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Exodus Motifs in First Samuel 7 and 8:

A brief comment by J. Ernest Runions

The employment of the Exodus motif in later biblical writing, notably in descriptions of the return from exile and of the Christian redemption, is commonly recognized. Dr. Runions, Principal of Carey Hall in the University of British Columbia, finds traces of it even earlier, in the narrative of Israel's return to covenant loyalty under the leadership of Samuel.

Some of the most exciting moments of my life (which is not overburdened by dullness) come in Bible study, often while I am doing background preparation for a preaching series. Often when I am grappling with extensive stretches of Scripture, fresh insights buoy me along so that tough exegetical work becomes intensely exciting.

So in a recent study of First Samuel, I was struck by the marked similarity between 1 Samuel 7-8 and Exodus 17-18. After carefully reviewing the two passages, I concluded that the similarities were not accidental.

H. P. Smith many years ago commented:

Throughout the chapter, Samuel reminds us of Moses. Like the great Lawgiver, Samuel rebukes the people, judges them, intercedes for them. Their victory is due to his prayers as the victory over Amalek in the Wilderness is due to the upraised hands of Moses. The parallel continues in the next chapter (ch. 8).¹

Later scholarship has not seriously explored the implications of Smith's comments.

In comparing Exodus 17 and 1 Samuel 7 the parallelism suggests that the writer of the account in Samuel was actively drawing on Exodus motifs to organize his account. The similarity in structure and content can be tabulated briefly.

Exodus 17	1 Samuel 7
1. Israel is in rebellion (v. 3).	1. Israel has neglected Yahweh (vv. 1,2).
2. Water is demanded by and poured out to the people (v. 6).	2. Water is poured out (v. 6a). ²
3. Moses judges Israel (v. 7).	3. Samuel judges Israel (v. 6b.).
4. Israel attacked by Amalek (v. 8).	4. Israel attacked by Philistines (v. 8).

¹ Henry Preserved Smith, *Samuel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p.xvii.

² Commentators agree that (a) this action is unusual and unexplained; and (b) that it symbolizes repentance. May it not also be included in the account as an act of identification with the same ancient people who came under the judgement of Yahweh at Massah and Meribah?

Table Continued

Exodus 17	1 Samuel 7
5. Moses lifts his hands in intercession (vv. 11-12).	5. Samuel offers sacrifice and prayer on behalf of the people (v. 9).
6. The Amalekites are routed (v. 13).	6. The Philistines are defeated (vv. 10, 11).
7. Moses erects an altar, named Yahweh-nissi (v. 16).	7. Samuel erects a pillar, named Ebenezer (v. 12).

As Smith observed, the parallels continue through 1 Samuel 8. In Exodus 18, Moses' status as a judge is clarified and some of his duties are delegated. In 1 Samuel 7:15-17, and throughout Chapter 8, Samuel exercises prerogatives of a judge in Israel. Commentators generally agree that Samuel stands next after Moses as a political, priestly, and prophetic figure in the history of Israel.³

The clear parallels offer a clue to the historiography of First Samuel. Exodus 17 and 18 are preparatory to the establishment of Israel under the constitution of the covenant (ch. 19;20); while 1 Samuel 7 and 8 are preparatory to the re-establishment of Israel as a nation on the political basis of kingship with their narration of Israel's repentance after long neglect of Yahweh, an unexpected attack by a Philistine horde, a victory as a result of Samuel's intercession, and a brief account of Samuel's political establishment.

While Samuel himself deplors the kingship as apostasy, the redactor of the Books of Samuel rejoices in the kingship as it developed in the Davidic dynasty. It is not surprising, therefore, that he found in the Mosaic tradition a structure admirably suited to his purpose of showing Samuel's role in the establishment of the kingdom. The literary structure legitimates the nation under a king as being the covenant people. And just as the Mosaic covenant declared the sovereign rights of Yahweh, so the writer of Samuel finds the reign of God manifested in a king selected, anointed, and established by Yahweh. Samuel's role as prophet and mediator in the re-constitution of the nation is analogous to Moses' role in the Exodus tradition.

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³ H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel*, E.T. by J. S. Bowden, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964); W. J. Martin, "Samuel" in *New Bible Dictionary* (London: Inter Varsity Fellowship, 1962); R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).