

# 1 Samuel

Samuel, the last judge and first great prophet in Israel, anoints the first king. Though Saul's physical credentials are impressive, his indifferent heart attitude toward God results in the kingdom being taken away from his family. In his place Samuel anoints young David as the king-elect. David becomes a growing threat to the insanely jealous Saul, eventually fleeing to the wilderness for his very life. But God's hand of protection is clearly upon David, even as God's hand of judgment is being felt by Saul and his family. Foolishly consulting a medium at En Dor, Saul hears his own doom pronounced. True to the prophet's word, Saul and his sons are killed the next day in combat.

## INTRODUCTION

The First Book of Samuel describes the transition of leadership in Israel from judges to kings. Three characters are prominent in the book: Samuel, the last judge and first prophet; Saul, the first king of Israel; and David, the king-elect, anointed but not yet recognized as Saul's successor.

The books of First and Second Samuel were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible, known as the "Book of Samuel" or simply "Samuel." This name has been variously translated "The Name of God," "His Name Is God," "Heard of God," and "Asked of God." Samuel has been divided into two books even though it is one continuous account. This division artificially breaks up the history of David.

## AUTHOR

The author of First and Second Samuel is anonymous, but Jewish talmudic tradition says that it was written by Samuel. Samuel may have written the first portion of the book, but his death recorded in First Samuel 25:1 makes it clear that he did not write all of First and Second Samuel. Samuel did write a book (10:25), and written records were available. As the head of a company of prophets (see 10:5; 19:20), Samuel would be a logical candidate for biblical authorship.

First Chronicles 29:29 refers to "the Book of Samuel the Seer," "the Book of Nathan the Prophet," and "the Book of Gad the Seer." All three men evidently contributed to these two books; and it is very possible that a single compiler, perhaps a member of the prophetic school, used these chronicles to put together the Book of Samuel. This is also suggested by the unity of plan and purpose and by the smooth transitions between sections.

## DATE & SETTING

If Samuel wrote the material in the first twenty-four chapters, he did so soon before his death (c. 1015 b.c.). He was born around 1105 b.c., and ministered as a judge and prophet in Israel between about 1067 and 1015 b.c. The books of Samuel end in the last days of David; so they must have been compiled after 971 b.c. The reference in First Samuel 27:6 to the divided monarchy in which Judah is separate from Israel indicates a compilation date after Solomon's death in 931 b.c. However, the silence regarding the Assyrian captivity of Israel in 722 b.c. probably means that First Samuel was written before this key event.

First Samuel covers the ninety-four-year period from the birth of Samuel to the death of Saul (c. 1105–1101 b.c.). The Philistines strongly oppress Israel from 1087 b.c. until the battle of Ebenezer in 1047 b.c. (7:10–14). However, even after this time the Philistines exercise military and economic control. They live in the coastal plains; and the hill country in which the Israelites dwell protects them from total conquest by the Philistines.