

## *An Introduction to I Samuel, Chapters 1 to 18*

### **THE BOOK OF SAMUEL**

Originally I and II Samuel were one book, and were not divided by the Jews into two books until the 16th century (A.D.). It was part of the collection of books called ‘the Former Prophets’, i.e. the Books from Joshua to Nehemiah, for they all constituted material of a thesis, i.e. the Deuteronomic one given by Moses that since they were the covenant people of God they must obey Him under pain of judgement—and even of exile—but they would be blessed and prospered if they kept to covenant loyalty. The ‘Former Prophets’ are virtually exhortations, material given to Israel that was prophetic—hortatory—to warn and strengthen them in obedience to their Covenant God. This was often in the face of prevailing idolatry and of the chastisement of God for covenant disloyalty. In order to get the best from our 18 chapters of I Samuel we need first to read chapters 27–34 of Deuteronomy, then the Books of Joshua and Judges. In other words, the Book—or Books—of Samuel is not merely history, so much as it is prophecy, so that the narrative is teaching Israel what are God’s dealings with His people, especially as they are obedient to Him, or as they are disobedient to His covenant. Prophecy teaches whilst it exhorts.

The authorship of I and II Samuel can scarcely be by Samuel himself, as Samuel’s death is recorded in I Samuel 25:1. Many theories exist as to the compilation of the Samuel material, but it need not here concern us. Certainly narrative material was available and was written with a view to the prophetic exhortation Israel needed to hear. If it was edited, then certainly the first 18 chapters of the book are free of any special editing. If the 18 chapters were written by Samuel (cf. I Chron. 29:29; I Sam. 10:25) it was because their substance was known to him.

### **THE MAN SAMUEL**

The First Book of Samuel—as we now know it—covers the times of Samuel, of Samuel and Saul, and of Samuel and David, although Samuel dies before Saul’s killing of himself. Samuel has often been thought of as a type of Christ—the Prophet, Priest and King par excellence—in that he was a prophet, a priest, and judge, the judge being the leader and somewhat similar to a king. The name ‘Samuel’ means ‘name of God’, or ‘the divine name is God [El]’. Samuel was born of an Ephraimite family at the place, Ramah. I Chronicles 6:28 tells us he was of Levitical stock. His parents were Elkanah and Hannah, and Samuel’s conception was in the context of special prayer, during which Hannah promised he would be a Nazirite. Hannah’s song at his dedication at the worship shrine in Shiloh especially sealed his being ‘lent to the Lord’. Much could be said of the strong effects of his godly parents in his early days of life. As a child he had a special call of God to be a prophet in a day when ‘the word of the Lord was rare’ (3:1), i.e. the prophetic word. 3:20 says, ‘Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord’.

It was in a prophetic vision that Samuel was told that the house of Eli would come to an end because of the sinfulness of Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas (cf. 2:27–36).

# **THE WORK AND MINISTRY OF SAMUEL IN THE FIRST 18 CHAPTERS OF I SAMUEL**

## **SAMUEL AS JUDGE**

Samuel stands as a leader in Israel between the system of the Judges and the establishment of the monarchy. We read in 7:15–16 that he ‘judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all these places. Then he would come back to Ramah, for his home was there, and he administered justice to Israel’. He came at a time when the priesthood was corrupt and when Israel was under the oppression of the Philistines. This oppression remained roughly 40 years (see Judg. 13:1), until the battle at Mizpah (I Sam. ch. 7) when Samuel judged Israel, Israel repented, and the Philistines were defeated. Samuel sought to extend the judgeship through his two sons—Joel and Abijah—but they were evil men and rejected by the people. It was Samuel who anointed Saul to be the first king, and in this sense passed his own judgeship to the first monarch. Samuel was not in favour of kingship and warned the people of the ills which would come upon them through a monarch (cf. Deut. 17:14–17). The time of judges had not seen absolute rule or even rule over the whole nation, as the Judges had judged—each in his or her time—from a certain locale. In chapter 14 Saul—without the instigation of Samuel—defeated the Philistines, but in chapter 15 Saul was told by God through Samuel to go against the Amalekites, which he did, and won. In this defeat of Amalek was also the defeat of Saul, who did not ‘obey the voice of the Lord’. Whilst he—Saul—ruled until his death (see ch. 31), he did so uneasily since his dynasty was doomed. In chapter 15 we see Samuel anointed David at the Lord’s command, and after that we hear nothing of Samuel, except his death (25:1) and Saul’s act of calling him up from the dead (ch. 28), only to be harshly rebuked by Samuel. It shows Saul’s high—if superstitious—regard for Samuel, who had been prophet, priest, and judge of Israel.

## **SAMUEL AS PRIEST**

Samuel was a Levite, and was drawn into the priestly role at Shiloh when tutored by Eli. His priestly role had to do with prayer and intercession. This was done at Mizpah (ch. 7), before the battle with the Philistines, when Samuel was judging the nation. In the same chapter it is recorded that Samuel built an altar to the Lord at Ramah. After victory over the Ammonites, and following the public demand for the anointing of a King, Samuel sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord (ch. 11). In chapter 13 Saul usurped Samuel’s ministry as a priest and—in impatience—offered the sacrifice. Samuel reprimanded him and said he had lost the opportunity of having his dynasty in perpetuity. In chapter 16 Samuel was commissioned by God to offer sacrifice—‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord’, and this was on the occasion of anointing David—proleptically—as king in Saul’s place. Samuel’s ministry as an intercessor is mentioned in Jeremiah 15:1, where it is coupled with Moses the great intercessor, and this mention is elaborated in Psalm 99:6.

Doubtless all Samuel’s teaching was in the combined roles of judge, prophet, and priest.

## **SAMUEL THE PROPHET**

‘And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision’, tells us that Samuel was called to be a prophet. Numbers 12:6 (amongst other references) shows that prophecy was received from God through dreams and visions. As a boy, Samuel was called by the Lord, and given a prophecy for Eli similar to that delivered previously by another prophet.

Curiously enough Samuel's name is not mentioned in the events during which the Philistines captured the Ark of the Lord, had it, and returned it—out of fear. Following these events Samuel prophesied, i.e. exhorted Israel prophetically to return to God, and so much so that they 'put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth. and they served the Lord only'. In chapter 9 begins the story of Saul and Samuel. Saul's servant said of Samuel, 'Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man that is held in honour; all that he says comes true'. In this chapter Samuel is called a seer, i.e. roeh (generally ecstatic) as against nahbi (primarily a prophet of the word of God). In I Chronicles 29:29 Samuel is referred to as a seer.

It would appear from Acts 3:24 and 13:20 that Samuel is referred to as the first prophet, but this was not so. Jesus nominated Abel as the first prophet. Moses was the great prophet before Samuel (cf. Deut. 18:18f.), and both Psalm 99:6 and Jeremiah 15:1 link Samuel with Moses. It is best to think of the Lukan sayings as meaning Samuel was the first in that line of prophets linked with the predictions of the coming Messiah. His prophetic career is described in the apocryphal book of Sirach (46:13–20). He is said to be the founder of a—i.e. the—prophetic order—the school of the prophets (cf. 10:10f.; 19:18ff.). This order was later prominent in the times of Elijah and Elisha. The prophets were warners and correctors whenever idolatry was a diversion from the pure worship of Yahweh, law was hypocritical legalism, and monarchy was an oppressive substitute for true theocracy and sought to rule Israel. Prophets brought the true word of God against these surrogate elements.

## THE SAUL OF CHAPTERS 9–18

Saul's life extends beyond the 18th chapter of I Samuel, but the end is seen in the above 10 chapters. Saul was a man who was handsome, of prepossessing appearance though tolerably shy. He was of a wealthy family, a Benjaminite, and was selected—so the narrative describes—to become the first king of Israel. In chapter 9 we have the story of the lost asses, the searching for them, the being led to the seer Samuel, his words regarding God's plan that Saul should rule over his Israel, Saul's humble protest, and the significant meal. In Chapter 10 Samuel anoints Saul to be king almost privately, tells of two miraculous and confirmatory events which await him, and sends him on his way. At this point 'God gave him [Saul] another heart'. Then there is the story of Samuel selecting Saul by lots, when the congregation met at Mizpah. Saul returns to his own home in Gibeah, and in chapter 11 is the story of the scorn of Nahash the Ammonite, who demanded unconditional surrender of the besieged Jabesh-gilead. Saul gathered Israel, and brought about the crushing defeat of Ammon. This event caused the people—under Samuel's guidance—to 'renew the kingdom', i.e. make Saul king publicly. In chapters 13 and 14 Saul's generalship is seen in the defeat of the oppressing Philistines, but something of Saul's strangeness appears (i) in assuming the priestly role in the sacrifice at Gilgal, and (ii) in forbidding the people to eat 'until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies'.

A decisive event in Saul's kingship is seen in chapter 15, where Saul—though victorious—did not adhere to the commands God had given, sparing Agag from death. For this he would lose the kingdom—he and his sons. When Samuel anointed David to be king (ch. 16), then Saul became a dark and troubled man, often in frenzies of madness and jealousy, though sometimes soothed by David's music. In chapter 17 is the story of David and Goliath and the rise of David. In chapter 18 we see the growing adulation of David by the people, the scheming of Saul to have David killed by the Philistines, David's success against them, and the marriage of Saul's daughter, Michal, to David.

All the seeds of Saul's decline and final shameful death are found in the remaining chapters of I Samuel.

## **DAVID, THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART**

The story of David is simple enough, i.e. his life as a shepherd-boy amongst his brothers, the sons of Jesse; the surprise anointing by Samuel (ch. 16) which seems to have been unknown to Saul; the selection by Saul's servants of David to play before the king and soothe his troubled spirit; the event of David and Goliath, whereby David becomes beloved by Jonathan and knowingly kept in the court by Saul, who then becomes enraged by David's popularity and seeks to destroy him with his spear. Saul's hope that David as the commander of a thousand troops might be killed in battle was unfulfilled. At the end of the 18th chapter we find this young anointed-of-God king-elect is married to Michal—Saul's daughter—and is popular in the eyes of Saul's son Jonathan, and indeed in the estimation of all.

## **AN EVALUATION OF I SAMUEL, CHAPTERS 1–18**

We can now make some kind of evaluation of the chapters we have been studying. In them we see Samuel as the last of the Judges and the first of a new series of prophets. We see the decline of Israel as a direct theocracy, and its growth as a monarchy. We see the old order of a nation of separate tribes give way to a consolidated kingdom. Certain judges had arisen and delivered their people from local domination by Canaanites. With the coming of the kingdom under Saul, the tribes were drawn together, became a significant force against the enemy such as Ammon, the Philistines and the Amalekites, and so were the beginnings of the kingdom which would become famous under David and his son, Solomon.

The eighteen chapters, then, cover the transition from one form of polity to another, and the concept of 'kingdom' as against a collection of autonomous tribes. Something of the greatness of Israel as a people begins to be seen. The foundations are laid for the wider view of God's Kingdom, and the 'great David's greater son'. Samuel's ministry as prophet-priest-king is a type of 'the one who is to come' who is the Prophet, the Priest and the King. It needed a man of his spirituality and stature to supervise the transformation of Israel and—as later Scriptures quoted of him show—he was remembered in Israel as a significant personage (cf. Heb. 11:32).

Thus it is that these 18 chapters set the foundation for the rest of the books of the 'Former Prophets'. In this regard it is good to read 7:3–4; 9:16–17; 11:14–15; 12:6–25; 13:13–14; 15:27–30.

# ***An Outline of Chapters 1–18 of I Samuel***

(See Cambridge Bible Commentary ‘Samuel–I’, A. F. Kirkpatrick, Cambridge Press, 1911)

## **PART I**

### **DIVISION ONE–THE EARLY LIFE OF SAMUEL (1:1–4:1A)**

Section 1. Samuel’s birth and infancy	
Samuel’s parents	1:1–8
Hannah’s prayer and its answer	1:9–20
Samuel’s dedication	1:21–28
Hannah’s song of thanksgiving	2:1–11
Section 2. Samuel at Shiloh	
The faithless Priests	2:12–17
Samuel’s ministry at the Tabernacle	2:18–21
Eli’s fruitless expostulations with his sons	2:22–26
The doom of Eli’s house and the calling of a faithful priest foretold by the man of God	2:27–36
The call of Samuel	3:1–10
The Message to Eli	3:11–18
Samuel established as a prophet	3:19–4:1a

### **DIVISION TWO–THE PERIOD OF NATIONAL DISASTER (4:1B–7:1)**

Section 1. Judgement on the nation and the house of Eli	
The defeat of the army and the loss of the Ark	4:1b–11
The doom of Eli’s house–death of Eli’s sons, death of Eli, death of Eli’s daughter-in-law	4:11–22
Section 2. The Ark of God	
Chastisement of the Philistines	5:1–12
Their resolution to restore the Ark	6:1–9
Return of the Ark	6:10–18
The penalty of irreverence	6:19–20
Settlement of the Ark at Kiriath-Jearim	6:21–7:1

### **DIVISION THREE–THE OFFICIAL LIFE OF SAMUEL AS JUDGE (7:2–17)**

National repentance and reformation	7:2–6
Rout of the Philistines at Ebenezer	7:7–12
Summary account of Samuel’s judicial activity	7:13–17

## PART TWO

### DIVISION ONE—THE APPOINTMENT OF THE FIRST KING (CHS. 8–10)

Section 1. The Demand for a King	
Misgovernment of Samuel's sons, and consequent request of the people	8:1–5
Jehovah's answer	8:6–9
Description of an Oriental Despot	8:10–18
Persistence of the people in their request	8:19–22
Section 2. The Private Choice of Saul by Samuel	
Saul's genealogy	9:1–2
His search for the asses	9:3–10
He inquires for Samuel	9:11–14
He is entertained by Samuel	9:15–24
He is anointed by Samuel, and promised three signs in confirmation of his call	9:25–10:8
Fulfilment of the signs	10:9–16
Section 3. The Election of Saul by Lot at Mizpah	
The assembly at Mizpah	10:17–19
Saul chosen by lot	10:20–23
Installation of Saul as king	10:24–27

### DIVISION TWO—SAUL'S REIGN TILL HIS REJECTION (CHS. 11–15)

Section 1. The Establishment of Saul's Kingdom	
Defeat of the Ammonites under the leadership of Saul	11:1–11
Confirmation of Saul as king at Gilgal	11:12–15
Samuel's farewell conference with the people in which he	
(a) asserts his official integrity	12:1–15
(b) rebukes the people for their faithlessness	12:6–12
(c) offers warning and encouragement for the future	12:13–25
Section 2. The War of Independence	
The revolt from the Philistines	13:1–7
Saul's disobedience and its penalty	13:8–14
The Philistine invasion	13:15–18
The disarmament of the Israelites	13:19–23
Jonathan's exploit at Michmash	14:1–15
Rout of the Philistines	14:16–23
Saul's rash oath and its consequences	14:24–46
Section 3. Summary Account of Saul's Reign	
His wars	14:47–48
His family	14:49–52
Section 4. The Rejection of Saul	
The commission to destroy Amalek	15:1–9
The penalty of disobedience	15:10–23
The kingdom rent from Saul	15:24–31
The execution of Agag	15:32–33
Samuel's parting from Saul	15:34–35

## **DIVISION THREE—THE DECLINE OF SAUL AND THE RISE OF DAVID**

(Chs. 16–31)

Section 1. David Chosen as Saul’s Successor	
Samuel’s mission to Bethlehem	16:1–5
The family of Jesse	16:6–11
David anointed by Samuel	16:12–13
Section 2. David’s introduction to the court	
Saul troubled by an evil spirit	16:14–18
David summoned to soothe him with music	16:19–23
Section 3. David’s advancement	
The Philistine invasion	17:1–3
The challenge of Goliath	17:4–11
David’s errand to the camp	17:12–31
David volunteers to fight the giant	17:32–37
The victory of Faith	17:38–51
The flight of the Philistines	17:52–54
Saul’s inquiry about David	17:55–58
Jonathan’s friendship for David	18:1–5
The celebration of the victory	18:6–9
Section 4. Saul’s Growing Jealousy of David	
Saul’s attempt on David’s life	18:10–11
David’s promotion and popularity	18:12–16
Saul’s offers his daughter Merab to David	18:17–19
Saul’s treacherous design against David’s life. David’s marriage with Michal	18:20–30

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