

Introductory Details on 1st and 2nd Samuel

1. The books of 1st and 2nd Samuel were originally one book. Together they form one sweeping narrative about the formation of Israel as a kingdom. Even while 1 Samuel focuses on Saul and 2 Samuel focuses on David, it is important to think of these books as one unified work. Additionally, the ancient and medieval church tended to think of Samuel (1 and 2 Samuel) as the first part of a two-part story, where 1 and 2 Kings functioned as the second part of the story. In this way, think of Samuel and Kings together telling the whole arc of the rise and fall of Israel as an independent kingdom—from the creation of the monarchy to their eventual downfall under Babylon.
2. The authorship of Samuel is unknown. Previous generations imagined that Samuel was the author, but that theory is complicated by the death of Samuel in 1 Samuel 25. Whatever the case may be, there is no clear author behind the text.
3. There are a variety of ways to think about the way these books are divided, but here is a simple one:
 1. 1 Samuel 1-7. About Samuel.
 2. 1 Samuel 8-14. About Saul.
 3. 1 Samuel 15–2 Samuel 8. About the rise of David.
 4. 2 Samuel 9-20. About David's rule and downfall.
 5. 2 Samuel 21-24. God's established Kingdom.
4. Both narratives of Saul and David have a tragic movement. While Saul fails in a more fundamental way than David, do not be surprised that Israel's first two kings are not simple heroes. Remember, this is a story about something that God is doing, not simply about the independent successes and failures of particular characters.
5. Keep in mind that God's purpose was always to build a kingdom from Israel. The purpose we see at work even in the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible) is that Abraham's people might become an entire nation who reflect God's character, values, and purposes to the world in such a way that He becomes known through them. Even when the Israelites demand a king in 1 Samuel 8, the problem is *when* and *how*, not that they have a king in the first place (see Deuteronomy 7 and 17). In this way, the books 1 and 2 Samuel detail a remarkable vision for our corporate life together. For many centuries, Christians have often used these books as informative about the church—what she looks like, how she should strive to live, and what her failures might be.
6. Be willing to get lost in the story. The particular movements within 1 and 2 Samuel can be strange and sometimes jarring, but allow yourself to be carried away. These are some of the most influential stories in history, and they are, at the very least, remarkable works of literature.