

Deception Intended to Prevent Death or Harm in the Books of Samuel

SINCE THE EXPLICIT STATEMENTS concerning deception in the OT only prohibit deception that brings unjust harm or disadvantage to another person, we will examine the deceptions in the books of Samuel based on the *motives* for which they were committed. In the present chapter we will explore deception intended to prevent death or harm. This category includes both deceptions committed to protect oneself (the Jabeshites' deception of Nahash in 1 Sam 11:1–11 ["Deception A"]; Samuel's deception of the Bethlehemite elders in 1 Sam 16:1–5 ["Deception B"]; Michal's deception of Saul after David's escape in 1 Sam 19:17b ["Deception D"]; and David's first two deceptions of Achish in 1 Sam 21:11–16 [10–15] and 27:7–12 ["Deceptions F and G"]) and deceptions committed to protect someone else (Michal's deception of Saul's messengers in 1 Sam 19:11–17a ["Deception C"]; Jonathan's deception of Saul in 1 Sam 20:27–34 ["Deception E"]; and the woman of Bahurim's deception of Absalom's servants in 2 Sam 17:15–21a ["Deception H"]). At the end I will summarize the analyses of the characteristics of these deceptions.

Deception A: The Jabeshites' Deception of Nahash (1 Samuel 11:1–11)

In 1 Samuel 11, Nahash the Ammonite besieged the Transjordanian city of Jabesh Gilead. The Jabeshites offered to make a covenant with him, but Nahash agreed only on the condition that he be able to gouge out their right eyes and so "bring disgrace upon all Israel" (v. 2). The Jabeshites requested seven days to send messengers throughout Israel to seek out someone to deliver

them and said that if one could not be found they would “go out” (יֵצֵא) to him, presumably to surrender. The messengers entered Gibeah, where Saul heard the message and rallied all Israel to deliver the Jabeshites. A huge army assembled and sent word to the Jabeshites that they would deliver them by the next day. The Jabeshites then sent word to Nahash saying that they would “go out” (יֵצֵא) to him the next day. During the morning watch, Saul’s army entered the unsuspecting Ammonite camp and slaughtered them.

Establishing the Deception

Most agree that the Jabeshites deceived Nahash in v. 10 through the ambiguous use of the verb יֵצֵא.¹ In v. 3 they told Nahash, “If there is no one to deliver us, *then we will go out to you* (וַיֵּצֵאוּנוּ אֵלֶיךָ).” The context of having “no one to deliver” suggests that יֵצֵא was meant to be understood as “going out to surrender.”² After securing the help of Saul, in v. 10 the Jabeshites told Nahash, “Tomorrow *we will go out to you* (וַנֵּצֵא אֵלֵיכֶם), and you can do to us whatever is good in your eyes.” Based on their statement in v. 3, this statement implied that they had not found a deliverer and therefore were “going out to surrender.” However, in reality they had found a deliverer in Saul, and rather than surrendering they planned to “go out in battle.” Therefore the Jabeshites deceived Nahash into believing falsely that they would surrender the next day, which left him unsuspecting of the early morning attack by Saul and his army.

However, one aspect of the text may call this interpretation into question. André Caquot and Philippe de Robert observe that the addressee in v. 10 is unstated and therefore ambiguous: the Jabeshites either could have been responding to the messengers sent from Saul’s army or speaking to Nahash.³ According to the first view, vv. 9b–10 would read: “And the messengers entered and told the men of Jabesh. And they [the Jabeshites] rejoiced and said [to the messengers]: ‘Tomorrow we will go out to you, and you can do for us whatever is good in your eyes.’” According to Caquot and de Robert, on this reading the Jabeshites responded that they would go out to Saul’s army and rely on them for the military strategy against the

1. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 93; Ackroyd, *First Book of Samuel*, 92; Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, 370–71; Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 220; Wénin, *Samuel et l’instauration*, 355, n. 39; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 98; Edelman, *King Saul*, 63–64; Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 474; Alter, *David Story*, 63; Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 310; Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 139; Vette, “Der letzte Richter?” 191–92.

2. Thus Josephus understood it (*Ant.* 6.5.1).

3. Caquot and de Robert, *Les Livres de Samuel*, 141.

Ammonites.⁴ Supporting this reading are the second person plural pronominal suffixes (אליכם, בעיניכם) and the second person plural verb (ועשיתם) in the Jabeshites' statement, which would make sense if directed toward "the messengers" (המלאכים). If this reading were correct, there would be no deception in v. 10.

However, several factors suggest the Jabeshites' statement in v. 10 was directed to Nahash and the Ammonites. First, a response to Nahash moves the plot forward. A chart outlining the narrative structure illustrates this:

A: Problem: Nahash oppresses Jabesh (vv. 1–2)

B: Jabesh sends word to Nahash requesting one week, and if no deliverer is found, they will "go out" (יצא) (v. 3)

C: Jabesh sends word to Gibeah (v. 4)

X: Saul assembles the army to deliver (vv. 5–8)

C': Gibeah sends word to Jabesh (v. 9)

B': Jabesh sends word to Nahash saying they will "go out" (יצא) (v. 10)

A': Solution: Saul and the army defeat Nahash (v. 11)

Only if the Jabeshites communicated with Nahash in B' does the narrative demonstrate a consistent plot development from problem to solution. A communication to the messengers in v. 10 does not contribute to the plot and thus is less preferable.⁵ Second, a response to Nahash in v. 10 maintains balance in the narrative structure: a Jabesh-Nahash communication in B' balances the Jabesh-Nahash communication in B. Third, v. 3 also seems to record a deceptive communication between Jabesh and Nahash, which, based on the narrative structure, makes a deceptive communication to Nahash in v. 10 even more likely.

In v. 3 the Jabeshites said to Nahash: "Leave us alone for seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel, and if there is no one to deliver us, we will go out to you." Two factors suggest that this initial request was deceptive. First, the Jabeshites' statement implied uncertainty concerning the existence of a deliverer, but the preceding chapter emphasized that "all the tribes of Israel" (כל־שבטי ישראל) were present at the public declaration of Saul as king (1 Sam 10:20). After Samuel had presented Saul, "All the people" (כל־העם) shouted and said, "Long live the king" (v. 24). Since all the tribes were represented at this occasion, it is probable that the elders of Jabesh Gilead knew about Saul's recent appointment. Since the people

4. Ibid.

5. Concerning plot structure, see Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations," 154–73.

had wanted a king so he could “lead us and *go out* (יצא) before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam 8:20), they almost certainly viewed Saul as this delivering king. The Jabeshites’ implication of ignorance of this delivering king was therefore deceptive.⁶

Second, the Jabeshites further deceived by saying that they planned to send messengers “through all the territory of Israel” (בכל גבול ישראל). Verse 4 does not record a general dispersal of messengers throughout Israel, but only says, “Then the messengers went to Gibeah of Saul” (ויבאו המלאכים גבעת שאול). Although a temporal rendering of this phrase is grammatically possible (“*When* the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul” [e.g., NIV, NRSV]), which could imply that Gibeah was only one place among many to which the messengers traveled, as V. Philips Long points out, “apart from the dubious assumption that the elders of Jabesh have spoken candidly to Nahash, there is no reason to prefer the temporal rendering here.”⁷ Since the Hebrew *wayyiqtol* form most often describes temporal or logical succession,⁸ the phrase could also be translated, “So/then the messengers went to Gibeah of Saul,” suggesting that Gibeah was their intended destination. That this was the case is likely for two reasons. First, the description of the messengers going to Gibeah is articular (המלאכים), which suggests that the entire group of messengers mentioned in v. 3 went to Gibeah.⁹ If the messengers were truly going “through all the territory of Israel” in seven days they probably would have split up. That the whole group went to Gibeah implies that they were not going throughout Israel as they claimed, but lied to Nahash to maintain the pretense of their uncertainty regarding the existence of a deliverer. Second, the toponym used by the narrator, “Gibeah of Saul,” suggests that the messengers were seeking out Saul,¹⁰ which also implies that Gibeah was their destination. This conclusion is reinforced by the LXX: “and the messengers went to Gibeah, *to Saul*” (καὶ ἔρχονται οἱ ἄγγελοι εἰς Γαβαα πρὸς Σαουλ).

Therefore it appears that in v. 3 the Jabeshites deceived Nahash into believing that they did not know if there was anyone to deliver them, when in reality they were aware of a new king who would go out and fight their battles. This deception set up Nahash for their second deception in which they utilized the ambiguity of the verb יצא to make him believe falsely that

6. So also Edelman, *King Saul*, 62; Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 465.

7. Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 221.

8. *IBHS*, 547.

9. Wénin, *Samuel et l'instauration*, 355–56, n. 39; Edelman, *King Saul*, 62–63, n. 2; Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 222; Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 465.

10. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 92; Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 466.

they would go out to surrender the next day, when in reality they knew the Israelite army was going out to destroy the Ammonites. Nahash's willingness to allow the Jabeshite messengers to search for a deliverer and his apparent unpreparedness for the Israelite attack in v. 11 shows that their deception was successful.

Analyzing the Deception

The Jabeshites used two tactics to deceive Nahash: a lie (v. 3) and ambiguous language (v. 10). The episode begins by stating that Nahash "went up and camped against Jabesh Gilead" (v. 1), which establishes the overall motive of these deceptions as military self-defense. The first deception (v. 3) delayed Nahash from inflicting harm upon them until they could contact Saul for deliverance, and the second (v. 10) made Nahash unsuspecting of the upcoming Israelite attack. In both cases the Jabeshites achieved the goals for which they deceived. In the first case, they acquired the necessary time to notify Saul of their predicament, and in the second the Israelite army destroyed the Ammonites in battle. The Jabeshites experienced no negative consequences and the author offers no explicit evaluation of their deceptions, though he seems to characterize them negatively. The narrative begins with the Jabeshites' offer to become Nahash's vassal: "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you" (v. 1b).¹¹ This initial offer of vassalage to a foreign king portrays the Jabeshites as disloyal to Israel and YHWH¹² and reflects the similar tribal disloyalty they demonstrated when they failed to assemble before YHWH at Mizpah in Judges 20–21, an event to which the present story alludes in multiple ways.¹³ Only when Nahash expressed his

11. The substantial plus of 4QSam^a does not affect the inappropriateness of the Jabeshites' offer of vassalage in v. 1, although in its absence the immediacy of their offer is emphasized in the exposition, which characterizes them more explicitly as easily willing to betray Israelite loyalty. Interpreters are divided as to the plus's originality. McCarter argues for its originality based on the novelty of its content and its lack of apologetic motive (1 *Samuel*, 199). However, for convincing arguments that the plus is secondary, see Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 302–3; Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 459–61; Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 118.

12. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, 360–61.

13. In both Judges 19–21 and 1 Samuel 11 the cities of Gibeah and Jabesh Gilead play a significant role, and both narratives involve the disavowing of a person/animal in order to rally all Israel (Judg 19:29; 1 Sam 11:7). Furthermore, Saul's actions resemble those of the judges who delivered Israel from foreign oppression: the divine Spirit comes upon him (1 Sam 11:6; cf. Othniel [Judg 3:10], Gideon [Judg 6:34], Jephthah [Judg 11:29], and Samson [Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14]) and he divides his army into three companies (1 Sam 11:11; cf. Gideon [Judg 7:16–20] and Abimelech [Judg 9:43]). See

harsh terms for the covenant did the Jabeshites call upon Israel's king to save them. Nevertheless, Fokkelman argues that 1 Samuel 11 presents a redemptive contrast to the negative depictions of Gibeah and Jabesh Gilead in Judges 19–21; whereas Judges depicts these cities as an “unfavourable pair,” each of which suffered great loss of life, 1 Samuel 11 describes the reversal of that prior tribal disharmony under the unified leadership of Saul.¹⁴ However, Firth notes that these same links may be portraying Saul as a judge in order to question his role as king.¹⁵ This latter position is supported by the negative depiction of Saul's kingship throughout 1 Samuel 9–15.¹⁶ Although this narrative is ambiguous in many respects, the characterization of the Jabeshites seems negative.

Deception B: Samuel's Deception of the Bethlehemite Elders (1 Samuel 16:1–5)

After YHWH rejected Saul as king, he commanded Samuel to fill his horn with oil and go to Jesse of Bethlehem, saying, “I have chosen a king for myself from among his sons” (1 Sam 16:1). Samuel protested that if he went on such a mission “Saul will hear about it and kill me” (v. 2a), so YHWH replied, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘In order to sacrifice to YHWH I have come’” (v. 2b). It appears that YHWH instructed Samuel to deceive any inquirers, and thus Saul indirectly, by causing them to believe falsely that rather than going to Bethlehem to anoint a rival king, he was going to offer a sacrifice.

Establishing the Deception

While many see divinely ordained deception here,¹⁷ others see no such element in YHWH's command.¹⁸ For example, John Murray argues that rather than advocating any form of “untruth,” YHWH only authorized Samuel to

McCarter, *I Samuel*, 204–5; Alter, *David Story*, 61; Vette, “Der letzte Richter?” 194).

14. Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 477.

15. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 137.

16. Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 233.

17. Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 77; Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 159; Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 121; Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 178; Alter, *David Story*, 95; Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 200; Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 104; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 168; Van Seters, *Biblical Saga*, 133; Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 184.

18. Hertzberg, *Samuel*, 137, n. a; Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” 683; Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 182.

engage in “concealment” or “evasion.”¹⁹ Similarly, Walter Kaiser sees this as a case of “concealment” and claims, “Samuel had no special prerogative to speak a falsehood.”²⁰ Both scholars argue that although part of the truth was concealed, what Samuel actually spoke was true.²¹ That is, Samuel said he was going to sacrifice, and since this sacrifice allegedly happened, his statement was true. However, Samuel did not simply conceal the true purpose of his visit by making another true statement. Regardless of whether or not a sacrifice subsequently took place, the deception concerned the communicated *purpose* of Samuel’s visit.

In v. 1 YHWH told Samuel, “I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, *for* (כי) I have chosen a king for myself from among his sons.” According to this verse, the purpose of Samuel’s trip was to anoint this new king. Only after Samuel protested did YHWH instruct him to say, “*In order to sacrifice* (לזבח) to YHWH I have come” (v. 2). Therefore Samuel’s public communication was intended to convey that sacrifice, rather than anointing, was the *purpose* of his visit.²² This communicated purpose would have averted any suspicions or danger that could have come from Saul. Since the purpose of Samuel’s visit was not to offer sacrifice but to anoint a rival king, it follows that YHWH instructed the prophet to deceive by means of a lie. Furthermore, even if we were to concede the description of Samuel’s action as not lying but only “concealing” part of the truth, his statement would still be deceitful. As Richard Patterson rightly notes, “were Saul to be told such a half-truth, he would assume that it was the whole truth.”²³ Since the belief that such a half-truth is the whole truth is a false belief, under such circumstances Samuel would still be deceiving Saul in obedience to a divine command. Whether or not Samuel actually carried out the sacrifice is irrelevant;²⁴ the deception occurred when he caused others to believe falsely

19. Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 139.

20. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 225–26.

21. Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 140; Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 226. See also Shemesh, “Lies By Prophets,” 90.

22. So also observes Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 77; Bar-Efrat, *Das Erste Buch Samuel*, 227; Prouser, “Phenomenology of the Lie,” 171; Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 200; Van Setters, *Biblical Saga*, 133; *contra* Kaiser, who asserts: “As for Samuel’s ultimate intentions, nothing is affirmed or denied” (*Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 226).

23. Patterson, “Old Testament Use of an Archetype,” 394.

24. Murray seems to think that Samuel actually offered a sacrifice in Bethlehem, and that this vindicates his words as true (*Principles of Conduct*, 140). However, although the text says that Samuel invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice (v. 5), it never reports that it actually occurred.

concerning the *purpose* of his trip.²⁵ That Samuel received no opposition from Saul, which suggests that no one warned Saul of the purpose of his trip, shows that he deceived the Bethlehemites.

Analyzing the Deception

The tactic Samuel used to deceive the Bethlehemites was a lie. His motive was to avoid being killed by Saul (v. 2a). A significant feature of this deception is the irony of Samuel's lie in the aftermath of Saul's rejection. Robert Gordon observes that Samuel's lie ("*In order to sacrifice to YHWH* [ליבח ליהוה] I have come") ironically employs language from Saul's excuses to Samuel during his rejection in chapter 15.²⁶ When Samuel had confronted Saul about disobediently sparing sheep and cattle during the Amalekite raid, Saul twice claimed that the army spared the animals "*in order to sacrifice to YHWH*" (למען זבח ליהוה [15:15]; ליבח ליהוה [15:21]). In the present passage, Samuel used this same language to deceive the Bethlehemites in order to anoint Saul's royal replacement. Samuel achieved the goal for which he deceived by anointing David unharmed. Since YHWH commanded Samuel to deceive (v. 2b), the author's evaluation of this deception is positive.

Deceptions C and D: Michal's Deceptions of Saul's Messengers and Saul (1 Samuel 19:11–17)

First Samuel 19 describes David's escape from Saul's court. After eluding Saul's attempt to pin him to the wall with his spear, David went to his house. Saul sent messengers to David's house "to guard it and kill him in the morning" (v. 11a). Aware of this plan, Michal warned David and lowered him from the window, enabling him to escape (vv. 11b–12).²⁷ Apparently to al-

25. Thus Barbara Green's interpretation of God's command here misses the point. She argues that rather than advocating subterfuge, "the words make equal sense as the straightforward directions: Just 'go prepared to sacrifice' is my sense of it, rather than 'go pretending it is a sacrifice'" (*How Are the Mighty Fallen*, 281, n. 25). However, the issue is not whether or not Samuel was actually going to sacrifice or simply to pretend to sacrifice; the issue is the true purpose of the trip vs. the communicated purpose. Even the command "go prepared to sacrifice" does not make sacrifice the true purpose, and therefore her comment does not mitigate the presence of deception here.

26. Gordon, "Simplicity of the Highest Cunning," 30–31.

27. Thus the narrative emphasizes that Michal initiated this escape, with David depicted as following her lead, which will become important in considering Michal's response to Saul in v. 17 (see below). See Mommer, "David und Merab," 198; Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 49; Klein, "Michal, the Barren Wife," 39; Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 217.

low more time for David to escape, Michal took a *teraphim*,²⁸ placed it in the bed, covered it with a garment, and put some goat's hair at the head. In so doing she created the false appearance that David was in the bed. When Saul's second set of messengers came to take David, Michal lied and said, "He is sick" (v. 14b). Saul then sent a third set of messengers to bring David to him so that he might kill him, but upon entering the room the messengers discovered the *teraphim* in the bed instead of David. Saul then asked Michal, "Why did you *deceive me* (רמיתני) like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" (v. 17a). Michal responded with what appears to be another lie: "He said to me, 'Send me away. Why should I kill you?'" (v. 17b).

Establishing the Deceptions

Two distinct deceptions occurred in this passage. Michal deceived (1) Saul's second set of messengers in vv. 13–16, and (2) Saul himself in v. 17.

Michal's Deception of Saul's Messengers (Deception C)

Michal deceived Saul's second set of messengers into believing falsely that David was sick in bed by two means: (1) the *teraphim* with the garment and goat's hair, and (2) a corresponding lie that David was sick. Many have suggested that this *teraphim* setup was intended to simulate a magical healing ritual whereby a figurine was placed in a bed as a substitute for a sick person.²⁹ According to Rouillard and Tropper, the normal ritual would involve the patient lying in the bed next to the figurine.³⁰ If this was what Michal intended to simulate, the second set of messengers may have seen the *teraphim* but believed that David was in the bed next to it, rather than mistaking the *teraphim* for David.³¹ However, this interpretation does not explain why Michal placed goat's hair at the head of the figurine, which suggests that she intended the *teraphim* to be mistaken for a person. Furthermore, this view

28. Scholars disagree on the appropriate referent of this word. It may refer to an "idol" (e.g., NIV, NRSV) or an "ancestor figurine" (see van der Toorn, "Nature of the Biblical Teraphim," 222). For a discussion of the various views see Lewis, "Teraphim," 844–50. Since the specific referent is not crucial to the deceptive function of this object, following common practice I will transliterate *teraphim* in the following discussion.

29. Willi-Plein, "Michal und die Anfänge des Königtums in Israel," 409–10; Willi-Plein, "1 Sam 18–19 und die Davidshausgeschichte," 152; Rouillard and Tropper, "Trpym," 346–51; Ackroyd, *First Book of Samuel*, 158; Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel*, 208.

30. Rouillard and Tropper, "Trpym," 347.

31. Thus claims Edelman, *King Saul*, 150; Ackroyd, *First Book of Samuel*, 158.

does not sufficiently account for the depiction of point of view regarding the third set of messengers and the *teraphim*.

Verse 16 describes the arrival of Saul's third set of messengers: "The messengers entered, and behold (והנה), *teraphim* in the bed." The particle הנה often indicates a shift from the narrator's point of view to a character's point of view.³² As Adele Berlin notes, since the narrator has already informed the reader that the *teraphim* was in the bed in v. 13, this הנה of v. 16 indicates the point in the narrative when Saul's messengers saw the *teraphim* in the bed.³³ If the third set of messengers did not see the *teraphim* until they entered the room in v. 16, it is unlikely that the second set of messengers saw the *teraphim* in v. 14, for at least two reasons. First, since the depiction of point of view reflected in v. 16 precludes the messengers having prior knowledge of the *teraphim*, if the second and third sets of messengers consisted of the same individuals, they could not have seen the *teraphim* in v. 14. Second, even if these were distinct sets of messengers, only the third set entered the house, and only then did they see the *teraphim*. This makes it improbable that the second set of messengers saw the *teraphim* from a distance without entering. Therefore, it seems that the second set of messengers did not see the *teraphim*, which argues against the view that they recognized the *teraphim* and assumed that David was behind it, and instead suggests that they believed it to be David himself.

This analysis of point of view and attention to the narrative spatial descriptions addresses the objection that the *teraphim* was too small to serve as a realistic substitute for David. As many observe, this narrative recalls Rachel's deception of Laban after she stole his *teraphim* (Gen 31:19, 34–35).³⁴ Since Rachel is described as "sitting on them" during Laban's search (v. 34), Rouillard and Tropper posit that the *teraphim* in 1 Samuel 19 was probably small.³⁵ This then presents a problem: how could such a small figurine be mistaken for a human being? Yet this question assumes that *teraphim* were always uniform in size, an assumption rejected by some historians³⁶ and biblical scholars.³⁷ Rouillard and Tropper further argue that the *teraphim*

32. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 35.

33. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 62.

34. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 150; Frontain, "The Trickster Tricked," 176; Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "Michal—eine literarische Figur mit Vergangenheit," 97; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 197; Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 90; Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 208; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 206.

35. Rouillard and Tropper, "Trpym," 340.

36. Hoffner, "Linguistic Origins of Teraphim," 232–33; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 10.

37. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 326; Robinson, *Let Us Be Like the Nations*, 107; Tsumura,

was small and thus did not reasonably resemble David because the third set of messengers allegedly recognized it so quickly, citing v. 16 as support.³⁸

Rouillard and Tropper do not explain why v. 16 implies that the messengers immediately recognized the *teraphim* as a ruse, but the הנה is the most likely element that could be used to support such a conclusion. However, if this were the case, this rationale would be inadequate. Berlin has shown that הנה indicates “suddenness in the *presentation of perception*, not suddenness in the occurrence of events.”³⁹ Therefore, without further data, this verse does not imply that the *teraphim* was immediately recognized and thus could not have deceptively substituted for David. Verse 16 simply depicts the moment of the messengers’ perception; it does not communicate a suddenness of recognition within the narrative.⁴⁰ Furthermore, this verse describes the third set of messengers and has no bearing upon the effective deception that occurred previously against the second set in v. 14. Therefore, it is sufficient to say that without entering the room to examine the details, the second set of messengers believed Michal’s lie that David was sick in bed. Michal supported this lie by the *teraphim* in the bed, which they assumed to be David.⁴¹

Although this is the most probable scenario, even if the second set of messengers believed the *teraphim* to be next to David, they still believed falsely that David was in the bed. This is shown by Saul’s command for the third set of messengers to “bring him up to me *in the bed* that I might kill him” (v. 15). The story is elliptical, but the second set of messengers who observed the contrived scene and heard Michal’s corresponding lie in v. 14 must have communicated to Saul that David was in bed. Obviously Michal lied in v. 14, since her statement was intended to corroborate the fabricated sick scene, and she knew that David was not sick in bed.⁴²

First Book of Samuel, 494; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 204; Lewis, “Teraphim,” 846.

38. They write, “the messengers have *hardly caught sight* of the object when they recognize the deception” (“à peine les émissaires avaient-ils entrevu le tableau qu’ils reconnurent la supercherie”) (Rouillard and Tropper, “*Trpym*,” 341, emphasis mine).

39. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 93 (emphasis hers).

40. So also van der Toorn, “Nature of the Biblical Teraphim,” 207.

41. Willi-Plein helpfully notes that it was sufficient for these messengers simply to have a general sense of a “sick room” from their perspective outside the room (“Michal und die Anfänge des Königtums in Israel,” 410).

42. Furthermore, this corroborative sick scene means that her statement would be deceptive even if one were to conjecture that David, though on the run, actually was sick. In this case Michal’s statement would not technically be false, but it still would be deceptive, since in context her statement implies, “He is sick *in bed*.”