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**EXPOSITOR'S  
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IN TWELVE VOLUMES

**VOLUME 3**  
(DEUTERONOMY-2 SAMUEL)

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# 1, 2 SAMUEL

## Introduction

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### 1. Title

In the Jewish canon the two books of Samuel were originally one. There is no break in the MT between 1 and 2 Samuel, and the Masoretic notes at the end of 2 Samuel give a total of 1,506 verses for the entire corpus and point to 1 Samuel 28:24 as the middle verse of the "book" (*spr*, sing.). Like Kings and Chronicles, each of which is slightly longer than Samuel, the scroll of Samuel was too unwieldy to be handled with ease and so was divided into two parts in early MSS of the LXX. Not until the fifteenth century A.D. was the Hebrew text of Samuel separated into two books, and the first printed Hebrew Bible to exhibit the division is the Bomberg edition published in Venice in 1516/17.

It is understandable that the ancient Hebrew title of the book was *šmū'el*, since the prophet Samuel is the dominant figure in the early chapters. A major theme of the work, however, led the LXX translators to group Samuel together with *nr/āgīm* ("Kings") and to refer to them collectively as *Biblioi Basileiōn* ("Books of Kingdoms"). Jerome modified the title slightly to *Libri Rēgum* ("Books of Kings") so that Samuel and Kings, each divided into two parts, became known as 1, 2, 3, and 4 Kings respectively. To this day Catholic commentators and translators often refer to 1 and 2 Samuel as "1 and 2 Kings" (cf. the version by Ronald Knox), a practice that has caused no end of confusion, even if only temporary, to non-Catholic users of their works. Protestants have uniformly reverted to labeling the books after their ancient Hebrew name.

### 2. Authorship and Date

According to the Babylonian Talmud, "Samuel wrote the book that bears his name" (Baba Bathra 14b). The same Talmud also asserts that the first twenty-four chapters of

muel were written by Samuel himself (1 Sam 25:1 reports his death) and that the of the Samuel corpus was the work of Nathan and Gad (Baba Bathra 15a). First nicles 29:29 is doubtless the source of the latter rabbinic assessment: "As for the ts of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of uel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer." uel, Nathan, and Gad may not have been the authors of the "records" that bear r names, however; and, in any event, 1 Chronicles 29:29 appears to be listing ces used by the Chronicler and therefore should not be understood as having hing to say about the authorship of the books of Samuel. Although the priests naaz (cf. 2 Sam 15:27, 36; 17:17, 20; 18:19, 22-23, 27-29) and Zabud (cf. 1 Kings among others, have been proposed as possible candidates, arguments in their r fail to convince. In sum, we must remain content to leave the authorship of uel—and, for that matter, of other OT books such as Joshua, Judges, Kings, and nicles—in the realm of anonymity. Ultimately, of course, the Holy Spirit is the or who prompted the inspired narrator and gave his work the "omniscient" ory often remarked upon.<sup>1</sup>

though the statement that "Ziklag . . . has belonged to the kings [pl.] of Judah 'since' (1 Sam 27:6) implies that Samuel was not written until after the division of kingdom of Israel following the death of Solomon in 931 B.C., the possibility of a est number of later editorial updates and/or modernizations of the original work ot be ruled out. In any case, "one imagines the writer of Samuel or the Chronicler athors, not redactors, rather much as one might assume that any anonymous text, tever its history might have been, implies an 'author' and a 'reader' whose ative strategies and response may be inferred from the 'work.'" <sup>2</sup> With respect to late of the books of Samuel, all that can be said for certain is that since they report last words of David" (2 Sam 23:1), they could not have been written earlier than second quarter of the tenth century B.C. (David died c. 970).

#### Historical Context

ecause of its setting during the period of the judges, the Book of Ruth was inserted ven Judges and Samuel at least as early as the translation of the LXX and inues to occupy that position in most versions to the present time. In the Jewish m, however, Ruth is one of the five festal "scrolls" (*megillot*) and therefore ars closer to the end of the Hebrew Bible in a section called *ketuvim* ritings"). When Ruth is thus displaced, Samuel follows immediately upon Judges. ter the conquest of Canaan by Joshua, the people of Israel experienced the nar range of problems that face colonizers of newly occupied territory. Exacerbat- heir situation, however, was not only the resilience of the conquerors but also the res—moral and spiritual as well as military—of the conquerors. Their rebellion nst the covenant that God had established with them at Sinai brought divine ution, and the restoration that resulted from their repentance lasted only until 'rebbed again (cf. Judg 2:10-19; Neh 9:24-29). The dreary cycle of rebellion— ibution—repentance—restoration—rebellion is repeated over and over again

<sup>1</sup> Shimon Bar-Efrat, "Literary Modes and Methods in the Biblical Narrative in View of 2 Samuel 10-20 i Kings 1-2," *Immanuel* 8 (Spring 1978): 20.  
<sup>2</sup> Burke O. Long, "Framing Repetitions in Biblical Historiography," *JBL* 106, 3 (1987): 386.

throughout the Book of Judges, which in many respects rehearses the darkest days of Israel's long history.

By the end of Judges the situation in the land had become intolerable. Israel was in *extremis*, and anarchy reigned: "Everyone did as he saw fit" (Judg 17:6; 21:25). A series of judges, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord "came" (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29) with energizing "power" (Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14), provided little more than a holding action against Israel's enemies within and without, who were both numerous and varied. More than three centuries of settlement (cf. Judg 11:26) did not materially improve Israel's position, and thoughtful people must have begun crying out for change.

If theocracy implemented through divine charisma was the hallmark of the period of the judges (cf. Judg 8:28-29), theocracy mediated through divinely sanctioned monarchy would characterize the next phase in the history of the Israelites. In the days of the judges "Israel had no king" (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), and it was becoming apparent to many that she desperately needed one. Judgeship did not end with Samson, however. The priest Eli and the prophet Samuel both served as judges (cf. 1 Sam 4:18; 7:6, 15, 17). Not until the accession of Saul did the people have a king in the truest sense of the word—and even then they expected him to "judge" them (cf. 1 Sam 8:5-6, 20).

Edwin R. Thiele has succeeded in establishing 931/30 B.C. as the year when the division of the monarchy took place following Solomon's death.<sup>3</sup> If we interpret the biblical figures literally, Solomon reigned from 970 to 931 (forty years, 1 Kings 11:42), David from 1010 to 970 (forty years and six months, 2 Sam 5:5), and Saul from 1052 to 1010 (forty-two years, 1 Sam 13:1). Assuming that Samuel was about thirty years old when he anointed Saul as king of Israel, we arrive at the approximate dates of 1080 (the birth of Samuel) to 970 B.C. (the death of David) as the time span covered in the books of Samuel.

#### 4. Literary Context and Unity

Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings constitute the first half of *neẓẓim* ("Prophets"), the middle section of the Jewish canon. As the so-called Former Prophets, the four books present a carefully selected series of narratives that summarize the history of God's people during a period spanning well over eight centuries: from the beginning of the conquest of Canaan (c. 1405 B.C.) to the end of the monarchy and beyond (c. 561 B.C., "the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah" [2 Kings 25:27]). Told from a prophetic viewpoint (cf. 2 Kings 18:13, 17-37; 19:1-20; 19 = Isa 36:1-38:8; 39:1-8; cf. 2 Kings 25:27-30 = Jer 52:31-34), the story proclaims the central truth that Israel could anticipate the Lord's blessing only so long as she remained

<sup>3</sup> *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 15, 31. Although he objects to certain aspects of Thiele's overall tour de force, William Hamilton Barnes settles on 832 B.C. as the most likely year for the beginning of the divided monarchy; cf. *Studies in the Chronology of the Divided Monarchy of Israel*, Harvard Semitic Monograph 48 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), pp. 153-54. Whether arguments in favor of an earlier (e.g., 945; cf. E.W. Faldstich, *History, Harmony, and the Hebrew Kings* [Spencer: Chronology Books, 1986], pp. 202-3) or later date (e.g., 927; cf. John H. Hayes and Paul K. Hooker, *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah and Its Implications for Biblical History and Literature* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1988], pp. 18-19) will succeed in winning the day remains to be seen.

