

1 & 2 SAMUEL: *Israel's Greatest King*

From judges to monarchy

God's purpose for Israel was to have His people be different from all other nations. However, they wanted to be like their neighbors. The last of the judges was also a prophet and he warned them of the dangers of their desires. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 makes clear God's command regarding a king over Israel when she settled in the Promised Land. As we discover in 1 Samuel they chose a king of their own making rather than God's choice. Israel could reject Yahweh from being their King, but they could not dethrone Him. Saul was a king after the people's own heart, but David was the king after God's own heart.

TITLE: originally was called "Books of the Kingdoms, and the two books of Samuel were one in the Hebrew text. The translators of the Greek Old Testament, *Septuagint*, divided the book and gave the titles First and Second Kingdoms with our two books of Kings as Third and Fourth Kingdoms. Since 1516 First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings have been used as their titles. 1 Samuel describes the transition to monarchy, while 2 Samuel focuses on the establishment of the Davidic covenant with God. The original readers of Samuel had one complete volume. Second Samuel is the continuation of the first volume in our English Bible.

AUTHOR: of both books is unknown although Jewish tradition suggests Samuel in chapters in which his history is recorded, with Nathan and Gad completing the book (1 Sam. 10:25; 1 Chron. 29:29). It is possible an unnamed prophet compiled the books of Samuel from the writings of Samuel, Gad, Nathan and other sources. It is likely these two books bear his name because of Samuel's dominate role in transition from the judges to a monarchy. The same person who wrote 1 Samuel also wrote 2 Samuel as well.

TIME: covers about 120 years from 1090 to 970 B.C. The focus is on the last of the judges to the establishment of the kingdom. First Chronicles runs parallel in time. First Samuel opens with the birth of Samuel and 2 Samuel closes with the last days of David. The time covers three important characters in the transition to a monarchy: Saul (1050-1010 B.C.), David (1010-970 B.C.), Solomon (970-931 B.C.) and the division of the kingdom about 931 B.C. Second Samuel begins with David at the peak of his career and focuses on the events in David's forty year reign as the king who united Judah and Israel.

Clyde Francisco describes the culture in Samuel as filled with "religious short comings. . . enemies were tortured, polygamy was common in the upper class." The centralized government "exerted a strong unifying influence on religious thought and practices. The poor had a right to justice, adultery was recognized as a great crime, and more emphasis was placed on the rights of the individuals" (p. 56).

Israel's biggest enemy was the Philistines whom David subdued. They lived along the Mediterranean coast and their strength lay in their possession of iron weapons. We get the name "Palestine" from these inhabitants of the land who migrated from Greece and Crete. The Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant which symbolized God's presence with His people. The Israelites foolishly thought the ark would protect them if they took it with them into battle. The false gods Israel contended with ere Canaanite gods.

PURPOSE: is to record the establishment of the kingdom and the Davidic covenant by Yahweh. The people chose Saul, a Benjaminite, but God chose the dynasty of David from the tribe of Judah. It documents the transition from a group of tribes into a monarchy. God's idea was for Israel to be a theocracy in which

King David is the type of a Greater David, the Messiah.

First Samuel begins where the judges left off, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Jud. 21:25). Samuel gives us the transition from the last judge to the people’s choice of a king and later God’s choice (8:5; 15:23). Second Samuel gives us the highlights of the reign of king David and the relationship of Israel to her sovereign God. It stresses the spiritual relationship of “a man after God’s own heart” with its ensuing blessings and resulting failures and punishment when God is not his desire. 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12 are the critical turning point in the life of David and his reign.

THEME: of the books is the covenant with David. Yahweh is faithful to His promises and will help His people to accomplish His eternal purposes. God is sovereign in the affairs of His nation. Everything moves toward and is centered on the Davidic covenant. Human sin and bad judgment jeopardized the Davidic covenant, but God overrules it to accomplish His purposes.

The theme is developed around three characters Samuel, Saul and David. Samuel is the last of the judges of Israel (7:6, 15-17). Saul was the first king and the people’s choice; David is God’s choice. His reign as king is described in Second Samuel. How ironic that His people wanted a king, but not the King!

The author gives us an interpretation of Israel’s history from the prophetic point of view. He interprets the relation of these three key men in the establishment of the kingdom. It is shown that Samuel prepared the foundations of the kingdom; Saul tried to establish it but failed; and David succeeded in establishing it. The God of Israel continues to be the true king of Israel. The earthly king is Yahweh’s representative on earth and responsible to Him. The success or failure of the earthly king depended upon his relationship with Yahweh.

J. W. Watts said, “The theme of 1 and 2 Samuel is the establishment of the kingdom and the theme of 1 and 2 Kings is the taking away of the kingdom.”

The principle of obedience to Yahweh brings blessings and disobedience brings judgment is illustrated in the life of David in 2 Samuel. However, God will pursue His eternal purpose and overrule man’s disobedience. Even though David commits adultery and murder for Bathsheba, she is the wife who gives birth to Solomon the successor to the kingdom. The intrigue and murder in David’s family is overruled so that God’s chosen reigns on the throne after David’s death.

Samuel, meaning, “El is His name,” or “name of God,” is the chosen man God used to usher in a new period in the history of Israel. He was Israel’s kingmaker and was the greatest Old Testament character since Moses. He was a Levite, a Nazirite, prophet and judge at a critical time in Biblical history. God used him to shape the future of the kingdom. Israel clamored for a king under Samuel’s rule as a judge.

“The truly successful pattern of government for Israel was a delicate balance—not a theocracy or monarchy but theocracy *through* monarchy. God must always be the true ruler if Israel was to be His people” (La Sor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, p. 235). Even when Israel had a human king, he was to be only the representative of the divine King. The people did not understand this when they chose Saul a Benjamite. If Yahweh were not King, any human king would not meet the demands for a righteous king. The king was to be viewed as the earthly head of God’s theocratic kingdom.

Saul is described as daring, brash, lack of spiritual sensibilities, sincere but artificial, dangerously unpredictable with an explosive disposition, rash and flagrantly disobedient to God. He deliberately disobeyed Yahweh by saving Agag, the king of the Amalekites and their best sheep and oxen. An evil spirit came upon Saul (1 Sam. 16:14-23), and when David became the military hero Saul turned bitter with envy (17:1-28:2). His tragic end was inquiring spiritual help from the witch at Endor (28:3-25).

R. B. Jones says, “The king whom the people selected in preference to the Lord proved to be unworthy and weak. But the children of Israel refused to learn their lesson. In deed, it seems hard for the nation to learn that only the Lord can be a worthy King” (p. 122).

David is the king the LORD God placed on the throne. He was anointed when he was about fifteen years old and was king in waiting for another fifteen years (1 Sam. 16:1-30:31). For almost 400 years the kings in Jerusalem would be sons of David.

David as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) was a successful and prosperous king until his sin of adultery and murder. After his sin with Bathsheba his life and kingdom were chastised. Rulers of the ancient world generally exercised absolute power so it is a wonder that the prophet Nathan was not killed (2 Sam. 12:1-14). God’s mercy was David’s only hope (Ps. 32; 51). No attempt is made by the author to excuse his glaring sins. The Old Testament is remarkably honest in dealing with its heroic characters.

The great importance of David is seen in God’s covenant with him. “God’s promise of a Redeemer becomes still more specific in the covenant He made with David that his seed would sit upon his throne forever. The Seed of the Woman is to be the Seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from the tribe of Judah and of the line of David. David was a type of the Greater King, the Messiah to come. The Kingdom of Israel was a type of the Messianic Kingdom to come” (Jones, p. 126). The apostle Peter declared the fulfillment of this great prophecy (1 Sam. 7:12-16; 1 Chron. 17:11-14) in his sermon at Pentecost (Acts. 2:30-36; cf. Rom. 1:3; Rev. 22:16). As Jesus came into Jerusalem the people shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matt. 21:9, 15). David is referred to 58 times in the New Testament.

God promised David that the throne of his kingdom would be established forever which was fulfilled in the eternal reign of David's Greater Son, Jesus Christ. Cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; 1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:8-10; 2 Chron. 7:17-18; Ps. 89:3-4, 27-29, 34-37; 132:11; Amos 9:11-12; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1, 10; Micah 5:2, 4; Jer. 22:29; 23:5-6; 33:20-21; Zech. 3:8, 9; 6:12, 13; 9:10; 12:8; 13:1; Lk. 1:30-33; Matt. 1:1-18.

The foundation for the messianic theology is seen in the hope that one day a Davidic king would meet the conditions and bring the restoration of the full Davidic covenant (Jer. 33:14-22). The covenant would be renewed through the ideal Davidic king, Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant with a truly eternal kingdom.

IMPORTANCE OF THE KINGDOM: J. W. Watts explains: “the kingdom in Israel meant the kingdom of God; the success of the human king depended upon obedience to God; failure to obey led to rejection of Saul as king.” It is also to be noted the “submission to the will of Yahweh, even after his great sin, led to establishment of the line of David forever.” Samuel’s focus is clear: Yahweh your God is your King (1 Sam. 12:12). The king was appointed by Yahweh and if he served Yahweh it would be well for him, but if not Yahweh would be against him (12:13-15). We see the principle clearly in the lives of Saul and David. It is of note that the expression “the servant of Yahweh” is never used of Saul, or by Saul. However, this is the emphasis in the case of king David. The “anointed of Yahweh” is a divine ordination to an office symbolized with anointing oil. The “servant of Yahweh” was appointed by Yahweh and was successful because he learned obedience (2 Sam. 3:18; 7:5, 8, 19-29).

Samuel is a powerful message that nothing is out of God’s jurisdiction. No event, no location, no person is beyond His control. G. Campbell Morgan said, “The ultimate victory of God is independent of the attitudes of individuals and people towards Him.”

The people cried, “Make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” And God said, “They have rejected me, that I should not be King over them.”

Title: Introduction to 1 & 2 Samuel

Series: [A Look at the Book](#)

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