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**MICHAEL AVIOZ, "COULD SAUL RULE FOREVER?  
A NEW LOOK AT 1 SAMUEL 13:13-14"**

# **COULD SAUL RULE FOREVER? A NEW LOOK AT 1 SAMUEL 13:13-14**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In 1 Samuel 13, the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines at Michmash is described. Following military obstacles and a prolonged anticipation of Samuel's arrival, Saul presents the burnt offering himself, though he was ordered in 1 Sam 10:8 to wait for Samuel. The resulting conflict between Samuel and Saul is presented in vv. 7-15a. Samuel delivers an oracle of judgment to Saul for his failure to heed the prophet's command to await his arrival:

You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you. The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, but now your kingdom will not continue; the Lord has sought out a

man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.

Scholars who deal with this pericope generally attempt to understand the nature of Saul's sin which necessitated his rejection from becoming king.<sup>1</sup> Only rarely do they deal with Samuel's words implying that Saul could have reigned forever. The main problems arising from Samuel's word to Samuel are as follows: are we to understand Samuel's words about Saul's everlasting kingship as reflecting his own interpretation, or should they be understood as resulting from a divine oracle delivered to Samuel? This question arises since there is no indication in 1 Samuel 13 or earlier that God has promised this to Saul. Furthermore, how are we to reconcile these words with the divine promise to David in 2 Samuel 7, in which David was promised an everlasting rule? Wasn't the promise to David exclusive and extraordinary?

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<sup>1</sup> See H.J. Stoebe, *Das erste Buch Samuelis* (KAT, 8/1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1973), 252-53; B.C. Birch, *The Rise of the Israelite Monarchy. The Growth and Development of 1 Samuel 7-15* (SBLDS 27; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 106. See also the bibliography cited in V.P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul. A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (SBLDS 118; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 90-93; T.S. Vecko, "Saul – the Persecutor or the Persecuted One?", in *The Interpretation of the Bible: The International Symposium in Slovenia* (ed. J. Krašovec; JSOTSS 289; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 201-214.

## 2. ANALYSIS

Some scholars are of the opinion that the narrator presents Samuel's words as the prophet's own innovation rather than God's.<sup>2</sup> This opinion derives from the lack of an explicit divine oracle delivered to Samuel (or "messenger formula"), containing instructions to convey its content to Saul.<sup>3</sup> In Amit's view, "this statement by Samuel can be interpreted as personal commentary that contains rhetorical exaggeration."<sup>4</sup>

She brings the text from 1 Samuel 13 as a demonstration of her thesis that biblical characters may be designated as unreliable. Brueggemann<sup>5</sup> argues that the narrator creates intentional ambiguity, so that the reader will doubt both Samuel's and God's intentions and interests.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Y. Amit, "The Glory of Israel Does not Deceive or Change His Mind": On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992), 209; R. Alter, *The David Story. A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton, 1999), 73.

<sup>3</sup> W. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox, 1990), 100; R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part II: 1 Samuel* (Bloomington: IUP, 1989), 127. This classification is based upon C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (trans. H.C. White; Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1967), 100-115.

<sup>4</sup> Amit, "The Glory of Israel," 209.

<sup>5</sup> Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 101.

Other scholars consider vv. 13-14 deuteronomistic, since they allude to Nathan's oracle to David in 2 Sam 7:12, 16.<sup>6</sup> And since 2 Samuel 7 is regarded as deuteronomistic, so is 1 Sam 13:13-14.

In the following, I intend to contest each of these arguments separately.

(a) These scholars assume too much rigidity in Westermann's formulaic categories. Westermann's formulas of prophetic speech are, in fact, very flexible, as Westermann himself argues, and this example of prophetic speech in 1 Samuel 13 may still have been a prophetic judgment speech, even without the introductory "messenger formula."

(b) This view supposes that Samuel lied to Saul, or waited to the appropriate opportunity to get rid of Saul. However, there is no basis for this assessment of Samuel in the book of Samuel. On the

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<sup>6</sup> M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 336, # 16; T. Veijola, *Die ewige Dynastie. David und die Entstehung seiner Dynastie nach der deuteronomistischen Darstellung* (AASF.B 193; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1975), 56-57; P.K. McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980), 228-30; M.A. O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis: A Reassessment* (OBO, 92; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1989), 131; P. Mommer, *Samuel: Geschichte und Überlieferung* (WMANT, 65; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991), 135-37; S.L. McKenzie, "The Trouble with Kingship," in *Israel Constructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (ed. A. de Pury, T. Römer, and J.D. Macchi; JSOTSup, 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 309-310.

contrary, Samuel is described as a reliable character, apart, perhaps, from 1 Sam 16:2-4, in which he was ordered by God to tell a lie.<sup>7</sup>

(c) Was the principle of dynastic succession prevalent in the days of Samuel and Saul? A few scholars answer this question in the negative.<sup>8</sup> In their view, Saul and David ruled in virtue of a divine gift (charisma), rather than through any principle of dynastic succession. However, other scholars<sup>9</sup> argue that all kings in the ancient Near East were regarded as chosen by the deity. Moreover, there is serious doubt whether a charismatic view was held in ancient Israel in the time of Saul and David<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this story as well as other stories in which prophets seem to lie, see Y. Shemesh, "Lies by Prophets and Other Lies in the Hebrew Bible," *JANES* 29 (2002), 81–95.

<sup>8</sup> See, among others, A. Alt, "The Formation of the Israelite State in Palestine," *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 171-237; M. Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: A & C. Black, 2nd edn, 1960), 228-30; J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: Westminster/John Knox, 1972), 234-35, 271; F. Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum* (WMANT, 49; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> See the references in R.R. Hutton, *Charisma and Authority in Israelite Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 71-83; Tomoo Ishida, *History and Historical Writing in Ancient Israel: Studies in Biblical Historiography* (SHCANE, 16; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 171; Z. Ben Barak, "The Status and Right of the Gebira," *JBL* 110 (1991), 29; K. Spanier, "The Queen Mother in the Judean Court: Maacha – A Case Study," in A. Brenner (rd.), *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (Feminist Companion to the Bible, 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 187, n. 2.

<sup>10</sup> See Beyerlin, "Königscharisma," 186-201; A. Malamat, "Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges," in *Magnalia Dei. The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (eds. F.M. Cross et al.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 152-68. When speaking of the 'charismatic leadership', Malamat confines himself in the era of the judges and does not continue to the reign of Saul.

That monarchy in Israel was hereditary from its inception is clear from the law of the king in Deut 17:20<sup>11</sup>: “That his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom, *he and his children, in Israel.*” According to this law, the covenant with the king includes a covenant with his dynasty. Saul himself hoped that his son Jonathan would inherit his throne (1 Sam 20: 30-31), and after the death of Saul and Jonathan, Abner appointed Ish-bosheth (Eshbaal) as king of Israel. A similar view is taken by J. Liver<sup>12</sup> who writes on Saul: “Saul also seems destined to have a kingdom not only for himself, but also for his descendants, and only circumstances caused the fall of the house of Saul”. As Laato has shown, the idea of the royal succession was inherent in the royal ideology of the ancient Near East.<sup>13</sup> After reviewing material from various texts from the ancient Near East, he concludes that

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<sup>11</sup> See A.D.H. Mays, *Deuteronomy* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eardmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 270; G.E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History* (SBLDS, 87; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 108-16; D. Jobling, *I Samuel. Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 80.

<sup>12</sup> J. Liver, “King, Kingship,” *Encyclopedia Biblica* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1964), IV, 1091 (Hebrew). Cf. W. Beyerlin, “Das Königscharisma bei Saul,” *ZAW* 73 (1961), 197; M. White, “History of Saul’s Rise: Saulide State Propaganda in 1 Samuel 1-14,” in “*A Wise and Discerning Mind*”: *Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long* (ed. S.M. Olyan and R.C. Culley; Brown Judaic Studies 325; Providence, RI: Brown Univ., 2000), 286.

<sup>13</sup> See the references in A. Laato, “Second Samuel 7 and Ancient Near Eastern Royal Ideology,” *CBQ* 59 (1997), 244-69.

“nothing indicates that the idea of an eternal dynasty was limited to either an early or a late period.”<sup>14</sup>

(d) The argument that vv. 13-14 in 1 Samuel 13 are deuteronomistic (on the basis of the appearance of the eternal dynasty motif in 2 Samuel 7) seems like a circular argument: if 2 Samuel 7 is late,<sup>15</sup> than 1 Samuel 13, who alludes to it, must be late too. Space limit does not allow me to discuss Nathan’s oracle in depth here, and therefore I will summarize briefly my views regarding the date and composition of 2 Samuel 7. Scholars who view Nathan’s oracle as a late composition, do it on the basis of the differentiation between conditional and unconditional covenants. According to their view, unconditional covenant is regarded as belonging to an early date, while the conditional reformulation is assigned to the hands of later (post exilic) editors.<sup>16</sup> However, this differentiation was contested by several scholars, most recently by

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<sup>14</sup> Latto, “Second Samuel 7,” 263. Cf. G. Beckman, “Royal Ideology and State Administration in Hittite Anatolia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson et al. (New York: Scribner, 1995), Vol. I, 533: “In most societies of the ancient Near East, kingship was normally passed from father to son.”

<sup>15</sup> For a review of the various suggestions concerning the redactional layers in 2 Samuel 7, see Dietrich, W. and T. Naumann, *Die Samuelbücher* (Erträge der Forschung, 287; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 153-56.

<sup>16</sup> See M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *JAOs* 90 (1970), 184-203. For a list of scholars following Weinfeld’s argument, see J.D. Levenson, “The Davidic Covenant and Its Modern Interpreters,” *CBQ* 41 (1979), 205-19. For a critique of Weinfeld see G.N. Knoppers, “Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?,” *JAOs* 116 (1996), 670-97.



Freedman and Miano.<sup>17</sup> It is my opinion that Nathan's oracle should be dated to the Tenth century BCE.<sup>18</sup> The covenant between God and David contains elements of vassal treaties known to us from Hittite texts from the thirteenth century BCE.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, the description of a king who desires to build a house for his god is well attested in hymns and royal building inscriptions from the early beginnings of civilization.<sup>20</sup> If my arguments are sound, then the conclusion might be that allusions made by the author of Samuel to Nathan's oracle in 2 Samuel 7

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<sup>17</sup> D.N. Freedman and D. Miano, "The People of the New Covenant," in *The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period*, eds. S.E. Porter and J.C.R. de Roo (JSJSup, 71; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), 7-26. See also M. Haran, "The B'rit 'Covenant': Its Nature and Ceremonial Background", in *Tehilla le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, eds. M. Cogan et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 203-19; J. Milgrom, "Covenants: The Sinaitic and Patriarchal Covenants in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-27)", in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume*, eds. C.A. Cohen et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 91-101.

<sup>18</sup> For an early date of the book of Samuel, see recently B. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eardmans, 2001), 57-72.

<sup>19</sup> See P.J. Calderone, *Dynastic Oracle and Suzerainty Treaty* (Manila: Manila University, 1966); J. Kim, *Psalm 89: Its Biblical-Theological Contribution to the Presence of Law within the Unconditional Covenant* (PhD dissertation; Ann Arbor, MI, 1989), 351 ff.

<sup>20</sup> V.A. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House. Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (JSOTSup, 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Richard E. Averbeck, "Sumer, the Bible, and Comparative Method: Historiography and Temple Building," *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative explorations* (eds. M.W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, JR.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 88-125; M. Avioz, *Nathan's Oracle (2 Samuel 7) and Its Interpreters* (Bern: Peter Lang, forthcoming).

cannot be used as a proof for presenting Samuel's oracle to Saul as a late addition.

### **3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

According to the view presented in this paper, Samuel's oracle to Saul in 1 Samuel 13:13-14 should be regarded as authentic rather than deuteronomistic or as a fabrication of Samuel himself. Neither the author of Samuel nor Samuel invented the idea of a royal dynasty. It was known many years before the time of Samuel. Therefore, Saul could have established a dynasty, in which his sons will be the future rulers of Israel. Why this did not happen is, of course, another matter. According to the book of Samuel, Saul's religious misconduct as a king has made him lose the crown for the sake of David.