

History: 1 and 2 Samuel

INTRODUCTION

Originally written as one book, 1 and 2 Samuel together tell the story of about 150 years of Israel's history. These books cover events from just before the birth of Samuel—Israel's last judge—until the end of King David's reign, which took place between 1120 BC and 971 BC.

The story begins during the final years of the judges, a time when God ruled Israel through leaders called judges. However, as time passed, the Israelites wanted to be ruled by a king like the other nations around them. This desire directly contradicted God's intention for the nation of Israel. They were supposed to be set apart! These books describe how Israel transitioned from being led by judges to being ruled by kings, starting with King Saul and then King David.

The main purpose of these books was to record the establishment of kingship in Israel and to explain its theological significance. 1 Samuel deals with the Israelites' initial request for a king, the appointing of that king (a handsome guy named Saul), and the tragic results of his reign. 2 Samuel covers the reign of Israel's second king, David. It also covers God's promises to him that point to a future and final king, Jesus (2 Samuel 7). While 2 Samuel accounts for David's triumphs, it also records his transgressions and his troubles. Together, 1 and 2 Samuel demonstrate the sovereignty of God and His faithfulness, the record of what happened to individuals and nations when they trusted and obeyed God's Word, and what happened when they failed to do so.

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

Have you ever watched or participated in a long-distance race? After warming up and stretching, the runners gather at the starting line, ready to go. The signal is given, and they take off! Getting a strong start is important, but what really matters is how they finish. Some runners start too fast and burn out before the end. Others push themselves too hard and end up injured or too exhausted to finish the race.

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel tell stories of people who started strong but didn't always finish well.

- Eli, the high priest, began as a respected leader but failed to discipline his corrupt sons. Because of this, he lost his position, and his life ended in tragedy.
- Samuel, Israel's last judge, was a faithful prophet who led the nation well. But his sons were dishonest leaders, which led the people to demand a king instead.
- King Saul was chosen by God and had a promising start, but his pride and disobedience led to his downfall.

2 Samuel focuses on King David, a man described as "after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). David was a great leader, but he also made serious mistakes, including committing adultery and having someone killed to cover it up. He faced painful consequences for his sins, but he also repented and remained faithful to God. Unlike Eli and Saul, David's story didn't end in complete failure—it was a story of both struggle and redemption. Like a race, life isn't just about how we start—it's about how we finish. The stories in 1 and 2 Samuel remind us that even great leaders can stumble, but those who turn back to God can still finish strong.

BOOK ORGANIZATION

1 SAMUEL: Monarchy

Samuel: Judge and Prophet (Chapters 1-7)

Saul: Israel's First King (Chapters 8-15)

Saul & David: The Decline of Saul and Rise of David (Chapters 16-31)

2 SAMUEL: David

David's Triumphs: Political and Spiritual (Chapters 1-10)

David's Transgressions: Adultery and Murder (Chapter 11)

David's Troubles: Personally and Politically (Chapters 12-24)

JESUS IN THE BOOKS OF 1 AND 2 SAMUEL

From the very beginning, God had a plan to bring Jesus, the true King, into the world. It didn't start with David—it started all the way back in Genesis 3:15, when God promised that a descendant of Eve would one day defeat sin and Satan. Throughout history, God worked through His people to move His plan forward. One of the biggest moments in that plan was His covenant with David.

In 2 Samuel 7, God told David: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16 NIV). While David's descendants ruled for a time, they eventually failed, and Israel lost its earthly kingdom—as we'll read about in 2 Kings, they were sent into exile. But God's promise wasn't just about an earthly throne—it was about Jesus. Jesus, a descendant of David, is the perfect, eternal King.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. He is not just the King of Israel—He is the King over all creation. His rule has no end, and His kingdom is one of love, justice, and redemption. The Davidic Covenant isn't just an old promise from history—this is personal. Jesus is King, and the question is: Will you let Him be King over your life?

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOKS OF 1 AND 2 SAMUEL

OBSERVATION

- 1 and 2 Samuel tell the stories of people who had some big successes and big failures. They also suffered earthly consequences for their sins. As you read look for moments to note examples of causae and effect. The difference in their legacies and in God's response to their shortcomings has to do with their hearts toward God and the nature of their relationship with Him.^[iii] As you read, ask questions like "What does this teach me about people?" and, "What does this teach me about God?"

INTERPRETATION

- Literary Context: The books are mostly a narrative history, with some poetry and discourse.^[iv] Be on the lookout for the "moral of the story" rather than explicit examples to follow. It's more likely you'll notice bad examples rather than good ones.
- Historical Context: The books describe the end of the period of the judges and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel.

APPLICATION

- What can we learn from the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David? How do their mistakes and successes relate to our lives today?
- What is the core difference between Saul and David? Based on their examples, how should we respond to our own sins?
- Consider the continued relevance of God's promises to David. Spend some time thanking God for his continued faithfulness in keeping his word. Remember, the goal of Bible study isn't just completion—it's connection. Are you meeting with Jesus as you engage with His word?

PRAYER

- Consider the prayers of Hannah and of David. Seek to pray persistently, praise God, and give heartfelt thanks as they did.
- Pray for a willingness to listen to and follow God's leading, as Samuel did.

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT 1 & 2 SAMUEL?

"God does not desire whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices, but He will have His voice to be hearkened to. Behold, a ready obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."—Irenaeus¹, 175 AD

"When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. Then Saul said to his servants, 'Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.'"—Origen², 215 AD

"But Christ, the true Solomon, who built the house of God, not with stones, but with living and rational stones, that is, with believers and saints, as also Peter says, 'You also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house,' and Paul, 'You are the temple of God,' and again, 'Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house are we.'"—Hesychius of Jerusalem³, 5TH Century AD

"By 'house' he means the royal dignity, and by 'kingdom' he indicates the dominion over the people; and by saying 'forever,' he teaches the endlessness of the sovereignty of Christ."—Theodoret of Cyrus⁴, 457 AD

"In Samuel we have a record of how commitment to the will of God results in blessings for individuals, groups of individuals, and whole nations. This commitment should rest on an appreciation for God's initiative in reaching out to undeserving sinners in grace. We also see how disregard for God's Word, because of a failure to appreciate God's grace, inevitably leads to blasting, a curse from God...The Books of Samuel continue the emphasis begun in Genesis and Exodus that Deuteronomy clarified, namely, that our response to God's grace determines our destiny." – Dr. Thomas L. Constable,^[v] 2018



¹ <https://ontheruinofbritain.wordpress.com/2021/03/30/the-lords-supper-part-two-the-early-church-1st-3rd-century/>

^[i] <https://www.gotquestions.org/when-was-2-Samuel-written.html>

^[ii] <https://www.bible.ca/ef/expository-2-samuel-7-1-29.htm>

^[iii] <https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-gospel-in-12-samuel/>

^[iv] <https://bibleproject.com/guides/books-of-samuel/>

^[v] <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/1samuel.pdf>

² <https://www.walkingwithgiants.net/devil/1-samuel-287-14-did-samuel-visit-from-the-grave/>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesychius_of_Jerusalem

⁴ <https://www.amazon.com/Theodoret-Cyrus-Commentary-Letters-Paul/dp/1885652526>