

1st Samuel

Lesson 1

Preface

We might rightly say this book has been a long time coming in the story of the Nation of Israel as recorded in the Bible. Why would we say that? The answer is simple. If we did not have the stories in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, we would not clearly understand the impact and importance the Book of Samuel holds in the relationship of the Nation of Israel with the LORD. Genesis tells us about the creation of everything and then quickly leads us through the families of Adam, Seth, Noah, Abraham, and Isaac in order to arrive at Jacob, whom the LORD will rename as Israel. Genesis ends with Israel and his family in Egypt, where they will be for four hundred and thirty years to the day.

Exodus picks up about three hundred and fifty years after Jacob and his family entered Egypt to tell us of the birth of Moses. Eighty years later, on the anniversary of the four hundredth and thirtieth year in Egypt, an eighty-year-old Moses leads the Nation of Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai where the LORD will train the nation through the guiding hand of Moses to be the LORD's elect people, the people from whom the Messiah will one day come to earth to be the Savior.

By the end of the first year out of Egypt, the Nation of Israel will have the civil and religious laws recorded by the hand of Moses, directly dictated to him from the mouth of the LORD. We have those laws in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. The nation will also have its Tabernacle in which to worship and its priests to direct that worship.

Things will go terribly wrong, as you might remember, when the nation attempts to enter the Promised Land the first time at the beginning of their second year out of Egypt. Back to Mount Sinai, they were sent for another thirty-eight years. We hear of the entire story of that full forty years under the leadership of Moses in the book of Numbers.

Then, at the end of Moses' life, in the last three months of his life, we hear a second telling of the Laws and a few added details to summarize the forty-year experience of the nation and a charge to take the Promised Land with a new leader named Joshua.

The book of Joshua records the details of taking the Promised Land from the Canaanites and the mighty hand of the LORD in that impossible task. Moses and Joshua were more than just leaders to the Nation of Israel; they acted like kings, although Moses and Joshua relied on the true King to direct them, the LORD.

With the start of the book of Judges, Joshua had died, and the nation was left without an earthly king or leader. That was the way it was supposed to be. That was the way the LORD wanted it to be. The LORD had given the nation all the instruction and training they needed through Moses and Joshua. The LORD wanted to be their King. The priests were the high judges and regulators of justice and morality in the nation under the LORD. There were magistrates throughout the Promised Land to handle the civil business. If the magistrates could not make a judgment on any civil business, they were to take the business to the priest who would make the judgment call. It was all the plan of the LORD, for the priests worked for the LORD, the people had the laws, and there was no need for anyone to be the king of Israel except the LORD.

But after the death of Joshua, Israel became unfaithful to the LORD. Oh yes, they worshiped Him on the required days, but they also worship false gods on the other days. In six cycles, Israel

sinned against the LORD, the LORD sent a foreign nation to oppress the Israelites, the people cried out for help, and the LORD sent a judge to return the control of Israel into the hands of the priests and the people. Israel, with no king, repeated the cycle of sin, oppression, submission, and redemption for over three hundred years.

But the LORD saw into the future and knew that Israel would ask for a king, and He would give them a bitter taste of one because they were unfaithful to Him as their King. But then He would give them a good king. To do that, we needed the book of Ruth to take us back into the early days of the time of the book of Judges and tell Ruth's story and of her descendants. The most important will be David, the shepherd boy who would be anointed as the future king by Samuel. But that is getting ahead of the story.

Samuel had penned the last part of Joshua's story as directed by the LORD. He completed the Judges story as directed by the LORD. In fact, he was born about the same time as Samson and knew the details of Samson's story first hand. He ended the book of Judges by telling us several times that *"there was no king in Israel."* It was set up by the LORD through Samuel to let us know why the people would be asking Samuel to select a king one day. It was because *"everyone did what was right in their own eyes,"* instead of what was right according to the LORD's laws, statutes, ordinances, covenants, and commands. He ended the book with a few detestable stories to tell us how far the nation had fallen away from the LORD.

Even though Samuel was alive during the last cycle of sin in Israel, as he recorded it in the book of Judges, he did not reveal himself in the book. Instead, late in his life, under the direction of the LORD, Samuel circled back in the time of the book of Judges, just as he did in the book of Ruth, but this time to tell his own story. He will start with his parents before his birth.

Before we begin, we must note that Samuel does not tell us that he wrote the book of Samuel, but indeed, he did write the first twenty-four chapters. At the start of chapter 25, either the prophets Nathan or Gad picked up the pen to carry the story through most of the life of Solomon, at least.

In the Hebrew Bible, First Samuel and Second Samuel are one book. It was divided in 250 BC when the Greek translation of the Old Testament was done. The same division was offered in the Latin Vulgate. However, in the translations, they were not called Samuel; they were called Kings. In the original English translations, they were named First, Second, Third, and Fourth Kings. The English Versions would rename First and Second Kings as First and Second Samuel in the 16th century A.D.

First and Second Samuel should be regarded as one book, and we will discover why by the conclusion of our commentary of First Samuel. As stated, the message in First Samuel has been a long time coming, at least thirty-one hundred years since the creation of Adam and eight hundred and twenty-six years since Israel moved his family into Egypt.

Let us now find out why Israel rejected the LORD as King and asked for an earthly king. Thus, we enter the time of Israel's king with the birth of the Judge named Samuel, who will select the first two kings of Israel.

When we attempt to try to outline this book for an easy reference to the varied topics included, it becomes pretty evident that First Samuel belongs with Second Samuel; Second Samuel belongs with First Kings, and First Kings belongs with Second Kings. The four represent the entire period of the reigns of the kings over the Nation of Israel. The first clue to this point is found in the overlapping lives of the main characters, which live on from one book into the next. If we were to outline the four books according to the main characters, it would look like the following.

- The Story of the Life of Samuel (1st Samuel 1- 24)
- The Story of the Life of Saul (1st Samuel 9 – 2nd Samuel 1)
- The Story of the Life of David (Ruth – 1st Kings 2)
- The Story of the Life of Solomon (2nd Samuel 5 – 1st Kings 12)
- The Story of the Lives of the Northern Kings (1st Kings 11 – 2nd Kings 18)
- The Story of the Lives of the Southern Kings (1st Kings 12 – 2nd Kings 25)

Obviously, the above outline does not include the twenty-one northern kings and the twenty southern kings by name simply for brevity and outlining purposes. Be that as it may, the short outline above proves the point and shows how, in most cases, the lives of the main characters live on into the next book. For example, the life of David stretches across four books.

The oldest Hebrew manuscripts display the material in two books, with the contents of 1st and 2nd Samuel in one book and the contents of 1st and 2nd Kings in a second book. When the Greek Septuagint translation was completed about 250 BC, the books were divided by scholars into the four booklets we have today. When the Latin Vulgate Translation was completed in the late 4th century A.D., the four books were separated as found in the Septuagint. Four hundred years ago, in the 16th century A.D., the Jewish community followed suit to divide this material into four books. Why did they do this? The simple reason was to control the book's length for publication and the ease of transportation and use in the reading of the Scriptures in the assembly times.

We have another interesting point to make about these four books; they are part of a larger section of the Old Testament called the *former prophets*, as opposed to the *latter prophets*. The *former prophet* books included Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings. The *latter prophet* books included Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (known as the major prophets because of the length of their books) and the twelve minor prophets. We often miss this point in our English settings and studies because the material in the *former prophet* books contain the history of the nation of Israel after entering the Promised Land with and without a king, all the material was written, or at least dictated to a scribe, by a prophet. They are no less from the mouth of God through the mouths of the prophets to whom the LORD spoke His message. In the case of 1st Samuel, our current study, the prophets to participate in the writing were Samuel, Nathan, and Gad.

In the study of any Bible booklet included in the whole canon of the Bible, we must understand that several storylines are presented as history unfolds. In every booklet, there is always a storyline that reveals the actions of the LORD God.

The Storyline of the LORD God in 1st Samuel

In the book of 1st Samuel, we will see the LORD answer Hannah's prayer, and she will give birth to Samuel. He will then answer Eli's prayer and allow Hannah to give birth to three more sons and two daughters. As soon as Samuel is old enough to communicate with the LORD, He will call Samuel and begin speaking with Samuel audibly for the rest of Samuel's life. The LORD will guide Samuel in the selecting of Saul and David to be the first two kings of the nation of Israel. He will bless and curse Saul. He will bless and protect David.

The Storyline of the Nation of Israel

In every booklet in the Bible, the storyline of the Nation of Israel is presented to tell us what the Jewish people are doing and what they are not doing. In 1st Samuel, we will see the people of Israel in rebellion to the LORD's command as they struggle to allow Him to be their only king. The people will reject the LORD as their sole king and ask for an earthly king. Their request will be granted, and Samuel will appoint their first and second kings. Within 1st Samuel, the people of Israel

will be struggling to survive due to the constant oppression of the surrounding nations. They will also participate in the building of much strife between King Saul and David, the musical shepherd boy who killed Israel's greatest threat – Goliath.