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# Samuel

For other persons named Samuel, see Samuel (name). For the Biblical books, see Books of Samuel.

Samuel	
	
The icon of the prophet Samuel from the collection of the Donetsk regional art museum (Donetskij oblastnoj hudozhestvennyj muzej). XVII.	
Prophet, Seer	
<b>Died</b>	Ramah in Benjamin
<b>Honored in</b>	Judaism Christianity Islam
<b>Feast</b>	August 20 (Eastern Orthodox & Roman Catholicism <sup>[1]</sup> ) July 30(Armenian Apostolic Church) 9 Paoni (Coptic Orthodox Church)

**Samuel** (/ˈsæm.juː.əl/<sup>[2]</sup> Hebrew: שְׁמוּאֵל, Modern *Shmu'el* Tiberian *šmû'ēl*; Greek: Σαμουήλ *Samouēl*; Latin: *Samvel*; Arabic: صموئيل *Šamoel*; Strong's: *Shemuwel*), literally meaning "Name of God" in Hebrew, is a leader of ancient Israel in the Books of Samuel in the Hebrew Bible. He is also known as a prophet and is mentioned in the second chapter of the Qur'an, although not by name.<sup>[3]</sup>

His status, as viewed by rabbinical literature, is that he was the last of the Hebrew Judges and the first of the major prophets who began to prophesy inside the Land of Israel. He was thus at the cusp between two eras. According to the text of the Books of Samuel, he also anointed the first two kings of the Kingdom of Israel: Saul and David.

## Biblical account

### Family

Samuel's mother was Hannah and his father was Elkanah. Hannah, at the beginning of the narrative, is barren and childless, like Abraham's wife Sarah. Hannah prays to God for a child. Eli who is sitting at the foot of the doorpost in the sanctuary at Shiloh, sees her apparently mumbling and thinks Hannah is drunk, but is soon assured of her motivation and sobriety. Eli was, according to the Books of Samuel, the name of a priest of Shiloh, and one of the last Israelite Judges before the rule of kings in ancient Israel. He blesses her after she promises the child to God. Subsequently Hannah becomes pregnant; her child is Samuel. After he is weaned, she leaves him in Eli's care.



Gerbrand van den Eeckhout - Hannah presenting her son Samuel to the priest Eli  
ca.1665

Elkanah is Samuel's father and lives at Ramah (1 Sam. 1:19; 2:11; comp. 28:3), in the district of Zuph. His genealogy is also found in a pedigree of the Kohathites (1 Chron. 6:3-15) and in that of Heman, his great-grandson (ib. vi. 18-22). According to the genealogical tables, Elkanah was, a Levite, a fact otherwise not mentioned in the books of Samuel. The fact that Elkanah, a Levite, was denominated an Ephraimite is analogous to the designation of a Levite belonging to Judah (Judges 17:7, for example).<sup>[4]</sup>

### Name

According to 1 Samuel 1:20<sup>[5]</sup>, Hannah named Samuel to commemorate her prayer to God for a child. Samuel is translated as *heard of God* or "God has heard" (from 'shama', "heard," and 'El', God).<sup>[6]</sup> The Hebrew root of "Samuel" is "sha'al", a word mentioned seven times in 1 Samuel 1 and once as "sha'ul", Saul's name in Hebrew (1 Samuel 1:28). Biblical historian Michael Coogan suggests that Saul's birth narrative was transferred to Samuel by the Deuteronomist historians.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Calling

One night, around the age of 13, Samuel heard a voice calling his name. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Samuel was about 12 years old. He initially assumed it was coming from Eli and went to Eli to ask what he wished to say. Eli, however, sent Samuel back to sleep. After this happened three times Eli realized that the voice was God's, and instructed Samuel on how to respond. Once Samuel responded God told him that the wickedness of the *sons of Eli* had resulted in their dynasty being condemned to destruction. Eli asked Samuel to honestly recount to him what he had been told, and upon receiving the communication merely said that God should do what seems right to himself.

**Leader**

<b>Judges in the Bible</b>	
<i>Italics indicate individuals not explicitly described as judges</i>	
<b>Book of Joshua</b>	
•	<i>Joshua</i>
<b>Book of Judges</b>	
•	Othniel
•	Ehud
•	Shamgar
•	Deborah
•	<i>Barak</i>
•	Gideon
•	<i>Abimelech</i>
•	Tola
•	Jair
•	Jephthah
•	Ibzan
•	Elon
•	Abdon
•	Samson
<b>First Book of Samuel</b>	
•	Eli
•	Samuel
•	v
•	t
•	e <sup>[8]</sup>

During Samuel's youth at Shiloh the Philistines inflicted a decisive defeat against the Israelites at Eben-Ezer (1 Sam. 4:1,2<sup>[9]</sup>), placed the land under Philistine control, and took the sanctuary's Ark for themselves.

This was decades before the Israelites began to be ruled by a king. After 20 years of such oppression, Samuel, who had gained national prominence as a prophet, summoned the people to Mizpah (one of the highest hills in the land), where he organized them into an army, and led them against the Philistines. The Philistines, having marched to Mizpah to attack the newly amassed Israelite army, were soundly defeated and fled in terror. The retreating Philistines were slaughtered by the Israelites, which the Bible portrays positively. The text then states that Samuel erected a large stone at the battle site as a memorial, and there ensued a long period of peace thereafter.

During the successful campaign against the Amalekites, King Saul spared Agag, the King of the Amalekites, and the best of the livestock. Saul's troops spared the choicest of the Amalekites' sheep and oxen, claiming that they intend to sacrifice the livestock to the Lord in Gilgal (1 Samuel 15:15, 21). However, they thereby transgressed the Lord's command, which had asked them to "slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, oxen and sheep, camel and ass" (1 Samuel 15:3). Seeing this transgression, Samuel wept all the night and was very sorrowful with Saul's leniency and disobedience. Samuel rebuked King Saul for disobeying the divine command to destroy the whole population and livestock, giving Saul notice that God had rejected his kingship for this reason. After Saul begged Samuel for forgiveness and repented, Samuel executed King Agag in a brutal manner: "And Samuel cut Agag into pieces before the Lord in Gilgal" (1 Samuel 15:33). King Saul never saw Samuel again as a living body after the execution of Agag in Gilgal.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Textual criticism

### National prophet, local seer

Some authors see the biblical Samuel as combining descriptions of two distinct roles:

- A *seer*, based at Ramah, and seemingly known scarcely beyond the immediate neighbourhood of Ramah (Saul, for example, not having heard of him, with his servant informing him of his existence instead). In this role, Samuel is associated with the bands of musical *ecstatic* roaming prophets (*Nevi'im - neb'im*) at Gibeah, Bethel, and Gilgal, and some traditional scholars have argued that Samuel was the founder of these groups. At Ramah, Samuel secretly anoints Saul, after having met him for the first time, while Saul was looking for his father's lost donkeys, and treated him to a meal.
- A prophet, based at Shiloh, who went throughout the land, from place to place, with unwearied zeal, reproving, rebuking, and exhorting the people to repentance. In this role, Samuel acted as a (biblical) judge, publicly advising the nation, and also giving private advice to individuals. Eventually Samuel delegates this role to his sons, based at Beersheba, but they behave *corruptly* and so the people, facing invasion from the Ammonites, persuade Samuel to appoint a king. Samuel reluctantly does so, and anoints Saul in front of the entire nation, who had gathered to see him.

Textual scholars suggest that these two roles come from different sources, which later were spliced together to form the Book(s) of Samuel. The oldest is considered to be that which marks Samuel as the local *seer* of Ramah, who willingly anoints Saul as King in secret, while the latter is that which presents Samuel as a national figure, who begrudgingly anoints Saul as King in front of a national assembly. This later source is generally known as the *republican source*, since here, and elsewhere, it denigrates the actions and role of the monarchy (particularly those of Saul) and favours religious figures, in contrast to the other main source – the *monarchial source* – which treats the monarchy favourably. Theoretically if we had the *monarchial source* we would see Saul appointed king by public acclamation, due to his military victories, and not by cleromancy involving Samuel. Another difference between the sources is that the *republican source* treats the *shouters* as somewhat independent from Samuel (1 Samuel 9<sup>[11]</sup>) rather than having been led by him (1 Samuel 19:18ff<sup>[12]</sup>). The passage (1 Samuel 7:15-16<sup>[13]</sup>) in which Samuel is described as having exercised the functions of a (biblical) judge, during an annual circuit from Ramah to Bethel to Gilgal (the *Gilgal* between Ebal and Gerizim) to Mizpah and back to Ramah, is thought by textual scholars to be a redaction aimed at harmonizing the two portrayals of Samuel.<sup>[14]</sup>

The Book(s) of Samuel variously describe Samuel as having carried out sacrifices at sanctuaries, and having constructed and sanctified altars. According to the Mitzvot only Aaronic priests and/or Levites (depending on the Mitzvah) were permitted to perform these actions, and simply being a nazirite or prophet was insufficient. The books of Samuel and Kings offer numerous examples where this rule is not followed by kings and prophets, but some textual scholars look elsewhere seeking a harmonization of the issues. In the Book of Chronicles, Samuel is described as a Levite, rectifying this situation; however textual scholars widely see the Book of Chronicles as an attempt to redact the Book(s) of Samuel and of Kings to conform to later religious sensibilities. Since many of the Mitzvot themselves are thought to postdate the Book(s) of Samuel (according to the documentary hypothesis), Chronicles is probably making its claim based on religious bias. The Levitical genealogy of 1 Chronicles 4<sup>[15]</sup> is not historical, according to modern scholarship.

### The Deuteronomistic Historians' Portrait of Samuel

The Deuteronomistic Historians, who redacted the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings), idealized Samuel as a figure who is larger than life like Joshua. Samuel's father, Elkanah, is described as having originated from Zuph, specifically Ramathaim-Zophim, which was part of the tribal lands of Ephraim, while the Books of Chronicles state that he was a Levite.<sup>[16]</sup> Samuel is a judge who leads the military like in the Book of Judges and also who exercises judicial functions. In 1 Sam 12:6-17, the Deuteronomistic Historians composed a speech

of Samuel that puts him as the judge sent by God to save Israel.<sup>[17]</sup> In 1 Samuel 9:6-20, Samuel is seen as a local “seer.” The Deuteronomistic Historians preserved this view of Samuel while contributing him as “the first of prophets to articulate the failure of Israel to live up to its covenant with God.” For the Deuteronomistic Historians, Samuel was extension of Moses and continuing Moses’ function as a prophet, judge, and a priest which made historical Samuel uncertain.

### Samuel's retirement and death

Samuel initially appointed his two sons as his successors; however, the Israelites rejected them and insisted on having a king rule over them. Samuel, who is opposed to a king, warns them of the potential negative consequences of such a decision, but at the people's insistence, asks God for a king. Samuel is told to seek out Saul, an animal herder said to be a head taller than his peers, and anoint him as the first King of Israel.

Just before his retirement, Samuel gathered the people to an assembly at Gilgal, and gives them a *farewell speech*, in which he emphasised how prophets and judges were more important than kings, how kings should be held to account, and how the people should not fall into *idol worship*, or worship of Asherah or of Baal; Samuel threatened that God would subject the people to foreign invaders should they disobey. This is seen by some people as a deuteronomic redaction; being that archaeologically sees that Asherah was still worshipped in Israelite households well into the 6th century. However, the Bible is clear in 1 Kings 11:5, 33, and 2 Kings 23:13 that the Israelites fell into Asherah worship later on.<sup>[18]</sup>



Apparition of the spirit of Samuel to Saul, by Salvator Rosa, 1668.

Samuel then went into retirement, though he reappears briefly in the two accounts of why Saul's dynasty lost divine favour (parts of 1 Samuel 13<sup>[19]</sup> and 15<sup>[20]</sup>), essentially acting, according to scholars, as the narrator's mouthpiece. Wikipedia:Citation needed Apart from being the individual who anoints David as king, a role Samuel is abruptly summoned to take, he does not appear any further in the text until his own death at his hometown Ramah (1 Samuel 25:1<sup>[21]</sup>, 28:3<sup>[22]</sup>), where he is buried. According to classical rabbinical sources, this was at the age of fifty-two.

Samuel's death, however, is not completely the end of his appearance in the narrative. In the passage concerning Saul's visit to the Witch of Endor, ascribed by textual scholars to the *republican source*, Samuel was temporarily raised from the dead so that he can tell Saul his future. There are other interpretations which say that Saul and the witch having been frightened by his appearance, and Samuel as having been composed, classical rabbinical sources argue that Samuel was terrified by the ordeal, having expected to be appearing to face God's judgement, and had therefore brought Moses with him (to the land of the living) as a witness to his adherence to the mitzvot.

## Perspectives on Samuel

### Judaism

According to the Book of Jeremiah, and one of the Psalms (99 <sup>[23]</sup>), Samuel had a high devotion to God. Classical Rabbinical literature adds that he was more than an equal to Moses, God speaking directly to Samuel, rather than Samuel having to attend the tabernacle to hear God.<sup>[24]</sup> Samuel is also described by the Rabbis as having been extremely intelligent; he argued that it was legitimate for laymen to slaughter sacrifices, since the Halakha only insisted that the priests *bring the blood* (cf Leviticus 1:5 <sup>[25]</sup>, Zebahim 32a).<sup>[26]</sup> Eli, who was viewed negatively by many Classical Rabbis, is said to have reacted to this logic of Samuel by arguing that it was technically true, but Samuel should be put to death for making legal statements while Eli (his mentor) was present.



Grave of the Prophet Samuel, Jerusalem

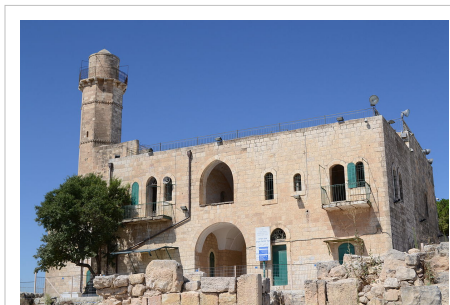
Samuel is also treated by the Classical Rabbis as a much more sympathetic character than he appears at face value in the Bible; his annual circuit is explained as being due to his wish to spare people the task of having to journey to him; Samuel is said to have been very rich, taking his entire household with him on the circuit so that he didn't need to impose himself on anyone's hospitality; when Saul fell out of God's favour, Samuel is described as having grieved copiously and having prematurely aged.<sup>[27]</sup>

### Christianity

For Evangelical Christians Samuel is considered to be a Prophet, Judge, and wise Leader of Israel, and treated as an example of fulfilled commitments to God. On the Eastern Orthodox liturgical calendar, his feast day is August 20. He is commemorated as one of the Holy Forefathers in the Calendar of Saints of the Armenian Apostolic Church on July 30. In the Coptic Orthodox Church, the commemoration of the departure of Samuel the Prophet is celebrated on 9 Paoni.

### Islam

Samuel is also a revered prophet<sup>[28]</sup> and seer in the Islamic faith. The narrative of Samuel in Muslim literature focuses specifically on his birth and the anointing of Saul. Other elements from his narrative are in accordance with the narratives of other prophets of Israel, as exegesis recounts Samuel's preaching against idolatry. Although he is mentioned in the Qur'an, his name is not given but he is instead referred to as "a Prophet". According to Islamic history, the Israelites, after the time of the prophet Moses, wanted a king to rule over their country. Thus, God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king for the Israelites. The Qur'an states:



Mosque of the Prophet Samuel, Jerusalem

Have you thought of the elders of Israel after Moses, and how they said to their apostle: "Set up a king for us, then we shall fight in the way of God?" He replied: "This too is possible that when commanded to fight you may not fight at all." They said: "How is it we should not fight in the way of God when we have been driven from our homes and deprived of our Sons?" But when they were ordered to fight they turned away, except for

a few; yet God knows the sinners.

—Qur'an, sura 2 (Al-Baqara), ayah 246

The Qur'an goes on to state that a king was anointed by the prophet, whose name was *Talut* (Saul in the Hebrew Bible). However, it states that the Israelites mocked and reviled the newly appointed king, as he was not wealthy from birth. But, in sharp contrast to the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an praises Saul greatly, and mentions that he was gifted with great spiritual and physical strength. In the Qur'anic account, Samuel prophesies to the children of Israel, telling them that the sign of Saul's kingship will be that the Ark of the Covenant will come back to the Israelites:

And when their prophet said to them: "God has raised Saul king over you," they said: "How can he be king over us when we have greater right to kingship than he, for he does not even possess abundant wealth?" "God has chosen him in preference to you," said the prophet "and gifted him abundantly in wisdom and stature; and God gives authority to whomsoever He will: God is infinite and all-wise."

Their prophet said to them: "The sign of his kingship will be that you will come to have a chest (tabu't) full of peace and tranquility (Sakina) from your Lord and remainder of the legacy of the children of Moses and the children of Aaron, carried over by the angels. In this certainly shall be a sign for you if you really believe."

—Qur'an, sura 2 (Al-Baqara), ayah 247–248

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[28] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Note.278 on verse 246: "This was Samuel. In his time Israel had suffered from much corruption within and many reverses without. The Philistines had made a great attack and defeated Israel with great slaughter. The Israelites, instead of relying on Faith and their own valour and cohesion, brought out their most sacred possession, the Ark of the Covenant, to help them in the fight. But the enemy captured it, carried it away, and retained it for seven months. The Israelites forgot that wickedness cannot screen itself behind a sacred relic. Nor can a sacred relic help the enemies of faith. The enemy found that the Ark brought nothing but misfortune for themselves, and were glad to abandon it. It apparently remained twenty years in the village (qarya) of Yaarim (Kirjath-jeafim): I. Samuel, 7:2. Meanwhile the people pressed Samuel to appoint them a king. They thought that a king would cure all their ills, whereas what was wanting was a spirit of union and discipline and a readiness on their part to fight in the cause of Allah."

- Ⓒ This article incorporates text from a publication now in the public domain: Easton, Matthew George (1897). "article name needed". *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (New and revised ed.). T. Nelson and Sons.

Preceded by <b>Eli</b>	<b>Judge of Israel</b>	<b>Saul was Anointed king</b>
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