Almost without exception, translators and commentators begin the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam. (4:1—7:2) with 4:1b rather than 4:1a. The reasons for this are well known and obvious. In 1 Sam. 1-3 the narration concentrates on the character Samuel by featuring: (1) his mother Hannah, whose initial barrenness caused her great distress and whose vow eventuated in his birth (1:1—2:10); (2) the religious leaders whom he would replace (2:11-36); and (3) the circumstances of his famous call (3:1-21). Yet, in spite of this dramatic build-up, Samuel is completely absent in the very next story, which of course recounts the capture and later return of the Ark. Thus, when the MT of 1 Sam. 4:1 begins “And the word of Samuel came to all Israel” (RSV; wayehi ḏeḇar-šēmū’ēl leḵol-yisra’ēl), the phrase is thought surely to go with what precedes rather than with what follows. It is summative, not anticipatory, since no word is forthcoming. Consequently, the Masoretic versification has simply been regarded as an error.

But even scholars who hold that the alleged originally independent Ark Story includes elements from 1 Sam. 1-3 ignore 4:1a, primarily because only information about Eli, Hophni and Phineas is thought to be relevant to the Ark pericope. For example, Miller and Roberts include 1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25 in the Ark account, but no references to Elkanah, Hannah or Samuel. There is accordingly no reason for them to begin the Ark account with 4:1a instead of 4:1b. A similar tack is taken by John Willis, regardless of the fact that he contends 1 Sam. 1-7 is a unified literary whole. Though for him chaps. 1-3 are preparatory to 4-7, he still makes 4:1a the last sentence of chap. 3 rather than the first sentence of chap. 4.

McCarter tries to solve the problem which 4:1a presents by resorting to textual criticism. He regards the longer LXX (3:19-4:1) reading as original, suggesting that the MT was shortened by haplography. But McCarter does not explain why the very line which supposedly triggered the haplography (i.e., wayehi ḏeḇar-šēmū’ēl leḵol-yisra’ēl)
does not appear in the presumed original LXX. In this light, one may fairly ask whether McCarter has practiced textual composition rather than textual criticism. Surely a much stronger case has to be made that the MT cannot be made sense of before the text is rewritten in such a manner.

But this is to state the issue negatively. My point is not merely that 4:1a is insufficiently disruptive or extraneous to be placed elsewhere or excised altogether. Rather, I submit that 4:1a belongs precisely where the Massoretic tradents put it, and that it not only makes perfectly good sense but that it plays an important hermeneutical function for comprehending the overall thrust of 1 Sam. 1-7. In my view, even scholars who have treated 1 Sam. 1-7 as a unified, coherent literary segment, and who in addition have observed that Samuel's silence and absence in the Ark story is neither incidental nor accidental, have failed to appreciate the significance of 4:1a. Robert Polzin virtually ignores the half-verse, despite his contention that Samuel's "unrecorded speech" is to be found throughout 1 Sam. 4:6. Eslinger incorporates 4:1a into his literary analysis, but misconstrues its function by assuming that it refers to a prophetic oracle already delivered rather than to one yet to come. Finally, K. A. D. Smelik opines that Samuel's absence in the Ark Narrative is the result of a "literary decision" rather than of differing sources, but in the end sees 4:1a as the conclusion of chap. 3. I hope to show that 1 Sam. 4:1a is intrinsic to the theological thrust of this important narrative.

I.

1 Sam. 4:1a must at the outset be seen in the context of a much larger narrative which emphasizes prophetic activity: the Deuteronomistic History ( = DtH). No one seriously questions the major role of prophecy and Israel's varied responses to it in the epic story which Judaism appositely entitled the Former Prophets ( = the canonical version of DtH, minus Deuteronomy). Von Rad, of course, saw DtH strictly in terms of prophecy and fulfillment—Deuteronomy was the "prophetic word of God" and Joshua through Kings "its exactly observed fulfillment." Polzin builds on von Rad's position by under-