Notes on
1 Samuel
2 0 1 2 E d i t i o n
Dr. Thomas L. Constable

Introduction

TITLE
First and Second Samuel were originally one book called the Book of Samuel in the Hebrew Bible. The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament (made ca. 250 B.C.) was the first to divide it into two books. The Septuagint translators titled these books 1 and 2 Kingdoms. That division has persisted ever since and has even been incorporated into subsequent editions of the Hebrew Bible (since A.D. 1517). The title "Samuel" was given by Jerome in his Latin translation, the Vulgate (ca. A.D. 400). The Jews gave the name "Samuel" to it because Samuel is the first major character in the book. Samuel anointed both Saul and David, so in this respect he was superior to both of them.

DATE AND WRITER
The writer did not identify himself as the writer in the book. Statements in the Book of Samuel imply that someone who had witnessed at least some of the events recorded wrote it. However someone, or more than one person, must have written most of it after Samuel's death (i.e., 1 Sam. 25—2 Sam. 24) and some of it even after the division of the kingdom following Solomon's death (e.g., 1 Sam. 27:6). These features have made it difficult to date the book.

"Our guess is that the author was a high state official in frequent attendance at the court, enjoying the full confidence of David and his household, who served David throughout his reign in Jerusalem and also Solomon during the early years of his reign, and whose duties may have been connected with literary work."1

Most conservative scholars prefer the view that Samuel may have written or been responsible for noting the record of earlier events in the book (chs. 1—24). Then some unidentified writer or writers put it in its final form later, perhaps soon after Solomon's death. Critical scholars tend to believe it was the result of much more piecing together, and some of them date its final form as late as 500 B.C.2 The Babylonian Talmud (ca. A.D. 500) attributed authorship of 1 Samuel 1—24 to the prophet Samuel, and the rest to


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Nathan and Gad. It is unlikely that Samuel wrote both books. One conservative estimate of the final date of composition is about 960 B.C. Another guess is near 920 or 900 B.C.

**SCOPE**

The Book of Samuel covers the period of Israel's history bracketed by Samuel's conception and the end of David's reign. David turned the kingdom over to Solomon in 971 B.C. David reigned for 40 and one-half years (2 Sam. 2:11; 5:5). This means he came to power in 1011 B.C. Saul also reigned for 40 years (Acts 13:21) so he became king in 1051 B.C. We can estimate the date of Samuel's birth fairly certainly, on the basis of chronological references in the text, to have been about 1121 B.C. Thus the Book of Samuel covers about 1121-971 B.C., or about 150 years of history.

The first part of 1 Samuel overlaps historically with the end of the Judges Period that we find in the Book of Judges. Apparently Samson was born just a few years before Samuel. Samson's 20-year judgeship evidently began shortly before the battle of Aphek (1104 B.C.) at which time Eli died (1 Sam. 4:18). It ended not many years before the battle of Mizpah (1084 B.C.) when the Philistine domination of Israel ceased temporarily (1 Sam. 7:13). Samuel's ministry, therefore, probably ran concurrent with that of Samson until Samson died. Saul began to reign about 35 years after Samson died (i.e., 1051 B.C.). Samuel evidently lived about 30 years after that.

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3*Baba Bathra* 14b, 15a.
4See David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, pp. 142-43.
5Eugene H. Merrill, “1 Samuel,” in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 204.
8See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 149-50.
9Leon J. Wood, *Israel's United Monarchy*, p. 23, wrote that the battle of Aphek happened about 1075 B.C. Though Wood is helpful in many respects, I do not think his dates are as accurate as those of Merrill and Thiele.
### PURPOSE

A main purpose of the Book of Samuel seems to have been to record the establishment of kingship in Israel and to explain its theological significance. It deals with the Israelites' initial request for a king, the establishment of that king (Saul), and the tragic results of that king's reign. It then explains the consolidation of power under a second king (David), God's promises to him, and his decline in his later years. The climax of the book comes in 2 Samuel 7, where God promises David an everlasting dynasty. The writer (or writers) clearly wanted to legitimize the Davidic monarchy and dynasty. Whether and how the monarchy should be established are main subjects of 1 Samuel, and the question of who should be Israel's king dominates much of 2 Samuel.¹¹

As with all the historical narratives of the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit's purpose in giving us the books of 1 and 2 Samuel was not just to record events that transpired. It was primarily to teach spiritual lessons to the original readers, and to readers of all time, by revealing the causes and effects of various human responses to God's grace.¹² God guided the inspired writers of Scripture to teach theology as well as to record history. This is clear in all the so-called historical books of both Testaments. We can see this as we examine the reasons God selected the particular events and facts that He recorded for inclusion out of the mass of possible data that He could have set forth.

Scholars have disputed what it was that the writer chose to emphasize primarily in the Books of Samuel. Some have felt his unifying purpose was to demonstrate the sovereignty of God.¹³ Some believe it was to show that God provides leadership for His people.¹⁴ Others have seen the purpose as something else. I believe those who see the record of what happens to individuals and nations, when they trust and obey God's Word or fail to do so, have identified the primary purpose.¹⁵

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¹¹Howard, pp. 141, 146-47.
¹³E.g., Ludwig Kohler, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 94.
For the Israelites, their commitment to obey the Mosaic Covenant out of trust in God, and gratitude for His calling them to receive His grace, would result in God blessing them (Deut. 28:1-14). However if they despised His grace and departed from His will, as expressed for them in the Mosaic Covenant, He would curse them (Deut. 28:15-68). Moses had explained God's "blessing" in Deuteronomy. It included fertility for the Israelites personally as well as for their herds and crops, and it included the ability to defeat their neighbor enemies and to enjoy peace and prosperity. It also included other material and social advantages, as well as the enjoyment of an intimate spiritual relationship with God. God's "curse," on the other hand, would be barrenness, defeat, oppression, and many other undesirable conditions.

In Samuel we have a record of how commitment to the will of God results in blessing 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. These lessons are not new; the Books of Samuel are not emphasizing these things for the first time in Scripture. The Book of Joshua is a positive lesson that people who trust and obey God succeed. They even accomplish supernatural feats and prosper. The Book of Judges gives the other side of that coin. People who disregard God fail, become unproductive, suffer defeat, and sometimes die prematurely. 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.

GENRE

The books of Samuel are mainly narrative (stories) with some poetic sections interspersed. The main genre is theological history.

"No book of the Bible has been the object of such intense interest to literary analysts as has Samuel."16

THEMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Longman and Dillard have identified several major themes in 1 and 2 Samuel, including the reversal of fortune, David as king, David as a man, and the Lord's anointed. Some of the characteristic compositional techniques include: the repetition of key words, irony, and repetition.17 Three important theological concerns of Deuteronomy play prominent roles in these books: the anticipation of a king for Israel, the anticipation of rest for Israel, and the anticipation of blessing for obedience and punishment for disobedience.18

17Ibid., pp. 159-61, 165.
18Ibid., pp. 163-64.
Notes on
2 Samuel
2012 Edition
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Introduction

Second Samuel continues the history begun in 1 Samuel. Please see my comments regarding 2 Samuel's title, date, authorship, scope, purpose, genre, and themes and characteristics, in the introductory section of the 1 Samuel notes.

OUTLINE

(Continued from notes on 1 Samuel)

V. David's triumphs chs. 1—8

A. The beginning of David's kingdom 1:1—3:5
   1. David's discovery of Saul and Jonathan's deaths ch. 1
   2. David's move to Hebron 2:1-4a
   3. David's overtures to Jabesh-gilead 2:4b-7
   4. Ish-bosheth's coronation over Israel 2:8-11
   5. The conflict between Abner and Joab 2:12-32
   6. The strengthening of David's position 3:1-5

B. The unification of the kingdom 3:6—5:16
   1. David's acceptance of Abner 3:6-39
   2. David's punishment of Ish-bosheth's murderers ch. 4
   3. David's acceptance by all Israel 5:1-12
   4. David's additional children 5:13-16

C. The establishment of the kingdom 5:17—8:18
   1. David's victories over the Philistines 5:17-25
   2. David's relocation of the ark to Jerusalem ch. 6
   3. The giving of the Davidic Covenant ch. 7
   4. The security of David's kingdom ch. 8

VI. David's troubles chs. 9—20

A. David's faithfulness ch. 9
B. God's faithfulness despite David's unfaithfulness chs. 10—12
   1. The Ammonite rebellion ch. 10
   2. David's unfaithfulness to God chs. 11—12
C. David's rejection and return chs. 13—20
   1. Events leading up to Absalom's rebellion chs. 13—14
   2. Absalom's attempt to usurp David's throne chs. 15—20

VII. Summary illustrations chs. 21—24
   A. Famine from Saul's sin 21:1-14
      1. Saul's broken treaty with the Gibeonites 21:1-6
      2. David's justice and mercy 21:7-9
      3. David's honoring of Saul and Jonathan 21:10-14
   B. Four giant killers 21:15-22
   C. David's praise of Yahweh ch. 22
   D. David's last testament 23:1-7
   E. Thirty-seven mighty men 23:8-39
      1. Selected adventures of outstanding warriors 23:8-23
      2. A list of notable warriors among The Thirty 23:24-39
   F. Pestilence from David's sin ch. 24
      1. David's sin of numbering the people 24:1-9
      2. David's confession of his guilt 24:10-14
      3. David's punishment 24:15-17
      4. David's repentance 24:18-25
Scholars frequently refer to chapters 9—20 along with 1 Kings 1 and 2 as "the succession narrative." The reason for this is that the passage deals with matters that lead up to Solomon's succession of David as Israel's king. Some scholars believe that there was a succession narrative source document that the writer(s) of this section of Scripture used, but others doubt the existence of such a document Other scholars prefer to call this unit "court history" since it deals with a broader range of subjects than just Solomon's succession to the throne.

"Virtually all scholars agree that this is one of the finest examples of history writing from the ancient Near Eastern world. It is at the same time a masterpiece of biography and storytelling what with its ingenious interweaving of plots and subplots, its brilliant character sketches, and its attention to artistic touches such as climax and denouement."

Chapters 9—20 begin with information about the survivors in Saul's family (ch. 9), as does the next major section of the book: chapters 21—24 (21:1-14).

**A. DAVID'S FAITHFULNESS CH. 9**

The story of David's kindness to Mephibosheth (ch. 9) helps to explain David's subsequent acceptance by the Benjamites. It also enables us to see that the writer returned here to events in David's early reign.

"It is, in my personal opinion, the greatest illustration of grace in all the Old Testament."

If Mephibosheth was five years old when Jonathan and Saul died on Mt. Gilboa (4:4), he was born in 1016 B.C. When David captured Jerusalem in 1004 B.C., Mephibosheth was 12. Now we see Mephibosheth had a young son (v. 12), so perhaps he was about 20 years old. People frequently married in their teens in the ancient Near East. So perhaps the events of chapter 9 took place about 966 B.C.

David's kindness (Heb. hesed, loyal love, vv. 1, 3, 7) to Jonathan's son, expressed concretely by allowing him to eat at David's table (vv. 7, 10-11, 13), shows that David was, at the beginning of his reign, a covenant-keeping king (cf. 1 Sam. 20:14-17, 42). This was one of David's strengths. His goodness to Mephibosheth was pure grace, entirely unearned by Saul's son. Yet the story is primarily about loyalty.

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164 They follow Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*. For a discussion of the succession narrative, see Anderson, pp. xxv-xxxvi.
168 Swindoll, p. 169.
It is doubtful that the Ammiel mentioned in verse 4 was Bathsheba's father (cf. 1 Chron. 3:5), though this is possible. Lo-debar (lit. no pasture) was about 10 miles northwest of Jabesh-gilead in Transjordan and 10 miles south of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee). David provided for Mephiboseth's needs in Jerusalem, but Ziba and his family cultivated Mephiboseth's land and brought the produce to David. Thus the produce of his land paid the cost of Mephiboseth's maintenance. The writer may have stressed the fact that Mephiboseth was lame (vv. 3, 13) to remind us of the sad fate of Saul's line because of his arrogance before God. Mephiboseth physically had trouble standing before God and His anointed.

"Given David's loathing for 'the lame and the blind' since the war against the Jebusites (2 Sam 5:6-8), one is brought up short by his decision to give Jonathan's son Mephiboseth, 'lame in both feet' (9:3, 13), a permanent seat at the royal table. . . . Is David willing to undergo such a daily ordeal just in memory of his friendship with Jonathan, as he himself declares, or as the price for keeping an eye on the last of Saul's line? Considering David's genius for aligning the proper with the expedient, he may be acting from both motives."170

The sensitive reader will observe many parallels between Mephiboseth and himself or herself, and between David and God. As Mephiboseth had fallen, was deformed as a result of his fall, was hiding in a place of barrenness, and was fearful of the king, so is the sinner. David took the initiative to seek out Mephiboseth in spite of his unloveliness, bring him into his house and presence, and adopt him as his own son. He also shared his bounty and fellowship with this undeserving one for the rest of his life because of Jonathan, as God has done with us for the sake of Christ (cf. Ps. 23:6).

"On the whole it seems very likely that in this instance David's actions benefited not only Mephiboseth but served also the king's own interests."171

In what sense can the affairs recorded in this chapter be considered part of David's troubles? We have here one of David's major attempts to appease the Benjamites. As the events of the following chapters will show, David had continuing problems with various Benjamites, culminating in the rebellion of Sheba (ch. 20). Not all of David's troubles stemmed from his dealings with Bathsheba and Uriah.

B. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS DESPITE DAVID'S UNFAITHFULNESS CHS. 10—12

These chapters form a sub-section within the Court History portion of 2 Samuel.172 The phrase "Now it happened" or "Now it was" (10:1; 13:1) always opens a new section.173

171Anderson, p. 143.
172Youngblood, p. 920.