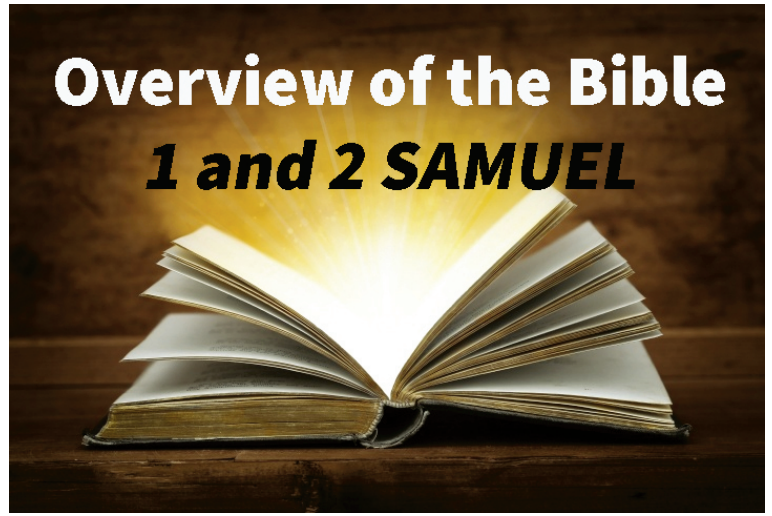


# Overview of the Bible

## **1 and 2 SAMUEL**



### 1 and 2 Samuel: *Lesson 47*

Wednesday, June 30, 2021

1 and 2 Samuel take their name from the eminent prophet, not because he authored them but because he represents the first of the books' three main characters to appear. Indeed, the figure of Samuel dominates the first dozen chapters of this originally one-volume work. The Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) first separated Samuel and Kings into two books each and called the resulting four volumes the "Books of the Kingdoms." 1 and 2 Samuel are considered part of the Deuteronomistic History, which extends through 1 and 2 Kings. The books of Chronicles offer another version of the history recounted in Samuel and Kings (see "The Two Histories" [229–30]).

#### **1 Samuel**

The events of 1 Samuel take place from about midway through the 11th century to 1000 B.C. The book includes the familiar accounts that describe Hannah's impassioned prayer for a son; Eli's recognition of God's nighttime call to the boy Samuel; David's slaying of Goliath; the friendship between David and Jonathan; Saul's hostility toward his rival, David; and Saul's tragic suicide on Mount Gilboa. Beginning with Samuel's anointing of Saul as king and then of David, 1 Samuel traces the early years of monarchy in Israel.

Chapters 1–12 develop Samuel's rise to national, spiritual leadership to replace the wayward priests of Eli's household. Chapters 13–31 center on Saul's rise and fall while weaving in accounts of David's military skill and its psychological effect on the king. Saul's disobedience in ch. 15 results in his ultimate inability to do any right in God's eyes, while David can do no wrong. The overarching theological theme of the book thus contrasts the results of disobedience, which leads to disaster, and obedience, which leads to blessing.

#### **2 Samuel**

2 Samuel focuses on the career of David, the "man after God's own heart" (cf. 1 Chronicles 11–29). The book takes the shepherd-champion from self-imposed exile among the Philistines to kingship, first over Judah and then over all the tribes at the beginning of the 10th century. It shows how David centralizes Israel's government and religion in the strategically located city of Jerusalem, but it also details Absalom's rebellion, which temporarily forces the king out of the capital.

During David's reign, a united kingdom of Israel pushes its boundaries to their farthest extent in the nation's history. God's covenant with the king includes the promise of a Davidic dynasty, which gives birth to prophecies concerning the Messiah and which finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. 2 Samuel also shows David's sinful side, most notably in his adultery and treachery involving Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. Yet this king's humble, contrite heart and his willingness to accept God's punishment both distinguish him from his predecessor, Saul, and preserve his favored status in God's eyes.

The final chapters include two of David's psalms. Chapter 24 recounts David's purchase of land that will later become the site for Solomon's temple.

## Authorship

While the author-editor of the books remains anonymous, he may have incorporated some of Samuel's own writings (1 Sam. 10:25) along with material from other prophetic sources (2 Sam. 1:18; 1 Chr. 29:29), as well as the poems David quotes in 2 Sam. 1:19–27; 22:2–51; 23:2–7. 1 Samuel 27:6 suggests that the work was composed after the monarchy had divided (after 900). Although some scholars argue for a late, 6th-century date, a consensus suggests two or more stages of editing, with completion likely in King Josiah's day (late 7th century). Further additions may have come during the Babylonian exile.

## Text

Difficulties exist in establishing the original Hebrew text of certain passages. Differences between the Hebrew (Masoretic) text and the Septuagint contribute to the problem, and the Greek sometimes agrees with the text of a much older (and therefore presumably more original) Hebrew manuscript of portions of 1 Samuel found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (1000 years earlier than the Masoretic Text). Nevertheless, many of the differences are minor. Despite the textual questions, the message of 1 and 2 Samuel—God's activity in accomplishing the ultimate purposes of his kingdom, despite Israel's desire for a monarchy "like the nations"—remains clear and intact.

## 1 Samuel

### 1 Hannah Prays for a Son

In her childlessness, Hannah keeps company with women who figure prominently for eventually bearing sons who fulfill important roles in Israel's covenantal history. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel—the mothers of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—all wanted God to reverse their barrenness to remove the social stigma attached to childless wives. Like Sarah, who became the object of Hagar's contempt (Gen. 16:5), Hannah must endure the taunts of her husband's other wife, Peninnah, who, though apparently less loved than Hannah, nevertheless has achieved respectability through bearing children (cf. Leah, Gen. 29:30–35). But Hannah's willingness to commit her son to lifelong service of God in a location that affords her only annual contact with him shows that her desire for a son is far greater.

Hannah utters her petition and vow silently at God's tent shrine in Shiloh, unaccompanied by her husband Elkanah but within earshot of the high priest Eli. Because Israelite worshippers normally prayed out loud, and because Eli sees Hannah's lips moving but hears no sound, he mistakes her prayerful abandon for drunken stupor. In explaining her purpose to Eli, however, Hannah does not reveal the substance of her petition, and only she knows about her promise.

God honors Hannah's prayer for a son; and, after nursing him for three years, she honors her vow to dedicate the boy, Samuel, to God's service by leaving him in Eli's care at the Shiloh sanctuary. Elkanah demonstrates both his love for Hannah and his own personal piety by supporting his wife in her resolve to fulfill the vow (v. 23). From the time he first learns of Hannah's pledge, Elkanah recognizes that God's claim on Samuel is greater than his own.

### 2:1–10 Hannah's Song of Praise

Before leaving for home without her young son, Hannah acknowledges God's goodness to her. Behind Hannah's poetic expression lies her struggle with Peninnah (esp. v. 5; on the blessing of "seven" children, cf. Ruth 4:15), yet Hannah's thoughts extend far beyond her own circumstances to praise God for his holiness and stability (v. 2), knowledge (v. 3), power (vv. 9–10), and his reversal of the fortunes of the weak and the poor (vv. 4, 7–8). The reference to "his king" in v. 10 probably reflects a later editorial hand.

## 2:11–36 The Fate of Eli's House

The opening verses set the ministerial activities of “the boy” Samuel in stark contrast to Eli’s corrupt and spiritually ignorant “sons of Belial” (= “worthless men”). Hophni and Phinehas make a mockery of the priesthood and the sacrificial system by disregarding the laws that regulate their right to a share of the offerings made to God (Num. 18:8–20; Deut. 18:1–5) and by using their position and power to satisfy their own selfish desires (esp. vv. 16, 22). Their ritual transgressions go far beyond those of Aaron’s sons, and God will punish them in the same way (cf. Lev. 10:1–2).

Hannah and Elkanah remain involved in the life of their son Samuel (vv. 18–21), who performs his ministerial duties properly (v. 26). This account contrasts their influence on Samuel and the lack of authority Eli wielded over his sons. Verse 25 attributes Hophni’s and Phinehas’s ignoring their father’s reproach to God’s determination to do away with them for their continued sin (cf. God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart; Exod. 4:21; 7:3).

An unnamed prophet (“man of God,” v. 27) reveals to Eli that God will hold him responsible for the misdirected priesthood of his sons. In foretelling the massacre at Nob (ch. 22), v. 31 harks back to the theme of the divine reversal of people’s fortunes displayed in Hannah’s song. While v. 35 appears to refer to Samuel as the “faithful priest” whose “house” God will establish to replace Eli’s line, it is actually the high priest Zadok who embodies the fulfillment of this prophecy during David’s reign (2 Sam. 8:17). “My anointed” (v. 35) refers to the Davidic line of kings.

## 3 Samuel Becomes God’s Prophet

At this time in Israel’s history God rarely communicated directly with his people, so neither Samuel nor Eli immediately understands when God summons Samuel’s attention. The young boy’s call to prophetic office occurs just before dawn while he dutifully attends his watch over the sanctuary lamp, which will soon need refilling after burning all night (Lev. 24:1–4). God informs Samuel of his plans for Eli’s uncontrolled priestly house, and when the boy relays God’s words the aged priest resigns himself to God’s promised judgment (v. 18; cf. 1:23). Remarkably, Eli neither attempts to change God’s mind by forcing change on his sons nor apologizes for his own failure. Though the priestly power remains for a time with Eli and his sons, Samuel’s reputation as a prophet of the Lord spreads throughout Canaan. Samuel’s prophecies reach fulfillment because of God’s presence with him (v. 19).<sup>1</sup>

### Works Cited

<sup>1</sup>Gordon D. Fee and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., eds., *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 203–204