

# The Book of Samuel

Lesson 1

An Introduction to Samuel



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# The Book of Samuel

## Lesson One

### An Introduction to Samuel

#### INTRODUCTION

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At one time or another, most of us have known leaders who set out to do great and noble things, only to end in failure. When this happens, we're often left wondering what the future holds. In many ways, this is what happened to ancient Israelites who first received the Old Testament book that we now call 1 and 2 Samuel. They'd been told that King David's royal descendants would secure their nation and spread God's rule to the ends of the earth. But as time passed, David and his house failed, and many in Israel were left wondering what the future held. Led by the Spirit of God, the author of Samuel admitted that David and his descendants had brought many trials to Israel. But he wrote his book to reaffirm, in no uncertain terms, that David's house would still bring great blessings to Israel and spread the kingdom of God throughout the world.

This is the first lesson in our series on *The Book of Samuel*, and we've entitled it, "An Introduction to Samuel." In this lesson, we'll see how our book first called ancient Israelites to continue to hope in God's promises to the house of David. And we'll also see how it encourages us to place all of our hopes for the future of God's kingdom in Jesus, the great, perfectly righteous son of David.

Before we move forward, we should acknowledge that today, nearly all Christians refer to this part of the Bible not as one book, but as two. So, it may seem strange at first to speak of the *book* of Samuel. But the works of Origen in the third century and Jerome in the fourth century confirm that 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one undivided book. It was probably first divided into two books to fit the limitations of ancient scrolls in the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint. As far as we know, the first *Hebrew* text that divided Samuel into two books was published very late, sometime in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. For these reasons, we'll follow the ancient Hebrew practice and speak of the book — not *books* — of Samuel. We'll refer to our book as 1 and 2 Samuel only as we cite particular chapters and verses.

Our introduction to the book of Samuel will divide into three parts. First, we'll explore the background of our book. Who wrote it and when? Second, we'll look at its overarching design. How and why was Samuel written? And third, we'll consider the book's Christian application. What does this book mean for us today? Let's begin with some basic background issues that are essential for understanding the book of Samuel.

#### BACKGROUND

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We'll concentrate on three features of the background of our book: its authorship, the date when it was written, and the circumstances of God's people at that time. Let's look first at the authorship of Samuel.

## AUTHORSHIP

Following the testimony of Christ and his first-century apostles and prophets, Christians rightly believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the book of Samuel. So this portion of Scripture has divine authority over all of God's people throughout the ages, no matter who wrote it. But at the same time, the Holy Spirit inspired a human being to write this book so that it addressed the circumstances that he and other ancient Israelites faced in their day. The more we understand about this human author, the better we'll be able to grasp not only why God gave his people the book of Samuel, but also how God wants us to apply it to our lives today.

To explore the authorship of Samuel, we'll begin with ancient traditional outlooks. Then, we'll summarize mainstream modern critical outlooks. And lastly, we'll turn to a number of recent evangelical outlooks that will guide us in this lesson. Let's consider first the traditional outlooks on our book's authorship.

### Traditional Outlooks

Traditional ancient Jewish and Christian positions on the authorship of Samuel are represented in the *Babylonian Talmud*, a record of traditional rabbinic commentaries and teachings. In a series of questions and answers about various Old Testament books, in *Tractate Baba Bathra 14b*, we read these words:

**Samuel wrote the book which bears his name and the Book of Judges and Ruth.**

As we see here, ancient rabbis identified Samuel as the author of our book, along with the books of Judges and Ruth. This point of view reflects the ancient Jewish and Christian practice of associating Old Testament books with prominent prophetic figures.

Although the Talmud's claim was widely held in ancient times, there's little to no positive evidence to support this point of view. Now, we should mention that 1 Chronicles 29:29 refers to scrolls called the "Chronicles of Samuel the seer." But it's most likely that this passage refers to a non-canonical collection of Samuel's prophecies, much like the "Chronicles of Nathan" and the "Chronicles of Gad," also cited in the book of Chronicles. We must always keep in mind that 1 Samuel 25:1 dates the death of the prophet Samuel before a number of events that are reported later in 2 Samuel. So, while some materials from the "Chronicles of Samuel," or similar texts, may have been incorporated into our book, we can be confident that someone other than the prophet Samuel himself was the author of our book.

**One of the interesting things about the Old Testament is that so many of the books are anonymous. That's true of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel as well. We really don't know who the author is. We're given a clue in 1 Chronicles 29:29 that both Samuel and Nathan and Gad left written records of their prophetic ministry. So whoever put the books into their final form would have had access to original source**

**materials, even from Samuel himself. But since he died by about 1 Samuel 25, it's obvious he didn't complete both volumes that bear his name.**

— Dr. Herbert D. Ward

In our day, it's unusual to find anyone who affirms ancient traditional outlooks on the authorship of Samuel. Instead, many modern interpreters have promoted critical outlooks on this issue — positions widely held among modern scholars who reject the full authority of Scripture.

## Critical Outlooks

As we've discussed in other series, most recent critical interpreters have been deeply influenced by the perspectives of Martin Noth. Noth's book, *The Deuteronomistic History*, was first published in German in 1943. In it, Noth argued that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, excluding Ruth, were completed as a unified work by a scribe or group of scribes. Noth called this scribe or scribes, "the Deuteronomist." In his view, the Deuteronomist composed these books during the Babylonian exile. And this entire Deuteronomistic History had one main purpose. It was written to demonstrate that the judgment of exile that had come upon the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah was well deserved.

It's difficult to deny that these Old Testament books have similarities in their vocabulary, style and theological perspectives. So, by and large, critical scholars have affirmed Noth's central perspectives. But, more recently, a number of critical scholars have modified Noth's outlooks in a variety of ways. Most importantly, they've argued rightly that Noth failed to take into account the distinctive features of each individual book in the Deuteronomistic History.

We should also mention that Noth and other critical commentators have argued that the book of Samuel contains several identifiable, pre-existing literary sources. For example, some have argued that there was a separate source for the stories about Eli and Samuel in 1 Samuel 1–3. Others have claimed that we can reconstruct an underlying, independent ark narrative from the stories about the ark of the covenant in 1 Samuel 4–6. And some have attributed 2 Samuel 6 to this same source. Many interpreters have also argued that the final compiler of Samuel wove together pre-existing pro- and anti-monarchical stories in 1 Samuel 7–15. And other critical scholars have asserted that several succession stories appear in 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1, 2. In this view, this source originally explained why Solomon, rather than some other son of David, became the king of Israel.

While it's *possible* that these or similar hypothetical sources existed, we can't be certain that they did. And preoccupation with these matters has frequently led to serious misinterpretations of our book. All too often these viewpoints have reflected beliefs about the development of Israel's faith that are contrary to Scripture. And even more importantly, they've detracted from interpreting the book of Samuel as it now stands, as a whole, in the canon of Scripture.

So, scholars have looked at Deuteronomy through Kings, and they've seen something that's really there. They've seen that a lot of the phrases that start occurring in Deuteronomy are reused all through Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. There's just a load of language, terminology, concepts, a fund of, sort of, stock imagery and stock phrases that gets used and reused across these books. That's really there. The question is, how do we explain it? ... A way to approach the material that actually abides by and holds to what the texts themselves claim for themselves would be to look at this material and say, well, the book of Deuteronomy claims, at a number of places, that Moses is responsible for this material, and then these other texts, they all attest to the profound significance of Moses. So, I don't think it should surprise us when we find Moses using all this language in Deuteronomy, and then we find these later authors who come after Moses picking up the language and the concepts that they learn from Deuteronomy and essentially describing the world through what we might call the "lens" that is ground in the book of Deuteronomy. So, that's the way that I would explain this material. I think there's a better, more biblical way to account for all of this language and imagery that derives from Deuteronomy than the Deuteronomistic hypothesis. I think, more likely, Moses had the profound impact that the texts indicate he had, and then later biblical authors were deeply influenced by the way that he described things.

— Dr. James M. Hamilton

## Evangelical Outlooks

The hallmark of evangelical outlooks is that we shape our views on authorship, as much as possible, by the testimony of the Scriptures themselves. But nowhere does the book of Samuel, nor any other portion of the Old or New Testaments, identify our author. Our book is anonymous. So, we simply can't say with certainty who wrote the book of Samuel. Still, when we look at the content of our book, we can discern at least two important insights about its author.

In the first place, we should note that the author of Samuel was a compiler of sources. By this we mean that he didn't sit down and write his book *de novo*, or entirely from scratch. Rather, he composed his book by skillfully weaving together his own materials and earlier written sources. Now, we need to be careful to avoid the often highly-speculative views of critical scholars on these matters. But we know that other biblical historical books, like Kings and Chronicles, frequently cite written records that their authors consulted. And the same was true for our author.

At a minimum, 2 Samuel 1:18 refers explicitly to "the Book" — or scroll — "of Jashar" as a previously written source. Joshua 10:13 mentions this same source. In addition, the similarities between 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18 strongly suggest that our

author incorporated a well-known “Psalm of King David’s court” into his book. Moreover, the title that introduces 2 Samuel 23:1-7 as “The Last Words of David,” indicates that our author drew from pre-existing official records of David’s court. These examples indicate that, like a number of other biblical writers, the author of Samuel employed existing written sources as he composed his book.

Knowing that our author compiled various sources is important because it affects the interpretation of Samuel in a number of ways. For instance, it helps us understand several literary qualities of the book of Samuel. When we read our book, it’s difficult to deny that different passages represent significantly different literary styles. At least some of this stylistic variety probably resulted from our author drawing from different sources. More than this, his use of sources also explains why the storyline or plot of our book often doesn’t flow as smoothly as we may like. At times, our book appears quite disjointed. The use of sources also helps us understand why the book repeats similar materials on occasion.

Beyond this, our author’s reliance on written sources clarifies certain temporal references that appear in our book. On at least seven occasions, the book of Samuel mentions that certain circumstances continued to be true “to this day.” As we’ve seen in other series, this same expression occurs in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and Kings. And in some of these instances, such as in 1 Kings 8:8, the expression “to this day” clearly refers to the time of an earlier source, rather than to the time of the book’s final composition. For these and similar reasons, as we study the book of Samuel, we must always keep in mind that our author edited and incorporated previously written materials into his book.

In addition to acknowledging that the author of Samuel was a compiler of sources, we can also be confident that he was a leader in ancient Israel. We know that our author was no ordinary man simply from the fact that he had access to written materials like Scriptures, the Book of Jashar and royal court records. In ancient times, these kinds of texts were reserved only for high-ranking nobles and Levites. So, our author was most certainly among, or in direct service to, the leaders of Israel in his day.

Our author’s social status provides us with some important expectations as we explore the book of Samuel. For instance, it soon becomes evident that our author was a leader of Israel writing for other leaders of Israel. He didn’t write his book to be read directly by the average, individual Israelite. Literature was not widely published and distributed in ancient Israel. And even if the scrolls of Samuel had been widely available, most Israelites wouldn’t have been able to read them. It was the task of nobles, Levites, elders and other leaders to become familiar with his book and to disseminate and apply its contents to the lives of ordinary Israelites.

Beyond this, the fact that our author was a leader writing for other leaders also helps us appreciate the national interest of his book. Now, the book of Samuel certainly dealt with the kinds of challenges ordinary men, women and children faced on a daily basis. But, as a leader in Israel, our author was primarily concerned with national political and religious issues facing Israel as a whole. And we must orient our interpretation of his book toward these kinds of issues.

Having looked at the authorship of the book of Samuel, we should turn to a second dimension of its background: the date of its final composition. When was the book of Samuel written?



## DATE

We've already noted that interpreters have identified different historical time periods for the authorship of Samuel. Ancient Jews and Christians placed the date of our book very near the time of the events it reports, sometime in the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. By contrast, most modern critical scholars argue that our book reached its final form during the Babylonian exile. Now, it is not possible to identify precisely when the book of Samuel was completed. But, as with many Old Testament books, we can establish the earliest and latest possible dates for when our author completed his book.

Let's begin with the latest possible date that Samuel may have been written. The best way to determine this time limit is to note its place in what has been called Israel's Primary History. This is the history recorded in the books of Genesis through Kings, excluding the book of Ruth. Together, these books form an interlocking chain, as each book takes up where the preceding book ends.

The first five books — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy — come from the days of Moses and form the initial links in the chain of the Primary History. The rest of the books — Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings — form the subsequent Deuteronomistic portion of this history. These books depend heavily on the theological outlooks of the book of Deuteronomy. Joshua begins with Moses' death and continues through Joshua's death. The book of Judges takes us forward after Joshua's death. Samuel begins with the rise of the man Samuel as the last judge of Israel and ends with David's reign. The book of Kings picks up where Samuel ends, beginning with the death of David and ending with the Babylonian exile. Now, when we compare Samuel with the opening chapters of Kings, one thing becomes evident: The author of Kings knew the record of David's life as it was recorded in the book of Samuel. And this factor strongly suggests that Samuel had to have been completed before Kings was written.

This observation is important because we can be fairly certain of when the book of Kings was written. It closes in 2 Kings 25:27-30 with David's royal descendent, Jehoiachin, released from prison in Babylon in 561 B.C. In addition, the book of Kings doesn't acknowledge Israel's return from exile in Babylon in 538 B.C. For these reasons, we can be reasonably confident that Kings was written between 561 B.C. and 538 B.C. And because the book of Samuel was completed before the book of Kings, it's safe to conclude that the latest the book of Samuel could have been written was 538 B.C., before the end of the Babylonian exile.

**It's difficult to know exactly when 1 and 2 Samuel was written and when it reached its final form. But there are a few indications when we look at 1 and 2 Samuel in light of the entire Old Testament that could at least give us the latest possible date that it would have reached its final form. When we look at the book of 1 Chronicles it actually draws quite a bit from the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and assumes knowledge of that. And since 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles were written in the post-exilic era, when the exiles had returned back to Jerusalem, the most we could say is that it was certainly in its final form before then... But we also see other indications throughout Scripture of knowledge of different elements that we see in the books**

**of 1 and 2 Samuel. There's knowledge of the Davidic covenant that's reflected, say, in Psalm 89... So, there's certainly knowledge of traditions that we see within the books of 1 and 2 Samuel that seem that there's awareness of, certainly, during the time of the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic periods. But in terms of when the final form of the book came together, the most we can say is that it came together before the post-exilic era.**

— Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

With this latest possible date of the Babylonian exile in mind, we should turn to the earliest possible date when the book of Samuel could have been completed. As we'll see, the content of the book of Samuel strongly suggests that it could not have been written earlier than the period of the divided monarchy.

As Scripture tells us, in 930 B.C., Jeroboam I led the northern tribes of Israel in rebellion against the house of David. His rebellion led to the formation of the northern kingdom of Israel — or Ephraim as it was often called — alongside the southern kingdom of Judah. And on a number of occasions, the author of Samuel indicated that he was aware of this division of God's people into two kingdoms. For instance, 1 Samuel 11:8 distinguishes between “the people of Israel ... and the men of Judah.” 1 Samuel 18:16 comments that “all Israel and Judah loved David.” In a similar way, we read in 2 Samuel 5:5 that David reigned “over all Israel and Judah.” In 2 Samuel 12:8, God said that he had given David “Israel and ... Judah.” 2 Samuel 21:2 mentions Saul's “zeal for ... Israel and Judah.” And in 2 Samuel 24:1 we see all of the tribes described as “Israel and Judah.” The repetition of this distinction between Israel and Judah strongly suggests that the author of Samuel could not have written his book until after the division of Israel and Judah in 930 B.C.

When we take all of these factors into account, we can see that the earliest possible date for the completion of our book was sometime during the divided kingdom, after 930 B.C. And the latest likely date was sometime during the Babylonian exile, before 538 B.C.

So far, we've considered the authorship and date of the book of Samuel. Now, let's turn to another feature of its background: the circumstances facing God's people when our book was written.

## CIRCUMSTANCES

As a leader who had access to the Scriptures, the author of Samuel was very much aware that the circumstances he and his audience faced had led to a major crisis of faith. On the one side, he knew their history. God had commissioned Adam and Eve, and later Noah, to fill the earth in service to him. God had called Abraham and his descendants to take the lead in fulfilling this global mission. In addition, God had appointed Moses to unite his people and place them in the land from which God's kingdom would extend throughout the world. And more than this, God had established David and his house as the permanent dynasty over Israel that would lead them in carrying out their purpose.

But on the other side, when the author of Samuel wrote his book, the circumstances God's people faced didn't fit easily with the hopes they'd placed in David's house. To be sure, there was plenty of blame to go around for the terrible state of Israel during both the divided monarchy and the Babylonian exile. But the Scriptures place the blame squarely on the sins of David's house, especially on its idolatry and failure to remain faithful to God. Passages like 1 Kings 11:29-40 and 12:1-24, place the weight of responsibility for the divided monarchy directly on the house of David. And passages like 2 Kings 20:12-19 and 21:10-15 indicate that the Babylonian exile also resulted primarily from the failures of David's house.

The failures of David's house shook the faith of God's people to the core. As God's judgments crushed their hopes, they wondered how they could continue to trust in the house of David. Perhaps God had turned his back on David's descendants. Perhaps they had been wrong all along. And it was in these troubling circumstances that God called the author of Samuel to write his book. He wrote to renew Israel's hope in the house of David.

Now that we've looked at the background of the book of Samuel, we should turn to the second main topic of our lesson: the design of our book. How did the author of Samuel shape his book? How did he intentionally arrange its content to address the circumstances that he and his original audience faced? And what kind of hope did his book offer God's people?

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## DESIGN

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As we approach the design of the book of Samuel, we must keep in mind that our author stood, as it were, between two worlds. The world of the events he described and the world in which he and his original audience lived. He devoted himself to giving a true account of what had happened in the past. But he also devoted himself to writing about the past in ways that addressed the people of Israel in his day. Unfortunately, evangelical interpreters often fail to make this distinction as they handle the book of Samuel. So, before we go any further, we should take a moment to unpack these two influences on the design of our book.

On the one side, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author of Samuel was determined to give his audience a true account of what had taken place long before he wrote his book. He wrote about what we'll call "that world," the world of historical events reported in his book. The first event he reported was Samuel's birth in 1 Samuel 1:1-28. Biblical and archeological evidences indicate that Samuel was born sometime around 1070 B.C.

And the last historical event he reported recounts David's last words in 2 Samuel 23:1-7. This speech was most likely one of David's final, official royal declarations, delivered near his death around 970 B.C. So, the book of Samuel gives an account of approximately one century of Israel's history, from around 1070 B.C. to around 970 B.C.

It would be difficult to overestimate how important this century was in the development of God's kingdom in Old Testament times. It was a period of major

transition in Israel. When Samuel was born, Israel was in disarray under the failing leadership of judges and Levites. But by the time David delivered his last words, God had established David and his descendants as the permanent dynasty over all the tribes of Israel. The author of Samuel designed his book to explain how a number of crucial events led to these dramatic changes in Israel.

As we've just said, the events recorded in the book of Samuel were all part of what we've called "that world." But on the other side, the author of Samuel was also determined to address the time and circumstances in which he and his original audience lived. We'll call this "their world," the world of the author and his audience, long after the historical period reported in his book. Whether during the divided monarchy or the Babylonian exile, our author wrote of what had happened in "that world" to teach God's people its significance for "their world." And this goal deeply shaped the design of his book. Rather than writing a stark, detached record of the past, he composed his account so that it would speak to the challenges facing his immediate audience.

Like other biblical authors, the author of Samuel did this in three main ways. First, he provided his original audience with historical backgrounds — the historical origins of the realities they faced in their own day. Second, he described characters in his book to give his audience models to emulate or reject. And, third, he wrote about a number of events in "that world" that showed how they were foreshadows of his audience's experiences in "their world." In this way, he provided guidance for the challenges his original audience faced.

We'll explore the design of our book in two steps. First, we'll introduce its large-scale structure and content. And second, we'll see how this structure and content reveals our author's overarching purpose for his book. Let's begin with an overview of the structure and content of the book of Samuel.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The book of Samuel is so complex that it's easy to become lost in its many details — so lost that we fail to see how highly selective it is and how skillfully it was arranged. In reality, the author of Samuel only wrote about a few people and events, and he carefully arranged them to accomplish his goals. The more we're aware of these features of our book, the better we'll be able to understand its original meaning and how we are to apply it to our lives today.

Broadly speaking, the Spirit of God led the author of our book to focus on three main characters: Samuel, Saul and David. And he also led our author to draw out a number of logical connections among these characters. Our author began with the fact that God had ordained Samuel as the one who brought Israel into the age of kingship. Then he concentrated on how Saul had failed as Israel's first king. And finally, he demonstrated that God had established David's kingship and dynasty as the instrument to strengthen and spread his kingdom. Together these three divisions reveal our author's coherent assessment of how God brought Israel from the period of the judges to the period of David's monarchy.

**The literary structure of 1 and 2 Samuel is really revolving around the three kings, or I should say, the three personalities. Samuel is the key figure ... then Saul becomes the key figure. David comes into the scene ... but Saul continues to be the main figure as he chases David around the country, and finally at the end of 1 Samuel, he is killed and 2 Samuel then is built around David. So, it's really those three figures that gives the structure to the two books.**

— Dr. John Oswalt

With these highlights of our book in mind, we can see that, on a large scale, the book of Samuel was written in three main divisions: Samuel's prelude to kingship in 1 Samuel 1–7; Saul's failed kingship in 1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1; and David's enduring kingship in 2 Samuel 2–24. Let's look first at Samuel's prelude to kingship.

### **Samuel's Prelude to Kingship (1 Samuel 1–7)**

From the outset, it's important to note that our author idealized Samuel. That is to say, he hailed him as a miraculous gift from God and as a man of exemplary moral character. According to our book, Samuel was so ideal that God not only blessed Samuel himself, but all of Israel through him. Of course, both our author and his original audience knew from Scripture and common experience that Samuel was a sinner. So, we can be confident that they were aware of the complexities of Samuel's moral character. But, rather than pointing out Samuel's faults, our author intentionally elevated Samuel and his service to God. He did this to stress why God sent, equipped and approved of Samuel as the one who introduced kingship to Israel, first by anointing Saul and then by anointing David.

*Samuel's Earlier Years (1 Samuel 1:1–2:11).* This highly idealized portrait of Samuel divides into two main sections. First, we find a record of Samuel's earlier years, from his birth until he was weaned, in 1 Samuel 1:1–2:11. In these chapters, our author stressed that Samuel's birth was God's miraculous answer to the prayers of his pious mother, and that he marked a new day for Israel.

The book of Samuel begins with a man named Elkanah who had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had many children, but Hannah was barren, so Peninnah was cruel to Hannah. In her grief, Hannah prayed and vowed that if God gave her a son, she would give him to the Lord's service for the rest of his life. And God miraculously answered her prayer.

When Samuel was born, Israel was lost in the futility of the time of the judges, a period characterized by chaos and depravity. But with Samuel's arrival, there was good reason to believe that God was about to send Israel a king. We see this hope in 2:10, where Hannah closed her praise to God for Samuel's birth with these words:

**The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give**

strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed (1 Samuel 2:10).

At a time when Israel faced internal disarray and trouble from foreign invaders, Hannah displayed remarkable faith. The miraculous birth of Samuel assured her that “the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces” and that God “will thunder in heaven” against them. And beyond this, Hannah was confident that God “will judge the ends of the earth.” He will spread his royal authority beyond Israel’s borders by judging all nations. But notice also *how* Hannah believed God was going to extend his kingdom throughout the world. It was by giving “strength to his *king*” and by exalting “the horn of his anointed” in victory over his enemies. Prior to the time of Samuel, Israel had never had a human king. But through Hannah’s words of praise, our author introduced Samuel’s most significant contribution to the history of Israel. From his birth, Samuel had been called by God to usher Israel into the age of kingship.

***Transition in Leadership (1 Samuel 2:12–7:17).*** The second section of Samuel’s prelude to kingship appears in 2:12–7:17, where we find an account of the transition in leadership from Eli and his sons to Samuel. Eli and his sons, as well as Samuel, were all from the tribe of Levi. Now, the last chapters of the book of Judges tell us that, around this time, a number of Levites were unfaithful to God and led Israel into disobedience to God’s law. And this was certainly true of Eli and his sons who served before the ark of the covenant in Shiloh. But the transition of leadership to Samuel represented a new day for Israel. Our author made it clear in these chapters that God himself decreed the transition of this central Levitical authority. Samuel’s humble, righteous service to God led to his exaltation as the most prominent Levitical prophet in all of Israel. And once Samuel came to this position, he brought the nation of Israel into a new period of its history, the period of kingship.

**The book of Judges is an interesting book where it talks about at any given time God raising up a judge who becomes like a leader to lead the Israelites in times of war, in times of settling disputes among them and so on. But with Samson being the last judge leading to the book of Samuel, it’s that there wasn’t any judge at that time during the time of Samuel. So it was like a nation without a leader at that time. But with the book of Samuel coming in, it talks about how Samuel was born and then became the leader of the Israelites, in that sense somewhat becoming a judge like the previous judges, to be able to lead them to war, to be able to settle disputes and other things.**

— Rev. Dr. Humphrey Akogyeram

After presenting Samuel’s prelude to kingship in 1 Samuel 1–7, the author of Samuel turned to Saul’s failed kingship in 1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1.



## Saul's Failed Kingship (1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1)

On the whole, our author set up a striking contrast between Samuel and Saul by offering a remarkably negative characterization of Saul. Now, we know from Scripture and experience that God grants common grace even to the worst of sinners so that their lives are not in utter ruins. And our author admitted that God had chosen Saul, and that Samuel had anointed him as king. He also noted that God had blessed Saul with support from all the tribes of Israel and with military victories early in his reign. However, our author focused *primarily* on why Samuel ended his support for Saul and began to oppose him. Saul repeatedly rebelled against God, and divine judgment came against him and his family. Saul's sins were so great that an evil spirit drove him to madness, and he relentlessly pursued David and troubled the people of Israel without just cause. This negative characterization of Saul demonstrated to the original audience of Samuel that their hope for God's glorious worldwide kingdom was not in Saul's family. For that matter, their hope for the future should not be in any king other than the one whom God endorsed as Saul's replacement, namely David.

***Saul's Earlier Years (1 Samuel 8–15).*** On a large scale, Saul's failed kingship divides into two main sections that parallel the divisions of Samuel's prelude to kingship. It deals first with Saul's earlier years, in 1 Samuel 8–15, before David became a factor in Saul's life.

In brief, these chapters focus on how Saul became king with Samuel's support, united the tribes of Israel, and led them in some significant victories over Israel's enemies. But it wasn't long before Saul turned from God and brought troubles to himself and Israel. In fact, he violated the law of Moses and Samuel's prophetic instructions so flagrantly that God commanded Samuel to reject him and his entire lineage from kingship. Listen to 1 Samuel 15:28-29 where we read Samuel's declaration of judgment against Saul and his family:

Samuel said to [Saul], “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret” (1 Samuel 15:28-29).

As we see here, God didn't just temporarily tear the kingdom of Israel from Saul. As Samuel declared, God was going to give it “to a neighbor . . . who [was] better than [Saul].” And God — “the Glory of Israel” — was not like a man, “that he should have regret,” or that he should “repent,” as it is often translated. No matter what happened in the future, God would never reverse his rejection of Saul's house. And he would never reverse his decision to give the throne of Israel to another — that is, to David.

***Transition in Leadership (1 Samuel 16–2 Samuel 1).*** After reporting Saul's earlier years in this way, our author moved to the second major section of Saul's failed kingship, the transition in leadership that took place in 1 Samuel 16–2 Samuel 1.

Much like God endorsed the transition of Levitical authority from Eli and his sons to Samuel, God endorsed the transition of royal authority from Saul to David. In a

number of encounters between Saul and David, it became clear that Saul deserved God's disfavor. He came under the influence of an evil spirit and drifted into madness. He repeatedly abused his royal authority. He unjustly sought David's death. And in the last scenes of his life, Saul even consulted the dead. As a result, Saul and his sons died in battle with the Philistines. But throughout this time, God blessed David. David remained innocent and responded to God's mercy with humility toward Saul and faithfulness to God. By contrasting Saul and David in these ways, the author of Samuel demonstrated, beyond doubt, that God had utterly rejected Saul and that he had raised David up to replace Saul as the king of Israel.

**King Saul and King David were very different, and to me the main difference really is that one epitomizes what it means to have been a bad king and the other what it means to have been a good king. Saul fit all the outward expectations of what a great king would be. He is described as coming from a family of standing. He was described as standing a head taller than everyone else in the nation of Israel. So, he fit all the outward expectations, but he failed, unfortunately, miserably in various ways as the king of God's people... He showed how he feared men rather than God. They particularly were ordered by God to destroy a city, and they went in there and they won the battle with God's help, but they saved some of the plunder for themselves, the men, the soldiers did. And King Saul allowed that... And Samuel made clear to him that, as a result, the kingdom was going to be taken away from him. King David is very different, on the other hand. It's interesting to me how Samuel later goes to Jesse's house, another family in Israel, and God has sent him there to anoint the next king of Israel. So, Samuel has Jesse bring his sons in to see each of them and to see which one God would call. Well, Jesse brings seven of his sons but leaves the youngest son, David, out of the picture. And he's simply out in the fields shepherding the sheep. But Samuel, even when he sees the oldest, Eliab, falls into the same trap of believing in the outward appearance. He sees how tall he is, and apparently he had a kingly bearing, and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here." But God said, "Don't look at the outward appearance. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." God didn't choose any of those brothers. They finally had to go and get the youngest, David, out from the fields, and God made clear that this was the one.**

— Dr. Doug Falls

## **David's Enduring Kingship (2 Samuel 2–24)**

Having seen how the book of Samuel begins with Samuel's prelude to kingship and continues with Saul's failed kingship, we should turn to our book's last division:



David's enduring kingship.

As we've seen, our author highlighted Saul's failures to explain why God rejected Saul and his lineage from the throne of Israel. By comparison, however, the characterization of David in the book of Samuel is much more balanced. It gives a lot of attention to David's positive qualities and his accomplishments, such as his victories in battle and his humility before God. But it also openly acknowledges David's serious moral failures and the troubles he brought to his house and to Israel. Still, despite David's failures, our author insisted that God greatly favored David. And, because of God's favor, David's dynasty will endure to lead the expansion of God's kingdom throughout the world.

The record of David's enduring kingship is found in 2 Samuel 2–24. This is by far the longest portion of our book, and it breaks with the pattern of the first two divisions. It divides into three lengthy sections: David's earlier years of blessings in chapters 2–9, his later years of curses in chapters 10–20, and a summary of the ongoing benefits of David's reign in chapters 21–24.

***Earlier Blessings (2 Samuel 2–9).*** The section on David's earlier years of blessings reports how David rose as king over all Israel after Saul's death, first in Hebron and then in Jerusalem. Throughout these chapters God blessed David and Israel in response to David's faithfulness to him. David achieved many victories over Israel's enemies. And although there was rebellion against David within Israel, his support increased, even from some who had served Saul and his house. The pinnacle of David's earlier years of blessings was God's promise that David would be the head of Israel's permanent royal family. Listen to what God said to David through the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:16:

Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

Here, in direct contrast with God's permanent rejection of Saul and his family, God solemnly promised that David's house and kingdom will be made sure and his throne will be established. And twice, God affirmed that this would be true "forever" — *ad olam* (עַד-עוֹלָם) in Hebrew.

Now, elsewhere in chapter 7, God warned that if David's royal sons turned from him, he would punish them for a period of time. And this threat was dramatically fulfilled in Judah's exile. But God blessed David with the promise that his house would never be utterly cut off. It would endure, no matter what happened in the future.

***Later Curses (2 Samuel 10–20).*** Following these earlier years of blessings, the second portion of David's enduring kingship reports his later years of curses in 2 Samuel 10–20. These chapters are well known because they include David's worst abuses of his royal power: his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his killing of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite. Because of these abuses, God cursed David through the death of Bathsheba's first son. But God also responded to David's sincere repentance with mercy, even as he warned that troubles would come upon David's kingdom. And indeed they did. David's family and the entire nation of Israel suffered throughout David's life because of his sin. Still, as we read in 2 Samuel 12:24-25, even in this portion of David's

reign, God did not break his promise of an enduring dynasty for David. Listen to this passage:

[Bathsheba] gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah (2 Samuel 12:24-25, NIV).

“Solomon” was the throne name of David’s son, meaning “a man of peace.” But, through the prophet Nathan, the Lord gave him the personal name “Jedidiah,” meaning “beloved by Yahweh,” “because the Lord loved him.” God’s special love for Solomon confirmed that God’s favor would continue toward David and his royal lineage.

*Ongoing Benefits (2 Samuel 21–24).* After describing David’s positive early years and his troubled later years, the author of Samuel gave his audience a summary of the ongoing benefits of David’s reign in 2 Samuel 21–24. Many interpreters have called this summary an “appendix” to the book of Samuel. It consists of events that took place at various times in David’s reign and arranges them topically rather than chronologically.

In these chapters, we learn that God gave special revelations through David that confirmed the secure future of his dynasty for all time. God also gave him mighty warriors who accomplished great victories. And God ordained David as the king whose intercessions won forgiveness and healing for the entire nation. These positive achievements appear at the end of David’s reign to leave a lasting impression on the original audience of our book. Despite the troubles that David and his descendants had brought to Israel, the benefits associated with David’s reign were not lost. God’s favor toward David throughout his life demonstrated the kinds of blessings that righteous kings from the house of David could still bring to Israel. The author of Samuel brought this theme forward in 2 Samuel 22:51. There, David said these words:

Great salvation [God] brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever (2 Samuel 22:51).

This verse alludes to 1 Samuel 2:10. You’ll recall that early in our book, our author recorded Hannah’s confidence that God “will judge the ends of the earth” by exalting “his king” and giving victory to “his anointed.” Here, in 2 Samuel 22:51, David echoed Hannah’s confidence by saying that God brings great salvation — meaning great deliverance through victory in battle. And this deliverance will come to “his king” as God “shows steadfast love to his anointed.” But David’s praise went one step beyond Hannah’s praise. He identified the recipients of God’s deliverance and steadfast love as “David and his offspring.” And he declared that they will receive these blessings “forever.”

Our overview of the structure and content of the book of Samuel leads us to a second feature of its design: the overarching purpose of our book. How did our author hope to impact his original audience?

## OVERARCHING PURPOSE

When authors create books as long and complex as the book of Samuel, they have countless goals. They shape their books to inform their readers, to change their readers' behaviors, and to influence their emotions in different ways. And the book of Samuel is no exception. The smaller portions of our book raised myriads of specific issues that had implications for the lives of its original audience. But at the same time, the author of Samuel wove every smaller portion of his book together with a unified, overarching purpose in mind.

Our author's overarching purpose can be summarized in many ways, but in this series, we'll put it this way:

**The author of Samuel explained how Israel's transition to kingship culminated in God's covenant with David so that Israel would put their hopes for the kingdom of God in the righteous rule of David's house.**

As this summary points out, on a large scale our author's purpose was twofold. On the one side, he focused on how Israel's transition to kingship culminated in God's covenant with David. On the other side, he wrote so that Israel would put their hopes for the kingdom of God in the righteous rule of David's house. Let's unpack both sides of our author's purpose.

As we said earlier, the book of Samuel highlights what we've called "that world" — the century in which God led Israel from the period of the judges to the period of kingship. Sadly, throughout the Old Testament, ancient Israelites often strayed from the ways of God because they forgot what God had done for them in the past. And knowing this, our author was careful to give his original audience a true, fully reliable record of the past.

Needless to say, it would have been impossible for our author to report everything that had taken place during the century of Israel's transition toward kingship. So, he chose to concentrate on the lifetimes of three main leaders in Israel: Samuel, Saul and David. And he dealt with the lives of these three men to establish a crucial historical fact for the nation of Israel.

As our purpose summary explains, all of the events in the lives of Samuel, Saul and David culminated in God's covenant with David. It was not until God made his covenant with David that the transition to kingship was complete.

In other series we've explained in detail how the Scriptures teach that God administered every stage of his kingdom on earth through covenants. God made covenants with all of humanity in Adam and Noah. He made covenants with the people of Israel in Abraham, Moses and David. And Old Testament prophets predicted that, after Israel's exile ended, God would make a new covenant with his people. Each of these covenants had different emphases that were appropriate for the times in which they were made. So, as each covenant incorporated the policies of earlier covenants, they also applied those earlier policies in new ways.

Still, in one way or another, all of God's covenants were initiated and sustained by divine benevolence. They all required grateful human loyalty in response to God's

benevolence. And they all revealed the consequences of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

By and large, interpreters agree that Nathan’s prophecy, in 2 Samuel 7:1-17, was the occasion when God made his covenant with David. The term “covenant” — *berith* (בְּרִית) in Hebrew — doesn’t appear in this passage. But Nathan delivered these words to David at the pinnacle of his earlier years of blessings, and they present the basic policies of God’s covenant with David. In addition, near the end of our book, the author of Samuel referred explicitly to God’s covenant with David. Listen to 2 Samuel 23:5 where David said these words:

For [God] has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure (2 Samuel 23:5).

As David put it here, God made an “everlasting covenant” with him — *berith olam* (בְּרִית עוֹלָם) in Hebrew. This covenant would never end. It was “ordered in all things” so that it would be absolutely “secure.” In other words, God’s covenant with David *guaranteed* that his house would rule over Israel forever. As Psalms 89, 132 also indicate, from this time forward, David’s dynasty was a permanent feature of God’s kingdom.

**God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 is of great significance for redemptive history. This is a pivotal chapter in understanding the history of redemption in general... We see in this chapter what is called the Davidic covenant. It’s a very important covenant in which we see a new perspective on the Savior, that this Savior will be the son of David. The term “son of David” is not an ordinary term in Scripture. Each time you see “son of David,” it’s necessary to remember the word “king.” David was the king, and in this chapter, the Lord promised him that his son would sit on the throne, the throne of the kingdom, forever. One of David’s offspring would be the king forever on David’s throne.**

— Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim, translation

God showed benevolence to David and his house by establishing them as Israel’s permanent dynasty, but God also required their loyal service. As a result, they were subject to the consequences of God’s blessings for their obedience and his curses for their disobedience. Listen to 2 Samuel 7:14-15 and the qualification in God’s covenant with David regarding Solomon, the first heir of David’s throne:

When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you (2 Samuel 7:14-15).

Psalms 89, 132 contain similar attention to God’s requirement of loyalty from

David's descendants. But in *this* passage we see that God will discipline the house of David when it falls into iniquity. He will afflict David's house "with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men"; in other words, with troubles from their enemies.

Still, with the establishment of God's covenant with David, a new day had come. As God said here, his "steadfast love will not depart" from the house of David, "as [he] took it from Saul." So, although God utterly rejected Saul and his descendants from the throne of Israel, he made it clear that he would never do the same to the house of David. Despite the troubles that David and his sons brought to Israel, David's dynasty would represent the people of Israel before God forever.

As we've just seen, our author presented God's covenant with David as the culmination of Israel's transition to the period of kingship. Now let's turn to the second half of his overarching purpose. He wrote his book so that Israel would put their hopes for the kingdom of God in the righteous rule of David's house.

**The literary purpose of the book of Samuel was to show that Israel could have confidence in the Davidic line, regardless of its problems, despite the suffering that the infidelity of David's household had brought to Israel. The author wanted to show that David and his household had been chosen by God to be the reigning dynasty, and then, through his book, to show that Israel should have confidence in David's line, even in spite of the failures of the Davidic dynasty.**

— Dr. David Correa, translation

We know from earlier in this lesson that the author of Samuel wrote about "that world" of the past to address the challenges facing his original audience in "their world." And whether they lived during the divided kingdom or during the Babylonian exile, one thing was obvious. Throughout these centuries, God poured out many curses on his people because of the sins of David's house. They suffered division, economic hardships, sickness, and defeat in war. And eventually, the people of God and the house of David were exiled from the Promised Land.

These troubles raised serious questions for the leaders of Israel. What were they to do? Where should they turn for help? Many of them simply lost all hope for brighter days. Others relied on themselves, on other gods, on alliances with other nations, on new royal families — on anything but the failed house of David. But the author of Samuel insisted that there was only one response that was acceptable to God.

To begin with, they were not to lose their hopes for the kingdom of God. Although the troubles the original audience endured made this very difficult for many in Israel, our author strongly reaffirmed that God's kingdom would not fail.

From the earliest times, God had revealed that history will reach its ultimate destiny when he establishes his reign over all the earth through the faithful service of human beings. Moses taught this foundational belief in his account of God's covenant with Adam. As the image of God, Adam and Eve were commissioned to fill the earth and subdue it, to extend the wonder of God's garden in Eden throughout the world. In his covenant with Noah, God reaffirmed this commission. It was the privilege and

responsibility of God's faithful people living in the fallen world to subdue the earth and fill it with his images. In his covenant with Abraham, God revealed that the people of Israel were the one family on earth chosen to lead the rest of humanity in turning the world into God's kingdom. In his covenant with Moses, God made the twelve tribes of Israel into a nation and placed them in the Promised Land. This land was the homeland from which they would extend the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth. And in his covenant with David, God established the house of his royal family that would lead the nation of Israel toward this grand destiny.

But when the author of Samuel wrote his book, many in Israel struggled to believe in God's promises to David. The people of Israel were facing devastating curses from God, and these troubles had come upon them through none other than the house of David. So, it's no wonder that, in the opening pages of his book, the author of Samuel reported Hannah's confidence about the future of the kingdom of God. Listen again to Hannah's praise in 1 Samuel 2:10:

The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed (1 Samuel 2:10).

Hannah had not lost hope for the worldwide reign of God. She looked at what God was doing in her day and was confident that, "The Lord will judge the ends of the earth." And she believed this because she knew that God "will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed" with great victories.

Throughout his book, the author of Samuel called on his original audience to follow Hannah's example. They were not to give up hope. Despite the trials they faced, Israel was to renew their confidence that the kingdom of God will spread throughout the world through God's king, his anointed one.

Now, there's a crucial qualification that the book of Samuel reveals about this hope for the kingdom of God. As our summary puts it, Israel's hope must be placed in the righteous rule of David's house. Our author insisted that the future of God's kingdom was in David's house and in no other. But more than this, God had ordained that this glorious future was in the righteous rule of David's house.

As we've already noted, our author explained that God's covenant with David was the culmination of Israel's transition into the period of kingship. And this covenant established that no matter what the sons of David did, no matter how far they turned from God, God would not replace David's dynasty with another. When we keep in view how much trouble the failures of one son of David after another caused the original audience, we can understand why the author of Samuel had to stress this conviction. How could anyone in Israel, even the most faithful, believe that this royal family would lead them anywhere but into more suffering under God's judgment? Still, the author of Samuel insisted that Israel should not turn to the kings of other nations and serve their false gods. Israel was not even to turn to other kings within Israel — not to Saul's descendants, not to the many kings who ruled over the northern kingdom, not to *anyone* except kings who came from the house of David.

Of course, this confidence in David's dynasty didn't mean that God would pour out blessings on his people and spread his kingdom to the ends of the earth through *any*



king from David's house. Not at all. The author of Samuel made it clear that David himself fell under God's curses when he violated God's law. Moreover, our author and his original audience knew that the troubles of the divided kingdom and the exile had come upon them because of the failures of David's sons. So, our author insisted that Israel must have a son of David who followed God's commands — a son of David who ruled in *righteousness*. Listen to the way our author revealed Israel's hope in 2 Samuel 23:3-5. In "The Last Words of David," we read:

The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth. For does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure (2 Samuel 23:3-5).

Here, David began by introducing the certainty of what he had to say. These words were not his opinion. Rather, they came from "the God of Israel," "the Rock of Israel." And David went on to declare that Israel should long for a king who would bring God's blessings to them. As he put it, such a king will be "like the morning light" after the long night of darkness, "like the sun shining forth" when there are no clouds in the sky, and "like rain" that causes plants to flourish. And where could they find such a king? David answered: "Does not *my house* stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant."

Because of God's everlasting covenant with David, there was no possibility of God's blessings for Israel apart from the house of David. But these blessings would not come through just any representative of David's house. There was only one kind of king from David's house who could lead Israel out of their suffering and into God's blessings. As David put it, he must be one who "rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God." Only a righteous king would bring Israel into the wonders of God's mercy again. So, the only hope that Israel had for the outpouring of God's blessings was the rule of David's righteous son.

So far in our introduction to the book of Samuel we've explored some important facets of the book's background and design. Now we'll turn to the third main topic of our lesson: Christian application of the book of Samuel.

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## CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

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As we've seen, the author of Samuel wrote his book at a time when ancient Israelites were suffering under God's judgment — either during the divided monarchy or during the Babylonian exile. And he primarily designed it so that Israel's leaders would guide the people to put their hopes in David's royal family. Of course, recognizing our author's purpose helps us understand many features of his book. But all too often, when students of Scripture first begin to focus on the original orientation of the book of

Samuel, they find it difficult to apply it to their Christian faith. We live in a different situation than those who first received the book. We're bound to God by the new covenant in Christ. And God's people are now spread out among all the nations of the earth. So what relevance does the book of Samuel have for us? As New Testament believers, what paths should we follow as we apply the book of Samuel?

There are many ways to answer these questions about Christian application of the book of Samuel. But, time will only permit us to mention two biblical teachings that associate the book's original meaning with our New Testament faith. First, we'll consider the biblical concept of divine covenants, and second, we'll explore the concept of the kingdom of God. Let's begin with divine covenants.

## **DIVINE COVENANTS**

Earlier in this lesson, we mentioned that the author of Samuel was familiar with five major divine covenants that God had already established in biblical history. These were God's covenants with all of humanity in Adam and Noah and his special covenants with Israel in Abraham, Moses and David. He was also aware that Israel's prophets predicted another covenant — a covenant of renewal that God would make with his people after the end of Israel's exile. We often describe this covenant as the “new covenant.” This future covenant was mentioned explicitly during the divided monarchy in Hosea 2:18, as well as later in passages like Isaiah 54:10 and Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26.

### **Samuel's Prelude to Kingship (1 Samuel 1–7)**

Now, the first division of Samuel — Samuel's prelude to kingship — doesn't use the word “covenant.” But our author presented every event in this division in terms of the covenant God made with Moses at Mount Sinai. In brief, Moses' covenant focused on the dynamics of God's benevolence toward Israel as a nation living in the Promised Land. It spelled out the requirements of human loyalty for the nation according to the law of Moses. And it drew attention to the consequences of curses and blessings that would come to the nation in response to their disobedience and obedience.

As we'll see in later lessons, in Samuel's prelude to kingship, our author concentrated specifically on God's benevolence in raising up Samuel as Israel's new leader. He also upheld the standard of Moses' law for human loyalty, especially Moses' regulations for worship. And he spelled out the consequences of curses and blessings for disobedience and obedience to these standards. He explained how God's curses fell on Eli's family because of their disobedience and how their disobedience brought curses on the nation of Israel. And he also spelled out how God's blessings came to Hannah and Samuel for their obedience to Moses' regulations for worship and how their actions led to blessings for Israel.



## Saul's Failed Kingship (1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1)

Beyond this, our author also appealed to God's covenant in Moses in the second division of his book — Saul's failed kingship. As we'll discuss more in the lessons that follow, in this portion of our book, God showed Israel benevolence by granting their request for a king. Our author broadened his focus on the requirements of human loyalty to include, not only Moses' regulations for *worship*, but also his regulations against the abuse of royal authority in Israel. Here, our author revealed God's curses against Saul for his blatant disobedience and documented how Saul's actions led to curses on Israel. He also highlighted God's blessings on David for his humble obedience and described how David's actions led to blessings on the nation of Israel.

## David's Enduring Kingship (2 Samuel 2–24)

In the third division of Samuel — David's enduring kingship — our author highlighted God's covenant with David. In this covenant, God realigned the dynamics of his covenant in Moses to demonstrate the new centrality of David and his dynasty. As we'll see more clearly in our next lessons, our author drew attention to the fact that God showed Israel great benevolence by establishing David's house as Israel's permanent dynasty. Of course, the standards of Moses' law were still in effect, especially his regulations for worship and kingship. So, our author continued his focus on the requirement of human loyalty in Moses' regulations for worship and his restrictions against the abuse of royal authority. But God's establishment of David's house as Israel's permanent royal family deeply affected how God implemented the consequences of his covenants. From that time forth, David and his house represented all twelve tribes of Israel before God. And, as a result, the curses and blessings that Israel received depended heavily on the disobedience and obedience of David's house.

Our author's attention to the dynamics of God's covenants in Moses and David provides essential connections between the book of Samuel and the Christian faith. We've explained these connections in more detail in other series, but it will help us to summarize them here. According to New Testament teachings, the new covenant realigns the dynamics of God's earlier covenants by focusing on the special role that Jesus plays in biblical history. As the final, righteous heir of David's throne, Jesus was the demonstration of God's greatest benevolence to his people at a time of terrible trouble. Jesus fulfilled every standard for human loyalty throughout his life of suffering and in his death on the cross. And because of his perfect obedience, Jesus received endless blessings from the Father in his resurrection and ascension.

**God promised David in 2 Samuel 7 a great and wonderful promise that had tremendous significance because it shaped all of redemptive history afterwards... This promise anticipated Jesus Christ who descended from David and built the greater temple, not a temple made of stone, but the temple of God's people, the church... And this Jesus Christ, who descended from David, rose from the dead and is reigning over David's kingdom forever. Thus, the promise in 2**

**Samuel 7 was far reaching and shaped the rest of the Old Testament, as well as the perspective of the New Testament, which states more than once, in crucial places, that Jesus Christ is the offspring of David.**

— Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail, translation

So, just as the book of Samuel acknowledges the crucial covenant roles of Israel's leaders, Samuel, Saul and David, we must acknowledge Christ as the perfect mediator of the new covenant. The book of Samuel gives many examples of Israel's leaders both disobeying and obeying God's requirement of human loyalty. But as the great son of David, Jesus stands in utter contrast to every example of disobedience in the book of Samuel. Moreover, Jesus' incomparable perfection far exceeds every example of obedience in the book of Samuel. This is why the New Testament calls on us to place all of our hopes in Jesus. Jesus will most certainly deliver every true believer from the everlasting curses that God will pour out in the final judgment. And Jesus will grant every true believer the everlasting blessings that God will bestow in the final judgment.

In addition, the book of Samuel also points to the dynamics of God's covenants in the daily lives of every ancient Israelite. And in a similar way, the New Testament explains how the dynamics of the new covenant apply to the daily lives of Christ's followers. Prior to Christ's return in glory, every display of God's benevolence toward his people in the book of Samuel reminds us of ways in which God shows benevolence to his church. Every requirement of human loyalty in the book of Samuel reminds us of how the New Testament requires us to show grateful loyalty to God for what he has done for us in Christ. And every time the book of Samuel reports temporary curses and blessings that came upon Israel, we can reflect on how Christ, in his incomparable wisdom, pours out temporary curses to discipline his church and temporary blessings to reward his church. So, as we study the book of Samuel in the light of New Testament teachings, we have ample opportunities to apply it to our daily lives.

Christian application of the book of Samuel is possible in large part because of its emphasis on divine covenants. But we must also see how the biblical theme of the kingdom of God helps us apply this book to our lives today.

## KINGDOM OF GOD

As we've said, the author of Samuel shaped every facet of his book with one overarching goal in mind. He called Israel to hope for the spread of God's kingdom through the righteous rule of David's house. Sadly, many modern Christians have lost sight of how important the spread of God's kingdom is in the Christian faith. And so, we have difficulty applying this prominent theme in the book of Samuel to our own lives. But in reality, Christ and his first century apostles and prophets made one thing perfectly clear: New Testament faith never discounts the hope for God's kingdom. On the contrary, in the New Testament it's quite obvious that the hope the author of Samuel held out before his original audience is fulfilled in the kingdom of Christ.

To see how this is true, we have to keep in mind what happened in Israel between

the time of the book of Samuel and the New Testament age. The books of Chronicles, Ezra, Haggai and Zechariah tell us that around 538 B.C. representatives of all the tribes of Israel returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. They brought with them high hopes that David's descendant, Zerubbabel, would lead them in rebuilding and expanding God's kingdom. But these same books make it clear that Zerubbabel failed to rule in righteousness. After some initial accomplishments under his leadership, we learn nothing more about him. The people of Israel continued to turn away from God and, as a result, God poured out more curses on them. Most of God's people remained outside of the Promised Land, and the few who returned suffered under the tyranny of Gentile nations and their false gods. For more than five centuries, the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans ruled over God's people. No righteous son of David appeared, and the kingdom of God nearly vanished from the face of the earth.

Still, throughout these centuries there was always a remnant of Israelites who kept believing. They knew God had promised through his prophets that in the latter days, in the last stage of history, he would send them a righteous son of David. This righteous son would make final atonement for sin, and God would raise him up to take the throne of his father David. From David's throne he would spread the kingdom of God throughout the world and bring everlasting judgment and blessings.

And, of course, this promise is at the heart of the Christian gospel — the good news of the kingdom of God in Christ. After more than 500 years of waiting, Jesus, the perfectly righteous son of David, was born. He is the righteous king of Israel, spreading the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth.

This central teaching about God's kingdom in Christ was especially prominent in the minds of New Testament authors. Clearly, these authors saw Jesus as the fulfillment of every hope that the book of Samuel placed in David's house. For example, Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, explicitly referred to Christ's fulfillment of events from the book of Samuel several times. He drew from the first division of Samuel — Samuel's prelude to kingship — on two occasions. In Luke 1:46-55, we read Mary's song of praise to God as she anticipated Jesus' birth. Listen to verses 51-53 where Mary said these words:

[God] has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty (Luke 1:51-53).

Many interpreters have noted that this and other portions of Mary's song parallel Hannah's song of praise for the birth of Samuel found in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Hannah celebrated how God had begun a new day by bringing curses on his enemies and blessings to his faithful people. And Mary celebrated the fact that God was doing the same through the birth of her son, Jesus. In a similar way, the Gospel of Luke also refers to Samuel's prelude to kingship as it describes Jesus' youth. In Luke 2:52, Luke wrote this of Jesus' younger years:

Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52).

Now listen to 1 Samuel 2:26 where we read these words:

The boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man (1 Samuel 2:26).

This verse describes Samuel as God raised him to leadership in Israel and brought curses on Eli and his sons. And Luke described Jesus in much the same way as God raised him up as the leader of Israel in contrast with the wayward leaders of Israel in Jesus' day.

Luke also drew from the second division of the book of Samuel — Saul's failed kingship — to draw attention to Jesus as the righteous son of David. In Luke 6:1-5, Luke recorded how the Pharisees pursued Jesus and accused him and his disciples of breaking the Sabbath. In verse 3, Jesus defended his actions by comparing himself to David when David and his men ate the holy bread of the Presence while they were being pursued by Saul. We find this story in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. As we know, God brought curses on Saul as he sought David's life, but he blessed David for his innocence. So, by noting Jesus' reference to the book of Samuel, Luke revealed that Jesus was the righteous son of David.

And finally, Luke also drew from the last division of the book of Samuel — David's enduring kingship — in Acts 2:14-41. Here, he gave his account of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. In verses 30 and 31, Peter explained why God had raised Jesus from the dead when he said this:

God had sworn with an oath to [David] that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, [and David] foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:30-31).

Peter's words here referred to God's covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13 where God made this promise:

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body ... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

As Luke indicated, Jesus' ascension to his throne in heaven was proof that Jesus was the righteous son of David who is destined to spread the kingdom of God throughout the world. Like other New Testament writers, every reference Luke made to the book of Samuel stressed one theme: Jesus is David's righteous son who fulfills Israel's hope that God's kingdom will one day spread to the ends of the earth.

**The future Messiah will be a descendant of David because David was of the tribe of Judah, the tribe that was specifically mentioned in Jacob's blessing before he died, when he said "the scepter" — a symbol of kings — "will not depart from Judah." And this prophecy will be fulfilled. Of the tribe of Judah, only Jesus Christ is the king after God's own heart. When Jesus was born, he fulfilled the promise,**

**the faithfulness, the grace, the salvation of God all together. Through Christ, God fulfills his will to save humanity through grace, which he had promised in the Old Testament, and which humanity was unable to attain through the Law.**

— Rev. Dr. Stephen Tong, translation

Still, as we've seen in detail in other series, Luke and all other New Testament authors also made it clear that Jesus didn't fulfill this hope suddenly or all at once. Rather, time and again, New Testament authors explained that Jesus brings the kingdom of God to earth in three stages.

He began to fulfill the book of Samuel's hopes during the inauguration of his kingdom in his first advent. He continues to spread his reign of righteousness during the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history. And Jesus will bring God's kingdom in its fullness when he returns in glory at the consummation of his kingdom. This threefold outlook on Christ's righteous rule as David's son is so crucial to the Christian faith that we must always apply the book of Samuel in the light of all three phases of Christ's kingdom.

## Inauguration

In the first place, as Christ's followers, we apply the book of Samuel to our lives by looking back to the inauguration of Christ's kingdom. During his earthly ministry, Jesus kept every requirement of human loyalty and secured eternal salvation for all who believe in him. As a result of Jesus' obedience, the Spirit of God raised him from the dead, and he ascended to his throne in heaven.

In the kingdom's inauguration, Jesus began to destroy the power of Satan and opened the way for people throughout the world to be rescued from Satan's grip. And from his throne in heaven, Jesus poured out his Spirit on his church as the down payment of the blessings of the world to come. So, when we read the book of Samuel's call for Israel to renew their hopes for the kingdom of God, we must put our hope in what Christ has already accomplished as David's great son in the inauguration of his kingdom.

## Continuation

In the second place, we must also be ready to apply the book of Samuel to the continuation of Christ's kingdom throughout church history. For more than 2,000 years, Jesus has extended his righteous rule day by day from his throne in heaven. And at each moment, he has fulfilled more and more of the hopes that the author of Samuel placed in the righteous rule of David's house. Through the preaching of the gospel, Christ continues to defeat God's adversaries. He has rescued countless men, women and children throughout the world from the clutches of the kingdom of darkness. And we can be sure that he will continue to do the same throughout the history of the church.

The author of Samuel called on his original audience to hope in the righteous rule of David's house when they faced discouraging difficulties. In the same way, we should turn our hearts toward the success of Christ as king during the continuation of his kingdom.

## Consummation

And finally, the New Testament also teaches us to apply the book of Samuel by turning our hearts toward the consummation of Christ's kingdom at his glorious return. We not only look to the past and to the present, but we also look toward the future for the fulfillment of Christ's righteous reign. When Christ returns in glory, all of God's enemies will fall under his everlasting curses, and his redeemed people will live in the fullness of God's blessings in the new creation.

In one way or another, every portion of the book of Samuel was designed to call Israel to restore their hopes for a renewal of the earth through the righteous rule of David's house. And for this reason, every portion of the book of Samuel calls us to renew our hopes in the righteous rule that Christ will establish throughout creation when he returns in glory.

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## CONCLUSION

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In this introduction to the book of Samuel, we've looked at its background and learned about the authorship, date, and the circumstances in which it was written. We've also noted how the book of Samuel was designed to call the people of Israel to renew their hopes in the righteous rule of David's house. And finally, we've seen how Christian application of our book's emphasis on divine covenants and the kingdom of God should strengthen our faith in Christ as the perfect mediator of the new covenant who will bring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

God first gave his ancient people the book of Samuel when many in Israel had lost hope. The difficulties of our lives often cause us to lose hope as well. But the author of Samuel encouraged Israel to discard every encumbrance that distracted them and to gain confidence that God's kingdom will reach its ultimate goal. As we learn how the author of Samuel led Israel in this direction, we'll find many opportunities to cast off every encumbrance in our own lives. Jesus, the righteous son of David has come, and God has placed him on his throne. Every day Jesus extends the rule of God further and further. And the book of Samuel assures us, through what God did in the lives of Samuel, Saul and David, that God's kingdom will not fail. Christ will return in glory to judge the ends of the earth. And all who have believed in him will reign with him in the wonders of God's kingdom to come.



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