

Introduction to Samuel

Title, Contents, Character, and Origin of the Books of Samuel.

From Commentary on the Old Testament, by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch

The books of Samuel originally formed one undivided work, and in the Hebrew MSS they do so still.

The division into two books originated with the Alexandrian translators (LXX), and was not only adopted in the Vulgate and other versions, but in the sixteenth century it was introduced by Daniel Bomberg into our editions of the Hebrew Bible itself.

In the Septuagint and Vulgate, these books are reckoned as belonging to the books of the Kings, and have the heading, B (*Regum*, i. et ii.).

In the Septuagint they are called “books of the kingdoms,” evidently with reference to the fact that each of these works contains an account of the history of a double kingdom, viz.: the books of Samuel, the history of the kingdoms of Saul and David; and the books of Kings, that of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

This title does not appear unsuitable, so far as the books before us really contain an account of the rise of the monarchy in Israel.

Nevertheless, we cannot regard it as the original title, or even as a more appropriate heading than the one given in the Hebrew canon, viz., “*the book of Samuel*,” since this title not only originated in the fact that the first half (i.e., our first book) contains an account of the acts of the prophet Samuel, but was also intended to indicate that the spirit of Samuel formed the soul of the true kingdom in Israel, or that the earthly throne of the Israelitish kingdom of God derived its strength and perpetuity from the Spirit of the Lord which lived in the prophet.

The division into two books answers to the contents, since the death of Saul, with which the first

book closes, formed a turning-point in the development of the kingdom.

The Books of Samuel contain the history of the kingdom of God in Israel, from the termination of the age of the judges to the close of the reign of king David, and embrace a period of about 125 years, viz., from about 1140 to 1015 B.C.

The *first* book treats of the judgeship of the prophet Samuel and the reign of king Saul, and is divided into three sections, answering to the three epochs formed by the judicial office of Samuel (1 Samuel 1–7), the reign of Saul from his election till his rejection (1 Samuel 8–15), and the decline of his kingdom during his conflict with David, whom the Lord had chosen to be the leader of His people in the place of Saul (1 Samuel 16–31).

The renewal of the kingdom of God, which was now thoroughly disorganized both within and without, commenced with Samuel.

When the pious Hannah asked for a son from the Lord, and Samuel was given to her, the sanctuary of God at Shiloh was thoroughly desecrated under the decrepit high priest Eli by the base conduct of his worthless sons, and the nation of Israel was given up to the power of the Philistines.

If Israel, therefore, was to be delivered from the bondage of the heathen it was necessary that it should be first of all redeemed from the bondage of sin and idolatry, that its false confidence in the visible pledges of the gracious presence of God should be shaken by heavy judgments, and the way prepared for its conversion to the Lord its God by deep humiliation.

At the very same time, therefore, at which Samuel was called to be the prophet of God, the judgment of God was announced upon the degraded priesthood and the desecrated sanctuary.

The *first* section of our book, which describes the history of the renewal of the theocracy by Samuel, does not commence with the call of Samuel as prophet, but with an account on the one hand of

the character of the national religion in the time of Eli, and on the other hand of the piety of the parents of Samuel, especially of his mother, and with an announcement of the judgment that was to fall upon Eli's house (1 Samuel 1–2).

Then follow first of all the call of Samuel as prophet (1 Samuel 3), and the fulfilment of the judgment upon the house of Eli and the house of God (1 Samuel 4); secondly, the manifestation of the omnipotence of God upon the enemies of His people, by the chastisement of the Philistines for carrying off the ark of the covenant, and the victory which the Israelites gained over their oppressors through Samuel's prayer (1 Samuel 5–7:14); and lastly, a summary of the judicial life of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:15–17).

The *second* section contains, first, the negotiations of the people with Samuel concerning the appointment of a king, the anointing of Saul by the prophet, and his election as king, together with the establishment of his kingdom (1 Samuel 8–12); and secondly, a brief survey of the history of his reign, in connection with which the only events that are at all fully described are his first successful conflicts with the Philistines, and the war against the Amalekites which occasioned his ultimate rejection (1 Samuel 13–15).

In the *third* section (1 Samuel 16–31) there is a much more elaborate account of the history of Saul from his rejection till his death, since it not only describes the anointing of David and his victory over Goliath, but contains a circumstantial account of his attitude towards Saul, and the manifold complications arising from his long-continued persecution on the part of Saul, for the purpose of setting forth the gradual accomplishment of the counsels of God, both in the rejection of Saul and the election of David as king of Israel, to warn the ungodly against hardness of heart, and to strengthen the godly in their trust in the Lord, who guides His servants through tribulation and suffering to glory and honour.

The *second* book contains the history of the reign of David, arranged in four sections: (1) his reign over Judah in Hebron, and his conflict with Ishbosheth the son of Saul, whom Abner had set up as king over the other tribes of Israel (1 Samuel 1–4): (2) the anointing of David as king over all Israel, and the firm establishment of his kingdom through the conquest of the citadel of Zion, and the elevation of Jerusalem into the capital of the kingdom; the removal of the ark of the covenant

to Jerusalem; the determination to build a temple to the Lord; the promise given him by the Lord of the everlasting duration of his dominion; and lastly, the subjugation of all the enemies of Israel (1 Samuel 5–8:14), to which there is appended a list of the principal officers of state (1 Samuel 8:15–18), and an account of the favour shown to the house of Saul in the person of Mephibosheth (1 Samuel 9): (3) the disturbance of his reign through his adultery with Bathsheba during the Ammonitish and Syrian war, and the judgments which came upon his house in consequence of this sin through the wickedness of his sons, viz., the incest of Amnon and rebellion of Absalom, and the insurrection of Sheba (1 Samuel 10–20): (4) the close of his reign, his song of thanksgiving for deliverance out of the hand of all his foes (1 Samuel 22), and his last prophetic words concerning the just ruler in the fear of God (1 Samuel 23:1–7).

The way is prepared for these, however, by an account of the expiation of Saul's massacre of the Gibeonites, and of various heroic acts performed by his generals during the wars with the Philistines (1 Samuel 21); whilst a list of his several heroes is afterwards appended in 1 Samuel 23:8–39, together with an account of the numbering of the people and consequent pestilence (1 Samuel 24), which is placed at the close of the work, simply because the punishment of this sin of David furnished the occasion for the erection of an altar of burnt-offering upon the site of the future temple.

His death is not mentioned here, because he transferred the kingdom to his son Solomon before he died; and the account of this transfer forms the introduction to the history of Solomon in the first book of Kings, so that the close of David's life was most appropriately recorded there.

So far as the *character* of the historical writing in the books of Samuel is concerned, there is something striking in the contrast which presents itself between the fulness with which the writer has described many events of apparently trifling importance, in connection with the lives of persons through whom the Lord secured the deliverance of His people and kingdom from their foes, and the summary brevity with which he disposes of the greatest enterprises of Saul and David, and the fierce and for the most part tedious wars with the surrounding nations; so that, as Thenius says, "particular portions of the work differ in the most striking manner from all the rest, the one part being very brief, and written almost in the form of a chronicle, the other elaborate, and in one part com-

posed with really biographical fulness.” This peculiarity is not to be accounted for from the nature of the sources which the author had at his command; for even if we cannot define with precision the nature and extent of these sources, yet when we compare the accounts contained in these books of the wars between David and the Ammonites and Syrians with those in the books of Chronicles (2 Samuel 8 and 10 with 1 Chron.

18–19), we see clearly that the sources from which those accounts were derived embraced more than our books have given, since there are several places in which the chronicler gives fuller details of historical facts, the truth of which is universally allowed.

The preparations for the building of the temple and the organization of the army, as well as the arrangement of the official duties of the Levites which David undertook, according to 1 Chron.

22–28, in the closing years of his life, cannot possibly have been unknown to the author of our books.

Moreover, there are frequent allusions in the books before us to events which are assumed as known, though there is no record of them in the writings which have been handed down to us, such as the removal of the tabernacle from Shiloh, where it stood in the time of Eli (1 Samuel 1:3, 9, etc.), to Nob, where David received the shewbread from the priests on his flight from Saul (1 Samuel 21:1ff.); the massacre of the Gibeonites by Saul, which had to be expiated under David (2 Samuel 21); the banishment of the necromancers out of the land in the time of Saul (1 Samuel 28:3); and the flight of the Beerothites to Gittaim (2 Samuel 4:3).

From this also we must conclude, that the author of our books knew more than he thought it necessary to mention in his work.

But we certainly cannot infer from these peculiarities, as has often been done, that our books are to be regarded as a compilation.

Such an inference as this simply arises from an utter disregard of the plan and object, which run through both books and regulate the selection and arrangement of the materials they contain.

That the work has been composed upon a definite plan, is evident from the grouping of the historical facts, in favour of which the chronological order generally observed in both the books has now and then been sacrificed.

Thus, in the history of Saul and the account of his wars (1 Samuel 14:47, 48), the fact is also men-

tioned, that he smote the Amalekites; whereas the war itself, in which he smote them, is first described in detail in 1 Samuel 15, because it was in that war that he forfeited his kingdom through his transgression of the divine command, and brought about his own rejection on the part of God.

The sacrifice of the chronological order to the material grouping of kindred events, is still more evident in the history of David.

In 2 Samuel 8 all his wars with foreign nations are collected together, and even the wars with the Syrians and Ammonites are included, together with an account of the booty taken in these wars; and then after this, viz., in 1 Samuel 10–12, the war with the Ammonites and Syrians is more fully described, including the circumstances which occasioned it, the course which it took, and David’s adultery which occurred during this war.

Moreover, the history of Saul, as well as that of David, is divided into two self-contained periods, answering indeed to the historical course of the reigns of these two kings, but yet so distinctly marked off by the historian, that not only is the turning-point distinctly given in both instances, viz., the rejection of Saul and the grievous fall of David, but each of these periods is rounded off with a comprehensive account of the wars, the family, and the state officials of the two kings (1 Samuel 14:47–52, and 2 Samuel 8).

So likewise in the history of Samuel, after the victory which the Israelites obtained over the Philistines through his prayer, everything that had to be related concerning his life as judge is grouped together in 1 Samuel 7:15–17, before the introduction of the monarchy is described; although Samuel himself lived till nearly the close of the reign of Saul, and not only instituted Saul as king, but afterwards announced his rejection, and anointed David as his successor.

These comprehensive accounts are anything but proofs of compilations from sources of different kinds, which ignorance of the peculiarities of the Semitic style of writing history has led some to regard them as being; they simply serve to round off the different periods into which the history has been divided, and form resting-places for the historical review, which neither destroy the material connection of the several groups, nor throw any doubt upon the unity of the authorship of the books themselves.

And even where separate incidents appear to be

grouped together, without external connection or any regard to chronological order, on a closer inspection it is easy to discover the relation in which they stand to the leading purpose of the whole book, and the reason why they occupy this position and no other (see the introductory remarks to 2 Samuel 9, 21–24).

If we look more closely, however, at the contents of these books, in order to determine their character more precisely, we find at the very outset, in Hannah's song of praise, a prophetic glance at the anointed of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:10), which foretells the establishment of the monarchy what was afterwards accomplished under Saul and David.

And with this there is associated the rise of the new name, *Jehovah Sabaoth*, which is never met with in the Pentateuch or in the books of Joshua and Judges; whereas it occurs in the books before us from the commencement (1 Samuel 1:3, 11, etc.) to the close.

(For further remarks on the origin and signification of this divine name, see at 1 Samuel 1:3.) When Israel received a visible representative of its invisible God-king in the person of an earthly monarch; Jehovah, the God of Israel, became the God of the heavenly hosts.

Through the establishment of the monarchy, the people of Jehovah's possession became a "world-power;" the kingdom of God was elevated into a kingdom of the world, as distinguished from the other ungodly kingdoms of the world, which it was eventually to overcome in the power of its God.

In this conflict Jehovah manifested himself as the Lord of hosts, to whom all the nations and kingdoms of this world were to become subject.

Even in the times of Saul and David, the heathen nations were to experience a foretaste of this subjection.

When Saul had ascended the throne of Israel, he fought against all his enemies round about, and extended his power in every direction in which he turned (1 Samuel 1:14, 47, 48).

But David made all the nations who bordered upon the kingdom of God tributary to the people of the Lord, as the Lord gave him victory wherever he went (1 Samuel 2:8, 14, 15); so that his son Solomon reigned over all the kingdoms, from the stream (the Euphrates) to the boundary of Egypt, and they all brought him presents, and were subject to him (1 Kings 5:1).

But the Israelitish monarchy could never thus acquire the power to secure for the kingdom of God a victory over all its foes, except as the king himself was diligent in his endeavours to be at all times simply the instrument of the God-king, and exercise his authority solely in the name and according to the will of Jehovah.

And as the natural selfishness and pride of man easily made this concentration of the supreme earthly power in a single person merely an occasion for self-aggrandisement, and therefore the Israelitish kings were exposed to the temptation to use the plenary authority entrusted to them even in opposition to the will of God; the Lord raised up for Himself organs of His own Spirit, in the persons of the prophets, to stand by the side of the kings, and make known to them the will and counsel of God.

The introduction of the monarchy was therefore preceded by the development of the prophetic office into a spiritual power in Israel, in which the kingdom was to receive not only a firm support to its own authority, but a strong bulwark against royal caprice and tyranny.

Samuel was called by the Lord to be His prophet, to convert the nation that was sunk in idolatry to the Lord its God, and to revive the religious life by the establishment of associations of prophets, since the priests had failed to resist the growing apostasy of the nation, and had become unfaithful to their calling to instruct and establish the congregation in the knowledge and fear of the Lord.

Even before the call of Samuel as a prophet, there was foretold to the high priest Eli by a man of God, not only the judgment that would fall upon the degenerate priesthood, but the appointment of a faithful priest, for whom the Lord would build a permanent house, that he might ever walk before His anointed (1 Samuel 2:26–36).

And the first revelation which Samuel received from God had reference to the fulfilment of all that the Lord had spoken against the house of Eli (1 Samuel 3:11ff.).

The announcement of a faithful priest, who would walk before the anointed of the Lord, also contained a prediction of the establishment of the monarchy, which foreshadowed its worth and great significance in relation to the further development of the kingdom of God.

And whilst these predictions of the anointed of the Lord, before and in connection with the call of Samuel, show the deep spiritual connection which

existed between the prophetic order and the regal office in Israel; the insertion of them in these books is a proof that from the very outset the author had this new organization of the Israelitish kingdom of God before his mind, and that it was his intention not simply to hand down biographies of Samuel, Saul, and David, but to relate the history of the Old Testament kingdom of God at the time of its elevation out of a deep inward and outward decline into the full authority and power of a kingdom of the Lord, before which all its enemies were to be compelled to bow.

Israel was to become a kingship of priests, i.e., a kingdom whose citizens were priests and kings.

The Lords had announced this to the sons of Israel before the covenant was concluded at Sinai, as the ultimate object of their adoption as the people of His possession (Ex.

19:5, 6).

Now although this promise reached far beyond the times of the Old Covenant, and will only receive its perfect fulfilment in the completion of the kingdom of God under the New Covenant, yet it was to be realized even in the people of Israel so far as the economy of the Old Testament allowed.

Israel was not only to become a priestly nation, but a royal nation also; not only to be sanctified as a congregation of the Lord, but also to be exalted into a kingdom of God.

The establishment of the earthly monarchy, therefore, was not only an eventful turning-point, but also an “epoch-making” advance in the development of Israel towards the goal set before it in its divine calling.

And this advance became the pledge of the ultimate attainment of the goal, through the promise which David received from God (2 Samuel 7:12–16), that the Lord would establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

With this promise God established for His anointed the eternal covenant, to which David reverted at the close of his reign, and upon which he rested his divine announcement of the just ruler over men, the ruler in the fear of God (2 Samuel 23:1–7).

Thus the close of these books points back to their commencement.

The prophecy of the pious mother of Samuel, that the Lord would give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed (1 Samuel 2:10), found

a fulfilment in the kingdom of David, which was at the same time a pledge of the ultimate completion of the kingdom of God under the sceptre of the Son of David, the promised Messiah.

This is one, and in fact the most conspicuous, arrangement of the facts connected with the history of salvation, which determined the plan and composition of the work before us.

By the side of this there is another, which does not stand out so prominently indeed, but yet must not be overlooked.

At the very beginning, viz., in 1 Samuel 1, the inward decay of the house of God under the high priest Eli is exhibited; and in the announcement of the judgment upon the house of Eli, a long-continued oppression of the dwelling-place (of God) is foretold (1 Samuel 2:32).

Then, in the further course of the narrative, not only is the fulfilment of these threats pointed out, in the events described in 1 Samuel 4, 6:19–7:2, and 22:11–19; but it is also shown how David first of all brought the ark of the covenant, about which no one had troubled himself in the time of Saul, out of its concealment, had a tent erected for it in the capital of his kingdom upon Mount Zion, and made it once more the central point of the worship of the congregation; and how after that, when God had given him rest from his enemies, he wished to build a temple for the Lord to be the dwelling-place of His name; and lastly, when God would not permit him to carry out this resolution, but promised that his son would build the house of the Lord, how, towards the close of his reign, he consecrated the site for the future temple by building an altar upon Mount Moriah (2 Samuel 24:25).

Even in this series of facts the end of the work points back to the beginning, so that the arrangement and composition of it according to a definite plan, which has been consistently carried out, are very apparent.

If, in addition to this, we take into account the deep-seated connection between the building of the temple as designed by David, and the confirmation of his monarchy on the part of God as exhibited in 2 Samuel 7, we cannot fail to observe that the historical development of the true kingdom, in accordance with the nature and constitution of the Old Testament kingdom of God, forms the leading thought and purpose of the work to which the name of Samuel has been attached, and that it was by this thought and aim that the writer was influ-

enced throughout in his selection of the historical materials which lay before him in the sources that he employed.

The full accounts which are given of the birth and youth of Samuel, and the life of David, are in the most perfect harmony with this design.

The lives and deeds of these two men of God were of significance as laying the foundation for the development and organization of the monarchical kingdom in Israel.

Samuel was the model and type of the prophets; and embodied in his own person the spirit and nature of the prophetic office, whilst his attitude towards Saul foreshadowed the position which the prophet was to assume in relation to the king.

In the life of David, the Lord himself education the king of His kingdom, the prince over His people, to whom He could continue His favour and grace even when he had fallen so deeply that it was necessary that he should be chastised for his sins.

Thus all the separate parts and sections are fused together as an organic whole in the fundamental thought of the work before us.

And this unity is not rendered at all questionable by differences such as we find in the accounts of the mode of Saul's death as described in 1 Samuel 31:4 and 2 Samuel 1:9, 10, or by such repetitions as the double account of the death of Samuel, and other phenomena of a similar kind, which can be explained without difficulty; whereas the assertion sometimes made, that there are some events of which we have two different accounts that contradict each other, has never yet been proved, and, as we shall see when we come to the exposition of the passages in question, has arisen partly from unscriptural assumptions, partly from ignorance of the formal peculiarities of the Hebrew mode of writing history, and partly from a mistaken interpretation of the passages themselves.

With regard to the *origin* of the books of Samuel, all that can be maintained with certainty is, that they were not written till after the division of the kingdom under Solomon's successor.

This is evident from the remark in 1 Samuel 27:6, that "*Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day.*" For although David was king over the tribe of Judah alone for seven years, it was not till after the falling away of the ten tribes from the house of David that there were really "kings of Judah." On the other hand, nothing can be inferred

with certainty respecting the date of composition, either from the distinction drawn between Israel and Judah in 1 Samuel 11:8; 17:52; 18:16, and 2 Samuel 3:10; 24:1, which evidently existed as early as the time of David, as we may see from 2 Samuel 2:9, 10; 5:1-5; 19:41; 20:2; or from the formula "*to this day,*" which we find in 1 Samuel 5:5; 6:18; 30:25, 2 Samuel 4:3; 6:18; 18:18, since the duration of the facts to which it is applied is altogether unknown; or lastly, from such passages as 1 Samuel 9:9, 2 Samuel 13:18, where explanations are given of expressions and customs belonging to the times of Saul and David, as it is quite possible that they may have been altogether changed by the time of Solomon.

In general, the contents and style of the books point to the earliest times after the division of the kingdom; since we find no allusions whatever to the decay of the kingdoms which afterwards took place, and still less to the captivity; whilst the style and language are classical throughout, and altogether free from Chaldaisms and later forms, such as we meet with in the writings of the Chaldean period, and even in those of the time of the captivity.

The author himself is quite unknown; but, judging from the spirit of his writings, he was a prophet of the kingdom of Judah.

It is unanimously admitted, however, that he made use of written documents, particularly of prophetic records made by persons who were contemporaries of the events described, not only for the history of the reigns of Saul and David, but also for the life and labours of Samuel, although no written sources are quoted, with the exception of the "book of Jasher," which contained the elegy of David upon Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:18); so that the sources employed by him cannot be distinctly pointed out.

The different attempts which have been made to determine them minutely, from the time of Eichhorn down to G.

Em.

Karo (*de fontibus librorum qui feruntur Samuelis Dissert.*

Berol.

1862), are lacking in the necessary proofs which hypotheses must bring before they can meet with adoption and support.

If we confine ourselves to the historical evidence, according to 1 Chron.

29:29, the first and last acts of king David, i.e., the events of his entire reign, were recorded in the **“dibre”* of Samuel the seer, of Nathan the prophet, and of Gad the seer.” These prophetic writings formed no doubt the leading sources from which our books of Samuel were also drawn, since, on the one hand, apart from sundry deviations arising from differences in the plan and object of the two authors, the two accounts of the reign of David in 2 Samuel 8–24 and 1 Chron.

11–21 agree for the most part so thoroughly word for word, that they are generally regarded as extracts from one common source; whilst, on the other hand, the prophets named not only lived in the time of David but throughout the whole of the period referred to in the books before us, and took a very active part in the progressive development of the history of those times (see not only 1 Samuel 1–3, 7–10, 12, 15–16, but also 1 Samuel 19:18–24; 22:5, 2 Samuel 7:7:12, 24:11–18).

Moreover, in 1 Chron.

27:24, there are “chronicles (diaries or annals) of king David” mentioned, accompanied with the remark that the result of the census appointed by David was not inserted in them, from which we may infer that all the principal events of his reign were included in these chronicles.

And they may also have formed one of the sources for our books, although nothing certain can be determined concerning the relation in which they stood to the writings of the three prophets that have been mentioned.

Lastly, it is every evident from the character of the work before us, that the author had sources composed by eye-witnesses of the events at his command, and that these were employed with an intimate knowledge of the facts and with historical fidelity, inasmuch as the history is distinguished by great perspicuity and vividness of description, by a careful delineation of the characters of the persons engaged, and by great accuracy in the accounts of localities, and of subordinate circumstances connected with the historical events.