

## Old Testament Literature

# 1 Samuel: Eli, Samuel, and the Selection of Saul as First King of Israel

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### Keywords

Samuel, Saul, Eli, Monarchy, Ark of the Covenant, Philistines, Shiloh, Ebenezer, Anachronism, Seer

### Abstract

This lecture examines Israel's historic transition from the era of judges to a centralized monarchy in 1 Samuel, focusing on the roles of Samuel, Eli, and Saul. It highlights key literary patterns including the downfall of corrupt leadership, divine selection of successors, and the necessity of military victory to validate authority. Through the failure of Eli's and Samuel's sons, the narrative reveals that Israel's demand for a human king reflected a spiritual rejection of God's direct rule rather than a mere governance change. Additionally, the lecture addresses historical and textual dynamics, such as Philistine conflicts, the Ark narrative, and scribal transmission in the Old Testament.

### Outline

#### I. Introduction and Roles of Samuel

- A. Historical placement in Old Testament timeline (~1100 BC)
  - 1. Samuel as the bridge between Judges and the Monarchy
  - 2. High esteem of Samuel in Jewish tradition (grouped with Moses in Jeremiah 15)
- B. The fourfold role of Samuel
  - 1. Last of the great judges
  - 2. Priest ministering at the tabernacle
  - 3. Prophet speaking God's word ('Thus saith the LORD')
  - 4. First king-maker (anointing Saul and David)

#### II. Authorship and Literary Structure of 1 Samuel

- A. Question of authorship
  - 1. Samuel's death in chapter 28 precludes sole authorship of the entire book
  - 2. Likely reliance on prophetic records, journals, and original notes
- B. The core literary pattern in 1 Samuel
  - 1. Demise of an old leader (e.g., Eli to Samuel, Samuel to Saul, Saul to David)
  - 2. Divine selection of a new successor
  - 3. Requirement of a military victory to validate new leadership

- 4. Emergence of problems and subsequent leader demise
- C. Literary 'echoes' and structural repetition throughout the narrative

### **III. The Samuel Cycle: Demise of Eli and Birth of Samuel**

- A. Historical and geographical setting at Shiloh
  - 1. Eli serving as priest at the Shiloh tabernacle
  - 2. Strategic and protected location of Shiloh off the Ridge Route
- B. Family dynamics of Elkanah
  - 1. Rivalry between Hannah (barren) and Peninnah (children)
  - 2. Elkanah's well-meaning but insensitive question ('Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?')
- C. Hannah's vow and prayer
  - 1. Nazirite vow dedicated from birth (no razor to touch his head)
  - 2. Eli's mistaken accusation of Hannah being drunk
  - 3. Meaning of Samuel's name (\*Shema-El\*: 'God heard' / 'God listened')

### **IV. Moral Failure of Eli's Family and Contrast with Samuel**

- A. Sins of Eli's sons (Hophni and Phinehas)
  - 1. Desecration of sacrificial offerings by taking choice meats by force
  - 2. Immorality at the tabernacle entrance (aping pagan Baal/Asherah fertility rites)
- B. Childhood of Samuel
  - 1. Righteous growth in favor with God and men (echoed in Luke 2:52 regarding Jesus)
- C. Eli's shortcomings as a father
  - 1. Weak parental discipline and failure to restrain corrupt sons

### **V. The Divine Call and Prophetic Commission of Samuel**

- A. Nighttime revelation in the tabernacle
  - 1. Threefold calling ('Samuel, Samuel') and initial confusion with Eli
  - 2. Eli's realization and instruction ('Speak LORD, for your servant is listening')
- B. Message of judgment against the house of Eli
  - 1. Irrevocable judgment due to unrestrained familial corruption
  - 2. Samuel's faithful delivery of the harsh message to his mentor
- C. Public recognition of Samuel as a established prophet of the LORD

### **VI. The Ark Narrative and the Demise of Eli**

- A. Battle of Aphek against the Philistines
  - 1. Israel's relocation of the Ark to the battlefield
  - 2. Theological fallacy of 'God in a box' (attempting to manipulate divine presence)
- B. Defeat and tragic outcome
  - 1. Capture of the Ark of the Covenant by Philistines
  - 2. Deaths of Hophni and Phinehas in battle

3. Death of Eli upon hearing of the Ark's capture (falling backward)

#### C. Birth of Ichabod

1. Death of Phinehas' wife during childbirth
2. Name meaning: \*Ich\* (no) + \*Chabod\* (glory) = 'The glory has departed'

### VII. Philistine Captivity and Return of the Ark

#### A. Geography of the Philistine Pentapolis

1. Five major cities: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron
2. Economic dominance via control of the Via Maris (Coastal Highway)

#### B. Divine judgment upon Philistia

1. Fall and humiliation of Dagon's idol before the Ark in Ashdod
2. Outbreak of plagues (tumors/rats) sweeping through Philistine cities

#### C. Return of the Ark to Israel

1. Use of golden tumors and golden rats as guilt offerings ('sympathetic magic')
2. Miraculous transport via unattended milk cows to Beth Shemesh

### VIII. Samuel's Leadership and Victory at Ebenezer

#### A. National spiritual renewal at Mizpah

1. Corporate repentance, fasting, and confession of sin
2. Samuel's intercessory prayer for military rescue

#### B. Defeat of the Philistines and setup of Ebenezer

1. Erection of the memorial stone (\*Ebenezer\*: 'Stone of Help')

#### C. Textual and historical concept of anachronism

1. Explanation of place name usage prior to historical event
2. Demonstration that later retrospective naming is standard historical reporting

### IX. Israel's Demand for a Monarchy

#### A. Degeneration of Samuel's sons (Joel and Abijah)

1. Accepting bribes and perverting justice at Beersheba
2. Israel's elders using filial failure as justification for political change

#### B. Reflection on fathers, sons, and generational faith

1. Contrast of leader fathers and sons (Eli/sons, Samuel/sons, Saul/Jonathan, David/Absalom)
2. Principle: 'God has children, but no grandchildren' (personal generational ownership of faith)

#### C. Theological analysis of the request for a king

1. Monarchy was anticipated in Deuteronomistic law (Deut. 17)
2. Core sin: Rejection of God's direct rule (\*theocracy\*) in favor of human authority

### X. The Selection and Establishment of Saul as King

#### A. Encounter between Saul and Samuel

1. Search for lost donkeys leading Saul to Samuel the 'seer'

2. Linguistic transition from \*roeh\* (seer) to \*nabi\* (prophet)
- B. Saul's character: Pseudo-humility versus deep insecurity
1. Insecurity mistaken for humility ('least of Benjamin')
  2. Test of character: How power is used (self-preservation vs. serving others)
- C. Empowering of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament
1. Spirit coming upon Saul to prophesy (special task/office gifting)
- D. Threefold confirmation of Saul's kingship
1. Private anointing at Ramah
  2. Public lot selection at Mizpah (hiding among the baggage)
  3. Military victory at Jabesh-Gilead and covenant renewal at Gilgal
- E. Samuel's farewell address and textual transmission note
1. Defense of personal integrity and pledge to continue praying for Israel
  2. Textual criticism regarding 1 Samuel 13:1 (scribal transmission vs. biblical inerrancy)