# 'PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM'

## THE POETICS OF NARRATIVE REPETITION IN 1 SAMUEL 1–7

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## Summary

*A final form reading of 1 Samuel 1–7 is offered here, examining the narrative poetics of repetition and its relationship to complete and incomplete elements of plot. Five key repetitions are examined – monarchy, the authentic prophetic word, the fall of the house of Eli, YHWH's independent reign and prefiguring allusions to Saul. Although the text undoubtedly makes use of sources, it is argued that it is considerably more than their sum as these elements are woven together into a coherent whole in a manner that prepares the reader for the issues that are to be addressed in subsequent narratives. In particular, the conflicts that surface in chapters 8–12 are seen to be within the frame of YHWH's intentions since they are anticipated in these chapters. As with any good introduction, the reader is left waiting to see how it will develop.*

## 1. Introduction

Traditional scholarship on 1 Samuel 1–7 has long drawn on the conventions of source and form critical analyses in order to demarcate the units that comprise this text. Thus, following on from the initial comments of Rost,[1] it has been common to speak of a separate 'ark narrative' in 4:1b–7:1 (plus 2 Sam. 6), which can then be examined as a discrete unit within it.[2] Once this source has been isolated, then the surrounding text can also be examined on the same terms, especially

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[1]  Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982): 6-34.

[2]  Most thoroughly by Antony F. Campbell, *The Ark Narrative (1 Sam. 4–6; 2 Sam. 6): A Form-Critical and Traditio-Historical Study* (Missoula: Scholar's, 1975).

with regard to the tensions generated by such issues as Samuel's non-appearance within the source. At the same time, it has also been noted that the ark narrative has clear links with material in chapter 2, so Miller and Roberts[3] suggest that the source itself included 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25 and 27-36, though also arguing that 2 Samuel 6 was not a part of this source.[4] Irrespective of the specific conclusions that were reached, these approaches all operate with the entirely reasonable assumption that one should study some of the components of 1 Samuel 1–7 in terms of their own form and tradition history rather than the finished text. It is not the purpose of this paper to critique such an approach to these narratives, since they represent legitimate concerns, though it should always be noted that any method has certain limitations built into it. Rather, I wish to argue that the final form of 1 Samuel 1–7 is considerably more than simply the sum of its parts, and that attention to its narrative poetics will highlight the way in which it has integrated and developed its sources in order to present a narrative preparation for the coming of kingship to Israel. Indeed, it has sought to do so in a manner that will also highlight the tensions that are described in 1 Samuel 8–12.

Such a model of analysis is consistent with a number of contemporary literary approaches to these chapters, notably that of Garsiel,[5] though those of Miscall,[6] Eslinger,[7] Polzin[8] and Fokkelman[9] should not be ignored. Even before such approaches began to be popular, the study of Willis[10] had already highlighted a number of internal points of contact within 1 Samuel 1–7, links that were also

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[3]    Patrick D. Miller Jr. and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1977): 27-31.

[4]    Walter Brueggemann, *Ichabod Toward Home: The Journey of God's Glory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002): 2-4 has followed Miller & Roberts in accepting these links to ch. 2, though he retains the place of 2 Sam. 6.

[5]    Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1990).

[6]    Peter D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986).

[7]    Lyle M. Eslinger, *The Kingship of God in Crisis* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985).

[8]    Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Interpretation of the Deuteronomic History. Part 2: 1 Samuel* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1989).

[9]    J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Structural and Stylistic Analyses. Volume IV: Vow and Desire (1 Samuel 1–12)* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1993).

[10]   J. T. Willis, 'An Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition from a Prophetic Circle at the Ramah Sanctuary', *JBL* 90 (1971): 288-308.

highlighted by Gitay.[11] What this might suggest is that the traditional divide between synchronic and diachronic readings is not as absolute as might be suggested by some, though perhaps elements that might be dismissed by some as simply redactional may well be those that are of most interest to others. At the risk of over-generalising, it is arguable that the literary approaches to these chapters have tended to focus more on the aspect of characterisation, especially of Samuel and YHWH, than the dominant poetics of the narrative, and particularly its use of repetition[12] as a key device.[13] Fokkelman is an obvious exception to this, but his rigorous assessment of the micro-details of the text can sometimes have the effect of obscuring the macro-textual features. Conversely, the macro-textual approaches of Koorevaar[14] and Klement[15] have addressed only limited features within this unit, though their analyses act as independent confirmation of at least the importance of the theme of the coming of the monarchy, even though they differ on the point of whether the major break comes at the end of chapter 7 or chapter 8.[16] The way the various themes are interleaved in preparation for the arrival of kingship would perhaps suggest that we are to see these chapters as a hinge rather than a major break.

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[11]  Yehoshua Gitay, 'Reflections on the Poetics of the Samuel Narrative: The Question of the Ark Narrative', *CBQ* 54 (1992): 221-30.

[12]  Cf. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981): 95-96 for a typology of repetition in Hebrew narrative and Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1987): 436-440 for some general consequences from the study of repetition.

[13]  I have examined levels of proximate repetition in 1 Samuel 5–6. See David G. Firth, ''Parallelismus Membrorum' in Prose Narrative: The Function of Repetition in 1 Samuel 5–6,' *OTE* 15/3 (2002): 647-56. That paper was concerned with repetition within a single narrative, whereas this paper examines repetition across a group of related narratives. Similarly, Miscall, *1 Samuel*, xxv, draws on Derrida's discussion of speech acts in his theory of iteration to show the ways in which repetition actually develops the point being made. Again, helpful though this discussion is, his concern is with proximate repetitions rather than remote repetitions that work thematically.

[14]  H. J. Koorevaar, 'De Macrostructuur van het Boek Samuël en de Theologische Implicaties Daarvan', *Acta Theologica* 17/2 (1997): 56-86.

[15]  Herbert H. Klement, *II Samuel 21–24. Context, Structure and Meaning in the Samuel Conclusion* (Frankfurt am Maim: Peter Lang, 2000): 157-59.

[16]  Bruce C. Birch, *The Rise of the Israelite Monarchy: The Growth and Development of 1 Samuel 7–15* (Missoula: Scholars, 1976): 11, sets the break a chapter earlier than Koorevaar. Limited support for this is also found in Hans Jochen Boecker, *Die Beurteilung der Anfänge des Königtums in den Deuteronomistischen Abschnitten des 1. Samuelbuches: Ein Beitrag zum Problem des 'Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks'*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1969): 93-96.

This paper, then, will be specifically concerned with the poetics of repetition in the narrative of 1 Samuel 1–7, and in particular with the ways in which the narrative seeks to work with these repetitions to anticipate the conflict between models of government that are worked out in 1 Samuel 8–12. The narrative prepares readers for this conflict, whilst also indicating that YHWH has, in fact, already anticipated them. This is achieved through the interweaving and repetition of the key themes of monarchy, the authentic prophetic word, the fall of the house of Eli, YHWH's independent reign and prefiguring allusions to the person of Saul. By means of repetition, and also the varying degrees of completion of the elements of plot that surround these themes, the narrator creates a sense of anticipation for readers concerning the means by which they will be worked out, even as each repetition also serves to refine our understanding of how that issue will be resolved. It is to each of these that we must now turn in order to examine their relationship and function within the narrative.

## 2. Monarchy

Although the origin of the monarchy is often studied only in terms of chapters 8–12, there are in fact two significant points where it is foreshadowed in 1 Samuel 1–7: in Hannah's song (2:1-10) and in the announcement of the unnamed man of God against the house of Eli (2:27-36). Both of these passages function to raise the issue of the monarchy, even though no such thing exists at this point in the narrative, suggesting that monarchy may be YHWH's intention for Israel. In addition, they both need to be placed within their context, though we shall also return to them in the examination of some of our other themes.

Reference to monarchy in Hannah's song occurs in its closing lines (2:10), though in so doing it now functions as the somewhat surprising climax of the song. Kingship has not been mentioned previously (though see below on the prefiguring of Saul), but now it is made an explicit point of reference. Indeed, since it is YHWH who will

> judge the ends of the earth,
> give strength to his king
> and exalt the horn of his anointed one (2:10),

we are clearly to understand that kingship is a part of YHWH's intention for Israel. The statement itself, embedded in a song that has celebrated the triumph of the marginal, looks to the presence of a king, and thus moves towards an expression of hope.[17] But the repeated use of the third person masculine suffix in both of these closing lines of the song needs to be emphasised. Although it is YHWH who will act, he will do so by giving power to his king (מַלְכּוֹ), by exalting the horn[18] of his anointed (מְשִׁיחוֹ). The song points to the fact that YHWH retains ultimate power, including that typically dispensed by a king since he 'judges' the ends of the earth.[19] But it also highlights that he is prepared to work through a king, provided that the king understands where real authority lies.

The theme of YHWH's king recurs in the narrative of the unnamed man of God who visits Eli to announce the end of his house in 2:27-36. The main theme here is, of course, the fall of the house of Eli, and their replacement by a 'faithful priest', but the judgement speech also records a second reference to the anointed one of YHWH in verse 35, where it is said that the faithful priest walks 'before my anointed one forever'. Once again, the use of the possessive form indicates that the anointed one is under the authority of YHWH though, since the man of God speaks as YHWH's messenger, we naturally switch to the first person. In terms of the poetics of repetition, however, we have an emphasis that is brought forward, though also one that develops the role of the king. The king is not only under the authority of YHWH, but is also one who works with the priesthood, another key segment of YHWH's rule over Israel.

Critical scholarship has long regarded both of these texts as secondary, a judgement that usually sees a reduction in their importance. Hence, Smith can observe that Hannah's song has 'no particular reference to her circumstances',[20] whilst also pointing to the presence of the word מָשִׁיחַ ('anointed') as evidence of a late date. Although the status of 2:27-36 is more fluid in critical discussions, it is still a dominant model of reading to simply note that the message is

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[17] Cf. Silvia Becker-Spörl, *'Und Hanna betete und sie sprach …': Literarische Untersuchungen zu 1 Sam 2, 1–10* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1992): 60, 76-77.

[18] The 'horn' (קֶרֶן) was a symbol of power.

[19] Note that in 8:5 the elders ask for a king to 'judge' them. Although this language is evocative of Deut. 17:14-20, it also provides a verbal link back to Hannah's song.

[20] Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899): 14.

really something written up after the event,[21] so that the primary question thus concerns the origin of the message, rather than its narrative function. Once we move beyond this point and begin to consider the final form of the narrative, we can see that this now functions as a repetition of a motif introduced in Hannah's song. By introducing the theme of kingship in this way, the narrator has thus flagged its importance, preparing the reader for its origin, though also suggesting that the initiative for kingship should come from YHWH. The reader who arrives at chapter 8 thus has reason to question why it is that the elders, rather than YHWH, appear to make the first move towards kingship. In addition, the way in which this theme is presented begins to resolve issues left over from Judges 17–21, with its repeated emphasis on the problems caused by the absence of a king (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). The type of king who might resolve the chaos that is described there is not indicated, though it clearly cannot be someone like Abimelech (Judges 9). What is specified here is that it is to be YHWH's own king, the one who is chosen and appointed by YHWH. Nevertheless, although the repetition of the theme of monarchy emphasises its importance for the narrative, it remains unresolved within the plot structure, and thus a matter which leaves readers seeking further information. It is this information that chapters 8–12 will, at least initially, begin to answer.

## 3. The Authentic Prophetic Word

A second theme of great importance through these chapters is the authenticity of the prophetic word. This theme is inexorably tied to the fall of the house of Eli, since both of the major units of prophetic speech (2:27-36 and 3:10-18)[22] deal with the fall of the house of Eli. Nevertheless, the prophetic word is, in fact, of broader applicability to the message of these chapters, and conversely the theme of the fall of the house of Eli cannot be restricted to the prophetic announcements.

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[21]  E.g. P. Kyle McCarter Jr, *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980): 92.

[22]  1 Sam. 3:10-18 could more properly said to be a record of YHWH's speech which Samuel reported to Eli. However, since this is seen as initiating his prophetic ministry in 3:19–4:1a, it should still be treated as prophetic speech, albeit one in which the messenger function of the prophet is emphasised rather than the prophet's freedom in formulating a message.

For our purposes, it will be heuristically helpful to separate these themes even though they are bound tightly together within the narrative.

The initial encounter with the prophetic word comes with the announcement of an unnamed man of God who came to Eli at Shiloh to announce the judgement of YHWH on his family, and their removal from the office of the priesthood. A significant part of the speech is based upon the failures of the family that are outlined in 2:11-26, but the matters that are of particular importance for us revolve around those announcements that have a future orientation since it is this orientation that provides the test for prophetic authenticity in Deuteronomy 18:22. There are four elements of the man of God's speech that represent such a future orientation

1  The removal of the family of Eli from the priesthood (2:30-33)
2  The death of Hophni and Phinehas on the one day as a sign of this (2:34)
3  The replacement of the family with a 'faithful priest' (2:35)
4  The perennial poverty of the family (2:36)

Of these elements, the fourth is a logical outcome of the first three, and for that reason receives no further treatment in the narrative, unless the fact that Ichabod is an orphan is a hint of this (4:19-20). The second is the sign of the first, so that the account of its resolution can be understood as proof that the first has been resolved. Accordingly, this issue needs to be demonstrated. The third is not a necessary conclusion of the first two because of its specificity in referring to a 'faithful priest' and that such a priest would be before YHWH's anointed one. We would, therefore, expect that the narrative would address this element. Crucially, the fulfilment of these future aspects is essential to the demonstration of the authenticity, and therefore authority, of YHWH's word. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the account of the capture of the ark also includes within it the record of the death of Hophni and Phinehas – indeed, 4:11 ties them together as related events. What is not necessary as an interpretation of the word of the man of God is that Eli would die on the same day too (though see below on Samuel's initial message), even though as an infirm ninety-eight year old he was obviously not in the battle. Nevertheless, Eli does indeed die as he falls from his throne following the report of the messenger from the battle (4:18). The first two elements of the message

of the man of God are thus fulfilled, and so is the authenticity of the prophetic word, a word that demonstrates the authority of YHWH over the people of Israel, even those in leadership positions such as Eli and his sons.

The gap in this rush of reporting fulfilment is in the appointment of the faithful priest. He remains ominously unnamed in the man of God's announcement, and it is only natural that we would begin to look for the one who fulfils this part of the message, though the very process of looking for this fulfilment has already put us on the path of looking for a king. But who is this priest? Smith suggests that it is Zadok, after he has displaced Abiathar, so that the fulfilment of the message is delayed until 1 Kings 2:27.[23] But this is an extraordinarily long gap in the structure of the narrative, which is why Eslinger argues that the reference is to Samuel.[24] This has an immediate appeal, though it suffers from the fact that the faithful priest is promised a sure dynasty, something that would appear to stumble at 8:1-3. A possible solution to this is to take the verb הֲקִימֹתִי ('raise up', 2:35) as indicating a succession of priests, akin to the line of prophets the same verb introduces in Deuteronomy 18:18,[25] for whom the requirement of faithfulness always endures, just as it had for the family of Eli. Samuel can then be the initial fulfilment of the word, even if it finds a more ultimate point of reference in Zadok. That Samuel is available to fulfil this role is clear from his position in the temple at Shiloh earlier in chapter 2, a point that receives further confirmation in his role in chapter 3. The key point that arises from this is that the authentic word of YHWH continues to be authoritative, even whilst it establishes the possibility of Samuel being the one who through whom the monarchy will be initiated.

It is against this background that we need to read chapter 3. Although Gnuse is correct to insist that this is not a call narrative,[26] it does function as a validation of Samuel, whilst also confirming the issue of the fall of the house of Eli in the message of the man of God at Shiloh. The importance of the narrative lies in the fact that it represents

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[23]   Smith, *Books of Samuel*: 23.

[24]   Eslinger, *Kingship of God*: 135-37.

[25]   Cf. J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002): 303.

[26]   Robert Karl Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel: Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Theological Significance* (Lanham: University of America, 1984): 134-40. Cf. Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*: 193.

the beginning of Samuel's role as an established prophet at a time when the word of YHWH was apparently scarce (3:1). The detail of the story, with Samuel's three visits to Eli, is well known. But the emphasis of the narrative is actually on the content of the message that YHWH announces to Samuel. This message is largely a repetition of the content of the message of the man of God, though not an exact repetition. This is most clearly seen in the fact that there is a narrowing of the time scale in regard to Eli: where the sign concerning his sons had been for the one day (2:34), an actual time scale for Eli was not specified. Samuel's message, however, now provides that level of specificity in that it specifies that the YHWH's message concerning Eli will all be fulfilled 'on that day'. In eschatological contexts, this phrase is used to indicate an indeterminate future time, but that is not its focus here. It is, admittedly, undefined as to its exact timing, but following the previous announcement of the man of God, it appears to indicate that the judgement on the house of Eli, including that on Eli himself, will take place on a specific day. This, then, provides the background to the fact that 4:12-22 records the deaths of Eli and his daughter-in-law on the same day as the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas. Thus, Samuel is established as one who brings the authentic word of YHWH, a theme which the narrator highlights by means of direct comment in 3:19–4:1a. Although Samuel will not be mentioned in the ark narrative itself, his authority hangs over it, and the outworking of his word concerning Eli and his family is thus an important component within it.

These areas of resolution with respect to the prophetic word highlight its authority and power as the means by which YHWH exercises his rule over his people Israel. Leaders of the nation, such as Eli, are subject to the rule of God, a rule that will also be exercised over a king when one is appointed. Yet, there is within 1 Samuel 1–7 no clear resolution of the identity of the faithful priest. We have suggested that Samuel is the most probable initial fulfilment of this position, and there are certainly hints of this, but it is never made explicit. Similarly, Samuel is established as the prophet whose word always comes to pass because of the presence of YHWH with him. Given that the king is to be subject to the authority of YHWH, and this authority is mediated through his prophet, then we have already laid out the basis for potential conflict between Samuel and any king who is appointed. Thus, the repetitions have refined our understanding of YHWH's message concerning the prophetic word, whilst their partial

resolutions provide the reader with the assurance that they will be fulfilled. Nevertheless, Samuel's role provides a context in which the potential for conflict with a king is established, a conflict that can indeed be modelled on that with Eli and his family.

## 4. The Fall of the House of Eli

As noted, the fall of the house of Eli cannot be separated from the theme of the authentic prophetic word. Nevertheless, there is more to be said concerning this theme in 1 Samuel 1–7 than would be gleaned from the prophetic announcements alone. The fall of the house of Eli is also indissolubly linked to the rise of Samuel, and this too is achieved through the technique of repetition. Since the final elements of the fall of Eli have already been covered, we shall examine here those elements that preceded the prophetic announcements.

The narrative of Samuel begins, of course, with the account of the visit of Hannah to the sanctuary at Shiloh. Whilst there, Hannah was vexed by her rival wife Peninah, so she went to the sanctuary where she prayed with some passion. Eli was there, but did not understand what was happening, and so rebuked her as a drunk (1:14), a charge that Hannah vigorously refuted, insisting that Eli should not regard her as a בַּת בְּלִיַּעַל ('worthless woman', 1:16). Although the exact derivation of בְּלִיַּעַל ('worthless') is not agreed,[27] it is a derisory term and this is implied by Eli's comments. The significance of Hannah's denial is not at first clear, since the narrative then goes on to focus on the birth of Samuel and Hannah's song. However, in 2:11-26 the narrator interweaves the accounts of Samuel and the sons of Eli at the sanctuary, constantly highlighting Samuel's virtue as opposed to the failings of Hophni and Phinehas, failings that Eli does not address. But in a striking introduction to Hophni and Phinehas, the narrator describes them as בְּנֵי בְלִיַּעַל ('worthless men', 2:12). That is to say, what Hannah is able to deny about herself, the narrator introduces directly about Hophni and Phinehas in a way that cannot be denied. This is then demonstrated in the account of their actions whereby they abuse the processes of worship at the temple by means of the misuse of sacrifices (2:13-17) and sleep with the women attendants (2:22). In contrast, Samuel is a model נַעַר ('servant'), a term that is deliberately

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[27]  Cf. Paul D. Wegner, בלה, *NIDOTTE* 1:661-62.

used throughout 2:11-26 to describe Hophni and Phinehas as well as their servant. The process of repetition here takes a negative turn, however, in that whereas Eli had rebuked Hannah, we are specifically informed that he did not rebuke his sons (2:22), in spite of all that they had done. Even his warning to them fails because of the decision of YHWH to act against them, whereas Samuel continued to grow and find favour with both YHWH and the community (2:26).

The pattern of repetition here is thus achieved more through contrast than directly repeating themes. Nevertheless, the contrast itself is built on a series of repeating motifs, all of which come together to find their goal in the deaths of Eli and his sons. The fall of the house of Eli is thus a central theme that is completed within 1 Samuel 1–7, and indeed seems to be complete by the end of chapter 4. However, there is an additional surprise at the point of the death of Eli since we are told that he had 'judged Israel for forty years'. At no point previously had it been indicated that Eli was also a judge, and it would seem at first that therefore the way has been cleared for the appointment of a king by YHWH. Given that the position of judge had been a charismatic one, at least for the major judges, there was no necessary reason why another judge should be appointed after Eli. But the process by which Samuel was replacing Eli is not yet complete, and Eli's death, along with that of his sons, opens the way for the statement at 7:15 – that Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. In the process of resolving one plot issue, that of the fall of the house of Eli and their replacement by Samuel, there is thus introduced an unresolved narrative tension. Hannah's song and the message of the man of God had opened the way for the expectation of a king, but the assumption is surely that a king would supersede the judges. Samuel, however, is a judge for life, as well as the bearer of the authentic prophetic word.[28] The basis for the conflict between Samuel, as the representative of the older charismatic model of leadership, and Saul as the one who will be anointed as נָגִיד ('ruler'; 9:16; 10:1) is thus established. Samuel and Eli stand as contrasts to one another as judges[29] just as they also do as priests, but neither will fit well with a monarchy.

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[28]  In this way, a parallel is also drawn with Deborah (Judg. 4:4). Cf. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*: 55.

[29]  The account of Samuel's sons in 8:1-3 suggests, however, that there is also a pattern of repetition with Eli. Cf. Christophe Nihan, 'L'injustice des fils de Samuel, au tournant d'une époque', *BN* 94 (1998): 26-32.

## 5. YHWH's Independent Reign

Although it is not difficult to find evidence of YHWH's reign over Israel, it is an important element of these chapters that he also reigns over the nations, and that he is therefore the ultimate king over Israel. For this reason, of course, it is YHWH who can appoint his own king and judges in Israel, but we also have a remarkable pair of narratives in 1 Samuel 4:1b–7:17 that indicate his ability to act as an independent king without any form of human assistance. As such, these narratives are quite distinct from those that we find in the book of Judges, where deliverance for Israel inevitably comes through YHWH's election of a charismatic saviour–judge. These two narratives, the story of the ark in 4:1b–7:1 and the victory at Ebenezer in 7:2-17 are distinctive in that YHWH achieves the victory without any form of human mediation. Indeed, in the story of the ark, it is almost the case that YHWH has to overcome Israel's attempt to manipulate him in order to demonstrate his real authority. Although military victories without human mediation will be described in 2 Kings 6:24–7:20 and 18:13–19:37, there is no precedent for that at this point. The nearest any prior text comes to this is in Joshua 10:10-14, but in that narrative Joshua has already initiated military action and also actively intercedes concerning the battle.

The story of the ark has primarily been investigated as a discrete narrative rather than as a part of the narrative of 1 Samuel 1–7.[30] Obviously, Samuel plays no role within these chapters and, for this reason, it is easy to recognise that the information in them comes from a different source.[31] The question of the links between these chapters and those around them has typically been whether or not parts of the narrative can be traced back to chapter 2. Our examination of the theme of the authentic word of YHWH also noted that there is a point of contact with Samuel's initial message, so these links need to be explored more widely. What needs to be noted here is that there is also a careful pattern of thematic repetition involved in the whole of 4:1b–7:17, so these narratives need to be read as a diptych in which YHWH's free authority is stressed.

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[30]  See above, notes 1-4.
[31]  Note, however, the link that William H. Shea, 'The 'Izbet Sartah Ostracon', *AUSS* 28 (1990): 59-86, has drawn between a nearly contemporary inscription and the narrative itself.

YHWH's independent reign is a matter that can easily be recognised in the story of the ark. Although the capture of the ark had not featured in either of the prophetic messages that preceded this narrative, it becomes the narrative vehicle through which both the messages of the man of God and Samuel are, at least partially, resolved. As is well known, the ark was captured at the point where the Israelites attempted to use it as the means to ensure that YHWH would fight for them against the Philistines at Ebenezer. Following an initial defeat, the elders decided to bring the ark to the battlefield in preparation for the next battle (4:3). Although the Philistines apparently understood Israelite theology in polytheistic terms (4:7-8), they recognise the association between the ark and the events surrounding the God of the exodus. Initially, they believed that a god had come into the Israelite camp and thus expected defeat, though they insisted on the need to fight courageously. However, instead of a crushing Israelite victory, it is the Israelites who were struck down, so that even more died after the ark was brought than before (4:2 and 4:10). As a result, the ark was taken away to the temple of Dagon in Ashdod.[32] Whilst there, however, the narrative delights in showing the ways in which YHWH's power was shown. First, Dagon is shown to be a defeated foe as he falls down as a slain figure before the ark.[33] Then, the power of YHWH is shown as the Philistines in the region of the ark are afflicted with a mysterious illness.[34] This affliction moves around the country as the ark is

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[32] Cf. Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*: 43-44 for analogies of symbols of one god being placed before an apparently victorious one. Brueggemann, *Ichabod Toward Home*: 26, offers an imaginative reconstruction of the event.

[33] Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*: 193, and H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1964) suggest that Dagon is making obeisance before YHWH. But this seems improbable when the head and hands have been removed, whilst Wolfgang Zwickel, 'Dagon's abgeschlagener Kopf (1 Samuel v. 3-4)', *VT* 44 (1994): 244-249, has shown that this is a common ANE means of indicating the complete defeat of an enemy. In addition, the participle of נפל ('fall') is never used of obeisance.

[34] The diagnosis of this illness is not easy. The swellings associated with it are called both עֲפָלִים ('tumours', 5:6) and טְחֹרִים (another word meaning 'tumours', 6:11, though also Qere at 5:6). Josephus calls it 'dysentery' (*Antiquities* vi.1), but may not be medically specific. The old interpretation of haemorrhoids is rendered improbable by the fact that they are hardly likely to be fatal to the extent experienced here (cf. J. Wilkinson, 'The Philistine Epidemic of 1 Samuel 5 and 6', *ExpTim* 88 (1977): 137-141). The association with mice (6:4 – McCarter, *I Samuel*, 119, follows LXX and introduces the mice at 5:6) has seen bubonic plague as a favoured diagnosis, but the mice are said to be ravaging the fields, and it is rats that are the bearers of bubonic plague. In any case, there is no reason why the Philistines should associate the mice with plague since the link between plague and rats is a modern one. Plague is perhaps

eventually shifted to Gath before the Philistine leaders decide that it is necessary to return the ark to prove that it is indeed YHWH who has afflicted them (6:9). Thus, the ark was returned to Israel at Beth Shemesh, though even this required some cows to overcome all their normal habits and leave their young behind and drag a cart, even though they had never previously done so. In this way, the Philistines discovered that it was indeed YHWH who had acted against them.

YHWH's freedom has thus been demonstrated over Israel and Philistia alike, and this demonstration is also continued after the return of the ark. So, when the men of Beth Shemesh looked into[35] the ark in their celebrations, seventy of their number died.[36] The final question that arises from this, 'Who is able stand before YHWH, this holy God?' becomes a point of reference for the whole of the story of the ark. YHWH is powerfully holy, and the power of this holiness means that he is not subject to human control. YHWH remains as the independent king, whose reign does not require human mediation.

These same themes are then repeated, though on a smaller scale, in 7:2-17. Once more, the repetition also entails a development, but we cannot read this narrative apart from its predecessor. Once again, the threat to Israel came from the Philistines, but twenty years have now passed[37] meaning that Samuel is now an adult and able to participate in a way that was precluded by his age in the preceding narrative. Moreover, he is now clearly leading the nation, something that might be expected in the absence of a judge and given his status as priest and prophet. Having summoned the people to repentance by removing their Baalim and Ashtaroth, Samuel then gathered the people at Mizpah for corporate worship. The exact significance of the water ceremony is not clear,[38] but while he was there we are told that Samuel 'judged the people'. Coming from the book of Judges we might expect this to refer to leading the nation in a military exploit, but instead Samuel was engaged in prayer and the offering up of a whole burnt offering, though

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most likely, but it was not really a part of the narrator's purpose to provide a definite identification.

[35]  Or 'onto' – the exact force of the preposition בְּ at this point is difficult to determine.

[36]  MT reads 'seventy men, fifty thousand men' though there seems to be a gloss here of the larger number. See David M. Fouts, 'Added Support for Reading "70 Men" in 1 Samuel vi 19', *VT* 42 (1992): 394.

[37]  Although the point from which the twenty years are counted is not indicated!

[38]  But cf. McCarter, *I Samuel*: 144 for some possibilities.

this is also said to stem from the people's fear of the Philistines, who were known to be in the area (7:7-8). At this point, however, Israel is not in a military formation, whereas the Philistines were actually launching a surprise attack as Israel was at worship (7:10). However, YHWH thundered and overcame the Philistines, and so takes on the royal role of leading the nation in battle. Eslinger thus notes that YHWH's voice did what Israel's could not at 4:6,[39] so that this formal repetition is also a reversal of what happened before. It is only after YHWH has routed the Philistines that Israel becomes involved in the battle though, in effect, it has already been won by YHWH independently of Israelite involvement. Israel may, however, participate in this battle effectively because of their repentance – and so in this way enjoy the independent kingship of YHWH. Indeed, even Samuel as a judge is marginalised in this process precisely because he does not lead the people in battle.

But the repetitions and reversals are not limited to this point. The return of the ark at 6:14 and 6:18 was marked by the presence of a great stone, though apparently one that was already present in the field. The stone itself, although a 'witness to this day', is not of any particular form. In 7:12, however, Samuel set up a stone which he called Ebenezer (Stone of Help) to commemorate all that YHWH had done up to that point, whilst in 7:14 we are told that the Philistines returned the captured lands – both a repetition and reversal of 4:3 where Ebenezer was the place of the defeat that led to the capture of the ark. Israel, as a repentant people, celebrate the goodness of YHWH as king, whilst the issues that were unresolved in the account of the ark are now seen as resolved. YHWH alone is the king of Israel, and the benefits of this may be enjoyed by a repentant people. Moreover, YHWH does not require any form of human mediation to achieve his purposes for his people. These resolutions, however, raise new questions about the coming of the monarchy, even as they have, to some extent, marginalised the role of the prophet and judge. Monarchy is coming, but it stands in stark contrast to a model of government that has been shown to be effective provided the nation is repentant. In any case, all leaders stand under the authority of YHWH as he chooses to mediate it through prophet, judge and priest. But what is clear is that a military role is not the key requirement for the coming king.

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[39] Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*: 241.

## 6. Prefiguring Allusions to the Person of Saul

Finally, we need to note briefly the ways in which the person of Saul is also prefigured within the narrative. Nowhere is this clearer than in 1:12-28, where there is a series of allusions to the name of Saul, all of which actually end up with Samuel. As is well known, the verbal root שאל (on which the name Saul is based) means 'to ask', though in the hiphil (1:28) it also means 'to dedicate'. What is characteristic of this narrative is that it continually flags an expectation of the story of Saul, such as the fact that Samuel's name is said to be because Hannah asked (שאל) for him, whilst the dedication statement goes further and says that הוא שָׁאוּל which could be either 'he is Saul' or 'he is dedicated'.[40] This verbal play is then picked up in 2:20 as we have the record of Eli's blessing of Hannah and Elkanah that other children would be given in place of Samuel, whom she had requested (שאל) from YHWH. In this way, the narrator continually plays with the expectations of the reader: we know from Judges 17–21 that kingship is required, but readers also know that it began with Saul. However, it continually leads readers to expect something about Saul, only to go instead to the story of an obscure family with a barren wife, and to insist that the story begins there instead.[41] Moreover, by repeating this technique in the blessing of Eli, the pattern is reproduced, though it is notable that the verbal forms of שאל ('ask') will not recur until 8:10, where the elders are indeed asking for the king who will finally turn out to be Saul. Klement has sought to show that the whole of the books of Samuel are ultimately an attempt to justify YHWH's choice of David,[42] and this in turn suggests that the narrator has thus already begun to deflate Saul's status, even before his formal introduction in 9:1-2.[43] The repetition of the root, and even form, of his name whilst pointing to Samuel instead is an important way of doing this. Nevertheless, for an audience that knows that Saul was the first king of

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[40]  McCarter, *I Samuel*, 63 thus believes that this story was originally about the nativity of Saul, not Samuel. See also Stanley Isser, *The Sword of Goliath: David in Heroic Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003): 110.

[41]  Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*: 25-26.

[42]  Klement, *II Samuel 21–24*: 252.

[43]  This suggests that a proper understanding of the story of Saul needs to move earlier than is traditionally the case in the study of the books of Samuel. E.g. David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980) begins with 1 Samuel 8.

Israel, an expectation has been created of his presence, an expectation that is not yet fulfilled.

## 7. Conclusion

Examination of these key themes – monarchy, the authentic prophetic word, the fall of the house of Eli, YHWH's independent reign and prefiguring allusions to Saul – suggests that 1 Samuel 1–7 is a carefully composed unit of text in which the various elements of the narrative work together to prepare the reader for the events that will unfold in chapters 8–12 and beyond. Repetition and the partial fulfilment of the themes that are introduced prove to be central techniques that are designed to initiate the conflicts that will develop once the request for a king will finally be made. Repetition is a crucial device because it enables the narrator to refine our understanding of the various themes, even as it also opens up new possibilities. Although the text may well contain a number of identifiable sources, the resultant narrative is considerably more than their sum. Thus, a unified narrative is presented, one with a number of thematic and plot elements, but one which nevertheless anticipates the conflicts that follow precisely because of those areas that remain unresolved within it. By the end of 1 Samuel 1–7, the reader knows that monarchy is coming, but the social and theological issues that it will raise have already been subtly flagged. As with any good introduction, the reader is left waiting to see how it will all pan out.