

# HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

A course in Biblical literacy

How to read...  
**1&2 Samuel**  
Cindy Brown

## A. Where are we?

*In the Former Prophets*

- 'Act 2: God's faithfulness and our forgetfulness: covenant and disobedience' (from week 1 of HtRtB)

*In the Promised Land, c. 1000 BC.*

## B. How did we get here?

*YHWH's agency in Genesis – Judges*

- initiates covenants: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic
- *here*: Davidic (2 Sam 7)

*Israel's response in Genesis – Judges*

- sometimes obedient, sometimes not
- tribal society, warring and trying to be monotheistic
- *here*: monarchical society, still warring and trying to be monotheistic

## C. Who are the key players?

- Samuel, Saul, David
- plus Hannah, Jonathan, Joab, Bathsheba, Abigail, Nathan, Absalom and a whole lot of other characters, some of whom were "commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." (Heb 11.39-40)

## D. What happens?

**1 Sam 1 – 7**: A faithful priest, prophet and final judge in Israel: Samuel

**1 Sam 8 – 14**: Israel's demand for a king and the rise of tall Saul

**1 Sam 15 – 31**: The long, slow demise of Israel's first king...

**1 Sam 16 – 2 Sam 10**: ...alongside the long, slow rise of chosen David

**2 Sam 11 – 20**: The sad, dramatic failings of David and his familial fallout

**2 Sam 21 – 24**: A reflective epilogue, just to tidy things up a bit!

### What do you think about this?

Compare Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam 2.1-10 with Mary's song in Luke 1.46-56. What do you notice that is similar in these two women's stories? How might each of these songs help us interpret what God is doing in 1 and 2 Samuel and also what he is doing in the life of Jesus? Be as specific as possible.

Note also the 'barren woman' motif of Scripture alongside stories such as Sarah (Gen 18.11-12), Rebekah (Gen 25.21), and Rachel (Gen 29.31). What is a common theme in these accounts?

### What do you think about this?

David was hardly as pure as the driven snow, yet 2 Sam 23.1-7 skates over his less praiseworthy qualities. Why might this be, given this scroll's role in the broader OT narrative?

YHWH's word to and about David in 2 Sam 7.4-17 likewise seems to ignore his sins. Yet read the text again: who is this *really* about? Who is the main actor and what are his actions? What does David do to merit or accomplish these things? Again: why might this be, given 1 and 2 Samuel's place in the broader OT narrative?

## E. Why does any of this matter?

*1 and 2 Samuel further reveal who YHWH is*

- greater than the gods of surrounding nations, worthy of worship and obedience
- almighty, proactive, faithful, attentive to the humble, challenging the proud

*1 and 2 Samuel trace significant transitions for Israel*

- from judges to kings
- from tribes to a (delicately!) unified kingdom
- from a 'wannabe' ancient Near Eastern king (Saul) to a faithful-to-YHWH king (David)
- from a temporary worship tent (Shiloh) to a permanent worship centre (Zion)

*1 and 2 Samuel record the promise of an unending dynasty*

- David doesn't build a house for YHWH (Solomon will), but YHWH promises a 'forever' house to David

*1 and 2 Samuel establish the singular significance of King David*

for Israel and the OT, and also for the NT and our understanding of Jesus

## E. Why does any of this matter?

- *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: '1 and 2 Samuel', Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart*
- *Men Behaving Badly*, John Goldingay: a devotional-type 'commentary' on 1 and 2 Samuel
- *The Psalms of David*: reading them in this context sheds light on some of their meaning, including in the growing worship life of Israel (e.g. Ps 18, 51, 52, 53, 57, 89...)

### What do you think about this?

Consider David's song in 2 Sam 22 alongside Moses's song in Ex 15. What similarities do you notice? Any differences? What has Israel learned about YHWH in the years since they left Egypt? How have they learned these things – learned who YHWH is?

Notes...

**DON'T  
MISS...**

*How to read  
1&2 Kings*

*Stephen  
McIlwaine*

**SUN 9<sup>th</sup>  
JUNE**