



# The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

## 1 & 2 Samuel

### Introduction

### 1 & 2 Samuel

The events covered in 1 & 2 Samuel are from the period of the judges to the end of King David's life. The purpose of the book is to encourage Israel to hope in David's line of descendants despite the trouble caused by David's shortcomings as a King. Israel desired a king to judge them "like the other nations" (1 Samuel 7:5) YHWH would grant them this desire only to show them his provision for a King in David.

#### Structure:

- i. Foundation of the Kingdom (1 Sam. 1-7)
- ii. Saul's Kingdom (1 Sam. 8-15)
- iii. David's Kingdom (1 Sam. 16- 2Sam 20)
- iv. Future of the Kingdom (2 Sam. 21-24)

The ministry of God's blessed prophet Samuel establishes the legitimacy of David and his line because he anointed David as King. Saul and his family forfeited kingship by turning away from God. God's king is David. God blessed David as he was faithful but cursed him with trouble when he failed. Nevertheless, the last chapters demonstrate that David's house was still the legitimate dynasty in which Israel must put its trust.

The failures of the descendants of David's Royal lineage lead to many problems in Israel. Would the Israelites put their hope in *David's seed* in spite of the problems?

### Foundation of the Kingdom (1 Sam. 1-7)

#### A Prophet by God's Gracious Provision

The Book of 1 Samuel begins with a miraculous birth of prophet, Samuel. His mother Hannah is one of several barren women who give birth by the provision of God. She joins Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, who as wives and mothers of the patriarchs all struggled with barrenness and childlessness. The mighty warrior Sampson was raised up from a barren womb, and John the Baptist from Elizabeth in her old age. The seed of the woman is to be the means of salvation for overcoming evil.



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*The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.*

*<sup>7</sup> The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.*

*<sup>8</sup> He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.*

*For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world.*

1 Samuel 2:6-8

Hannah is a model of persistent prayer and faithfulness. Her story reveals the responsiveness of YHWH to the righteous and the persevering. The song of Hannah is a testimony to the sovereignty of God over all things.

The sovereignty of God is the key issue in the entire book. Israel is rejecting the gracious reign of God for a "king like other nations". Their exchange of YHWH's rule for human rule will have consequences. However, even with a king YHWH is still sovereign:

*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."*

*--1 Samuel 2:10*

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The word translated anointed is the Hebrew word, Messiah. This is the first time it appears in the Bible.

## **Judgment begins with the House of God (2:11-36)**

Hannah's song exalts God's sovereignty over his enemies. As the story, we see the "adversaries of the Lord" are inside the House of the Lord. The priesthood was corrupt because of the gluttony of Eli and the immorality of his sons. While Eli appears to have a faithful heart to the Lord, his love of fat and his sons over the Lord prevent him from disciplining his sons.

The LORD would clean house! He promised to judge the corrupt priestly line by "cutting off" their length of days. (2:31) The Lord would replace Eli with a new and faithful priest:

*<sup>35</sup> And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever. --1 Samuel 2:35*

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And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. --1 Samuel 3:19

## Judgment Spoken: The Calling of Samuel (3)

It is important to ask why the "Word of the Lord was rare in those days". (3:1) Israel was under discipline and judgment. The Lord often withdraws his presence and voice and hands the rebellious over to their own desires and sins.

Samuel is given his first prophetic vision of judgment. At first he thought that the voice was his master's. But Eli, weak as he was, knew it was the Lord calling Samuel. Ironically, the message was for Eli, his house would be judged because he "failed to restrain" his corrupt sons. Eli submitted to the judgment: "It is the LORD let him do what seems good to him." (18)

The Lord would establish Samuel to be a true prophet. All Israel would know that Samuel was a prophet of the LORD.

## Judgment Realized: The Ark is Lost (4)

Chapter four tells the story of how Samuel's first prophecy comes to realization. In a battle with the Philistines, the Israelites are undergoing a humiliating defeat. In their dismay the Israelites retrieve the ark of the Covenant as if it is some type of talisman. "Let us bring the ark...that it might save us from the power of our enemies. However, YHWH's judgment was against Israel for their corruption. The Philistines rally, Israel is soundly defeated, the two sons of Eli, Phinehas and Hophni, die in battle and the ark is captured.

The news of his son's death brings about Eli's death as he falls back and breaks his neck from his own obesity. The section ends with the wife of Phinehas dying in childbirth and as she is dying names her son "Ichabod" which means "The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

Sadly, God does have to withdraw his presence from Israel at times in order to have them seek him rightly.

## Cheer up YHWH is still Lord! (5-7)

Israel is to undergo discipline for its failings. Nevertheless, YHWH is Lord wherever he resides. The story of the Ark of the Covenant in Philistia is a bit of comic relief in an otherwise sad state of affairs.



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We see something of YHWH's sense of humor as the Philistia king brings the Ark into the temple of their god Dagon as tribute to their god's victory over Israel. To their surprise, for several mornings in a row they find the statue of their god fallen from its place and lying face down before the Ark of the Covenant.

The possession of Ark in the camp of the Philistines becomes a curse to them. They are afflicted with tumors and overrun with mice. Seven months of misery prove too much. As a test of whether it truly is the Ark which was inflicting the Philistines, they set up a cart with two cows never before yoked. They place the calves of the two cows in hiding and watch to see if the cart returns to Israel or travels another direction. In the cart they placed the Ark and 5 golden tumors and 5 golden mice as an offering to YHWH for their guilt!

Indeed, the cart went "straight in the direction" of Beth-shemesh of Israel!

The men of Beth-Shemesh gladly received the ark but several of them failed to respect the Holiness of God and were struck down-70 in all!

*Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us?"  
<sup>21</sup> So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to you." --1 Samuel 6:20-21*

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The prophet and judge Samuel, called all Israel to repentance. The return of the Ark demonstrated that YHWH was sovereign over all. In their return to dependence YHWH "helped" Israel defeat the Philistines soundly. Samuel set up a stone called Ebenezer for he said "Till now the LORD has helped us."

The "Till now" or "Up to this point" is a statement of YHWH's enduring faithfulness to Israel for generations. why would you want any other to rule?



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*Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.*

--1 Samuel 8:7

## A King like other Nations (8)

Like the cycle of sin under the Judges, the Israelites falter with the end of Samuel's administration. His sons were corrupt and greedy. The people of Israel recognized the leadership crisis and determined a human solution to their problem--"a king to judge us like all the other nations." (8:5)

This greatly distressed Samuel. Like Moses, he plead with the Lord for Israel. But, the LORD gave the people what they wanted!

Samuel warns the people that in their desire for human security, they will lose their independence and freedom. Kings are costly and oppressive. In spite of Samuel's pleadings and warnings, the people demand a king:

***"No! But there shall be a king over us, that we may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." --1 Samuel 8:20***

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In that moment, the Israelites chose security over freedom, dependence over responsibility, curse over blessing, sameness over holiness, human rule over divine sovereignty.

## Saul's Kingdom (9-15)

The Lord's selection of a king like the other nations was Saul. He was a deeply insecure person (10:22) who from outward appearances was regal in stature (10:23). The people value the outward appearance of strength but fail to recognize the inner failing. "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? There is none like him among all the people!...Long live the King!" (10:24)

Human rule, become an occasion for fragmentation and disunity for some asked: "How can this man save us?"



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## Samuel's Intercession and Prophecy

The record of Samuel's words provide an enduring testimony to his concerns of human rule over divine rule. He again reemphasizes that the Israelites have chosen poorly in their sin in asking for a king. They have made their bed, now they must lie in it. Samuel's prophecy is a warning both to Israel and its king that future blessings would only come from obedience to the sovereign rule of YHWH.

*If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. <sup>15</sup> But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king. 1 Samuel 12:14-15*

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*"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. <sup>23</sup> For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."*

--1 Samuel 15:22-23

The blessings and curses of for keeping and breaking covenant are now in the purview of the king. Israel now will rise and fall with its monarchy at the helm--just like the other nations. Samuel provides a contrast to Saul of a strong leader who is humble before the Lord. He is an intercessor for his people and he is a teacher of the way of the Lord. He is fearless in the fulfillment of his calling to prophetically speak the word of the Lord.

The Lord did not let any of his words "fall to the ground". (3:19)

While the new king Saul did prove to be one who would fight Israel's battles, his heart was corrupt. He engaged in inappropriate sacrifices (13) and made rash vows (14). The Lord would ultimately reject Saul as king and seek out "a man after his own heart."

The final straw was Saul's disobedience in plundering the Amalekites , rather than devoting them to destruction as the Lord commanded. Samuel asks, "What is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of oxen that I hear?" (15:14)

It was the sound of disobedience!