

Intro to the Books of Samuel

Note by Steve Gregg

Originally one book in Hebrew Bible, but divided in LXX into two to accommodate the inclusion of vowels in the Greek version. The LXX called them the “First and Second Books of Kingdoms” (designating 1 and 2 Kings as the “Third and Fourth Books of Kingdoms”). The Latin Vulgate replaced the word “Kingdoms” with “Kings.” The KJV called them *1 & 2 Samuel* and *1 & 2 Kings*. Much of the history of the Books of Samuel is paralleled in the book of *1 Chronicles*. 1 Samuel covers the period from the birth of Samuel to the death of Saul (approx 1155–1055 BC, or 100 years), and 2 Samuel covers the whole reign of David (1055-1015 BC, or 40 years). So according to Floyd Nolen Jones (*Chronology of the Old Testament*), most modern scholars place the events about a century later.

Purpose of the Books of Samuel:

To record the transitions from the era of judges to the establishment of Israel’s monarchy and its first two dynasties. The book probably served as a defense of the legitimacy of David’s claim to the throne.

Authorship and Time of Writing:

Jewish tradition assigns various portions to Samuel, Nathan and Gad (see 1 Chron.29:29) —all prophets contemporary with David. (But see: 1 Sam.27:6 reference to divided kingdom—a later editorial gloss?)

Samuel’s importance second only to Moses

The kingmaker, who himself served as judge (7:15-17), prophet (3:20) and priest (he was a Levite, descended from Korah —1 Chron. 6:33ff).

In shepherding Israel through the transition from a pure theocracy to a theocratic monarchy, Samuel anointed and counseled Israel’s first two kings.

By anointing David, Samuel established the hereditary dynasty that would eventually produce the Messiah (Matt.1:1).

Samuel was the last of the judges (Acts 13:20), and the first of the prophetic order (Acts 3:24/Heb.11:32).

Samuel established and led a number of enduring prophetic communities, or guilds (1 Sam.10:5, 10; 19:20) — which were called “sons of the prophets” (1 Kg.20:35 / 2 Kg.2:3, 5; 4:1; 6:1) —and which were located at Naioth in Ramah (1 Sam.19:18-20), Bethel (2 Kg.2:3), Jericho (2 Kg.2:5), Gilgal (2 Kg.4:38), and, possibly, Mizpah (1 Sam.7:16).

The nature of a theocratic monarchy: a king who is subject to God speaking thru prophets

The Philistine threat

Experts in Iron-working, the Philistines were a well-organized military state, with garrisons in the heart of Israel (13:4). They had disarmed Israel (13:19-23).

The character of the narrative:

History from a prophetic point of view; theology depicted in historical events and human situations, rather than in textbook analyses.

Multidimensional characters. Complex psychological studies. The most skillful and engaging story-telling in the O.T.

Outline of the two books of Samuel:

- I. Samuel as the Final Judge (1 Sam. 1-7)
 - A. Samuel’s childhood (chs.1-3)
 - B. The end of the priesthood at Shiloh (ch.4)
 - C. The ark and the Philistines (chs.5-6)
 - D. Rededication at Mizpah (ch.7)
- II. Samuel and Saul (1 Sam. 8-15)
 - A. The people demand a king (ch.8)
 - B. Saul established as first king (chs.9-12)
 - C. Saul’s failure and rejection (chs.13-15)
- III. Saul and David (1 Sam.16—2 Sam.1)
 - A. The anointing of David (ch.16)
 - B. David and Goliath (ch.17)
 - C. Saul’s jealousy endangers David (chs.18-20)
 - D. David in exile (chs.21-30)
 - E. Saul’s death & David’s reaction (1 Sam.31—2 Sam.1)
- IV. David as King (2 Sam.2-8)
 - A. David reigns over only Judah (chs.2-4)
 - B. David reigns over all Israel (chs.5-8)
 1. David conquers Jerusalem and subdues Philistines (ch.5)
 2. David brings the Ark to Jerusalem (ch.6)
 3. God covenants with David (ch.7)
 4. Summary of David’s wars and his officials
- V. Events of David’s Rule (2 Sam.9-20)
 - A. Mercy shown to Mephibosheth (ch.9)
 - B. Ammonite and Syrian wars (ch.10)
 - C. David’s sin, repentance; birth of Solomon (chs.11-12)
 - D. Absalom’s story (chs.13-18)
 - E. David’s return from exile (ch.19)
 - F. Northern tribes revolt against David (ch.20)
- VI. Appendices (2 Sam.21-24)
 - A. Unfinished business with Saul’s family (21:1-14)
 - B. Dispensing with the giants (21:15-22)
 - C. A psalm of David (ch.22)
 - D. Summary of exploits of David’s mighty men (ch.23)
 - E. The census and its consequences (ch.24)

