

# a synopsis of 1 SAMUEL

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Unlike our English Bibles, the Hebrew Bible has three main sections: Law (God's expectations of Israel), Prophets (where we see God's covenant relationship with Israel play out), and Writings (works of wisdom, poetry, and narrative that helped ancient Jews navigate the world in light of God's laws). The first seven books of the Hebrew Bible match our English Bibles. But *Samuel*, originally one book, follows *Judges* in the Hebrew Bible. During the period of the judges Israel changed dramatically for the worse—both spiritually and nationally. In the Hebrew Bible *1 Samuel* becomes a natural extension of *Judges* with this link: “In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25). *1 Samuel* presents the establishment of the kingship in Israel to solve this problem. Spoiler alert: it didn't go so well.

While Samuel is ascribed as the author by Jewish tradition, he could hardly have written it all since his own death is recorded in 1 Samuel 25:1. Anything after that was written by someone else. Samuel was a writer and it is certainly possible that he wrote some of the book; it is almost certain that some of his writing was used in the composition of these books (see 1 Chronicles 29:29). And since David's death is not mentioned in *Samuel*, it is probable that these books were written before that event.

A simple outline of 1 Samuel could look like this (adapted from *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*):

1. Shiloh and Samuel. 1:1—7:1
  1. Birth and childhood of Samuel; future of the priestly line of Eli. 1:1—3:21
  2. Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant; Eli's death. 4:1-22
  3. The Ark creates problems and the Philistines send it back to Israel. 5:1—7:1
2. Samuel and Saul. 7:2—15:35
  1. Israel requests a king; Samuel warns of the danger of such a move. 7:2—8:20
  2. Saul becomes King of Israel. 8:21—11:15
  3. Samuel retires from active public life, but continues as adviser to the King. 12:1-25
  4. Saul's incomplete obedience brings the Lord's rejection. 13:1—15:35
3. Saul and David. 16:1—31:13
  1. Samuel anoints David as Saul's successor; becomes Saul's court musician and mighty warrior. 16:1—17:58
  2. David and Jonathan's friendship; Saul's jealousy and fear of David. 18:1-16
  3. Saul's open hostility causes David to flee for his life until Saul and his sons perish. 18:17—31:13

The purpose of all Old Testament history is stated clearly in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:11). Pray that we will be the generation that does learn something from history. That will be good news indeed.

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