2 Samuel - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

Ten Aspects of the Kingdom: Its Various Aspects in Relation to Believers, Ten Aspects of the Kingdom

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Many Christians have pondered the different terms used in Scripture in connection with the kingdom and have been thoroughly confused. It has not helped that—in an attempt to solve the problem—faulty definitions have been brought forward to explain the differences between the terms. An example is: "'The kingdom of God' refers to those who are real believers, and 'the kingdom of the heavens' has a mixture of both real believers and mere professing believers." This definition is an oversimplification of these terms, and furthermore, it does not fit every reference concerning the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the heavens. For instance, in Luke 13:17-21, the Lord speaks of two characteristics of "the kingdom of God" where there are mere professing persons in it, corrupting it with their evil doctrines and practices. Also, some of the references to "the kingdom of the heavens" refer only to those who are real believers—i.e. the parable of the "treasure" and the parable of the "pearl" (Matt. 13:44-46).

Being conscious that we could cause further confusion on the subject, we proceed with caution and heartfelt dependence upon the Lord. Our aim is to provide a simple, but accurate, explanation of the terms Scripture uses concerning the kingdom.

There are ten of these terms. This does not mean that there are ten kingdoms, but rather, ten aspects of one kingdom. The first two terms ("the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of the heavens") are used many times in Scripture, whereas most of the other expressions concerning the kingdom are only used once. This indicates that these are the two main terms describing the kingdom.

1) The Kingdom of God

This term (mentioned over 70 times) has to do with the moral side of the kingdom. That is, when it is used, it is emphasizing the moral order that should be found in the walk and ways of those who are in the kingdom.

In Romans 14:17, the Apostle Paul defines this aspect of the kingdom as: “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Thus, he shows that it has nothing to do with outward religious rituals and ceremony (“meat and drink”), but rather, with moral characteristics (“righteousness, and peace, and joy”) that God would produce in His people. Hence, the kingdom of God has to do with moral principles regarding our attitudes, and our walk and ways (Matt. 6:33). It is significant that the Gospel of Luke, which has a moral theme throughout, mentions the term more than any other book in the Bible.

In answer to those who were looking for the kingdom of God to be set up, the Lord Jesus said, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation (outward show): neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within [in the midst of] you” (Luke 17:20-21). The people thought that the kingdom of God would come in with an outward display of political power and material blessing, but the Lord explained that it had already come and was on display "in the midst" of them—it was seen in His life. The moral features of the kingdom were perfectly displayed in His walk and ways. Hence, the kingdom of God is an inward, moral order that manifests itself in practical righteousness in its subjects.

A person enters the kingdom of God in reality, by new birth. The Lord said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Possessing a new life and nature from God (communicated through new birth) enables a person to live according to the moral standards of the kingdom. Apart from new birth, a person cannot rightly display the moral features of the kingdom of God, nor can he or she appreciate them displayed in others (John 3:3).

The Apostle Paul said (as to his labours): “That I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:24-27). He used three expressions here to indicate the order in which he taught people, and it helps us to understand the place that the kingdom of God should have in our ministry. After people were saved by “the gospel of the grace of God,” Paul preached to them “the kingdom of God,” and then after that, he declared unto them all “the counsel of God,” which involves the truth of the Mystery. This shows that after believing the gospel, people need a moral order to be established in their lives. They need instruction on how to walk uprightly in God’s kingdom. It is only after that, that they would be in a state to profit from the whole counsel of God concerning Christ and the Church.

While a person must enter the kingdom in reality by new birth, it is possible for one to put on an outward display of the moral features of the kingdom without being a real believer. Luke 13:18-21, indicates this sort of hypocrisy. The Lord taught that the kingdom of God (in the hands of men) would develop into "a great tree" of profession. There would be many who would attempt to display the moral features of the kingdom in their lives but are false professors. And also, there would be some who would teach false principles ("leaven") concerning moral standards in the kingdom, and as a result, many would be corrupted by them.

In the Millennium, the kingdom will be marked by the appropriate moral features in its subjects. Men will be forced to live godly lives in “the regeneration”—the new moral order in the earth (Matt. 19:28). Those who are not truly characterized by the moral features of the kingdom—not having a new life and nature through new birth—"shall not inherit the kingdom of God" in its eternal sense (1 Cor. 6:9-10) because they are not real children of God (Eph. 5:5).

2) The Kingdom of the Heavens

This is a term that is only found in Matthew's gospel—occurring 33 times. It refers to the kingdom that was promised in the Old Testament Scriptures which the Messiah of Israel would set up on earth, having its seat of rule in the heavens. It is not a kingdom in heaven, as commonly thought, but rather, a kingdom on earth whose seat of government is in the heavens. Psalm 103:19 clearly indicates this: "The LORD hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all." Hence, the Lord will rule over all the earth from the heavens.

Genesis 49:10 promises that a king would rise out of the tribe of Judah. This is indicated in the fact that the "sceptre" (the symbol of a king's royal power and authority) would be found in the lineage of the tribe of Judah. Hence, there would be a King who would come out of the lineage of Judah to whom the Gentile nations ("peoples") would gather themselves (Zech. 2:11, etc.). Since a king cannot reign without a sphere to reign over, a kingdom, therefore, is implied.

In 2 Samuel 7:12-13, the Lord confirmed to David that One of his posterity would reign in that kingdom "forever." This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who is great David's greater Son (Psa. 110:1; Matt. 1:1).

Then, in Daniel 2:31-45, the prophet indicates that the kingdom would be established when the Messiah ("the Stone" that was "cut without hands") would put an end to "the times of the Gentiles" at His Appearing (Luke 21:24-28). "The Stone" would fall on "the feet" of "the image" (the Roman Empire) and break it into pieces. After crushing the image, the "Stone" became "a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." A "mountain," in Scripture, is a figure of a long-established governmental power. This means that in the days when the Roman Empire would be in power, the Lord Jesus would come in judgment and establish His kingdom. Since the Roman Empire is now defunct, this necessitates a revival of that empire in the future. The fact that the "mountain" filled the whole earth, means that the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ will have its dominion over the whole earth (Psa. 72:8; Zech. 14:9). Hence, we learn from Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation by Daniel when the great kingdom of Christ will be established—at His Appearing. Daniel 7:13-14 confirms that the establishment of the kingdom will be when the Lord Jesus comes as the Son of Man. This great kingdom will be used of God to the display of the power and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the blessing of man on earth. Many Old Testament prophets speak of the wonderful utopian conditions that will exist on earth during the kingdom.

What is not mentioned in the Old Testament prophecies is that "the kingdom of the heavens" would pass through two phases on account of the Jew's rejection of their Messiah. This is seen in the outline of Matthew's Gospel. In chapters 1-10, the Lord presented Himself to the nation as their Messiah. He proved that He had all the credentials and the power to bring in the kingdom as promised by the Old Testament prophets. But He was rejected by the people in the villages of Galilee (chap. 11) and by the leaders of the nation in Judea (chap. 12:24-45; Mark 3:22). Consequently, in a number of symbolic actions and teachings, the Lord indicated that He would sever His connections with the nation (temporarily) and bring in the kingdom in a different character altogether. Hence, the kingdom would pass through a mystical phase first, before it would be seen in its public manifestation, as described by the Old Testament prophets (Matt. 13:10-17).

These two phases can be distinguished by the letter "M."

The kingdom in mystery (Matt. 13:11).

The kingdom in manifestation (1 John 3:2 – J. N. Darby Translation footnote).

They can also be distinguished by the letter "P."

The kingdom in "patience" (Rev. 1:9).

The kingdom in "power" (Mark 9:1).

There is, therefore, a present phase and a future phase of the kingdom of the heavens. Of the 33 times that the term "the kingdom of the heavens" is used in Scripture, 24 are referring to the kingdom in its present mystical phase; the other nine have to do with the kingdom in its future public manifestation. As noted, the public manifestation of the kingdom is presently in abeyance and will not be established until a future day (i.e. the Millennium).

Each of these two phases of the kingdom of the heavens has its own starting point. The parable in Luke 19:11-12 indicates this. The mystery phase began when the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven after His death and resurrection. This is seen in the "nobleman" (the Lord Himself) going to a "far country" (heaven) and receiving the "kingdom" (Acts 1:9-11; Psa. 110:1). Later, the nobleman returned to take account of the servants whom he had left in charge of certain responsibilities, and then, He rewarded those who were faithful. This would be at the Rapture. The servant who was found to have no faith—and proved it by hiding his "pound" in the earth—was judged (Luke 19:20-27). This will happen to the faithless in the kingdom at the Appearing of Christ (Matt. 13:38-42). Hence, the starting point of the kingdom of the heavens in its manifested form of power and glory will be at the Appearing of Christ (Dan. 2:35; 7:13-14; Rev. 11:15).

The kingdom at this present time has a mystery character to it because it does not look like there is a kingdom in session. From all outward appearances it doesn't seem as though God has anything going on in this world at all. Presently, a person enters the kingdom of the heavens in its mystery form by making a simple profession of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour; the formal way is by being baptised.

Presently, the kingdom of the heavens exists in a mystical or mysterious form because:

It is without a visible King.

It is without an earthly geographical headquarters.

It is without any national boundaries.

Most of its professed subjects do not regard the authority of the King and live as if there were no King.

Regardless of these peculiarities, faith sees the King (the Lord Jesus) on His throne today in His kingdom. As good subjects in the kingdom, faith leads the believer to live according to the principles of His Word, as given in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), until the kingdom passes into its manifestation phase.

From chapter 13 onward in Matthew's Gospel, the Lord gave ten similitudes of "the kingdom of the heavens" in its mystery phase. These similitudes present a comprehensive description of the character that the kingdom would have in this present day when the King is absent. The point of these special parables is not to reconcile the Christian revelation of truth (given in the epistles) with what is found in the similitudes. There is a salient point that the Lord intends for us to get out of each one, but they do not necessarily incorporate all of the doctrines of Christianity into them. For instance, in the 9th and 10th similitudes we are seen as guests invited to the wedding, and not as the bride. The bride in both similitudes is not in the picture because the Lord is focusing on a different side of things. Another example is that God is seen as the King, rather than the Lord Jesus, in the 7th and the 9th similitudes. Therefore, we must focus on the salient point in each similitude to understand the lesson that the Lord is teaching in each one.

The ten similitudes can be divided into three groups. The first group (#1 thru #3) tell us what Satan is doing in the kingdom. The next group (#4 thru #6) tell us what the Lord is doing in the kingdom in spite of Satan's work. The last group (#7 thru #10) tell us what we should be doing in the kingdom as good subjects.

Similitude #1—Satan is introducing evil persons ("tares") into the kingdom (Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43).

Similitude #2—Satan is introducing evil spirits ("fowls") (Matt. 13:31-32).

Similitude #3—Satan is introducing evil doctrines ("leaven") (Matt. 13:33).

Similitude #4—The Lord is securing individuals (a "treasure") for Himself (Matt.13:44).

Similitude #5—The Lord is calling the Church (the "pearl") at a great cost to Himself (Matt. 13:45-46).

Similitude #6—The Lord is saving souls by the gospel (the "dragnet") and putting them into local assemblies ("vessels") (Matt. 13:47-50).

Similitude #7—We should maintain a right state of soul in relation to the Lord and have a forgiving spirit toward our brethren for fear of the governmental dealings of God (Matt. 18:23-35).

Similitude #8—We should serve in the Lord's vineyard without competition, jealousy, or complaint (Matt. 20:1-16).

Similitude #9—We should spread the gospel to the world, even though the Lord is rejected (Matt. 22:1-14).

Similitude #10—We should be looking for the imminent return of the Lord (Matt. 25:1-13).

As mentioned, the kingdom of the heavens will pass into its manifestation phase at the Appearing of Christ. The kingdom, in this aspect, will be brought in by the power of God in judgment. "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9; Acts 17:31). In establishing the kingdom of the heavens in power, the first thing the Lord will do is cleanse the kingdom of the mixture that has existed in it for many years. At this time, those who are not real believers will be taken out in judgment by the angels (Matt. 13:40-43; 24:40-41). These are those who have professed subjection to the King but have rejected the gospel of the grace of God. The first of this class of persons to go into the lake of fire are the Beast and the False Prophet—the Antichrist (Rev. 19:20). After the angels pass through the western lands, where the gospel is known and has been rejected by the masses, there will be relatively few persons left! (Isa. 24:1) Those who are left on earth will be given an opportunity to live under the righteous reign of Christ (Isa. 32:1; 61:11). These will be the few still remaining in the western lands and the masses in the Third World countries who have not been killed in the war-judgments of the Lord at His Appearing and just after it. They will not be Christians (all Christians will have been taken to heaven at the Rapture), but those who have not rejected the gospel of God's grace that is being preached today.

There are a number of different expressions that refer to the kingdom of the heavens in the time of its display of glory and power (manifestation):

The Millennium (Rev. 20:6 – the Latin Vulgate)

The Times of Refreshing (Acts 3:19)

The Restitution of All Things (Acts 3:21)

The Regeneration (Matt. 19:28)

The Reformation (Heb. 9:10)

The World to Come (Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 2:5)

The Fulness of Times (Eph. 1:10)

After the Millennium is concluded, the Lord Jesus will deliver up the public reign of the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Having received the kingdom from God, He will deliver it back to Him with an enhanced glory. All administrators in history have failed to maintain the sphere of authority committed to them in the state in which it was given. Neither Adam, nor David, nor Solomon, nor any Gentile monarch has done so. However, when the Lord takes the kingdom, "all enemies" will not yet be "put down," but when He delivers it up to the Father in "the end," all will be in complete subjection to God. This sets Him apart from all others as the greatest Administrator—the "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16).

3) The Kingdom of the Son of Man

(Matt. 13:41)

When the kingdom of the heavens passes into its full manifestation in the Millennium, Christ will reign publicly as "the Son of Man." There will be two departments in the kingdom—a heavenly sphere and an earthly sphere. The earthly side is the kingdom of the Son of Man (Matt. 13:41; 16:28; 19:28; 20:21; Luke 22:30; 23:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 3:21; 20:4), and will be composed of the remnant of Israel and

the Gentile nations (Zech. 2:11; Rev. 2:26-27; 21:24).

4) The Kingdom of Their Father

(Matt. 13:43)

The heavenly side of the kingdom in the day of Christ's public reign (the Millennium) is called "the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 6:10; 13:43; 26:29; 1 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 12:28). In Matthew 13:43, the Lord used the figure of the “sun,” which is a heavenly orb, to describe those in the heavenly side of the kingdom. The “righteous” who will “shine forth” in the heavens are not those who will be left on earth after the angels take the wicked out in judgment, but those who have been gathered into the “barn” (Matt. 13:30). The heavenly department of the kingdom will be composed of:

- Resurrected Old Testament saints ("the spirits of just men made perfect" – Heb. 12:22-23; Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28)
- Those who have died under the age of accountable responsibility and have been resurrected (Matt. 18:10)
- The resurrected martyred portion of the Jewish remnant (Rev. 14:13)
- And the Church—the "dead in Christ" who will be raised and the living saints who are raptured (1 Thess. 4:15-18; Phil. 3:20-21).

These heavenly saints will reign with Christ over the earth during the Millennial day (Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 3:21). The reigning time of the heavenly saints will close at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:4). Revelation 22:5 confirms this, saying, "They shall reign to the ages of ages," which is the Eternal State.

5) The Kingdom of the Son of His Love

(Col. 1:13)

This term describes the one prevailing rule of life for those in the kingdom now who have the special place as being "sons"—i.e. Christians (Rom. 8:14-15; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). They are as near to God as the Son Himself (Eph. 1:6) and are loved by the Father as the Son Himself (John 17:23).

6) The Kingdom of the World of Our Lord and of His Christ

(Rev. 11:15)

This term refers to Christ's Lordship authority being established over the whole world by the power of judgment at His Appearing. This aspect of the kingdom correlates with "the day of the Lord" when He publicly asserts His universal power and authority over all men (Isa. 2:10-22; Jer. 46:10; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 2:2-3; Mal. 4:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:8-10).

7) The Kingdom of Christ

(Eph. 5:5)

This aspect of the kingdom has to do with the display of Christ's glory in the Millennium. It correlates with "the day of Christ" which emphasizes the manifestation of His glory and the manifestation of the rewards of the heavenly saints (John 8:56; 1 Cor. 1:8; 3:13; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 2 Thess. 1:10).

8) The Kingdom of Our Father David

(Mark 11:10)

This aspect of the kingdom sees Israel as the center of God's earthly operations.

9) The Heavenly Kingdom

(2 Tim. 4:18)

This aspect has to do with the destiny of the heavenly saints.

10) The Everlasting Kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

(2 Peter 1:11)

This aspect of the kingdom emphasizes the longevity of the kingdom. It will literally go on to the end of time, unrivaled by men. “Everlasting,” in this verse, does not mean eternal, but what goes on to the end of time. That is, the kingdom will exist for as long as time will run—which will be to the end of the Millennium. (The word “forever” is used in the same way in many places in the Old Testament.) Thus, the reign of the saints with Christ in the government of the world to come will continue “to the age of ages,” which is the Eternal State (Rev. 22:5 – J. N. Darby Trans.). When the Eternal State begins, there will be no need for reigning and controlling adverse powers that might rise up—as a kingdom implies.

G. Davison said: “This title assures us that once the kingdom has been set up in power, it will never be succeeded by another, as it will last as long as time lasts. It does not mean that the kingdom will go on forever in the eternal state, but rather that it will not have a successor. Kingdoms are established to keep adverse powers in subjection, as well as to protect their subjects. Indeed, one is the outcome of the other, but as there are no adverse powers in the eternal state, the kingdom will not be needed. This is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:24-26” (Precious Things, vol. 1, Answers to correspondence –July/Aug).

The Apostle Peter tells us that the saints will make their "entrance" into this everlasting aspect of the kingdom at Christ's Appearing. What will be "ministered [richly furnished]" unto them at that time is the "glory" that will be given in that day (2 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Peter 5:10).

Hence, the "everlasting" aspect of the kingdom is characterized by the display of glory.

At the end of time, the Lord will deliver the kingdom to the Father, in order to devote Himself to His bride (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Having received the kingdom from God, He will deliver it back to Him with an enhanced glory. Every administrator in history has failed to maintain the sphere of authority in which he has reigned. Neither Adam, nor David, nor Solomon, nor any Gentile monarch has done so. However, when the Lord takes the kingdom, “all enemies” will not yet be “put down,” but when He delivers it up to the Father in "the end," they will be in complete subjection to God. This sets Christ apart from all others as the greatest Administrator.

Three Young Men Who Had a Fall: Reasons Why We Fail, Mephibosheth

Now, let’s turn to 2 Samuel 4:4. “Jonathan, Saul’s son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.”

Here we have a third young person who had a fall—Mephibosheth. This is, perhaps, that saddest of all, because it was hardly his fault. He was put in the hands of someone who was not careful, and she caused him to fall. Sometimes a young person’s fall can be traced back, in some degree, to those who have had the care over him. In Mephibosheth’s case it was his “nurse” who caused him to fall. This passage warns us of the danger there is in turning our children over to babysitters who may not have the same care and principles that we have. Parents, let’s be careful about who we leave our children with; they could corrupt them and make them “lame” in their walk in some way.

Introducing Things to Stumble Our Children

But we don’t want to just point the finger at those with whom we leave our children; we, as parents, are probably the biggest offenders in this. What I’m saying is that WE are often the ones that cause our children to fall—more so than any babysitter! We can, and often do, stumble our children by what we do and allow in our lives. This is solemn. We can occasion their fall by introducing things into their lives that will overtake them later and cause them to stumble. The classic example is Abraham taking Lot into Egypt. Lot got a taste for Egypt that he never got out of his system, and it was the reason why he made the choices he did in his life that caused him to go to Sodom (Gen. 13:10-11).

There was a Christian man and his wife who received a phone call late one night from the city police. They were asked to come to the city mortuary to identify a body—the body of their own daughter who had just died in a car crash! How would you like to have a phone call like that? When they got there, they were told that the girl had been under the influence of alcohol. She had been drunk.

When the parents returned home, they were, of course, devastated. Many thoughts ran through their minds. How did their daughter get liquor, being under-age? And why would she do such a thing? The father kept repeating that he would like to find the person who gave liquor to his underage daughter; he wanted to get his hands on him. And you can imagine how he felt. Not being able to sleep, the man paced the floor of his house. And he thought that he was ready to have a nervous breakdown. So, he thought he had better take a little shot of brandy or whisky, or whatever it was that he kept in the house. He was an upright Christian man who saw nothing wrong with drinking; he had always used it carefully, never allowing himself to get tipsy. So, he went over to his liquor cabinet, and lo and behold, the bottle was gone! But he saw a note there saying, “Daddy, we took your bottle because it’s graduation; we’ll give you the money to replace it later.” It was signed by his daughter!

What a lesson this man had to learn. Here he was looking for the person who had given his daughter liquor; and it turned out that it was himself! By having it in the house, he facilitated the opportunity for his daughter to get drunk.

Dear parents, don’t be so naïve to think that if your young people drink that they are using it for medicinal purposes. Now you might say, “If they want it, they’re going to get their hands on it anyway.” Yes, but do you want to have it on record that you were the one who enabled their fall? I mention this as an example of how we can occasion the falling of our own children whom we love dearly. Let’s be careful about what we allow in our homes.

Unfortunately for Mephibosheth, this all happened at a time when there was a division in Israel. He was of the family of Saul, and quite naturally his family followed the house of Saul. But sadly, they were following the wrong side. Hence, Mephibosheth was a young person who was led away in a division among the Lord’s people, whether he liked it or not. Being but a child, it was not his fault.

Now brethren, doesn’t that sound familiar? Are there not similar cases among the Lord’s people today? There are young people who have not been cognizant of what’s been happening among the brethren, who have been taken away in a division by their erring parents. Their fall can be traced to their parents and those who have had the spiritual care over them. It’s pitiful; it really is.

Now, how are we to behave toward such persons? I believe that Scripture would tell us that we are to make a difference in such cases, because the wrong position that they have gotten into was not of their own doing (Jude 22). Scripture indicates that the children should not be held responsible for their parents’ mistakes (Deut. 24:16; 2 Chron. 25:4). Our hearts should go out to such. We should try to be a help to those unfortunate ones as opportunity presents itself. And this is exactly what we see David doing in 2 Samuel 9. If we were to turn to that chapter, we would see that David went after the innocent victims of the house of Saul and showed them kindness. He found Mephibosheth in a place of isolation—in Lodebar. He had been there for twenty years! David’s heart went out to him, and he sent for Mephibosheth and brought him to Jerusalem (the divine center), and thereafter he had the privilege of eating at the king’s table.

Primary Teaching of This Passage

This is instructive for us, because most think of the story of Mephibosheth as being a picture of the grace of God going out to sinners in the gospel. But that is a secondary application. The primary teaching in the passage is the work of going after ones who have strayed away, and perhaps, have been damaged through the mistakes of others. But having said that, we have to be careful in this because gathering people to the Lord’s name is not our work—it is the work of the Spirit of God (Matt. 18:20; Luke 22:10).

Now, if these persons who have been taken away in a division prove themselves to be intelligent supporters of their parents' mistakes—and we have seen such—that's a different thing altogether. If they understand what happened and still believe that their parents' position is right, and they are active in supporting it, then we need to back off. Their will is at work, and they are engaged in the same sin as their parents. Joshua 7:24-25 indicates that such persons should come under the same judgment as their parents. Achan was judged for his sin, and his children were judged on that day too. This is not a violation of Deuteronomy 24:16, which says that the children should not die for their parents' sin; it was done because they were actively involved in their parents' sin. Scripture says that Achan was "not alone in his iniquity" (Josh. 22:20). So, this all comes back to what I was saying earlier; it takes discernment in each case.

With Mephibosheth there was a lovely restoration; he "dwelt in Jerusalem" and did "eat continually at the king's table" (2 Sam. 9:13). He was tested on these things later in his life in the revolt of Absalom. Another division developed in Israel and many turned after Absalom, but Mephibosheth remained faithful (2 Sam. 19:24-30). He had learned some valuable lessons. Sometimes, those who have been carried away into division and have been restored value the place more than those who have been there all along.

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