

## Background and Setting

The majority of the action recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel took place in and around the central highlands in the land of Israel. The nation of Israel was largely concentrated in an area that ran about 90 mi. from the hill country of Ephraim in the North to the hill country of Judah in the South and between 15 to 35 miles East to West. This central spine ranges in height from 1,500 ft. to 3,300 feet above sea level. The major cities of 1 and 2 Samuel are to be found in these central highlands:

- ◇ **Shiloh, the residence of Eli and the tabernacle**
- ◇ **Ramah, the hometown of Samuel**
- ◇ **Gibeah, the headquarters of Saul**
- ◇ **Bethlehem, the birthplace of David**
- ◇ **Hebron, David's capital when he ruled over Judah**
- ◇ **Jerusalem, the ultimate "city of David."**

## Historic Action:

During the years narrated in Samuel, the great empires of the ancient world were in a state of weakness. Neither Egypt nor the Mesopotamian powers, Babylon and Assyria, were threats to Israel at that time.

The two nations most hostile to the Israelites were the Philistines to the West and the Ammonites to the East. The major contingent of the Philistines had migrated from the Aegean Islands and Asia Minor in the 12th century B.C. After being denied access to Egypt, they settled among other preexisting Philistines along the Mediterranean coast of Palestine.

The Philistines controlled the use of iron, which gave them a decided military and economic advantage over Israel. The Ammonites were descendants of Lot who lived on the Transjordan Plateau.

David conquered the Philistines, the Ammonites, along with other nations that surrounded Israel .

# THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL



**Thursday Night Bible Study**

**Jeffersonville Presbyterian Church**

**September 2018 - May 2019**

Samuel was a contemporary of King Saul and King David. His parents (Elkanah and Hannah) dedicated Samuel to the Lord, giving him to the priest Eli to be raised in the temple. Samuel is portrayed as the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. Few people in the Bible were as obedient to God as Samuel.

## History of Samuel, Saul, and David.

Timeline: The events of 1 and 2 Samuel took place between the years 1105 B.C., the birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:1–28), to 971 B.C., the last words of David (2 Sam. 23:1–7). They span about 135 years of history.

The Books of Samuel are set in the land of Israel, where the Hebrews had invaded and settled. Numerous other peoples continued to dwell alongside Israel, often disrupting the peace and encouraging the Israelites to stray from their faith.

First Samuel begins, Israel was at a low point spiritually. The priesthood was corrupt, the Ark of the Covenant was not at the tabernacle, idolatry was practiced, and the judges were dishonest. Through the influence of godly Samuel and David, these conditions were reversed. Second Samuel concludes with the anger of the Lord being withdrawn from Israel.

Both books deal with a transitional period in the history of ancient Israel. There is a transition of leadership first from the priest Eli to the judge Samuel, then from the judge Samuel to the king Saul, and then from Saul to David. Samuel thus is the link between the judgeship and the kingship in Israel. He is the prophet God uses to anoint both Saul and David. The kingdom of Saul was also transitional. Under Saul, Israel was more than a loose confederation that gathered together whenever there was a common threat, but there was no strong central rule such as existed later.

In this critical period of Israel's history, the people of God transformed from a loosely affiliated group of tribes into a unified nation under a form of government headed by a king. They traded the turmoil of life under the judges for the stability of a strong central monarchy.

## KEY THEMES

**God's kingship.** God is King of the universe and always has been. No human king can assume kingship except as a deputy of the divine King.

**God's providential guidance.** Through the Holy Spirit, God providentially and individually guided the lives of chosen people such as Hannah, Samuel, and David. Even the life of Saul was in God's providential care. God's timing is always perfect, for he is the Lord of history.

**God's sovereign will and power.** God chooses or rejects people according to his absolute sovereign will and purpose. He may change his way of dealing with individuals according to his plan and purpose, but his decision is always just and right. At the same time, he is merciful and gracious. Therefore, obedience to God's word is of prime importance.

**Only God's grace allows sinful human beings to be in relationship with the holy God.** Only the God-given way of approaching him through sacrifice can prepare humans to come closer to God. Believers can only wait on God, who will do his will according to his own purpose. What is impossible for humans is possible for God. This should encourage believers to put their faith in the one who is sovereign over the entire creation.

**Messianic promise.** 2 Samuel is a turning point in the history of salvation. God chose David to be the beginning of an enduring dynasty, from which the ultimate Ruler, Jesus, would come. God used David to fulfill his eternal plan of salvation, not because he was perfect from a human viewpoint, but because the Lord was "with him" and showed grace to him.

