

1 & 2 Samuel

Message

National and individual security does not rest with human kings, but with a nation and individuals whose hearts (*like David's*) are fully devoted to Yahweh!

Title

The ancient Hebrew title of the Book of Samuel was *s^emuel* taken from the principal character in chapters 1–24. 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one book (scroll) in the Hebrew Bible.¹ This single work was first divided into two volumes (ca. 250 B.C.) by the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). This twofold division was subsequently followed by Jerome (in his Latin Vulgate version) and by modern versions. Daniel Bomberg divided the single Hebrew text of Samuel into two volumes in the first printed Rabbinic Hebrew Bible in AD 1517.²



1 and 2 Samuel are named after Samuel, the last judge and first prophet of Israel. He not only anointed both Saul and David, Israel's first two kings, but he also gave definition to the new order of God's rule over Israel, the monarchy. Samuel's importance as God's representative in this period of Israel's history is seen to be parallel to that of Moses (see Ps 99:6; Jer 15:1). Samuel, more than any other person, provided for covenant continuity in the transition from the rule of the judges to that of the monarchy.

Author

The authorship of Samuel—and for that matter many of the other OT books—while shrouded in a certain amount of anonymity, since the author is not identified, has nonetheless been attributed to Samuel the prophet: “Samuel wrote the book which bears his name and the Book of Judges and Ruth” (Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 14b–15a). This can apply, however, to no more than the first twenty-four chapters, since Samuel's death is recorded in 1 Samuel 25:1. Jewish tradition assigns the subsequent chapters recorded in Samuel to Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer, who are recognized as having

¹There is no break in the MT between 1 and 2 Samuel, and the Masoretic postscript is recorded at the end of 2 Samuel. Esdras and Josephus both refer to Samuel as a single composition.

²The translators of the Septuagint apparently divided Samuel into two parts because of the great length of the original Hebrew manuscript which would have made the length of a single Greek scroll unmanageable due to the additional space needed to accommodate the much longer Greek words and vowels (see Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 10:xxv).

written accounts of the life and times of King David (see 1 Chr 29:29).³ While this falls short of proof and fails to satisfy liberal critics, it is not inherently impossible.

Herbert Wolf proposes that Samuel wrote 1 Samuel 1–14 (see 1 Sam 10:25); Gad wrote 1 Samuel 15–2 Samuel 8 (considered in form criticism as being the genre of a “dynamic defense” or “an apology”); and that Nathan wrote 2 Samuel 9–24 (called the “Succession Narrative” or “Court History of David”); and that these three works may have been later combined by an editor.⁴ However, as Merrill points out, “there is no reason to question that the writings of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad together make up the books of Samuel.”⁵

Date of Composition

If, as has been suggested, and supported by both biblical and talmudic tradition, that Samuel, Nathan, and Gad were the primary authors of Samuel, the material was written during or soon after David’s lifetime, say between 1040–900 B.C. This dating is reasonable, and supports Samuel’s composition of the first part of the book (1–24), which he would have written prior to his death in about 1020 B.C. It also recognizes Nathan’s role in recounting the history embodied in Samuel concerning both David and Solomon. Writing in defense of the traditional view assigning authorship to Samuel, Nathan, and Gad, and against the “Deuteronomistic History” view proposed by modern critics, Merrill says:

The view that Samuel is but a constituent part of the massive work known as the “Deuteronomistic History,” a work that achieved its final form in the postexilic period, has less to commend it. While not necessarily inimical to a high view of Scripture, it simply lacks any objective internal support, to say nothing of any compatibility with ancient tradition. Nothing in its present form presupposes any need for the account to have been edited as it left the pen of a tenth-century author.⁶

Most conservative scholars prefer the view that Samuel did indeed write the record of earlier events in the book (1–24), and that Nathan and/or Gad, were the authors of the remainder, including 2 Samuel, which may have been composed soon after Solomon’s death in 931 B.C. Since there is no mention of the fall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and in order to allow for the contribution made by Samuel of the material recorded in the earlier chapters of the book (1–24), the overall date of composition of the material found in the Book of Samuel would have had to have taken place between 1040–900 B.C. Merrill proposes a more precise date of about 960 B.C., for the books essentially completed rendition, which he bases upon Nathan’s role as a chronicler in recounting the history embodied in Samuel.⁷

³Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 15a

⁴“1 and 2 Samuel,” in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5:260–61.

⁵Gene Merrill, “1 Samuel,” in *Old Testament Explorer*, 203.

⁶*Ibid.*, 204. For an overview of the objections and theories of critical scholars opposed to the traditional view which assigns authorship to Samuel, Nathan, and Gad see Klein, *1 Samuel*, xxviii–xxxii.

⁷Merrill, “1 Samuel,” in *Old Testament Explorer*, 204.

Recipient(s)

No recipients are identified but the content would suggest that this material was preserved for the nation of Israel, in order that the generations to come would have these books as a remembrance and a challenge to aide in guiding their walk as a nation before Yahweh.

Inferior Text of Samuel

For some unexplained reason the Masoretic text of 1 and 2 Samuel is among one of the least well-preserved of all of the extant books of the Old Testament (so too Job and Hosea). In particular many letters and words are missing (perhaps due to a worm-eaten or frayed condition resulting from simple overuse). A particular problem faced by interpreters concerns the omission of years and numbers in several key portions of the text. For example, there is a problem in determining the number of years in 1 Samuel 13:1, since there is no number preceding the word for years in the textual reference. Many modern scholars have turned to the Septuagint, and more recently the Dead Sea Scrolls, to answer questions related to the textual criticism of Samuel. However, this practice is contested by other scholars who question the reliability of the Septuagint translation, and feel that it is preferable to retain the MT in many cases where the arguments supporting the MT are of equal value to the LXX.

Historical Background

The events recorded in the Book of Samuel span a time period of 150 years: from Samuel's conception (1121 B.C.) until the near close of David's life in 971 B.C. Samuel judged Israel from 1069 B.C. and died during Saul's reign in about 1020 B.C. Saul reigned (40 yrs.) from 1051–1011 B.C. (Acts 13:21). David reigned (40 yrs.) in Hebron for seven years and then in Jerusalem for another thirty-three years until his death, or from 1011–971 B.C. (2 Sam 2:11; 5:5). The date of Samuel's birth can be estimated, with a fair amount of accuracy, based on chronological references in the text, to have been about 1121 B.C.⁸ Thus Samuel covers approximately 150 years in Israel's history, extending from about 1121–971 B.C.

*The Place of Samuel in Relationship to the Book of Judges.*⁹ It should be noted that the opening events recorded in 1 Samuel overlap historically with the end of the period of the Judges that we find in the Book of Judges. Samson appears to have been born just a few years before Samuel. Samson's twenty year judgeship evidently began shortly before the battle of Aphek (1104 B.C.) at which time Eli died (1 Sam 4:18). It ended not many years before the battle of Mizpah (1084 B.C.) when the Philistine domination of Israel was temporarily terminated (1 Sam 7:13). It appears that Samuel's ministry probably ran concurrent with Samson's up until Samson death. Saul began to reign approximately 35 years after Samson died (1051 B.C.). Samuel evidently lived about 30 years after that.

⁸See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 149-50.

⁹The following chronological information was adapted from Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 149-50.

Placement in the Canon. In the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Samuel is the third book of the prophetic writings. The Prophetic books comprise the second of the three main divisions of the Jewish Old Testament. The Law and the Writings are the first and third divisions. The second division, known as the Prophets, is grouped into the *Former Prophets* and the *Latter Prophets*. The Former Prophets section contains the four books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (as noted earlier, both Samuel and Kings were originally single volumes recorded on individual scrolls); the second division of the Prophets, the Latter Prophets, also contains four books, those are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the single collection known as the Twelve Minor Prophets [without Lamentations and Daniel]). In the English Bible, the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel are the fourth and fifth books found in the collection known as the (12) Historical Books (Joshua through Esther).

Theological Purpose

The Book(s) of Samuel provide an official account of the purposes of God that were being accomplished through this period in Israel's history as the nation transitioned from a time of theocracy under the period of the judges to a monarchy instituted by Samuel in his appointments of Saul, as Israel's first king, and his replacement by David, who proves to be a man after God's own heart (13:14). With the selection and anointing of David as Israel's second king, Samuel lived to see the inauguration of the dynastic kingship which God had promised to Abraham as part of His covenanted messianic, redemptive plan (Gen 12:1-3; 15; Gen 49:10; Num 24:17). The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel particularly focus on the rise and reign of David, whom God had Himself chosen to occupy the throne in Israel (16:1-13). Initially, David seemed a most unlikely choice—he was but a youth, the youngest son of the undistinguished rural family of Jesse—yet his most remarkable quality was his faith in God whom he was said to have loved with all of his heart (13:14; David's Pss).

David becomes the divinely chosen instrument of God delegated to lead the nation of Israel by exemplifying what it means to rule under Almighty God. It is through David and his divinely elected Dynasty that David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, eventually came through the incarnation to establish the sovereign rule of God over all creation.

Christ perfectly exercised kingship in His own life and through His sacrificial death and resurrection He has provided the basis for all people who believe in Him to reign with Him and through Him forever (2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89:36-37; Isa 9:7).

Extended Message/

Purpose Statement

The Book(s) of Samuel reveals the sovereign purposes of God in transitioning His wayward people from a period of faithless theocracy to a period of faithful monarchy realized through the installation of David as God's ideal king and covenant administrator; with whom He establishes His covenant and promises that through David's dynasty that his greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ would eventually come to establish His throne and kingdom rule over Israel and the world forever (2 Sam 7:8-16).

Others feel that the books of 1 and 2 Samuel show how the Deuteronomic Covenant (Deut 28–32)—which is a restatement of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 19:1–24:18) for the generation of Israelites about to enter the Promised Land—was worked out in the nation in the time of the monarchy. The Covenant stipulated that (1) obedience to God would result in physical/temporal blessing, including fertility or productivity of land, animals, people, and king; and (2) disobedience to God would result in cursings, including infertility or lack of productivity in the land, people, and king. **The reversal of fertility or fortune is seen throughout 1 and 2 Samuel.** For example the contrasts between fertility and infertility, blessings and cursings, are seen in the lives of Hannah and Eli, Samuel and Saul, Goliath and David, Saul and David, and David and Absalom. “Reversal-of-fortune” is seen in each of their lives as well. The purpose of Samuel (1 and 2 Samuel), then, could be stated as follows: To demonstrate how in the establishing of the monarchy, obedience to the LORD results in blessing and disobedience results in loss of blessing (Deut 28:1-68).¹⁰

Outline

Any attempt to outline 1 and 2 Samuel must take into account the fact that these are two volumes of what was originally a single book in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹ Therefore, the

¹⁰John A. Martin understands obedience to the covenant of Deuteronomy 27–28 to be the explanation for the way in which the LORD blesses or curses the nation of Israel in Samuel (“Studies in 1 and 2 Samuel Part 4: The Theology of Samuel” *Bibliotheca sacra*, 141:4 [1984]: 303-14). Martin states specifically that, “The author of 1 and 2 Samuel was showing the outworking of the Deuteronomic Covenant for Israel” (ibid., 132); also Roy B. Zuck, “1 Samuel” (unpublished class notes in 303 OT History I, Dallas Theological Seminary).

While elements of the outworking of the Deuteronomic Covenant in the nation of Israel are certainly seen in Samuel (as in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, and for that matter, all of the Old Testament), it does not seem best to understand this as God’s primary purpose in Samuel. God’s primary purpose in Samuel is to move His people from a period of faithless theocracy (Judges) to a period of faithful monarchy (Samuel) through the election and installation of David as God’s ideal king and covenant administrator in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant of promise (Gen 12:1-3; 15; 49:10; Num 24:17; and here in 2 Sam 7:12-16).

¹¹Carlos Pinto provides an outline suggesting a marvelous chiasmic structure which emphasizes, “God’s gracious saving activity in favor of His [covenant] people” and which serves as an “inclusio for the establishment of the monarchy in Israel” (taken from David Malick, *Notes on 1 Samuel*, downloaded from www.bible.org):

- I. Grace: The nation is saved from collapse by God’s grace, mediated through Samuel (1 Sam 1–9)**
 - A. Law: The nation Falters as a result of Saul’s spiritual callousness (1 Sam 10–31)
 - 1. Law: The nation faces division and extinction (2 Sam 1–4)
 - 2. Grace: The nation experiences unification and expansion (2 Sam 5–10)**
 - B. Law: The nation falters as a result of David’s greed and lust (2 Sam 11–21)
- II. Grace: The nation is saved from collapse by God’s grace mediated through David (2 Sam 22–24)**

outline of these two books must of necessity reflect a single, continuous, and harmonious presentation of the central theme of the Book of Samuel, which concerns the official record of God's establishment of the Monarchy in Israel through His three sovereignly appointed representatives: Samuel, Saul, and David. The following outline for the Book(s) of Samuel will be followed in conjunction with this study:

- I. The Prelude to Monarchy in Israel: Samuel, Israel's Last Judge 1 Sam 1:1–7:17**
- II. The Establishment of the Monarchy in Israel: the Period of Saul 1 Sam 8:1–31:13**
 - A. The rise of King Saul 1 Sam 8:1–10:27
 - B. The reign of King Saul 1 Sam 11:1–14:52
 - C. The rejection of King Saul 1 Sam 15:1–35
 - D. The replacement of King Saul by David 1 Sam 16:1–31:13
- III. The Consolidation of the Monarchy in Israel: the Period of David 2 Sam 1:1–20:26**
 - A. David becomes king over Judah 1:1–3:5
 - B. David's attempts to unite Judah and Israel 3:6–4:12
 - C. David becomes king over all Israel 5:1–10:19
 - D. David's sins and sufferings 11:1–20:26
- IV. The Closing Appendices 2 Sam 21:1–24:25**

1 Samuel Outline

- I. The Prelude To Monarchy: Samuel, the Last Judge 1:1–7:17**
 - A. Samuel's Birth and Dedication to God 1:1–2:10
 - B. Samuel's Childhood Ministry Contrasted with Eli's Wicked Sons 2:11–36
 - C. Samuel's Call and Confirmation by God as a Prophet of the LORD 3:1–4:1a
 - D. The Capture and Return of the Ark of the Covenant 4:1b–7:1

E. Samuel's Revival Ministry to Israel 7:3-17

II. The Establishment of the Monarchy in Israel: the Period of Saul 1 Sam 8:1–31:13

A. The Rise of King Saul 8:1–10:27

B. The Reign of King Saul 11:1–14:52

C. The Rejection of King Saul 15:1–35

D. The Replacement of King Saul by David 16:1–31:13

1. The rise of David as the newly anointed king of Israel 16:1-23

2. The reason for God's selection of David: his worthiness 17:1-58

3. The reactions to God's selection of David 18:1–19:17

4. The rejection of David by Saul 19:1-17

5. The record of David's exile and Saul's pursuits 19:18–31:13

