

1 & 2 SAMUEL

Introduction

Author. Although the titles "1 & 2 Samuel" might lead one to believe that Samuel is the author he was actually only a leading figure in the narrative. It is clear that Samuel was not the author because he died only half way through the two books in 1 Samuel 25:1. It is clear, however, from the biblical record that Samuel and his colleagues did record history. 1 Chronicles 29:29f state: "Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the chronicles of Samuel the seer, in the chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the chronicles of Gad the seer." It is likely, then, that a later editor used these written documents in his writing of theological history. The guess of E. J. Young was ". . . the books of Samuel were composed under Divine inspiration by a prophet, probably of Judea, who lived shortly after the schism and who incorporated in his earlier written material."

The Hebrew text contains the title "Samuel" listing both halves as "A" and "B", although the books were originally considered as one. The LXX translation, made around 200 B. C., combined the books of Samuel and Kings under the one heading "1-4 Kings".

Date. The book covers the period from the birth of Samuel (circa 1120 B. C.) to the end of David's reign (circa 971 B. C.). Terminus a quo--It is clear, however, from several references to the Kings of Judah and Israel (1 Sam 11:8; 17:52; 18:16; 27:6; 2 Sam 5:5; 11:11; 12:8; 19:42-43; 24:1, 9) that the book was composed after the division of the Monarchy. Terminus ad quem--Because of no mention of the exile of Israel, many would deduce the writing to have preceded 722 B. C. But, the subject matter of the book would not require reference to such, thus making the terminus ad quem difficult to establish. A dating during the times of Hezekiah would be possible (see more under "Occasion/Purpose").

Structure. The two books may be divided into the following units:

1B The Eli and Samuel narrative. Chapters 1-3

2B The history of the Ark. Chapters 4:1--7:1

3B The Samuel and Saul relationship. Chapters 7:2--15:35

4B The Saul and David conflict. Chapters 16--2 Samuel 1

5B The King David narrative. Chapters 2-8

6B The struggle for David's throne. Chapters 9-20

7B The epilogue. Chapters 21-24

Historical Setting. The time frame of the books extends from the birth of Samuel (circa 1120 B.C.) to the end of David's reign (circa 971 B.C.), thus spanning 150 years of history. The book opens in the period of the Judges when Israel was without a King, at the mercy of her enemies and deeply involved in paganism with its attendant immorality. A central sanctuary exists but the pericope of the Danite migration (Judges 17-18) may indicate little respect or support for the priesthood and an independent approach to religion and rule. The first chapter reveals a decadent priesthood in the sons of Eli. Samuel is able to exert a positive influence over the nation, but even so they reject Yahweh's kingship over them in their request for a king like the nations around them. Saul is chosen and begins the work of welding a loose tribal confederation into a cohesive central government which is completed by David.

Occasion/Purpose. Reasoning backwards from the emphases of the book (the covenant, the ark/central sanctuary, and the monarchy), and working within the previously stated historical parameters almost anytime in the divided monarchy could have precipitated the writing of this book. However, the time of Hezekiah may be particularly fitting. 2 Chronicles 29-31 records a revival in which the covenant and hence the central sanctuary are emphasized, all led by the Davidic king, Hezekiah. Because the books of Samuel would have spoken pointedly to this situation and because Hezekiah is known to have led a great movement of literary activity, the occasion of Hezekiah's reign may be as likely an occasion for writing as any.

The purpose of the writer then, was to record selected historical events from a theological perspective emphasizing the prosperity of those who keep the covenant in order to encourage Israelites to keep the Deuteronomic covenant, thus giving particular attention to the central sanctuary and the Davidic

King.

In the broader context of God's purposes the book records another stage in the fulfillment of God's theocratic program in providing a King for his people and in further narrowing the line through which the ultimate King would come. David appears at first to be a possible fulfillment of the original promised deliverer but ultimately fails, thus, focusing the reader's attention upon one of his sons who may finally be the promised deliverer of his people.

Message Statement. Although the book does commend the kingship of David and thus of his descendants the theme of the book seems to be broader. Because David was both blessed and cursed in the book, the point of the book is not simply to lift up the king, David. The message of the book seems to be: *The blessings and cursings of God are given to men based upon their relation to the Deuteronomic covenant.*

Argument

- 2A THE DIVINE PROVISION OF A PROPHET IN A TIME OF APOSTASY 1:1--3:2
In this corpus which so clearly focuses upon the reigns of Saul and particularly David, the story of their nativity is never told. By contrast, that of Samuel is detailed, thus giving particular emphasis to the person and work of Samuel. This one who will eventually anoint the first and second kings of the land and establish the monarchy is himself given by God. Thus the royal office ultimately finds its origin not in the will of Israel but in the prophetic office and thus the will of Israel's God. He comes at a time of unchecked apostasy in the nation to lead her back to God.
- 1B The Miraculous Birth of the Prophet 1:1-20
God often emphasized the fact of his people's dependency by using a miraculously born child. It is important to the argument of this book to acknowledge at the very outset that God is clearly responsible for the existence of Israel's hero and king-maker.
- 2B The Faithfulness of Hannah: A Paradigm of Covenant Loyalty 1:21--2:11
Hannah's actions are detailed here as an example of those who are faithful to keep their obligations to God and the blessings which they receive. With great personal sacrifice Hannah gives up her boy to the service of the temple in fulfillment of her vow. Her praise of God (2:1-10) is a rich theology of God's goodness to the faithful and his discipline of the unfaithful. *The Lord sends poverty and wealth: he humbles and he exalts. . . . It is not by strength that one prevails; those who oppose the Lord will be shattered* (2:7, 9b). It serves as the theme for the book and the principles which are poetically expressed here will be demonstrated in the remainder of the book both in the lives of individuals and in the life of the nation. The immediate result of her faithfulness is that Samuel served the Lord (2:11).
- 3B The Miraculous Call of the Prophet 2:12-4:1
Not only was Samuel's birth supernatural but so also was his call. The author notes that in those days the prophetic word was rare, emphasizing the uniqueness of this call. Before

Samuel's call is recounted however, the necessity for it is given as the wickedness of Eli's family is described. The writer deliberately contrasts God's disapproval of Eli's sons with his approval of Samuel (2:22-26) before the prophetic judgment against Eli's house is given. Even in his call to the prophetic office Samuel is given a difficult message of judgment which he faithfully delivers to Eli.

- 4B Summary of God's gift of a prophet for Israel 3:19--4:1a
 In this summary Samuel is described as a faithful conduit of God's message to Israel.
- 3A THE ARK NARRATIVE: EVIDENCE OF ISRAEL'S INFERTILITY 4:1b--7:1
 The point of this section seems to be the underscoring of the plight of Israel. Throughout the book (1 & 2 Samuel), the author sees the nation's attitude toward the tabernacle and the ark (and the worship which they represent) a litmus paper test of their regard for the theocratic arrangement and the covenant which lay at the heart of that system. In this section special focus is given to Israel's perverted use of the ark and the consequences which they suffer. The results in the life of the nation when governed by a leadership which is oblivious to the covenantal/theocratic arrangement are pitiful. This section therefore points up the need of a divine deliverer such as a Samuel who will be sensitive to God's rule through his covenant over the nation.
- 1B Israel's Contempt for God: Seen in Her Contempt for the Ark 4:1b-11
 Israel's decision to take the ark into battle shows her view of the ark as a mere talisman. Their confidence was misplaced in the ark of God rather than in the God of the ark.
- 2B God's Judgment of Israel: Loss of Ark & End of Eli's House 4:12-21
 The importance of the ark is seen in the reaction to its loss. The death of Eli is related to his reception of the news concerning the ark of God (4:18). The last words of his daughter-in-law also concern not her own impending death nor the death of her husband but rather the tragedy of the loss of the ark (4:21-22).
- 3B God's Faithfulness to Israel Despite Her Faithlessness 5:1--7:1
- 1C God's protection of His name 5:1-12
 In order that His name not be blasphemed among the Gentiles God protects the ark in three cities of Philistia, each time asserting supremacy over their gods.
- 2C God's return of the Ark 6:1--7:1
 In this section the treatment of the Philistines is contrasted with the disrespect of Israel. When the ark is returned to Israel numbers of men die because of some kind of improper reaction to it. God has been faithful to His people but they still demonstrate their spiritual bankruptcy and need of spiritual leadership.
- 4A THE RISE AND FALL OF A COVENANT-BREAKING KING 7:2--15:35
 Finding the regulations of the covenant with God too restrictive the people sin by asking for a king like all the surrounding nations. It is clear from the people's disenchantment with the theocratic arrangement (seen clearly in their experience with the return of the ark) that they would rather not have their personal fortunes based upon their obedience to the covenant. Rather, they would have a human king fight their battles for them irrespective of their covenant loyalty. Ironically, this is the account of a people who receive a king cast in their own image--one of patent covenant disloyalty.
- 1B Introduction: A Contrastive Example of a Covenant-Keeping Leader: Samuel 7:2-17
 Samuel's conquests as a leader of Israel is proof that the people could survive and succeed under the current theocratic arrangement if they so desired. Due to their carnality, however

they desire a king.

- 2B The Rise of Saul: The Kingship Given to Him 8:1--11:15
 Necessary for the king to be chosen is the people's popular rejection of God's kinship over the nation. This rejection was confirmed in the face of a clear warning by the prophet (8:19). Nevertheless, God granted the carnal request of the people through a series of private and public actions. Saul's private anointing (9:1--10:16) is then publicly confirmed (10:17--11:15). This confirmation is made by God's word of inauguration (10:17-26), God's supernatural empowerment in Saul's defeat of the Ammonites (11:1-11) and the nation's commitment to Saul (11:12-15).
- 3B The Fall of Saul: The Kingship is Taken From Him 12:1--15:35
 Soon, however, Saul's character is exposed and is judged by God.
- 1C The request for a King evidences an evil heart 12:1-25
 This section chronicles the farewell words of Samuel. The basic point seems to be that although the people had clearly rejected God's kingship in their request for a human monarch God would in fact work through Saul's reign if the king and the people were loyal to the covenant. Thus the failure of Saul's reign can not be attributed to a reluctance on the part of God to support him.
- 2C The decline of Saul in the Philistine wars 13:1--14:46
 This section opens with an account of Saul's disobedience to the word of God through Samuel with the announcement that his kingdom will not endure. Saul's impotence and foolishness as a leader are seen in his dealings with Philistia. Virtually the only hope of Israel at this point seems to be Jonathan, a covenant-keeping sort, whose success and wisdom only serve to accentuate his father's lack of the same.
- 3C The definitive decline of Saul in the war with Amalek 14:47--15:35
 Saul's independent spirit and partial obedience come to a decisive level in his war with Amalek. When Samuel rebukes his performance Saul attempts to rationalize his sin and then only falsely repents. Samuel, the prophet, is forced to complete Saul's obedience by killing Agag. God's displeasure with Saul is both stated (15:35b) and demonstrated (15:35a) at this point. The only solution at this point is the selection of a new king who will honor the covenant with God.
- 5A THE CONTRAST BETWEEN DAVID THE COVENANT-KEEPER AND SAUL THE COVENANT-BREAKER 16:1--1:27
 The author interweaves the rise of David and the fall of Saul in order to contrast the differences in the two men. For example, he deliberately juxtaposes the arrival of God's Spirit upon David and the Spirit's departure from Saul in 16:13-14. Interestingly David is anointed at the outset of this section so that both men can be evaluated from the perspective of their treatment of the "Lord's anointed."
- 1B The Anointing of David As King Means That He Is to Fight Israel's Wars 16:1--18:5
 In reflection of the motif established at the outset of the book by Hannah, David first appears here as the most insignificant member of Jesse's family. The lowly shepherd is the humble one whom God chooses to exalt. David is then providentially brought into contact with Saul to whom he effectively ministers from the start. Soon the effect of his anointing is seen as he fights Goliath and leads Israel in victory. Afterwards David affirms his loyalty to God's anointed (Saul, 17:55-58) and Jonathan affirms his loyalty to God's anointed (David, 18:1-4). This section closes with the summary statement of the result of David's anointing--

unbridled success.

- 2B David, the Anointed One/Covenant-keeper, is Driven From the Royal Household 18:6--20:42
 This section records the intensification of the conflict between David and Saul further emphasizing their respective characters. Saul's jealous attempts to kill David are always met with a righteous response from David who is providentially protected from harm.
- 3B David, the Anointed Covenant-keeper Lives in Exile 21:1--29:11
 This section records David's forced exile from Saul demonstrating God's protection and promotion of him despite his treatment by men.
- 1C David's forced exile: Saul's disregard of God 21:1--22:23
 God's care for David is seen in his experiences with foreign kings. Saul's decline is forcefully demonstrated by his slaughter of God's priests at Nob.
- 2C God delivers David 23:1-29
 Although Saul conspires with certain groups of foreigners in the land, God delivers David.
- 3C David prospers and proper and improper responses to the Lord's anointed 24:1--26:25
 The original motif is evident here as those who honor the Lord and his anointed are prospered and those who do not ultimately fail. Saul, David, Nabal and Abigail are the players in this drama.
- 4C David is spared while Saul is killed 27:1--1:27
 David is providentially spared from even being involved in the conflict with Israel while Saul and his house are killed. Saul's regression is complete in his consultation of the spiritist at Endor. Even in death David demonstrates his regard for God and Saul (1:1-16) and genuinely laments his demise (1:17-27).
- 6A THE FERTILITY OF DAVID, THE ANOINTED, COVENANT-KEEPER 2:1--9:13
 David's success in this section is a result of his anointing and his regard for the God of that anointing, expressed in his obedience to the covenant.
- 1B David's Strength Increases 2:1--3:5
 David's increase in strength is seen in the political, military and domestic spheres. He is anointed king over Judah (2:1-7), his men grow stronger than Saul's men (2:8--3:1) and his wives bear him many sons (3:2-5).
- 2B David's Wisdom is Used by God to Unify the Kingdom 3:6--5:16
 David continues his habit of trusting God to unify his kingdom by being party to any kind of fleshly attempts to secure the promise (seen in the anointing of David) of his kingship. This trust is seen in his godly response to the murders of both Abner (3:6-38) and Ishbosheth (4:1-12). The result of this trust is that the kingdom is then given to him (5:1-25).
- 3B God Firmly Establishes the Kingdom for David 6:1--9:13
- 1C David establishes a central place for worship 6:1-23
 David's regard for the covenant and its demand for a central place of worship is seen in his relocation of the ark of God in Jerusalem as soon as it was possible. This seems

to be the high point of David's career.

- 2C God establishes David's throne 7:1-29
 Although God refuses, in part, David's desire to build a house for God, He does give David a promise which he did not give to his predecessor, Saul: a permanent dynasty. David will have a son who will sit on his throne and build the temple which he envisioned.
- 3C God gives David military dominance 8:1-18
 This is the clear result of David's loyalty.
- 4C David keeps covenant with Jonathan 9:1-13
 David is faithful here to his covenant with Jonathan by his preservation of his son Mephibosheth, showing for one of the last times in the book the covenant-keeping character of David.
- 7A THE INFERTILITY OF DAVID THE COVENANT-BREAKER 10:1--20:26
 Just as God prospered David for loyalty he is also disciplined for his disloyalty. His anointing will not prevent the correction of God in the life of David.
- 1B David's Unfaithfulness to the Covenant 10:1--12:31
 This section chronicles the sorry story of David's contempt for God. His disobedience is rendered deliberate by the continued attempts to cover up the sin.
- 1C Background: The Ammonites shameful treatment of David's messengers 10:1-19
 While the author has no honorable young heir to the throne with which he can contrast David's folly (as he did with Saul), he does stress David's wickedness by comparing it with the actions of a naive pagan king.
- 2C The act: David's shameful treatment of his messengers 11:1-27
 David's lust is here only the beginning of his sin here. The main body of the story concerns David's treachery with his faithful servant Uriah. Uriah's honor accentuates David's dishonor.
- 3C The punishment: Nathan's rebuke and prophecy 12:1-25
 Although he is the Lord's anointed, in faithfulness to His covenant, God will punish David. The fact of the long term consequences is confirmed by the short term prophecy of the death of the child.
- 4C God's grace 12:24-31
 Despite God's displeasure with David, He will be faithful to his promise of a temple-building heir, namely Solomon.
- 2B God's Punishment for David's Unfaithfulness 13:1--20:26
 This is an important section for the teaching of the nation which at times fell under the delusion that God would never destroy Jerusalem. If God punished the founder of Jerusalem, then he would, in the same covenant faithfulness, punish the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The following account records the punishment as it fell from David's own lips: *that man must pay four-fold what he stole*. For the death of Uriah, one of David's sons has already died; now two more must die. Eventually the fourth will die at the hand of Solomon.
- 1C The death of Amnon 13:1-39

Sensing an opportunity to clear his path to the throne, Absalom kills the heir apparent.

- 2C The Revolt of Absalom 14:1--19:43
 David is forced to flee for his life from the capital. For a time he is forcibly reduced to the status of a fugitive, having been stripped of all outward evidences of God's blessings. All that God had done for him because of obedience is now taken from him due to his disobedience. David's response is one of genuine repentance and submission to the will of God however, as seen in his encounter with Shimei. When David returns to Jerusalem he faces Mephibosheth. Although he is probably guilty of rebellion David spares him in compliance with his covenant with Jonathan. Although imperfect, the thrust of David's life was one of covenant loyalty.
- 3C Further rebellion 20:1-26
 This section recounts more rebellion in the ranks of the people and the military, both of which frustrate David. Much to his chagrin, certain of his leaders did not share his respect for the covenant.
- 8A SIX APPENDICES 21:1--24:254
 The contribution of these appendices to the thematic flow has been the matter of some debate. The effort has been made here, however, to understand them in light of the theme of the book as mentioned above.
- 1B David's Faithfulness to the Covenant with Gibeah 21:1-14
 Despite what may have been considered a gruesome act David seems to be honoring the covenant made with Gibeah by delivering over seven of Saul's sons as retribution for Saul's violation of it.
- 2B Victories Over Philistia: Results of Covenant-Keeping 21:15-22
 Miscellaneous feats of valor are recorded, perhaps as examples of what can be accomplished by those who are faithful to the God of Israel.
- 3B David's Song of Praise 22:1-51
 This song of praise serves as an inclusio to Hannah's song. David notes that "You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low" (22:28).
- 4B David's Great Hope of Messiah 23:1-7
 The author notes that the last words of David concern his son who will be the fulfillment of God's covenant with him.
- 5B David's Thirty Mighty Men 23:8-39
 Although David began with a group of vagabonds and refugees, the author now lists a group of mighty men who joined themselves to him. Whether the Lord has given David these men as support or He has turned the once vagrant group of men into these heroes, God is still to be praised for strengthening David's kingdom through these men and their feats of valor.
- 6B David's acquisition of the site of the Temple 24:1-25
 Whereas the high point in David's career may have been the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem, the securing of the site of the Temple is surely of utmost significance. Though David's sin precipitates this story, in repentance and trust David is used by God to procure the site of future worship. In the last chapter the author focuses attention upon the central sanctuary.

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