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Establishing the Kingdom, Part 1

If you were to sit down and read a synopsis of the life of Christ, it wouldn't take long to discover that Christ came to establish a literal kingdom. At the start of His public ministry we read that Jesus began preaching in Galilee saying this:

Mark 1:15, "And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Now this kingdom which Christ spoke of did not exist prior to His coming.

Luke 7:28, "For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

As John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets, he was not part of the inauguration of Christ's earthly kingdom, he died before it was realized on earth. And that is why though he was the greatest man born of a woman, nevertheless the least in the Kingdom is greater than he!

So what is this kingdom?

In its most essential form, Christ's kingdom is defined as His reign and rule. However it involves so much more than this. It is physical; though today it is unseen.

How can it be physical and yet unseen?

It is physical and unseen because its inauguration began and currently exists in the hearts of man!

Luke 17:20-21 (NIV), “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation [that is, in its inauguration it would not come as other earthly kingdoms with pomp, circumstance, parades, and the like], nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.’”

Truly when Christ’s Kingdom came into this world, it first was established in the hearts of men and women. Yet that is not to say that someday it will not concern itself with physical geography. The day is coming when every land and place on this earth will be ruled over by Christ who at that time will walk the earth.

2 Peter 3:13, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

Some day Christ is going to destroy this world, re-create it, and then establish once again regency in which He would walk in the cool of the day with His people. When Christ returns this is what we will be doing:

Revelation 5:10, “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

When Christ returns we will co-reign with Christ in a kingdom which encompasses the entire world! Such is the glorious Kingdom which entered into this world when first Christ walked the earth.

And yet you must know that this Kingdom was God’s plan from the beginning. As such, the things of this life beginning with the physical creation to

- Its passing seasons.
- The rise and fall of nations.
- Its institutions and governments.
- Its many false religions.
- The falling of a sparrow on the ground.

All of this was given to foreshadow, proclaim, and adorn the Kingdom of God’s beloved Son of which we are privileged citizens.¹

John 5:39, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”

Colossians 2:17, “Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”

Accordingly as we have been considering the rise of Saul as the first King of Israel, we believe that what is recorded here about “Its Beginning” is a shadow of the outworking of the Messianic Reign and Rule of Christ in our day. With that, let’s consider how God established the Kingdom under Saul with the expectation that this will teach us about the nature and growth of the Messianic Kingdom of Christ.

¹ Compare Philippians 3:20

The Players

Player 1

1 Samuel 11:1, “**Then Nahash² the Ammonite came up**, and encamped against Jabeshgilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.”

Nahash was the king of the Ammonites which populated the region east of the Dead Sea. This people-group traced their origin to Ben-ammi, Lot’s youngest son by his daughter.³ They were regarded as relatives of the Israelites and so were commanded to treat the children of Abraham kindly.⁴ Yet time and again their history shows that they rose up against Israel every chance they could get.

For example, in Deuteronomy 23, the Ammonites joined the Moabites in hiring Balaam to curse Israel.⁵ In the days of the Judges, the Ammonites assisted Eglon of Moab to subdue Israelite territory.⁶ And at the time of Jephthah they encroached on Israelite lands east of the Jordan.⁷

Accordingly, the Ammonites would remain enemies of Israel throughout their history. Now at the time of our passage the king of the Ammonites was “Nahash”- whose name literally means snake or serpent. Because of our passage and so the Ammonite defeat here, Nahash had it out for Saul and so opposed him every chance he got.⁸

This is the first “player” in the establishing of the Kingdom of God’s Anointed — Nahash. Notice that he was at war with Israel.

1 Samuel 11:1, “Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, **and encamped against Jabeshgilead**: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.

Jabeshgilead was a city on the Jabbok River which lay on the east side of the Jordan midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Depending on your Bible knowledge, you may or may not remember that this was the city, toward the end of the book of Judges, which refused to fight against Benjamin when civil war broke out between Israel and this sinful tribe.⁹ As a result, Benjamin along with this city were wiped out... except for four hundred girls from Jabeshgilead who were given as wives to the remaining six hundred men of Benjamin.¹⁰

Now a helpful piece of trivia as we approach this text is that, as a Benjaminite, Saul’s family would have been traced back to this city- for his great, great grandmother (whatever, we do not know) would have been one of the women who were given in marriage to the men of Benjamin. This explains why Saul was quick to come to their aid even though, as we’ll see, throughout the territory many an Israelite man already had lost their right eye to Nahash and Saul did nothing.

² נָחָשׁ Nachash Nahash = "serpent"

³ Compare Genesis 19:38

⁴ Compare Deuteronomy 2:19

⁵ Compare Deuteronomy 23:3-6

⁶ Compare Judges 3:13

⁷ Compare Judges 11

⁸ Compare 1 Chronicles 19:2

⁹ Compare Judges 21

¹⁰ Compare Judges 21:8

This also explains why the men of this city were the ones who fought the Philistines in order to retrieve the bodies of both Saul and Jonathan following their deaths in battle.¹¹

Player 2

Jabeshgilead was a city favored by virtue of their relation to the king.

Player 3

This brings us to the third player.

1 Samuel 11:5, “And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field; and Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh.”

And so we behold the THIRD PLAYER, Saul. At this time, the time of his anointing, recall that Saul was not a young man. Jonathan his son was an adult who would serve as one of his generals.¹² Furthermore, it is clear in this passage that though Saul was God’s anointed and so the vessel through which God would deliver His people, nevertheless his kingdom was not yet established since our text finds Saul not engaged in the affairs of state, but plowing in the fields. And we also see that Saul wasn’t engaged as king because Jabeshgilead did not come running to him in their distress, but they sent out a general distress to the entire nation.¹³

So there you have it; a cruel and heartless snake, Nahash; a favored town by virtue of their relationship with the king, Jabeshgilead; and a man whom God claimed as His own and yet whose kingdom had not been established, Saul..

The Assault

With this state of affairs, notice the assault.

1 Samuel 11:1, “Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabeshgilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.”

It is believed that these events occurred about one month following the installation of Saul as King. And whether you realize it or not this would have been a serious threat.

At this place and time, laying siege to a city represented a most cruel tactic of warfare akin to our view of terrorism. Today we look down upon the terrorist because his tactic is to attempt to break the resolve of a people by attacking the helpless, weak, and innocent.

Well that is what siege warfare was all about at this time. During a siege, the he gates to the city were blocked; food and supplies were not allowed in or out; if a man, woman, or child were caught escaping, more often than not they were killed on the spot. In fact when Rome laid siege to Jerusalem in 70 AD anyone caught escaping was crucified on the spot!

¹¹ Compare 1 Samuel 31:11-13 and 2 Samuel 2:4

¹² Compare 1 Samuel 13:2-3

¹³ Compare 1 Samuel 11:3-4

A siege resulted in a city being brought to its knees as the inhabitants; first the weak, aged, and then the children, began dying either of thirst or hunger. Think of the atrocity that occurred to Samaria when they were under siege.

2 Kings 6:24-30, “And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress? And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh.”

This is the awful result of siege warfare!

And yet why is Nahash laying siege to this city and no others?

The possible answer is given in a passage found in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible¹⁴.

1 Samuel 10:27 (NRSV) , “Now Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites [recall that these tribes took the eastern side of the Dead Sea as their home during the distribution of the land following the conquest (Joshua. 13:15-28) that region which formerly was under the control of the Ammonites]. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabeshgilead. About a month later...”

If this is indeed part of Scripture, and it very well could be, then the fuller picture is that Jabeshgilead was a city of refuge into which many fled upon suffering the threat of Nahash, the snake!

The Bargaining

And that brings us to the bargaining.

1 Samuel 11:1, “Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabeshgilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, **Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.**”

This passage literally reads, “cut a covenant” by virtue of the fact that when a vassal treaty, a covenant was made at this time, animals would be cut in half and the parties would walk between them.¹⁵

¹⁴ Recall that for the most part the Hebrew Old Testament has remained intact and therefore free of errors. Textual criticism shows us this by comparing the Massoretic text and the Dead Sea scrolls. However that is not to say that there are no problem passages- texts which read differently when placed side-by-side with other valid manuscripts. And our text is one of those times. The passage found in the NRSV was preserved in the Qumran scrolls (i.e., in the Dead Sea Scrolls) and quoted by Josephus. Note that both the MT and the *LXX* omit this section.

¹⁵ Compare Genesis 15:9-11, 17 and Jeremiah 34:18

Now, during our study hour we've seen the elements of the vassal treaties which existed during this time. While I will not go into the details here, suffice it to say that when a stronger nation threatened a weaker one or simply when it served the interests of the two nations a covenant and so a relationship could be forged between the two peoples wherein

- The stronger nation promised to protect the weaker one, and
- The weaker nation would become its vassal promising to
- Submit to the stronger nation.
- Pay them a set tribute.

It is this type of relationship which is being sought after here. Though Gad and Reuben were the covenant people of God and so already a vassal nation of the Lord¹⁶ therefore they needed only to look to God for their protection. And they had an anointed king whom God gave to Israel to protect them at just such a time. Nevertheless the men of Jabeshgilead (Gadites and Reubenites combined) resorted to willing submission to Nahash if only he would call off his army!

The Humiliation

And this brings us to the humiliation.

1 Samuel 11:2, "And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel."

This is the ultimate in cruelty. Indeed Nahash would love to enter into a Vassal Treaty with Israel but first they had to give him their right eye! Family of God, you must see that this conditioned was stated for no other reason than the gross humiliation of Israel. God's people weren't attacking the Ammonites here. They were living peacefully in their own land when Nahash attacked.

And so we do not regard this condition as an element of military strategy, but as the desire to demoralize the people of God. Notice the two phrases here:

- "Thrust out all your right eyes" though not a mortal wound by any stretch of the imagination, nevertheless in terms of a man's ability to protect his family or his city, this was a serious blow depth perception requires two points of reference and hence two eyes. Thus the gouging out of an eye rendered a warrior useless on the battle field- it's akin to the de-clawing of a bear. Furthermore, fighting while using a shield- the primary means of warfare at the time- would have been all put impossible. Josephus put it this way: "...and this he did, that when their left eyes were covered by their shields, they might be wholly useless in war."¹⁷ Matthew Henry added this clarification: "They must disable them for war, for in those times they fought with shields in their left hands, which covered their left eye, so that a soldier without his right eye was in effect blind."¹⁸

Now what effect would this have on a population when its strong, hardened, and well-trained warriors to be rendered useless when it came to battle?

Not only would it make the city vulnerable since their army would be unable to protect them, but it

¹⁶ Compare Exodus 24

¹⁷ *Ant.* vi. 5. 1.

¹⁸ *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume*, 1 Samuel, page 297

also would seriously effect morale as hordes now could sweep in, plunder property, with little or no recourse from Jabesh's men. So this was a serious and, honestly, unfair condition. So why did Nahash require this? As I said, it was for no other purpose than to humiliate Israel.

- “Thus I will make it a reproach on all Israel:” This gives the specific connotation of casting scorn on someone. And from this we see the real motive behind Nahash's condition was that he was not satisfied to have Israel in subjection to him, he wanted them to be a laughing stock!

And why is that?

Because according to Judges 11:13, the Ammonites were bitter over losing the land of Gilead during the conquest, land they wouldn't have lost had they not opposed the people of God¹⁹ So Nahash is determined to make Israel a reproach. And yet, that is not strong enough. For in select passages of Scripture²⁰ *reproach* has the added connotation of taunting or even mocking which captures the nuance of this term. Without the ability to judge depth or hide behind a shield the strongest warrior could be defeated by the weakest swordsman which would leave the one-eyed soldier subject to all sorts of taunting, reviling, threats, and challenges not to mentioned the shame that malformity had in that day!

The picture painted here is that Nahash, just like a lion playing with its prey, is making sport of the men of Jabeshgilead. Their submission and allegiance is not enough; no, he must

- Have their pride and self-respect.
- Beat them down till they are as nothing.
- Make them a laughing stock.
- Thoroughly and utterly humiliate them.

The Hopeless Plea

This brings us to the hopeless plea of Jabeshgilead.

1 Samuel 11:3, “And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee.”

This is a win-win situation for Nahash. In seven days he will have either the last hold-out of this territory without war or a battle with an unorganized, backward people if any should respond.

Again, Jabeshgilead is the last remaining hold out. There are no other Israelite strongholds in the region to help them. And if any Israelite on the west side of the Jordan cared, they would have come at the beginning of the war, not now. So waiting for Nahash brought no imminent risk, but it certainly extended the pleasure he was deriving in exerting his power over God's people! And family of God would you notice, he was richly rewarded.

¹⁹ Compare Judges 11:15-21

²⁰ Compare also Judges 8:15; Psalm 119:42; 2 Kings 19:22; 1 Samuel 17:10ff)

The Sorrow

1 Samuel 11:4, “Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept.”

That’s about all Israel could do at the hearing of this message and Nahash knew that! He was such a cruel and wicked man. What a snake!

The message of Jabeshgilead’s predicament did not rouse the hearts of the brave and able warriors of Israel it brought them to the end of themselves such that all they could do was weep!

You say, “But Saul is King! Why wasn’t he called upon?”

Again that’s the point of this series! Though he was installed in 1 Samuel 10, nevertheless the Kingdom here has yet to emerge. And in fact it was this threat that served as the soil from which it came forth.

Herein we see the context, the beginning, the soil out of which the Kingdom of Saul at this time sprouted! A snake was assaulting the people of God. This snake was not content to see them in chains, he must watch them squirm and cry at the horrors that awaited them if help did not come. A lone city was all that remained as refuge, a city whose unseen hope was that they were related to the king.

Yet the word had gone forth for help, but clearly it was but a vain hope. Any Israelite man with the courage to fight had already been defeated. Honestly, who would come to Jabesh’s aid?

The Rest of the Story

Well we know the rest of the story! There was one who would come to their aid, his name was Saul.

And why was he moved?

He was moved because Jabeshgilead was his family! And so filled with the Spirit of God,²¹ Saul would go forth and route the foe which threatened his people!

Brothers and sisters, you can’t miss the application here as it pertains to Christ’s Kingdom! Are we not the inhabitants of a lone city into which we have fled for refuge, the New Jerusalem, the city of God?²² Has not a snake threatened to undo us with severity and humility?

You say, “There is no snake threatening us? What are you talking about?”

Revelation 20:2-3, “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

Regardless of what this says about the location of Satan at the present time, notice two very important truths about this adversary: First he is the serpent of old. One of the chief metaphors used to describe him is that

²¹ Compare 1 Samuel 11:6

²² Compare Revelation 3:12

HE IS A SNAKE! Secondly, his primary focus in his work today is that of deceiving the nations!

In light of this we conclude that Satan's primary goal is making the child of God a reproach by

- Casting him low.
- Accusing him before God and man.
- Humiliating him.
- Telling him lies about God, Christ, and the future.
- Keeping him crushed in spirit.

In light of this warfare what is the typical response of the child of God to Satan's fiery darts?

My observation is that the child of God

- Throws his hands in the air.
- He shrinks back.
- He becomes paralyzed with fear and worry.

This is exactly what happened to the citizens of Jabeshgilead. When they were confronted by the snake they were overcome by worry and fear. Now I have no doubt that many this day have experienced a rough life and a life that has gotten hard. In fact you know the threats that have been raised against you by the evil one, who lives in part to cruelly mistreat you. And rather than trusting God to deliver you, you have shrunk back to despair. In fact, you maybe even have considered an alliance with the world as the means of victory.

Well brothers and sisters, don't miss it, just as Jabesh's relative was king, so also your relative is the King of kings! Christ said this:

Matthew 12:50, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Paul called our Lord brother:

Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

If Saul, as unqualified as he was to be king, acted when his kinsmen were sorely oppressed don't you suppose that our Kinsman Redeemer will act on our behalf when we call out to Him?

He will and has!

- Is a "snake" threatening you today?
- Are you living in the valley of suffering and humility?
- Has the wind and the waves of turmoil rendered you ineffective in the battle?
- Is your right eye threatened?
- How about your freedom?

Brothers and sisters, rejoice! Your redemption is drawing near for your Kinsman Redeemer is roused and is coming! He will deal with Nahash! You need only to trust Him and not lose heart.

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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