



1 SAMUEL OVERVIEW

SUMMARY

The books of 1 & 2 Samuel, originally just a single document, contain the story of Israel's shift from a tribal society to one ruled by kings. Picking up on the heels of Judges, where "everyone did what was right in their own eyes," the narrative of 1 Samuel traces four major characters. Hannah, mother of Samuel, the barren woman whose faithful cry to God is heard and answered. Samuel, prophet and last of the judges, who serves as the mouthpiece of God in the midst of political upheaval. Saul, first king of Israel, whose reign is marked by impatience, jealousy, and paranoia. David, lowly shepherd boy, whose unlikely rise to the throne is marked by exile, violence, and—even so—the providential hand of God.

OUTLINE

- I. Prophetic Authority (1.1-8.3)
 - a. Story of Hannah (1.1-2.11)
 - b. Story of Eli (2.12-36)
 - c. Samuel's Rise (3.1-4.1a)
 - o Story of Ark (4.1b-7.2)
 - d. Samuel's Ministry (7:3-8:3)
- II. Kingly Authority (8.4-31.13)
 - a. Birth of the Monarchy (8.4-22)
 - b. Saul's Rise (9.1-11.15)
 - o Samuel's Farewell (12.1-25)
 - c. Saul's Reign (13.1-15.35)
 - d. David's Rise (16.1-31.13)

KEY WORDS

House - 66

- a. This Hebrew word can refer to the *physical structure* of a home or more metaphorically to a *family/household*.
- b. Even when this term is not used, a helpful question to keep in mind in each chapter is: What will become of this person's family legacy (i.e. Elkanah/Hannah, Samuel, Eli, Saul, David)?

Take - 80

- a. This Hebrew word can mean the ordinary taking of something (i.e. picking something up) or acquiring something (i.e. a spouse) to taking something *by force*.
- b. This is a major theme throughout Samuel, beginning in 2:14 with Eli's sinful sons and going on to define the reigns of both Saul and David. This continues in the books of 1 & 2 Kings as the monarchy lives up to the warnings of Samuel in 8:11-16.

Anointed - 12

- a. This is the Hebrew word, *messiah*, and it means to anoint with oil or *anointed one*. This is done to both Saul and David when they are anointed king by Samuel.
- b. Throughout the book, readers should ask the question: who is the "anointed one?" There is an ideal way these anointed characters are supposed to act, yet the narrative reveals different characters trying and failing to live up to this ideal.

KEY THEMES

1. God is the true king
2. Authority of kings vs. authority of prophets
3. Taking by force
4. Whose family line will last?

KEY BACKGROUND

Authorship: Though the author is anonymous they were clearly a literary artist whose ability to retell history within a theological perspective remains a shining achievement of the ancient world.

Setting: The times of Samuel were times of great transition in society. The Israelites had settled in the land, yet they embodied a tribal and pastoral lifestyle during the time of the Judges. From 1050-900 B.C. settlement patterns indicate the rapid settlement of the Judean hill-country—the region in which much of 1 Samuel takes place. By the opening of the book, the Philistines (Sea peoples who arrived around 1200) have crept into the picture and are posing a threat to the Israelites. Against the pressures from these newfound enemies—and the other prominent nations such as Amalek and Ammon—the people of Israel begin to be tempted toward a centralized power. Having a king becomes more and more appealing to the people as they are constantly under threat and

don't have the cohesive strength to fend off their attackers.

Historicity: For many years, it was quite popular for scholars to question the existence of Saul, David, and Solomon given the lack of archeological and literary historical records. That is until the 1993 discovery of the Tel Dan Stele which refers to the "House of David." This is the oldest reference that clearly mentions David's existence. Dating to the late 800s B.C., it shows that there was some form of Davidic dynasty by that point, thus lending a great deal of credibility to the events of the Samuel scroll. Additionally, the lack of evidence is exactly what one would expect since the reigns of David and Solomon were periods of power for Israel and subsequently weakness for their neighbors. Egypt and Mesopotamia were both experiencing periods of weakness during this time, even further supporting the historicity of the biblical account.

Canonical Context: The book of 1 Samuel is a part of the "Former Prophets" section of the Hebrew Bible which contains Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These books contain the perspective on history taken by the prophets, many of whom were unpopular and persecuted, yet claimed to speak for God. The story is about the downward spiral of sin and a refusal to uphold the Covenant of Moses on the part of the people and their leaders. When examined from a broad perspective, these four books provide a window into how God views history. These books are meant to take the reader on a journey from hope to disappointment—from triumph to tragedy—and then right back again. With each successive judge, each

successive king, each successive dynasty, the reader should be left with growing despair. Ultimately, the rejection of God as Israel's one true king in 1 Samuel 8 is the same rejection which began in the Garden of Eden. Yet it foreshadows the rejection of Christ as the promised king. For the Christian, 1 Samuel should stoke a sense of longing for the true king as revealed in the Gospels. Source: "Samuel" in *The Old Testament* by Richard Hess

THEOLOGICAL EMPHASIS

The major theological issue of the book concerns whose authority ultimately wins the day. In many ways, Samuel stands in the prophetic lineage of Moses and facilitates the rulership of God to the people. Through Samuel, they hear directly from God (3:1, 19-21). Chapter 7 depicts this going well for the people as Samuel's authority successfully results in the Lord routing the Philistines. But Samuel falls into the same pattern as Eli as he passively turns a blind eye to his sons' sin in his old age. Thus, when the people request a king in Chapter 8 there is a dramatic shift in the authority structure. No longer will God go to battle for the people the way he did in Chapter 7, for the king will go before them (8:20). Tension arises because the kings of Israel are still called to submit to God's ultimate kingship, displayed by his prophets and in the Torah. Saul proves incapable and unwilling to do this, and the book ends with David set to take his place. Will David live up to his moniker of "man after God's own heart" by submitting to the word and rule of God, or will he insist on his own authority having the final say?

SOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

1 & 2 Samuel by David Firth - Firth, David G. *1 & 2 Samuel*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary. Nottingham; Downers Grove: IVP, 2009.

Readable but thorough Evangelical commentary with easy-to-follow sections and solid verse-by-verse exposition.

1 & 2 Samuel by Joyce Baldwin - Baldwin, Joyce. *1 & 2 Samuel*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary. Nottingham: IVP, 2008.

Solid exposition and survey of background. Really shines when considering the theology of the text. Hard to go wrong with this series.

"Samuel" - chapter in *The Old Testament* by Richard Hess - Hess, Richard S. *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Great introductory survey of the background and scholarship of Samuel.