

Chapter 14: 1–2 Samuel

Key Terms

- lament: an appeal to a merciful God for divine intervention in a desperate situation
- Deuteronomistic school: (Hypothetical) Hebrew scribal guild of the seventh century BC responsible for shaping the historical literature of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy–Kings)
- Deuteronomistic History: Martin Noth proposed that Deuteronomy–2 Kings is a unified work written primarily during the exilic period. This term describes Deuteronomy–2 Kings in Noth's theory, which remains a dominant theory today.
- Historical Books: Old Testament books Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther
- monarchy: system of government in which a single ruler (monarch) has complete authority over the affairs of the nation
- Saul: first king of Israel
- David: second king of Israel
- ark of the covenant: most important religious artifact in Israel, it represented Yahweh's presence

Key Ideas

- The institution of kingship.
- The process toward establishing a covenant with David's line.
- The importance of divine kingship.

Chapter Summary

First and Second Samuel were originally one book which followed Israel's history from the conclusion of the judges period to the establishment of the monarchy. The Septuagint combines these two books with the books of Kings and calls them "Kingdoms." Though the events of the book probably occurred in the eleventh–tenth centuries BC, it is difficult to determine when they were recorded.

The primary purpose of this book is to record the history of the Davidic covenant and also to demonstrate that David did not usurp the throne. The Shiloh traditions introduce Samuel as the one who brings about the transition from the judges to the kings. Also marking this transition is the self-imposed exile of Yahweh, who abandons Israel because of her apostasy. The people's desire to establish a king demonstrates a further rejection of God; from the beginning, the people misunderstand the function of the human king, who was intended to represent the divine king, Yahweh. The first king, Saul, acts much like the judges of the previous age—providing temporary deliverance to the people from their enemies. His failure results from lack of spiritual depth and sound judgment. In the transition from Saul to David, the author is careful to avoid any implication of fault in David. The author intends to legitimize David's claim to the throne, but he does not conceal David's blameworthy actions. David's success as king is crowned by his retrieval of the ark of the covenant, the establishment of Yahweh's throne in Jerusalem, and the formation of the Davidic covenant.

There are several important themes in the books of Samuel. First, the ark of the covenant is the most important religious artifact in Israel, as it represents Yahweh's presence among the people. Second, kingship features prominently in the books. Though it is Yahweh's prerogative, the people viewed kingship as a more permanent office that eliminated their need to rely on Yahweh. Third, the Davidic Covenant is the primary focus of the books of Samuel and should not be overlooked. Fourth, the books view Saul negatively, and sixth, they view David mostly positively.

David's sin with Bathsheba marks the beginning of his decline, and the following chapters record the sins of David and of his sons, which jeopardize the covenant. Though God remains faithful to David and preserves him through the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba, Samuel concludes with God bringing judgment on David through famine and plague.