

FIRST SAMUEL SECOND SAMUEL



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Wadi in Canaan

This lesson looks at the two books of Samuel. Although these two books were once considered to be a single work in Hebrew, the Greek translators of the Old Testament divided the work into two parts. Our English tradition followed the Greek practice.

These two books tell the story of the lives and careers of three great Israelite figures: Samuel, the last judge; Saul, the first king; and David, the greatest ruler. In the first book of Samuel, the careers of these men overlap. Second Samuel deals with the reign of David.

FIRST SAMUEL 1-7

Chapters 1 through 7 of First Samuel tell about the birth, early life, and career of Samuel. Chapter 1 tells the story of Samuel's birth to Hannah. Hannah is one of Elkanah's two wives. Unlike the other wife, Hannah has no children. While attending the annual festival at Shiloh, she prays for a child and vows that if she has a son, she will give him to the Lord. God answers her prayer, and she gives birth to Samuel. Hannah weans Samuel when he is between two and three years of age. Then she presents him to Eli, the chief priest at Shiloh.

According to Chapter 2 the sons of Eli are wicked priests who are out to make a profit from religion. So religion falls on hard times in Israel. First Samuel 3:1 describes the religious conditions in the following way: "The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread." With Israel in this state of religious need, God calls Samuel in the night and tells him of his intention to wipe out Eli's family.

The days of Samuel are not only times of religious crisis but also of political crisis. At this time, the Philistines who settled along the southwest coast of Canaan begin threatening the Israelites. Now the Philistines start a program of expansion at the expense of the Israelites.

First Samuel 4, 5, and 6 describe a Philistine victory over Israel. The Israelites carry the ark of the covenant into battle hoping it will bring victory. However, the Philistines defeat Israel and capture the ark. They take the ark back to their territory, but the ark only brings trouble to the Philistines. The statue of their god Dagon keeps falling over, and the Lord afflicts the people with tumors. After seven months, the Philistines return the ark to Israel.

First Samuel 7 presents Samuel in a role similar to the judges. Samuel commands the troops against the Philistines, and the Israelites enjoy a victory. Samuel then sets up a stone called Ebenezer, which means "stone of help," because the Lord helped them. The end of Chapter 7 depicts Samuel as a circuit judge who moves on a yearly circuit from Ramah, to Bethel, to Gilgal, to Mizpah, and back to his hometown of Ramah.

1. God intended to wipe out Eli's family. What was the sin of Eli's sons? (Read 1 Samuel 2:15-17.)

2. What was the sin of Eli? (Read 1 Samuel 2:22-25 and 3:13-14.)

3. Read 1 Samuel 7:2-11. What factors enabled the Israelites to win the victory?

a. (7:2)

b. (7:3-4)

c. (7:5)

d. (7:6)

e. (7:9)

f. (7:10)

FIRST SAMUEL 8-15

Chapters 8 through 12 of First Samuel tell how Israel chooses the rule of a king, who provides centralized authority.

What appears to be two versions of the story of Saul can be reconciled into a single account. Saul was anointed privately by Samuel (1 Samuel 10:1), acknowledged as king by the nation (10:17-24), and established as king after his first victory in combat (11:15). But considered as two versions, the fact that the writer or compiler of First

Samuel incorporated both versions in the book seems insignificant.

One account is favorable toward Saul and kingship, and the other account is unfavorable. We find the unfavorable account in 1 Samuel 8; 10:17-27a; and 12:1-25. In this version, Samuel and God oppose kingship. Read 1 Samuel 8:4-7. These verses tell how God evaluates kingship.

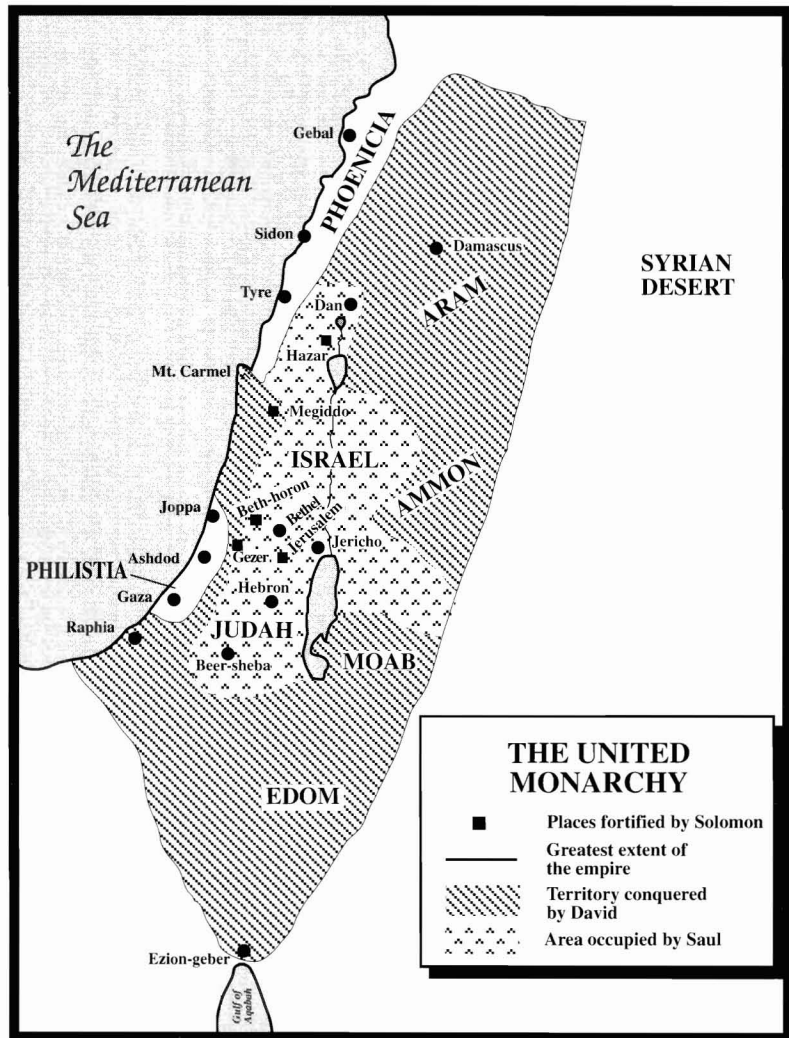
The account favorable to Saul and kingship is 1 Samuel 9:1-10:16 and concludes with Chapter 11. This narrative presents Samuel as a prophet who assists Saul to be a leader at the command of God. Read 1 Samuel 9:5-17.

After Samuel anoints Saul in Chapter 10, Saul leads the Israelites in battle against the Ammonites in Chapter 11. Following this victory, the people make Saul king in Gilgal.

Chapters 13, 14, and 15 tell us a little about the reign of Saul, especially how he defeats the Philistines. In much of the Old Testament, David overshadows Saul so that we forget how important Saul was in Israelite history. Read 1 Samuel 14:47-48. These verses record some of Saul's achievements.

1. First Samuel 13 records a major mistake that Saul made. Read verses 8-12, and compare them with Leviticus 1:3-5. What was Saul's sin?

2. First Samuel 15 records Saul's second great error. Read verses 1-9, and describe that sin below.



3. What are some of Saul's achievements? (Read 1 Samuel 14:47-48.)

FIRST SAMUEL 16-31

From First Samuel 16 through the end of First Samuel, David becomes the center of attention. First Samuel 16 and 17 tell how David first enters Saul's service. David comes to the court of Saul to play the lyre and soothe Saul's spirit.

In Chapter 18 Saul sets David over the men of war. David is such a successful soldier that Saul becomes more and more jealous of him. The close friendship between Saul's son, Jonathan, and David intensifies Saul's jealousy. This jealousy resulted in a series of confrontations between the two men. Saul's determination to kill David is portrayed in 1 Samuel 19–30. David flees from the court after Saul first tries to kill him with a spear. David builds a personal army. First Samuel 22:2 describes those who join him during his "Robin Hood" days: "Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented."

With his band of followers—eventually numbering 600 men—David stays on the move, running from Saul. On two occasions he has the opportunity to kill Saul, but does not because Saul is God's anointed. Read 1 Samuel 24:4-7.

David apparently secures support from the local people by running a kind of protection racket. In Chapter 25 David tries to collect from Nabal who does not know that David has been protecting him. Chapter 25 also reports the death of Samuel.

Finally, in Chapter 27 David hires out himself and his men to Achish, one of the Philistine kings fighting Saul and the Israelites.

The Philistines plan a major attack on Israel. In readying for the battle King Saul cannot get any word from God either by dreams or by prophets. In Chapter 28 Saul goes by night to a woman of Endor who practices witchcraft, a practice Saul has condemned previously. The witch calls up the spirit of Samuel, which predicts defeat for Saul and Israel.

Chapter 29 describes the Philistines' preparation for battle with Saul. The Philistines, however, do not trust David enough to take him into battle, so they send him back. In the ensuing battle in Chapter 31, the Philistines badly defeat Saul's forces. Saul, severely wounded, finally falls on his sword. He chooses to end his life rather than be captured by the enemy.

Three of his sons, including Jonathan, die with him.

1. The account of David's conflict with Goliath is a heroic story recorded in 1 Samuel 17. Read verses 37 and 46-47. What was the basis of David's courage?

2. Jonathan and David shared a close friendship. Why was this affection so unusual and so opposed by Saul? (Read 1 Samuel 20:30-31.)

SECOND SAMUEL 1-7

Second Samuel 1–5 tells how David gradually becomes king over all Israel. In Chapter 2, the men of Judah anoint David as king over Judah in the town of Hebron. The followers of Saul place Saul's son on the Israelite throne. So David is king in the south, and Saul's son, Ishbaal, is king in the north. Civil war follows.

The war between David and the house of Saul continues for some years. However, David's men eventually kill Abner, Israel's general, and King Ishbaal. After this, the tribes of Israel ask David to be king over Israel as well as Judah.

After reigning in Hebron for seven and one-half years, David's troops capture the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. David makes Jerusalem his capital. Second Samuel 6 reports how David's chosen men bring the ark to Jerusalem. With the ark's return, Jerusalem becomes the religious capital as well as the political capital.

David wants to build a temple in Jerusalem for Yahweh, Israel's God. In 2 Samuel 7, the prophet Nathan reports that David's building a house is not God's will.

Instead God will build David a house—a family to rule over Israel forever. God promises David that he and his family will sit on the throne forever.

1. David wanted to build a temple in Jerusalem for God. Why did the Lord refuse that offer? (Read 2 Samuel 7:4-6.)

2. Read 2 Samuel 7:1-16, and answer the following questions.

a. How will the Lord make David a house?

b. Whom did the Lord appoint to build a house?

SECOND SAMUEL 8-24

Chapter 8 summarizes David's military conquest and lists his cabinet officers. David not only defeats the traditional enemies of Israel, but he extends Israel's rule over neighboring states to create an empire.

Beginning with Chapter 9, Second Samuel focuses on David's court and family. In Chapter 9 he restores all the land of Saul to Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan.

The war with the Ammonites and Arameans, described in Chapter 10, forms the background of the David-Bathsheba story, which Chapters 11 and 12 relate. David steals Bathsheba, commits adultery with her, and has her husband Uriah put to death. Nathan reprimands David and promises him that evil will rise up against him from his own house. Read 2 Samuel 12:9-11.

Nathan's promise comes true. In Chapter 13, Amnon, the son of David, rapes his half-sister, Tamar. Tamar's brother, Absalom, kills Amnon and then flees. And in Chapter 14, after Absalom returns from exile, he leads a revolt against his father, David. Chapters 15 through 20 tell this story of Absalom's revolt. David flees from his son. But Joab, David's commander-in-chief, kills Absalom, whom he finds hanging from a tree after Absalom's hair becomes entangled in a tree limb. David mourns Absalom's death.

The final four chapters of Second Samuel are diverse. Chapters 22 and 23 contain poems attributed to David. Second Samuel 22:2-51 also appear in Psalm 18:2-50. This poem describes how God chooses David and protects him in times of great trouble.

1. Second Samuel 12:1-6 is a parable told by Nathan to David. Read these verses, and explain the point of the parable.

2. Read 2 Samuel 22:1-4. David praised the Lord by recounting God's attributes. List eight of them below.

a. (22:2)

b. (22:2)

c. (22:2)

d. (22:3)

e. (22:3)

f. (22:3)

g. (22:3)

h. (22:3)

SUMMARY

The books of First and Second Samuel tell us about some of the most important figures in Israel's history. The following episodes are the highlights of these books.

- (1) Samuel's career as the last judge in Israel (1 Samuel 7)
- (2) The reign of Saul as the first king over the Israelites (1 Samuel 13–15)
- (3) The anointing of David as Saul's successor (2 Samuel 1–5)
- (4) The story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12)
- (5) David's psalm of praise to God for delivering Israel from her enemies (2 Samuel 22)

With the close of Second Samuel, we move into the era of the kings.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In 1 Samuel 8 the elders of Israel assemble at Ramah and ask Samuel to appoint a king who would govern over them. Samuel is not pleased with their request. Read 1 Samuel 8:10-18, in which Samuel warns

the people about the effect a king will have upon their lives. The people are not convinced by Samuel's arguments. Do Samuel's predictions seem realistic to you? How would you have responded to these warnings? Would you have changed your mind about the request for a king? Why or why not?

2. Ancient Israel told two versions of how Saul became king. The biblical writer, however, incorporated both versions in the account without explanation or apology. Does this method help us understand the Bible as the Word of God? Or does this peculiarity cause doubts about the inspiration of the Bible? Why might it cause doubts? How can the two accounts be understood positively? What are some similar situations in our time where more than one version of an event is circulated?

3. Read David's lament over the death of Saul in 2 Samuel 1:19-27. Think back about the history of the relationship between Saul and David. Are you surprised at David's ability to forgive Saul after the animosity that existed between them? Why do you think David forgave Saul? What part does forgiveness play in your life?

4. We are all familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba. In order to "cover up" his illicit relationship with Bathsheba, David has her husband, Uriah the Hittite, killed in a battle. Think about the covering up of one crime with another. How is that pattern reflected in American political history?

DAILY READINGS FOR FIRST AND SECOND KINGS

- Day 1: 1 Kings 2:1-12
Day 2: 1 Kings 10:23–11:18
Day 3: 1 Kings 19:1-18
Day 4: 2 Kings 5:1-14
Day 5: 2 Kings 17:1-18
Day 6: 2 Kings 22:1-13
Day 7: 2 Kings 25:1-12