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Article 9: First Samuel at a Glance

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FIRST SAMUEL AT A GLANCE

This book records the birth, dedication and ministry of Samuel (Israel's great prophet), the failures of Eli (Israel's High Priest), the selection, rejection and death of Saul, Israel's first king and the first (of 3) anointings of David to later serve as Israel's second king.

BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

GOD SAVE THE KING! GOD SAVE THE KING!

For the first time in scripture, this cry is heard (10:24). The book of First Samuel is, among other things, a transitional "bridge" book which takes us from the theocracy (where God ruled directly through priests and military leaders) to the monarchy (the direct rule by various kings).

FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

1. Who? **Samuel**. He was the son of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:19, 20) who anointed both Saul and David as king over Israel (1 Sam. 9:27-10:1; 16:13).
2. What? The books of Judges, Ruth, **1 Samuel 1-24**.
3. When and where? 1020 B.C. (?), probably from Shiloh (1 Sam. 3:21) or Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17) in Israel.
4. Why?
 - a. Judges. The woes of Israel (due to sin) and the warriors of God (the 12 Judges)
 - b. Ruth. The thrilling love story of David's great-grandparents, Boaz and Ruth.
 - c. **1 Sam. 1-24**. Saul's anointing as Israel's first king and subsequent persecution of David.
5. To whom? The generations living just prior to and immediately following the monarchy in Israel.

KEY EVENTS

1. Birth of Samuel
2. Failure of Eli and his wicked sons
3. God's call to Samuel
4. Capture of the Ark by the Philistines
5. The revival at Mizpeh led by Samuel
6. Israel's demand for a king
7. Saul's anointing as Israel's first king
8. Rejection of Saul as king
9. First anointing of David at Bethlehem
10. David's victory over Goliath
11. The undying friendship between David and Jonathan
12. Beginning of David's flight from Saul
13. The first of two occasions where David spared the life of Saul

14. Saul's visit to witch of Endor
15. Death of Saul on a battlefield

KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Eli:** high priest who reassured Hannah that God had heard and would answer her prayers for a son
2. **Hophni and Phinehas:** Eli's two wicked priestly sons who were killed by God in a battle with the Philistines
3. **Ichabod:** infant son of Phinehas whose mother died during childbirth
4. **Samuel:** Israel's last great judge who would later serve as both prophet and priest
5. **Saul:** a tall Benjamite who would become Israel's first king but was later rejected by God for his many sins
6. **Nahash:** cruel king of Ammon who threatened to destroy an Israelite town but was himself and his armies totally routed by King Saul
7. **Jonathan:** godly and brave son of Saul who became a close friend of David
8. **David:** a shepherd boy from Bethlehem who defeated the mighty Goliath and eventually became Israel's most famous and finest king
9. **Goliath:** a huge Philistine warrior killed by David
10. **Michal:** daughter of Saul who became David's first wife
11. **Ahimelech:** high priest who was murdered by Saul for showing kindness to David
12. **Abigail:** beautiful and wise widow whom David married after God had killed her drunken and worthless husband Nabal
13. **Witch of Endor:** a medium, visited by the desperate Saul to inquire in regards to his upcoming battle with the Philistines

KEY PLACES

1. **Ramah:** home city of Hannah and Samuel
2. **Shiloh:** city where the Ark of the Covenant was kept
3. **Ashdod, Gaza, Gath, Ekron, and Ashkelon:** five Philistine cities plagued by God for displaying the captured Ark of the Covenant
4. **Kirjath-jearim:** where the Ark of the Covenant resided after being returned from the land of the Philistines
5. **Jabesh-gilead:** Israelite city rescued by Saul from the cruel Ammonites
6. **Bethlehem:** city of David
7. **Valley of Elah:** where David defeated Goliath
8. **Gibeah:** Saul's capital city
9. **Gath:** Philistine city visited by David when fleeing from Saul
10. **Cave of Adullam:** early headquarters of David and his 400 men
11. **Carmel:** home city of Nabal and Abigail
12. **Endor:** place visited by King Saul to seek the seances of a witch
13. **Mt. Gilboa:** where both King Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in battle

UNIQUE FEATURES

1. Four important individuals assume their roles in First Samuel. They are Eli the priest, Samuel the prophet, Saul the king, and David the shepherd.
2. This book also serves as an encouragement and a warning to Christian parents to raise their children in the Lord. Note Hannah's beautiful words of dedication as she gives her child to God: "*For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there*" (1:27-28).
3. But not all God's servants practiced such dedication. Both Eli and Samuel would raise up ungodly and worthless sons (see 2:12-17, 22-25; 8:1-5). In fact, scripture describes three tragic instances in which God himself stepped in and actually executed ungodly sons of godly fathers.
 - *First occasion:* The death of Judah's boys, Er and Onan (Gen. 38:7-10)
 - *Second occasion:* The deaths of Aaron's boys, Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2)
 - *Third occasion:* The deaths of Eli's boys, Hophni and Phinehas (2:34; 4:11)
4. Much of Israel's history centers around its three sacred buildings, the tabernacle of Moses, and the temples of Solomon and Herod. All three were eventually destroyed by its enemies.
5. In First Samuel 4 we read of the destruction of the first building. The Philistines destroyed the tabernacle of Moses (chapter 4). The Babylonians destroyed the temple of Solomon (2 Kings 25). The Romans destroyed the temple of Herod (Mt. 24:1-2; Lk. 21:20-24).
6. The book of First Samuel tells of a divine midnight visit and of a devilish midnight visit. The first occurred when God spoke to the young boy Samuel in the temple about the future (chapter 3). The second took place when Saul consulted with a witch in Endor about the future (chapter 28). This second account is probably the strangest story in all the Bible.
7. First Samuel shows the dangers of making demands on God, specifically Israel's desire to have a king just as their pagan neighbors had (8:4, 20). On the other hand, 1 Samuel records the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy that Israel's kings would come from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8-12).
8. First Samuel records the awesome power of the Ark of the Covenant (5, 6).
9. It illustrates the tragedy involved of asking for the right thing, but at the wrong time for the wrong reasons (8:1-9).
10. It warns us just how God views prayerlessness (12:23).
11. It demonstrates how far-reaching and devastating a believer's sin can affect others (21:1-9; 22:6-19).
12. It describes for us the fearful consequences involved in turning one's back on God (28:5, 6). See also Prov. 1:24-31.
13. In First Samuel we witness the agony of a dying mother and the ecstasy of a dedicated prophet. The agony is seen in the word *Ichabod*. "*And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a*

- son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken”(4:19-22).*
14. The ecstasy is seen in the word *Ebenezer*. *“And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us”(7:10-12).*
 15. Samuel was history’s first circuit riding preacher, traveling yearly from Ramah, to Bethel, to Gilgal, to Mizpeh (see 7:15-17). At this time he established several “Bible schools” for Israel’s prophets. These were located at Gilgal, Jericho, and Bethel (see 1 Sam. 10:10; 1 Kings 18:13; 2 Kings 2:3, 5; 6:1-2).
 16. In First Samuel we find one of scripture’s greatest passages on obedience and true human worth.
 - On obedience: *“And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”(15:22).*
 - On true human worth: *“But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart”(16:7).*
 17. This book describes the world’s tallest man (Goliath, measuring ten feet in height, 17:4), and scripture’s most beautiful friendship (between Jonathan and David, 18:1). It also provides us with the first extended example of demon possession. Saul was the man possessed (see 16:14; 18:10).
 18. In First Samuel we have the first of several recorded conversations carried on by individuals who had previously left this earth in death (compare 28:15-19 with Lk. 16:23-31; Rev. 6:9-10; 7:9-10).
 19. Finally this is the first biblical book to quote from a noncanonical source (see 24:13).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

The Saul of 1 Samuel and the Saul (Paul) of the New Testament:

- Both were from the tribe of Benjamin (9:1-2; Phil. 3:5); the first was tall and impressive in appearance (9:2), while the second was probably unimpressive (2 Cor. 10:10).
- The first began as God’s friend and ended as God’s enemy (10:6-7; 28:6); the second began as God’s enemy and ended as God’s friend (Acts 9:1; 2 Tim. 4:18).
- The life of the first was characterized by disobedience (13:13; 15:22-23); the life of the second was characterized by obedience (Acts 26:13-19).

The Book of Acts:

As has been previously observed, First Samuel serves as a bridge book, linking the account with that of the monarchy. The book of Acts functions in similar fashion, taking us from the gospel account of Jesus to the writers of the epistles.

The Gospel of Luke:

Hannah's power (2:1-10) in regards to her infant son can be favorably compared with that of Mary's prayer in regards to her unborn son (Lk. 1:46-55).

TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. The Lord of Hosts (1:3)
2. The Rock (2:2)
3. Friend of the Helpless (2:7, 8)
4. Protestor of Saints (2:9)
5. Judge of the Earth (2:10)
6. Lord God of Israel (2:30)
7. The Holy Lord God (6:20)