

Acts 13:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

Analysis

And afterward they desired a king (αἰτέω, aiteo)—Israel's demand for a king (1 Samuel 8:5) was rooted in covenant unfaithfulness, rejecting the LORD as their King (1 Samuel 8:7). Paul emphasizes this as **they desired**, highlighting human initiative rather than divine design.

God gave unto them Saul (Σαούλ, from Hebrew שׂאֻל, sha'ul meaning "asked for")—The irony is profound: God gave them exactly what they asked for. Saul embodied Israel's self-will—tall, impressive outwardly (1 Samuel 9:2), but ultimately a tragic failure. **A man of the tribe of Benjamin**, the smallest tribe (1 Samuel 9:21), yet Saul's reign foreshadowed the greater Saul of Tarsus (also Benjamite, Philippians 3:5) who would be transformed to serve God's true King. **Forty years** marks a complete generation of testing, paralleling Israel's wilderness wandering—both periods of divine patience with rebellion.

Historical Context

Paul preached this sermon in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (c. AD 47-48) during his first missionary journey. He recounted Israel's history to demonstrate God's faithfulness leading to the Messiah. Saul reigned approximately 1050-1010 BC; Josephus and Jewish tradition assigned him a 40-year reign, though 1 Samuel gives incomplete chronology.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do you see the pattern of "asking" for what seems good externally but proves spiritually disastrous in your own life or culture?
2. What does God giving Israel exactly what they desired teach about the danger of demanding our own way rather than trusting His timing and plan?

Interlinear Text

κάκειθεν	ἠτήσαντο	βασιλέα	καὶ	ἔδωκεν	αὐτοῖς	ὁ		
And afterward	they desired	a king	and	gave	unto them	G3588		
G2547	G154	G935	G2532	G1325	G846			
θεὸς	τὸν	Σαοὺλ	υἱὸν	Κίς	ἄνδρα	ἐκ	φυλῆς	Βενιαμίν
God	G3588	Saul	the son	of Cis	a man	of	the tribe	of Benjamin
G2316		G4549	G5207	G2797	G435	G1537	G5443	G958
ἔτη	τεσσαράκοντα							
years	by the space of forty							
G2094	G5062							

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 10:1 (Parallel theme): Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?

1 Samuel 15:1 (Kingdom): Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.

1 Samuel 11:15 (Kingdom): 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.

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