

A Brief Introduction to Sefer Shmuel Aleph- by Tzvi Daum

Rashi at the start of our Sefer quotes the first Mishnah in פרקי אבות which states:

משה קיבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים..

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua transmitted it to the Elders and the Elders to the Prophets.

(Avot 1:1)

We see from this Mishnah two distinct periods in Jewish history are mentioned. One is the period of the Elders (also known as the Shoftim) and then there is the period called the Prophets. As Rashi at the start of Sefer Shmuel explains, Sefer Shmuel is the start of the era called “the Prophets”. The question is why? It certainly isn't that the book of Shoftim only describes judges and not prophets whereas Sefer Shmuel describes only prophets and not judges. For example, Devorah and Shmuel were both prophets and judges. Thus, why does Sefer Shmuel mark the beginning of a new era called נביאים? How is this era different than the era of the Judges which preceded it?

To understand this, one must realize that from the time of Moshe Rabbeinu until Shmuel (a period of about four hundred years), the **spiritual** leaders of the Jewish nation had assumed the role of **political** leadership as well. However, at the start of Sefer Shmuel, the Jews come to Shmuel and asked him to appoint a king who will lead them in battle “like all the other nations”. Shmuel doesn't view this request simply as a request for a king, but rather as a rejection of this entire concept that the Jewish nation should be led by their spiritual leaders in every aspect of life including politics (i.e. the battlefield). In fact, Hashem tells Shmuel, “It is not you who they have rejected but me!”

Thus, from the start of Sefer Shmuel we have a new era, where although the **spiritual** leader remains the prophet, nevertheless the **political** leader is now the **king**. This is the meaning of the Mishnah in Avot which is focused on the transmission of Torah throughout the ages. The Mishnah notes although in the era of the Prophets the Navi or judge was no longer the **political** leader of the nation (as this was the role of the king), nonetheless the prophets remained the **bearers of tradition** and **transmitted the teachings of Moshe**. However, to be sure, it is the start of an entirely new era.

Sefer Shmuel Aleph discusses how this change to kingship came about. The sefer begins with **the birth of Shmuel** and proceeds to recount the life of **Shaul Hamelech** who was the first king of the Jewish nation. **Shmuel Bet** discusses **the reign of Dovid Hamelech** who was for practical purposes the second king of Israel.

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Who wrote Sefer Shmuel?

The Gemarah says [in Bava Basra 15a](#) that the book of Shmuel was written by Shmuel and completed by the Navi Gad and the Navi Natan.

Why is the Book of Shmuel divided into two parts (שמואל א' – שמואל ב')?

The division of Sefer Shmuel is not of Jewish origin as Jewish tradition considers all of Sefer Shmuel to be one book. The division into two parts is [of Christian origin](#). Since there was no “freedom of the press” in the early days of the printing press, the Jews found themselves using Hebrew books printed by non-Jewish printers. The Jews eventually adopted their division and numbering system in order to make referencing psukim easier. In general terms Shmuel Aleph describes how the transformation to being led by a king took place amongst the Jews and it describes the reign of Shaul Hamelech the first king of Israel, whereas Shmuel Bet describes the reign of Dovid Hamelech the second king of Israel.