

The First Book of SAMUEL

Otherwise Called the First Book of the Kings

INTRODUCTION

[Following is the introduction to both 1 and 2 Samuel, which are parts of one whole.]

1. Title. The two books known today as 1 and 2 Samuel appear as one volume, in all Hebrew manuscripts prepared before 1517. It was not until the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, about the 3d century before Christ, that the book was first divided into two parts. In that translation, the LXX, these two parts appeared as —First of Kingdoms and —Second of Kingdoms; the books we now know as 1 and 2 Kings appeared as —Third of Kingdoms and —Fourth of Kingdoms. The Latin Vulgate of Jerome, dating from the 4th century A.D., is the first to make the titles read —Kings rather than —Kingdoms. As late as several centuries after Christ the Masoretes noted that the statement of 1 Sam. 28:24 was at the middle of the book in the Hebrew text. Hebrew Bibles, in fact, preserved the original arrangement until the edition printed by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1517.

Because the life and ministry of Samuel dominate the first half of the book, in its original form, his name was attached to it. This title was appropriate in view of his important role as the last of the judges, one of the greatest of the prophets, founder of the schools of the prophets (see Ed 46), and the one who led out in the establishment of the Hebrew kingdom and in the laying down of the fundamental principles on which it was to operate (see 1 Sam. 10:25). Essentially, the name Samuel thus designates content rather than authorship.

2. Authorship. In contrast with the Pentateuch, where it is specifically stated, regarding certain portions, that they were written by Moses, the books of Samuel contain no information as to who the author or authors may have been. According to Jewish tradition the first 24 chapters of 1 Samuel were written by Samuel, and the remainder of 1 Samuel, together with 2 Samuel, by Nathan and Gad (see 1 Chron. 29:29). When the book was divided—in the Hebrew text and in most English translations—the original name, Samuel, was applied to both parts even though his name is not once mentioned in the second part. Samuel's death is recorded in 1 Sam. 25:1, and his name appears for the last time in the books of Samuel in 1 Sam. 28:20.

In view of the fact that David is pre-eminent in the second part, his name might be a more appropriate title for 2 Samuel. The statement of the Talmud that Samuel wrote all of that which now bears his name is obviously in error, for all of 2 Samuel—as well as the last part of 1 Samuel—records the history of Israel after his death. Some Bible scholars have pointed to 1 Sam. 27:6 as evidence that the books of Samuel date from the time of the divided kingdom. But if the two parts of Samuel were written at different times by different authors, why were they originally published as one? Yet, if they represent the continuous work of one author, he must have written following the deaths of Saul (2 Sam. 21:1–14) and David (see 2 Sam. 23:1). It seems most reasonable to conclude that 1 and 2 Samuel represent composite authorship, and that they are a collection of narratives, each complete in itself. Each writer wrote by inspiration, and all parts were eventually brought together as a united whole under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. Historical setting. The book of 1 Samuel covers the transitional period from the judges to the united kingdom of Israel, including the last judgeship, that of Samuel, and the first reign, that of Saul. The second book of Samuel deals exclusively with the reign of David. 1 Samuel therefore covers nearly a century, from about 1100 to 1011 B.C. and 2 Samuel 40 years, or 1011 to 971 B.C.

The period from about 1200 to 900 B.C. was one of national unrest and political controversy. There was little sustained effort throughout the ancient world to record and preserve written accounts of contemporary events. Such *From the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, volume 2, pages 447-450. Review and Herald Publishing Association, copyright 1976. Available at your Adventist Book Center or www.adventistbookcenter.com*

ancient historians as Herodotus, Berosus, Josephus, and later Eusebius found it necessary to draw largely on folklore accounts for the events that took place in the world during this era. Consequently, it is necessary to check their statements by modern archeological discoveries, which provide considerable information not previously available. New material is constantly coming to light to increase our store of knowledge of the period of time during which the events of 1 and 2 Samuel occurred.

This period of unrest, turmoil, and transition opened with the migrations of the Sea Peoples (see p. 27), which, directly or indirectly, affected all parts of the ancient East. Throughout the period covered by 1 and 2 Samuel the priest kings of the Twentieth Dynasty (see p. 26) and the secular rulers of the Twenty-first Dynasty ruled Egypt, their reigns marked by weakness and national decay and disunity. During most of this period Assyria was also extremely weak. In Babylon, conditions were much the same as in Egypt and Assyria, with internal weakness and foreign invasion the order of the day. The political influence of both Egypt and Syria thus disappeared from Palestine. Migrations of the Sea Peoples and the Aramaeans added to internal troubles, and kept the international political situation throughout the ancient East in a state of turmoil for the best part of two centuries.

As a result, the early kings of Israel were comparatively free to consolidate their control over the Promised Land and neighboring regions, without interference from their formerly strong neighbors to the north and south. Their only enemies were the local nations of Palestine, such as the Philistines, the Amalekites, the Edomites, the Midianites, and the Ammonites. The resistance of these neighboring tribes was gradually overcome, and most of them submitted to Israelite control. David and Solomon eventually controlled large areas that had formerly belonged to the Egyptian Empire and to the nations of Mesopotamia.

When Israel entered Canaan the Lord had commanded them to assign cities to the Levites throughout the various tribes. Thus instruction in ways of righteousness might be given to all the people. But they seem to have paid little or no attention to the command. They did not, in fact, even drive out the Canaanites, but dwelt among them (Judges 1:21, 27, 29-33). Within a few years the Levites, who had received no specific tribal allotment, found themselves without employment. Even Jonathan, the grandson of Moses (see on Judges 18:30), visited the home of Micah the Ephraimite — to sojourn where he could — find a place (Judges 17:8), and became priest to Micah's — house of gods (Judges 17:5). He eventually stole the images out of Micah's house and went with the migrant Danites to be their priest (see Judges 18). Thus at a time when — every man did that which was right in his own eyes, Israel violated God's plan that the Levites should instruct the people in His ways, and soon lapsed into the ignorant, superstitious ways of the heathen about them. Six times during the period of the judges God sought to awaken His people to the error of their course by permitting them to become subject to the surrounding nations. But soon after each deliverance from servitude, they lapsed into indifference and idolatry.

Growing up in such an environment, Samuel chose to repudiate the evils of the day and to devote his life to the correction of these tendencies. His plan for accomplishing this centered in the establishment of the so-called — schools of the prophets. One of these was at Ramah, his ancestral home (1 Sam. 19:19-24), and others were later established at Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38), Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), and Jericho (2 Kings 2:15-22). Here young men studied the principles of reading, writing, music, the law, and sacred history. They engaged in various trades, that they might as far as possible learn to be self-supporting. The expression — schools of the prophets does not occur in the Old Testament, but the young men so trained were called — sons of the prophets. They devoted their lives to the service of God and some of them were employed as counselors of the king.

Toward the close of his life Samuel was called upon to be the unwilling agent in the establishment of the monarchy. After discussing the question with the people, he wrote a book on — the manner of the kingdom and laid it up before the Lord (1 Sam. 10:25). This was probably of no value to Saul, who is thought to have been unable to read.

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Samuel encouraged Saul with assurances of God's abiding presence, but he soon rejected the inspired counsel of Samuel, surrounded himself with a strong bodyguard, and quickly made himself an absolute ruler.

Following Saul's rejection, Samuel was called upon to select and train a man according to God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), one who would not set himself above the law but who would obey God. David's training, like that of Christ, was carried on in the face of jealousy and hatred. Although David sometimes fell into transgression of the law he revered and advocated, he always humbled his heart before that law as supreme. As a result of David's cooperation with the principles laid down by God through Moses and Samuel, Israel gradually subdued all her enemies, and the boundaries of the nation were pressed northward practically to the Euphrates and southward to the borders of Egypt. God was able to bless Israel, and as a result they enjoyed an era of national prosperity and glory that continued throughout the reign of Solomon, and has never since been equaled.

4. Theme. The first book of Samuel records and accounts for the rather sudden transition from centuries of pure theocracy, operating through prophets and judges, to the status of kingdom. The record of Saul's reign reveals some of the problems that accompanied the establishment of the kingdom, and explains why the house of David replaced that of Saul. The second book of Samuel deals with the glorious reign of David, first at Hebron and later in Jerusalem, and concludes with his purchase of the threshing floor of Araunah, on which the Temple was later constructed by Solomon. The account of David's last years and death appears in the early chapters of 1 Kings.