

## A SUMMARY OF 1 & 2 SAMUEL



The main purpose of 1 and 2 Samuel is to provide a history of the foundation of the kingdom of Israel and the settlement of the throne on David and his line. It will be remembered that at the end of Judges the people saw a monarchy as the only way out of a situation of internal strife and anarchy. Outside enemies had been reduced to one--the Philistines, who were established along the Mediterranean coast; but the Philistines were so formidable and expansionist that the very survival of Israel seemed to be at stake, and the tribes really needed to combine forces.

Samuel, who is regarded as the last of the judges, was the man chosen to bring about this unification. God used him to make Saul the first king of Israel. Everything connected with this choice of Saul, as with later events resulting from it, shows that God is still with his people; he is going to bring them to new political and military heights.

The Philistines are defeated, though not brought under total control. Like the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and Aramites, they become tributaries of Israel. This whole campaign was brought to a conclusion during the reign of David, whose vassal even the king of Tyre became. The effect of all this is that all Transjordania came to be dominated by David.

Despite these impressive victories the unity of the tribes of Israel under one king was still somewhat artificial. It was very much dependent on the military and political genius of David, who managed to get the twelve tribes to pull together: But differences among them ran deep; their underlying causes were not removed and later led to permanent divisions. David was shrewd enough to unite the two previously separated kingdoms (north and south), but the distinction between them still remained, and a final schism took place after David's death, accelerated by the unfortunate policy of his son Solomon, who started well and finished badly.



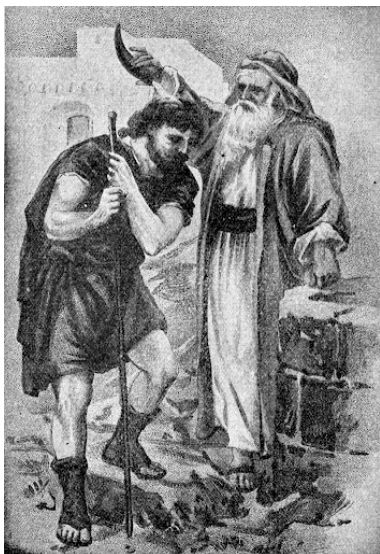
1 and 2 Samuel are structured in four parts, with an appendix. The first part covers the miraculous birth of Samuel and his upbringing in the Temple. Here we should note especially the canticle of his mother, Hannah, after Samuel is consecrated in the temple of Shiloh; it is one of the most beautiful hymns in the Old Testament (1 Sam. 2:1-10) and is regarded as an anticipation of the Magnificat, echoing as it does the messianic hopes of the *anawim* (= the poor, the humble). God will enrich the poor and bring down the proud. The nations will fear the Anointed (the Christ) who will reign over them so that his name will be honored to the ends of the Earth.

The narrative then goes on to describe the first war against the Philistines: The Israelites lose, and the ark falls into the

hands of their worst enemies. In the second part (1 Sam. 8-15) the establishment of the monarchy is described and the consecration of Saul as king. The people ask for a king, and Samuel at first refuses, but then God tells him to do what they want and in fact nominates Saul. Samuel proclaims Saul king, after anointing him with oil to show that he is a sacred person. In 1 Sam. 9:16 God's providence shines out; he fills Saul with the insight and courage necessary to give his people good government.

After Saul's coronation his divine election is confirmed by his great victories over the Amalekites. Once Samuel retires from his position as judge, the book goes on to describe more of Saul's victories. Despite all these victories, God rejects Saul because he transgresses his commandments.

We noted that during the period of the judges Israel very often failed to stay loyal to God. The same thing happens under the monarchy. Saul himself is rejected--which again shows that God chooses people irrespective of their merits and then expects them to remain true to the grace received.



The third section (1 Sam. 16 - 2 Sam. 1) deals with the relationship between Saul and David. At God's express wish, David is secretly anointed, and Saul, in his jealousy, does everything to kill him. David has to flee, and he remains a fugitive until Saul and his son Jonathan are killed in battle against the Philistines. David with his usual magnanimity composes a funeral eulogy in their honor. In the fourth part (2 Sam. 2-20) the narrative centers on David: the civil war, ending with the deaths of Abner and Ish-Bosheth, the pretender to the throne of Judah; the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem, which David makes his capital; the messianic promise that an eternal throne will be given to one of David's lineage (2 Sam. 7:12ff). The exceptional peace which ensued was disturbed by King David's double sin, followed by Absalom's conspiracy and death.

2 Samuel 11:4ff deals with these sins of David--his adultery with Bathsheba and his arrangement of her husband's death in battle. God condemns David's sin--and punishes him for it--but hope of pardon is present throughout the narrative. God allowed David, whose life had been so upright, to sin in this serious way in order to show his mercy and forgiveness--the final expression of this being the messiahship of his descendant. After this episode David changes completely and remains contrite until his death.

In an appendix (2 Sam. 21-24) two great calamities are reported--a famine which lasts for three years, ending when David makes satisfaction to the Gibeonites for a wrong done them; then the three days of pestilence which ravages the entire country from Dan to Beersheba. The end of the book also contains an account of David's deeds against the Philistines, his song of deliverance, and the prophetic messianic oracle about David's lineage.

Samuel makes more explicit God's promise of salvation given to our first parents and developed in the sacred books. Many centuries of checkered history must pass before this promise finds its fulfillment and the kingdom of God is established on Earth. David's reign is one of relative peace, preceded by the fall of Saul and following the infidelities of Solomon. When least expected, God sends a message of hope, in the form of a prophecy by Nathan to the effect that God will establish his offspring on his throne forever:

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom....And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

The New Testament repeatedly refers to this prophecy (cf. Luke 1:32-33, Acts 2:30, 2 Cor. 6:18, Heb. 1:5), and the Fathers see it as referring to Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah: Chosen to bring salvation to all, he was persecuted by those of his own house; although he was humiliated, he pardoned and atoned for the behavior of those who ill treated him; in his meekness he did not rebel but rather acted with infinite patience.



David, who originates the dynasty which will eventually lead to the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation, was one of the most humble and devout personalities in the Old Testament. He was the first man since Moses to unite the various Israelite tribes, spiritually as well as politically. He led them to victory over their enemies, but, what was more important, he renewed their faith in their covenant with Yahweh and taught them an all-important lesson--never to embark on any enterprise without first consulting Yahweh their God.

His sense of devotion led him to take particular care of everything to do with the worship of God. Even in his old age his piety never faltered, and it stood to him when he fell into sin, leading him to repentance and atonement.

He was a humble man. He admitted his sins and was not ashamed to weep before God, whom weakness caused him to offend. As a prophet he composed songs extolling the future Messiah who will be his descendant--the "son of David," whom later prophets will call "King David" (Jer. 30:9, Hos. 3:5), "My servant David" (Ezek. 34:23, 37:24)--the best praise God could give this faithful and pious king.

**Source:** Catholic Answers Website. The author, Antonio Fuentes teaches theology at the University of Navarre, Spain.