

The Book of Samuel (1 & 2 Samuel)

He who rules over men must be just, Ruling in the fear of God.
And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises. . . (2 Samuel 23:3-4)

Nations, to function well and to last any length of time, require protective and nurturing governments; these types of governments are dependent upon righteous, consistent leadership. When God formed the nation of Israel He gave them a constitution, the Torah of Moses, to guide in the divine principles of life and living, and He gave them Himself as their leader, their King. Israel did not live well under that form of government, wishing instead, a military potentate like their neighbors had. In order to teach Israel the error of its ways the Lord granted their request in the person of Saul, and the nation suffered. However, out of His mercy and grace Yahweh sent one who shared His own heart's desire for the chosen people and divine rule on earth, David. Though David did not rule perfectly, God still demonstrated through him the importance of having the right kind of a king, instilling hope for one who would eventually come to lead Israel into the fullness of its blessing promised through Moses and the patriarchs. Samuel is the book of the foundation of Israel's kingdom because it introduces the proto-typical king, David, the man after God's own heart.

Authorship

The two books bearing the name of Samuel in our modern Bibles were originally one work. Since Samuel, who is one of the three main characters of the combined books, died late in the reign of Saul (the second main character) he is obviously not the author of the whole work. The book bears his name after the manner of ancient libraries which identified their collection of scrolls "by reference to their opening words or to the person of note with whom the early columns were concerned."¹ Modern critical scholarship has suggested rather complex (and sometimes convoluted) theories of composition beginning with the source-critical approach of Wellhausen followed by tradition-historical and redaction-critical hypotheses.² Though the validity of the documentary hypothesis espoused by Wellhausen has been undermined as the best means of explaining Samuel's composition, its replacement, the authorial activity of a

¹ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 20.

² For a summary discussion of these approaches see Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 137-40.

seventh century Deuteronomistic historian, who wrote Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, retains its grip on the thinking of a majority of modern scholarship.³ It is obvious, both from the time span involved and from specific references, that a number of sources have been utilized in the literary fashioning of Samuel (cf. 2 Sam 1:18; 1 Chr 29:29). However, this fact should not be automatically taken to infer that the extant work is simply the stitch work of some redactor(s). Recent literary approaches have begun to unveil the true authorial genius that under lays the received biblical text. Thus, we may, with sure literary and philosophical foundations, speak of the “author” of the combined Book of Samuel, even though his exact identity is ultimately undeterminable.⁴

Date

Since David’s death can be dated as c. 970 B.C. the final form of the book of his kingship would be sometime subsequent to that time, though it is apparent that earlier recorded material is incorporated. The mention of Ziklag as belonging to the kings of Judah (1 Sam 27:6) might argue for a date during the divided monarchy, though before the fall of Samaria since that is nowhere intimated. Though this yields a range of 970 B.C. to 722 B.C. it is reasonable to posit Samuel’s composition as fixed in its basic form by sometime during Solomon’s reign (970 B.C. to 931 B.C.) with a few notations being added later.

Historical Setting

Samuel (the combined book) covers the period from the birth of Samuel to near the end of David’s reign, that is, from c. 1100 B.C. to 970 B.C.⁵ It depicts the transition from the failure of the theocracy (the time of God’s direct rule over His people through Torah as taught and administered by the priesthood) to the time of the establishment of a monarchy, whereby God exercised His rule on earth through a succession of human kings. Internationally, it was a time of relative stability due to the weakness of the great empires of the ancient Near East, namely, the Hittites, Assyria, and Egypt. This allowed Israel time to become established as a nation under a human king and to begin to extend its influence into the world at large. In Canaan the

³ For a discussion see Baldwin, *Samuel*, 24-30.

⁴ For probing of this issue of authorial intent and unity as it applies to Samuel see Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 271-80.

⁵ Merrill places the birth of Samuel as early as 1121 B.C. (see Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987, 1996), 149-50.

Philistines were strong, having afflicted Israel throughout the period of the judges. However, under the leadership of Samuel, Saul and then David, the Philistine threat was abated for good.

Original Readers/Occasion

There is no specific historical event or issue indicated in the text that serves as the occasion for the composition of Samuel. From a determination of the message and purpose of the book (see below) it may be concluded that original readers were members of the divided monarchy of Israel and Judah, who were in need of a divine perspective on the validity and purpose of the Davidic dynasty. For those in the position of having to choose between the rule of David and his sons or the competing dynasties of the northern kingdom, Samuel would provide God's rationale for whom they should choose to serve and why. For later readers who would be tempted to despair over the condition of both kingdoms, Samuel provides a message of hope, via the Davidic Covenant, hope in the coming of a King who would perfectly fulfill the role of the ideal king which David only approximated (though to the greatest degree of any of Judah's kings).

Special Issues

The Interpretation of Historical Narrative Literature in the Bible. The books of Samuel contain some of the greatest and most loved stories in the Bible, enjoyed for their own right and prized for the lessons they teach. However, these various episodic texts are part of a larger narrative context that is often overlooked or not very well understood. All approaches to the biblical text assume that there is some theological point or points being made by whoever is responsible for its creation. What is being recognized increasingly is that the literary form of the Bible, in this case narrative, has a great deal to do with the message that the authors (human and divine) intended to communicate. When attention is given to the way narrative works then the part played by each by each constituent part is more readily determined; hence the ultimate purpose of the text is more likely to be discovered and applied. While a literary approach to the interpretation of the Bible may deter readers frustrated by their study of other kinds of literature, it should be remembered that in the case of the biblical text there is a much better chance of a "satisfying" interpretational experience. This is due to the fact that because of its divine origin, there exists an internal consistency and a correlation to reality unachievable by any other writing, even given the gulf of time and culture that exists for the modern reader. The images, ideas, principles, outlook, and moral character of any given biblical text is informed by the whole of revelation and is therefore genuinely understandable, though not necessarily in

absolute completeness. The basic assumption that God is communicating with His personal creation through the medium of a language that can be learned and taught is foundational to any confident reading of the text. When one makes the effort, in dependence on the Spirit of God, to determine what the whole of a biblical narrative is trying to say and how each constituent part contributes to that message, he or she will be rewarded accordingly.⁶

State of the Text. It is generally recognized that the Hebrew text of Samuel has not been well preserved though the reason for this is not certain. Discoveries at Qumran have confirmed an alternate Hebrew text to that upon which the Masoretes must have based their work. The discovered text must have been the basis for the Septuagint, which means the Greek text can be very helpful in reconstructing the correct reading of a number of difficult passages in Samuel.⁷

Theme Statement

The selection of David as Israel's king and the subsequent establishment of his dynasty in perpetuity signaled Yahweh's strategy to bless the earth through a ruler who, like David, would be a man after His own heart, but who, unlike David, would avoid the sins that so beset earthly rulers to the harm of their subjects; the perfection of that ideal will be the person and rule of the coming Messiah-King (23:3b-4).

Outline

- I. The life and ministry of Samuel brings to an end the rule of judges and gives rise to hope in a humanly desirable king.1:1–8:22
 - A. Samuel's birth was Yahweh's provision for Israel's need.1:1–2:11
 1. Hannah's affliction: a picture of Israel's barrenness.1:1-7
 2. Hannah's vow: a symbol of Israel's need.1:8-18
 3. Hannah's gift: a symbol of Yahweh's graciousness1:19-28
 4. Hannah's prayer: an expression of Israel's hope.2:1-10
 5. Samuel's service: an indication of Yahweh's purposes.2:11

⁶ A foundational work in narrative literature is Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books Publishers, 1981). Baldwin says: "An appreciation of literary qualities in the Bible in no way conflicts with a theological understanding of its message; indeed the two are inseparably linked. The very fact that the Bible has a message to proclaim which matters supremely because it relates to eternal issues means that only the best in literary art is good enough. When God has a revelation to make to the human race he will surely see to it that it is expressed in many different ways, using every literary device to ensure that what he is saying is both arresting and unambiguous, both earthed in human experience and therefore always relevant to every generation, but introducing all the same external dimension as the only appropriate context because that is the true context of all human history. The books of Samuel form a significant part of Old Testament narrative. The unusual amount of detail related about the chief characters invites the reader to get to know them as individuals and to appreciate God's dealings with each one, both of which we shall be most likely to do if we enjoy reading about them" (Baldwin, *Samuel*, 16-17).

⁷ Cf. Dillard and Longman, *Introduction*, 143-45.

- B. Samuel's service as a judge ended the period of Israel's theocracy.....2:12–8:22
1. Samuel's service as a Priest highlighted the wickedness of Eli's sons' service as priests.....2:12-21
 - a. Eli's corrupt sons embodied the failure of the theocracy.2:12-17
 - b. Samuel's service in the Tabernacle embodied hope for Israel.2:18-21
 2. Samuel's growth in favor with Yahweh highlighted the stagnancy of Eli's character and service.2:22-26
 - a. Eli proved incapable of dealing with serious sin.2:22-25
 - b. Samuel displayed promise through his spiritual development.2:26
 3. Samuel distinguishes himself as a prophet of Yahweh.....2:27–4:1a
 - a. An anonymous prophet proclaims judgment on Eli's house.....2:27-36
 - b. Samuel, as a prophet, confirms the judgment against Eli's house.....3:1-18
 - c. Samuel distinguishes himself as a prophet throughout Israel.3:19–4:1a
 4. Samuel distinguishes himself as a judge over Israel.4:1b–7:17
 - a. Capture of the ark by the Philistines signals the bankruptcy of Israel's faith.4:1b–7:1
 - 1) The ark is captured due to Israel's unbelief.4:1b-11
 - 2) The house of Eli comes to an end because of unbelief.....4:12-18
 - 3) The birth of Icabod embodies Israel's estrangement from Yahweh.....4:19-22
 - 4) The ark's fortunes demonstrate that Yahweh is still committed to his people for his own glory.5:1–7:1
 - a) The Philistines are cursed in the presence of the ark.5:1-12
 - b) The Philistines return the ark to Israel.6:1-16
 - c) Israelites are judged for showing disrespect to the ark.6:17-19
 - d) Yahweh provides a temporary resting place for the ark.....6:20–7:1
 - b. Samuel successfully judges Israel against the Philistines in preparation for the ark's return.....7:2-17
 - 1) The ark remains absent from Israel's place of worship.....7:2
 - 2) Samuel successfully judges Israel.....7:3-17
 - a) Samuel leads the nation into repentance and worship.7:3-6
 - b) Samuel leads the nation in victory over the Philistines.....7:7-14
 - c) Samuel's successful leadership is summarized.....7:15-17
 5. Samuel's judgeship ends in Israel's request for a humanly approvable king.8:1-22
 - a. The failure of Samuel's sons provokes Israel's request for a king.....8:1-5

- b. Yahweh instructs Samuel to grant their request for a king.8:6-9
 - c. Samuel declares the ramifications of the king being requested.8:10-18
 - d. The people persist in their request for a king of their liking.8:19-22
- II. The life and ministry of Saul as Israel's first king is a disastrous failure, thus demonstrating the need for a different kind of ruler.9:1-15:35
 - A. Saul's selection as king satisfied Israel's demand but not Yahweh's standards.9:1-12:25
 - 1. Saul's selection combined Israel's desires and Yahweh's purposes.....9:1-26
 - a. Saul possessed outwardly the qualities sought in a king.....9:1-2
 - b. Yahweh exercised sovereignty in selecting Saul as king.9:3-26
 - 1) Yahweh oversees the circumstances which lead Saul to Samuel.....9:3-14
 - 2) Yahweh reveals to Samuel his purposes for Saul.9:15-17
 - 3) Samuel indicates Yahweh's purposes to Saul through word and sign.9:18-26
 - 2. Saul's anointing by Samuel confirms him as Yahweh's choice for king.9:27-10:16
 - a. Yahweh's choice is confirmed by ceremonial recognition.....9:27-10:1
 - b. Yahweh's choice is confirmed by prophetic revelation.10:2-8
 - c. Yahweh's choice is confirmed by spiritual manifestations.10:9-13
 - d. Yahweh's choice is betrayed by Saul's fleshly hesitation.....10:14-16
 - 3. Saul's public proclamation as king produces a mixed reception.10:17-27
 - a. Samuel reminds the people of their rejection of Yahweh as king. 10:17-19
 - b. Saul manifests doubt in his own selection as king.10:20-22
 - c. Samuel pronounces Saul's divinely approved qualifications for king. 10:23-24
 - d. Saul garnishes a mixed reception as Israel's king.10:25-27
 - 4. Saul's successful action against the Ammonites confirmed Yahweh's enabling of him as king.11:1-13
 - a. Saul comes to the defense of Jabesh Gilead.11:1-11
 - b. The people affirm their support of Saul as king.11:12-13
 - 5. Saul's coronation establishes the monarchy in Israel.11:14-12:25
 - a. Saul is made king at Gilgal.11:14-15
 - b. Samuel charges the people in the affairs of monarchy at Gilgal. 12:1-25
 - 1) Samuel proclaims his propriety in acting as Israel's judge.12:1-5
 - 2) Samuel rehearses Yahweh's faithfulness in providing leaders for Israel's benefit in all her history.....12:6-13
 - 3) Samuel warns Israel concerning the increased dangers of monarchy in light of Israel's recent rebellion.12:14-18
 - 4) The people receive assurance of Yahweh's favor after confessing their culpability in requesting a king.....12:19-25

- B. Saul's failure in his service as king results in the forfeiture of his realm.13:1–15:35
1. Saul's disobedience incurs the initial pronouncement of the revocation of his kingdom.13:1-15
 - a. Saul fails in his leadership of the people.13:1-7
 - b. Saul sins in presumptuously offering his own sacrifice.13:8-10
 - c. Samuel pronounces Saul's kingdom as forfeited through disobedience.13:11-15
 2. Saul's impotence is revealed in the Philistine domination of Israel. ...13:16-23
 3. Saul is surpassed in battle by the courage of his son.14:1-23
 4. Saul's foolish oath threatens the safety of his son and the morale of the people.14:24-46
 5. Saul's sole legacy lay in his constant military activity.14:47-52
 6. Saul's disobedience in not destroying the Amalekites incurs the final proclamation of the revocation of his kingdom.15:1-35
 - a. Saul sins in not completely destroying Amalek.15:1-9
 - b. Saul is rejected as king by the pronouncement of Samuel.15:10-23
 - c. Saul's response demonstrates his unsuitability to rule Israel.15:24-31
 - d. Samuel mourns the demise of Saul.15:32-35
- III. The life and ministry of David reveal the characteristics of the ideal king, and give rise to a hope in the coming Messiah-King by reason of Yahweh's covenant. 16:1–2 Samuel 20:26
- A. David manifests the character qualities necessary for a successful reign as Israel's king in contrast to Saul's failure.16:1–31:13
1. David is anointed as Yahweh's choice of an ideal king in place of Saul.16:1-13
 - a. Yahweh directs Samuel to anoint a new king over Israel.16:1-5
 - b. Yahweh warns Samuel not to judge by outward appearance.16:6-11
 - c. Yahweh informs Samuel that David is his choice as king.16:12
 - d. Samuel anoints David who receives the gift of the Spirit.16:13
 2. David is revealed by Yahweh as a man in tune with the Spirit in contrast to Saul.16:14-23
 - a. Saul's ability to rule is crippled by trouble of spirit.16:14-18
 - b. David's ability to rule is displayed in calming Saul's spirit.16:19-23
 3. David is displayed by Yahweh as a man who feared God rather than man in contrast to Saul.17:1-58
 - a. Saul and Israel only fear the Philistine Goliath.17:1-11
 - b. David is provoked against Goliath because he feared Yahweh. ...17:12-54
 - 1) David takes offense at Goliath's defiance of Yahweh.17:12-30
 - 2) David's bravery contrasts with Saul's unbelief.17:31-39
 - 3) David kills Goliath in the name of Yahweh.17:40-54
 - c. David is identified for future service.17:55-58
 4. David is revealed as a man who was loyal in contrast to Saul.18:1–30:31
 - a. Despite Saul's attempt to kill him, David performs wisely over the king's army.18:1-16
 - b. Despite Saul's treachery in the matter of his daughters, David performs valiantly against the Philistines.18:17-30

- c. In response to Saul's conspiracy to murder him, David flees the monarch instead of confronting him.19:1–30:31
- 1) At Jonathan's intercession David returns to serve Saul. ...19:1-7
 - 2) Through Michal's deception David escapes the conspiracy of Saul.....19:8-17
 - 3) Due to prophetic manifestation David escapes Saul at Naioth in Ramah.19:18-24
 - 4) David escapes the rage of Saul through the loyalty of Jonathan.....20:1-42
 - 5) David flees the brutality of Saul through deceit and dissimulation.....21:1–22:23
 - a) David deceives Ahimelech the priest to live.....21:1-9
 - b) David feigns madness before Achish to live.....21:10-15
 - c) David looks to the safety of Moab to live.22:1-5
 - d) David takes responsibility for Saul's murder of the priests of Nob.....22:6-23
 - 6) David escapes Saul despite the treachery of the people of Keilah.23:1-13
 - 7) David escapes Saul despite the treachery of the Ziphites. .23:14-29
 - 8) David spares Saul because he was Yahweh's anointed.24:1-22
 - a) David spares Saul in the cave.24:1-15
 - b) Saul confesses David's righteousness and right to the throne.....24:16-22
 - 9) Samuel's death seals the transfer of the kingdom.....25:1
 - 10) David is delivered from bloodguilt by the action of Abigail.25:2-44
 - 11) David spares Saul again, being Yahweh's anointed.26:1-25
 - a) David spares Saul in his own camp.26:1-12
 - b) Saul blesses David for his righteousness and faithfulness.....26:13-25
 - 12) David escapes Saul by sojourning with the Philistines.27:1–30:31
 - a) David allies himself with the Philistines but remains loyal to Israel.27:1–28:2
 - b) Saul opposes the Philistines but violates the nation's covenant with Yahweh.28:3-25
 - c) David is rejected by the Philistines and fights against the Amalekites.....29:1–30:31
 - i) The Philistines reject David's alliance.....29:1-11
 - ii) Yahweh directs David's recovery of Amalekite captives.30:1-31
 - (a) David seeks Yahweh's direction.30:1-10
 - (b) David experiences Yahweh's help.30:11-20
 - (c) David displays Yahweh's goodness.30:21-31
5. Saul reaps the consequences of his failed character and loses his life to the Philistines.31:1-13

2 Samuel

- B. David establishes his kingdom and rules well, receiving the covenant of an eternal dynasty.....1:1–10:19
1. He shows respect for the position of Yahweh’s anointed.1:1-27
 - a. He avenges the killing of Yahweh’s anointed.1:1-16
 - b. He laments Saul’s house with the “Song of the Bow.”1:17-27
 2. He shows restraint as the kingdom becomes his.....2:1–4:12
 - a. He is anointed king at Hebron and continues to honor Saul.2:1-7
 - b. He is opposed by Abner and Ishbosheth.2:8–3:5
 - 1) He rules over Judah alone for seven years.2:8-11
 - 2) His army shows itself superior to Abner’s.....2:12–3:1
 - 3) His family begins to grow.3:2-5
 - 4) His opponents are destroyed through wickedness and intrigue.3:6–4:12
 - a) Abner abdicates to David but is killed; David mourns him.....3:6-39
 - b) Ishbosheth is murdered and avenged by David.4:1-12
 3. He shows faith as he receives and rules over his kingdom.....5:1–10:19
 - a. He is acclaimed king by all Israel.....5:1-5
 - b. He establishes Jerusalem as his capital.....5:6-16
 - c. He defeats the Philistines by Yahweh’s counsel.5:17-25
 - d. He brings the ark to Jerusalem.....6:1-23
 - 1) He acts as king in establishing the place of Yahweh’s worship.....6:1-12
 - 2) He acts as priest by sacrificing to Yahweh and blessing the people.6:13-19
 - 3) He acts as a prophet in rebuking Michal’s disdain.6:20-23
 - e. He enters into covenant with Yahweh.7:1-29
 - 1) He expresses a desire to build Yahweh a house.7:1-3
 - 2) He hears of Yahweh’s intent to build him a house, that is, a dynasty.....7:4-17
 - a) He is informed that no command had been given to build Yahweh a house.7:4-7
 - b) He is reminded that Yahweh had made him ruler and would secure him and Israel in the near future. 7:8-11a
 - c) He is promised an eternal seed, throne, and kingdom.7:11b-17
 - i) His son would build Yahweh’s house and be established in his kingdom.....7:11b-13
 - ii) His son would be chastened by Yahweh his eternally loyal father.....7:14-15
 - iii) His house, kingdom, and throne would be eternal.7:16-17
 - 3) He responds to Yahweh’s covenant promises.7:18-29
 - a) He praises Yahweh for His promises.7:18-24
 - b) He prays for Yahweh to keep His promises.7:25-29
 - f. He displays faith in fighting Yahweh’s enemies and experiences His near promise of a great name.8:1-14

- g. He orders all his kingdom.....8:15-18
 - h. He continues kindness to Saul’s house in caring for Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth.....9:1-13
 - i. He shows himself to be Yahweh’s instrument for the blessing and cursing of the nations.....10:1-19
- C. Though David sins and reaps the bitter consequences of his failure Yahweh remains faithful and blesses His chosen king.11:1–20:26
- 1. He sins in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah her husband.11:1–12:31
 - a. He commits adultery with Bathsheba and has her husband killed.11:1-27
 - b. He is confronted by Nathan the prophet and repents.....12:1-15a
 - c. He experiences the consequences of his sin in the death of his son.....12:15a-23
 - d. He experiences the continued blessing of Yahweh.....12:24-31
 - 1) He receives a son who was “Beloved of Yahweh.”12:24-25
 - 2) He receives honor for conquering Rabbah.....12:26-31
 - 2. He fails to rule his own house and threatens his very kingdom.....13:1–20:26
 - a. Amnon defiles his sister Tamar invoking only David’s anger.13:1-22
 - b. Absalom murders his brother Amnon and becomes estranged from his father David.13:23-39
 - c. Absalom is restored to Jerusalem and his father but not completely.14:1-33
 - d. Absalom disdains David’s rule and proclaims himself king.15:1-12
 - e. David flees Jerusalem for fear of Absalom.15:1–17:4
 - 1) David is replaced by Absalom in Israel’s affections.15:1-12
 - 2) David flees Jerusalem with loyal servants.....15:13-23
 - 3) David leaves the ark in Jerusalem for the people.15:24-29
 - 4) David is forsaken by Ahithophel.....15:30-37
 - 5) David is deceived by Ziba.....16:1-4
 - 6) David is cursed by Shimei.....16:5-14
 - 7) Absalom, through the council of Ahithophel, establishes himself as king in Jerusalem.16:15–17:4
 - f. David is blessed and restored to his kingdom.....17:5–20:26
 - 1) He is aided by the action of Hushai.....17:5-14
 - 2) He is aided by Zadok, Abiathar and their sons.17:15-22
 - 3) Ahithophel removes himself by hanging.17:23
 - 4) David is provided for at Mahanaim.17:24-29
 - 5) David’s loyal army defeats and kills Absalom.18:1-18
 - 6) David is prepared by Ahimaaz for news of his son’s death.....18:19-32
 - 7) David is rebuked by Joab for the good of his kingdom.18:33–19:8
 - 8) Israel is prepared for David’s return.19:9-18a
 - 9) David display’s godly kindness, evidencing a sense of Yahweh’s mercy to himself.19:18b-39
 - a) Shimei is not executed.....19:18b-23
 - b) Mephibosheth’s plea is accepted.19:24-30
 - c) Barzillai’s kindness is blessed for his support.....19:31-39

- 10) Further conflict and rebellion is quelled.....19:40–20:22
- 11) A summary of David’s government officers confirms the reestablishment of his rule.20:23-26
- IV. Epilogue: David’s experience as Israel’s king highlights the relative strengths and weaknesses of the human monarch against Yahweh’s absolute covenant faithfulness.....21:1–24:25
- A. (A) David averts divine judgment by avenging the Gibeonites.21:1-14
- B. (B) David is aided by able men against the Philistine giants.....21:15-22
- C. (C) David praises Yahweh for His salvation and faithfulness.....22:1-51
- D. (C’) David confesses Yahweh’s covenant with His anointed.23:1-7
- E. (B’) David’s mighty men are listed and honored.23:8-39
- F. (A’) David evokes divine judgment, but is forgiven through sacrifice at the place of Yahweh’s choosing.24:1-25

Theme Statement

The selection of David as Israel’s king and the subsequent establishment of his dynasty in perpetuity signaled Yahweh’s strategy to bless the earth through a ruler who, like David, would be a man after His own heart, but who, unlike David, would avoid the sins that so beset earthly rulers to the harm of their subjects; the perfection of that ideal will be the person and rule of the coming Messiah-King (23:3b-4).

Theme Development

I. The life and ministry of Samuel brings to an end the rule of judges and gives rise to hope in a humanly desirable king (1:1–8:22).

The downward spiral of Israel’s experience chronicled in the Book of Judges becomes the seed-plot for the ministry of Samuel, which leads directly to the introduction of the monarchy. Israel’s barrenness as a national entity, Yahweh’s kingdom of priests, had brought them to a crisis of leadership. Like Hannah, they cry out to Yahweh for a leader who would satisfy their longings. Unlike Hannah, Israel had little idea of the kind person who could lead them into true peace and security. Samuel’s birth was Yahweh’s provision for Israel’s need (1:1–2:11). The Lord is always ready to respond to the needs of His people when they cry out to Him, even when they may ask for the wrong thing.

Samuel’s exemplary service as a judge of Israel, in contrast to the efforts of Eli and his sons, was still inadequate in leading the people into holiness (2:12-25). Even his own sons took on the corruption of the nation (cf. 8:1-5). As the first of the office of prophets, Samuel distinguished himself as a faithful purveyor of the Lord’s words (3:1–4:1a). Because he was attuned to God’s will and aware of God’s ways he was able to help Israel recover in part from the folly of Eli’s leadership, whereby the ark of the covenant had been lost for a time to the

Philistines (4:1b–7:17). But not even Samuel’s exemplary faithfulness could stem the people’s headlong rush toward complete spiritual dissipation. Israel’s demand for a king, while not contrary to Yahweh’s ultimate intentions in one sense,⁸ was none the less misguided in its immediate intent. They wanted not the kind of a king envisioned in Moses’ instructions (Deut 17:14-20), whose primary responsibility was to lead the people into righteousness, depending upon the Lord for victory on the battle field; Israel wanted a king who would lead them into successful battle with great fanfare and look good doing it (8:1-5; cf. esp. v. 20). Despite Samuel’s warning about the negative ramifications of monarchy, the nation persisted in its request, and Yahweh instructed his prophet to grant them their request (8:19-22). Yahweh Himself would make sure they received what they wanted so that later they might appreciate His kind of a king.

II. The life and ministry of Saul as Israel’s first king is a disastrous failure, thus demonstrating the need for a different kind of ruler (9:1–15:35).

The rather complicated way in which Saul is selected as king is designed to demonstrate that he was the divine appointee to the monarchy (9:1-14). Moses had instructed that Israel’s king must be chosen by Yahweh himself from among themselves, not a foreigner (Deut 17:15). Saul’s selection is confirmed by ceremonial recognition (9:27–10:1), prophetic revelation (10:2-8), and the manifestation of the gift of the Spirit of God as the necessary endowment for kingly service (10:9-13). Saul lacked nothing that God could give him for a successful reign. What Saul did lack was vision for the task and a heart for the Lord. This is evidenced from the very beginning by his various displays of hesitancy and fear (cf. 10:14-16, 21-22, 26-27). Saul did have the makings of a warrior, though, and through God’s enabling evokes Israel’s confidence by saving Jabesh Gilead from the Ammonites (11:1-13). At Gilgal Saul is crowned king and Samuel uses the occasion to deliver a charge to the people with respect to what they really needed to give attention if they were going to thrive as a nation (12:1-25). On the basis of Yahweh’s gracious election of Israel they are commanded to fear and obey Him and to serve Him with all their heart (12:14, 24). If they, both king and people, do this rather than rebel and do evil, they will prosper. This was the key to their strength and security as a nation and Samuel was prepared to teach them this good and right way (12:23). Their wickedness in asking for a king lay in a lack in this very area (12:16-20).

⁸ Cf. Gen 17:16; 35:11; 49:10; Num 24:17; Deut 17:14-20.

Within two years (13:1) Saul's deficiencies as king come into full view. Unable to lead Israel to victory over the Philistines he makes an unlawful sacrifice and then defends the action when confronted by Samuel (13:1-12). Later, when David fails and is rebuked, he repents and experiences the Lord's forgiveness. This is a major difference between the two kings. Saul's obvious display of rebellious independence warrants Yahweh's judgment, namely the forfeiture of his realm—his house will not continue to rule (13:14-15). The subsequent narrative displays Saul's inability in the face of the Philistines (13:16-23), cowardice (14:1-23), foolishness (14:24-26), and disobedience (15:1-35). His only positive legacy lay in his constant military activity (14:47-52). Ultimately Saul's unsuitability for ruling Israel is made abundantly clear. Samuel's final pronouncement of that fact sets up the introduction of David, whose character will be highlighted against the dark background of his predecessor.

III. The life and ministry of David reveal the characteristics of the ideal king, and give rise to a hope in the coming Messiah-King by reason of Yahweh's covenant (1 Samuel 16:1–2 Samuel 24:25).

The narrative strategy of the author of Samuel could not be clearer on a macro scale. Having developed the failure of the theocracy through the medium of the life and ministry of Samuel and the institution and initial failure of the monarchy through the life of Saul, he now introduces the hope for the monarchy, the ideal king. This is accomplished by contrasting David to Saul, then highlighting the success of his reign. Only after that, does he look at the problems with David's rule as a way to focus hope exclusively on Yahweh and His promises.

A. David manifests the character qualities necessary for a successful reign as Israel's king in contrast to Saul's failure (16:1–31:13).

Even though Saul does not drop out of the picture at this point, it is David who becomes the focal point. Saul's character and outcome have already been established. From this point forward he is used as a foil for the unveiling of David, Yahweh's ideal king. What makes David the "ideal" king lies not in superior ability or the perfection of his performance. Like Saul, David becomes king by divine choice and becomes equipped to rule by divine gift (the Spirit of God). What sets him apart is that "he was a man after God's own heart" (cf. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

Though David is anointed as king at this point (16:1-13) his actual reign does not begin until Yahweh has removed his predecessor, Saul. Yahweh directs Samuel to "mark" David as His choice as king to replace the failed monarch. The reason that God does not either wait until Saul is removed or remove the king immediately is that He deems it necessary to demonstrate the

reason for creating the new dynasty. This rather extensive transition period allows a full display of the character of David.⁹ Two important features brought out by David's anointing is that (1) it was his heart that was the main determining factor of his choice (16:7) and (2) the Spirit of Yahweh was given to him as the Enabler for his regal service (16:13). All that comes afterward brings these two things out in some fashion. David's positive spirit, and his ability to bring spiritual solace, is demonstrated with respect to Saul's troubled mind (16:14-23). David shows the power of the fear of the Lord in his killing of Goliath, while Saul and his soldiers are overcome with the fear of man (17:1-58).

The major feature of the remainder of this section (18:1–30:31) is that David remains loyal to his calling and commitments, in complete conformity to the Lord's standards and purposes, even under great duress. While serving the interests of Israel, in honor of Yahweh, he is abused, misused, and plotted against by the king he would someday replace. While not always trusting God fully for his safety and well-being (e.g. in his alliance with the Philistines and his feigning madness in fear of Achish—21:10-15, cf. Ps 34), David is constant in his respect for Yahweh's anointed, refusing to strike down the rebellious Saul on numerous occasions, and in his protection of the people of Israel. Even Saul confesses that David is the more righteous of the two (24:17).

Another motif running through this section is the aid given to David by others, who, for the most part, shared David's faith and positive vision. His wife Michal, Saul's daughter, loves and aids her husband (18:1-4, 17-30; 19:11-12). Jonathan, Saul's son, becomes David's life-long friend, giving him continual help and encouragement even to his own peril (19:1–20:42). David's four hundred men and his "mighty men of valor" were indispensable in his military exploits (22:1-5; 23:1-29). Abigail, the wife of Nabal, prevents David from an unwise act of vengeance and later becomes his wife (25:1-43). These all recognized in David the qualities of a successful king. However, the one ultimately responsible for David's safety and success was the Lord Himself. It is God who delivered Goliath into David's hand so that all Israel may know that

⁹ The Hittite "Apology of Hattusilis," a 13th century B.C. dynastic defense, "reveals a remarkable parallel to the basic outline of 1 Samuel 15 through 2 Samuel 8. In this ancient document, a king (or his supporters) outlines the reasons why his rule is legitimate. Such an apology would be particularly important in the case of a king who founded a new dynasty and might be charged with usurping the throne. This was the case both with Hattusilis and King David who founded new dynasties" (J. Carl Laney, "Notes on the Book of First Samuel," revised by Ronald B. Allen (unpublished notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, n.d.), 8. See also Herbert M. Wolf, "Implications of Form Criticism for Old Testament Studies," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127/508 (October-December 1970): 303-4; and idem. "The Apology of Hattusilis Compared with Other Political Self-justifications of the Ancient Near East," (Dissertation, Brandeis University, April, 1967).

“the battle is the Lord’s” (17:45-47). The Lord gave David success against the Philistines (23:1-5) and against the Amalekites (30:1-25) and sent Abigail to David to keep him from bloodshed (25:32-33). All in all it should be obvious to the reader that David’s appointment to the monarchy was of the Lord. Not only had David shown himself to be upright in his ways but Saul had utterly disqualified himself through faithlessness and disobedience (cf. 28:6, 16-18).

B. David establishes his kingdom and rules well, receiving the covenant of an eternal dynasty (1:1–10:19).

The reign of David occurs in three movements. The prelude has just concluded, which demonstrates David’s divine selection and personal worthiness to serve as Israel’s king. The main movement concerns the establishment and consolidation of David’s kingdom highlighted by his reception of an eternal covenant of kingship (2 Sam 1:1–10:19). The conclusion of David’s reign will be a rather somber depiction of David’s personal failures and their consequences (2 Sam 11:1–20:26). However, even this has a positive spin in that it emphasizes the fact that, ultimately, David’s dynasty is guaranteed by the covenant faithfulness of the Lord, not by anything that the human ruler had done or would do. David’s dynasty was secure because it was Yahweh’s sovereign intention to make it so.

After the death of Saul, David continues to show respect for the Lord’s anointed by avenging the one claiming to have taken Saul’s life and by composing a hymnic eulogy for the fallen king (1:1-27). David shows restraint in taking up his rule, not moving to ruthlessly exterminate all the royal household, as kings were wont to do, but rather allowing God to work out the transition in His own way and time. However, there were those around David who did not share his faith perspective, who regularly took matters into their own hands, for example Joab (2:1–4:12).

Eventually all Israel does recognize David’s rule and they formalize his reign by covenant at Hebron (5:1-5). This begins a section where David is shown to exercise all of his sterling qualities in his capacity as king over all Israel (5:1–10:19). There is little in this section to criticize with respect to David’s actions, though the seeds of his later problems do certainly appear (e.g. the multiplication of wives—5:13). He secures Jerusalem as his capital and the place for the building of the temple later on (5:6-10). David knows that the exaltation of his kingdom was for the people of Israel’s sake, not for his own selfish ends (5:12). Once again he is seen defeating Israel’s archenemies, the Philistines (5:17-25). His initial failure at introducing the ark to its new tabernacle in Jerusalem serves to show that David is able to recover from missteps in

his ruling, unlike Saul, who seemed to careen from one act of rebellion to another. The ark is eventually successfully delivered to its new home with David leading in the celebration (6:1-19). Though David performs functions of a priest (6:14), he is not guilty of impropriety in worship as was Saul.¹⁰ It may well be in this chapter that David is acting as king (in the king's role to order the worship of Israel—cf. Deut 18:19), priest and prophet (in his condemnation of Michal's attitude—6:20-23).

The most important aspect of David's reign is the covenant that Yahweh entered into with him concerning the building of a house. Once David had been given rest from his enemies by the Lord he expressed his desire to build a permanent dwelling for the ark, literally a "house" (7:2). Yahweh informs him that such a structure was not for him to construct. Rather, Yahweh was going to build David a house, that is a dynasty of kings (7:11). David is reminded that he had become king by divine choice, apart from anything he had done (7:8), and had been enabled by God to defeat his enemies (7:9). Furthermore the Lord promises him that He will make his name great, appoint a place for Israel and plant them in it (7:9-10). Though the ultimate planting of Israel so that they will not be moved or oppressed anymore is still future from our time, there is a near fulfillment of these promises for David. Indeed David did come to have a great name (cf. 8:13) and Israel enjoyed peace and security during his and Solomon's reigns. These immediate signs of Yahweh's faithfulness will serve as pledges of His inviolable intent to fulfill the more distant promises of an eternal house (dynasty), throne and kingdom for David. These promises look forward to their complete fulfillment in the eternal Son, Jesus Christ, who will one day rule over Israel from David's throne in Jerusalem. David's response is one of thanksgiving for being the privileged recipient of such honor (7:18-24) and of supplication for the realization of the promises (7:25-29). Once again David displays a heart for God and His gracious purposes. David continues to display his faith through contending with Yahweh's enemies (8:1-13), in the notice of his attention to the ordering of the kingdom (8:15-18), and in his kindness to the house of Saul by supporting his lame son Mephibosheth (9:1-13). The incident concerning the ungratefulness of Hanun illustrates the outworking of the Abrahamic promises whereby those who mistreat the patriarch's descendents fall under the Lord's curse (10:14-19). David has shown himself to be Yahweh's chosen and choice instrument for the

¹⁰ This is due to the difference in attitude between the first two kings and also to the fact that David's priestly activity was in line with the example of Melchizedek. Cf. Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of Chronicles," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, Roy B. Zuck, ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 177, 180-82.

outworking of the divine will on earth as the means of exalting the God of Israel. As such this is a fitting conclusion to the positive development of David's early reign. It will turn negative quickly.

C. Though David sins and reaps the bitter consequences of his failure Yahweh remains faithful and blesses His chosen king (11:1–20:26).

David's ascension and early reign are exemplary when compared to Saul, becoming the standard by which all the rest of the kings, for both Judah and Israel, are to be evaluated. However, David was not without fault, as this section so dramatically reveals. The seeds of the failings and problems that David experienced in his later reign are sown in his early days, especially with respect to his family life. The multiplication of wives was a crucial violation of Torah for the king (cf. Deut 17:17). Though David's heart was not turned away from the Lord by his wives as was Solomon's, it was this practice of taking numerous wives and concubines that nearly became his undoing. Yet God did not judge him as He had Saul. David does experience chastening to be sure. However, he does not lose the kingdom.

David's sins fall into two broad areas: (1) committing adultery and murder against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah and (2) failing to lead his own family in the ways of righteousness and then failing to deal with serious sin when it occurred. His adultery and the cover-up murder is exposed and confronted by the prophet Nathan. Unlike Saul, David repents at the prophet's word of judgment and casts himself upon the mercy of God, receiving His forgiveness (cf. Pss 51, 32). Though there are consequences (the son of adultery dies) Yahweh chooses to bless David with another child who is named "Beloved of Yahweh." The king also receives honor for conquering Rabbah, which he scarcely deserved. These two incidents set the tone for the rest of the section: Yahweh will continue to bless his anointed even though he falters as king.

The rest of David's reign centers on the sin and rebellion of his house and the consequences that ensued for king and kingdom alike. In this case David's affection for his wicked son Absalom outweighs his respect for Yahweh's Torah. Hence, he does not deal with Absalom's incest nor with his treasonous manipulations to become Israel's king. While David had clear instruction from Torah on how to deal with rebellious children, he fails to do so. If righteous restraint it is then it mirrors God's longsuffering with sinners, giving them a chance to repent. If it was merely indulgence born of personal, familial affection then it was an affront to the holiness of God and a threat to His purposes for David's rule on earth. Since David's

experience becomes in many respects typical of Jesus Christ's in his rejection as Israel's king, the positive interpretation of David's restraint cannot be totally dismissed, though his culpability for the kingdom crisis must at any rate be maintained. As David flees Jerusalem he is deceived, cursed and generally persecuted, though there are, as well, many acts of support and aid (15:1–17:4). To David's credit he is still able to trust God with the outcome and leave vengeance to his Lord.

An important contrast to Saul's last days is seen in the fact that Yahweh continues to bless David. This is not because he had been perfect in his rule—he had not been. It was because he had continued to exercise faith and because God had committed Himself to David and his dynasty by unconditional covenant. As a result, the king is restored to his kingdom, though not without rebukes along the way; and he manifests a godly kindness to those who might otherwise have come under judgment for questionable actions or attitudes (17:5–19:39). When further discord and rebellion surfaces, David's servants deal with it decisively (19:40–20:22). The brief summary of David's governmental officers (20:23–26) serves to give notice that the kingdom had been spared and had settled into normalcy. Hence, David weathers his greatest storm because he had a heart that received instruction and repented and because he had a God who had bound himself to David's dynasty by covenant.

IV. Epilogue: David's experience as Israel's king highlights the relative strengths and weaknesses of the human monarch against Yahweh's absolute covenant faithfulness (21:1–24:25).

Samuel ends with six episodes from different periods in David's life. Arranged in a concentric pattern they are designed to summarize what has preceded.¹¹ The emphasized center of this six-part chiasm contains a psalm of David (22:1–51), which appears substantially unchanged as chapter 18 of the Book of Psalms, and a poetic summarization of his last words (23:1–7). The psalm of praise celebrates Yahweh's deliverances and rewards. It is an exultant celebration of the goodness and grace of the God of Israel who had chosen David as His anointed. David's last words focus on the expected characteristics of Israel's king. He must be just and rule in the fear of God (23:3–4). If he rules in this manner, then Israel will be continually refreshed. David admits that his house had not always had that effect on the nation,

¹¹ Baldwin concludes that this material presents “Israel's greatest king as a man who both inherited problems from his predecessor and created them himself (A, A¹); who fought and achieved his victories with the help of many others who are celebrated here (B, B¹), and whose joy and strength was his God, whom he praised with total abandon because everything he was and everything he had achieved was to be attributed to the faithful Lord God of Israel, (C, C¹)” (Baldwin, *Samuel*, 283).

but confesses that Yahweh had made an everlasting covenant with him, which would guarantee the continuance of his dynasty (23:5). Even though the rebellious must be cut off there would always be someone to rule from the house of David. This passage contains perhaps the greatest messianic statement in the two books of Samuel, for only in Messiah will Israel experience a reign of justice and the fear of God to a sufficient degree so as to realize the promises of their nationhood. Hence, the earliest Gospel begins “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David . . .” (Matt 1:1).

The very last episode concerns another of David’s errors, the numbering of the people (24:1-17). David’s heart condemns him for this act and he asks Yahweh for forgiveness (24:10). This he receives, but not without consequences, which David himself chooses from among three alternatives presented by the prophet Gad (24:11-17). Being sure of the Lord’s mercies he chooses that which gave Yahweh direct control over his discipline. When the Lord relents he instructs David through the prophet Gad to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, that is in Jerusalem. It was through the offering of sacrifices upon this altar that the plague against Israel was abated. And so Samuel concludes his presentation of the Davidic kingship with the king’s purchase of the place of sacrifice which centuries later would become the place of the offering of the greater Son of David for the sins of the nation once for all.

Conclusion

After the failure of the period of judges, Israel had great hope in the rule of a king. From the beginning Samuel had made it clear that the real issue was the nation’s refusal to submit to Yahweh’s sovereignty. Saul’s failure demonstrated the bankruptcy of kings selected according to human standards. David proved successful because he had a heart that was easily impressed with the will of God. But even he failed to live up to Torah and to lead the nation into obedience and unmitigated blessing. The one true source of hope was Yahweh Himself. He had consistently demonstrated His commitment to the chosen nation and His faithfulness to covenant. Therefore it was right to hope for the King who would rule righteously, the Son of David, who would rule forever on the throne of His father.

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