

The Book of Samuel is the 4th book of the Bible. To give you some perspective: The 1st book is the Torah. It describes Jewish history from creation up to the time the Jews were about to enter Israel. The 2nd book of the Bible is the Book of Joshua. It describes the 28 years during which Joshua led the Jews across the Jordan River, conquered Israel and split it up among the tribes. The 3rd book is the Book of Judges. It describes the 300 years that the Jews were led by communal leaders, called judges. These judges were often religious leaders, whom the Jews obeyed out of the respect, not out of legal obligation as would be the case with a king. This 4th book, the Book of Samuel 1, describes the life and times of the last communal leader, Samuel. He guided the Jews through the transitional stage from the era of judges to the era of kings.

The story starts out 3100 years ago. Samuel's father was Elkanah. He was a Levite living among the tribe of Ephraim, not far from Shilo, where the Mishkan (tabernacle) was. He had 2 wives. His older wife had children. His younger wife, Chana, was childless. He would periodically take his family on a pilgrimage to the Mishkan in Shilo. On one pilgrimage, Channa was praying in the Mishkan for a child. She prayed in a whisper, like we pray Shmoneh Esrai now-a-days. Eli, the high priest, saw this and thought she was drunk and made a snide comment about it. She responded "No sir. I am not drunk. I was only praying to Gd with a broken heart." In response, Eli gave her a blessing that Gd should be grant whatever she was praying for.

9 months later, she had a son. She named him Shmuel (Samuel), which essentially means "Gd heard" in that Gd heard her prayer. When Shmuel became a teenager, she brought him to Eli the high priest in Shilo. She reminded Eli about her visit years earlier. She said "I was praying for this child. And I promised Gd that if I bear a son, I will donate his services to the Mishkan his entire life. So he is now your apprentice." She sewed Shmuel priestly garments and left him with Eli.

Over the years, Shmuel acquired a good reputation as an honest priest. This was in contrast to Eli's 2 sons who were also priests but who had a bad reputation as being money grubbing womanizers. One day, Gd sent an angel to Eli telling him that because he only chastised his sons for their bad behavior but didn't actually stop them, which brought shame on Gd's Mishkan, Gd would kill them in one day. And Eli grandson's, whom Eli hoped would take his some day, would instead be taking orders from the apprentice boy, Shmuel.

Soon after, Gd told Shmuel the same thing. In that episode, Shmuel was lying in bed in the Mishkan and heard a voice saying Shmuel Shmuel. He ran to

Eli and asked why Eli called him, and Eli said I didn't call you; go back to sleep. This happened 2nd time. After the 3rd time, Eli realized it was a voice from Gd, and told Shmuel to stay in bed next time he hears the voice and listen to Gd's message. Gd told Shmuel the same thing he told Eli, that Eli's 2 sons would die and Shmuel would take their place.

Eventually, Eli's sons did die. In that episode, Eli was 89 years old, and had led the Jews for 40 years. The Jews were battling the Philistines. This was part of a constant power struggle with the Philistines, who were constantly trying to subjugate the Jews, and the Jews were constantly fighting them off. The Jewish army sent messengers to the Mishkan in Shilo to bring the *aron kodesh*, the holy ark with the broken tablets, to the battle front, along with Eli's 2 priestly sons. The Jews figured that the Gd's presence, which always accompanies the holy ark, would bring them victory. But the opposite happened. The Philistines won the battle, and killed 30K Jewish soldiers and Eli's 2 sons, and captured the holy ark. When the tragic news reached Shilo, Eli fainted and cracked his head on the floor and died, and his daughter-in-law, the wife of one of his dead sons, gave birth prematurely and died at childbirth.

The Philistines eventually returned the *aron kodesh* after they found that each Philistine city they brought it to experienced a plague.

After Eli's death, Shmuel became the new communal leader. Before the next battle with the Philistines, Shmuel ordered the Jews to prepare for the battle by first doing penitence. The Jews won that battle. This probably convinced the Jews that this new leader, Shmuel, knew what he's doing. Throughout Shmuel's leadership, the Jews successfully held the Philistines at bay.

The Jews asked Shmuel to appoint a king to rule over them like all other nations. That is because a king has the legal authority to compel the nation to unite for the common defense, something a judge cannot do. Shmuel explained to them the benefits of having a religious leader, like himself, lead them instead of a king. He explained that a king will likely take the best of the people's wealth, land, children and produce for his own benefit. Shmuel recommended that his own 2 sons replace him as leader. But the Jews still insisted on having a king. Gd told Shmuel that He will guide Shmuel in selecting the right candidate.

Soon afterward, Shmuel was traveling to a neighboring city, and a tall young man, named Shaul (Saul), approached Shmuel and asked if he knew where the local "seer" is. Shmuel recognized this man as the one Gd designated. Shmuel answered "I am the seer. I know that you have been seeking your lost

donkeys for the past 3 days. Don't worry, they have been found and will be returned to you. But more importantly, you are the one that the Jews have been seeking." Shmuel anointed Saul by pouring oil over his head, and introduced Saul to the Jews their new king. After that, the Jews seemed to have lost interest in their new king until the following incident occurred.

In Transjordan (east of the Jordan), a Jewish city was under siege by the army of Amon. The Amonite king agreed to withdraw the siege if the right eye of every Jewish inhabitant would be gouged out. When Saul heard of this, he unified the Jews and led a Jewish army that defeated the Amonites and saved the city. This convinced the Jews of having a king.

But things went downhill for Saul after that. He made 2 minor mistakes that cost him the ability to pass his reign to his sons.

The 1st mistake occurred when the Jews were preparing for battle. Shmuel instructed Saul to gather 3000 soldiers and wait in a certain city for 7 days. Shmuel said "I will join you there in 7 days, and then we will offer a sacrifice and fight the enemy." Saul did what Shmuel told him to do. But while Saul waited for Shmuel to arrive, his soldiers were gradually deserting, and by the 7th day, his army had dwindled to only 700 men, and Shmuel hadn't shown up yet. Saul figured if he waits any longer for Shmuel to arrive, he won't have any soldiers left. So he made the sacrifice himself. Just as Saul was readying his men for battle, Shmuel arrived and scolded Saul, saying that since Saul disobeyed Shmuel's command from Gd to wait for Shmuel's arrival, his (Saul's) lineage is no longer fit for monarchy. Nevertheless, the Jews won the following battle, with Saul's son Yonatan being the main hero in that battle.

The 2nd mistake Saul made was when the Amalekites in the south were attacking the Jews, and Shmuel instructed Saul to defeat the Amalekites and kill every Amalekite man, woman, child and animal. Saul's army defeated the Amalekites and killed everyone except for the king, and kept the cattle alive to sacrifice to Gd. Shmuel scolded Saul for not obeying his instructions to kill everyone, and declared that "Gd wants your obedience more than your sacrifices." And Shmuel reminded Saul that he is being replaced as king.

Then Gd guided Shmuel to choose Saul's successor. Shmuel visited Bet Lechem (Bethlehem) about 15 miles south of Jerusalem. Shmuel selected a red-haired shepherd boy, David, the youngest of 8 sons of Yishai. He anointed David as the future king, in a private ceremony that Saul was unaware of.

Afterward, Saul started to become plagued with bouts of depression. And David was commissioned sing to him to relieve his depression.

David was once visiting his brothers on the battle front against the Philistines. His brothers were Jewish soldiers, and David was bringing them care packages from home. David heard the Philistine giant Goliath (Goliath) challenge the Jews to a 1-on-1 dual. David volunteered to accept the challenge even though he was not a soldier. David knocked out Goliath with a rock from his slingshot, and used Goliath's own sword to cut off Goliath's head. This panicked the Philistines and enabled the Jews to rout them. After the battle, David gave Goliath's sword to the priests, and carried Goliath's head to King Saul. Saul was so impressed that he appointed David as his general. After that, David became so successful in battle, that he became more popular than King Saul himself.

Saul gradually realized that Gd chose David to be his successor. In 2 separate incidents, Saul threw a dagger at David but missed. Saul explained to his son Yonatan that as long as David is alive, Yonatan can never succeed his father as king, and tried to convince his son to conspire with him to assassinate David. But Yonatan refused, and even warned David of King Saul's evil intentions.

David fled to a village inhabited by 85 cohen's and their families. David lied to the chief cohen, saying he was on a secret mission from the king. David asked for food, and the cohen gave him bread. David said he left his sword at home, and asked if the cohen had any weapon around, and the cohen gave David Goliath's sword. Then David fled. Saul heard about this incident. Saul thought the chief cohen knowingly aided a fugitive from the king, not realizing that David had lied to the cohen. King Saul ordered every man, woman, child and animal of that village killed.

David eventually assembled around him a gang of 600 ruffians who defended Jews in their area against marauding gentile gangs.

Saul seemed to spend most of the remainder of his reign in a cat-and-mouse game trying to hunt down and assassinate David. During this time, Shmuel died. Soon afterward, King Saul and his 3 sons were killed in battle, and David took over as king.

In retrospect, Shmuel never got the satisfaction of seeing the man he anointed to be the second king (David) actually become king. Shmuel probably wondered how Gd could have picked a potentially unstable depressive maniac (Saul) as the Jew's first king. This story is a good lesson in the tragedy of mental illness. It is also a good example of corrupt government, where the ruler consumes his time and resources on eliminating his successor, instead of on protecting his people.