

1 Samuel - Introduction & Background

Title

Samuel is arguably the central character in the book of 1 Samuel since he represents Israel's last judge and first prophet as well as the anointer of Israel's first two kings. Thus, the book is most probably named in honor of him. The name Samuel means "The name of God," "His name is God," "Heard of God," and "Asked of God." The Massoretes originally considered both 1–2 Samuel as one book. The LXX entitles 1 Samuel *Basileion Alpha* ("First Kingdoms"). The LXX calls 2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings "Second, Third, and Fourth Kingdoms." The Latin Vulgate entitles the Samuel and Kings books *Libri Regum* ("Books of Kings"). The Latin Bible entitles the book of 1 Samuel *Liber I Samuelis*, which means "First Book of Samuel."

Authorship

The Book of 1 Samuel is an anonymous work. However, according to *Baba Bathra* 14b–15a, Samuel wrote the Samuel books. Samuel is a likely candidate for authorship of the book since he authored other works (1 Sam 10:25; 1 Chr 29:29) and was the head of a group of other prophets (1 Sam 10:5; 19:20). However, Samuel could not have been the author of all of the book's contents since the book itself records his death (1 Sam 25:1). *Baba Bathra* 15a asserts that Nathan and Gad wrote the rest of the material. Gad is a logical candidate as a contributing author since he lived at least until David's purchase of the temple property (2 Sam 24:18) and also wrote other works about David (1 Chr 29:29). Nathan is similarly a logical candidate for a contributing author since he was critical in the transition between David and Solomon (1 Kings 1:8–45) and also demonstrated a propensity for writing about David's life (1 Chr 29:29).

The Deuteronomistic School holds that the book was originally comprised of two or three documents with other sections introduced by a redactor as late as 550 BC. However, ...the view that Samuel is a constituent part of the massive work known as the 'Deuteronomistic History,' a work that achieved final form only in the post-exilic period, has less to commend it. While not necessarily inimical to a high view of Scripture, it simply lacks any objective internal support, to say nothing of any compatibility with ancient tradition. Nothing in its present form presupposes any need for the account to have been edited as it left the pen of a 20th century BC author.

Date

The book must have been written before 722 BC since it fails to mention the Assyrian captivity. Many hold that the book must have been written after the division of the kingdom in 931 BC since it seems to identify Judah as a separate entity (11:8; 17:52; 18:16; 27:6).

However, this argument should not be pushed too far since 2 Sam 5:1-5 seems to also present Judah as a separate entity even in David's time.

Many date the book in 960 BC since Solomon replaced David in 971 BC "Granting the reliability of both biblical and talmudic tradition regarding Nathan's role in recounting the history embodied in Samuel, a date of about 960 for its essentially completed rendition is not wide of the mark. Solomon succeeded David as king in 971 BC, and Nathan had a hand in recording some of the events of Solomon's reign (2 Chr 9:29). It would seem that he must have lived for at least a few years of Solomon's tenure in order for it to have been considered important enough to mention." However, Pond argues that it is possible to date the book even earlier toward the middle of David's reign. Not only does the book omit any reference to David's death but 2 Sam 23:1-7 should be regarded as a thematic conclusion to the book rather than David's deathbed words. All things considered, a date of 990-970 BC for the composition of the book seems appropriate.

Scope

The dates of the reigns of Israel's three kings must be kept in mind when determining the scope of the book of 1 Samuel. Saul reigned from 1051-1011 BC (Acts 13:21). David reigned from 1011-971 BC (2 Sam 2:11; 5:4-5). Solomon reigned from 971-931 BC (1 Kings 11:32). Moreover, the Book of 1 Samuel begins where the Judgeship of Samson left off (Judges 16:31). Because Samson had provided an incomplete conquest of the Philistines, Samuel had to contest this foe as well.

Thus, the Book of 1 Samuel begins with the birth of Samuel and extends all the way until Saul's death. Because Samuel, who was born around the same time as Samson, had sons who were old enough to be Judges before the reign of Saul (8:1-4), Samuel could have been born in 1105 BC. Thus, the book covers Samuel's birth (1105 BC), ministry (1067-1015 BC), and ends with Saul's death (1011 BC). In sum, the book covers the 94-year period of time in between the birth of Samuel (1105 BC) and the death of Saul (1011 BC).

Recipient(s)

Most agree that 1 Samuel was written to the generation of Jews in Solomon's time. However, if Pond's previously described early date scenario holds true, then it is likely that the book was addressed specifically to King Solomon. In this case, the book was written to teach him through the example of Saul and David that covenant obedience yields fertility and blessing both individually (popularity, abundance of children, Godliness of children, and longevity of kingship) and nationally (success, victory, peace, and prosperity). By contrast, covenant disobedience brings forth infertility and curses. Even if one dates the book later, this message could still be applicable to all of Israel's future kings.

Historical Background

Most of the world empires during the time of the Samuel books were in a state of weakness. The Philistines were the entity responsible for oppressing Israel during the time

when the events of 1 Samuel transpired. The era when the Philistines most strongly oppressed Israel was from 1087 to 1047 BC. The Philistines dwelt in the coastal plains during this time. Israel dwelt in the hill country, which protected the land of Israel from complete conquest and domination by the Philistines.

Due to their monopoly on the use of iron (13:19-22), the Philistines enjoyed a strategic advantage over Israel. The Philistines' aggressive military behavior during this time made Israel long for a king who would fight their battles for them (1 Sam 8).

Message

In the Book of 1 Samuel, God transitions His covenanted nation away from the failing theocratic administration under the Judges and toward the theocratic administration through the monarchy. By showing the deficiencies of the final phase of the Judges era (1-7), the Book of 1 Samuel is an apologetic for the new monarchy, which God graciously establishes for His people in spite of their sin. However, the book represents more than just an apology for the monarchy in general. Specifically, it also represents an apologetic for the notion that God will only reign during the monarchial form of the theocracy through the king that He elects (Gen 49:10) and who obeys His covenant.

Thus, the writer is careful to note the monarchy's failings under the leadership of Saul, who was a non-elect and disobedient king (8-15). To this end, the book also highlights the inferiority of Saul in comparison to David, the elect, obedient king whose rule was yet to be inaugurated (16-31). Thus, the book is an apology not only for David and his dynastic successors but also an anticipation for the coming of David's greater son who will rule in perfect obedience to God's covenant (Gen 49:10; Deut 17:14-20; 2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89:36-37; Is 7:14; 9:6-7). The successes of David and Samuel as well as the failings of Eli and Saul also exemplify to Israel's future kings that covenant obedience brings fertility and blessings while covenant disobedience brings infertility and curses.

Purposes

The writer had several purposes in mind when he composed his book. First, he wrote to explain the failure of the Judges form of the theocracy. Second, he wrote to define, explain, and defend the new monarchy. Third, he wrote in order to explain that the monarchy would only function properly with an elect and obedient king on the throne.

Fourth, he wrote in order to give future rulers examples of how curses will come upon them nationally and personally due to covenant disobedience and blessing will come upon them nationally and personally through covenant obedience. Fifth, he wrote in order to introduce and explain through the example of Samuel the role of a prophet within the monarchy. He showed that the role of a prophet is to call disobedient kings back to covenant faithfulness. Sixth, he wrote in order to bridge the historical gap in between the Judges' era and the Davidic dynasty.

Theological Themes

Numerous theological themes recur throughout the Book of 1 Samuel. First, the sovereignty of God is displayed as God unilaterally transitions from one form of theocracy to the next and raises a lowly shepherd to the pinnacle of power. God's sovereignty is also displayed in the way He establishes and removes kings. Second, the book emphasizes the dangers of settling for God's permissive will rather than His perfect will (1 Sam 8). Third, the book reiterates spiritual gifting or empowerment for service (1 Sam 10:6; 16:13). Fourth, the book explains both the office of the prophet and the king. Fifth, the book emphasizes prayer (1:10-18; 2:1-10; 7:5,6,12; 8:6,21). Sixth, 1 Samuel furnishes a foundation for various New Testament themes since Christ referred to the book at least twice (1 Sam 21:6; Matt 12:3-4; 1 Sam 16:7; Luke 16:15).

Unique Characteristics

The Book of 1 Samuel boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, the book epitomizes leadership transitions. Samuel is both the last judge as well as the first prophet. While Saul is the first non-elect king, David is the first elect king. Second, the book represents the beginning of both the office of the prophet and the king.

Third, the book is known for its use of God's names. For example, the book is the first to employ the term "anointed one" or *messiah* (2:10). Moreover, the book also is the first to refer to God as "the Lord of Hosts" (1:3). Fourth, well-used names come out of this book such as *Ichabod* or "no glory" (4:21) and *Ebenezer* or "stone of help" (7:12). Fifth, "The text of Samuel is probably the most corrupt of any book in the Masoretic Text (Mt)...Generally the text is to be considered very reliable because the percentage of corrupt material is extremely small."

Structure

The Book of 1 Samuel follows a well defined four-fold structure. First, the house of Samuel is exalted while the house of priest-judge Eli is abased (1-3). Second, the book records the journeys of the ark (4-7). Third, the Samuel and Saul narrative is recorded (8-15). Fourth, the David and Saul interchange is recorded (16-31). Chapters 1-7 record the decline of the theocratic administration under the judges. Chapters 8-31 record the rise of the theocratic administration under the monarchy. In this last section, Samuel represents the final judge, the "kingmaker" of Israel's first two kings, and the prophet who calls the wayward king Saul to repentance.

Christ in 1 Samuel

Samuel may be a type of Christ since both men fulfill the three offices of prophet, priest, and king and both ushered in a higher order. David's birth in Bethlehem, roles as shepherd and king, anointing, heart after God (13:14; 16:7), and election cause him to typify Christ. He foreshadows the one who will come and rule perfectly as the final Davidic king. Consequently, the NT constantly draws a connection between Christ and David (Matt 1:1-17; Rom 1:3; Rev 22:16). The reference to "messiah" (2:10) is also obviously Christological.

Genre

Most of the material in the book is straightforward narrative with an occasional display of the poetic sub-genre (18:7). While the book is considered one of the historical books in the protestant canon, it is categorized with the former prophets in the Hebrew Bible. As such its primary point is not to communicate comprehensive history but rather to use history selectively to teach a spiritual lesson. The lesson that the book teaches is covenant obedience leads to fertility and vice versa.

Outline

I. Transition from the house of Eli to Samuel (1:1—4:1a)

(1) Samuel's birth (1:1—2:10)

- (A) Hannah is provoked by her rival (1:1-8)
- (B) Hannah's vow to dedicate her child to the Lord (1:9-18)
- (C) Hannah begets Samuel (1:19-23)
- (D) Hannah dedicates Samuel (1:24-28)
- (E) Hannah praises God (2:1-10)

(2) Samuel's spirituality contrasted with Eli's son's carnality (2:11-36)

- (A) Contrast in ministerial faithfulness (2:11-17)
 - (a) Samuel's faithfulness (2:11)
 - (b) Eli's sons unfaithfulness (2:12-17)
- (B) Contrast in fertility (2:18-25)
 - (a) Samuel brings fertility to his home (2:18-21)
 - (b) Sons of Eli bring infertility to their home (2:22-25)
- (C) Contrast in divine blessing (2:26-36)
 - (a) Samuel blessed (2:26)
 - (b) Eli's sons cursed (2:27-36)

(3) Samuel eclipsed Eli as the divine spokesman (3:1—4:1a)

- (A) God's threefold call to Samuel rather than Eli (3:1-9)
- (B) God reveals His plans concerning Eli's destruction to Samuel (3:10-14)
- (C) Samuel discloses God's plans to Eli (3:15-18)
- (D) Samuel confirmed as God's prophet (3:19—4:1a)

II. The Ark's travels (4:1b—7:17)

(1) Israel loses the Ark (4:1b-22)

- (A) Philistines defeat Israel (4:1-4)
- (B) Philistines re-defeat Israel and take the Ark (4:5-11a)
- (C) Israel's loss of blessings as a result of the Ark's departure (4:11b-22)
 - (a) Death of Eli's sons (4:11b)
 - (b) Death of Eli (4:12-18)
 - (c) Phinehas' wife dies while begetting Ichabod (4:19-22)

- (2) God demonstrates his sovereignty over the false gods of the Philistines through the Ark (5:1-12)
 - (A) Yahweh's supremacy over Dagon (5:1-5)
 - (B) Yahweh's supremacy in each Philistine city (5:6-12)
 - (a) Ashdod (5:6-7)
 - (b) Gath (5:8-9)
 - (c) Ekron (5:10-12)
 - (3) God supernaturally guides the Ark back to Israel (6:1—7:2)
 - (A) Philistines strategize a magical return to Israel (6:1-9)
 - (B) God supernaturally guides the ark to Beth-Shemesh (6:10-18)
 - (C) God supernaturally manifests himself through the ark to the inhabitants of Bethshemesh (6:19-20)
 - (D) Ark returns to Kiriath-jearim (6:21—7:2)
 - (4) Samuel's successful judgeship (7:3-17)
 - (A) Covenant renewal at Mizpah (7:3-6)
 - (B) Philistines defeated (7:7-14)
 - (C) Realm of Samuel's circuit (7:15-17)
- III. Samuel and Saul narrative (8:1—15:35)
- (1) Israel requests a King (8:1-22)
 - (A) Israel rejects Samuel's sons as rulers (8:1-5)
 - (B) Israel rejects God as King (8:6-9)
 - (C) Samuel warns Israel of the consequences of having a king (8:10-18)
 - (D) God grants Israel's request (8:19-22)
 - (2) God chooses Saul to be the king (9:1—10:16)
 - (3) Saul's coronation (10:17-27)
 - (4) Israel accepts Saul as King at Gilgal after he defeats the Ammonites at Jabesh-Gilead (11:1-15)
 - (5) Samuel's warning against national covenant unfaithfulness (12:1-25)
 - (6) Saul usurps priestly prerogatives while awaiting Samuel at Gilgal before battle with the Philistines (13:1-23)
 - (7) Saul's rash vow (14:1-52)
 - (8) Saul's partial obedience in destroying Amalek causes God to reject him as King (15:1-35)
- IV. Transition from the house of Saul to the house of David (1 Samuel 16:1—31:13)
- (1) David on friendly terms with Saul (16:1—17:58)
 - (A) David's anointing (16:1-13)
 - (B) David's employment in Saul's court (16:14-23)
 - (C) David slays Goliath (17:1-58)

- (2) David at enmity with Saul (18:1—20:42)
 - (A) Jonathan's covenant with David (18:1-4)
 - (B) David prospers and Saul becomes jealous (18:5-16)
 - (C) David marries Saul's daughter Michal (18:17-30)
 - (D) Saul's royal household protects David from death (19:1—20:42)
 - (a) David protected by Jonathan (19:1-10)
 - (b) David protected by Michal (19:11-17)
 - (c) David protected by the Spirit (19:18-24)
 - (d) David protected by Jonathan (20:1-42)
 - (3) David in exile from the pursuing Saul (21:1—29:11)
 - (A) David and his men given weaponry and nourishment by the priest Ahimelech in Nob (21:1-10)
 - (B) David feigns insanity in order to be protected from Achish in Gath (21:11-15)
 - (C) David becomes a leader of the men at Adullam (22:1-2)
 - (D) David leaves his mother and father in Moab (22:3-4a)
 - (E) David stays at Masada (22:4b-5a)
 - (F) David hides in the Hereth forest while Saul slaughters the priests at Nob (22:5b-23)
 - (G) God protects David from betrayal by Keliath into Saul's hands after he delivered Keliath from the Philistines (23:1-13)
 - (H) Jonathan visits David in the wilderness of Ziph as the Ziphites divulge David's location to Saul (23:14-23)
 - (I) David's narrow escape from Saul near Maon (23:24-28)
 - (J) David's exemplary character (24:1—26:25)
 - (a) David spares Saul's life at Engedi (24:1-22)
 - (b) David spares Nabal at Maon and marries Abigail at Carmel (25:1-44)
 - (c) David again spares Saul's life at Ziph (26:1-25)
 - (K) David in Philistia (27:1—29:11)
 - (a) David serves under Achish in Gath (27:1—28:2)
 - (b) Saul and the witch of Endor (28:3-25)
 - (c) Philistines dismiss David (29:1-11)
 - (4) Epilogue (30:1—31:13)
 - (A) David defeats the Amalekites at Ziklag (30:1-31)
 - (B) Saul's death (31:1-13)
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The books of Samuel and Kings form a basic foundational study in the OT. The LXX calls 1st & 2nd Samuel and 1st & 2nd Kings, "1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Kingdoms." It was Jerome's Latin translation (the *Vulgate*) which was made about six centuries later that resulted in their current labels. An understanding of this basic history is essential, not only to understanding the Old and New Testaments, but in gaining a valid perspective of eschatological issues as well.

Together the two books of Samuel explain Israel's transition from loosely associated tribes led by local "judges" to a unified nation led by kings. The book of 1 Samuel was really the story of Samuel, the last of the judges, and the transition to a king, with the dismal career of Saul. Samuel, Israel's last and greatest judge, was also a prophet (3:20) and a priest (9:12-13). It covers the period of Israel's history bracketed by Samuel's conception and the end of David's reign. David turned the kingdom over to Solomon in 971 BC. David reigned for 40 and one-half years (2 Sam 2:11; 5:5). This means he came to power in 1011 BC. Saul also reigned for 40 years (Acts 13:21) so he became king in 1051 BC. We can estimate the date of Samuel's birth fairly certainly, on the basis of chronological references in the text, to have been about 1121 BC. Thus the Book of Samuel covers about 1121–971 BC, or about 150 years of history.

Israel had failed to treat God with respect. Even Eli permitted his own sons to defile the priesthood. It's clear that Eli failed with his sons, but ironically Samuel himself also had a similar failure! We read that Samuel appointed his grown sons as judges, but that they "turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice" (8:1-3). Samuel personally was a godly person, dedicated to God from his childhood. Yet, how do we explain his failure with his sons? Do godly parents always produce godly children?

Consider the following excuses:

- Busy parents don't give enough time to their children
- Godliness in parents is not attractive to children
- Godly parents expect too much of their children and turn them away
- Godly parents are a good influence but influence cannot determine what a person will become
- Children, like parents, have to make their own spiritual commitments

Purpose

For the Israelites, their commitment to obey the Mosaic Covenant out of trust in God and gratitude for His calling them to receive His grace, would result in God blessing them (Deut 28:1-14). However if they despised His grace and departed from His will, as expressed for them in the Mosaic Covenant, He would curse them (Deut 28:15-68). Moses had explained God's "blessing" in Deuteronomy. It included fertility for the Israelites personally as well as for their herds and crops, and it included the ability to defeat their neighbor enemies and to enjoy peace and prosperity. It also included other material and social advantages, as well

as the enjoyment of an intimate spiritual relationship with God. God's "curse," on the other hand, would be barrenness, defeat, oppression, and many other undesirable conditions. In Samuel we have a record of how commitment to the will of God results in blessing for individuals, groups of individuals, and whole nations. This commitment should rest on an appreciation for God's initiative in reaching out to undeserving sinners in grace. We also see how disregard for God's Word, because of a failure to appreciate God's grace, inevitably leads to blasting, a curse from God. These lessons are not new; the Books of Samuel are not emphasizing these things for the first time in Scripture. The Book of Joshua is a positive lesson that people who trust and obey God succeed. They even accomplish supernatural feats and prosper. The Book of Judges gives the other side of that coin. People who disregard God fail, become unproductive, suffer defeat, and sometimes die prematurely. The Books of Samuel continue the emphasis begun in Genesis and Exodus that Deuteronomy clarified, namely, that our response to God's grace determines our destiny.

Echoes in Later History

When we get to the Book of Esther, we encounter a dramatic contest between the evil Haman, Xerxes' prime minister, and Esther's benefactor, Mordecai.

It is interesting that the villain of the narrative, Haman, was an "Agagite," a royal Amalekite, the last of his proud house to occupy a position of influence and power [Josephus, *Antiquities*, xi 6, 5], and thus a descendant of the Agag whom Saul had failed to kill, and the reason he lost the kingdom.

The hero of the narrative, Mordecai, was a descendant of Shimei (Esther 2:5), whom David declined to have killed (2 Sam 16:10). If David had let Abishai kill Shimei, perhaps the drama of Haman's attempt to exterminate the Jews might have ended differently!

The Reign of David

In 2 Samuel we enjoy the career of the greatest king whose perpetual dynasty is climaxed in none other than the Messiah Himself! Understanding God's commitment to David is fundamental to understanding the NT and virtually all eschatological issues. Furthermore, David is, in many ways, a personal example to us all. He alone was called "a man after God's own heart." (Why?)

David's accomplishments as Israel's ruler are unmatched (2 Sam 5-10). David's rule was strong and aggressive and his accomplishments were unparalleled. Other men of history have demonstrated military and administrative capacity, but David overshadows them all by the breadth and depth of his ability. To cap it all, David is one of the great men of faith. His personal qualities and faith provide examples for believers of every age.

But perhaps even more important, he is an anticipatory type of Jesus, who will rule as God's coming King. In what ways was the kingdom of David *prophetic* of that of Jesus Christ?

The Davidic Covenant

One of the most important passages in all of Scripture is the unique commitment that God announces through Nathan regarding the eternal dynasty of David:

2 Sam 7:11-16:

11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

It was this very throne that was confirmed by Gabriel to Mary:

Luke 1:31-33:

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

The Scepter of Judah

This rulership of the tribe of Judah was prophesied as early as Genesis when Jacob prophesied over each of the twelve tribes. Among these seemingly cryptic riddles, the best known one concerns the royal tribe of Judah:

Gen 49:10: The **scepter** shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

- "...scepter" - refers to their tribal identity and the right to apply and enforce Mosaic Laws and adjudicate capital offenses: *jus gladii*

— It is significant that even during their 70-year Babylonian captivity (606-537 BC) the tribes retained their tribal identity [Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pp. 108-168]. They retained their own logistics, judges, etc. (Ezek 1:5,8).

The term "Shiloh" was understood by the early rabbis and Talmudic authorities as referring to the Messiah [*Targum Onkelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and Targum Yerusahmi, The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation; The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum*, Samson H. Levy, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1974.]

The Scepter Departs

In 6-7 AD, King Herod's son and successor, Herod Archelaus, was dethroned and banished to Vienna, a city in Gaul. Archelaus was the second son of Herod the Great [Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17:13]. The older son, Herod Antipater, was murdered by Herod the Great, along with other family members. (It was quipped at the time that it was safer to be a dog in that household than a member of the family!)

Archelaus' mother was a Samaritan (1/4 or less of Jewish blood) and was never accepted. After the death of Herod (4 BC?), Archelaus had been placed over Judea as "Ethnarch" by Caesar Augustus. Broadly rejected, he was removed in 6-7 AD. He was replaced by a Roman procurator named Caponius. The legal power of the Sanhedrin was immediately restricted and the adjudication of capital cases was lost. This was normal Roman policy. [This transfer of power was recorded by Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Bk 2, Ch. 8. Also, *The Jerusalem Talmud*, Sanhedrin, folio 24.]

This transfer of power is mentioned in the Talmud [*The Jerusalem Talmud*, Sanhedrin, folio 24.] and by Josephus: After the death of the procurator Festus, when Albinus was about to succeed him, the high priest Ananius considered it a favorable opportunity to assemble the Sanhedrin. He therefore caused James, the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, and several others, to appear before this hastily assembled council, and pronounced upon them the sentence of death by stoning. All the wise men and strict observers of the law who were at Jerusalem expressed their disapprobation of this act... Some even went to Albinus himself, who had departed to Alexandria, to bring this breach of the law under his observation, and to inform him that Aranius had acted illegally in assembling the Sanhedrin without the Roman authority. [Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:9]

This remarkable passage not only mentions Jesus and His brother James as historical figures, it also underscores that the authority of the Sanhedrin had already been passed to the Romans.

Panic Reaction

When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, they covered their heads with ashes and their bodies with sackcloth, and bemoaned, "Woe unto us for the scepter has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come!" [*Babylonian Talmud*, Chapter 4, folio 37; also, Augustin Lemann, *Jesus before the Sanhedrin*, 1886, translated by Julius Magath, NL#0239683, Library of Congress #15-24973]. *They actually thought that the Torah, the Word of God, had failed!* They should have known better.

The scepter had, indeed, been removed from Judah, but Shiloh *had* come. While the Jews wept in the streets of Jerusalem, a young son of a carpenter was growing up in Nazareth. He would present Himself as the *Meshiach Nagid*, Messiah the King, on the very day which had been predicted by the Angel Gabriel to Daniel five centuries earlier (Dan 9:24-27).

Some Self-Test Questions

This brief teaser cannot do justice to these critical historical books of 1 and 2 Samuel, but may stimulate an in-depth study of them. Here are a few "prods" to consider:

- (1) How could Samuel anoint a member of the tribe of *Benjamin* when Jacob had predicted that Judah would be the royal tribe (Gen 49:10), and the Book of Ruth predicted the line of the David (Ruth 4:17-22)?
- (2) Why would Ahithophel (Bathsheba's grandfather), David's private counselor, later turn against him by encouraging Absalom's rebellion?
- (3) In Ps 51:11, David prayed, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me." Can we pray that? Why not? (Rom 11:29; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30)
- (4) And what does the strange episode with the Witch of Endor (1 Sam 28) teach us about the occult?
- (5) Even the familiar account of the defeat of Goliath has deeper overtones than most of us are probably aware of (1 Sam 17). (Why did David pick up *five* stones when he crossed the brook to face the giant?

Israel's Last Judge

- After Joshua died, God was rarely heard from for hundreds of years because God's people quit talking to Him, listening for His words, or reflecting on the Scriptures
 - There was no consistent, God-honoring leadership and little unity in Israel
 - Israel's association with the Canaanites and their gods brought social instability, moral corruption, dissension and death, just as God had prophesied (Judges 19:1–20:48)
 - They lacked communication with God, so they lacked unity with one another
 - They lost sight of their purpose
 - They no longer heard what was important and eternal
 - They did whatever seemed right in their own eyes
- Under Samuel's influence, the 12 tribes of Israel united and were again instructed in the Lord's ways
 - Samuel, Israel's last and greatest judge, was also a prophet (1 Sam 3:20) and a priest (9:12-13)
 - In his old age he served as God's adviser to Israel's first king, Saul. Samuel anointed Israel's greatest king, David
 - Together the two books of Samuel cover the history of Israel from the last quarter of the 12th century BC to the first quarter of the 10th

- They explain Israel's transition from loosely associated tribes led by local judges to a unified nation led by kings

The Book of 1 Samuel can be outlined as the story of two men, though the Biblical focus soon shifts from the flawed Saul to his more godly successor, David.

Early Life

The events in these opening chapters of the book center around three persons: Hannah, a Godly mother; Eli, a failing father; and Samuel, the last and greatest "Judge" and a national prophet and priest.

- Samuel is equaled only by Moses among OT prophets.
- Samuel ends the period of the Judges.
- Samuel founded the School of the Prophets...was the first National Prophet

