

# WHY 1-2 SAMUEL?

This month we will read the entirety of 1-2 Samuel. A lot has happened since Deuteronomy. God has brought his people to the promised land (Joshua), but they failed to fully remove the gods of the people there and soon spiraled into sin and rebellion against God (Judges). Now we will see the story continue in 1-2 Samuel with more highs (God working and providing for his people) and lows (the people turning away from God into sin). It tells us a lot about the sovereignty and faithfulness of God, the seriousness of sin, and the hope of a better King. Let's read these books with the following themes in mind.

## **A period of transition in the story of the people of God**

Jason DeRouchie identifies three periods of transition in 1-2 Samuel. These are helpful to locate the story within the grand story of God's working in Israel and history. First, there is a historical transition from the rule of the judges to a monarchy in Israel. The judges were temporary rulers sent by God (in the book of Judges) to right the ship of Israel's sin and help them defeat enemies. It was a judgment of Israel that these rulers had to function in such a way. Now, Israel is demanding a monarchy like the world. Second, there is a theological transition from a typical king (Saul) to a king who is loyal to the Lord (David). The narrative of 1-2 Samuel really stresses the differences between these two men—their size, God's view of them, and how they respond in similar situations (see the Goliath narrative for example). However, as the story develops, we are left wanting and needing an even better king than David who is truly faithful to the Lord—King Jesus. Third, there is geographical transition as the roaming tabernacle sanctuary moves towards being an established central sanctuary at Jerusalem. This is developed through the early chapters of 1 Samuel and then more in 2 Samuel. It looks forward to the place of permanence that God's people will enjoy to know him in it. All of these points will be developed below.

A failure for Israel to trust God as leader

One of the central themes of 1-2 Samuel is Kingship—and its relationship between God and the people. In Deuteronomy 17, Moses looks forward to a time when Israel would ask God for a king. God grants that they can have a king, but offers stipulations. The king must be from Israel and not a foreigner (a covenant member), must not acquire a lot of horses (a sign of self-dependence and strength), and must not have many wives or gold (a sign of pride and uncontrolled desires) (Deut. 17:14-17). But perhaps more importantly is what God says the king must do: he must read a copy of the Torah (first five books of the OT) daily in order that he would learn to fear God and keep his commandments (Deut. 17:18-20). In other words, the king must fear the Lord, be formed by his word, and not be caught up in the things of the world (see Psalm 1). This functions as a litmus test for the kings in the rest of Israel's history.

An ominous tone is struck for the future of Israel in 1 Samuel 8:7 when they ask for a king and God says to the prophet Samuel, **“Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”** How is their request for a king seen as rejecting God when God said they would one day have a king? That answer is in 8:5 in how they ask for a king, **“Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.”** They affirm their desire to be like the other nations in 1 Samuel 8:19-20. They don’t want a God-fearing king rooted in the Torah, they want a king like the nations—strong, powerful, a great military leader. Not only is this a rejection of God’s design but a rejection of God himself as the provider and protector of Israel. Directly after this they choose Saul (1 Samuel 9) who unfortunately becomes what God warned against. Let the stories of 1-2 Samuel remind us of our need to live with trust in God to sustain and keep us—and no other “kings” we may be tempted to trust in.

### **A development in God’s dwelling and a covenant that points forward to Jesus**

One of the most important chapters in the Old Testament comes in 2 Samuel 7. It makes sense of the story of 1-2 Samuel and furthers the story of the Bible with two major things happening. It begins with King David saying that he is going to build God a house of permanence. David has noticed that he dwells in a fancy house while God’s presence dwells in a movable tent (the tabernacle) (2 Sam. 7:3). He then proposes that he would be the one to build God a permanent house—a temple. God instead replies that David’s son (Solomon) will be the one to build God a house (7:13). But using a double meaning of the word house, God first says that he will make a house out of David (7:11). David wants to make a house (temple); God says that he will first make a house (dynasty or lineage).

What will this house, or dynasty of David, consist of? Some of the promises find an initial fulfillment in Solomon—his kingdom will be established, he will build a house, God will discipline him in sin (7:12-14). But some of the promises look to a far off descendant. One that the steadfast love of the Lord will not depart from, whose kingdom will be made sure forever, and whose throne will be established forever (7:15-17). This is looking to nothing other than to Jesus, the far-off descendant of David. Matthew 1 and Romans 1 are both adamant in grounding Jesus’ genealogy as an offspring of David. Why? Because he is the promised eternal King of the Davidic covenant. The one who would come and make David’s line truly eternal, for he would sit on his throne forever as the Son of God.

Why does this matter for how we read 1-2 Samuel? First, it tells us how to read the temple and God’s dwelling with Israel. Even as the permanent temple is promised, we know that won’t solve the problems of sin. What is needed is not only a better location and structure; but a better prophet, priest, and king to bring us into the presence of God. This perfect Son of David will do just that. Second, it helps us understand the kingship of Israel and long for more to come. David is seen as the golden child and final answer as king for much of 1-2 Samuel. What do we do then when the wheels start to come off after his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah? Is all hope lost? No, it makes us long for a better king to come as promised in 2 Samuel 7.

A king that will not commit iniquity and who will not stumble into serious sin. A king who will be perfect. Jesus' coming kingship is promised here in 2 Samuel 7. It is a covenant—an unbreakable promise from God of what he is going to accomplish. Read the book with longing for this king to come, and celebration that he has come to rule on his throne forever.

### **A call to live in reference to God, and with God's view of the world**

An interesting theme running through 1-2 Samuel is how God views the world differently than humans. It begins with a seemingly random barren woman (Hannah) who is distraught because she is unable to have a child. Towards the end of 1 Samuel 1, she has a baby boy (Samuel) who will become a prophet in the service of God and a key character in the story. After this, she prays to God in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. It is an incredible prayer and culminates in a Messianic promise that looks forward to Jesus (2:9-10). But it also gives one of the lenses for understanding the book: the proud are not who the Lord looks kindly upon, but the humble. She prays, **"The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts"** (1 Sam. 2:7). Then again, **"He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail."**

These themes continue on through the book. In a programmatic statement condemning the house of Eli as priests, God says, **"Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed"** (1 Sam. 2:30). God's preference of the lowly over the proud continues in 16:7 as he doesn't pick the most noble son of Jesse as future king, but instead says to Samuel, **"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."** This theological point is summed up in David's song at the end of the book (which echoes much of Hannah's prayer) **"With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless; with the purified you deal purely, and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous. You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down."** The final verse seals the point: God has no regard for the prideful, but he is there for the humbler to bring salvation. This point is all through 1-2 Samuel as God regards the proud with judgment (the Philistine god, Saul, David's oldest brother, Goliath) while looking on the humble with blessing (Hannah, Samuel, David).

Application for us looks like adopting God's view of the world and living in response—to not put stock in riches, status, or accomplishments, but knowing and being saved by God. A historical movie that follows the life of a rich man who made ruin of his life ends with this statement on the screen: "It was in the reign of George III that the aforesaid persons lived and quarreled; good or bad, handsome or ugly, rich or poor, they are all equal now." That is a fitting quote for the theology of 1-2 Samuel. What matters is not looks, status, or wealth—but how one is viewed in God's eyes. Dependent or self-reliant? Humble or proud? Let reading 1-2 Samuel drive you to further dependence on God, understanding the most important thing is a humble heart before him.