
Then and Then but For Us

The Book: an Introduction¹

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Israel was suffering under the repeated cycles of judges and prophets. The history since the glorious conquest under Joshua was a sad story. There were long years of sin and slavery. The military rule under Joshua had given way to a succession of leaders and prophets who served as judges over Israel. Rarely did they follow the Lord. They continued to worship at the Tent. It had been set up in Shiloh. Obedience to the Law and Testimony was spotty at best.

Into this chaos God brought the last of the judges and the first of the writing prophets.

The Book

Author

Various sources compiled by a single author. Much of the earlier material appears to have been written by Samuel himself. But the narrative is taken up by another after Samuel's death.

Date

The book was probably written just before the Babylonian captivity around 600BC.

The author is unknown but he cannot have been writing earlier than the death of Solomon, towards the end of the tenth century BC, since 1 Samuel 27:6 shows knowledge of the divided monarchy. It is generally agreed that the books of Samuel were not written by themselves but were part of the whole sequence of books beginning with Joshua and ending with Kings. If so, the author of this whole historical work was writing at the time of the Babylonian exile (sixth century BC). Some verses, such as 1 Samuel 9:9 and 2 Samuel 13:18, suggest that the writer lived long after the events he records. However, the author made use of many ancient and authentic source documents, one of which is mentioned by name (2 Samuel 1:18). (D. A. Carson p. 296)

The events in the book take place between 1000 BC and 701 BC.

Unity

In the Hebrew canon, this is one book, Samuel and is part of The Writings. Joshua through Chronicles are a unit in the Old Testament and write of the conquest of the land and the rise and fall of the monarchy.

What we have as two books are like Volumes I and II of a large book. It is best to treat them as one large unit. 1 Samuel is about the rise of the kingdom and the fall of Saul. The second book is about the rise of David and the establishment of the kingdom.

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Context

John Woodhouse has summarized the context that brings us to 1 Samuel very well.

There had been about 200 years of extraordinary social upheaval, verging p 19 at times on anarchy. These were the 200 years after the Israelites had come into the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. The era is often referred to as the period of the judges. Much of it is recounted in the book of Judges, which concludes with this summary: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). In other words, there was no established and permanent political authority in the land. Anarchy reigned. There was a crisis of leadership in Israel. Or so it seemed. What kind of leadership did this troubled society need? (Woodhouse p. 19)

The Approach

Sometimes I just assume you understand my commitment not just to the Bible but to the text itself. There are some core beliefs and commitments that shape how I understand and preach.

The Bible as the Word of God

I believe the Hebrew text and accurate translations of it are the Word of God.

I believe that the authors used various sources *but what they produced is to be treated as an organic whole*. I have little patience with most modern textual criticism that wants to deconstruct the text and thus dismantle its accuracy and authority.

I believe that what the Bible records is true. It provides the interpretive grid to understand everything. We do not interpret the Bible according to modern science, history, psychology or sociology.

The Historical Narrative as the Word of God

I believe that the literary form of the text should shape our understanding and preaching/teaching of the text.

I believe that the authors organized their material to make an argument, present a theme not merely to record a chronological history in the western form.

I believe that not only can people and things foreshadow Christ, but so can events. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:1-7.

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."

I believe there is a Christ-centered, gospel-oriented lesson in the Old Testament narratives that are intended to keep us from sin and living in obedience and wisdom.

Let me conclude these thoughts with some startling words from J. Gordon Keddie.

The goal of all Old Testament study ought to be a more perfect discipleship to the Lord. All of God's Word is directed towards the moulding of heart and mind and the transformation of behaviour, to the end that we might be holy as God is holy. Sad to say, modern biblical scholarship has all but abandoned this calling in favour of a kind of technical exegesis which, while meticulous in its dissection of the text and abounding in ingenious and intricate theories of its origins, is strangely arid and virtually devoid of any contemporary application. The secularization of modern life, having banished the Bible from every sphere of human existence except the realm of private faith, has now succeeded in expelling faith from the Bible itself! It seems hardly possible, I know, but a half-hour study of many of the modern commentaries—even those that are ostensibly conservative and evangelical—will reveal a disturbing unwillingness to make concrete application of the teaching of the Word of God to our lives. Biblical scholarship has ceased to be devotional both in its very nature and in its thrust. Secular methodology has hijacked biblical study. It is academically unacceptable today to expound Scripture in terms of its redemptive, devotional and prophetic purposes. A chasm has been opened between 'serious' study ('scholarly' commentaries) and 'devotional' or 'layman's' exposition. And here's the rub: the life-changing power of the Word of God has been relegated to the realm of the non-scholarly, the private and the relatively uninformed! Current studies in the historical books of the Old Testament are particularly blighted with this plague of secular intellectualization. (Keddie p. 12)

I am happy to say that in more recent years the wilderness has some new life giving streams. I have profited much from the commentaries by John Woodhouse and Kent Hughes as well as Alex Motyer and Derek Kidner.

These stories are for us...**Romans 15:4-7**

Let us remember that the Old Testament narratives are more than interesting stories of ancient Israel's history. Paul in Romans 15:4-7 tells us:

⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Paul was using an Old Testament text to point to Christ's willingness to even take on reproach in order to save Jew and Gentile. The bias and bigotry that separated the Jewish and Gentile believers had been heaped on Christ. In the middle of that Paul reminds them of three important things when taking up an Old Testament text:

They were written for us to teach us. (v. 4)

The stories of Samuel, Saul and David were written for us and in some ways, to us. We are the second intentional recipients of their message and meaning.

They were written so our hope will be based on the Scriptures. (v. 4)

Because so much of the Christian life involves suffering and enduring, of not yet having all that we are promised, the Old Testament encourages us. It so enables our faith that we will do the hard, hard things in the hope, the assurance, of the fulfillment of Christ's promises.

They were to focus on a Christ-centered obedience (v. 5, 7)

These stories first bring us to Christ, His person, promises and provision. They foreshadow who He is and what He has done and what He will do. We do not moralize these stories by commanding "you must" because "they did." But we see Christ who acts, speaks and commands us.

They were to be applied to our situations. (v. 5-6)

Both 1 Corinthians 10 and Romans 15 make specific, particular applications to the Christian. "The Old Testament told us that Christ would bear our bias and bigotry. Since Christ has dealt with what divides and has welcomed Jew and Gentile, then you welcome one another." Christian liberty then is grounded in the cross reversing the divide of the Old Testament through Jesus' work on the cross so that we live together as a Christian community even when we are very different.

This is how we will listen, learn and live these two books over the next year.

The Melodic Line

1 Samuel 1-2 are a unit and 2 Samuel 22-23 are the parallel unit. The book opens and closes with a poem. From these two stanzas of the opening and closing poems we have the melodic line, the theme of the Samuels.

1 Samuel 2:9-10

⁹ “He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.
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.”

2 Samuel 22:47-51

⁴⁷ “The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock,
and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation,
⁴⁸ the God who gave me vengeance
and brought down peoples under me,
⁴⁹ who brought me out from my enemies;
you exalted me above those who rose against me;
you delivered me from men of violence.

⁵⁰ “For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.
⁵¹ Great salvation he brings to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his offspring forever.”

The primary theme is that the Lord will establish His King with strength and salvation so as to be glorified in all the nations. This will ultimately point to King Jesus.

The secondary theme is that the Lord will accomplish His purposes through the sin and destruction of some and through the righteousness and deliverance of others. This will ultimately point to the cross.

Redemptive historical themes fill the book. Not the least will be the role of Jesus as the perfect prophet, priest and king. We will see the name of the Lord upheld when His enemies are defeated. We will also see the purposes of God are not thwarted by the sins of His people or His leaders.

The Overview

The books' plot are arranged naturally around the three major characters. Think of a stage. Different characters come into the center of the stage. They still interact. While one fades, one comes to the fore. Yet they continue to interact.

Samuel – “the Word came...” (1 Sam. 1–7)

His name means “God hears” with the idea of being sent as a result of prayer

His Sending (1–3)

His Service (4–7)

Saul – “like the nations...” (1 Sam. 8–15)

His name means “asked of God” with the idea of being given as a result of a demand

His Crowning (8–10)

His Conquests (11–12)

His Condemnation (13–15)

David “man after God’s own heart...” (1 Sam. 16–2 Sam. 24)

The Shepherd (1 Sam. 16–17)

The Servant (1 Sam. 18–19)

The Sojourner (1 Sam. 20–31)

The Sovereign (2 Sam. 1–24)

His Triumphs (2 Sam. 1–12)

His Trials (2 Sam. 13–24)

His Personal Failures (11–12)

His Son’s Failures (13–18)

His Testing (19–24)

Reflect and Respond

All of the Word of God is inspired of God and is profitable to us so that we may be completely equipped for every good work. This is not a promo for the series nor merely a justification for studying the Old Testament. It is a reminder that the Spirit intended 1st and 2nd Samuel to be useful to us. Do you believe this?

May I invite you to be engaged in this series. Yes it is on a Sunday night, but the Scriptures will be helpful and profitable to you.

May God grant that we will see Jesus more and more in all of the Word of God.