popular voice and often yields to it, even though it results in rank disobedience. We see this in chapter 15. The commandment of the Lord was to “go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” This was to be an act of divine judgment upon the Amalekites because of what they did to Israel when they left Egypt (1 Sam 15:2–3).

⁴ This is not the Ark being brought back from Kirjath-jearim as in the AV. The Ark was not something that could simply be “brought hither.” The root word is “box” (aw-rone'), which could refer to the vessel that carried the ephod (cf 1 Sam 14:3).

But Saul as king failed in his royal mission – he lost sight of the sanctuary, the throne and he abandoned the sceptre and sword of righteousness. He “and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.” He reasoned that the best of the beasts should be spared for sacrifices and offerings to God. For this he was rebuked by Samuel. “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams, for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Sam 15:22–23). Saul was thus compelled to acknowledge his sin and confess the reason for it. “And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.” Saul in government was outside the sanctuary and so he forgot the lesson from history. “When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (Deut 20:1).

There is an ever present danger to seek and fall into line with the majority view – or, a minority view held by the influential. In either case proper government is held to ransom. It is always a sad dereliction before the Lord and His word, if those who are charged by God with government fear the people. They may fear a threat to their popularity or that church numbers may fall as people threaten to defect. And so the proper and spiritual course is abandoned and scriptural principles fall by the wayside. We are reminded that “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Pro 29:25).

The fanaticism of the flesh

Envy is vanity and vexation of spirit and we see it in Saul as king. In chapter 18 we read that “Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David's enemy continually” (v 29). It was pure jealousy that fuelled Saul's fanatical quest to murder David. Where there should have been a sceptre of righteousness in hand, there was a javelin of jealousy. History shows how jealousy has caused governments in Christendom to hurl the javelin rather than uplift the sceptre of righteousness. Saul looked at David's victories and his appeal among the people through covetous eyes; but he did not address his own vices. This is what envy does! Favour was showed to Saul, yet he did not learn righteousness, he dealt unjustly, because he did not behold the majesty of the LORD. Envy is a sin that is harboured in the innermost of the heart – it is “even the rottenness of the bones” (Pro 14:30). It polluted Saul's government. “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Pro 14:34).

That same fanaticism is seen in the horrible histories of men such as Hitler and Stalin. They eliminated all who posed a threat to their power and position. Like Saul, there was no fear of God before their eyes (Rom 3:18), and so they devised mischief upon their beds; and set themselves in ways that were not good; they abhorred not evil (Ps 36:4).

The fraudulent nature of the flesh

In chapter 28 we read that Saul was again facing a threat from the Philistines. Samuel had died. In fear and trembling, Saul seeks help from a source expressly forbidden by God. “Then said Saul unto his

servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor” (1 Sam 28:7). He goes to her and seeks help to bring up Samuel. This was indeed a dark matter, because her profession was acquired in the school of Satan. Such was the fraud perpetrated by the flesh, that earlier in accordance with the commandments of God, Saul put out of the land those that had familiar spirits (Ex 22:18; Deut 18:10,11).

Observe then the black hypocrisy and deception of the flesh which drove Saul to *disobey* the Word of God and then seek to *depend* upon words that were not of God. This was the sad state of King Saul and Israel, for the people who knowingly consented to his rule and its predicted failing. It foreshadows the sad state of apostate Israel in the Tribulation, the people not only disobey God’s Word, but also defect to the words of the Beast, who at that time is part of the satanic trinity.

The finality of the flesh – self destruction

In government Saul and the Beast confer with evil and share an ignominious end, but with this difference. Saul falls on his own sword; the Beast will be put to the sword.⁵ Why the difference? Saul, as David confessed, despite his failures was anointed of God. He was imprisoned by the flesh, but he was not a personification of satanic power. The Beast was not and could never be anointed by God. He is Satan’s man, his anointed ruler and the opponent of God. “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess 2:4). He will be judged and must be destroyed by the One on a white horse noted above, clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God, and He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” – even the Faithful and True (Rev 19:11–16).

No doubt, Saul was God’s choice as king – but it was one that He knew would suit and reprove the carnal hearts of the people. In their request for a king, the people showed no dependence on God at all. “And the LORD said unto Samuel, hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam 8:7). “So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels” (Ps 81:12). This is God’s judgment. God has given men up to their lusts, and has allowed them to walk according to the counsels of their own hearts.

The responsibility of the people

The lessons from Saul’s government are sobering lessons to the governed. In the reign of Saul there is no voice of God coming to the people out of the tabernacle as in the days of Moses and Aaron. He was not dwelling among them; He could not because of His rejection by the people. God will depart and sometimes allow the government chosen by the people in order that they are reprovved. And, if not reprovved, then He will give them up to the follies associated with their fleshly counsels. There may be a large community of

⁵ The account of the Amalekite in 2 Samuel chapter 1, was as false as it was opportunistic, thinking he could gain a reward from the killing of David’s enemy in Saul.

people and even much activity which pleases the flesh, but very little spirituality, which grieves the Spirit. It has been said, that “the people get the government that they deserve.” The principle holds true in regard to the people in the day of Saul. Let it also be true in the positive sense for the Lord’s people today; that the people look to God and His Spirit to appoint those who are to rule. Then the people who are not natural, will get the government which they deserve – that which is spiritual.

The local church is to be governed by a theocracy. It is “house of God,” indicating its divine character as being within the sanctuary and before the throne (1 Tim 3:15). This is allied to the truth of His Spirit raising overseers; the Chief Shepherd reigning through His Spirit-led under-shepherds (1 Pet 5). Where we submit to the Word of God and allow liberty to His Spirit, men will be raised and fitted for local rule and, there will be no difficulty in knowing and accepting those He raises – even from “Dan to Bersheba.” Government will be sanctified by the sanctuary and judgments sealed before the throne. The sceptre of righteousness will be raised in administration which will be according to the Word of God, which is sharper than a two-edged sword.

We conclude with a remark that properly belongs to a contrast between the rule of Saul and of David. In his carnal and self-serving reign, Saul lost sight of the truth that “the Lord’s portion is His people!” (Deut 32:9). The Church is the object of the Lord’s unfailing love and glory on earth. He gave Himself for it. How large then, is the responsibility given to us in regard to it – even the Lord’s portion, in government under the sceptre and sword of the Chief Shepherd! The people in Saul’s day were at fault. By rejecting the Lord as king and bringing in another to rule, they too had lost sight of the truth, that the Lord’s portion is His people!

⁴In chapter 13 verse 1, we read in the AV that “Saul reigned one year,” which is taken to be the sense of the literal rendering, that *Saul was years old when he became king*. It is common in Scripture to have the king’s numerical age noted when took up his reign – the regal expression (2 Sam 2:10; 5:4; 1 Kings 14:21; 22:42, etc.). It is worth remembering that this is the beginning and transitional period of the monarchy in Israel and the regal formula was perhaps yet to be warranted. Some argue that the regal formula was intended, but there was an error of omission in the original text. “Saul was years old when he became king.” The Septuagint omits verse 1 altogether so it removes the problem. Others argue the literal rendering is that Saul was *one year old* when he became king. This can only be figurative; meaning that when he began his reign, Saul was as innocent and good (or as naive) as a child of a year old; hence the Chaldee paraphrase: “he was without fault, like the son of a year”. This may be consistent with the description of him in chapter 9. He was “a choice young man, and goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he.” Yet others have suggested that the expression relates to the year after Saul’s *anointing* by Samuel. That is, that one year had passed from his being anointed, to the renewal of the kingdom at Gilgal; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, then he chose 3,000 men etc. His son Johnathon was at that time given command of 1,000 of Saul’s chosen men, which means that Saul was not an infant in physical terms. The expression “when he had reigned two years over Israel” records the events of those years. It does not say he “only” reigned 2 years. Both Luke (Acts 13:24) and Josephus state Saul reigned 40 (rounded) years.

Clearly, the matter is inconclusive, and we may wish to side with one of the many explanations. We prefer to conclude that the numerical age of Saul has been omitted and, that his age at the beginning of his reign was not of significance to the narrative. Its omission of itself does not mean that it was done in error! It seems that verse 1 simply refers to a description of Saul’s early reign – in which he displayed dependence and deference to Samuel – a son of one year!