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CHRONOLOGIES AND KINGS (1)

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We have completed our overall survey of Biblical chronology, and now turn to a detailed examination of the Biblical information regarding the chronology of Israel's kings. The first piece of chronological information we have regarding Israel's kings is very cryptic, and it serves as an guide to the interpretation of some later cryptic verses we shall find as we go along.

1 Samuel 13:1 literally says: "A son of one year was Saul when he became king, and two years he reigned over Israel." There are two obvious problems with this verse. First, how could Saul become king when he was one year Old, and especially since he obviously was much older? Second, how can it be said that Saul only reigned two years, when clearly he reigned for many more (including the whole time David was in exile)?

The actual number of years Saul reigned was 40, according to the inspired saying of Paul in Acts 13:21: "And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for 40 years." This verse settles the larger chronological question, but it forces us to consider again what to do with 1 Samuel 13:1.

One solution, which we find in the New International Version, is to assume that 1 Samuel 13:1 has become corrupted in transmission. A few late manuscripts of the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament read that Saul was 30 years old when he began to reign, so that is how the NIV renders the first half of the verse. Then, taking Acts 13:21 into account, the NIV assumes that a number had dropped out of the second half of 1 Samuel 13:1, so that it should read, "and 42 years he reigned over Israel." The NIV footnotes explain that the translators have assumed that Acts 13:21 is giving around number when it says he only reigned for 40 years.

If, however, there is a way to interpret 1 Samuel 13:1 without changing it, we should do so. Besides, Saul must have been older than thirty at this time, because he had a grown son, Jonathan, who was old enough to serve in the army with him. Saul was probably about 40 when he began to reign, reigned 40 years, and died at about 80 years of age.

Martin Anstey (*Chronology of the Old Testament*, p. 164) points to a better interpretation, but misses the mark. With many older commentators, he states that Saul's two-year reign only covers the time when he legitimately ruled Israel. For the remainder of his reign, he says, "are years of the unrecognized and illegitimate tyranny of Saul, the usurper of David's throne, and the rejected of the Lord" (p. 165).

illegitimate usurpation of his throne. - went out of his way to accord Saul respect as the Lord's anointed and as Israel's proper ruler.

The first half of the verse, Anstey maintains, should not be translated "A son of one year was Saul when he began reigning," but rather "A son of one year was Saul in his @ W W f . ' ' h c @ ; I ~ 1 3 1 m a a n a n a that Saul has already reigned one year, and has only two more legitimate years to reign. This is how the translators of the original and new King James versions interpreted the clause, for they rendered it: "Saul reigned one year."

It is true that the phrase translated "when he began reigning," is literally in Hebrew "in his reigning," but this is the phrase used everywhere else in the Old Testament to denote the beginning of a man's reign (2 Samuel 2:10; 5:4; 1 Kings 14:21; etc.) Unless it means something else here, which is what Anstey asserts, we shall have to look for another interpretation.

So, then, first of all, what does it mean that Saul was only one year old when he began to reign? The answer is not hard to find. As I have shown elsewhere, Saul was adopted by Samuel as his son when Samuel anointed him king (1 Samuel 10:9). Thus, Said was said to be in the Company of the prophets, "and who is their father?" (1 Samuel 10:12). Their father was Samuel, and so at this point Saul was adopted by Samuel. (For more information on this, and what it means for the king to have the prophet as his father, see my essay, *King Saul: A Study in Humanity and the Fall*, available for \$5.00 postpaid from Biblii Horizons, c/o Jordan, 642 Brookhaven, Niceville, FL 32578).

After that, Saul was made a judge, and he defeated Nahash ("serpent") the Ammonite. After that victory, Saul was proclaimed king (1 Samuel 11).

Now we are in a position to understand the meaning of 1 Samuel 13:1 in context. It means that a year after Saul's adoption by Samuel, he became king "when he was one year old." This interpretation does full justice to the grammar of 1 Samuel 13:1 as well as to its context.

Now, what about the second half of 1 Samuel 13:1? What were Saul's two years of reign? Many older expositors link this half of the verse with - 2, a phrase that reads: "and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose . . ." This is also the way the translators of the original and new King James versions took it. The problem with this translation is, again, that the phrase is a formula used everywhere else for the actual length of a king's reign (2 Samuel 2:10; 5:4; 1 Kings 14:21; etc.).

James translation does not make

accession, and the length of his reign?

We have seen that in context Saul can properly be said to have been one year old when he became king. Now, the text tells us that he reigned for two years. What happened during these two years. The events are recounted in 1 Samuel 13-15, which record the three falls of Saul. At the end, after Saul's third and final rebellion against the Lord, Samuel announced to him that the kingdom had been taken from him, and that he had been rejected from being king (1 Samuel 15:26-28). Yet, even though Saul was rejected at this point from being king in a spiritual sense, Samuel continued to treat Saul as king in a national sense (1 Samuel 15:30). Saul's kingship was not illegal (contrary to Anstey), but it was assuredly doomed.

What we need to learn from this interpretation is this: Sometimes the chronology will date a king's reign not from his natural birth, but from some other spiritual event in his history, or in Israel's history. Sometimes the length of a king's reign will be given in terms of something other than his literal rule over the nation.

What this means for us is that we cannot simply run through the text of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles and add up years, assuming in every case that they measure the literal age of a man when he begins his reign and the literal number of years he reigns. In most cases, of course, such a procedure is proper, but in every case we have to read the information in context, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and make sure that our interpretation is sound before adding up the numbers.

Saul In Context

Back in *Biblical Chronology* 2:2 (February, 1990), we saw that from the time Israel conquered Canaan to that of Jephthah was 300 years (Judges 11:26), while the time from the exodus (40 years before) to the fourth year of Solomon was 460 years (1 Kings 6:1). That leaves 140 years from Jephthah to the fourth year of Solomon.

Subtract 40 for David's reign, 40 for Saul's, and 4 for Solomon's, and we have 56 years left. There were 40 years of Philistine oppression at the beginning of this pe-

growing up. During the second 20, Samuel and Samson judged Israel. The battle of Mizpah took place immediately after that, in the year Samuel died and right at the time Elon the Zebulunite, the northern judge, also died (Judges 12:7-12). That leaves 33 years between the battle of Mizpah and the call of Saul, and 34 years until Saul became king at the (adopted) age of one year. Samuel was 74.

This means that Saul was probably born just before the battle of Mizpah. He grew up under the judgeship of Samuel. Samuel was about 35 years older than Saul. Saul's rejection of Samuel's counsel becomes all the more culpable in the light of this chronological investigation.

David was 30 when Saul died, so that David was born in the tenth year of Saul's reign (2 Samuel 5:4). Samuel was 64. Saul had already been rejected for eight years. Since Jonathan was already a member of the army when Saul was rejected, he must have been at least 20 at that time (Numbers 1:3). Thus, Jonathan was about 26 when David was born. If David was anointed by Samuel at the age of 10, this would be at the mid-point of Saul's 40-year reign, and Jonathan would be 36. Samuel was 94---

If David was 15 when he slew Goliath, Jonathan would be 43 years old at the time and David formed their friendship. (We should note here that 1 Samuel 16:15-23 is placed in the text out of chronological sequence. These events happened after the defeat of Goliath in chapter 17.) Samuel was 99.

David served as Saul's armor bearer for several years, and then joined the army at age 20. He became so popular that Saul drove him out into exile, probably at the age of 23 or so. Samuel was 107. Jonathan would be about 51 at that time. During David's exile, Samuel died (1 Samuel 25:1), perhaps at the age of 110 (compare Joshua 24:29).

David became king when Saul died at the age of about 60, and Jonathan died at the same time, at about 56 years of age. Saul's youngest son, Ishbosheth, was 40 (1 Samuel 31:2; 2 Samuel 2:10).