

# INTRODUCTION TO FIRST AND SECOND SAMUEL

by  
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## **Preface to the First Book of Samuel** **Otherwise called The First Book of the Kings**

This and the three following books were formerly termed the *first, second, third, and fourth books of Kings*, and the two books of *Samuel* made in ancient times but one. The separation which has taken place seems to have been done without reason or necessity. These [four] books are, properly speaking, a continuation of the book of *Judges*, as they give us an account of the remaining judges of Israel down to the election of Saul and of all the kings of Israel and Judah to the Babylonish captivity.

Of this book, called the first book of Samuel, the following are the contents.

The birth and education of Samuel; the high priesthood of Eli; the Philistines attack the Israelites, overthrow them with a terrible slaughter, take the ark of the Lord and set it up in the temple of their god Dagon; they are visited with Divine judgments and are obliged to send back the ark with offerings and presents.

Samuel, long acknowledged as a prophet of the Lord, takes the government of the people. Under his wise and pious administration the affairs of Israel become reestablished and the Philistines are subdued. [Nevertheless, due to] the sons of Samuel (who principally administered the secular concerns of the kingdom) acting unworthily, the people desire to have a king who should be supreme both in civil and military affairs. Samuel, after expostulations, yields to their entreaties; and under the direction of God, Saul the son of Kish (while seeking the lost asses of his father) is met by the prophet and anointed king over Israel.

This man [Saul], not conducting himself in the government according to the direction of God, is rejected and David the son of Jesse anointed king in his place (though Saul continues still in the government). This person [David] soon becomes advantageously known to Israel by his single combat with a gigantic Philistine chief called Goliath whom he slays (on which the Israelites attack the Philistines and give them a total overthrow). Saul, envious of David's popularity, seeks his destruction. He [David] is in consequence obliged to escape for his life and take refuge, sometimes among the Moabites, sometimes among the Philistines, and sometimes in the caves of the mountains of Judah, everywhere pursued by Saul and everywhere visibly protected by the Lord.

At last Saul, being pressed by the Philistines, and finding that the Lord had forsaken him, had recourse to a witch that dwelt at Endor, whom he consulted relative to the issue of the present war with the Philistines. He loses the battle, and being sorely wounded and his three sons slain, he falls on his own sword and expires on Mount Gilboa. The

Philistines find his body and the bodies of his three sons among the slain. They cut off Saul's head and affix the bodies to the walls of Beth-shan. The men of Jabesh-gilead, hearing this, go by night and take the bodies from the walls of Beth-shan, bring them to Jabesh, burn them there, bury the bones, and mourn over their fallen king, fasting seven days. Thus concludes the first book of Samuel.

Concerning the author of these books, there have been various conjectures. Because in most of the Hebrew copies they bear the name of Samuel as a running title, it has been generally supposed that he was the author. But his name does not appear to have been anciently prefixed to these books, at least in those copies used by the Greek interpreters (commonly called the *Septuagint*), as they simply term each βασιλείων, The *History* or *Book of Kingdoms*. The *Chaldee* has no inscription. The *Syriac* and *Arabic* call each The *Book of Samuel the Prophet*; and the *Vulgate*, The *Book of Samuel*, simply.

The Jews, in general, believe that Samuel is the author of the first twenty-seven chapters of this book, which contain the history of his own life and government and what respects Saul and David during that time. The remaining four chapters they suppose were added by the prophets Gad and Nathan. This opinion is founded on what is said [in] 1 Chronicles 29:29: "*Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer.*" Others suppose the books to be more recent than the persons already named, but that they were compiled out of their memoirs.

But who was the compiler? Some of the most learned among the Jews suppose it to have been Jeremiah the prophet, and that the style bears a near resemblance to his prophecies. That they were the work of a more recent author than Samuel, &c., Grotius thinks evident from this circumstance: that the names of the months are comparatively modern and were not known among the ancient Jews. Others have attributed them to David, others to Hezekiah, and others to Ezra the scribe on his return from the Babylonish captivity.

Calmet's opinion is as probable as any, viz., "That these books were written by the same hand, though composed out of the memoirs left by persons of that time; and that the compiler has generally used the same terms he found in those memoirs, adding here and there something of his own by way of illustration." The equality of the style, the frequent eulogiums on the character of Samuel, the connection of the materials, particular quotations, and remarks on certain events are, he thinks, proofs sufficiently clear of what he assumes. These books contain remarks or expressions which could only proceed from a *contemporary* author, and others which are evidences of a much *later* age.

1. For instance, we read: "*The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision*" (3:1), i.e., in the days of Eli, the high priest. Hence it is evident that the author lived in times in which prophecy was *more common*; which, in fact, it was after Samuel, under David and the succeeding kings of Israel and Judah.

2. Again, in the time of the author of this book, *Beth-el* was called *Beth-aven* (13:5), which name was given to it in derision *after* Jeroboam had placed there his golden calves.

3. Again, it is said that the ark of the Lord was set down in the field of *Joshua the Bethshemite, where it remained to the time of this author (6:18)*; and yet in chapter 7:15 he speaks of Samuel as being already dead: "*And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.*"

4. It is not natural to suppose that Samuel would have spoken of himself as is done: "*And the child Samuel grew, and was in favour both with the Lord and with men*" (2:26). But if he were *dead* when this book was written, any author might have added this with the strictest propriety.

5. In 27:6 it is said that Achish gave Ziklag to David: "*Wherefore Ziklag pertaineth to the kings of Judah unto this day.*" This is a proof that when this book was written the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were *separated*; and that, although the tribe of Simeon belonged to the kings of *Israel*, yet *Ziklag*, which was in that tribe, remained in the hands of the kings of *Judah*.

Here, therefore, are proofs that this book contains matters which must have been written by a *contemporary* author; and others which could not have been inserted but in times *much posterior*. These seeming contradictions are reconciled by the hypothesis that the books were compiled by a comparatively recent author out of materials of a much earlier date, the author not changing many of the expressions which he found in those ancient documents.

Several other proofs might be here adduced to support this opinion; but as the reader will find them noticed in the places where they occur, it is not necessary to repeat them here. Those who wish to see the subject farther discussed may consult Calmet.

We may rest satisfied with these three things. (1) That the books of Samuel were constructed out of original and authentic documents. (2) That the compiler was not contemporary with the facts he narrates. And, (3) that both the author and time in which he compiled his history, though comparatively more recent than the facts themselves, are nevertheless both *uncertain*.

### **Preface to the Second Book of Samuel Otherwise called The Second Book of the Kings**

As this is a continuation of the preceding history, without any interruption, it can scarcely be called *another* book. Originally this and the preceding made but one book, and they have been separated without reason or necessity.

It is generally allowed that this book comprehends a period of forty years . . . .

It has been divided into *three* parts: in the *first* we have an account of the happy commencement of David's reign, chaps. 1-10. In the *second*, David's unhappy fall and its

miserable consequences, chaps. 11-28. In the *third*, his restoration to the Divine favour, the re-establishment of his kingdom, and the events which signalized the latter part of his reign, chaps. 19-24.

**Note:** Author's introduction in *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, With A Commentary and Critical Notes*. (New York: G. Lane & C. B. Tippet, 1846). The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs divided.