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# BOOKS OF SAMUEL

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**Approximate date:** 970-800s B.C.E. (Right, some conservative-moderate); before 586 B.C.E. (some conservative-moderate, some Left); mid-to-late 500s B.C.E. (some Left)

**Time period:** rise of Israel's monarchy via the establishment of Kings Saul and David

**Author:** Samuel (Right); Israel's court historians and further editors (conservative-moderate); Israel's court historians or an unknown exile from the Southern Kingdom (Left)

**Location of author:** Land of Israel (Right, some conservative-moderate); Jerusalem, Babylon, and/or Land of Israel (some conservative-moderate, Left)

**Target audience and their location:** people of Israel during the Davidic and/or Solomonic monarchy (Right, conservative-moderate); Jewish religious leaders during the reign of King Josiah and/or Jewish exiles living in Babylon or returning from Babylon (Left)

## People:

Elkannah, Hannah, Peninnah, Hophni, Phinehas, Eli, Samuel, Philistines, Ichabod, Dagon (deity), Abinadab, Eleazar, Baals and Ashtoreths (deities), Amorites, Joel, Abijah, Kish, Saul, Matri, Nahash the Ammonite, Jonathan, Ahijah (son of Ichabod), Ammonites, kings of Zobah, Amalekites, Ishvi, Malki-Shua, Merab, Michal, Ahinoam (daughter of Ahimaaz), Abner (son of Ner), Abiel, Kenites, Agag, Jesse, Eliab, Abinadab (a son of Jesse), Shammah, David, Goliath, Adriel, Ahimelech, Doeg the Edomite, Achish, Gad (prophet), Abiathar (son of Ahimelech), Nabal, Abigail, Ahinoam, Paltiel (son of Laish), Ziphites, Ahimelech the Hittite, Achish, Geshurites, Girzites, Jerameelites, Ish-Bosheth, Zeruiah's sons (Joab, Abishai, Asahel), sons born to David (Amnon, Kileab, Absalom, Adonijah, Shephatiah, Ithream), Maacah (daughter of Talmi), Haggith, Abital, Eglah, Rizpah (daughter of Aiah), Baanah, Recab, Mephibosheth, Jebusites, Hiram, more children born to David (Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, Eliphet), sons of Abinadab (Uzzah and Ahio), Obed-Edom, Nathan (prophet), Moabites, Hadadezer, Arameans, Toi (Tou), Joram, Edomites, Jehoshaphat (son of Ahilud), Zadok (son of Ahitub), Seraiah, Benaiah (son of Jehoiada), Ziba, Kerethites, Pelethites, Ziba, Makir (son of Ammiel), Mica, Hanun (son of Nahash), Shobach, Bathsheba (daughter of Eliam), Uriah the Hittite, Rabbah, Tamar, Jonab (son of Shimeah), Talmi (son of Ammihud), Tamar (daughter of Absalom), Ahithophel, Ittai, Hushai the Arkite, Ahimaaz (son of Zadok), Jonathan (son of Abiathar), Shimei (son of Nahash), Makir (son of Ammiel), Barzillai, Kimham, Sheba (son of Bicri), Adoniram, Sheva, Ira the Jairite, Armoni and Mephibosheth (sons of Aiah's daughter Rizpah), Ishbi-Benob, Rapha, Sibbelai, Saph, Elhanan (son of Jaare-Oregim), David's mighty men (2 Samuel 23:8-39), Araunah the Jebusite

**People mentioned:**

Pharaoh, Egyptians, Rachel, Moses, Aaron, Jacob, Sisera, Jerub-Baal, Barak, Jephthah, Abimelech (son of Jerub-Besheth)

**Places:**

Ramathaim, hill country of Ephraim, Shiloh, Ramah, Dan, Beersheba, Ebenezer, Aphek, Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, Beth Shemesh, field of Joshua, Ashkelon, Gaza, Kiriath-Jearim, Mizpah, Beth Car, Bethel, Gilgal, Shalisha, Shaalim, Zuph, Zelzah, Tabor, Gibeah, Jabesh Gilead, Bezek, Geba, Micmash, Beth Aven, Jordan, land of Gad, Ophrah, Shual, Beth Horon, Valley of Zeboim, Migron, Bozez (cliff), Seneh (cliff), Moab, Telaim, Amalek, Havilah, Shur, Bethlehem, Ephes-Dammin, Socoh, Azekah, Valley of Elah, Shaaraim, Meholah, Naioth, Secu, Ezel (stone), Nob, cave of Adullam, forest of Hereth, Keilah, Desert of Ziph, Horesh, Desert of Maon, Arabah, Jeshimon, Sela Hammahlekoth, En Gedi, Craggs of the Wild Goats, Carmel, Jezreel, Gallim, hill of Hakilah, Jeshimon, Ziklag, Shunem, Gilboah, Endor, Aphek, Negev, Besor Ravine, Ramoth Negev, Jattir, Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa, Racal, Bor Ashan, Athach, Hebron, Beth Shan, Jabesh, Mahanaim, Gilead, Ashuri, Gibeon, Geshur, Bahurim, well of Sirah, Beeroth, Jerusalem (Zion), Tyre, Valley of Rephaim, Baal Perazim, Baalah, threshing floor of Nacon, Perez Uzzah, Metheg Ammah, Zobah, Euphrates River, Damascus, Tebah, Berothai, Hamath, Valley of Salt, Helam, Rabbah, Thebez, Baal Hazor, Tekoa, Aram, Giloh, Kidron Valley, Mount of Olives, En Rogel, Lo Debar, Rogelim, Abel Beth Maacah, Zela, Tahtim Hodshi, Dan Jaan, Sidon

**Places mentioned:**

Egypt, Hazor

**Key Themes and Events:**

1 Samuel: Hannah asks God to give her a child, and Samuel is born / Hannah takes Samuel to Shiloh, and he is dedicated for the service of the Lord / Hannah prays a special prayer to the Lord / Samuel is left to the care of Eli the priest / the corruption of Eli's sons is detailed, including: improper appropriation from the meat of sacrificed animals and sexual improprieties / negative words are delivered against the House of Eli because of its corruption / the Lord calls out to Samuel while he sleeps in the Tabernacle complex / the Israelites are defeated in a battle against the Philistines / Hophni and Phinehas bring the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield / the Israelites are defeated a second time, only worse / the Ark of the Covenant is captured by the Philistines, and Hophni and Phinehas die on the battlefield / Eli dies upon hearing the bad news / Phinehas' wife goes into distressful, dying childbirth, delivering Ichabod / the Philistine god Dagon bows down before the Ark of the Covenant, and bows down a second time with his head and arms having fallen off / the people of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron all break out in tumors as the Ark of the Covenant is moved between them / the Philistines agree to send the Ark of the Covenant back to the Israelites, because of the plague that it has unleashed upon them / a tribute of five gold tumors and five gold rats is sent with the Ark / seventy Israelite men of Beth Shemesh die for looking into the Ark / the Ark of the Covenant comes to the home of Abinadab / Samuel is set as judge-leader over Israel / Israel experiences military victories over the Philistines, after turning away from idolatry / the people of Israel want a king to lead them, and the Lord tells Samuel they

have rejected Him / Samuel tells Israel the consequences that will ensue for demanding a king / Saul is anointed as king over Israel / Saul rescues the city of Jabesh from the assault of the Ammonites / Saul's kingship is reaffirmed in Gilgal / Samuel gives a farewell speech to Israel, summarizing what has happened with the rise of its new monarchy / Samuel tells Saul that his dynasty will not last because he acts presumptuously with the burnt and fellowship offerings / Israel finds itself without weapons before the Philistines / Jonathan and his armor-bearer are able to kill a significant number of Philistines / the Philistine force flees / Jonathan eats honey, not realizing that his father King Saul has prohibited his forces from eating food that day / Saul's reign is bereft with conflicts with the Philistines / Saul is rejected by God as king of Israel, because he did not completely eliminate the Amalekites / the Lord tells Samuel to go to Jesse in Bethlehem / the Lord tells Samuel not to look at the outward appearance of Jesse's sons / David plays his harp for Saul, being tormented by an evil spirit / David becomes one of Saul's armor-bearers / the giant Goliath taunts the Israelites / Jesse sends David with supplies for his brothers on the front lines against the Philistines / David kills Goliath with a rock hurled from a slingshot / the Philistine army is routed away / King Saul promotes David in his army / King Saul becomes jealous of David's fame / David is sent away on military campaigns / King Saul hopes David will die in battle / King Saul gives his daughter Michal to David in marriage, hoping she will be a snare leading to his downfall / Jonathan warns David that Saul wants him dead / Michal helps David escape as men are sent by Saul to kill him / David escapes to meet with the Prophet Samuel / Jonathan discovers that his father Saul is truly intent to kill David / David and his men are fed with the Bread of the Presence by Ahimelech / David escapes to Gath, purposefully acting like a madman so that the Philistines would not harm him / David has his parents sent away to Moab for their protection / Saul has the priests of Nob killed because they gave aid to David, even though Ahimelech testifies of David's loyalty to him / David saves Keilah from the Philistines / Saul pursues David throughout the desert, and Jonathan warns his friend / David cuts off a corner of Saul's robe, while he rests in a cave while near En Gedi / David is distressed over *why* Saul wants to kill him / David swears to Saul that he will not wipe out either him or his family / Samuel dies / Nabal is not gracious to David when he extends him greetings / Nabal's wife Abigail extends refreshments to David's men / David takes Abigail as a wife, following the death of her husband / David is given another chance to kill Saul while he pursues him in the desert, yet spares his life again / David and his men live in the land of the Philistines, so Saul will not kill them / Saul consults a necromancing woman at Endor, who calls up Samuel from Sheol / Achish asks David and his men to leave the Philistine army, lest the Philistine commanders think that he will turn against them / Ziklag is plundered by Amalekites while David is gone / David is able to recapture what was stolen from him, including his wives / Saul's battle with the Philistines did not go well, with his three sons being killed / Saul falls on his sword, committing suicide / Saul's body is cremated to prevent abuse by the Philistines / 2 Samuel: David is told of Saul's death from an Amalekite who testifies to killing him / David has the Amalekite killed for striking down God's anointed / David composes a lamentful poem to remember the fall of Saul and Jonathan / David is anointed king over Judah at Hebron / Abner makes Ish-Bosheth king over the rest of Israel / a civil war breaks out between those loyal to David and those loyal to Saul / Abner strengthens his position among those loyal to Saul, so much that Ish-Bosheth fears him / Abner sends David his wife Michal / Joab kills Abner

to avenge the death of his brother / David sings a lament for the death of Abner / Ish-Bosheth is murdered while in bed / David has Ish-Bosheth's assassins put to death / David is recognized as king over all Israel at Hebron / David conquers the city of Jerusalem, and makes it his capital / Hiram king of Tyre has a palace built for David / David defeats the Philistines on the battlefield / the Ark of the Covenant is carried on a cart, and Uzzah is struck dead for trying to stabilize it / David dances before the Lord as the Ark of the Covenant is brought to Jerusalem / Michal despises David for dancing as though he were a commoner / God promises King David that he will have an enduring dynasty / King David prays before the Lord in response to His promises to him / the Lord grants David a succession of military victories / David shows kindness to Mephibosheth / the Ammonites become subject to David's rule / David impregnates the already-married Bathsheba / David sends Uriah to the frontlines to die / after Uriah dies, David takes Bathsheba as one of his wives / Nathan rebukes David for stealing Bathsheba from Uriah / David recognizes the horrible sin he has committed / Bathsheba's child dies, and David laments horribly / Tamar is raped by her half-brother Amnon / Absalom kills his half-brother Amnon for raping Tamar / Absalom flees to the king of Geshur / Absalom returns to Jerusalem / a conspiracy centered around Absalom strengthens / David and his court are forced to flee Jerusalem because of Absalom / Ziba, a servant of Mephibosheth, is given Mephibosheth's estate by David / Shimei, a relative of Saul, curses and harasses David / Absalom has relations with David's concubines / Absalom pursues his father into the desert / King David is provided with stores while hiding out / Absalom's forces are defeated by King David's forces / Absalom's hair got him caught in a tree, and he is killed by Joab / David mourns over the death of his son Absalom / David returns to Jerusalem, and finds Mephibosheth who tells him that Ziba has betrayed him, as he is loyal to David / Sheba the Benjamite leads an insurrection in Israel against David / Joab prepares to besiege Abel Beth Maacah, but is stopped when its inhabitants send him the head of Sheba / the Gibeonites are avenged when David sends them seven of Saul's descendants / Saul and Jonathan's remains are exhumed and moved to Benjamin / Israel under King David experiences more victories against the Philistines / David's song of praise for deliverance against Saul and his other enemies is given (in the text) / the last words (praise?) of David are given (in the text) / David's mighty men and some of their exploits are detailed / the Lord is angered by David who intends to take a census of Israel's fighting men / a plague is sent upon Israel for David allowing the census / David purchases the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite

**Key Scriptures:** 1 Samuel 1:10-11, 27-28; 2:1-2; 5:1-5; 6:19-20; 8:6-9, 19; 12:12-15, 21-25; 13:11-14; 14:25-30, 44; 15:7-10, 13-23; 16:7; 17:33-37, 45-50; 18:7-9; 21:10-11; 22:13-17; 23:15-18; 24:3-7, 16-22; 26:8-11, 13-17; 28:12-20; 2 Samuel 1:23-27; 3:31-34; 4:9-12; 5:1-3; 6:20-23; 7:11-16, 22-26; 9:6-10; 12:1-10; 18:33-19:4, 24-30; 22:2-3, 31-32, 47-51 / **Eli and Samuel** (1 Samuel 1:1-7:17); **Samuel and Saul** (1 Samuel 8:1-15:35); **Saul and David** (1 Samuel 16:1-31:13) / **David's Successes** (2 Samuel 1:1-10:19); **David's Struggles** (2 Samuel 11:1-24:25)

**Theological Summary:** The Books of 1&2 Samuel are named for the Prophet *Shmuel* (שְׁמוּאֵל) whom God used to establish Israel's monarchy. It is largely an account of three individuals: Samuel as Israel's last judge, Saul as Israel's first king, and David as Israel's greatest king. The

Prophet Samuel anointed both Saul and David, and his role in this period of Israel's history is similar to that of Moses several centuries earlier (Psalm 99:6; Jeremiah 15:1). The Books of 1&2 Samuel tell us a great deal about the human condition as lived out in the lives of political figures. 1&2 Samuel depict a type of kingship unique to the Ancient Near East, where kings were often absolute rulers. With the examples of Saul and David, we see that a delicate balance existed between Israel's monarchs and the religious authorities,<sup>1</sup> making the king accountable to God.

Samuel was originally a single book, but became divided in two by the Third-Second Centuries B.C.E. by the translators of the Greek Septuagint.<sup>2</sup> This likely occurred because the Greek translation of the Hebrew required two scrolls instead of one.<sup>3</sup> The division of Samuel into two books started appearing in standardized Hebrew texts in the Fifteenth-Sixteenth Centuries C.E.,<sup>4</sup> possibly to accommodate Christians in Europe.<sup>5</sup> The division between 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel occurs naturally as King Saul dies and the reign of King David begins.

Throughout history this text has actually had a variety of names. The Septuagint originally used the designation *Bibloi Basileōn* (Βίβλοι Βασιλεῶν) or Books of the Kings for what we today consider 1&2 Samuel and 1&2 Kings, dividing them into 1, 2, 3, and 4 Kings. This pattern was also followed by Jerome in his Latin Vulgate translation, as he designated them *Libri Regum*. Over time, however, the most common designation became 1&2 Samuel.<sup>6</sup>

In the Jewish canon the Books of Samuel are placed among the Former Prophets, and they appear right after Judges. In the Christian canon, following the order of the LXX, 1&2 Samuel are placed in the Histories.

Many hypotheses have been proposed for the composition of 1&2 Samuel. Jewish tradition in the Talmud ascribes authorship to the Prophet Samuel (b.*Bava Batra* 14b),<sup>7</sup> but exclusive authorship has extreme problems considering that the events of 1 Samuel chs. 25-31 and all of 2 Samuel occur after his death.<sup>8</sup> It is notable, though, that Samuel was a writer (1 Chronicles 29:29), and he may have had a hand in composing some of the sources that would have been used in a book that bears his name.<sup>9</sup> Some consider that the Prophets Nathan and

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<sup>1</sup> Shimon Bar-Efrat, "First Samuel," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 559.

<sup>2</sup> James W. Flanagan and Walter Brueggemann, "Samuel, Book of 1-2," in *ABD*, 5:957; Carl E. DeVries, "Samuel, Books of," in *NIDB*, 893.

<sup>3</sup> Flanagan and Brueggemann, "Samuel, Book of 1-2," in *ABD*, 5:957; Carol Grizzard, "1 Samuel," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 391.

<sup>4</sup> DeVries, "Samuel, Books of," in *NIDB*, 893.

<sup>5</sup> S. Szikszai, "Samuel, I and II," in *IDB*, 4:203; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 695; D.F. Payne, "1 and 2 Samuel," in *NBCR*, 284; R.W. Klein, "Samuel, Books of," in *ISBE*, 4:313.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, "1,2 Samuel," in *EXP*, 3:553.

<sup>7</sup> "Samuel wrote the book that is called by his name and the book of Judges and Ruth" (b.*Bava Batra* 14b; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

<sup>8</sup> DeVries, "Samuel, Books of," in *NIDB*, 893.

<sup>9</sup> Payne, in *NBCR*, 284.

Gad could have been later compilers of the sources for Samuel (b.*Bava Batra* 15a);<sup>10</sup> based on the testimony of 1 Chronicles 29:29:

“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.”

Another possible source for Samuel includes what would have become 2 Samuel 9-1 Kings 2, the so-called “succession narrative.”

If Samuel, Nathan, and Gad composed various accounts of Saul and David’s kingships, these independent sources in Israel’s court history could have later been edited together.<sup>11</sup> Whoever was the ultimate author or editor of 1&2 Samuel would have needed access to records detailing the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David. It is fair for us to assume that Samuel and some of the other prophets had more influence on the text than is commonly assumed, even if they are not responsible for its final form.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, many conservative scholars are forced to conclude that the author of Samuel must be considered anonymous,<sup>13</sup> with many placing it at the feet of Israel’s court historians.<sup>14</sup> Even though Jewish tradition ascribes authorship to Samuel, it is notable that the author does not identify himself in the text. Attributing the name of Samuel to these books comes as an attribution of honor.

There are some varied independent sources that may have been used in the composition of Samuel that are proposed by various conservatives. Some consider a non-extant Book of Jashar to be such an independent source (2 Samuel 1:18), even though Jewish scholarship largely holds “the Book of Uprightness” (ATS) to be the Torah. The author of Chronicles references “the account of the chronicles of King David” (1 Chronicles 27:24), as well as the chronicles of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad (1 Chronicles 29:29). Many of these potential sources probably included first hand accounts, and the author of Samuel demonstrates a knowledge of being an historian himself.

Chronologically, the events of 1&2 Samuel take place over a period of about 200 years, at the beginning of the Eleventh Century B.C.E. to the end of the Tenth Century B.C.E. Many conservatives advocate that Samuel was written at the end of David’s life, and prior to or during the reign of Solomon,<sup>15</sup> placing it at the end of the Tenth Century B.C.E. Some have noted that the text tends to favor the Southern Kingdom of Judah over the Northern Kingdom of Israel,<sup>16</sup> leading some conservatives to believe that Samuel was written in the Ninth Century B.C.E. after the division of Israel. Regardless of whether Samuel was composed in the Tenth or Ninth Century B.C.E., the audience that would have received this text would have a document legitimizing the reign of King David and his dynasty (1 Samuel 16:13).

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<sup>10</sup> “Samuel wrote the book that is called by his name and the book of Judges and Ruth: But is it not written, ‘Now Samuel was dead’ (1Sa. 28:3)? *Gad the seer and Nathan the prophet finished it*” (b.*Bava Batra* 15a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

Cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 709; Klein, “Samuel, Books of,” in *ISBE*, 4:313; Youngblood, in *EXP*, 3:554.

<sup>11</sup> Klein, “Samuel, Books of,” in *ISBE*, 4:315.

<sup>12</sup> Youngblood, in *EXP*, 3:554.

<sup>13</sup> Dillard and Longman, 136.

<sup>14</sup> Klein, “Samuel, Books of,” in *ISBE*, 4:314.

<sup>15</sup> Payne, in *NBCR*, 284.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 709.

As with many Biblical texts, there are some chronological uncertainties, and some events may not be given in a strict sequential order.<sup>17</sup> Some events are repeated not because they are different, but possibly because their perspectives are different or supplementary information is added later.<sup>18</sup> The Books of Chronicles often attempt to reconcile the differences. Some perceived differences may be on account of varied textual traditions where the Hebrew MT is incomplete.<sup>19</sup>

Liberal theologians today largely consider 1&2 Samuel to be among the so-called Deuteronomistic Histories (DH) of Joshua, Judges, and Kings, following the lead of Martin Noth.<sup>20</sup> There are a few conservatives who believe that Samuel reached its final form along with these texts,<sup>21</sup> possibly before the Babylonian exile, but often use “Deuteronomic” to describe the influence of Deuteronomy on the text, not that it was written after or during the exile.<sup>22</sup> Noth advocated that the DH were written to call Israel to repentance during the reforms of Josiah in the Seventh Century B.C.E. as a single work, recalling the “glory years” that the people should return to. Most liberals today continue to agree with Noth’s DH proposition, with some moderate variance.<sup>23</sup> Some liberals argue for literary unity of 1&2 Samuel, especially with 1&2 Kings,<sup>24</sup> and date the text immediately prior to, during, or after the Southern Kingdom’s exile to Babylon. Only a few liberals believe in a dating immediately after the time of David.<sup>25</sup>

Earlier liberals tried to import elements of the JEDP documentary hypothesis (see **Genesis** entry for a summarization of the JEDP documentary hypothesis) of the Torah into Samuel,<sup>26</sup> claiming that the (perceived) contradictions in Samuel can only be solved by understanding the sources behind the text, probably the same sources behind the Pentateuch. This view has largely died out in favor of Noth’s hypothesis of DH unity.<sup>27</sup> Conservatives have frequently responded to these views by asserting that there is unity of language and style throughout Samuel,<sup>28</sup> and that harmonization of the text can be accomplished by a closer reading.

Liberal positions on the historicity of 1&2 Samuel vary, with some believing that it presents an accurate portrayal, and others believing that the text has been grossly exaggerated to cast David in too positive a light.<sup>29</sup> Conservatives generally counter this by

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<sup>17</sup> Payne, in *NBCR*, 286.

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 701-708.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 708.

<sup>20</sup> Klein, “Samuel, Books of,” in *ISBE*, 4:317; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 697; Flanagan and Brueggemann, “Samuel, Book of 1-2,” in *ABD*, 5:959-960; Dillard and Longman, pp 139-140.

<sup>21</sup> Payne, in *NBCR*, 284.

<sup>22</sup> Youngblood, in *EXP*, 3:556-557; Dillard and Longman, 136.

<sup>23</sup> Flanagan and Brueggemann, “Samuel, Book of 1-2,” in *ABD*, 5:966.

<sup>24</sup> M. Tsevat, “Samuel, I and II,” in *IDBSup*, 777.

<sup>25</sup> DeVries, “Samuel, Books of,” in *NIDB*, 893.

<sup>26</sup> Szikszai, “Samuel, I and II,” in *IDB*, 4:204-208; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 697; Tsevat, “Samuel, I and II,” in *IDBSup*, pp 778-780.

<sup>27</sup> Flanagan and Brueggemann, “Samuel, Book of 1-2,” in *ABD*, 5:959.

<sup>28</sup> DeVries, “Samuel, Books of,” in *NIDB*, 893.

<sup>29</sup> Szikszai, “Samuel, I and II,” in *IDB*, 4:209.

noting that 2 Samuel reflects on the largely dysfunctional nature of David's family, and presents him as a human being with real human problems. It is notable that historically the rise of the Davidic monarchy took place when no major superpower overshadowed the Land of Israel, easily allowing Israel to become a regional force.

Both liberals and conservatives recognize that there are some serious textual problems in the Hebrew MT of Samuel,<sup>30</sup> with some considering it to be "the worst of the OT books," even though "it is not evident to the ordinary reader" (*IDBSup*).<sup>31</sup> Samuel "has suffered from extensive textual corruption, particularly in the omission of words or phrases" (*ISBE*).<sup>32</sup> A notable one appears in 1 Samuel 13:1, where the MT simply says "Saul was ... years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel two years" (NJPS). A few versions supply "thirty" (NASU, NIV) as a guess as to Saul's age.

Some passages in various English translations of Samuel have to be supplemented with information from parallel texts in Psalms, Chronicles, and ancient versions such as the Greek Septuagint,<sup>33</sup> Dead Sea Scrolls, or even information from Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*. Notable among these sources is the LXX, which some consider to be "an indispensable source for the text of Samuel" (Flanagan and Brueggemann, *ABD*),<sup>34</sup> frequently expanding the text where the Hebrew leaves the reader puzzled by incomplete statements.<sup>35</sup> Many Christian Bibles will provide supplementary information from the LXX when the Hebrew is unclear, whereas Jewish versions will often just indicate textual difficulties in margin notes. The Septuagint version of Samuel likely reflects an older, non-extant Hebrew text that was considerably longer than the present MT.<sup>36</sup>

1 Samuel largely details the establishment of Israel's monarchy led by a human king, and the events that necessitated it. The birth of Samuel (1 Samuel chs. 1-3) foreshadows the events which are to take place. The ark narratives (1 Samuel chs. 4-6) describe Israel's battling with the Philistines, and how the Ark of the Covenant is stolen several times. Samuel as a judge of Israel (1 Samuel 7) calls Israel to repentance, and they experience victory over the Philistines.

After this takes place, the narratives of 1 Samuel chs. 8-12 describe the establishment of the monarchy, and how there is some tension. On the one hand, Samuel is told by God to give the people a king (1 Samuel 8:7, 9, 22; 9:16-17), but on the other hand Israel's desire for a king is considered to be a rejection of God (1 Samuel 8:7; 10:19; 12:12, 17, 19-20). Moses himself had anticipated Israel's desire for a human king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), but this was not to take place at the expense of Israel rejecting God as its Great King.

A Benjamite named Saul is brought to Samuel and is chosen to be Israel's first king (1 Samuel chs. 9-10), and he begins his reign at Gilgal (1 Samuel chs. 11-12). Challenges arise when the people of Israel have to choose between ultimate loyalty to this new human king or

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<sup>30</sup> Szikszai, "Samuel, I and II," in *IDB*, 4:209; Youngblood, in *EXP*, 3:559-560.

<sup>31</sup> Tsevat, "Samuel, I and II," in *IDBSup*, 777.

<sup>32</sup> Klein, "Samuel, Books of," in *ISBE*, 4:313.

<sup>33</sup> Payne, in *NBCR*, 285.

<sup>34</sup> Flanagan and Brueggemann, "Samuel, Book of 1-2," in *ABD*, 5:958.

<sup>35</sup> Dillard and Longman, pp 143-145.

<sup>36</sup> Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 708, 717-718.

to the Lord. Saul himself has difficulty as a king who must answer to God (1 Samuel chs. 13-15). He refuses to destroy the Amalekites at His command, and as a result is rejected as Israel's king (1 Samuel 15:23).

1 Samuel concludes with God choosing David to be Saul's successor (1 Samuel chs. 16-31), and the conflict that steadily arose between Saul and David. It culminates in the death of Saul and two of his sons, including David's close friend Jonathan.

2 Samuel continues the narrative of David, and focuses extensively on his kingship. 2 Samuel chs. 1-4 detail how he is gradually accepted as king by the tribes of Israel. David captures the city of Jerusalem and makes it his royal residence (2 Samuel 5:13-16), later bringing the Ark of the Covenant to the city (2 Samuel 6; Psalm 132:3-5). David's rule and influence expands from Egypt in the south to the Euphrates River in the north (2 Samuel 8). David is told by the Prophet Nathan that he is not permitted to build a permanent house for the Lord, as God is the One who would build him a house or dynasty (2 Samuel 7). The institution of the Davidic Covenant is a theme that we see emphasized numerous times by the Prophets who predict the coming of a King who will perfectly fulfill the role that David models.

2 Samuel chs. 10-20 detail the darker aspects of David's reign. We see his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, the leniency he has toward his wicked sons and with family squabbles, and the rebellion of Absalom. 2 Samuel 22:31-51 ends with David praising the Lord.

The Books of 1&2 Samuel have much to teach us about God's involvement in politics and what good government actually is. The dilemma that anyone faces is how one can be loyal to both God and the state, understanding how He is directly involved with human rulers as He is with the rise of Saul and David to power. These are two kings whose personal characteristics can be easily compared and contrasted. We can also see that although David is a very godly man, he is also a man of war and can easily fall prey to sin. The king's family serves as a model—whether good or bad—to the nation. While 1&2 Samuel can often be viewed as “Sunday school” material, this text has a great deal to tell us about the human condition that cannot be ignored. “As a rule, human beings, not God, occupy the central stage, their lot being determined by their conduct” (*Jewish Study Bible*).<sup>37</sup>

The common themes seen in 1&2 Samuel are undoubtedly employed in the Apostolic Scriptures, and form a major part of the worldview of Yeshua and His Apostles. Even though Samuel is not directly quoted in the New Testament, its figures are mentioned quite regularly. 1&2 Samuel have proven to be a rich resource “for countless sermons, lectures, and lessons throughout the centuries” (*EXP*).<sup>38</sup> Both the Jewish and Christian theological traditions have always had a high regard for the message of Samuel.

When interpreting 1&2 Samuel today, it is very important that we keep in mind that this text represents a pre-exilic perspective of Israel's monarchy and King David. We cannot forget the passing influence of Deuteronomy on the message of Samuel,<sup>39</sup> and the fact that Samuel helps lay the groundwork for the ideas of Messianism and an Anointed King who will save

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<sup>37</sup> Bar-Efrat, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 558.

<sup>38</sup> Youngblood, in *EXP*, 3:559.

<sup>39</sup> Youngblood, in *EXP*, 3:556; Dillard and Longman, 145.

Israel.<sup>40</sup> The Books of Samuel are an excellent place to see Israel asserting itself as a regional power. The question they must continually answer in order to be a blessed power is whether or not they will obey God.

There is not a great deal of examination of all of 1&2 Samuel in today's Messianic movement, even though it is an excellent place for one to see the "Torah in action" on a national scale with the establishment of Israel's monarchy. Any Messianic handling of Samuel, however, will have to take into account varied literary factors, the role of the Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in complimenting the Hebrew MT, as well as the various historical criticisms against its message. It will also ask us many questions about loyalty not only to God and to state, but how we can balance loyalty to our native countries and maintain a high regard for Israel. Perhaps most importantly, Messianic Believers have a profound opportunity to teach on and learn about the human condition when examining Samuel, and how obedience to God is imperative to living a happy, productive life.

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON SAMUEL:

**1. Summarize what you consider to be the most important or the most impactful events of Samuel's life.**

**2. What happened when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant?**

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<sup>40</sup> Dillard and Longman, pp 146-147.

- 3. What were some of the successes of King Saul's early reign?**
- 4. Why was Saul rejected as king by God?**
- 5. What do you believe is significant about David's selection as Israel's king?**
- 6. What was the ongoing conflict that existed between King Saul and David? Compare and contrast their attitudes toward one another.**
- 7. Why does David *not* go ahead and kill King Saul?**
- 8. How did King Saul finally fall from power?**
- 9. What were some of the early challenges with David ascending to power in Israel?**
- 10. What do you believe are some of the most important military victories King David experienced?**
- 11. Why do you believe King David showed Mephibosheth great kindness?**
- 12. What was the sin David committed with Bathsheba? How does this possibly reflect on the rest of his home life?**
- 13. Summarize the sin of Amnon, and Absalom's later actions. What did this do to David's kingship?**
- 14. Upon reviewing the life of King David, why do you believe he is commonly known as a "man after God's own heart?"**
- 15. What lessons might today's Messianic community learn by listening to the message of 1&2 Samuel?**

## REFLECTION ON SAMUEL'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

*Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Books of Samuel:*