

I Samuel

Lesson 1 - Introduction

Today we begin a study on a series of books that were at one time a single unified work. However in our modern Christian (especially Protestant) bibles that single unified work became divided into 4 books. We'll examine all 4, in order, and the book we're going to examine first is called 1st Samuel; 2nd Samuel follows this book immediately, then 1st and 2nd Kings.

We'll be in these books a long time, probably approaching a couple of years.

As is our usual pattern I'm going to open our study with an introduction to try to set the boundaries, establish the context, and (using a broad brush) paint the landscape and then map-out the road that lay ahead of us. And all along the way I will take us on some occasional detours to explain several of the finer nuances of bible scholarship because these nuances have a great deal to do with how and why modern Christian doctrines were formed. We are going to delve into some of those nuances today, so please stay focused as they will explain some important fundamental aspects about our study of the book of Samuel and beyond.

So beginning with the basics, let's expand a bit on my opening statement that there is a difference between the ancient Hebrew manuscripts and our modern bibles as to the divisions of this section of the bible. The first division performed on this extensive work was to separate it into two books loosely called Samuel and Kings by our modern criteria. This division occurred, interestingly enough, with those translators based in Alexandria, Egypt and it was part and parcel with the translation of the Hebrew into what we call today the Greek Septuagint (the usual scholarly designation for the Greek Septuagint is the Romans numeral LXX). Centuries later other bible versions such as the Vulgate (a Latin translation) adopted this method of dividing the original book into several books and around the 16th century even the modern Hebrew bibles accepted it.

Upon it's division into two books they became referred to as The Books of Kingdoms with what is today called 1st and 2nd Samuel then called "Kingdoms" and the final two books called "Kings". While the title of each book and it's divisions is hardly an important matter, nor should we ever think of this division process as a corruption of the original because it has no effect on the content, it is good to know that they were originally one large document so that we understand that from the author's mind this was a single extensive and connected history that was recorded. Thus just because we move from one book to the next in this 4 book series, we've shouldn't hit our mental "reset" buttons when we finish one and begin the next, as though the previous book is unconnected to the next in the series. The information is intertwined: later facts of the stories are dependent on earlier facts, and the later stories often expand on information given in the earlier stories.

Now as for the author of these books: it was not Samuel himself, except that he certainly contributed a portion of the material for some of the opening chapters of the book of 1st Samuel. There is no doubt that more than one hand was involved in the creation of this 4 book series and that the title of the book of Samuel was not named for it's author but rather for it's central character. Samuel died before David ruled a united Israel, and so everything in this series of 4 books that refers to King David (at least from about the time of his coronation) was written by someone else, edited a little bit later on, and possibly even added to (to a degree that's very difficult to substantiate or prove).

The book of 1st Chronicles in chapter 29 tells us that some of the information about King David's reign comes from documents that are now lost to us, entitled, "Samuel the Seer", "Nathan the Prophet", and "Gad the Seer". In other words the greatest portion of what we'll examine over the next two years in Torah Class is a compilation of various records from the eras of Samuel, King Saul, and King David as written by a number of historians; and then those records were used as a source of information by some other and later anonymous editors (plural) who wrote the books of 1st and 2nd Samuel and 1st and 2nd Kings as they appear today in our bibles.

Thus just like for the Gospel writers of the New Testament, the writers of the 4 Books of the Kingdoms generally were NOT (so far as we know) eye-witnesses to the events they wrote about (or perhaps they personally witnessed but a part of what they wrote about); rather they acted somewhat like journalists, librarians and documentarians who interviewed eye-witnesses or reliable people who knew the eye-witnesses, and also researched historical records that earlier historians had created. And then from all this information they created a summary account that now appears as holy writ in our bible.

Now, even though some of you have studied with me for a long time perhaps what I just told you has unnerved you a bit; but don't let it. That most books of the bible were compilations from other records (oral or written) and only sometimes were written by the namesake of the book or even by someone who was present from beginning to end of the events described in that book, it doesn't harm their accuracy or bring suspicion upon the inspired nature of what was written.

First, understand that I'm not giving you some new or modern age academic take on the creation of the various books of the Bible. What I've explained to you was common knowledge among the Hebrews, and when we give it some thought we can quickly imagine that it couldn't possibly have been any other way. Just as with the Torah where a goodly portion of it takes place after Moses' death, it obviously could not have been written entirely by Moses. And the entire book of Genesis took place enormous periods of time before Moses' birth so most of what Moses' knew and wrote about the epoch of Genesis was either a direct oracle from the Lord or had been handed down by word of mouth (and almost certainly what we read today is a combination of the two).

Second, since we are studying the **Old Testament** and there has been a certain bigotry against it by gentiles since about the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine forward, and then in a few more centuries an outright denial that the texts were even valid any longer, there

has developed over the last 200 years some questioning of its veracity. And the question of veracity is often because a major portion of many OT books was written well after the fact, edited and re-edited, and therefore some commentators claim that this means the information is not reliable as compared to the New Testament. But the truth is that both Testaments are cut from the same cloth. As I mentioned the best examples of that rather standard process of creating the books of the bible are the New Testament Gospel accounts, which were NOT all written by eyewitnesses (especially the Synoptic Gospels). In fact the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke weren't even called by those names until the late 2nd century or the beginning of the 3rd century AD; rather they were written anonymously and only later (because there were multiple Gospel accounts in circulation within the early Church) were names finally (and somewhat arbitrarily) assigned to the various Gospels so as to distinguish them one from the other.

Third, it is undeniable that there are some differences in the biblical accounts of this section we call Samuel and Kings between the oldest Hebrew manuscripts and the oldest Greek manuscripts. It has become rather traditional among Christian bible researchers to say that where there are differences, the problem automatically lies with a corrupted Hebrew manuscript and that the Greek Septuagint is the more accurate; and this is not without good reason. The reality is that until not long ago, the oldest OT manuscripts known to us were written in Greek, not Hebrew. The Septuagint was written about 250 B.C., and we have copies of the Septuagint that date probably to somewhere between 50 B.C. and 150 AD (right around the time of Christ). The oldest Hebrew manuscripts we had, however, are called Masoretic texts and they were written around 1000 AD. So it was certainly not unreasonable to assume that a text (in whatever language) that was written a full millennia before the next latest one is the better and is probably closer in content to the original. Thus the Greek Septuagint has usually been considered (at least by gentile scholars) as the more authoritative biblical source for serious study and research.

But that theory was seriously challenged with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940's. Here was a Hebrew manuscript (and some Greek manuscripts as well, by the way) of the Old Testament that was written at about the same time as our oldest known Greek manuscripts. And while not all the work that has been done on the Dead Sea Scrolls is yet published, what can generally be ascertained from what has been published is that there is precious little difference between the Hebrew Masoretic Texts of 1000 AD and these Hebrew bible scrolls discovered at Qumran from perhaps 100 BC. So now we have evidence that the Septuagint is not quite as faithful to the original writings as we once thought, and that perhaps the Hebrew Texts should be regarded as the best source that we currently have. And what was once thought to be corruptions in the Hebrew Text may not be corruptions at all.

Bottom line: the account of the 4 books originally called "Kingdoms" beginning with 1st Samuel were not strikingly different in the manner of their creation than any of the other books of the bible, including many of the New Testament books. So we can trust them even though it is in vogue among modern Christian scholars to say that the books of Samuel and Kings are so corrupted as to be of little worth.

Let's continue our detour and take just a few more moments to discuss these so-called

corruptions that have enchanted so many modern scholars, most of which subscribe to the newer academic disciplines of bible research called literary criticism and textual criticism. It's important that you have an understanding of these things otherwise you'll have few answers for those who question your assertion that the former testament is as valid as the latter; or to counter accusations from those who regularly speak of biblical textual error but have little to back it up.

A fellow named David Tsumura has done a marvelous job in correctly shooting holes in the textual corruption theories aimed at various OT books (and especially the books of Samuel and Kings) that so dominates current liberal bible scholarship. And as with most rebuffs of this kind, common sense is at its core rather than some esoteric academic blather that is considered valid not because there is ample evidence but rather because the person saying it has the proper credentials and notoriety among his peers to get attention; thus his or her new theories are considered unassailable despite the lack of any actual evidence.

Here's the issue in a nutshell: part of the reason that when we hold up various bible translations and compare them and see somewhat different words (and sometimes those words can be quite different in their effect) is because the translators come across words and phrases that are at times quite difficult to deal with and are out of the ordinary. The immediate assumption is that since our modern understanding of biblical Hebrew is so advanced, that the text must have been corrupted due to misspellings, omissions, additions, and so on and so that gives the translator license to substitute what he thinks OUGHT to have been written for what is there. And, as Dr. Tsumura writes, that is certainly the easy way out; but it also opens a very dangerous door.

In his view these translators are so intent on applying the rules of their favored kind of research discipline that they tend to overlook the obvious and discard the simple solution. And the obvious is that at all times when converting oral speech to written words (even within the same language), we do so phonetically; that is we use a written alphabet of letters that each indicate a certain sound as a means to record the spoken word, and then later accurately recover it.

Let me untangle that a bit. Spoken language came before written language. People didn't first communicate with writing, and then develop speech from writing; rather it was the other way around. Pictographs were created as the first so-called alphabets or written form of communication. In other words if the spoken word is "house", then the written word is literally a drawing of a house. But in time some languages evolved complex alphabets that were individual sounds assigned to distinctive characters that could be strung together to form words. Thus pictures were replaced with a series of letters; and in time that is how the Hebrew alphabet worked (it is the same with our English alphabet). So the goal of alphabets is to combine letters that enables us SPEAK the word it stands for. In order to speak it, we have to know what it sounds like, right?

When I write the word "**shema**" (a Hebrew word), I am using the English alphabet to sound out a Hebrew word. I hear what the word sounds like in Hebrew and then use some appropriate English alphabet characters to try and approximate what the word sounds like in Hebrew. The academic term is that I'm expressing the Hebrew in phonetic English. But the problem is that

everyone doesn't pronounce words the same; people from different regions, and even different eras, can pronounce words from the same basic language quite differently. In modern times, where English is spoken in many countries, the same words can sound totally different. In America we say riv-er; in Australia they say reev-uh. In America we say Sked-u-all. In England they say Shed-yule. If one writes these spoken words down phonetically according to how they sound they wind up being spelled somewhat differently, even though they are intended to be the same words. Again: the original purpose of an alphabet was to have a means to write down what a word sounds like when it is spoken.

Thus Dr. Tsumura points out a number of places in Samuel where supposedly there is scribal error or some other type of corruption that happened over time, and says that all that has happened is that an ancient editor was writing down how the word sounded when spoken. But of course since pronunciation changes a bit with time and location and culture and even personal preference, whoever was the most recent editor and copyist of that passage of Scripture wrote the word or phrase down in a way that best reflected the most current pronunciation. And it wouldn't necessarily match a formal Hebrew dictionary spelling, or the exact way it was spelled by other writers.

Thus we'll find (for instance) that some Hebrew manuscripts will add a "p" to Samson's name making it "Samp-son". It's not a misspelling per se, nor is it a corruption; it's simply how that word was being pronounced in a particular culture or region.

Complex to explain I suppose, but very simple in concept; and we see this exact thing every single day of our lives wherever we live and in whatever language we use. So while certainly there are some amount of actual scribal errors and actual textual corruptions in the book of Samuel (and all the books of the bible for that matter), they are far fewer than claimed and the more glaring ones can usually be remedied by comparing a couple of old manuscripts to find the more correct spelling or the intended word. Remember; until the printing press of barely 500 years ago, multiple copies of documents were the result of individuals literally hand copying the example document letter-by-letter, word-by-word. And to think that in hand copying a book as enormous as the bible there wouldn't be a copyist error here and there is not realistic.

OK let's get back on course.

The 2 books that form Samuel contain the history of the continuing formation of the Kingdom of God that is embodied in God's set-apart people and nation, Israel. It tells the story of the transition from the period of the Judges (the **Shophetim**) that starts late in the book of Joshua, extends through the book of Judges, and includes the book of Ruth, and then takes us into the period of the monarchy (that is, the Kings of Israel). However the books of Samuel end with King David; it is left to other records to take it from there. The time period covered is from about 1140 B.C. to around 1000 B.C, 140 years (give or take).

In this first book of Samuel we're going to see a progression of 3 major events take place each with a rather in-depth story surrounding them: 1) the anointing of Samuel as a new type of Judge that is more akin to a prophet; then 2) the coronation of Saul as the first king of Israel

and then ultimately his rejection by God; and finally 3) Saul's growing conflict with David that goes hand in hand with the decline of Saul's kingdom, and terminates with David eventually replacing Saul.

From a higher view what we're seeing is that the ruinous era of the Judges has run its course and at least part of its divine purpose was achieved by demonstrating to the tribes of Israel that Israel (and all humankind for that matter) needed to be governed by a king. Man's sinful condition is such that we need a strong earthly authority to rule over us and keep us in line or we are guaranteed to run afoul of God's laws and commands, leading to disastrous results. I know this idea of a need for a king flies in the face of our American system that holds self-rule as sacrosanct, but the Bible certainly does not advocate democracy as the solution.

I don't want to venture too far afield but I would like to comment that just like the rest of you I have no interest in being ruled by a typical worldly monarch. But as long as God's rule is rejected and we prefer the rule of men, it's not that a king or some other system of government is better than democracy, rather its that (just as we see now) the temptations of leadership, wealth and power are usually too much for us to handle in any kind of humanly oriented government system. All of our governing systems are doomed to fail eventually.

The era of the Judges proved that strong central rule was indispensable; that not even Israel who had every possible advantage in having Yehoveh as their God, and even holding God's own Word in their possession, could withstand the evil inclinations that lurk within us all to do things our way. Self-interest, greed, and the sheer ambition of power combined for the ever-declining morality of Israel until finally God had to rescue them once again or absolute destruction was the inevitable outcome. And God's way to rescue Israel was to give them a king.

Interestingly the Hebrew Sages have assigned the book of Samuel (as well as Kings) to being part of what is called The Former (or early) Prophets. But where do we find Prophets in those particular books? We don't as we typically think of the office of Prophet. So we should handle the term Prophet lightly as what it amounted to from the time of Moses' death through the book of Kings because it isn't quite in the mold of someone like Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. The earlier concept of a prophet was not so much as a seer of the future who gives a divine vision that is not of his own accord, nor does he give the divine prophetic vision in his own words, but rather he is an occasional instrument of God who helped to bring about God's will on earth, often in the selection and anointing of leaders.

Yet we see a steady progressive move towards the formal office of the Prophet being established as a divine seer and messenger of a direct oracle from Yehoveh, and it's earliest beginnings were centuries before the time of Samuel, Saul, and David. And interestingly we see a pattern of **prophetic** warning to the people of Israel that they were headed towards a monarchy and it was put into a negative light.

Thus the books of Samuel and Kings have been a real source of heated debate among bible scholars and theologians because on the one hand the anointing of King Saul seems to have its origin in the wanton and wicked behavior of the people of Israel who insist on having a king

like their neighbors (and God reluctantly gives them that king); but on the other hand in time God replaces Saul with David and God seems pleased to do it and King David is set up as the ideal earthly leader for His people; a leader that Yehoveh says is near to his own heart. Not only that but God seems to move from preferring that His people not have a king to promising David that his descendants would be the royal ruling dynasty FOREVER!!

It's this situation (along with a couple of others) that has led many modern bible scholars to turn to literary and textual criticism to try and find the answer to God apparently doing a major about-face. Did God change His mind about the need of a king for Israel? Or have we in the Scriptures merely two or more historical accounts of that period that eventually wound up in our bibles, written by two or more authors, each with their own different point of view of the situation? Might there be an original account that was modified and redacted on a couple of occasions (at the least) by an editor who felt the need to rationalize the seeming negative attitude that God held at one time towards Israel having a king, and then unexpectedly changed to a positive attitude about a king over Israel with the rise to the throne of David?

Put another way: were people loyal to David busily at work rewriting history to validate and glorify his kingship, and at the same time setting Saul up as being illegitimate or at the least without merit, in order to make his demise at David's hand more palatable? I can tell you that this line of thinking is quite popular right now. But I see it as misguided and the result of an intellectually based textual and literary criticism approach to the bible that sets aside the bigger picture that forms the indispensable context for understanding the Word of God, as well as ignoring the God-patterns and principles set down beginning in Genesis, and showing little interest in the underlying theology that is the essential thread that strings together a pearl necklace of stories. Indeed if one removes the spiritual element from the history of Israel, one has nothing more to examine than yet another of the hundreds of histories of nations rising and falling since the dawn of Creation.

Rather in my view what we see is that God has been steadily moving Israel along a path towards the ultimate king, the Messiah, and giving glimpses all along the way of the Messiah's attributes and character.. The Lord gave Israel a leader in Moses that bore a certain attribute of the future and ultimate leader, that of being a Mediator for the people. Then the Lord gave Israel a leader in Joshua that bore another attribute of the future and ultimate leader, the warrior chief. During the era of the Judges the Lord demonstrated the attribute of deliverance from oppression by using various **Shophetim** to save Israel from the never-ending litany of enemies who tried to subjugate Israel and take their land and possessions. During the coming era of the kings that Samuel will transition Israel into, the Lord would give Israel a leader that demonstrated the attribute of ultimate central authority and how if it was accomplished under Holy Spirit guidance Israel would truly exist and operate as the intended Kingdom of God; but if it was accomplished without paying attention to the Lord's laws and commands the resultant kingdom would simply be another in a long list of kingdoms of men destined to fall and blow away as dust just as had all the other kingdoms had down through the ages.

In the course of examining Samuel we'll run headlong into some of the most fascinating events in the bible including the confiscating of the Ark of God by the Philistines and it's subsequent return. We'll see King Saul go from being an admired and charismatic leader into

a depressed and depraved psychopath. We'll watch a young David courageously fight the giant Goliath when the Israelite soldiers were too fearful to confront him; and then observe the people's growing adoration of David lead to Saul becoming jealous, paranoid and mentally unstable.

As we open the Word of God to the first few verses of Samuel next week, we'll find that the Levitical Priesthood at Shiloh existed by now in name only. It had not been held immune from the depths of apostasy into which all of Israel had plunged during the dark era of the Judges, and so we find the aged and decrepit High Priest Eli unable to control his thoroughly worthless sons who ate the sacrifices brought from the people right off the altar pit as though they were having a bar-b-que.

If Israel was going to be salvaged from its current dismal state of bondage to sin and idolatry it would need yet another new beginning of sorts and it would be necessarily for God to start at His own earthly sanctuary at Shiloh; but such a rescue could not possibly be accomplished using those corrupt men who were priest-pretenders.

Thus the pious Hannah, wife of the Ephraimite Elkanah, asks God to deliver her from her humiliating barrenness and a son is born to her: Samuel. Because she had vowed a Nazarite vow to dedicate Samuel to serve God, once he is weaned she takes her son to the sanctuary at Shiloh and turns him over to Eli. Hannah is apparently oblivious the unwholesome and thoroughly degraded priesthood as it now exists. There the Lord God of the Universe calls to the innocent 5 year old Samuel, and Samuel responds with "here I am". Eli recognizes that Yehoveh is electing and separating Samuel apart from all others for a special divine purpose; but Eli has no clue that this special purpose was also a call to judgment upon himself and his sons and his whole household who had failed so miserably to properly serve God or Israel.

Chapter 2 of 1st Samuel is that theological feast called the Song (or prayer) of Hannah. There we see so many of Yehoveh's multiple attributes laid out simply and without compromise: it is God who does it all. It is God who saves and delivers. It is God who is so holy that nothing comes close. It is God who can regenerate a dead womb. It is God who takes life and makes life. It is God who puts men in the grave and resurrects them at His will. It is God who helps the poor and brings down the mighty. It is God who sits in judgment of everyone and everything.

Samuel rises to power and in the 7th chapter of 1st Samuel it was time for the uneasy peace brought about by the easy compromise that Israel had with the Philistines to come to an end. The Philistines felt they had the right to lord over Israel by now, and God led Samuel to begin the process of breaking Israel free from these pagans. So Samuel called for the people to acknowledge their apostasy and put things right between them and God as step number one.

The people gathered at Mizpah and Samuel as priest offered a sacrifice; but the Philistines attacked the worshipping Hebrews as the Philistines considered the gathering an unlawful assembly and a provocation. Israel prevailed with Samuel's leadership and the question was now openly asked as to why there could still possibly be a need for a king if a leader who seemed to be operating more or less in the traditional leadership role of a Judge proved so effective?

Lesson 1 - I Samuel Introduction

By the 12th chapter of 1st Samuel the cry for a king again arose and Samuel gave in to it. But could there be room for two leaders of Israel? How could a Judge and a king operate in the same sphere? But even more Samuel worried about what might happen to the covenant relationship between Israel and YHWH whereby the agreement was that YHWH was to be Israel's king; a proposition that seemed to have been horribly violated by the people who would have it no other way than to have an earthly king just like their neighbors.

With the rise of Saul, Samuel's role would have to change. A monarch in the person of Saul now ruled over the political matters of Israel, so Samuel would become the representative of the spiritual values of God on earth. But who (Saul or Samuel) would have preeminence? Thus we see the beginning of this king/prophet tandem formed in which a God-designated Prophet would be the king's spiritual advisor so to speak. The Prophet would be the official bearer of God's oracle TO the king of Israel and the king was not so much to obey the person of the Prophet but rather he should obey the message of God that the Prophet brought to the king.

Lessons for modern day Israel and we, the modern day church, abound as we move from story to story and chapter to chapter of these 4 action-packed books; lessons filled with warnings that I pray we'll heed rather than apostasy that I fear that we'll repeat.

You're going to like the next several months, I think, because all that you have learned up to this point is going to be very valuable in rightly understanding what you'll learn from here on.