

1-2 SAMUEL

Short Version

The Books of Samuel tell us about a time of transition in Israel—a transition from a *loose confederate* style of leadership to a *unified monarchical style*. The Book of Judges ends with the words: “*In those days there was no King in Israel; everyone did what he thought best*” (21:25).

Sick of oppression by surrounding tribes, the Israelites clamor for a king who will fight their battles. They want a king so that they can be “like other nations” (1 Sam 8). But they are forgetting that when God made them a nation, they were to be different—a nation *unlike* any other nation, a “people set apart.” In the end, the pro-monarchy group gets their wish when Saul becomes their first king. But they must always remember that God is their true king. The earthly king’s job is to carry out the wishes of God, which nearly all of Israel’s kings failed to do. By the end of 2 Samuel, Israel has become a respected kingdom, the dominant power in the land which God has given them.

Samuel, Saul and David

We will find that most of the events described in 1 Samuel center around Samuel, Saul and David.

Samuel. Samuel is the main transitional figure between the era of tribal life in Israel and the rise of the monarchy. Samuel is often called the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. He is also a priest who offers sacrifice to God, and a Kingmaker who anoints Israel’s first two Kings.

Saul. In 1 Samuel, Saul is portrayed as a tragic figure. He does not want to be king. While out looking for his father’s donkeys, Samuel comes upon Saul and tells him that God wants him to be king. Initially, Saul does very well winning several great victories over Israel’s enemies. Then he ‘blows it’ by choosing his own way over God’s way.

David. David was chosen to be one of the Bible’s great heroes despite some big mistakes or sins. He is regarded as Israel’s greatest King. He makes Jerusalem the center of Israel’s worship life. In contrast to Saul, David understands that God is Israel’s real King. As a reward for his fidelity, God promises David that his dynasty will last forever

(2Sam 7). This *promise* is remembered and celebrated in many of the psalms. Towards the end of the Book of Samuel, David gives us a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving (ch. 22).

The Story: Samuel, the last judge, anoints Saul as first king of Israel. Saul begins well but ends badly, becoming obsessed with jealousy and hatred of David. Saul turns to occult practices and eventually commits suicide. David succeeds him on the throne and unites Israel into a powerful kingdom. Although he never abandons the Lord, David’s own sins bring strife to his family and nation.

Nearly all of 1-2 Samuel is worth reading for in its pages we will find the story of Samuel the prophet, Saul and David – Israel’s first two kings. Having said that, if the reader wishes to read an abridged version of 1 and 2 Samuel, I suggest the following passages.

1 Samuel

Chapters 1-3—Hannah’s longing for a child, the birth and call of Samuel.

Chapter 8—Israel demands a king

Chapters 9-10—Saul, Israel’s first king

Chapter 15—Saul rejected as king

Chapter 16—David anointed as king

Chapter 17—David and Goliath

Chapters 18-19—Saul’s jealousy of David

Chapter 20—David and Jonathan’s friendship

Chapters 24-26— David spares Saul’s life twice

Chapter 31—Death of Saul and his sons.

2 Samuel

David's rise to power

While there is no real break in the story as we move into the second book of Samuel, the following is one way to divide the twenty-four chapters of this book:

David's successes (chapters 1-10):

- David becomes King of Judah
- David becomes King of Israel
- David conquers the surrounding nations

David's struggles (chapters 11-24):

- David's sin with Bathsheba
- Turmoil in David's family
- National rebellion against David
- Later years of David's rule

Suggested chapters for reading.

Chapter 1—David grieves Saul and Jonathan's deaths

Chapter 2—David anointed king by his own tribe

Chapters 6-7—The ark is brought to Jerusalem, the new capital of Israel. The Lord's promise of an eternal dynasty and David's prayer of thanksgiving.

Chapters 11-12—David sins. Nathan pronounces God's judgment, David's repentance.

Chapters 13-19:1—David's son Absalom dominates these chapters

Chapter 22—David's song of thanksgiving

Chapter 23—Last words of David