–Save This Page as a PDF–

The Life of King Sha’ul from a Messianic Jewish Perspective

*To John Rice, **my own son in the faith (First Timothy 1:2)**, who has kept the faith and been a consistent witness of **Yeshua Messiah** throughout all his teaching and coaching career.*



The book of **First Samuel** describes the transition of leadership in Isra’el from the judges to kings. Three characters are prominent in the book: **Samuel**, the prophet and last judge; **Sha’ul**, the first king of **Isra’el**; and **David** anointed as king but not recognized as **Sha’ul’s** successor. The two books of Samuel were originally one in the Hebrew text, but were divided when they were translated into Greek. Thus, the Septuagint (the Greek TaNaKh) and English translations divide Samuel into two books, even though this introduces an artificial division into what is actually one continuous account.

The Use of the New International Version:

Because I am writing this commentary on **David** from a Jewish perspective, I will be using *the New International Version* unless otherwise indicated. There will be times when I will be using the Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern. But generally I will be using the NIV translation for the Jewish perspective.

The use of ADONAI:

Long before **Yeshua’s** day, the word **ADONAI**

had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God's** personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yud-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce Tetragrammaton,** meaning the four-letter name of **God**, and this remains the rule in most modern Jewish settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** or **Ha'Shem** where **YHVH** is meant.[1] In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His** name became so sacred to them that they started to substitute the phrase ***the Name***, instead of writing or pronouncing **His Name**. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His Name** was lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no syllables. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*.

The use of TaNaKh: The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for "Torah"), **N** (for "**N**evi'im," or the Prophets), and **K** (for "**K**etuvim," or the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term "Old Covenant" implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Jesus Himself** said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB).** I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** instead of the phrase the Old Testament, throughout this devotional commentary.

First and Second Samuel

Title: In the Jewish canon the two books of **Samuel** were originally one. There is no break in the Masoretic text between **First** and **Second Samuel**; the Masoretic notes at the end of **Second Samuel** give a total of 1,506 verses for the entire body of writing and point to **First Samuel 28:24** as the middle verse of the "book." The scroll of **Samuel,** like the scrolls of **Kings** and **Chronicles**, both of which are slightly longer than **Samuel**, was too unwieldy to be handled with ease and so was divided into two parts in the early manuscripts of the Septuagint (The Greek

translation of the TaNaKh 250 BC). Not until the fifteenth century AD was the Hebrew text of **Samuel** separated into two books, and the first printed Hebrew Bible to exhibit the division was the Daniel Bomberg edition published in Venice, Italy in 1516/17.

Names: The Hebrew name is **Shmu'el** since the prophet **Samuel** is the dominant figure in the early chapters. The Greek name from the Septuagint is called the "Book of Kingdoms." The Latin name in the Vulgate Bible is referred to as *Libri Regnorum*, or Book of Kings and **Samuel** and **Kings** are each divided into four parts: First, Second, Third and Fourth Kings respectively, which has caused much confusion to non-Catholics in the past. In English Bibles, they are **First** and **Second Samuel**, **First** and **Second Kings**.

Author: **According to the Babylonian Talmud "Samuel wrote the book that bears his name" (b. B. Bat. 14b). The same Talmud asserts that Samuel himself wrote the first twenty-four chapters of First Samuel (since 1 Samuel 25:1 reports his death) and that the rest of the books of Samuel were the work of Nathan and Gad (b. B. Bat. 15a). First Chronicles 29:29** is doubtless the source of the latter rabbinic assessment: **As for the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer.** However, **1 Chronicles 29:29** is merely listing sources used by **the Chronicler** and should not be understood as having anything to say about the authorship of the books of **Samuel**. Although the priests **Abiathar (1 Samuel 22:18-23, 23:6-9; Second Samuel 15:24-29, 19:11), Ahimaaz (2 Samuel 15:27** and **36, 17:17** and **20, 18:19, 22-23, 27-29)** and **Zabud (1 Kings 4:5)**, among others, have been proposed as possible candidates, arguments in their favor fail to convince. In the last analysis, we must leave the authorship to **Samuel** – and, for that matter, of other books of the TaNaKh such as **Joshua**, **Judges**, **Kings** and **Chronicles** – in the realm of anonymity. Ultimately, of course, **the Ruach (Holy Spirit)** is **the Author** who prompted the inspired narrator to put pen to parchment.

Date of the Books: With respect to the books of **Samuel**, all that can be said for certain is that since they report **the last words of David (Second Samuel 23:1)**, they could not have been written earlier than the second quarter of the tenth century BC (**David** having died in 970 BC). On the basis of historical and archaeological date as well as literary analysis, Baruch Halpern concludes that "the

composition of **Samuel** cannot be placed later than the 9th century, and probably should be dated in the 10th century, shortly after **David's** death in **Solomon's** day.[2]

Historical Setting: Because of its setting during the period of the judges, the book of Ruth was inserted between **Judges** and **Samuel** at least as early as the Septuagint (LXX) and continues to occupy that position in most versions of the Bible to the present time. In the Jewish canon, however, **Ruth** is one of the five festival scrolls, the Megillot, and therefore appears closer to the end of the TaNaKh in the Writings. Therefore, when **Ruth** is placed in the Writings, the books of **Samuel** follow immediately after the book of **Judges**.

After the conquest of Canaan by **Joshua**, **the Israelites** experienced the normal range of problems the colonizers of a newly occupied territory. The situation, however, was made worse not only by the resilience of the Canaanites but also the moral, spiritual and military failures of **the Jews**. The rebellion against the Covenant that **YHVH** had established with them at Sinai (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bi – The Stipulations of the Covenant**) brought divine retribution, and the restoration that resulted from their repentance lasted only until they rebelled again. The dreary cycle of rebellion – retribution – repentance – restoration – rebellion was repeated over and over again throughout the book of **Judges**, which in many respects rehearses the darkest days of **Isra'el's** long history.

By the end of the **Judges** the situation in **the Land** had become intolerable. **Isra'el** was at the point of death and anarchy reigned: **Everyone did as they saw fit (Judges 21:25).** A series of judges, upon whom **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** came with energizing power, provided little more than temporary relief from **Isra'el's** enemies within and without, who were both numerous and varied. More than three centuries of settlement did not materially improve **Isra'el's** position, and the righteous of the TaNaKh must have begun crying out for change.

In the days of the judges, **Isra'el** had no king, and it was becoming apparent to many that **she** desperately needed one. **They** wanted to be like **all the nations** around them! This desire for a king **(First Samuel 8:5)** was not in itself inappropriate. **Their** sin consisted in the fact that they were asking for a **king to lead us and to go out before us and to fight our battles (First Samuel 8:20).** In other words, **they** refused to believe that **YHVH** would grant **them** victory in **His** own time and according to His own good pleasure. **They** were willing

to exchange humble faith in the protection and power of **ADONAI-Tzva'ot** for misguided reliance on the strength of **the fighting men of Isra'el**.

Sha'ul ruled for 42 years **(1 Sam 13:1)** from 1052 BC to 1010 BC, **David** ruled for 40 years from 1010 BC to 970 BC, and **Solomon** ruled 40 years from 970 to about 930 BC **(1 Kg 11:42)**. Therefore, in **the life of David**, we see about the last 20 years of **Sha'ul's** life, all of **David's** life, **Solomon's** birth and at the end of **David's** life, the tumultuous transfer of authority from **David** to **Solomon, God's** anointed, and the beginning of **his** reign.

Purpose: There are *three* specific *purposes* of the books of **Samuel**. First, is *the historical purpose*. It picks up from **Judges 21:25 NLT**, we read that **in those days Isra'el had no king and all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.** So the purpose of the books of **Samuel** was to explain how **Isra'el** gained **a king**. And in doing so, the difference between human choice, which was **Sha'ul**, and divine choice, which was **David**. Keep in mind, it was already **God's** plan for **Isra'el** to have **a king** at some point because in **Genesis 49:10**, Jacob prophesied that **a scepter will not depart from Judah,** for **the Messiah** would be a **King** from **Judah**, and therefore, a kingship would be established. Moreover, in **Deuteronomy 17:14-20 the Ruach** commands **Isra'el** to **be sure to appoint over you a king that ADONAI your God chooses,** and spells out the rules **the king** must follow when they have one. David was supposed to be **Isra'el's** first **king**, but because they didn't **wait on the LORD (Psalm 27:14)**, they got **Sha'ul** (and a lot of heartache) instead of **David**. So *the historical purpose* was to show how **Isra'el** finally received **a king** – **Yeshua Messiah** who is an ancestor of **King David** (see the commentary on **Ruth Bd – Coda: The Genealogy of David**).

Secondly, is *the vindication purpose*. **David** needed to be vindicated because **he** did not hijack the throne away from the house of **Sha'ul**. **David** had two chances to kill **Sha'ul** (see the commentary on **the Life of David Bj – David Spares Sha'ul's Life** and **Bp – David Again Spares Sha'ul's Life**) and did not do so. And when the Philistines finally killed **Sha'ul**, **David** was three days' journey away. In addition, when **David** heard about the death of **Sha'ul he** wasn't happy about it, but lamented **his** death (see **the life of David By – David's Lament for Sha'ul and Y'honatan**). **He** was not involved in the murder of Abner, the general in charge of **Sha'ul's** army, nor Ish-Bosheth, who succeeded **Sha'ul** as **king** of the northern tribes of **Isra'el**. **He** was merciful to **Sha'ul's** grandson (see **the Life of**

David Da – David and Mephiboseth), and **he** had no choice but to hand the seven sons of **Sha'ul** over to the Gibeonites for execution as a result of **Sha'ul's** sins and to avert a plague (see **the Life of David Ef – The LORD's Wrath Against Isra'el**).

Thirdly, there is *a theological purpose*. For the most part the Bible is not merely trying to write history for history's sake. **The Ruach** is not only writing biographies. One of **His** three purposes is to teach theology. So the theological purpose of the books of **Samuel** is the establishment of the Davidic Covenant (see **Ct – The LORD's Covenant with David**), just as **Genesis** records the establishment of **God's** Covenant with Abraham. The books of **Samuel** also emphasize **God's** providence. People choose **kings**, but **God** chooses dynasties.

Psalms

Title of the Psalms:

The English title **Psalms** (or **Psalter**) is derived from the Greek translation of the TaNaKh. In the Codex Vaticanus (fourth century AD) the title *Psalmoi and the subtitle Biblos paslmon* (Book of **Psalms**) were used. In the Codex Alexandrinus (fifth century AD) the name *Psalterion* appears. The Greek word *psalmos*, which translates the Hebrew *mizmor*, signifies music accompanied by stringed instruments. Under the influence of the Septuagint and of Christianity, the word *psalmos* came to designate *a song of praise* without the emphasis on accompaniment by stringed instruments. Because *mizmor* is used in the titles of 57 of the **psalms**, the Greek translators used the translation of that word for the title of the entire collection. In the TaNaKh the title is **the Book of Praises**, referring to their content rather than form. This title is fitting for their collection of hymns used in Isra'el's worship, because most of the psalms contain an element of praise.[3]

The Psalms as Windows into Isra'el's Faith:

The 150 psalms that **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** has given us, is more than merely a book of **Isra'el's** prayer and praise. It is a cross section of **God's** revelation to **Isra'el** and of **Isra'el's** response in faith to **ADONAI**. In them, we receive windows that enable us to look out on our brothers and sisters in the faith of more than twenty-five hundred years ago. They invite us to experience how **the LORD's** people in the past related to **Him**. They witness to the glory of Tziyon, to **God's** covenant with **David**, to the faithfulness of **YHVH**, to the exodus and conquest traditions, to **God**

the Creator-Redeemer-King, and to **the Tender Warrior**. We see an interplay of many different motifs and emphases, which, when isolated, help us to understand better the TaNaKh as a whole and its bearing on the B'rit Chadashah (New Testament) because the TaNaKh looks forward and the B'rit Chadashah looks back.

The book of Psalms is **God's** prescription for complacent believers, because through it **He** reveals how great, wonderful, magnificent, wise, and utterly awe-inspiring **He** is! If **the LORD's** people before the coming of **Messiah** in the Gospels could have had such a faith in **ADONAI** – a witness to **His** greatness and readiness to help – how much more should this be true among us today! The book of **Psalms** can revolutionize our devotional life, our family patterns, and the fellowship and witness of the congregations of **God**.[4]

The Psalms is Our word to God and God's Word to Us,

The Inspiration and Authority of the Psalms:

The book of **Psalms** is first and foremost **God's Word** to **His** people. We hear the voice of **YHVH** in each individual psalm through the many moods of the psalms and through the many themes of **the Psalter**. The purpose of the psalms is the same as any other part of Scripture **(2 Tim 3:16)**, nevertheless it is unique. In it, **ADONAI** not only speaks to **His** people but also encourages us to use the language of the psalms in our individual and communal prayers and praise. By applying these ancient psalms to modern situations, the life of faith, hope, and love of each believer and the congregations of **God** can be greatly enhanced.

The psalms encourage a conversation between **the LORD** and **His** children. Though no book of the TaNaKh has been more important in the history of **God's** people than the book of **Psalms**, we are in danger of losing it, partly because of lack of use and partly because of the skills required for understanding them. **Ha'Shem** expects **His** children to incorporate the psalms into every aspect of our lives. There are seven values of **the psalms** to our lives:

1. Prayer is our communion with **God**. Prayers in **the psalms** sometimes take the form of complaints against **God**. The psalms lament adversity, describe the evil in **His** world, or petition **YHVH** to be faithful to **His** promises. Truly, **the psalms** affect our whole being. There is not a single emotion that we can be aware of, that is not represented in **the psalms**.

2. Praise is a person's longing for and for others to be moved with the same desire for **God**. The acts of **God** in the past filled **His** children with longing for a renewal of **His** acts, therefore intertwining past history (creation, the exodus, conquest, restoration, and so on) with future eschatology. Any token of **God's** goodness in the past energizes a greater hope for the future. So praise bridges the two horizons of the past and the future.

3. **The psalms** have a distinct place in the liturgy of the congregations of **God**. From the earliest of times **the psalms** have been the manual of praise and prayer in public worship. But lately, things have changed. **The psalms** are sung and read less and less. Hymns, gospel songs and other readings have taken their place in public and private worship to our detriment.

4. **The psalms** inspire the believer with the hope of the kingdom of **God**, not only now, but also in the messianic Kingdom and the Eternal State (see the commentary on **Revelation Fq – The Eternal State**). **They** guide the believer into a clearer picture of the **God** who has acted in creation, revelation and redemption, and who will act decisively in establishing **His** Kingdom. The study of **the psalms** transforms our perspective on ourselves and on the world.

5. **The psalms** reflect the faith experienced by **God's** people before the Second Coming (see the commentary on **Isaiah Kg – The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**). Their expressions of frustration, impatience, anger, and joy reflect the tension between the "now but not yet." One of the issues in the psalms of lament lies in their definition as *petition* or *lament*. They are both. The emphasis on prayer as *petition* may emphasize our submission to the power of **God**. The stress on *lament* brings out our struggle with **YHVH** as **the psalmist** wrestles with **God's** freedom, **God's** promises, and **his** own inability to understand **God**. In either case, **the psalmist** cries out in faith for the fullness of redemption.

Now that **Yeshua** has come, **the psalms** continue to hold great value for believers today as we, too, cry out for the day of our redemption. The B'rit Chadashah is clear that **Jesus** is **the Messiah**. **He** is the only **Mediator** between **God** and mankind. **He** alone will bring in the fullness of redemption. **The psalms** have been, in the truest sense, the prayer-book for believers of all ages. **The psalms** bridge the gap between "the then and the now," the ancient world and the present world, probably better than any other book of the Bible.

6. **God** addresses both the individual and the community. At times it may seem that

the psalms should be limited to **Isra’el** in **her** national existence (community laments) or to the king (royal prayers) and that we may use **the psalms** very selectively. Some have been guilty of emphasizing **Isra’el’s** collective experiences as a worshiping community to the virtual exclusion of an individual experience. However, **the psalms** can also be most valuable in our personal lives. **They** speak to our hearts and can transform us.

7. The value of the psalms lies in their connection between the TaNaKh and the B’rit Chadashah. Strictly speaking, they do belong in the TaNaKh and not to the B’rit Chadashah, as the psalmists stand among the people of **God** who served **Him** at the Temple and knew only of the kingdom of **David** and **his** heirs. However, **the psalmists** also longed for the day of redemption, the light of which grew ever more brightly with the birth of **Immanuel (Isaiah 8:1 to 9:7)**, **His** earthly ministry, crucifixion, ascension to heaven and present rule at **the Father’s** right hand. **Yeshua** is **the Messiah** of **God**, in whom all the promises of **YHVH** are sealed, including **His** messianic rule. This makes us different from the righteous of the TaNaKh. But **Jesus** and **His** disciples loved **the psalms**, which witness to the suffering and exaltation of **the Son of Man**. The early believers used the psalms in explaining **Christ’s** ministry, resurrection, exaltation and present rule.

First Chronicles

Author and Date:

If we accept the tradition that the canon of the TaNaKh was finalized during the general period of the Persian monarch Artach’shashta who died in 424 BC, then **Chronicles** would have to be written before that date. If its composition, moreover, is associated with the work of **Ezra**, we must notice that the Aramaic language found in the book of **Ezra** matches that of the Elephantine papyri, which likewise belongs to the fifth century BC.

Relationships between the books of **Chronicles** and **Ezra** provide the most important single clue for fixing the date of **Chronicles** and also for its authorship. Since **Chronicles** appears to be the work of an individual writer, who was a Levitical leader, some identification with **Ezra** the priest and scribe (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Bh – Ezra Returns from Babylon**), appears likely. Not only that, but the personal qualities of the author show he was a priestly official of knowledge, insight, wisdom, courage, organizing ability, and determination to carry out his plan.

The literary styles of the books are similar, and their contents have much in common: the frequent lists of genealogies, their focus on ritual, and joint devotion to the Torah. Most significant of all, the closing verses of **Second Chronicles 36:22-23** are repeated as the opening verses of **Ezra 1:1-3a**. **The rabbis teach that Ezra wrote Chronicles, along with the book that bears his name,** and is also upheld by as unanimous a consensus as can be, as can be found anywhere in the analysis of the Scriptures.

Therefore, for those who accept his historicity of the events recorded in **Ezra** – from the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC down to **Ezra's** reform in 458-457 BC – and the validity of **Ezra's** autobiographical writing within the next few years, the date of the composition for both **Chronicles** and **Ezra** as one consecutive history must be about 450 BC from Tziyon.[5]

Purpose and Structure:

While the books of **Samuel** and **Kings** give a political history of **Isra'el** and **Judah**, **Chronicles** present a religious history of the **Davidic** dynasty of **Judah**. The former are written from a prophetic and moral viewpoint, while the latter from a priestly and spiritual viewpoint. **First Chronicles** begins with the royal line of **David** and then traces the spiritual significance of **David's** righteous reign. **The Chronicler** omitted the slaughter of **two-thirds** of **the Moabite** army because **David** was **a man of war (First Chronicles 28:3)**. This was precisely the reason that **David** was not permitted to build **the Temple**.