

THE AUTHORSHIP OF SAMUEL

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The Old Testament books of I and II Samuel from a very early time were called I and II Kingdoms. I and II Kings were called III and IV Kingdoms. The Greek Orthodox Church still refers to these four books in this way. The Septuagint, the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, divided the book of Samuel into two parts but gave them the title I and II Kingdoms. The Latin Vulgate changed the title from Kingdoms to Kings. The Masoretes, scholars who cared for the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, originally designated it “The Book of Samuel.”

According to Jewish tradition, “Samuel wrote the book which bears his name . . .” (*Baba Bathra*, 14b). But, the same book of Jewish tradition also says, “But is it not written in it, Now Samuel was dead?” (*Baba Bathra*, 15a). The death of Samuel does occur in I Samuel 25 posing a problem for Samuel’s writing the remaining thirty chapters. It is significant that the inspiration and acceptance of I and II Samuel does not hinge on the question of authorship because the book does not claim Samuel to have been its author. It is an anonymous book, that is, its author is unnamed.

Two reasons are given for the books bearing Samuel’s name. First, Samuel is the principle character of the first twenty-eight chapters. Details of his birth at Ramah of Ephraim, also known as Ramathaim Zophim (1:1), are given. Samuel’s life and leadership during this transitional period of Hebrew history is covered. Samuel’s importance has been highlighted in the notion: Whereas Moses was the founder of the nation Samuel was the organizer, developer, and savior of it. Also, Samuel’s death and burial at Ramah are included in the first part of the books of Samuel. Second, Samuel anointed the two principle characters of the rest of the book, Saul and David.

The *terminus a quo*, a Latin term meaning “fixed date or point from which” the time of writing is reckoned, for Samuel must consider the internal evidence of I Samuel 27:6. The verse mentions that “Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day.” The significance of this statement is that it alludes to the division of the kingdom into the ten northern tribes of Israel and the two southern tribes of Judah, an event which took place after the death of David’s son Solomon or about 930 BC. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., suggested that the absence of any reference to the

fall of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, in 722 BC makes that date a probable *terminus ad quem*, “fixed date or point from which” a time can be set. Archer along with Steinmueller and Moeller, conservative scholars, place the writing of Samuel anywhere between 930 BC and 722 BC. But, Edward J. Young affirmed that the writing of Samuel took place “shortly after the schism” or nearer the 930 BC date than the 722 BC date. Roland Kenneth Harrison concurs. Therefore, the books of Samuel were completed forty to eighty years after Samuel’s death.

However, to say the books of Samuel are anonymous is not to preclude the idea that Samuel wrote material contained in the books. Samuel did some writing. I Samuel 10:25 reads, “Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord.” Also, the Chronicler said, “. . . The acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer” (I Chron. 29:29). Samuel is given credit for some of the writing, but the passage in Chronicles brings to light the fact that others may have also had a part. The full verse reads, “Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer.” Another source in Samuel is the book of Jasher (II Sam. 1:18). So, instead of I and II Samuel being written by a single author it was probably written by a compiler who used early documents written by Samuel, Gad, Nathan, and possibly others.

Young summarized his view of the authorship of Samuel by saying, “The books of Samuel were composed under divine inspiration by a prophet, probably of Judaea, who lived shortly after the schism and who incorporated into his work earlier written material.” Archer agrees with Young that the books were composed and utilized some source material, “There is little doubt that the compiler of the books of Samuel employed prior written sources.” Harrison commenting on I Chronicles 29:29 pointed out, “As with other chronicles of a similar character, it is impossible to state what the precise contents of these written documents comprised.” A summation of this study of the authorship of Samuel shows that the books of Samuel were probably written by a Judean prophet shortly after the kingdom divided somewhere between 930 BC and 722 BC and, this unknown or anonymous writer and compiler used previously written works of Samuel and others.

The apostle Peter gave assurance of the inspiration of such prophetic writings in II Peter 1:19-21, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the

scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

REFERENCES

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