

BIB104 OT2 Life & Literature of Israel

Unit 2a 1 Samuel: From Anarchy to Monarchy

Presented by the



For Use by the

Blue Letter Bible Institute

[Web: Study.Bible](http://Study.Bible)

A Ministry of the

Blue Letter Bible

[Web: BlueLetterBible.org](http://BlueLetterBible.org)

1 Samuel. It's a story of a narrative history and includes a great deal of drama. Israel has not heard from God in decades. The priests are corrupt. The nearby nations threaten the land's safety. Even Eli, the high priest and judge of Israel, is not faithfully serving God and his people. Israel needs more than a judge. Israel needs to fear God and to hear from him again. Israel needs a prophet, so God gives them Samuel. The central theme of the books of Samuel is how the Lord, number one, established a dynasty or his house in Israel for David's line rather than Saul's, and how he chose Jerusalem as the place where God's successor to David would establish the temple or the house for the worship of the divine king Yahweh.

It's an interesting timeline as you think about 1100 B.C., which is when Samuel was born, and then about 1050 or 1030 B.C., in there we see the reign of Saul begins, and then in 1010 B.C., we see the reign of David begins. A lot happens in what really is just a few decades. Now, 1 Samuel was written right about 930 B.C. Now, together, 1 and 2 Samuel form one book in the Hebrew Bible. The Greek translation of the Bible or the Septuagint was the first version to divide the material into two different parts. Though named after its main character, the prophet Samuel, the book doesn't claim to have him as the author. In fact, Samuel may have written and he certainly supplied the information for 1 Samuel 1:1-24:22, which is the biography of his life and the career that he had up until his death. But you'll see in 1 Chronicles 29:29, it notes that Samuel along with Nathan and Gad recorded the acts of King David. Now, evidence in the writings suggest that the books of 1 and 2 Samuel were compiled by someone from the prophetic school who used documents from Samuel, from Nathan, and also from Gad.

The events of 1 Samuel span approximately 100 years, from 1100 B.C. to about 1000 B.C. The events of 2 Samuel cover another 40 years. The date of writing them would be sometime around 960 B.C. Now, 1 Samuel records the history of Israel in the land of Canaan as they move from the rule of judges and being a unified nation in that way to having a king and being in control of the whole nation and a different segment of rule. Samuel emerges as the last judge and he anoints the first two kings, Saul and David. And the books were probably written soon after the end of his reign, that is, David's.

The purpose of 1 Samuel is really to highlight two major events: the establishment of the monarchy of Israel, which is chapters 8 to 12, and the rise of David to be king after Saul, chapters 16 to 31. After ruling for a while, Saul was rejected by the Lord in favor of David. You'll see that in chapters 15 and 16. Saul stayed on the throne until his death at Mount Gibeah [sic Gilboa], which you see in chapter 31. And then later in 2 Samuel 7, God promises David and his house an eternal destiny. The Book of 1 Samuel establishes the principle that obedience to the word of God is the necessary condition for a king to be acceptable to the God of Israel. You see the diversity between Saul, which we'll learn a little bit more about, and David and their response to Yahweh God, their response to his rule, his control, his direction in their lives.

1 and 2 Samuel both deal with the transitional period in the history of ancient Israel. There's a transition of leadership from the priest Eli to the judge Samuel, and then from the judge Samuel to the king Saul, and then from Saul to David. Samuel is the link there between judgeship and kingship in Israel. He's that transitional leader of so many different things, which makes him such a significant character in the Old Testament. Under Saul, Israel was more than a loose confederation that gathered together whenever there was a common threat, but there was no strong central rule such as existed later. The story of the rise of David is the second half of 1 Samuel, which prepares us for the full-scale kingship of David in the Book of 2 Samuel.

Now, as in many books, there's some key passages that we need to be aware of here. And I'm just going to give you three that I think really summarize a lot of what the heart of 1 Samuel is really all about. The first is in 1Sa 8:6-7. It says this: "But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected you, but they have rejected me as their king.'" Now, that's an important verse or verses. Why? Because the people rejected God as their monarch, as their king, as their ruler. Remember, the prophet Samuel and the other judges (he's also called a judge) were the voice of God to the people of Israel. He told them they didn't need to have a king like the other nations, but they desperately wanted to be like the world around them.

Strike similar to us? How much do we as Christians so desperately want to ignore even the principles of God's word so that we can have what the world has to offer? We need to understand, my brother and sister, the value of thinking and understanding that God alone is enough, that when he says something, he means it, that two plus two, so to speak, equal four in a biblical sense. You're not the exception. We need to embrace his rule. But God wanted Samuel to know too. "They didn't reject you. They rejected me." To those of you that are out there faithfully teaching and sharing your faith and letting other people know about the principles of God's word, when man rejects your message, they're not rejecting you because your message should be God's message and they reject God. You and I are called to be the voice of truth. We're called to be the proclaimers of truth. Their reception or rejection of it is between them and Almighty God. So keep sharing and spreading the truth.

Another key verse or verses that we see is in 1 Samuel 13:13-14. And it says this: "You acted foolishly, Samuel said. 'You have not kept the command of the Lord that he gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of the people, because you have not kept the Lord's command.'" Samuel talking to Saul. There's some strong language there. "You are not going to be able to continue on. Your lineage will not stay in the king's throne. You are going to be stepping away and God is going to bring somebody from a different family to rule the land." And I would think the most cutting thing for Saul to hear would be that phrase "a man after God's own heart." "Saul, you don't have God's best interest. You're not pursuing God. You're pursuing the pleasing smile of mankind." Again, brothers and sisters, remember that. Seek to serve and follow God, not the smile of mankind.

And then we see in 1 Samuel 15:22-23 this: “But Samuel replied: ‘Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination (witchcraft), and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.’” Again, a reiteration now of the reason behind. Not just you haven’t sought God, but you sought the devil, witchcraft, other ways to try to get your answers. How desperate do we get in wanting to be able to hear from God? Desperate enough to do whatever he tells us to do or desperate enough that we reject his word and try to seek something else that will make us happier, that will be the answer we’re looking for. Remember this. When you ask for advice, don’t go asking for affirmation of a decision you’ve already made. Go seeking advice so that you can take it into consideration as you make decisions that are in line and pleasing with God. Saul did not do that.

Samuel, as we mentioned, served the people as a prophet and a judge. He spoke the word of the Lord to the people and he taught them how to live as the people of God should live. But when Samuel got old and Israel’s enemies attacked, the people told Samuel that they wanted a king. Now, Samuel advised the people, “Trust God, not human leadership.” But the people, they didn’t listen. They determined to have a king rule over them and he would deliver them from the enemy. Again, be aware, the king won’t deliver us from the enemy. No. God is the one. So God gave them Saul. Now, Saul was foolish. He was selfish and he was a cowardly king. He ignored the word of the Lord and he craved the approval of men. He disobeyed God several times. He overstepped his duties. He put the people at odds with God and each other. King Saul doesn’t keep the Law of Moses and he doesn’t direct the Israelites to live as God’s holy people. So then God gives them David.

David is a man after God’s own heart, which we read just a while ago, but it’s also in 1Sa 13:14. He was a skilled warrior, a musician and a leader of men, a man who trusted God and encouraged his countrymen to act like God’s people. David’s famous defeat of Goliath makes him a popular, famous figure in Israel. Saul then fears David will seize his kingdom eventually and spends the rest of his life hunting David down instead of hearing what God had said: “Saul, your kingdom will be taken from you and given to another.” [1Sa 15:28] The theme that we see in 1 Samuel 24 and 25 is only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your heart, for consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away.

1 Samuel 27:6 refers to the divided monarchy when the 10 tribes of Israel rebelled against the two tribes of Judah, which occurred after Solomon’s reign. From this, we can conclude that the book came together sometime after the death of David in 971 B.C. and perhaps even after the death of Solomon which was in 931 B.C. Because the book contains the references to the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C., it’s likely that it originated during that period of exile. The events that happen in 1 Samuel took place over a period, as we mentioned a little earlier, of about 100 years, stretching from the closing day of the judges when Samuel was born, around 1120 B.C., and through the death of Saul around 1011 B.C.

We see the birth of Samuel, his call from God, and his subsequent prophetic ministry. We see the rise and fall of King Saul and the anointing and maturity of young David.

1 Samuel is set in the land of Israel where the Hebrews invaded and settled, which you'll see if you look back to the Book of Joshua. Numerous other people continue to dwell alongside of Israel because they chose to reject God's command again and not drive them out of the land. Often, it disrupted the peace and encouraged the Israelites even to stray from their own faith and worship the gods of those that they were supposed to defeat and kick out of the land. It's an important book, this Book of 1 Samuel. It's a critical time in Israel's history. The people of God are being transformed from a loosely affiliated group of tribes into a unified nation under a form of government that would be headed by a king. They traded the turmoil of life under the judges for the stability of a strong central monarchy. 1 Samuel focuses on the establishment of this monarchy. The people demanded a king, similar to the kings that were in the surrounding nations. We see that in 1Sa 8:5. Saul, the first king, though, head and shoulders above the rest, the Bible says, didn't have a righteous heart and his line was destined to not inherit the crown (9:1-15:35). God instructs Samuel to anoint David, the youngest son of Jesse who is of Bethlehem, as the next king (1Sa 16:1-13).

And much of the book, we find, follows the exploits or adventures of David. He was a young musician, a shepherd, a warrior. We witness, as we said earlier, his underdog story where he goes up against the giant Goliath in chapter 17, his deep friendship with Jonathan in chapter 18 in the first part, and his growing military prowess we see in the second half of chapter 18. He waits patiently for the throne, often pursued and driven into hiding by Saul. And we see that the book concludes with Saul's death (1Sa 31:1-13), which serves as a natural dividing marker between 1 and 2 Samuel.

Samuel is one of the most intriguing figures in Old Testament history. He's a star player in the story of David and also Saul, the first two God-anointed kings in Israel. We meet him as a baby and we see him grow to be a national leader, an intercessor, and even see him as a ghost. Samuel was a miracle child. We meet his parents before we even meet him. His mother Hannah can't have children, but God hears her prayers and opens her womb, blessing her with the child Samuel, which she gives back to God to serve him 100%. Boy, as a parent, that strikes me as I have four children. Do I give my children over not just from birth but day by day, "Lord, they're yours to serve you"? Do I pray daily, "Lord, help my kids to love you with their whole heart and love others as the Bible says is the greatest commandment"? Samuel was given back to God to follow him, and we see the impact he had.

It's interesting to note that as you think of Samuel in that light, you also see that his name is very interesting because it means "name of God." It's even in the Old Testament sometimes listed as Samuel when it's spelled in the English alphabet, which literally means the name of God or, this is an interesting one, "God has heard." Samuel is from the tribe of Levi. Not only was he from that tribe, but he may have had the Ephraimite blood in him as well. We see that in 1 Chronicles 6:33-38 and even in 1 Samuel 1:1, which, as a result of that, it qualified him to serve in a temple. But we find that Samuel is much more than a priest. He was also the last judge.

And you can read about most of the judges in the Book of Judges, but after Joshua dies, the nation of Israel enters the days of the judges (Ruth 1:1) where there was no centralized government. During that time, God raised up individuals who deliver Israel from their enemies. The Book of Judges tells us about 12 different judges, and 1 Samuel introduces two more. Who? Eli and Samuel. Why is Samuel the last? Because after Samuel, Israel is led by kings. Acts 13:20 tells us that as well. And interestingly enough is that transition of history. Samuel has the chance to anoint a king, Saul, who rejects God instead of the way that he should have obeyed him, and how David accepts God in the way that he should accept him. When the people demanded that national king, God directed Samuel to anoint Saul. A tall man from the tribe of Benjamin doesn't turn out so well, and so God anoints that young shepherd David as the future king. Not the king Israel needs, but the king they ask for and deserve is Saul. The king they needed was God Almighty, but he provides David as a foreshadowing of even who Jesus Christ would be as he protects and provides for his people.

Now, Samuel is interesting because he's noted as being a prophet. In the Book of Acts, Peter considers Samuel to be the first of the prophets, after Moses, that is, in Acts 3:24. Now, a prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God or with the voice of God. Samuel wasn't the first person to be called a prophet in the Bible. Moses is, both earlier and probably greater. More people know of Moses. But as far as we can tell, he led an order of prophets or had a prophet school we hear about. And we first hear about that in 1 Samuel 19:20. His prophetic ministry is significant because it begins at a time when words from the Lord were rare and infrequent. 1Sa 3:1 tells us that. But after Samuel, Israel's history comes alive with prophetic revelation. Much of it is recorded in the prophetic books of the Bible.

Now, we also noted that Samuel was a priest connected to the Levites. And he begins his ministry, remember when he enters into the tabernacle, serving for the chief priest in 1 Samuel 3:1. He makes sacrifices on behalf of God's people and even offers intercessory prayer to God himself for the Israelites in 1Sa 7:9. He's also a Nazarite. Now, like the mighty Samson who is the most famous and well-known Nazarite, Samuel is dedicated to the Lord as a child. This dedication was for life, and so he never cuts his hair. 1 Samuel 1:11 and then in Numbers 6:1-21 tell us about that Nazarite and his vow. Samuel also, as I mentioned a little earlier, is the only ghost that we meet in the Bible. After Samuel dies, Saul meets with the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28:7. This medium conjures up the spirit of Samuel, and Samuel is not too happy about what Saul has done. And you can read the whole story and all about it in 1 Samuel 28. And he's remembered also, I think it's interesting, Samuel is, for his prayers.

The psalmists who penned Psalm 99 ranks him with Moses and Aaron as one who called upon the Lord's name (Psalm 99:6). And he's called by God twice. Samuel is one of eight people in the Bible that God calls by name twice. The others are Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Martha, Simon, and Saul. Samuel is the only character in the book by this name. We don't ever hear the name Samuel in any other way. And there's some key personalities, as we focused a lot on Samuel, that are also in the Book of 1 Samuel: Eli, Hannah, Saul, Jonathan, and David. It's written to show how Israel chose a king, but in the process, they blatantly rejected and abandoned God.

So let's give a summary then of the book. We've given you some highlights. The book starts with the miraculous birth of Samuel, which is an answer to his mother's earnest prayer. As a child, Samuel lived and served in a temple. God singled him out as a prophet (1Sa 3:19-21), and the child's first prophecy was one of judgment on the corrupt priests. Samuel was born to Hannah, a previously barren woman, [who] had to give Samuel to Israel's chief priest Eli to be raised as a Nazarite. The priesthood in Israel is in a general state of decline and Eli's sons are disobeying God in monumental proportions. His family starts to deliver messages that aren't in line with Scripture, and they take advantage of the children of Israel. So as a result of that, God would remove from Eli his family's priestly responsibilities and he hands it over to Samuel even as a young man as he pursues God. And he becomes recognized as a prophet in Israel pretty early on, delivering messages to God's people.

Now, the Israelites go to war with their perennial enemies, the Philistines. The Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant and are in temporary possession of it. During battle, the Philistines kill Eli's sons and capture the Ark of the Covenant, Israel's religious altar and the symbol of the inhabitants of God. Upon learning of the attack and robbery, Eli falls over and dies. The ark is returned to Israel after it causes its Philistine captors to become terribly diseased. Upon its return, the nation rejoices and Samuel persuades Israel to set aside its worship of local pagan deities, and God helps Israel thwart the Philistine oppression for many years to come. The Israelites then demand that Samuel appoint a king for them so that Israel can be like the other nations. Samuel, as we mentioned before, is unhappy, but God grants him permission to elect a king. God knows that by asking for a king, the people have not rejected Samuel. They've rejected God. And Samuel warns the people that a monarchy brings certain drawbacks, such as taxation, the conscription of armed forces, and the potential for tyranny, but the people are resolute.

God tells Samuel who should be king, and the following day, a man named Saul appears before Samuel, inquiring about some lost donkeys. Samuel pours oil over Saul's head to anoint him as king, and God provides a series of mystical signs to assure Saul that he would be the next king. Saul, who, as we mentioned earlier, is a head taller than the average man, pleases the Israelites as king, and he leads them in rescuing an Israelite outpost from invasion. Stepping down as Israel's leader, Samuel encourages the people that so long as they're obedient to God and his laws, God will not punish them for requesting a king.

Now, Saul enjoys many military victories and initial successes. He defeats the Ammonites in battle. You see that in chapter 11. But then he makes a series of missteps. Saul disobeys God. He tries to rush into battle by performing a ritual war sacrifice without the help of a priest. In chapter 13, we see that. He makes a foolish vow at the expense of his own son Jonathan in chapter 14. And he disobeys the Lord's very direct command, and Samuel sends Saul to fight the Amalekites, instructing Saul to destroy them completely and leave nothing alive. Saul, however, spares the Amalekite king and the best portion of their flocks, hoping to present them as sacrifices to God.

Samuel rebukes Saul, claiming that obedience to God's instruction is more important than religious sacrifice (chapter 15). And because of Saul's rebellion, God chooses another to take his place. He informs Saul that he's going to choose another man to be king of Israel. Saul pleads with Samuel, begging for forgiveness. Saul grabs for Samuel's cloak, but the cloth tears, a symbol, Samuel says, of Saul's broken or torn out of his hand's kingdom. So God leaves Samuel to the town of Bethlehem to choose a new king from Jesse's family. Each of Jesse's sons that are older are impressive, but God instructs Samuel to judge people not by their external appearances but rather by their heart.

Another important lesson for us to make sure we make application to today. How do we judge people? Frequently by the outward. When we see somebody who doesn't look the way we think they should look, that doesn't behave perhaps in the way we do, what judgment do we give of them and what grace do we give to them? But Saul, he was known as being tall, masculine. Only by the outward it would appear that he'd be great and powerful, but inside, the character that he had was flawed, whereas David, a young boy chosen while he's watching the sheep as the youngest child of the family, the runt, so to speak, has the character and the righteousness that God was looking for. And God gave divine power to David, and he withdrew his power from Saul, cursing Saul with a psychological distress in the form of an evil spirit we see in 1Sa 16:14. David begins his rise to courtly status as a harp player for Saul during the king's emotional unrest. The music comforts him. Ironic, isn't it?

Later, David has his famous confrontation with Goliath, a Philistine, and becomes a national hero in chapter 17. He serves in Saul's court, he marries Saul's daughter, and he's befriended by Saul's son. But Saul himself grows jealous of David's successes and popularity, and he attempts to kill David. David flees and he begins an extraordinary period of adventure, intrigue, and even romance. With supernatural aid, David narrowly but consistently evades the bloodthirsty Saul. We see that from chapter 19 through chapter 26. Through it all, David maintains his integrity and also his friendship to Jonathan. Now, near the end of the book, Samuel has died and Saul is a lost man. On the eve of a battle with Philistia, Saul seeks for answers. Having rejected God, he finds no help from heaven and he seeks counsel from a medium instead. We talked about that. During this séance, Samuel's spirit rises from the dead to give him one last prophecy. Saul would die in battle the next day. The prophecy is fulfilled. Saul's three sons, including Jonathan, fall in battle, and Saul commits suicide.

1 Samuel chronicles the beginning of Israel's monarchy. It follows the lives of the prophet Samuel, the ill-fated king Saul, and God's ultimate choice of David as the king. And we see several prominent themes. We see God's providence, how God repeatedly made everyday works for his purposes. He used Hannah's contentious relationship with Peninnah in 1 Samuel 1:1-28, which led Saul to Samuel during Saul's search for the lost donkeys (chapter 9) and caused David to learn of Goliath while taking food to his brothers (chapter 17). These are just a few examples of where even on the small things, you see the hand of God. We see kingship as the divine king God designated a human vice-regent, so to speak, David, to rule over his people. This history validates David's house as the legitimate rulers of Israel. It also fulfilled Jacob's promise that the scepter will never depart from Judah, David's tribe, in Genesis 49:10.

We also see a reversal of human fortune. Hannah's barrenness gave way to children. Samuel became prophet instead of Eli's sons. Saul rose to prominence though he was from the holy tribe that he came from. And David was anointed king though he was the youngest son. Normal human patterns are reversed by God so that his plan can be furthered, showing his sovereignty overall. And last, we see a foreshadowing. The prayer of Hannah makes several prophetic references to Christ. She extols God as her rock, and we know from the gospel that comes that Jesus is the rock upon whom we should build our spiritual houses. Paul refers to Jesus as the rock of offense to the Jews. Christ is called the spiritual rock who provided spiritual drink to the Israelites in the wilderness, just as he provides living water to our souls. Hannah's prayer also makes references to the Lord who will judge the ends of the earth, while Matthew 25:31-32 refers to Jesus as the Son of Man who will come in glory to judge everyone. Once again, we see throughout the pages of a book of the Bible the fingerprints of God, the proclamation of a king to come, who would be Jesus. Lots of great lessons to learn from the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David in particular.