

Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 0, Introduction

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This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 0, the Introduction to 1 and 2 Samuel.

Before we begin our chapter-by-chapter study of the books of 1st and 2nd Samuel, we need to orient ourselves to the book so we know what to expect, kind of do a little overview, and talk about the background of the book.

When you open your English Bible, you find the books of Samuel in the so-called historical books. We have the Pentateuch, and then the historical books, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. The books of Samuel are tucked right in there in the midst of that history.

In the Hebrew Bible, the arrangement of the books is different. The Hebrew Bible, sometimes called the Tanakh, has three sections. The Torah, which would be the Pentateuch, and then the N in Tanakh stands for the Nevi'im, the prophets.

The K in Tanakh stands for the Ketuvim or the writings. So, all of the books of the Old Testament are placed in one of those three sections. The prophets are divided up into the former and latter prophets.

The former prophets consist of Joshua, Judges, not Ruth, Samuel, and Kings. The other so-called historical books, Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are in the Ketuvim. They are in the writings.

So, the arrangement of the books is a bit different in the Hebrew Bible. The section in the Former Prophets, which tells the history of Israel all the way from the entry into the land under Joshua until the exile to Babylon in 586 BC, is covered in Joshua through Kings. It's important to realize that there is a theology that's developing there.

In fact, scholars sometimes call this the Deuteronomic history. I call it the Deuteronomic history because the history as told reflects the theology of the book of Deuteronomy. So that's where Samuel is, in the former prophets, or the English Bible, the historical books.

When did the events in Samuel take place? Well, we are able to determine a fixed date for Old Testament history by looking at Assyrian records, which mention a solar eclipse. Scientists can determine when these solar eclipses occurred. Now sometimes

you have three or four options that you've got to work with, but scholars have been able to pinpoint which solar eclipse is the key one referred to in the Assyrian records for purposes of harmonization with the Old Testament history.

When we do all of this work in the Assyrian records and then correlate the Assyrian material with what we have in the Old Testament, we can do that because a couple of kings of Israel are mentioned in the Assyrian records, Ahab and Jehu, we are able to determine that Solomon began his reign in 970 BC. We know that David reigned for 40 years, so David's reign began in 1010 BC. On the basis of a New Testament passage, we are able to determine that Saul's reign was 40 years, and so Saul began his reign around 1050 BC.

Of course, in the books of Samuel, we begin before that. In the earlier chapters of Samuel, there is still no king, and we are in the Judges' period. So, we're not sure how many years that would cover, but it's before 1050, and then the story ends right toward the end of David's career before Solomon becomes king in 970.

So, we're covering about a hundred year period in the books of Samuel. 1 and 2 Samuel is at the core of the biblical account of Israel's history. If you'll recall, the book of Judges ends with the observation in its epilogue that things were bad in Israel.

Everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes because Israel had no king. So there's this sentiment that if Israel just had a king, things would be better, but not just any king will do. I think Judges is talking about the ideal king described in Deuteronomy 17, who would lead the people spiritually as well as serve as a king.

So, Judges ends with this hope, this expectation, that Israel will have a king, an ideal king as described in Deuteronomy. Now remember, the book of Ruth is not in the former prophets, and if in the English Bible, the book of Ruth talks about the genealogy of David, and so it sets you up for the entry of David into the story in Samuel. But in the Hebrew Bible, Ruth isn't there, so you go directly from Judges to Samuel.

And of course, in Samuel, the problem is seemingly rectified as the Lord gives Israel a king. But we quickly discover that not just any king will do, because Saul goes from bad to worse, really, and he is a failure as king. And finally, the Lord brings along David, a man after his own heart.

Things appear to be going well once David becomes king, but David also fails as a king, and his story in many ways ends as a tragedy. But along the way, the Lord makes an irrevocable covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 that sustains him in spite of his great sin. But as 2 Samuel ends, we can forge ahead with confidence, knowing that the Lord has committed himself to David and his dynasty.

But at the same time, we understand that human beings are very, very flawed, and so we wonder what will happen in Israel's history. And of course, in Kings, we discover that Israel goes downhill until finally the northern kingdom, in fact, the kingdom divides. The northern tribes go their own way, and Judah is left isolated, and eventually the northern kingdom goes into exile, and then finally Judah as well in 586 BC.

Three major characters dominate the pages of 1 and 2 Samuel. Samuel the prophet, Saul the first king of Israel, and then David who replaces Saul. Their careers overlap.

Samuel is very prominent in 1 Samuel 1-16. Saul comes on the scene in 1 Samuel 9. He is formally introduced at that point, and of course, he is a key figure in history all the way through the book of 1 Samuel. Saul dies at the end of the book in 1 Samuel 31.

David is introduced in 1 Samuel 16. He is formally introduced in 1 Samuel 17. And of course, David is the focal point all the way through to the end of 2 Samuel chapter 24.

David is the focal point literally, and historically. The other two characters, Samuel and Saul, function primarily in relation to David. As the Lord's chosen prophet, Samuel is the one who anoints Saul and then David as king.

He is the kingmaker, as it were, under the authority of the Lord. Saul is the king that Israel desired. His name, Shaul, means asked for.

He is the one they asked for and perhaps deserved. But in the end, he becomes a mere foil, a character who serves as a contrast to David, who at his peak, at least, was the king that Israel needed. It is also clear as we go through the books of Samuel that the narrator of 1 and 2 Samuel wants to demonstrate David's superiority to Saul.

There is a sense in which we have here an apology for David, a defense of David, not an apology for his actions as we often use the word, but a defense, like biblical apologetics where we defend the Bible against attacks by critics. This is an apology for David. It is a defense of David's kingship.

It establishes his credentials and demonstrates that he is indeed the chosen one of the Lord. From reading the story, we know that not everyone agreed with that in Israel's history, at least initially. There was opposition to David.

So, this history demonstrates that David is indeed the one chosen by the Lord. It defends David against charges that he somehow organized a coup against Saul and was responsible for Saul's death. That's just not true.

David was a loyal subject to Saul. So, in chapter after chapter, the narrator is going to be establishing David's superiority to Saul. Then you may wonder, how does the defense of David work when David commits this horrible sin against Uriah in 2 Samuel chapter 11? He commits adultery with Bathsheba and then has Uriah murdered.

That doesn't sound like a defense of David. Well, it kind of is because you would think that those sins would terminate David's kingship and his dynasty. They're so severe.

But David has that covenant, 2 Samuel 7. The Lord has committed himself to David before this and that covenant sustains David and the Lord disciplines David very harshly, but nevertheless he does not abandon David as he did Saul. So even the story of David's tragic demise following his sin against Uriah fits into the defense of David as the rightful king of Israel. If we want to talk about the structure of the book, and how it's put together in terms of its outline, maybe the simplest way is just to divide it up into three parts according to the three main characters.

Samuel is the focal point in 1 Samuel 1-8, Saul in chapters 9-31, and then David in 2 Samuel. But that's simplistic because the characters overlap. And as I said before, David really is the primary focus in the book.

So, I divide the book up this way in terms of its large, what we call macrostructure. And it revolves around the theme of kingship. The books of Samuel are about kingship.

Judges was looking forward to a king and Samuel talks about how kingship begins in Israel. And so, the first seven chapters of 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel 1-7, we could call the prelude to kingship. The Lord raises up Samuel who is going to anoint the first two kings of Israel.

And then kingship is inaugurated. Saul becomes king of Israel in 1 Samuel 8-12. And then kingship fails.

Saul forfeits his dynasty and then his throne in 1 Samuel 13-15. Kingship is then in limbo. Even though Saul has been rejected as king, he continues to rule over Israel.

David has been chosen as king, but he doesn't take the throne immediately. And so kingship is in limbo. The first king has been rejected, the next king has been chosen, but we're kind of in this in-between period.

The Lord chooses and protects a new king, David, 1 Samuel 16-31. And then kingship is revived. Saul is killed in battle and the Lord establishes David's throne and David's dynasty in 2 Samuel chapters 1-10.

And then kingship is preserved. The Lord punishes David for his sins but preserves him as king in 2 Samuel 11-20. The books of Samuel have an epilogue, which is kind of a microcosm of David's reign, and that's in 2 Samuel 21-24.

Those chapters are not in strict chronological order. It's as if the story is put on hold at the end of 2 Samuel 20. We then have this epilogue and when we get there and study it, you'll see that in some ways it is a microcosm of David's reign.

And then the story picks up again in 1 Kings 1, where we then read about the fact that David chooses Solomon to be his successor and then David passes away. So that's kind of an overview of where we're going in this study. And in our next lesson, we'll begin with 1 Samuel chapter 1. This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel.

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