

Samuel - Introduction

Advent: A Season of Anticipation and Longing

People of God, today is the First Sunday in Advent, marking the beginning of the Church Calendar. This means it is technically the Christian New Year. Advent is a four-week period leading up to Christmas, designed to help the Church prepare for the birth of Israel's Messiah.

Fittingly, the word "Advent" means "coming" or "arrival."

While we know that Christ Jesus was born over 2,000 years ago and manifested in the flesh to save us from our sins, it is still valuable for us to reenact the longing of God's people. This practice trains us in the virtues of patience and hope as we look forward to Christ's second Advent.

Hebrews 9 tells us that at that time, Christ will appear a second time, not to deal with sin as He did the first time, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.

Therefore, Advent teaches us to hope and wait for Christ, who has already taken away the guilt of our sins and will come again to deliver us from all our enemies and grant us total salvation.

Introducing the Books of Samuel

In light of these wonderful truths, I am going to begin a sermon series on the books of 1 & 2 Samuel today. And in these early chapters I am confident that we are going to

find plenty of material that keeps us connected to Advent and to the birth of our savior Jesus Christ.

But before I get into chapter 1, I need to give you the customary introductory sermon that helps you understand what Samuel is about, and why it was written.

Structure

Samuel's story revolves around three main characters: the prophet Samuel, King Saul, and King David. Together, they transition Israel from a collection of tribes governed by judges into a unified kingdom under King David in Jerusalem.

The Book of Samuel features a fascinating structure that intertwines the narratives of these three figures across four main parts. The first section, consisting of chapters 1-7, centers on Samuel, who serves as the key leader and prophet during this initial phase. He also plays a significant role in the following section, which focuses on Saul's story, told in two movements.

The first movement explores Saul's rise to power and his subsequent failures as Israel's first king, covered in chapters 8-15. The second part, in chapters 16-31, details Saul's downfall and tragic death.

The drama of Saul's demise is paralleled by David's thrilling rise to power, also narrated in two movements. Beginning in chapter 16 of 1 Samuel, David gains fame after defeating Goliath, but this success is shadowed by his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah, which occurs by chapter 11 of 2 Samuel. Following his initial successes, David faces his own tragic failures, leading to the slow disintegration of both his family and his kingdom.

The book concludes with an epilogue that reflects on the entire story.

The Need for a King: Setting the Stage

The next thing we need to consider is why the book of Samuel was written. Samuel begins where the book of Judges ends. Judges concludes with a series of stories that depict Levites leading Israel into sin, including idolatry, sexual immorality, and civil conflict.

Regarding Levitical idolatry, Judges concludes with the story of a Levite who becomes a priest to an idol. A man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim created an idol for worship and ordained his sons as priests over his household shrine, making ephods for them to wear. Later, a Levite came along, and Micah appointed him to be his personal priest over the idol and shrine. The Levite served

that image until a group of Danites came, stole him, and took Micah's idol, setting him up as priest for the image and shrine in Northern Israel, in the territory of Dan.

While this story is troubling, it becomes even worse when we learn that the Levite who served in Dan was named Jonathan and was the grandson of Moses. Moses' descendants continued to serve as priests over the shrine in Dan until the time when the ark from Shiloh was captured by the Philistines.

1 Samuel opens with the spiritually dull Eli and his corrupt sons, Hophni and Phinehas, running the Tabernacle in Shiloh contrary to the instructions given in the Torah. Hophni and Phinehas forced Israelite worshipers to offer unacceptable portions of their sacrifices to the Lord, taking for themselves what rightfully belonged to God. Eli, as their father, did nothing to stop this corruption.

Additionally, Judges ends with a horrifying civil war. The men of Gibeah in Benjamin abused a woman to death, reminiscent of the wicked men of Sodom and Gomorrah who sought to harm angels. This woman was a concubine to a Levite. After discovering her dead body, the Levite cut it into pieces and sent them to all twelve tribes as a call to action. The leaders of the tribes gathered to discuss the situation and demanded that Benjamin surrender the wicked men of Gibeah for punishment. When Benjamin

refused, the eleven tribes waged war against the one tribe of Benjamin, ultimately destroying it.

Instead of fighting a Holy War against the Canaanites, Israel chose to engage in a brutal civil war against the Benjamites. By the end of Judges, we witness the profound moral decline within Israel, even in Shiloh, where the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were located. Following the civil war, only 600 Benjamite men survived. The tribes wanted to help replenish Benjamin's population, but they had sworn not to give their daughters as wives to the Benjamites.

To resolve this dilemma, the eleven tribes sent men to attack Jabesh Gilead, killing its inhabitants but sparing 400 virgin women for the 600 surviving Benjamites. Still, 200 women were needed, so they devised a plan for the remaining Benjamites to abduct women attending annual feasts at Shiloh. The extent of Israel's sin was so grave that Shiloh was described as being in Canaan rather than in Israel.

In addition to all this, 1 Samuel opens with sexual immorality still rampant at Shiloh. Eli the High Priest's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were sexually violating the women who gathered at the tabernacle's entrance. These women, known as festal virgins, represented purity and were symbols of Israelite military protection.

Because these women were violated at the entrance of the tabernacle, the gates of Israel became spiritually open, making them susceptible to attack and defeat. This is among the sins highlighted to illustrate why God allowed the Philistines to defeat Israel, capture the Ark of the Covenant, and kill Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas.

Thus, the book of Samuel was written to demonstrate that Israel was in desperate need of godly leadership to address these issues. Ultimately, Israel needed a king.

God's Plan for a King

God had promised Abraham that kings would come from him (Gen. 17:6). Jacob prophesied that the scepter would not depart from Judah (Gen. 49:10). And Balaam further prophesied that a star and scepter shall arise out of Jacob and crush the enemies' forehead, exercising dominion (Num. 24:17-19).

Moses told the Israelites before they went into the land that they were permitted to set up a king over themselves, so long as it was the king that God had chosen among their brothers. And when that king took his throne, he was not to multiply horses, wives, and gold. But he was to write out a copy of the law of God approved by the Levitical priests and he was to read it all the days of his life that he

might keep God's word, and continue long in his kingdom (Deut. 17:14-20).

Being a faithful obedient worshiper of God was where the strength of His kingdom lay. Not in his military prowess, not in his accumulation of wives for the sake of political alliances with foreign nations, nor in his accumulation of great wealth. The safety, protection, and divine blessing of the kingdom of Israel was found in the king being a living embodiment of God's covenant – worshiping the Lord exclusively, and following the law of God with all his heart.

The Role of God's King

So from the Pentateuch we get this idea that God's King will be:

- From Judah
- He will be a warrior,
- And he will be a man who loves God's law.
- But we also later discover in Samuel that the king will unify the divided tribes of Israel and Judah into one people again.
- And he would restore the true worship of God in a central sanctuary.

Now many think that Israel's request for a king in 1 Samuel 8 was sinful. But it was not their request for a king

that was wrong, rather it was their reasons for wanting a king that were wrong. They said, “*Give us a king, then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out and fight our battles.*” (1 Sam. 8:20).

But this understanding of kingship was exactly what was wrong with their request. God himself fought on behalf of Israel, so long as His people worshiped the Lord faithfully and were obedient to Him. Thus one of the main responsibilities of God’s king was to lead Israel in being faithful to God’s covenant, and to worship him, so that God would fight on their behalf.

The Problem of Worship in the Judges Era

Samuel was thus written to show that David was the king who would solve much of these problems surrounding false worship in Israel. Remember the refrain at the end of Judges: *there was no king in Israel in those days, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.* While this most certainly carries with it a sense of moral anarchy of the time, this phrase is used to demonstrate just how prone to idolatry the people were.

The phrase “everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes” is a phrase used by Moses first in Deut. 12, used to describe people worshiping wherever and however they wanted, like the Canaanites.

After reviewing the various ways the Canaanites worshiped the gods of their land, Moses commands the people saying:

⁴*You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things.*

⁵*“But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. ⁶There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you.*

⁸*“You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes— ⁹for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you... ¹³Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; ¹⁴but in the place which the Lord chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.*

God called the people to do what was right in God’s eyes – to centralize their worship in one location when they entered the land. But during the time of the judges everyone did what was right in their own eyes, they worshiped whoever they wanted, wherever they wanted, however they wanted. Under David this would stop.

David: The Warrior King and Worship Leader

Thus we see later that when David brings the ark of the covenant back from captivity from Kiriath Jearim up to Jerusalem, he is the solution to the problem at the end of the book of Judges – there was no king in Israel and everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.

Therefore, one of the main purposes of the books of Samuel is to show that David is the faithful obedient warrior king who defeats the enemies of God, and who unifies God’s people through the worship of the One True God at the One central place of worship in Jerusalem.

This is also why the story of David ends with him purchasing the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and building an altar there to avert the wrath of God away from the people. This is the location where Solomon would build the temple, and inaugurate the golden age of Israelite history.

“And so the story of David begins with the desolation of the tent of Moses ends with David purchasing a place for the Solomonic house. The big story in Samuel is the transition from tabernacle to temple.”¹

¹ Peter Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 26-27.

Judge to King

Another transition is leadership from Judge to King. Samuel himself was the last of the Judges, and he himself served as the Kingmaker. He is like a John the Baptist character who prepares Israel for the coming of the kingship. Saul, Israel's first king, was himself a transitional figure in that regard. It really wasn't until David that Israel fully comes into the glory of the monarchy.

“Thus even in the story of Saul and David we see a retelling of the story of Adam and Jesus. Saul's rise and fall is like an extended retelling of the story of Adam, and if Saul was like Adam, David is a type of the Last Adam, called to replace the fallen king as the head of God's people, persecuted without cause by his rival, waiting patiently until the Lord gave him the kingdom. David is a man after God's own heart, and foreshadows the work of his greater Son, Jesus.”²

Most importantly, what 1&2 Samuel highlights is the decisive importance of leadership, and specifically leadership over generations. Familial, political, cultural, and ecclesiastical leadership, or lack of it, determines the health of a civilization, and the health of the church. As Peter Leithart says, “It is not simply that good leaders *do*

² Peter Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 27.

things that restore health to a civilization; the mere *fact* of a righteous and godly leader marks a rebirth.”³

And that rebirth was marked by the birth of Samuel – a new Nazirite Priest and Prophet who was going to prepare the people for their coming king, and for the glories to come. At Samuel’s birth, his mother Hannah rejoiced in song because she discerned that God had begun a revolution of the elites of the land. He was casting down the mighty oppressors, and he was exalting the humble and meek to make them inherit a throne of glory.

And this is exactly what Israel needs at this time. She is in spiritual darkness, ruled over by the Philistines, and even worse, Eli, Hophni, and Phineas. And when rebirth comes, it is going to be messy, people are going to die, God’s newly ordained leaders are going to need the wisdom of God to know how to lead the people under their charge during the transition.

Let me now conclude with some general application points from all this.

The Need for a Godly King

First, the books of Samuel highlight Israel's desperate need for a godly king who would lead them in faithfulness to God's covenant. The failures of Israel's leaders during the

³ Ibid. 28.

Judges era underscore the necessity of a ruler who embodies covenant obedience, pointing to Christ as the true and perfect King.

Just as Israel longed for a righteous king, we too should pray for our earthly leaders, and obey them seeing them as imperfect but lawfully ordained rulers sent to you from Jesus Christ. In this, we learn to submit to Christ's rule in every area of our lives.

But let us also understand that God places leaders who have authority over their specific jurisdictions. It is a great sin when leaders transgress their boundaries, doing those things which they do not have the authority to do. And similarly, when leaders refuse to take responsibility for their specific jurisdictions, they also forfeit the authority and leave those under their charge with no protection.

Leadership matters. In the church, the home, and the broader society, godly leaders bring blessing and stability. Pray for your leaders and encourage them to be like David—a man after God's own heart—a man who is quick to confess his sins, but one who delights in the law of God and who seeks to apply it in his personal and public life. And consider also where God is calling you to be a leader.

Each one of us is also called to reflect Christ's kingship in our spheres of influence. We are all a royal Priesthood, and we all rule with Christ. So, whether it is in your family,

workplace, or community, or church strive to lead with humility, integrity, and a heart that seeks God's will above your own.

Worship as the Heartbeat of the Kingdom

Second, the establishment of centralized worship under David, culminating in Solomon's Temple, teaches that the heart of God's kingdom is pure and unified worship.

When the Church is fragmented or corrupted, the nation also falters. Worship is central to our life as God's people.

Let us therefore guard against worshiping God in ways that seem right in our own eyes, and instead align ourselves with the patterns He has revealed in Scripture. Let us gather with God's people regularly to offer Him the worship He deserves. And let us keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with these our brothers and sisters for whom Christ died, and not be engaged in needless brother wars.

The Anticipation of Christ

Thirdly, the movement from tabernacle to temple point us to the hope of the resurrection of the body. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 that we know that if this earthly house, this tent, referring to our physical body, if it is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands,

eternal in the heavens. There is a movement and a transition from lesser glory to greater glory.

The story of Samuel, and the story of the NT also, teaches us that this life is a movement from an earthly tent to a heavenly temple. But while we are still here in this earthly tent we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our heavenly habitation. We want mortality to be swallowed up by life. And he who has prepared us for this very thing is the Spirit of God.

So let us keep in step with the Spirit of God, and not grieve him through our sinfulness. But let us be like David, who was a man after God's own heart, precisely because he was a man who confessed his sins and repented of them. He was not perfect. Only Christ is. So grieve your sin, and long for Christ to bring you to your heavenly dwelling. For in this hope you are saved.

Hope in the Greater King

And Finally, David's life and reign remind us that even the best earthly leaders fall short. Our ultimate hope is in Jesus, the King of kings, who reigns in righteousness and whose kingdom will never end. Place your trust in Him, for He is faithful to fulfill every promise.

In closing, as we begin Advent looking to the books of Samuel, may we be reminded of God's faithfulness to His

covenant promises to David and His ultimate plan to establish Christ as King over all things. The promise made to David was that there will always be a man to sit on His throne. And that man is Jesus of Nazareth, who is right now sitting on David's Throne in Heaven at the right hand of God the Father. And from thence he shall one day come to judge the living and the dead. Let us live as those eagerly awaiting the return of the King. Amen.