

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## Introduction to Samuel

Today we embark upon a journey which will take us many places in our walks. In the coming year we are going to be looking at 1 Samuel in which we will gaze upon the heights of God's plan for His Kingdom, and plunge the depths of human depravity as we consider Eli and his sons, then Samuel's children, then Saul, and lastly David. Through our study we will examine the revelation of Christ as given to us by God in the 10th Century B.C.

## Details about the Book

First and Second Samuel are perhaps the most popular books of the Old Testament. In fact there have been more commentaries written on these books than any other book of the Old Testament cannon.

These books were penned from 1105 BC to 970 BC and cover the last days of the temple at Shiloh until the end of David's reign. Until the 6th Century A.D., 1 & 2 Samuel comprised one book in the Hebrew Bible. Before this time the Hebrew identified this portion of scripture by the book of Samuel — since Samuel is the dominant figure at the beginning of the book.

The Septuagint (LXX) identified this section of Scripture more accurately as the Book of Reigns/Kingdoms- since Samuel is dead by 1 Samuel 25, and the two books are more about David and the Kingdom of God than Samuel.

Now looking upon Samuel from a distance, four elements emerge which serve as the major themes of this book.

1. The Davidic Covenant. The books of Samuel are literally framed by two references to the "anointed" King — in the prayer of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:10) and the song of David (2 Samuel 22:51). As we shall see, this ultimately is a reference to the Messiah, the King who will triumph over the nations.<sup>1</sup>
2. The Sovereignty of God — as seen, for example in the birth of Samuel in response to Hannah's prayer.<sup>2</sup> In relation to David, nothing can frustrate God's plan to have him rule over Israel.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Genesis 49:8-12; Number 24:7-9, 17-19

<sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 9:17; 16:12 - 13

<sup>3</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 24:20

Indeed, throughout this book we learn that the Lord governs everything from the flight of a stone<sup>4</sup> to the sinful desires of a people who longed for an earthly king.<sup>5</sup>

3. The Work of the Holy Spirit in empowering men for divinely appointed tasks. The Spirit of the Lord came upon both Saul and David after their anointing as king.<sup>6</sup> The power of the Holy Spirit brought forth prophecy<sup>7</sup> and victory in battle.<sup>8</sup> And it is this Spirit that is at work in our lives as well.
4. The Personal Effects of Sin —the sins of Eli and his sons resulted in their deaths.<sup>9</sup> The lack of reverence for the Ark of the Covenant led to the death of a number of Israelites. Saul's disobedience resulted in the Lord's judgment, and accordingly he was rejected as king over Israel.<sup>10</sup> Although David was forgiven for his sin of adultery and murder after his confession,<sup>11</sup> he still suffered the inevitable and devastating consequences of his sin.<sup>12</sup>

In the next several weeks, each of these themes will become reference points for us as we seek to grow in our walks with Christ.

Oh, what a glorious book is Samuel! Let me introduce you to this work by looking its setting, style and significance.

## **An Introduction to Samuel: Setting**

Judges 21:25, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

This represents the setting from which the books of Samuel arose. (In the BHS Ruth is placed after Proverbs leaving Judges as the historical predecessor to the books of Samuel.) Internally — the people of God at the beginning of Samuel were in chaos. Because the Israelites lacked a king, the word of God slipped from being the authority in the land — and with this slip came moral failure of all kinds.

1. The priesthood was corrupt (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-26).
2. The Ark of the Covenant was not at the tabernacle (1 Samuel 4:3-7:2).
3. Idolatry was practiced everywhere (1 Samuel 7:3, 4).
4. The judges that did remain were dishonest (1 Samuel 8:2, 3).

Indeed, Samuel begins at a time when the people of God had no king — physically or SPIRITUALLY. The people of God lacked a king, not because God hadn't given them one<sup>13</sup> but because the Israelites had rejected Him.

1 Samuel 8:7, “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not

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<sup>4</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 17:29

<sup>5</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 17:14 and 1 Samuel 8:5

<sup>6</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13

<sup>7</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 10:6

<sup>8</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 11:6

<sup>9</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25; 3:10-14; 4:17, 18

<sup>10</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 13:9, 13, 14; 15:8-9, 20-23

<sup>11</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 12:13

<sup>12</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 12:14

<sup>13</sup> Compare Judges 8:23

reign over them.”

Thus the people of God reaped in their body the due recompense for their deeds! Because there was no earthly king and the people had rejected God. Government was by mob rule.<sup>14</sup>

At this time in redemptive history no world power was seeking to dominate the Near East — Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon were either in decline or too small. Israel's battles were waged against their neighbors, whose territories bordered their land — specifically the Philistines and the Ammonites.

## **The Philistines<sup>15</sup>**

The Philistines were a warrior people who settled in Palestine (derived from the name, "Philistine") in and around 1200 B.C. Originally these people came from Greece and the Island of Crete, they were governed by five Lords or "masters" whose bases of operation, according to Joshua 13:2-3, were Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.

Because the Philistines controlled the use of iron, they had a military and economic advantage over Israel which they willingly exercised.<sup>16</sup> In fact, in the providence of God, it was the Philistine military threat that impelled God's people to reject God and long for an earthly king.

## **The Ammonites**

They were an uncivilized people on the East side of the Jordan River (modern day Jordan). They traced their heritage back to Ben-ammi, Lot's son through his youngest daughter.<sup>17</sup> Though they were relatives of the Israelites and commanded to treat them kindly,<sup>18</sup> nevertheless they were the constant enemy of the people of God. They conspired with the Moabites in hiring Balaam to compromise the people of God.<sup>19</sup> (Incidentally, the Moabites were the children of Lot through his oldest daughter.<sup>20</sup> )

In the days of the Judges, the Ammonites assisted Eglon of Moab in subduing Israelite territory.<sup>21</sup> At the time of Jephthah they encroached on Israelite lands East of the Jordan.<sup>22</sup> Just before Saul became king, the Ammonites besieged Jabesh-gilead.<sup>23</sup> During the reign of David, the Ammonites hired Syrian mercenaries and went to war with Israel.<sup>24</sup>

Truly, the setting of Samuel was a time of chaos, rejection, moral failure, anarchy, and disbelief. It is in this context that we read these words:

1 Samuel 1:1, “Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an

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<sup>14</sup> This is also known as democracy according to Plato. Compare 1 Samuel 8:4 Judges 21:25

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that the rabbinic teachings said that the seven surrounding nations represent the full nature of sin.

<sup>16</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 13:19-22

<sup>17</sup> Compare Genesis 19:38

<sup>18</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 2:19

<sup>19</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 23:2-6

<sup>20</sup> Compare Genesis 19:17

<sup>21</sup> Compare Judges 3:13

<sup>22</sup> Compare Judges 11

<sup>23</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 11:1 – 11; 12:12; 14:47

<sup>24</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 10 and 1 Chronicles 19

Ephrathite.”

## **The Style**

If you were to pick up a decent commentary on Samuel, you would discover this: Many, many pages written about the author(s), sources, and writing of 1 Samuel and many attacks from liberal scholars as to the veracity of the text, teaching, and style of this book. And yet evangelical scholars have shown again and again that the liberal attacks of the 19th and 20th century against this book are quite unfounded.

By studying the books of Samuel in light of what has been called, "The Narrative Art of Hebrew."

My professor in seminary, Dr. Phil Long, has made a name for himself in Old Testament studies by teaching and defending this approach to the Hebrew text — and much of what I am teaching in this section has come from him.

## **The Narrative Art of Hebrew**

This is an approach to the Hebrew text which recognizes that Hebrew is a language of poetry. Consequently, the Hebrew narratives of the OT have three characteristics — characteristics which must be understood if we are to understand fully the text.

### **Scenic**

Hebrew Narratives are Scenic. This means that the Hebrew will tend to communicate more by showing than by telling. The narrator very often does not tell you exactly what he wants you to think about a person or what that person said or did. He will rely on your discernment, though he will often give indications in the text as to how we ought to judge matters that we are reading about.

One will find out more about Saul by watching what he does and listening to what he says than from any evaluation of his character provided by the narrator (which is rather scant). In a moment I'll give you an example of this.

### **Succinct**

Hebrew Narratives are Succinct. In Hebrew narratives, the writer accomplishes his goal with a minimum expenditure of words and the result is a heightening of the importance of what he says. Who could forget those incredible words?

1 Samuel 17:45, “Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.”

1 Samuel 18:7, “And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”

2 Samuel 12:7a, “And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.”

And so, when we come to any text in a narrative what is there is what is essential for us to know that we

might understand the material and gain its lesson for ourselves. Thus, things we might at first glance have felt were unimportant details, more and more, show themselves to be critical parts of the story — as we'll see.

## Subtle

Hebrew Narratives are Subtle. Whether it be in Joshua or 2 Chronicles, the Hebrew will convey much of its message by implication using a variety of narrative techniques. For example a shift from prose to poetry is used to emphasize a stretch of text. As I already mentioned, you will notice that very early in Samuel there is a long, important poem, "Hannah's song of praise."<sup>25</sup> Toward the end of Samuel there is another long and important poem, "David's Song of Praise and his Last Words."<sup>26</sup> These two songs frame the books of Samuel and tell us what the author thinks is most important about all he is going to be telling us — the demonstration of God's sovereignty, faithfulness, and goodness which is the subject of both hymns and the content of the themes that reverberate throughout the entire book.

The use of key-words (לְתַשְׁתַּרְסוֹתָאֵל) like glory, to hear, king and to utterly destroy — all of which are found throughout the text of Samuel.

The use of puns or plays on words (which, of course, show up in the Hebrew and some clever English translations) often to indicate irony.

1 Samuel 18:7, “And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”

There is no pun in the Hebrew in this verse. However this verse gives an example of a play-on-words.

The use of repetitions where similar events or scenes in different circumstances invite comparison or contrast and so interpretation. For example Abraham's servant prays at the well in Nahor (Genesis 24:12-14) in contrast, at the very same well Jacob shows off (Genesis 29:10-11)! Also Eli's son's sin with unbridled passion and yet the people endure them (1 Samuel 2:12-17); Samuel's sons are half the sinner, but now the people want a king (1 Samuel 8:3). And so, with the use of these literary tools and more, the means of communicating the narrator's- and so the Bible's- point of view will be indirect, pithy, and concise.

Thus as we look at a Hebrew narrative, with a few striking exceptions, the narrator will SHOW US a person's good or bad traits. This will not be made plain by an explicit comment telling us that he was a good or bad man. It will be made plain by giving us enough of his words and deeds to draw the conclusion.

## 1 Samuel 13 & 14

In this section of 1 Samuel, Saul and Jonathan are described in a variety of ways that encourage us to compare them with one another. Now as we do this, we immediately note that Saul is presented in unfavorable terms. In 1 Samuel 9, Saul is completely ignorant of whom Samuel is — though all the nation knew him.<sup>27</sup> When the Spirit of God comes upon him and he begins prophesying, the people are

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<sup>25</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 2:10

<sup>26</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 22:51

<sup>27</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 8:4

so amazed that the expression was born, "Is Saul among the prophets?" — this would be parallel to our expression, "When pigs fly!"<sup>28</sup> When it came time for his unveiling as the king, Saul hides behind a pile of baggage.<sup>29</sup> After the unveiling, Saul does not serve in the office, but went back to farming.<sup>30</sup>

Much more could be said and will be said, but this brings us to the comparison. In 1 Samuel 13 Saul explains that he went ahead with the sacrifice at Gilgal, even though he had been told to wait for Samuel and even though he was not a priest, because "he saw his army scattering" (1 Samuel 13:11). And yet, in the very next chapter we read of Jonathan facing the Philistines all by himself. Why? Because "nothing can hinder the Lord by saving, whether by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6).

The comparison between the perspective of father and son is a devastating indictment of Saul's faith, or lack of it. This we shall see — and much, much more — as we allow the books of Samuel to show us:

1. The kingdom of God.
2. The person and work of Christ.
3. The depravity of our hearts.
4. Our need for a Savior.
5. The nature of kingdom service.

## The Significance

Why study Samuel? The Book of Samuel is a key time in redemptive history. During the time of Samuel, God's people move from a tribal system to a monarchy. As such, this book contains so much by way of discussion on the nature of the kingdom of God and its King — Jesus Christ.

The book of Samuel is a fleshing out of our theology. For the past three years we have spent much time learning about Christ, His Kingdom, and church life from the book of Philippians — and what a wonderful epistle. Now we begin a study of a book which is going to show us what Paul was teaching in Philippians!

Dr. Rob Rayburn wrote in reference to 1 Samuel these words:

"The Bible... teaches so much with its historical narrative. It is theology in flesh and blood. It is the Christian life in its reality, both tender and harsh. It is faith the way faith is in the real world of sin, temptation, flesh. We saw ourselves with all the warts on in Isaac and Jacob, but we also saw in them the Lord's grace and power in our own lives. And so it will be in Samuel..."<sup>31</sup>

.What a glorious adventure awaits us as we study this book for insofar as the epistles of the New Testament aid at our heads, Samuel takes aim at our hearts!

The book of Samuel is Christ in the flesh.<sup>32</sup> Christ when speaking to the Jews of His day said, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me" (John 5:39). It is amazing how much debate has gone into identifying the genre of Samuel, its

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<sup>28</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 10:12

<sup>29</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 10:22

<sup>30</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 11:5

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Rob Rayburn, sermon notes on 1 Samuel.

<sup>32</sup> Compare John 5:39

message, and its place in redemptive history.

If we don't see Christ in Samuel, we haven't done our job. For truly, this book is as much about Christ as it is anything else.

Allow me to give an example of this. In Matthew 21 we read a rather obscure statement which most commentaries simply ignore.

Matthew 21:14, "And the blind and the lame came to him [Christ] in the temple; and he healed them."

Now whether you realize it or not, the background behind this verse is 2 Samuel 5. In this passage David captured Jerusalem the last of the Canaanite strongholds to fall to the Israelites. The account, which is brief and somewhat obscure, nevertheless quotes a saying about the blind and lame being sufficient to ward David off because the city was so well-fortified. Yet the city is eventually captured after David challenged his men to smite the inhabitants, including "the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul" (2 Samuel 5:8b).

Following the battle, David evidently issued a decree which became a "saying" which would govern God's people until Christ and "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house" (2 Samuel 5:8c). Now don't miss the contrast and the incredible message of Samuel. When David entered Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 5, the blind and the lame were expelled but when the "Son of David" entered the city a 1000 years later (Matthew 21), He made it a point to receive the blind and the lame (verse 14).

By way of contrast, we see in David the glory of the One who would come after him and rule with equity and justice! That is what this book is all about.

Family of God let me ask you some very important questions as we close our time here. The Israelites had the Philistines and the Ammonites — what foe dwells on your east and west side this morning? Though God is invisible, have you grown tired of trusting Him? Are you longing for a life more like the nations? What leader will capture your attention: Saul or Christ? Will you be moved by the character and goodness of your God or the opinions of man? How large must the foe be for you to lose heart and hide in the mountains?

See though Samuel was written about 3000 years ago, nevertheless we live at a time much like Samuel, and thus we are confronted by the same questions that rested upon that generation.

Now I don't know about you, but I don't want to answer those questions as did our brothers and sisters at the time of Samuel. I want to learn from their mistake. And thus, whatever else happens in my life, I want to be found panting for my Savior, content to have God as my King. I want to be satisfied with His providences in my life. I want to ever and always give myself to His service. I want to honor God instead of man. That is the message and the passion that we all must seek to take from Samuel!

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 1, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.