



Background Notes on the Books of Samuel

Compiled by Pastor David Hentschel

Overview: First and Second Samuel, originally one book, provide a chronological record of the beginning of Israel’s united monarchy and record the life of the great king David. The two books of Samuel were originally one book (designated by the Masoretes as the “Book of Samuel”). Alexandrian Jews brought both Samuel and Kings together as four books of “kingdoms.” The Latin Vulgate separated them again according to the traditional division. The Dividing Samuel into two parts (1 and 2 Samuel) was first introduced in 1516 by a Venetian printer. The book is named after its principal character Samuel in the early narratives, playing a prominent role in the anointing of both Saul and David. The story begins at a low point in Israel’s history, as even the priesthood is corrupt (1 Sam 2:12-17) and ends at the height of Israel’s military and political power in the United Monarchy handed to Solomon, legitimizing the Davidic dynasty. Under David, the countries of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Syria were conquered and the kingdom of Israel reached its height of military and political power and God’s covenant made with David (2 Sam 7) solidified David’s name and house in Israel’s history forever. The troubles of David began with his great sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12). David’s sin was forgiven, but God determined that he should suffer the inevitable consequences of his evil actions. (2 Sam 12:14) Therefore, David experiences family troubles for the rest of his life, including some of the worst expressions of sin (murder and assault), leading to David fleeing from his son, leaving Jerusalem (2 Sam 15-16). The book ends with an appendix (ch 21-24), including a roster of David’s mighty men and a psalm of praise for the Lord’s deliverance. The last words of David express his anticipation of the consummation of God’s everlasting covenant with him (2 Sam 23:1-7), and the building of the altar of the threshing floor, upon which his son Solomon would build the temple for the Lord.

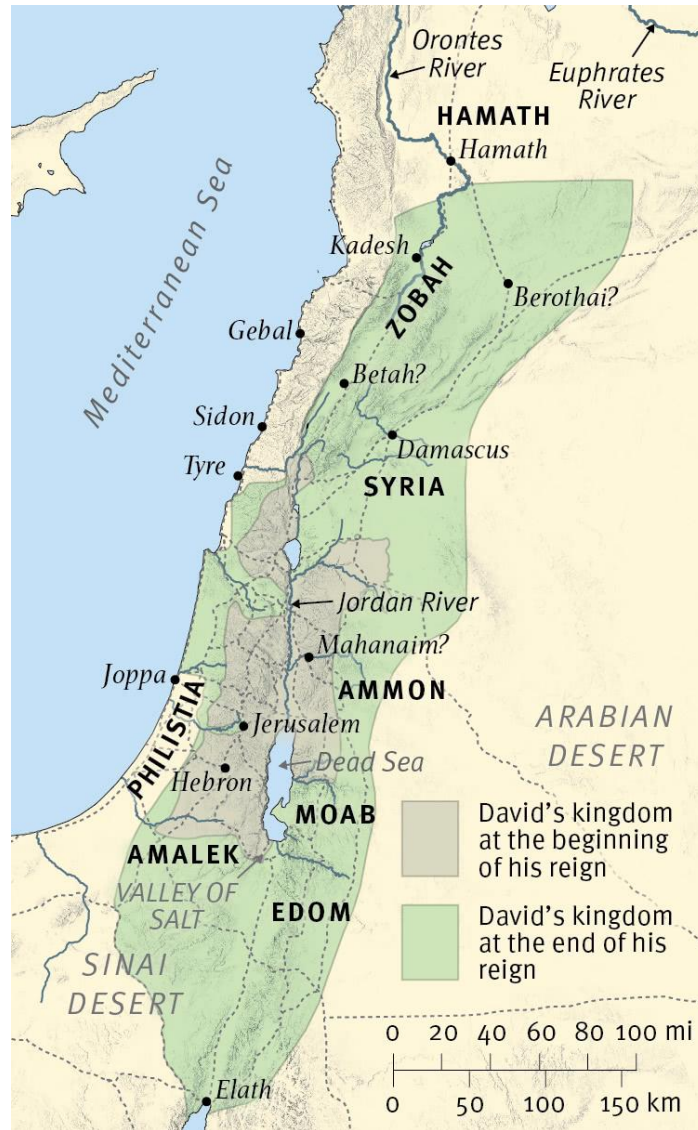
Author and Date of Writing: The prophet Samuel may have authored the first part of the book (Ch 1-25), but parts of the book would have been written after the death of Samuel (1 Sam 25:1, 28:13). The remainder may have been written by Nathan and Gad (1 Chron 29:29). There is no mention of the fall of Samaria, so the date is typically set to be between 930 and 722 BC.

Timeline: The timeline of 1 and 2 Samuel spans roughly 140 years (ca 1100 BC to 971 BC), from the time of Eli to the close of David’s reign. The timeline of these books parallel the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles as follows:

1 Samuel	2 Samuel	1 Kings	2 Kings
	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	

Though there are parallel accounts, the author of Chronicles had a different purpose for writing in that 1 Chronicles has nothing negative written about David and 2 Chronicles only tells the story of the southern kingdom: Judah.

Geography: Israel during the United Monarchy (map taken from the ESV study bible):



Structure of the Books of Samuel

	Books of Samuel					
	1 Samuel			2 Samuel		
Division	1 Sam 1-8	1 Sam 9-15	1 Sam 16-31	2 Sam 1-10	2 Sam 11-12	2 Sam 13-24
Main Characters	Samuel	King Saul	King David			
			Rise	Expansion	Fall	Decline
Spiritual Topics	Rule of Yahweh	Rejection of Rule of Yahweh	Yahweh's chosen King	David's Obedience and Covenant	King David's Sin of Disobedience	Judgment and Need for Yahweh as King

Key Theological Themes and Lessons:

Theologically the books are intended to show the sovereignty of Yahweh over all of God's rulers and nations.

- 1. God is Sovereign.** There is only one living God. He is Yahweh, the Sovereign LORD. Yahweh providentially guides the individuals in this book, Hannah, Samuel, and David. He is the Lord of History. If God can run the kingdom of Israel, he can run your life, career, ministry, and family.
- 2. God has promised His people a King.** The LORD (Yahweh) has established a royal covenant with the house of David. Theologically, these books are about the establishment of David's kingdom. However, David is meant to both inspire us but also disappoint us. The promise of an eternal king from David's line is the hope of the entire world, the Messiah from David's line.
- 3. Human beings are accountable to God for their actions.** The book makes clear that our actions have consequences. Obedience leads to God's favor, and disobedience leads to God's discipline. We see this theme throughout, but prominently in the lives of Saul and in David.
- 4. Maintaining biblical family values are an important part of one's integrity and legacy.** David serves as a bit of a foil (a negative example) of how families can best operate under God's rule. David fails to be faithful in marriage and fails to discipline his sons, leading to endless grief at the end of his life.

Psalms in the Life of David

David wrote approximately half the psalms in the book of psalms. Fourteen psalms begin with the superscriptions linking them to specific events in the life of David (Ps. 3; 7; 18; 30; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; 142). Nine Psalms were written during David's flight from Saul ("Songs of the Outlaw") The remainder of the psalms with the superscriptions, link to specific occasions after David becomes king, which therefore become the "Songs of the King".

"Songs of the Outlaw"	
1 Samuel 19:11 – 12	Psalm 59
1 Samuel 21:1 – 9; 22:6 – 23	Psalm 52
1 Samuel 21:10 – 15	Psalm 34; 56
1 Samuel 22:1, 24:3	Psalm 57; 142
1 Samuel 23:14	Psalm 63
1 Samuel 23:19	Psalm 54
1 Samuel 24:9 – 15	Psalm 7
"Songs of the King"	
2 Samuel 6:17 – 19	Psalm 30
2 Samuel 7	Psalm 89
2 Samuel 8:3	Psalm 60
2 Samuel 12:1	Psalm 51
2 Samuel 15:13	Psalm 3
2 Samuel 22	Psalm 18

Historicity of the Books of Samuel

The term historicity refers to the historical authenticity of the events and persons presented in a literary composition. Is this book just myth, legend, or fiction or is this book really factually true? Did this really happen? There are many skeptics who would deny the historicity of the books of Samuel. Biblical “minimalists” affirm some things in the Bible but think of most events in the Bible as exaggerative tradition, folklore, fabrications, not historical.¹ Monotheism they say was a post-exilic invention, the Pentateuch was written late, and the stories of David and Solomon they say are largely fabricated. These were post-exilic tales, woven to provide a unifying identity for the Jews. Biblical “maximalists,” interpret the data very differently and see these texts as largely historically accurate.² “Moderates” represent a kind of middle position.³ The questions one must ask are the following: Is there any archaeological evidence or literary documentation that corroborates the major events and persons in this book? The answer to that question is overwhelmingly “yes.”⁴ Here are some specific examples:

The Discovery of the “Tel Dan Stele.” For a long time, a significant point of attack against the faith was the lack of any extra-biblical evidence mentioning King David. Skeptics doubted the existence of David altogether. However, in 1993 they found a stone which had text on it, dated to 830 B.C. and it’s the account of a nearby king and his military operations against the “house of David.” He was fighting against Israel. Dr. Eugene Merrill states, “This puts the historical existence of David beyond doubt – and furthermore shows him to be so powerful a figure that the nation was named for him.” (The Veracity of the Word, Kindred Spirit, p.13). Did King David exist as a powerful king in that area? Yes.

Historical Synchronisms with Ancient Near Eastern Kings: Many of the Bible’s places and characters have been discovered in archaeology. For example, according to the biblical text, David and Solomon were contemporaries of Hiram king of Tyre (2 Sam 5:11). Archaeologists have discovered the sarcophagus of Ahiram (980-947 BC) of Byblos, which is the same ruler. Discoveries have also been made for many other ANE contemporaries such as: Shishak, Achish, Hadad-ezer and Toi (2 Sam 8:9-10).

Archaeological sites and structures: The town of **Gibeah** (Saul’s capital city) has been discovered (Tell el-Ful), excavated by Albright and Lapp (1 Sam 10:26). Eilat Mazar has been working on the discovery of either David’s palace or an ancient Jebusite palace in Jerusalem. Solomon’s fortifications at Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer have been discovered. Phoenician style temples with striking similarities to Solomon’s temple have been discovered from this time period. Solomon hired Hiram, King of Phoenicia to build his temple, with the same exact architectural style. (1 Kgs 7:13-26)

Discovering these exact names of contemporary rulers, as well as structures and sites all in the right places, at the right time period is strong evidence for the historicity of the biblical story. Furthermore, there are 53 New Testament verses that refer to David or the House of David by name. The New Testament writers and the testimony of Jesus Christ himself referring to the historical person of David (as well as many other historical events recorded in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel) further solidifies the case that these books contain not hagiography or legend, but real history.

¹ Leading **Minimalists:** Mark S. Smith (NYU), Israel Finkelstein (University of Tel Aviv), Thomas Cahill (Seton Hall), Michael Coogan (Harvard Divinity), Niels Peter Lemche (Univ of Copenhagen), Philli Davies (University of Sheffield), Keith Whitelam (Univ of Sheffield), T.L. Thomsen (University Copenhagen),

² Leading **Maximalists:** James K Hoffmeier (TEDS), Kenneth A. Kitchen (Univ of Liverpool), Allen R. Millard (Univ of Liverpool), Donald J. Wiseman (Univ of London), Amnon Ben Tor (Heb Univ of Jerusalem), Amihai Mazar (Heb Univ of Jerusalem), Richard Hess (Denver Sem), Eilat Mazar (Shalem Center, Jerusalem)

³ Leading **Moderates:** William G. Dever (Univ of Arizona); P. Kyle McCarter (Johns Hopkins); Carol Meyers (Duke); Donald Redford.

⁴ For a detailed record of people in the Bible confirmed through archaeology, see <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/50-people-in-the-bible-confirmed-archaeologically/>

Outline of the Books of Samuel

1 Samuel

- I. The Ministry of Samuel (1 Samuel 1-8)**
 - a. The Desire of Hannah (1 Sam 1:1-23)
 - b. The Prayer of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10)
 - c. The contrast of the sinful sons of Eli vs. Samuel the prophet of God (1 Sam 2:12-3:21)
 - d. The defeat of Israel to the Philistines. Yahweh does not fight for Israel and the ark is taken (1 Sam 4:1-22)
 - e. The humbling of the Philistines and the return of the ark (1 Sam 5:1-7:2)
 - f. Samuel leads Israel in covenant renewal (1 Sam 7:3-17)
- II. The Reign of King Saul (1 Samuel 8-12)**
 - a. The Israelites reject Yahweh as king and sinfully request a king to be like the other nations (1 Sam 8:1-22)
 - b. The identification of Saul as a king like the other nations (1 Sam 9:1-11:15)
 - c. Samuel's words of warning to people for rejecting God (1 Sam 12)
 - d. The Failure of King Saul (1 Samuel 13-15)
 - i. War with Philistines (1 Sam 13:1-14:46)
 - ii. Summary of Saul's warfare (1 Sam 14:47-48)
 - iii. Saul's family (1 Sam 14:49-51)
 - iv. Saul is rejected (1 Sam 15)
- III. The Reign of King David (1 Samuel 16-31)**
 - a. David's anointing and rise to prominence (1 Sam 16:1-18:9)
 - b. Saul attempts to rid himself of David (1 Sam 18:10-30)
 - c. David's exile (1 Sam 19:1-31:13)

2 Samuel

- IV. King David's Expansion (2 Sam 1-10)**
 - a. David becomes king (2 Sam 1:1-5:5)
 - i. David is King over Judah
 - ii. David is King over all
 - b. David's successes (2 Sam 5:6-12:31)
 - i. Jerusalem is captured (2 Samuel 5:6-16)
 - ii. Victory over Philistines (2 Sam 5:17-25)
 - iii. The ark is brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam 5-6)
 - iv. The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7)
 - v. Territory expansion (2 Sam 8)
 - vi. Love to Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9)
 - vii. War with Ammon and Aram (2 Sam 10)
- V. David's great sin (2 Samuel 11-12)**
 - a. Sin with Bathsheba and cover up (2 Sam 11:1-27)
 - b. Short-term Consequences (2 Sam 12)
 - c. Long term Consequences (2 Sam 13-21:22)
 - i. Amnon and Absalom (2 Sam 13-19)
 - ii. Sheba's revolt (2 Sam 20)
- VI. Epilogue (2 Samuel 21-24) A Microcosm of David's reign.**
 - a. Gibeonite revenge (2 Sam 21:1-14)
 - b. Exploits of David's mighty men (2 Sam 21:15-22)
 - c. Theological summary (2 Sam 22:1-23:7) A Royal Thanksgiving Psalm
 - d. David's mighty men (2 Sam 23:8-39)
 - e. Census and Yahweh's wrath against David (2 Sam 24:1-25)

Recommended Resources on 1 & 2 Samuel for further study:

- **Commentaries:**
 - Richard Phillips, *1, 2 Samuel*, Reformed Expository Commentary series, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012)
 - Robert Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Teach the text series (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2013).
- **Books:**
 - Chuck Swindoll, “*David: A Man of Passion and Destiny.*” (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997).
- **Videos:**
 - The Bible Project overview of 1 and 2 Samuel:
 - 1 Samuel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJOju5Dw0V0>
 - 2 Samuel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvoWDXNDJgs>
 - Mark Dever, Overview sermons
 - 1 Samuel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4tNyw7TkwM>
 - 2 Samuel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdNYKzVHNnQ>
- **Courses:**
 - TGC course
 - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/1-2-samuel/#genre-setting>
 - Dallas Theological Seminary course on 1 Samuel
 - <https://courses.dts.edu/register/1-samuel/>