

THE AMALEKITE'S REPORT OF SAUL'S DEATH: POLITICAL INTRIGUE OR INCOMPATIBLE SOURCES?

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The circumstances of Saul's death have remained enigmatic for many years because of divergent accounts in 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1. In the former chapter the wounded Saul apparently committed suicide after his armor-bearer refused to apply the *coup de grâce*. In 2 Samuel 1, however, the Amalekite was not so hesitant to "help" Saul and admits as much in his report to David.

In 1 Samuel 31 we are told that after Saul's three sons were killed the Philistine archers gravely wounded him.¹ In the face of certain defeat, Saul pled with his armor-bearer to mercifully end his life rather than allow him to fall into the hands of uncircumcised Philistines who would doubtless torture and mutilate a captured Israelite monarch. When the armor-bearer refused to comply, Saul drew his own sword and fell upon it. Later in the chapter (vv 8-10) we learn that Saul's fears were well founded. The Philistines discovered his body the next day. After decapitating him and removing his armor, they impaled his body on the walls of Beth Shan and sent his head and armor on a victory tour around the Philistine countryside.

In the first chapter of 2 Samuel² the account of the unfortunate Saul's demise is incompatible with this scenario. Here David and his private troops were waiting in Ziklag for news from the battle at Mount Gilboa. On the third day an Amalekite messenger arrived at Ziklag bearing visible signs of mourning (torn garments and dirt on his head). Having escaped from the Israelite encampment, he reported to David that Saul and his sons and many other Israelites had fallen in battle to the victorious Philistines. When David asked for more detail, the Amalekite related the events as follows: He happened upon the seriously wounded monarch at Mount Gilboa. With the Philistines pressing all around, Saul asked this Amalekite stranger—not the armor-bearer—to finish him off. The Amalekite then coolly recounted how he had killed Saul and taken from his body the diadem and royal armlet that he then presented to David. David responded with bitter mourning and fasting until evening

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¹ The LXX of 1 Sam 31:3 gives more detail: "and he was wounded in the abdomen." The MT has "and he writhed greatly because of the archers."

² A chapter that should be viewed as a literary transitional device as we shall see below.

because of the death of Saul and Jonathan. Finally David had the Amalekite messenger executed for killing the anointed of Yahweh.

The problem we will address here is the Amalekite messenger's account of Saul's death, since it appears incongruous with the account given in 1 Samuel 31. There the king committed suicide, here the Amalekite killed him; there he was wounded by archers, here his enemies were charioteers; there the Philistines took his armor, here the Amalekite brought his crown and armlet to David.³

This problem has been variously explained. Harmonization was attempted by Josephus, who, after giving a general description of the debacle at Mount Gilboa, reconstructed the events as follows:

Saul himself . . . fought with great bravery; and when he had received so many wounds that he was not able to bear up nor to oppose any longer, and yet was not able to kill himself, he bade his armour-bearer draw his sword, and run him through, before the enemy should take him alive. But his armour-bearer not daring to kill his master, he drew his own sword, and placing himself over against its point, he threw himself upon it; and when he could neither run it through him, nor, by leaning against it, make the sword pass through him, he turned him round, and asked a certain young man that stood by who he was; and when he understood that he was an Amalekite, he desired him to force the sword through him, because he was not able to do it with his own hands, and thereby to procure him such a death as he desired. This the young man did accordingly; and he took the golden bracelet that was on Saul's arm, and his royal crown that was on his head, and ran away. And when Saul's armour-bearer saw that he was slain, he killed himself; nor did any of the king's guards escape, but they all fell upon the mountain called Gilboa.⁴

Although Josephus' conclusions about the manner of Saul's death are unsatisfying, we believe his general approach to the problem may not be far from the truth. In this paper we shall consider the validity of prevailing scholarly opinion on 2 Samuel 1 and its relationship to the preceding chapter. We shall then offer some tentative observations and attempt to view the problem in light of the books of Samuel as a whole.

I. CRITICAL INTERPRETATION

It has been maintained by a number of scholars that the narrative is composite.⁵ According to one form of the tradition a soldier brings the news from the battlefield to David, who laments with his followers (2 Sam 1:1-4, 11-12). In the other form a young Amalekite boasts of

³ The Chronicler does not shed any light on the problem since the first four chapters of 2 Samuel are not paralleled in 1 Chronicles.

⁴ Josephus *Ant.* 6.14.7. This is typical of Josephus' method of organizing "related but scattered biblical passages, which at times conflicted with each other, into coherent units." H. W. Basser, "Josephus as Exegete," *JAOS* 107 (1987) 30.

⁵ Among them see particularly K. Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1902) 193-195.

having killed Saul and brings the royal insignia as evidence, presumably expecting a reward (vv 5-10, 13-16).

Those who hold this theory generally view vv 5, 13 as editorial links for the so-called E-source. Verse 5 serves to introduce the exact report of vv 6-10, but omitting Jonathan entirely. Verse 13 is the editor's method of returning to the Amalekite messenger after the lamentation of David in vv 11-12. Thus vv 1-4, 11-12 form the first source, identified by some as J. Verses 5-10, 13-16 are the second source (E). Thus:

J-Source (2 Sam 1:1-4, 11-12)

¹After the death of Saul, David returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites and remained two days in Ziklag. ²And on the third day, behold, a man [²iš] came from the camp where Saul had been; his garments were torn, and earth was upon his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground and did homage. ³David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I escaped from the camp [*maḥāneh*] of Israel." ⁴David said to him, "What has happened? Tell me." And he said, "The people have fled from the battle, and many of the people have also fallen and died, and even Saul and his son Jonathan are dead." . . . ¹¹Then David took hold of his garments and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. ¹²And they mourned and wept and fasted until the evening because of Saul, his son Jonathan, the people of Judah and the house of Israel, for they fell by the sword.

E-Source (2 Sam 1:5-10, 13-16)

⁵David then said to the young man [*na'ar*] who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" ⁶And the young man who told him said, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and behold, Saul was leaning upon his spear, and lo, the chariots and the riders were pressing him hard. ⁷Then he turned behind him and saw me, and he called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' ⁸He said, 'Who are you?' I said to him, 'I am an Amalekite.' ⁹And he said, 'Stand beside me and kill me, for deadly pain has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' ¹⁰So I stood beside him and killed him, for I knew he could never live after his fall. Then I took the crown [*nēzer*] that was on his head, and the armlet [²eš'ādā] that was on his arm, and brought them here to my lord." . . . ¹³Then David said to the young man who told him, "Where are you from?" And he said, "I am the son of a resident alien, an Amalekite." ¹⁴And David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to send your hand to destroy the anointed of the Lord?" ¹⁵Then David called one of the young men and said, "Draw near and strike him down." And he struck him, and he died. ¹⁶And David said to him, "Your blood be upon your head, for your own mouth testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the anointed of the Lord.'"

The following observations led early literary critics to divide the segment in this way: (1) Separate appellatives are used for the messenger in v 2 (²iš) and v 5 (*na'ar*). (2) In v 3 the messenger said he escaped from the camp (*maḥāneh*) of Israel (identified in 1 Sam 29:1 as being located "by the fountain in Jezreel"), whereas in vv 6-8 it is apparent that he

came from the battlefield itself (Mount Gilboa). (3) The aforementioned contradictions with 1 Samuel 31 are evident in one source but absent in the other: The J-source follows smoothly from 1 Samuel 31 with no contradictions, but E stands in opposition to 1 Samuel 31 and to J.

Some scholars attempt to reconstruct the motives of the author of the E-source.⁶ They posit an original form of the Hebrew text that was offensive because it portrayed David savagely striking down the messenger who, it is assumed, was in reality an Israelite soldier. Gradually the tradition arose that attempted to romanticize and reduce the old offensive tradition. The new tradition (E) did away with Saul's suicidal end, exonerated David from the single-handed homicide of an innocent victim, and gave the appearance of a solemn transference of kingship through the use of royal insignia. In the process the Israelite soldier became an Amalekite, the son of a resident alien, and David is portrayed as a religious enthusiast doing what any righteous king should do. At a late date a final redactor used E, the new tradition, to mitigate the offensive sections in the earlier source.

But this neat, schematic approach has some glaring difficulties.

1. *The so-called E-source has literary problems.* Budde himself pointed this out.⁷ As it stands in our present text, v 5 is the beginning of the source, which means it has no introduction. We are not told where David was when he received the message, nor are we told the manner in which the message came. Important portions of the narrative are also missing from the present E-source, which the source critics have said were lost or fell out in the process of redaction. Of course similar conclusions are frequently drawn whenever a theory is accepted as a premise. To assume that vv 5-10, 13-16 constitute part of an independent source is to necessarily assume that its introduction has been omitted. But this is circular reasoning.

2. *All three of the observations listed above that led to this theory have alternative explanations.* (1) The terms *ʔiš* and *naʿar* are not mutually exclusive since a *naʿar* is understood as a "servant" or "retainer" approximately 105 times in the Hebrew Bible.⁸ It would be more appropriate to consider *ʔiš* as a generic term and *naʿar* as more descriptive. The distinction between these words is not clear enough to serve as a criterion for source analysis and division (note the comparison with the generic *ʔēlōhīm* and the descriptive *YHWH*).⁹ (2) Since *maḥāneh* often refers to a company, body of people, or army in general,¹⁰ there is no real contradic-

⁶ For examples see Budde, *Samuel* 193-194; A. Schulz, *Die Bücher Samuel* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1919) 8.

⁷ Budde, *Samuel* 193.

⁸ BDB 655a. See also the Ugaritic parallels "guild member, servitor, soldier"; *UT* 19, 1666.

⁹ The terms are fluid enough for *ʔiš* to be used for "male child" (Gen 4:1) and *naʿar* to mean "lad of marriageable age" (34:19); cf. also "warrior" in 2 Sam 18:5, 12; 1 Chr 12:29; etc.

¹⁰ Gen 32:7-8; Exod 14:9; Josh 8:13; 10:5; 11:4; Judg 4:15-16; 7:1, 8; 8:10-12; 1 Sam 17:1, 46; etc.

tion between v 3 and vv 6-8. (3) The Amalekite's account of Saul's death can be easily harmonized with 1 Samuel 31, with the exception of vv 7-10 where he claims to have killed Saul himself.

3. *None of the so-called contradictions are answered by postulating separate sources.* If the Biblical text has a contradiction of this nature, either an original author was willing to live with that contradiction or a later redactor was willing to leave it in the text. Early literary criticism has not helped with our understanding of this passage but has merely moved the problems into a different time frame and credited the difficulties to later scribes.

More recent studies have been no more productive. We shall limit ourselves to two examples. John Van Seters comments briefly that the "difficulty . . . lies entirely in the Amalekite's story in 2 Sam. 1:5-10, 13-16, which can easily be removed as secondary, leaving a harmonious continuity."¹¹ Of course this rather laconic remark is in complete agreement with the earlier scholars. But Van Seters goes beyond their efforts by attempting to establish the circumstances in which the secondary material was added. According to his view the Saul and David stories within the Deuteronomistic history were intended to legitimate the royal house of David. The succession narrative, on the other hand, was supposedly added as an "antilegitimation" story. The court historian, then, was offsetting and counterbalancing the purely idealistic account of the Deuteronomist, who portrayed David peacefully succeeding Saul at the invitation of the northern tribes. The succession narrative was allegedly a post-Deuteronomist "addition to the history of David from the postexilic period." In this light, Van Seters suggests that the negative report of 2 Sam 1:5-10, 13-16 was part of the court historian's "antilegitimation" of David's royal house.¹² We must commend Van Seters for his artistic and stimulating reconstruction of ancient literary traditions. But again the discrepancies among the sources, however they may be accounted for, are still present in the text, and nothing has really been resolved.¹³

Our second example of current scholarly contributions is that of John Mauchline, who argues that the Amalekite's story rings true because "if he had wanted to gain approbation from David for having destroyed Saul, he would not, in a concocted story, have said that Saul collapsed *in extremis* before he despatched him."¹⁴ Mauchline prefers, instead of assuming the messenger lied, to portray David as an uncompromising religious enthusiast whose victim was the unfortunate but truthful Amalekite. As we shall point out below, however, the basic elements of the Amalekite's report are at least compatible if not in agreement with 1 Samuel 31. We have no compelling reason to suggest he fabricated the

¹¹ J. Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983) 285.

¹² *Ibid.* 285-291.

¹³ Furthermore it might legitimately be questioned whether ancient literature grew as Van Seters has described.

¹⁴ J. Mauchline, *I and II Samuel* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971) 197.

entire account, especially in light of broad agreement on the general circumstances of Saul's death. The only real discrepancies are in vv 7-10, in which he recounts his conversation with the wounded king and claims to have actually taken Saul's life. Thus the comments in vv 6, 9 regarding the seriousness of Saul's wound are not a portion of an Amalekite fabrication. On the contrary, they agree in striking detail with many elements of 1 Samuel 31, which he reported accurately, and they may reflect his eyewitness account. But Mauchline's comments fail to adequately address the deviations in vv 7-10 from the account in 1 Samuel 31.

II. HISTORICITY AND THE ROLE OF DECEPTION

We now turn our attention to a single element of the account in 2 Samuel 1 that may provide the key to its accurate interpretation: the rather obvious suggestion that the Amalekite's version of Saul's death is untrue. We will argue here that the events on Mount Gilboa as detailed by the Amalekite are basically true with the exception of vv 7-10, where he enhances his own role in Saul's death.

Although this solution was consistently rejected by many earlier commentators, there have been a few who have recognized its value. Robert Pfeiffer wrote that "after giving the true version of Saul's death in I Sam. 31, the author has the right to assume the reader will recognize the falsehood of the Amalekite's report in II Sam. 1."¹⁵ Hans Hertzberg likewise believed the messenger tried to "underline his part in the matter, thus unsuspectingly taking himself into an extremely dangerous realm."¹⁶ Hertzberg's interpretation centered on what has been called "the one important clue"¹⁷ contained in the text:

His description of himself as an Amalekite, twice repeated, must have made his action seem all the more horrible in the eyes of David and his men, newly returned from battle against Amalek. Amalekites remain Amalekites, even if they are sojourning in Israel; these born robbers do not even shrink from the Lord's anointed!"¹⁸

P. Kyle McCarter concludes that 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Sam 1:1-16 were written by the same author and that "the contradiction is deliberate, a result of the writer's self-conscious portrayal of the Amalekite messenger as a liar."¹⁹

We suggest here not only that the author has deliberately portrayed the Amalekite as a prevaricator but also that the events themselves, as described in 2 Sam 1:1-16, are historically consistent with 1 Samuel 31. The first two pieces of evidence will buttress the idea that the Amalekite

¹⁵ R. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1941) 350-351. Pfeiffer goes on, however, to add: "It is . . . characteristic of our author that oral reports are not always in harmony with the actual facts as he has previously presented them."

¹⁶ H. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 236.

¹⁷ P. K. McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1984) 63.

¹⁸ Hertzberg, *Samuel* 236-237.

¹⁹ McCarter, *Samuel* 64.

lied. The final observation will further suggest the historicity of the events described here and in 1 Samuel 31.

We first point out the unlikelihood of the conversation between Saul and the Amalekite preserved in vv 7-9. Verse 6 states that Saul was leaning on his spear while the enemy approached. 1 Sam 31:3 indicates the seriousness of Saul's wound: "He writhed greatly because (of fear) of the archers."²⁰ In light of Saul's situation it seems unlikely that he would turn and strike up a new acquaintance with the Amalekite (vv 7-8). Furthermore if Saul's life was lingering, as the Amalekite stated in v 9, the possibility of escape may not have been necessarily precluded.²¹ The sudden appearance of the Amalekite, Saul's unfamiliarity with him, and the polite civilities exchanged between them call the Amalekite's report into question. It might also be added that any harmonization that forces the Amalekite's actions of vv 7-10 into the account of 1 Samuel 31 (e.g. between 1 Sam 31:4 and 31:5) does a fundamental injustice to the literary unit of that account.

The additional evidence of 2 Samuel 4 supports the view that the Amalekite's story in 1 Sam 1:7-10 is untrue. In this chapter the sons of Rimmon, killing Ishbosheth while he slept, beheaded him and carried his head to David at Hebron. Before slaying them for their deed, David made the following statement in v 10: "When one (referring to the Amalekite of chap. 1) told me, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and slew him at Ziklag." David's comment is not explicit enough to tell us whether he was effectively deceived by the Amalekite's claim to have killed Saul. What is clear is that David realized that the Amalekite felt he had something to gain by accepting the responsibility for Saul's death.²² And certainly this episode in chap. 4 illustrates the commonly-held belief that regicide was profitable for one's political aspirations.

I come now to an often overlooked piece of evidence that I believe supports the view that the Amalekite was lying but also attests the historicity of 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1. The references to the royal crown and the armlet in v 10 are very significant. The diadem may be comparable to the emblem worn on the forehead by the kings of Egypt.²³ The primary function of the Egyptian pharaoh to unite the disparate and traditionally competitive upper and lower regions of Egypt is reflected in his titulary, "Lord of the Two Lands." Thus the pharaoh was "the wearer of the double crown which symbolized the union of the two regions" of

²⁰ Cf. LXX: "they had wounded him in the abdomen." This may very well be original, though MT seems to be supported by 1 Chr 10:3.

²¹ This was first hinted at in C. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976 reprint) 288.

²² Some have suggested that the real contradiction is between chaps. 1 and 4, since the Amalekite is said to have come mourning in chap. 1 but as one bearing good news in chap. 4. But his very presence in Ziklag (and with the royal insignia) so soon after Saul's defeat makes it clear he thought he was bearing glad tidings. We have no reason to assume that David was oblivious to the Amalekite's motives, whether or not he was suspicious of his veracity.

²³ Cf. McCarter, *Samuel* 60.

Egypt.²⁴ In Mesopotamia the significance of the crown (Akkadian *agû*) is reflected in the traditions of Anu. He is the god of kingship and is himself the king of the gods.

To him belong the insignia in which the essence of royalty was embodied—the sceptre, the crown, the headband, and the shepherd's staff—and from him did they derive. Before any king had yet been appointed among men these insignia already were, and they rested in heaven before Anu. . . . From there they descended to earth.²⁵

The hebrew term *nēzer* (v 10) is from the verbal root meaning “to separate, consecrate.” It is evident from the best enthronement account available (i.e. Joash in 2 Kgs 11:12–20) that the *nēzer* was the physical sign of consecration. The anointing was the essential feature in the coronation ritual, which the history of Israelite monarchy bears out. But the crown was the visible symbol of royalty, and it has therefore been called “the royal emblem *par excellence*.”²⁶

If the crown was the single most important Israelite symbol of royalty, then the second was the armlet (*ʿeṣʿādā*, related to the verb “to step”?). This “band clasping (the) upper arm”²⁷ was removed by the Amalekite, along with the crown, from Saul's body (v 10). In the Joash enthronement passage (2 Kgs 11:12) we read that “then they brought out the king's son, and put the crown (*nēzer*) upon him, and gave him the testimony (*hāʿēdūt*).” BHK and many commentators read *haṣʿādôt* (“the armlets”) for “the testimony,” thus providing a perfect illustration of the crown and armlet as the primary royal insignia.²⁸

In light of this, we question the idea that in 1 Samuel 31 the Philistines discovered the fallen Saul, cut off his head, stripped off his armor, fastened his head in the temple of Dagon,²⁹ displayed his armor in the temple of Ashtaroah, fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan, and—all the while—failed to make a similar theatrical exhibition of the pre-eminent Israelite symbols of royalty. This seems unlikely—unless, of course, the crown and armlet had already been removed. To this extent the Amalekite's version of the events on Mount Gilboa are true. He only heightened his own involvement in those events when David pressed him for more details (vv 7–10). We may assume that after Saul's serious wound, and in light of the imminent arrival of the Philistines and his armor-bearer's reluctance to mercifully kill him, he committed suicide. In the ensuing chaos the Amalekite, whose connections with the Israelite camp are unknown, took the royal insignia from the king's corpse. The next morning the Philistines found Saul's body and stripped him of his

²⁴ H. A. Frankfort, J. A. Wilson and T. Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951) 83.

²⁵ Ibid. 152; see also H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973) 54.

²⁶ R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 1. 103.

²⁷ BDB 857b.

²⁸ We admit, however, that there exists no textual evidence for this change.

²⁹ An added detail from 1 Chr 10:10.

armor. But the most substantial spoils of war, the royal crown and armlet, were already being carried to Ziklag with the message that Saul was dead.

III. LITERARY FEATURES IN THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL

The relationship of this chapter in the progression from Saul to David is not at first apparent. The conclusion to Saul could easily have been 1 Sam 31:8-13, where the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead removed his mutilated body and those of his sons from the walls of Beth Shan and, after burning them, buried their bones under the tamarisk at Jabesh. 2 Samuel 1 would thus begin the story of David's reign, and presumably this was one of the criteria for dividing the books in this manner. The story of David's reign, however, begins more properly with chap. 2, where he is anointed as king by the men of Judah at Hebron (v 4). Since David's elegy for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam 1:17-27 is a fitting close to the reign of Saul, this chapter may be seen as a transitional device. It brings to a close the author's discussion of Saul but also prepares the reader for David's rise to power.

Regardless of how the materials of the books are divided, 2 Samuel 1 is an important element of the Davidic traditions. Modern scholarship has recognized and made maximum use of the distinction between "David under the blessing" and "David under the curse."³⁰ Thus "David under the blessing" might extend through 2 Samuel 7 (or perhaps chap. 10), and "David under the curse" would include the remainder of 2 Samuel. Instead of isolating the various traditions in each unit (either oral or written³¹) it is best to simply recognize here the literary structural feature known as cruciality. The crucial, pivotal point of the story of David is of course the Bathsheba incident of 2 Samuel 11-12.

In light of our interpretation of 2 Samuel 1, one might ask what role deception plays in the books of Samuel. Harry Hagan has argued that the role of deception is central in the succession narrative (2 Samuel 9-20; 1 Kings 1-2).³² He maintains that this motif can be traced as a twofold construction of deception and counterdeception, a construction that is distinctive in the succession narrative.³³ According to this theory, deception is the weak individual's method of defeating the equally deceitful but more powerful enemy. The initial deception is an attempt to obtain a

³⁰ R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1964).

³¹ McCarter argues for written sources behind the sections, which he divides as follows: David at the court of Saul (1 Samuel 16-20), estrangement between Saul and David (1 Samuel 21-31), consolidation of David's rule over Judah and Israel (2 Samuel 1-7); McCarter, *Samuel* 9, 61.

³² H. Hagan, "Deception as Motif and Theme in 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2," *Bib* 60 (1979) 301-326.

³³ Hagan counts 18 instances in the succession narrative: 2 Sam 10:1-8; 11:6 ff.; 12:1-4; 13:1-14; 13:23-28; 14:1 ff.; 15:1-6; 15:7 ff.; 16:15 ff.; 17:15 ff.; 18:12-13; 18:28; 19:24; 20:4 ff.; 20:14 ff.; 1 Kgs 1:5 ff.; 1:11 ff.; 2:13 ff.; *ibid.* 302 n. 5.

woman or the kingdom, and the counterdeception is initiated to restore order.

Whether this elaborate hypothesis becomes accepted by the scholarly world, it is clear that deception is an important part of the succession narrative. Taking 2 Samuel 1 as one example of deception, we counted thirteen other possible examples in the rest of the Samuel material.³⁴ It would seem, then, that taking this important transitional chapter as an example of deception does no injustice to an analysis of the books of Samuel as a whole.

IV. CONCLUSION

When confronted with the disparate accounts of Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1, the modern savant has a choice: political intrigue or incompatible sources. If in fact the Amalekite has enhanced his own involvement in the incident, then we have a simple case of opportunistic self-aggrandizement and the Biblical records contain no actual discrepancies. If on the other hand certain divergences are assumed to exist, then the presence of contradictory sources must also be assumed.³⁵

This paper has argued in favor of the first of these alternatives. After a brief survey of the arid results of modern critical investigation we concluded that the problems of 2 Sam 1:1-16 are unresolved by such attempts. Furthermore we have argued that the events described in 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1 are historically consistent if it is assumed that the Amalekite messenger was attempting to deceive David. This conviction is supported by the nature of the Amalekite's report, David's assumption that he was an opportunist (2 Sam 4:10), and the lack of references to the royal insignia in 1 Samuel 31. Finally we have suggested that deception is an important motif in the Samuel materials and that the author's presentation of the deceptive Amalekite is consistent with the book as a whole.³⁶

³⁴ 1 Sam 11:10; 18:17-29; 19:11-17; 20:35-42; 21:1-2; 21:13; 22:10, 13; 25:19 (?); 27:8-12; 28:8-12; 29:6-11; 2 Sam 3:25; 3:27.

³⁵ In my mind, this choice between political intrigue and incompatible sources in 2 Samuel 1 reflects a far larger decision that must be made regarding one's methodology. Combining comparative ancient Near Eastern studies with a high view of the written sources of Scripture will result in a "grammatico-historical" approach in which the sources will dictate the theories (recently revised and renamed the "syntactical-theological" method by W. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981] 87-89). The conclusion that the sources in these chapters are incompatible is an easy solution, but one that seems unsatisfying to exponents of the grammatico-historical method. The so-called traditio-historical methodology has much to contribute to Biblical studies, but not by submitting the sources to subjective, higher-critical theories.

³⁶ I owe many thanks to B. E. Beyer, G. L. Cockerill, E. C. Hostetter and W. A. VanGemeren for their helpful comments on an early draft of this paper.