

SAMUEL.

Introduction.

Originally the two books of Samuel were one book, but the translators involved in the Septuagint translation felt that the book of Samuel and the book of Kings were a complete history of the Jewish kingdom from the beginning to the fall. It was therefore divided into four books and given the name the "Books of the Kingdoms."

The books of Samuel 1 and 2 describe the work and actions of Samuel associated with Israel. There is no indication that he was the author.

Samuel is the central figure who is guiding and controlling the events of the early part of the Jewish history and later by his personal influence on the king. It was God who chose Samuel, as His prophet, he was establishing the earthly monarchy of Israel. As a result of this the nation had many changes and developments. The book of Samuel does not appear to record events in a strictly chronological order of the events, however, they are authentic history.

You will find it impossible not to notice that the words *"The Lord of Hosts"* is very much present in the recorded history of the book of 1 Samuel, being mentioned over sixty times just in the first three chapters. Mankind has been given the power to make decisions, good or bad, but it is the Lord who controls, working His planned purpose in and through each person and nation. This fact is a great warning to those who choose to ignore and even fight against the "will of God" because He will always win in the end.

At the beginning of 1 Samuel we find two successive religious leaders, Eli and Samuel, the scene takes place during the period of the Judges. Samuel appears at a critical time in the Jewish history, the Jewish tribes needed direction, Samuel was to become the source of spiritual leadership to the Jewish nation. God has much patience, long-suffering and is full of mercy with the Jewish nation, however, He is also Holy and needed to punish any sin, but He always will finally achieved what He had planned from the beginning.

The life of Samuel

Samuel was the last of the judges, and the first of the prophets as Israel now moved into a new situation in their history.

[Acts 3:24](#);

[Acts 13:20](#);

[Hebrews 11:32](#).

[1 Samuel 2:1ff](#).

The Jewish nation had sunk to a very low spiritual state, they had lost any godly leadership, the priest hood was defiled, no messages came from the Lord,

[1 Samuel 3:1](#).

It is now that we hear of a godly woman named Hannah, she was one of the wives of a man called Elkanah, a Levite,

Elkanah had two wives, this was not prohibited by Jewish law,

[Deuteronomy 21:15-17](#);

[Deuteronomy 24:1-4](#),

But God originally intended a man to be married to one woman for their lifetime.

Hannah, possibly his first wife, had no children, so he may have married Peninnah to continue the family, she had children. Each year the family went to Shiloh to worship,

[Exodus 23:14-19](#).

Peninnah took this opportunity to make fun of Hannah, especially as Elkanah had to give Peninnah a bigger portion during the worship meal. Hannah was full of grace, she knew that the problem was with her and not Elkanah, so after many years without a child she took her situation to God. In her prayer she made this promise,

"O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head."

She was observed by Eli in her silent prayer, he thought she was drunk and reprimanded her. Soon after God responded to the prayers of Hannah and she had a baby boy who was called Samuel. From the point of view of a human the arrival of this baby was as a result of this woman's prayer, yet it was the beginning of a new future for the Jews, as planned by God.

"When she had weaned him, she took Samuel to the house of the Lord with her, for her sacrifice she took three bullocks, one ephah of flour and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young."

There she met Eli the priest and identified herself to him and explained how God had answered her prayers. *"Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And Eli worshipped the LORD."* The text seems to suggest that this arrangement was temporary, but the dedication is complete and cannot be changed.

Elkanah and Hannah left the child Samuel in the temple and returned to their home. They visited the temple each year, Hannah brought suitable clothes for Samuel. God blessed Hannah and Elkanah for the loan of their son Samuel with three more sons and two daughters.

Samuel now spent his young life in a home where the father Eli was the high priest, unfortunately Eli was tolerating serious sins in the lives of his two sons, the scripture calls them *"sons of Belial;"* they knew not the LORD.

However, despite Eli not being able to have his own godly family he was able to train Samuel to love and serve the Lord,

[1 Samuel 7:9, 17;](#)

[1 Samuel 9:6-12;](#)

[1 Samuel 12:16-25;](#)

[1 Samuel 15:11;](#)

[Psalm 99:6;](#)

[Jeremiah 15:1.](#)

"And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest." To serve in the presence of the Lord indicated that as Samuel grew up he was performing the duties of the priests and Levites under the instruction of Eli, this meant that he was associated with the worship of the Lord.

Verse 18: Samuel was supplied with a linen ephod, as worn by the junior or second class priests, for example [2 Samuel 6:14](#). This is not the same ephod as used by the high priest.

The sin of the sons. [1 Samuel 2:13-17](#).

The priests had a special custom, this is found in,

[Deuteronomy 18:3](#)

[Leviticus 7:31-34.](#)

The two sons of Eli were taking more than their share of the offering, they were taking all that the fork would hold and they were taking their share before the blood and fat was offered in the sacrifice to the Lord, they wanted the prize cut of the meat before the offering was made.

Verse 22: Indicates that the two sons may have been involved in prostitution, this was often part of the Canaanite idol worship. Eli reprimanded his two sons because their behaviour was turning the people away from worship, but it appears they took no notice, verse 25. **"if a man sin against the LORD, who shall entreat for him?"** indicates that any judgement will be by direct action of the Lord, no one else will act to help.

God speaks to Samuel.

[1 Samuel 3:1-4.](#)

Some time has passed, Samuel has served in the temple for many years. He is probably about twelve years old. Eli is losing his eyesight and there had not been any visions or messages from the Lord,

"the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision."

This indicated that there was no recognized prophet for the people to receive messages from God, so no one would have expected the Lord to speak to anyone, especially a young person.

It appears to be early morning, the seven branch candlestick in the temple would have contained sufficient oil to burn overnight, and this was still alight, [Leviticus 24:2,3](#), we are told *"ere the lamp of God went out in*

the temple of the LORD. " Samuel is asleep, somewhere near the Ark in the temple area, probably in a small cell room designed for the priests.

"The LORD called Samuel:" Samuel thinks that it is Eli calling for him and responds by going to Eli. *"I called not; lie down again,"* was Eli's response. Samuel appears not to have been taught the scriptures and did not understand about the Lord. Again the Lord called to Samuel twice more each time Samuel runs to Eli. Finally Eli realized that it was God calling to Samuel so told Samuel to next time respond

"Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth."

The Lord responds with a threat, *"Behold, I will do a thing in Israel,"* The family of Eli is to be punished for their sins, nothing will change the mind of God from ending the house of Eli. Samuel was scared to tell Eli what had been said to him, but Eli instructed Samuel to *"tell him every word, and hid nothing from me."* On hearing the words from God, Eli submits to the will of the Lord.

Samuel grows and God is with him, the people of Israel realize that they have a prophet of the Lord and came from all parts of the country to consult Samuel at Shiloh. The Lord continued to make Himself known to Samuel.

The Capture and return of the Ark of the Covenant.

[1 Samuel 4:1](#) to [1 Samuel 7:1-17](#).

The Philistine nation were the only non-Jewish nation who inhabited the land known as Palestine, because of this the Nation of Israel and the Nation of the Philistines were often in battle. The Philistines were organized under five lords, each controlling one of the five cities, Ashdod, Ekron, Askelon, Gaza and Gath. The Philistine nation was later destroyed by the conquering armies of Babylon, etc.

"Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek." This battle takes place in open ground, probably in the Plain of Sharon. In the open ground the Philistines were able to use their chariots with great advantage,

[1 Samuel 13:5](#);

[2 Samuel 1:6](#).

On the first day of the battle engagement of the armies the Israelites suffered considerable losses of the men but held their ground. The Israelites, knew that they would be unable to hold out against the Philistine enemies in the next battle so the Israelites had the Ark of the Covenant brought from Shiloh. They knew that the ark had been present in the early successful battles, for example the entry and conquering of the Promised Land. Then the dramatic destruction of Jericho. This action of having a symbol of their God was also an imitating of the way the Philistines behaved, they always carried their idol god's with them in to battle.

The Ark of the Covenant was brought into the camp by Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli. On the arrival of the ark the Jews made a great shout, the Israelites thought that the presence of the divine symbol would rectify their problems. The people did not realize that the presence of God does not depend upon a material symbol, but on the spiritual situation of the people present.

When the Philistines heard the shout which came from the Hebrew (Israel) camp, and heard of the arrival of the ark, they were greatly concerned, *"the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore,"* verse 7. The result was that the Philistines decided to fight for their lives with all they could. It soon became apparent to them that the Jews were actually very easy to beat, *"the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen."* *"And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain."*

Some scholars feel that thirty thousand dead must be an exaggeration but other battles from that time show that a considerable loss of life was possible.

Compare [Psalm 78:1ff](#)

This gives an account of the history of the Jewish nation,

[verses 60 onward](#) refers to the above events.

A man of Benjamin.

This man comes to Shiloh from the battle field, his appearance was in a sorry state, it was a common action by the people to tear their clothing and put ash or dirt on their head when in mourning,

See [Joshua 7:6](#);
[2 Samuel 15:32](#).

We are not given any more details about the man, whoever he was he brings terrible news for Eli who is sitting by the city gate. The man initially ignores the blind, ninety eight years old man and rushes into the city with the news of the defeat, probably many men from Shiloh had been killed. The man returns to Eli and tells him of the events of the battle, "a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead." But there was even more terrible news, the Philistines have captured the ark of God. This news resulted in Eli collapsing, possibly with a stroke or heart attack, and he broke his neck as he fell.

The shock brought the wife of Phinehas, who was pregnant, into labour, she delivers a baby son but dies during the child birth. She named the baby Ichabod just before she died. (Ichabod, the probable meaning is "where is the glory?", but it can also mean "where is God?") God was in fact very much present, He was with the religious symbol of the ark.

The Ark arrives at Ashdod.

[1 Samuel 5:1-5](#).

In [1 Samuel chapter 4:1](#) we read the sentence "The ark of God is taken." The Philistines had been permitted by the Lord to win the battle with His people, this was done that He might accomplish His own purpose. Having punished Israel, who had betrayed His symbol of the ark, God is now about to deal with those who ignored and abused Him.

Ashdod is about thirty-three miles west of Jerusalem, one of the five main cities of the Philistines. The ark was placed in the temple of their god Dagon, a man-fish god, It had the head and arms of a man but the body was like a fish in appearance. The Philistines had a great day of sacrifices and celebration at the Dagon temple for now it seemed that Dagon had taken the God of Israel a prisoner. The depositing of their trophy of war in a temple was common practice, in this situation it was apparently showing that they were victorious over the tribe of Israel, but had yet to realize the real significance of the presence of the ark, God was not defeated and still very much in control. The next day, on arrival at the temple to continue their celebration the Philistines found that the idol had fallen on its face before the ark. The idol immediately replaced on its stand but the next day it was on its face before the ark but now the head and hands had also been broken off, destroyed by God and the event was proof that it had no power , verse 6.

"The threshold of Dagon in Ashdod," is possibly referring to the pedestal that the idol had once stood upon, the Philistines still thought it was special, they ignored the fact that the idol had been powerless to protect itself from the true God.

God destroyed them.

[1 Samuel 5:6-9](#).

In [1 Samuel 6:4ff](#) the Philistines refer to mice and "Tumour's," this does suggest that possibly the illness God inflicted upon them was some version of the bubonic plague, which is spread by rodents and with swollen lymph-glands in the groin being one of the usual visible symptoms.

The effect of the plague made the people of Ashdod want to rid themselves of the ark of God which they do by sending it on to one of the other cities. From Ashdod they sent the ark to Gath and there again God revealed His judgment, destruction and the plague illness again happens. The ark then was sent to Ekron, judgment followed there also. For seven months the ark was carried from one city to another throughout the Philistine country, at last they decided to send it back to the Israelites. With the ark, they returned "*five golden emerods (tumors), and five golden mice,*" emblems of the judgment, they also sent a message that they were "*to give glory to the God of Israel.*" They were admitting that the God of Israel was superior and accepted their own defeat and suffering.

[1 Samuel 6:1-9](#)

They also remembered what had happened to the Egyptians and Pharaoh when they revolted against God,

[Exodus 7:14](#);
[Exodus 8:15,32](#);
[Exodus 9:12,35](#);
[Exodus 10:1](#).

The Ark is returned.

[1 Samuel 6:10-16.](#)

The Philistines built a new cart, it would not have been used for anything else before, a sign of reverence, in addition they used "two milch cows," (cows that had being kept only for producing milk and would probably have calves somewhere.) These cows would not have ever been used or trained for pulling a cart or having a yolk fitted on their neck for pulling a cart. The cows and cart carrying the ark, had no driver but it moved forward in an orderly manner, following "*the straight pathway to Beth-shemesh.*", eight or ten miles from the cows home. A cow with a calf would not normally have left their calf, so they were under supernatural control.

The Jews were harvesting when the cart comes into their view, "*the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite,*" and stopped. The cart and cows had been used for a sacred task by carrying the ark so could not be used for any other non religious purpose, so they used the wood from the cart and animals as a sacrifice to God. As there was no central place of worship or sanctuary at that time, this would appear to have been acceptable to God.

The divine presence.

[1 Samuel 6:19,20.](#)

The Israelites were full of joy at the return of the ark, but it is immediately clear that the ark is a symbol of a divine presence, it is holy and cannot be subjected to casual interest by a non priest. The curiosity of the people was punished by God, He commands reverence and awe in anything associated with Himself. We should consider our own worship, it should not consist of a program of clever approaches, but one of true worship from our hearts, we should be ever mindful of who God is,

[Heb 10:31.](#)

The ark never returned to Shiloh, from Beth Shemesh, the ark was taken to Kirjath-Jearim. Here the ark remained in the house of Abinadab under the sanctified Eleazar, his son, for twenty years. It was still here when David found the ark,

[2 Samuel 6:1-23;](#)

[1 Chronicles 13:1-16:36.](#)

The people return to God.

[1 Samuel 7:3-17.](#)

The idol Ashtoroth was the name of the "goddess" of a Babylonian idol called Ishtar, worship of her was widespread. She was considered, a goddess of fertility and sexual relationships.

Baal was a male deity of the Phoenicians and Canaanite nations, the idol was often known as the son of Dagon, he was dedicated as a fertility god and who supposed to control nature. Baal worship was common in the area when Israel entered the Promised Land.

Samuel now appears as a national leader, no longer a priest at Shiloh. It is obvious that idol worship was everywhere since the victory by the Philistines. Following encouragement and promises from God through Samuel the people now turned away from the worship of these idol gods to the worship of the true God, the answer to their problems. "*Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.*" Mizpeh has been used as a national meeting place on several occasions.

Verse 6: This appears to be the only time that the pouring out of water and fasting is used as a sign of penitence, possible due to there being no normal place of worship.

The Philistines heard that the people are gathered together and decide to attack them. The people were probably not prepared for war so were petrified, they asked for help from God, so Samuel makes an offering, "*Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.*" God dealt with the Philistines, then the men of Israel, who were not armed for a fight, completing the task. "*So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.*" The text does suggest that further battles may have occurred but Israel was the victor during the time of Samuel.

The name Amorites (Westerner) is a general name given to the original inhabitants of the Promised Land. Samuel now takes up the task of judge for the convenience of the people, Gilgal seems to have become the principle center for the nation following the destruction of Shiloh. Samuel also built an altar there. This does seem to disobey [Deuteronomy 12:5,13](#), but as the Tabernacle had been destroyed, Samuel, who was devoted

to God, had a desire for a place of worship. Jehovah obviously sanctioned this action, as indicating by the offerings being accepted by God from those who offered them.

Samuel the judge.

[1 Samuel 8:1-3.](#)

Samuel remained judge over Israel, but he still did not learn from the problem Eli had with his sons. When Samuel became elderly he appointed his sons, Joel, and Abijah as judges in Beersheba, unfortunately *"they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice."* As a result the people requested for a king to lead them, which would separate civil rule from religious leadership, this would mean a political history as well as a religious controlled history.

Samuel was not happy and was offended with this request after his lifetime of faithful service for the nation, but he was told of the reason, his evil sons and the need for a leader in war, verse 20, and so accepted the situation.

[1 Samuel 8:1 to 14:52](#)

[The people want a king.](#)

Samuel's final address to Israel.

[1 Samuel 12:1-25.](#)

This passage is more a reminder of his life's work, he challenges the people to find fault with his time as Judge and leader as he approaches the end, *"I am old and gray headed;"* in addition a king has now been appointed and taken his place as leader. The people can find no bad conduct by him, *"you have not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither have you taken ought of any man's hand."*

Samuel then reminds the people of their relationship with Jehovah, what He has done for them, however *"when they forgot the LORD their God, he sold them,"* as punishment, but *"they cried unto the LORD, and said, "We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, then He redeemed, purchased, them back. Samuel reminds them that now they have a king they must still "fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, " or "the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers."*

Verses 16-19: Samuel makes a request of the Lord to show them that the Lord does not approve of them wanting a king, *"and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel."* (This was not the season for this type of weather).

Finally, Samuel said that *"as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:"* he feels that praying for his people is an obligation he still has as the Lord's servant.

Samuel continued to serve God in the position as religious leader throughout the reign of Saul and later David.

Samuel was a man of much experience and as he approached the later years of his life he planned and created a great prophetic school, a training school for the prophets which had great effect on the future Old Testament characters.