

DISCOVERING DAVID IN LIGHT OF 1 SAMUEL 25:
A NARRATIVE CRITICAL READING OF 1 SAMUEL 24-26

by

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ABSTRACT

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Although David seems to be characterized differently in 1 Samuel 25 than in 1 Samuel 24 and 26, the literary cohesion of these three chapters suggests otherwise. By exploring the parallels in setting, plot, characterization, and style between each chapter this study uncovers a multidimensional characterization of David. Nabal is established as Saul's surrogate and David's men (in 1 Sam 24), Abishai (in 1 Sam 26), and Abigail (in 1 Sam 25) are demonstrated to be David's alter-egos. These paralleled characterizations suggest that as David is with Nabal so he is with Saul and that the interchange between David and his men and David and Abigail externalize polarized qualities within David's character. By exploring the interweaving of narration, setting, plot, characterization, and style in 1 Samuel 24-26 this thesis seeks to demonstrate that both David's restraint and his unrestraint are rooted in his political brilliance and moral deficiency.

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and for your eagerness to learn more about David's story.*

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BI	Biblical Interpretation
BO	Berit Olam
BS	Bibliotheca Sacra
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
ch.	chapter
DBI	Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation
ECB	Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible
Ev.	Event
FCI	Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation
H/L	Hasifrut/Literature
IESS	International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB '95	New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NIDB	The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
Pres	Presbyterion
RQ	Restoration Quarterly
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
Sc.	Scene
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
v.	verse
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

Chapter One: Establishing a Methodological Foundation

1.1 Foreword

Within the preserved canon of the Hebrew Bible exists a rich narrative heritage that rivals, and even triumphs over, the most renowned narrative anthologies of all human history. The stories of the Hebrew Bible are intricate, layered, and offer a timeless appeal because they capture the human condition with haunting candidness. In addition to these aesthetic and humanistic qualities must be added their ancient and enduring function within the life and ethics of faith communities that have spanned geography, time, language, culture, and political landscape. Through its stories, the Bible has impacted the world in ways that shrink even the greatness of such literary giants as Homer, Shakespeare, or Tolstoy. Therefore, since the Bible contains narrative literature, and narrative literature of the highest pedigree, it is only reasonable that it be appreciated, investigated, and examined accordingly.¹ This thesis will take seriously the narrative genius of 1 Samuel by conducting a close reading of 1 Sam 24-26.

1.2 Introduction of Thesis Topic

In addition to being the main character in 1 & 2 Samuel, David is central to Israel's self-understanding in the Hebrew Bible. At the same time, David is presented in 1 Samuel as a man who guards his inner-thoughts and emotions closely, thus making a careful study of David's character a complicated and exhausting adventure.

Although traditional interpreters recognize David's later kingly and familial failures (especially by 2 Sam 11), they still largely tout *the* David of 1 Samuel as a man who is authentically concerned with innocence, righteousness, obedience, and

¹ Alter, *David Story*, xxii.

faithfulness.² This is especially true of his rise to power, as many conventionally swallow with enthusiasm that David – as he is portrayed in 1 Samuel – is a man obliged to accept the reins of power almost in spite of himself.³ Scholars of influence that have subscribed to this traditional perspective of David include Mark Boda, Walter Brueggemann, Mary J. Evans, Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, Ralph Klein, P. Kyle McCarter, William McKane, Gnana Robinson, and David Toshio Tsumura.⁴ Clearly this is a reputable group of men and women who contribute considerable influence within the guild of biblical studies.

A second group of scholars, however, have emerged from the shadows of traditional study to challenge the pristine reputation of David during his rise to power in 1 Samuel. Among these are Robert Alter, Keith Bodner, Joyce G. Baldwin, Mark Biddle, Cheryl J. Exum, Robert P. Gordon, Barbara Green, Peter Miscall, Robert Polzin, and Joel Rosenberg.⁵ These academics tend to acknowledge David's careful loyalty to the king in 1 Samuel while also recognizing David's consummate political aspiration and astuteness. They tend to conclude that David's loyalty may be extended more to his future office than to Saul or YHWH.

Finally, a third group of commentators risk suggesting a much more radical understanding of David in 1 Samuel. Among them are Baruch Halpern and Steven L. McKenzie, who attempt to reconstruct David almost entirely against-the-grain and

² McKane (*I & II Samuel*, 146) for example, writes: "The intention of this chapter (1 Sam 24) is to write large the magnanimity of David and to exhibit him as the very soul of honour."

³ Boda (*After God's Heart*, 61), for example, contrasts Saul and David by citing 1 Samuel 24 and 26 and thus suggesting that whereas Saul "is desperate to hang on to his power," David "[refuses] to grasp after the throne."

⁴ Boda, *After God's Heart*; Brueggemann, *David's Truth*; Brueggemann, *Samuel*; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*; Klein, *1 Samuel*; McCarter, *I Samuel*; McKane, *I & II Samuel*; Robinson, *Like the Nations*; Tsumura, *1 Samuel*.

⁵ Alter, *David Story*; Bodner, *1 Samuel*; Bodner, *National Insecurity*; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*; Biddle, "1 Samuel 25"; Exum, *Tragedy*; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*; Gordon, "David's Rise"; Green, "1 Samuel 25"; Green, *King Saul*; Miscall, *1 Samuel*; Polzin, *Deuteronomist*; Rosenberg, *King and Kin*.

therefore in contrast to traditional scholarship.⁶ For example, in his pursuit of unmasking the lesser known David, McKenzie paints a controversial portrait of David by suggesting that the strife between David and Saul was the result of an attempted coup d'état sometime before David's heroic escape and exile.⁷

In this thesis I will interact with both traditionalists and non-traditionalists as they endeavour to make sense of David in 1 Sam 24-26. However, this thesis will seek to defend the hypothesis that the narrator of 1 Samuel presents David as a man who is very much aware of the political opportunities before him and that he makes a series of well-calculated moves to ensure his rise to power.

To begin, I will focus exactly where many commentators find great difficulty in the Samuel narrative, *i.e.* 1 Sam 25. For Stanley Isser, as for many, the placement of this chapter is problematic precisely because it seems to be a disjunction from its parenthetical chapters.⁸ I suggest, however, that it is exactly this seeming dissimilarity that invites us to ask questions about the location and purpose of 1 Sam 25 in the broader narrative. By conducting an exhaustive examination of 1 Sam 25 I will seek to fully expose and analyse the many narrative elements presented in this "middle" chapter so that a more comprehensive understanding of David can be gleaned.

I will then propose that 1 Sam 25 is deliberately placed by the narrator and should be read as a narrative commentary on David's apparently contradictory characterization in 1 Sam 24 and 26. In order to better understand David in 1 Sam 24-26 I will identify parallel characterizations that are made between Nabal and Saul, David and his men, and

⁶ Halpern, *Secret Demons*; Levenson & Halpern, "David's Marriages"; McKenzie, *David*; It is not clear from his limited writing if Levenson ("1 Samuel 25") more appropriately fits in the non-traditional or radical streams.

⁷ McKenzie, *King David*, 87-88.

⁸ Isser, *Sword of Goliath*, 133.

David and Abigail. My intention will be to reveal that in 1 Sam 25 the narrator has covertly provided us with a unique window for better understanding David's true inner-struggle as he relates to the *realpolitik* of Israel throughout the Samuel corpus.

The final result will be a refreshing perspective on who the narrator perceives David to be and why the narrative presents David the way that it does. I am confident that in so doing the David of 1 Samuel will be brought to light as a brilliant yet shrewd politician who makes use of every opportunity to further his power and authority within ancient Israel. This thesis will emphasise that David in 1 Samuel is one of literature's most accomplished and able political minds; something that traditional interpretation has been unwilling or unable to acknowledge or appreciate.

In order to accomplish all this, I will employ a narrative critical methodology because it is best able to make sense of the slight nuances in Hebrew storytelling. The fine aspects of the narrative of 1 Sam 24-26 will be identified, studied, and evaluated in order to appreciate David in 1 Samuel as a man of profound political ambition and moral shortcomings.

1.3 *Brief History of Old Testament Narrative Criticism*

A literary reading of the Bible can be traced as far back as Augustine and Jerome in the fourth and fifth centuries AD.⁹ However, the Enlightenment gave rise to a massive departure from serious study of the Bible as literature because of its disposition toward scientific and historic intrigue in all areas of scholarship, including biblical studies.¹⁰ Higher Criticism began to pick apart the Bible, increasingly bringing into question its

⁹ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 13-15; Longman, "Literary Approaches," 101.

¹⁰ Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 5; Prickett, *Words and the Word*, 197 (also referenced by Longman, "Literary Approaches," 101).

assumed historicity. In the nineteenth-century, the Bible became more interesting to mainstream scholars as a bridge to lost texts and events than as a valuable piece of literature in its own right.¹¹ Narrative criticism, on the other hand, takes seriously the biblical text and in many ways, through its insistence on a close reading of the Bible, it has revitalized “a lively and critical engagement with the text in its canonical form.”¹² Nevertheless, the road back to acknowledging the richness of biblical literature has been a long one, with varying opinions about which scholar and which publication has made the greatest impact.

Robert Alter and Frank Kermode credit Erich Auerbach’s 1946 study, *Mimesis*, as a critical turning point in that journey.¹³ In *Mimesis*, Auerbach compares Old Testament narrative with Homeric narrative, thus reintroducing the thought that an inherent connection exists between the Bible and Western literature.¹⁴

Yairah Amit suggests that Meir Weiss’s 1962 publication, *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation*, initiated renewed interest and focus on narrative criticism.¹⁵ Weiss’ approach to the Bible was ground-breaking because he prioritized the internal literary qualities of the text rather than the historical development of the text:

Weiss’s method, which he called “total interpretation,” is a literary synchronic approach, as opposed to the dominant historical diachronic one, which means it ignores the history of the text and its stratification, and concentrates on the story’s meaning in relation to its formal design.¹⁶

¹¹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 10-11.

¹² Heard, “Narrative Criticism,” 41.

¹³ See: Auerbach, *Mimesis*.

¹⁴ Alter and Kermode, *Literary Guide*, 4-5; Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 17; Longman, “Literary Approaches,” 97.

¹⁵ See: Weiss, *Bible from Within*.

¹⁶ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 12.

Amit submits that Weiss' synchronic approach was quickly supported by Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg in a series of articles published in the Hebrew periodical, *Ha-Sifrut*.¹⁷ Of particular importance was their 1968 article, "The King through Irony: The Narrator's Devices in the Biblical Story of David and Bathsheba and Two Excursions on the Theory of Narrative Text."¹⁸

Tremper Longman III acknowledges much of this historical development, but he credits, along with the company of many others, Alter's 1981 publication, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, as the defining moment in the re-emergence of narrative criticism as a legitimate methodology within Old Testament studies.¹⁹ Longman suggests that Alter's approach to the Hebrew Bible was wildly popular for several reasons. One, fewer new insights were being gleaned from the traditional historical-critical approaches, opening opportunity for alternative methods. Two, a renewed interest in a synchronic interpretation of the final form of the biblical text was developing at about the same time Alter burst onto the scene. Three, rather than isolating small fragments of the Bible for study, Alter advocated an approach that examined the entirety of the final text as a coherent whole. And four, Alter was already well respected as a comparative literary critic outside the guild of biblical studies, which made him fresh and gave him a peculiar but legitimate voice of authority.²⁰

In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Alter admits that his proposed literary approach to the Hebrew Bible was underdeveloped and not yet in the mainstream of biblical

¹⁷ Bar-Efrat ("Structure in Biblical Narrative," 155) also recognizes a shift from historical diachronic to literary synchronic that occurred about this time among many scholars.

¹⁸ See: Perry and Sternberg, "Irony Eyes," 263-292; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 12.

¹⁹ See: Alter, *Biblical Narrative*; Longman, "Literary Approaches," 97-98; also: Heard, "Narrative Criticism," 29; Mathewson, "Old Testament Narratives," 411.

²⁰ Longman, "Literary Approaches," 98.

studies, but not without giving credit to the few scholars who had, in his opinion, made some contribution. Among the works mentioned were Edwin M. Good's *Irony in the Old Testament*, Michael Fishbane's *Text and Texture*, J.P. Fokkelman's *Narrative Art in Genesis*, Shimon Bar-Efrat's *The Art of the Biblical Story*, and, as previously mentioned, Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*. In spite of their mention, Alter critiques each of the examples in this short list, with the exception of Auerbach's first chapter, as incomplete or unsatisfactory in their overall approach.²¹ Like Amit, Alter also references four articles written by Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg published in the Hebrew quarterly, *Ha-Sifrut*. While heaping praise on Perry and Sternberg for their efforts, Alter proceeds to offer reservations about their work, saying that the way they formulate their conception of "the Bible as literature," is "needlessly concessive and condescending," and that they neglect the advances made by historical scholarship to their detriment.²² For all the recognition Alter lauds on his peers, these mentioned scholars remain in the shadow of his previous introductory comments:

It is a little astonishing that at this late date literary analysis of the Bible of the sort I have tried to illustrate here in this preliminary fashion is only in its infancy. By literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else; the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy. The general absence of such critical discourse on the Hebrew Bible is all the more perplexing when one recalls that the masterworks of Greek and Latin antiquity have in recent decades enjoyed an abundance of astute literary analysis, so that we have learned to perceive subtleties of lyric form in Theocritus as in Marvell, complexities of narrative strategy in Homer or Virgil as in Flaubert.²³

²¹ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 15-16.

²² Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 17-19; For a detailed comparison between the methodologies of Alter and Sternberg, read: Long, "Understanding Old Testament Narrative," 102-109.

²³ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 12-13.

In his own words we see Alter confess the monumental contribution he was endeavouring to make in the establishment and momentum of literary approaches to Old Testament studies.

Longman suggests that Alter's enthusiasm and his well exhibited methodology influenced many biblical scholars to try their hand at a literary approach to biblical studies. Among those he mentions are Adele Berlin, Meir Weiss, Shimon Bar-Efrat, and Meir Sternberg, which are today some of the better known advocates of narrative criticism.²⁴ The contributions made by these scholars have renewed the literary interest of treasured stories of the Hebrew Bible and reinvigorated the Church to read the Bible carefully and thoughtfully.

To a detailed narrative critical methodology we now turn our attention. This methodology will be divided into two parts. First, we will briefly investigate the process of communication expressed through biblical narrative. Both the diachronic development of narrative texts and a synchronic approach to these narratives will be described in detail. Second, the individual components of a synchronic narrative methodology will be explained. These components are narration, setting, plot, characterization, and style.

1.4 Communicating Through Biblical Narrative

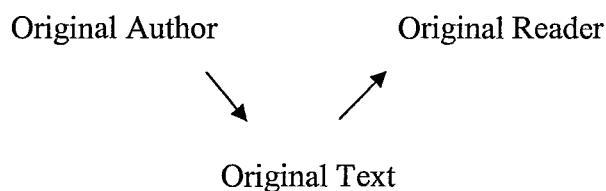
The biblical stories we read today were written centuries ago by authors who were firmly rooted in time and space for audiences that also existed in the context of specific historic situations. We are therefore faced with many interpretive challenges: Who were the original authors? Who were the original intended audiences? What historical, cultural,

²⁴ Longman, "Literary Approaches," 100.

religious, economic, and geographical elements influenced the original intent of the author and understanding of the audience? How do we glean meaning from texts that were not, in their original context, intended for us? To begin to answer these questions we must first understand the process of communication inherent to our interaction with biblical texts.

1.4.1 *Diachronic Study: Becoming a Text*

In its most basic form the process of communication includes a sender, a message, and a receiver.²⁵ In literature, these agents are most basically understood as original author, original text, and original reader:²⁶



The *original author* is the person or people who initially wrote the text, the *original reader* is the person or community who first received the text, and the *original text* is the first finished draft produced by the original author and given to the original reader.²⁷ The original text is the medium through which a message is passed from author to reader.²⁸ Of course this chain of communication is limited to the few immediate original participants and therefore to a more complicated chain of communication we must direct our attention.

A *secondary reader* is most probably the first development in this chain of communication. A secondary reader is a person or community who was not the originally

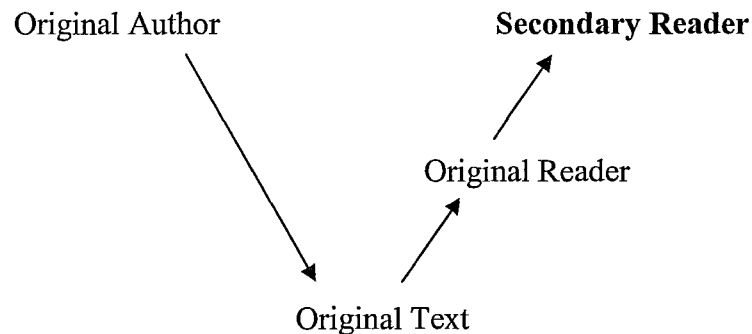
²⁵ Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 8.

²⁶ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 9; Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 8.

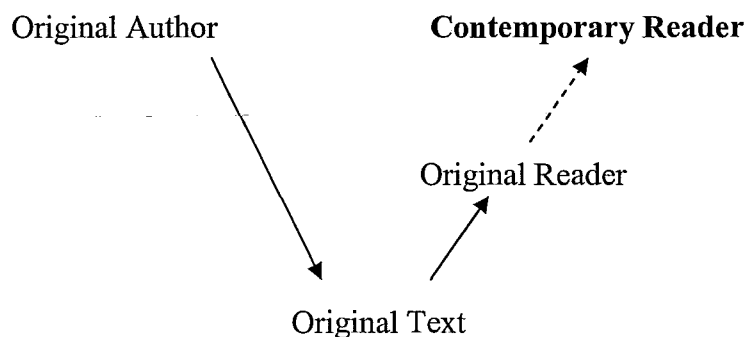
²⁷ Walsh, *1 Kings*, xviii.

²⁸ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 83; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 9.

intended reader by the original author. A secondary reader might be someone who reads the text upon the solicitation of the original reader, or a secondary reader might happen upon the text by accident. In either case, a secondary reader was not directly or indirectly envisioned by the original author and must, therefore, attempt to understand the text through the filter of the original reader:²⁹



Just as a secondary reader must be included in the process of communication, so too must a tertiary reader be considered, and so on. Every generation of readers adds further distance between the reader and the original author. All of these generations of readers can be categorized as *contemporary readers*:

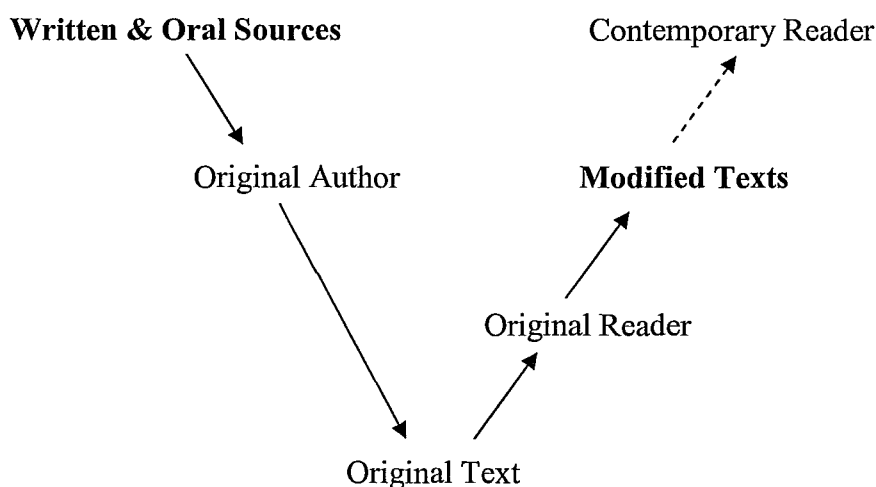


The arrow going from Original Reader to Contemporary Reader is dashed because it represents a passing of the text from the original reader to multiple contemporary readers

²⁹ Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 9.

who have spanned time and geography or may not follow one after another in a single chain of communication.³⁰

The text is not static either. First, it is possible that the original text was compiled from several *written and oral sources*, each with their own original authors.³¹ Second, the original text has probably been *modified* since it was first read by the original reader through intentional and unintentional editing, as well as translation:



Longman rightly asks, “Should we speak of one author, many authors, or even many editors?”³² Such a question introduces a further wrinkle in this process of communication, which is trying to identify the original text by sifting through many editions of modified texts, perhaps each stemming from a different tradition. With so many authors and editors potentially involved in the life of a text, retrieving the original text is a daunting task, rightly tackled by text critical scholars.³³ Although such study is valuable, discovering the original text is not the primary concern of narrative criticism.

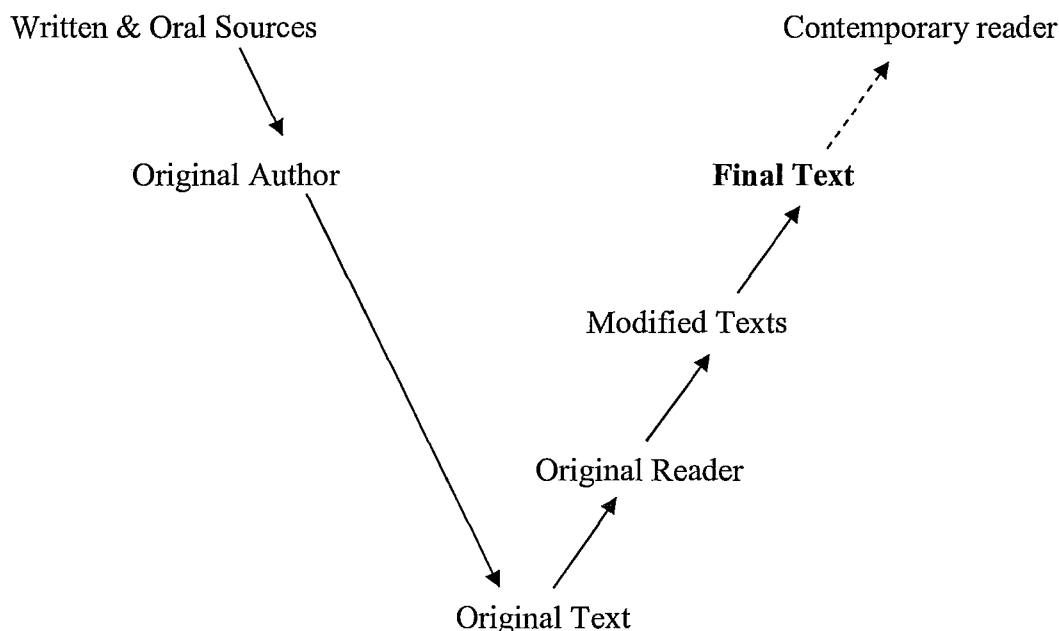
³⁰ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 84; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 103.

³¹ Berlin, *Poetics*, 113; Walsh, *1 Kings*, xii.

³² Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 83.

³³ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 23; Berlin, *Poetics*, 111-134.

The narrative critic is much more concerned with *a final text*.³⁴ A final text is the actual text the contemporary reader has in his or her hands. No matter how many modifications the text may have undergone, or will undergo, every contemporary reader has a specific final text in his or her possession:



A final text is birthed in history through an almost miraculous rite of *becoming*. Of greater significance to the narrative critic, however, is the next stage in the life of a final text, that of its *being*.

1.4.2 Synchronic Study: Being a Narrative

For a narrative critical methodology the synchronic study of a final text becomes more important than the diachronic development of that text into its final form.³⁵ As Bar-Efrat suggests:

The various historical approaches have undoubtedly contributed greatly to our knowledge of the world and literature of the Bible. The literary approach and methods are no less important than the historical ones, however, since the *being* of biblical narrative is equally as interesting as its *becoming*. Anyone who wishes

³⁴ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 7.

³⁵ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 83-84.

to study its being must use the avenue of literary analysis, for it is impossible to appreciate the nature of biblical narrative fully, understand the network of its component elements or penetrate into its inner world without having recourse to the methods and tools of literary scholarship.³⁶

Even the narrative critic, however, recognizes the distance between the original author and a final text and a final text and the contemporary reader. Therefore, further refinement to the process of communication is required.

An initial distinction must be made between the original author and the implied author. It is not possible for us to truly know the original author because “he does not make his or her presence known explicitly.”³⁷ Even when the name or other data is provided about the original author, there is no way for us to verify that the author was actually as he or she self-presents.³⁸ This problem becomes all the more difficult in the case of anonymous authors. Therefore, it is helpful for narrative critics to establish an *implied author*:

In the process of writing, the real author becomes an implied author. The self who writes is somehow different than the self who thinks. For all practical purposes the implied author is the one whom the reader constructs from the text itself. For example, the only things we know about the author of Job are what we know from the text – his view of God and humanity; what, for him, constitutes true integrity; and his opinion of death. We know nothing of his everyday life, except what the writer chooses to reveal through the text. The author allows the reader access to only a limited area of his or her intellectual world.³⁹

Put another way, the implied author is what we know about the original author from the limited evidence available to us in the text.⁴⁰ He or she is “the textual manifestation of the real author... the author as he [or she] would be constructed, based on inference from the

³⁶ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 10.

³⁷ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 83; also: Walsh, *1 Kings*, xviii.

³⁸ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 84; Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 9.

³⁹ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 103.

⁴⁰ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 14; Walsh, *1 Kings*, xviii.

text.”⁴¹ We may have little or no historical or experiential knowledge of the original author, but we can reconstruct the self-presentation of that author from a final text.⁴²

A second distinction to be made concerns the role of the contemporary reader. As previously discussed, the contemporary reader is not the originally intended reader and therefore he or she is not being directly addressed by the text. Even when we are told who the original reader was, as in the case of Luke’s writings to Theophilus, we cannot be entirely certain how that original reader reacted to his or her reading of the text. Therefore, narrative critics identify an *implied reader* who, like the implied author, is internally reconstructed from the text:

Narrative critics generally speak of an implied reader who is presupposed by the narrative itself. This implied reader is distinct from any real, historical reader in the same way that the implied author is distinct from the real, historical author. The actual responses of contemporary readers are unpredictable, but there may be clues within the narrative that indicate an anticipated response from the implied reader.⁴³

Since the implied author had an audience in mind, the text will present clues as to who this audience was. This audience, presupposed by the narrative, is the implied reader.⁴⁴ Narrative criticism differs from historic and form criticism because it seeks to discover the implied reader and not the original reader.⁴⁵

Narrative criticism is focused intently on the text. From within the text the narrative critic seeks to glean all three components of the communication process, including sender (implied author), message (narrative), and receiver (implied reader). The

⁴¹ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 84.

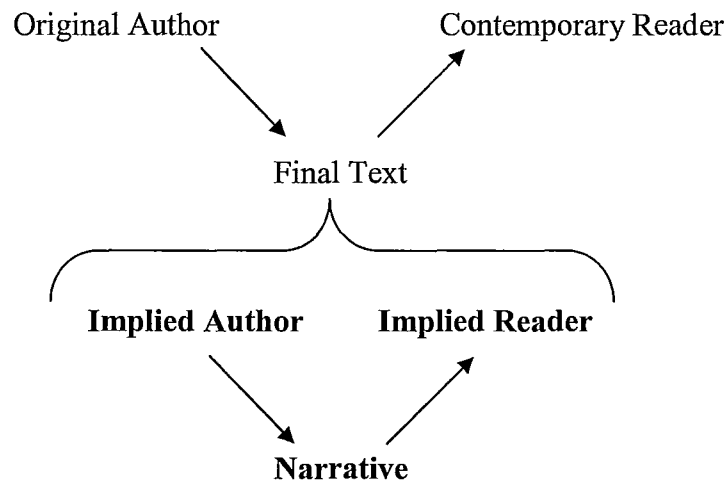
⁴² Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 9.

⁴³ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 19.

⁴⁴ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 85; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 103; Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 9.

⁴⁵ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 19.

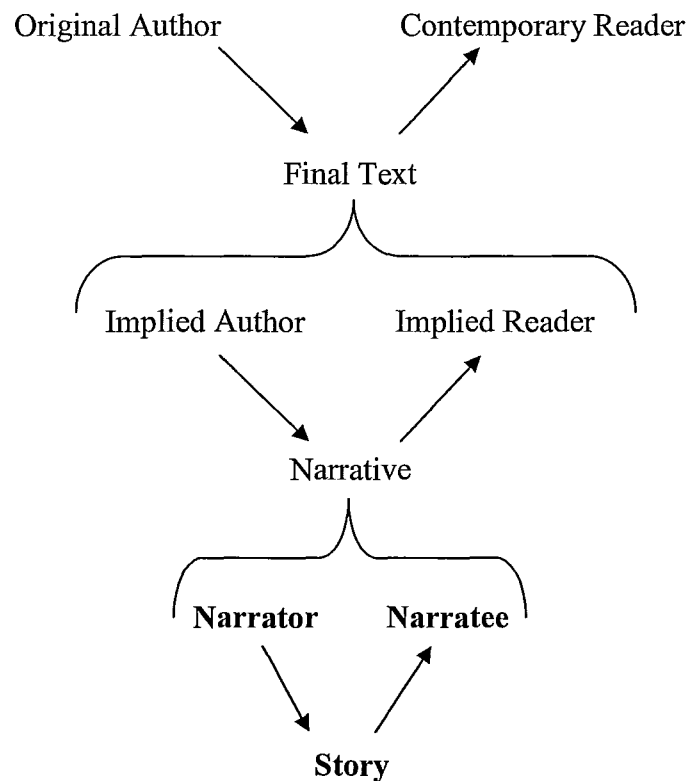
following diagram will review the communication process as described thus far as it concerns narrative criticism:



The original author and the contemporary reader are both considered to be external to the communication that occurs within a final text. The implied author, narrative, and implied reader are all internal to, and reconstructed from, a final text. While acknowledging the validity of external agents of a final text, the priority of narrative criticism is text-centred, meaning its focus is internal to the text.⁴⁶

There exists one more echelon in the process of communication important to narrative criticism. Obviously, even more important than the study of the text is consideration of the narrative itself. Therefore, narrative critics identify all three agents of communication (sender, message, and receiver) not just within the text, but also within the narrative. Just as the implied author, narrative, and implied reader are all internal to a final text, like Russian dolls so too the *narrator*, *story*, and *narratee* are internal to the narrative:

⁴⁶ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 20.



Both the narrator and narratee are rhetorical devices created by the implied author: “They are part of the narrative itself, part of the discourse through which the story is told.”⁴⁷ In simple terms, even when they go unnoticed, it is the narrator who tells the story and the narratee who hears it.⁴⁸ The implied author employs the voice and presence of the narrator to integrate and evaluate all aspects of the narrative, as well as to attempt to persuade the implied reader to adopt a particular point of view.⁴⁹ The narrator and narratee are integral to a narrative critical study because they are themselves literary creations and as such they are ingrained in the process of communication within

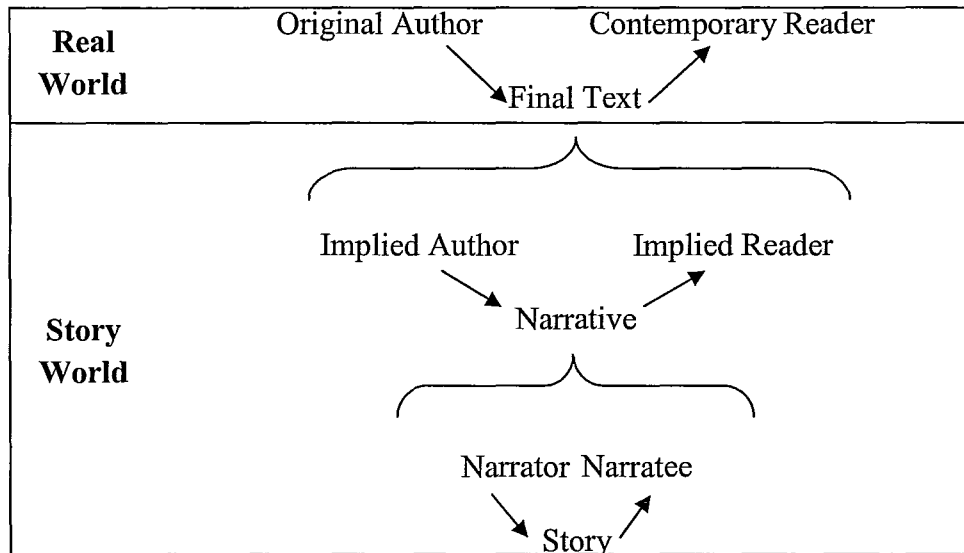
⁴⁷ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 27; also: Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 13; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 85.

⁴⁸ Berlin, *Poetics*, 52; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 85-87; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 27; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 104; Walsh, *1 Kings*, xvii.

⁴⁹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 14; Mathewson, “Old Testament Narratives,” 413; Sternberg, *Poetics*, 51; Walsh, *1 Kings*, xviii; Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 8, 10-11.

narrative, unencumbered by anything external. More will be said about the narrator in the next section of this chapter.

Finally, a distinction ought to be made between the real world and the story world:



Even when a story seeks to portray the real world it remains a literary reflection of the real world. This story world is created by *mimetic narrative*:

Mimetic narrative transcends history, for what is found in narrative is a redescription of reality, the creation of a literary world or a textual world that reaches beyond itself and beyond its historical milieu. Through a definable and well-structured artistry, it offers to guide the reader into the discovery of some universal truth.⁵⁰

Whereas historic criticism sees the text as a means to understanding the real world, narrative criticism is primarily concerned with the reality presented and contained within the story world. However, the story world is not entirely detached from the real world. An appeal may be made by the narrative critic to the real world in order to discern the significance of images, phrases, and worldview. Nevertheless, the goal is to understand the story world, which, “through artistic forms and strategies ... assumes its own reality,

⁵⁰ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 104-105.

a reality that is capable of communicating its own truths.”⁵¹ Although anchored in history a narrative is an independent world and must be explored according to its narrative nature.⁵²

In order to conduct a synchronic study of narrative as story certain tools are required and available. Every story has a narrator, setting, plot, characters, and a particular style. In order to enter into the story world the narrative critic needs to be acquainted with these narrative features. To a detailed narrative methodology, therefore, we now focus our attention.

1.5 *Detailed Narrative Critical Methodology*

The main elements considered in the synchronic narrative methodology of this thesis will be narration, setting, plot, characterization, and style.

1.5.1 *Narration*

In many respects, the narrator is an almost invisible character created by the implied author to bring every aspect of the narrative together:⁵³

The narrator does not figure in the events of the story; speaks in the third person; is not bound by time or space in the telling of the story; is an implied invisible presence in every scene, capable of being anywhere to “recount” the action; displays full omniscience by narrating the thoughts, feelings, or sensory experiences of many characters; often turns from the story to give direct “asides” to the reader, explaining a custom or translating a word or commenting on the story; and narrates the story from one overarching ideological point of view.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 106.

⁵² Walsh, *1 Kings*, xi-xii.

⁵³ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 15; Heard, “Narrative Criticism,” 31.

⁵⁴ Rhodes and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 36 (Also cited by Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 86.).

As story teller, a third person narrator is an observer, not a participant, in the unfolding drama.⁵⁵ The way in which the narrator observes, therefore, is very important. The narrator employs particular points of view in his telling of a story.⁵⁶ There are four key aspects to the narrator's point of view in biblical narrative. They are spatial, temporal, psychological, and ideological.⁵⁷

Spatial and *temporal* points of view refer to the location of the narrator in relation to the story.⁵⁸ Spatially, the narrator of 1 Samuel is omnipresent and omniscient.⁵⁹ He can be in any place at any time and, like a director of film, he is able to control the spatial scope of the story in order to give the narratee a deliberately limited or vast perspective.⁶⁰ Temporally, the narrator of 1 Samuel transcends the narrated time of the story. This is a further example of his omniscience. He is able to foreshadow events that, within the chronology of the story, have not yet happened and he is able to purposefully withhold exposition until later, thus compelling the narratee to reconsider the story to that point.

The *psychological* point of view refers to the perspective from which behavior is perceived and described.⁶¹ The narrator of 1 Samuel is able to reveal and evaluate the inner-lives of characters, including their thoughts, emotions, and motives.⁶² He is privy to information to which no other character has access and is able to disclose such insight to

⁵⁵ Walsh, *1 Kings*, xvii.

⁵⁶ For sake of clarity, throughout this thesis the "narrator" will be referred to in the masculine gender and the "narratee" will be referenced by using the feminine.

⁵⁷ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 87-88 (citing Uspensky, *Poetics*); Berlin, *Poetics*, 43-44, 55-56.

⁵⁸ Berlin, *Poetics*, 56; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 87-88.

⁵⁹ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 157-158; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 94; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 15-20; Berlin, *Poetics*, 43, 52; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 87-88; Sternberg, *Poetics*, 84-85; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 109; Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 10.

⁶⁰ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 157; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 94; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 15, 17; Berlin, *Poetics*, 43-44; Walsh, *1 Kings*, xx.

⁶¹ Berlin, *Poetics*, 56; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 88.

⁶² Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 157-158; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 20-22; Berlin, *Poetics*, 52.

the narratee when he chooses.⁶³ This is yet another key dimension to the narrator's omniscience and it is this omniscience that establishes the narrator of 1 Samuel as a reliable and authoritative source of knowledge within the story.⁶⁴

Finally, the *ideological* point of view refers to the narrator's ability to evaluate aspects of the story as appropriate or inappropriate, good or evil, approved or disapproved.⁶⁵ He tells the story in a way that is meant to persuade the narratee to adopt his ideological point of view.⁶⁶ Sometimes he does this in subtle ways and at other times he directly addresses the narratee with evaluative comments and statements.⁶⁷

Direct comments by the narrator to the narratee demonstrate *overt narration*, where the presence of the narrator is concretely felt outside the space and time of the story.⁶⁸ In these instances it is easy to discern the narrator's spatial, temporal, psychological, and ideological points of view.

There are many times, however, when the narrator intentionally limits the presentation of his points of view for rhetorical effect, thus demonstrating *covert narration*.⁶⁹ When the narrator does this he draws the narratee more intently into the story by adopting the *limited* point of view of a particular character or observer:

Hebrew narrators sometimes utilized a literary technique in which they assumed the limited perspective of a character or observer, rather than an "omniscient," divine perspective. This technique is employed for rhetorical purposes. It is sometimes marked formally, but more often one must rely on contextual clues to detect it. For this reason one cannot always be certain where it appears.

⁶³ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 158; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 17-18; Sternberg, *Poetics*, 85; Walsh, *I Kings*, xx.

⁶⁴ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 65-67; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 74, 94-95; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 17-23; Berlin, *Poetics*, 43;

⁶⁵ Berlin, *Poetics*, 55; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 88.

⁶⁶ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 157; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 16; Berlin, *Poetics*, 47, 52.

⁶⁷ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 16; Berlin, *Poetics*, 52.

⁶⁸ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 95; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 23-32.

⁶⁹ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 126; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 22, 32-45.

Recognizing the presence of this technique is essential to the proper interpretation of certain puzzling texts.⁷⁰

Covert narration minimizes the felt presence of the narrator and increases the vivid depiction of characters and plot.⁷¹ A narrator's presentation of a story by limited points of view creates intentional ambiguity between *some truth and the whole truth*, obliging the narratee to experience the story as it would have seemed to an outside observer within the story world.⁷² Nevertheless, the narrator remains very much in control of the shape and development of the story in order to persuade the narratee to adopt his ideological point of view. Therefore, the narratee must be sensitive to the ways in which the narrator is subtly weaving the story together, being careful to read each passage in its proper literary context.⁷³

In order to make assessments about biblical narrative, it is crucial to identify the narrator's ideological point of view. To do this, the narratee is able to trust that the narrator is omnipresent, omniscient, reliable, and authoritative within the story. This is true whether the narration is presented overtly or covertly. The way in which the narrator presents setting, shapes plot, and develops characters all help the narratee to identify the narrator's ideological point of view. To these other aspects of narrative criticism, therefore, we now turn our attention.

⁷⁰ Chisholm, "Point of View," 414.

⁷¹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 76.

⁷² Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 157-177; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 23; Heard, "Narrative Criticism," 34; Sternberg, *Poetics*, 126, 230-263.

⁷³ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 97; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 32; Heard ("Narrative Criticism," 38) suggests that there are multiple options when considering what it means to read a passage in context. This thesis will limit context to 1 and 2 Samuel.

1.5.2 *Setting*

Characters and plot are narrated in the foreground of a story within the context of a particular setting. As Longman summarizes:

Setting is also related to plot and character. The characters live and act, with the setting providing the background. The setting provides the physical location of the action, sometimes adds atmosphere, and at other times supports the message of the passage.⁷⁴

The setting of any story acts as a container for all plot and character development.⁷⁵

Every story has a setting structure that is known by the narrator and narratee, but not by the characters. The *setting structure* is the narrator's division of the story into events, scenes, acts, books, and compositions. A story is made up of small occurrences called *events*, which are connected together like links in a temporal or causal chain. A single event will lead to another event that follows it sequentially in time.⁷⁶ A series of events create a *scene*, which is determined by the characters involved. Usually there are only two characters involved in the foreground of each scene.⁷⁷ Scenes are clustered together to form *acts*, which can be identified based on the location, time-frame, or theme of the scenes that belong together. Most often a change in the setting, either temporal or spatial, signals a change in act.⁷⁸ Acts are gathered together to form *books* and books work together to form a single coherent *composition* that takes us, in the case of the Hebrew Bible, from Creation all the way to the Babylonian Captivity.⁷⁹ Much like our real world *time* and *space* create a setting that gives shape to this structure.

⁷⁴ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 94.

⁷⁵ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 111.

⁷⁶ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 95; Mathewson, "Old Testament Narratives," 412-414.

⁷⁷ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 96.

⁷⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 102.

⁷⁹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 94.

Time is more complicated than it may seem for the simple reason that time within the story world is not one and the same as time in the real world. *Narration time* refers to time in the real world, external to the story. In other words, narration time is concerned with how long it takes a reader to move through the narrative. *Narrated time*, on the other hand, refers to the time internal to the story world, meaning the minutes, hours, days, years, and generations within the story.⁸⁰ Without question, narrated time moves much more quickly than narration time since the biblical story endeavours to provide a succinct summary of many generations over several millennia.⁸¹

Within the story world, the narrator may move forward or backward, fast or slow, through narrated time at will. The narrator is able to thrust the narratee quickly forward in narrated time by using genealogical lists, standard phrases that mark the beginning of a new era, and summarizing statements that tell us that several years have passed.⁸² He is also able to slow down narrated time by using the techniques of repetition, dialogue, and physical description.⁸³

Through this manipulation the narrator sheds light on his ideological point of view. The narratee is able to observe what details the narrator deems important and which ones he does not by noticing the ratio between narration time and narrated time. The slower narrated time moves, the more important the content because the narrator has decided to select a particular event to highlight apart from the fast-moving panorama of the story. This same principle applies to each individual event. Within any event certain details are more important than others, which can be appropriately discerned according to

⁸⁰ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 63; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 104-106; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 143; Mathewson, "Old Testament Narratives," 416.

⁸¹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 105.

⁸² Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 106-108.

⁸³ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 108-109; Mathewson, "Old Testament Narratives," 421-422.

the slowing pace of narrated time.⁸⁴ The ratio between narration time and narrated time during dialogue is roughly 1:1 and therefore we can surmise that discourse between characters is always deemed essential.⁸⁵

Narrated time normally moves forward linearly from past to future.⁸⁶ This sequential aspect to Hebrew storytelling is ingrained in the very grammar of the language via the *waw-consecutive imperfect*, which joins scenes together chronologically, like links in a chain.⁸⁷ Departure from the standard *waw-consecutive imperfect* construction, which is the backbone of Hebrew narrative, usually indicates a parenthetical statement that is either outside of narrated time, such as a description or clarification, or is a disjunction in the time continuum. Both instances impact the flow of the story and must be noted. The narrator will not break the straightforward chronology of a story without good reason and therefore such instances might reveal clues about the narrator's ideological point of view. In each case the narratee is compelled to ask why the narrator chose to deviate from the naturally sequential path of the story.

The second aspect of the setting is space. Hebrew story normally moves from one space to another in accordance with the forward movement of narrated time. Just as it is impossible to be in two places at once in real life, so it is with Hebrew narrative. If a particular plot involves two or more locales, the narrator will normally alternate between them without backtracking in narrated time to give an account of what has happened in the meantime.⁸⁸ Any exception to this rule should be noted and deeply considered.

Flashbacks and delayed exposition are sometimes inserted by the narrator to provide

⁸⁴ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 63; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 108.

⁸⁵ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 65; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 109-110.

⁸⁶ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 47, 110; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 166.

⁸⁷ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 166.

⁸⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 167-168.

pertinent information for understanding or re-evaluating the story. Since these are both rare, the information imparted is significant.⁸⁹

The main method of developing space is through the movement of characters from one locale to another.⁹⁰ These locales can be specific, such as a well, a house, or a roof. They can also be more general, such as towns, cities, or regions. While all places mentioned are important to the development of the plot, the more specific the place, the more textured the setting becomes.⁹¹ The narrator will often refer to a certain milieu, such as a city or region, or specific locations, such as the gate to a city or a mountain, in order to impregnate the story with specific meaning. This meaning is derived by some symbolic significance, such as despair associated with a pit or power linked to a capital city, or by allusion to past events that have transpired at a specific or similar place.⁹² A location that is not applicable to the plot will usually not be cited. As Bar-Efrat writes, “Thus, places in the narratives are not merely geographical facts, but are to be regarded as literary elements in which fundamental significance is embodied.”⁹³

It is very rare for space to be intricately described in biblical narrative. The reason for this is informed by the principle of narration time versus narrated time. As discussed above, the slower narrated time develops in contrast to narration time, the more important the narrator deems the content to be. Physical depictions of space require narrated time to come to a complete stop and therefore any description of space is important.⁹⁴ As a result of this principle it is essential to pay close attention to when the narrator decides that a

⁸⁹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 175.

⁹⁰ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 185.

⁹¹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 187.

⁹² Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 123; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 94; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 111.

⁹³ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 194.

⁹⁴ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 117.

particular space merits further description beyond mere mention. The details provided will serve a distinct purpose in the story.⁹⁵

Stories require a setting that is established by the intersection of time and space. Narrated time is created by the narrator within the story world and, unlike narration time which transpires consistently in the real world, it can be manipulated to achieve the narrator's objectives. Every story must also develop a concept of space. Space can be minutely defined or vaguely referenced based on its role within the story. Both time and space contribute to the demarcation of a setting structure of a story, which includes events, scenes, acts, books, and compositions.

1.5.3 Plot

Closely related to characterization is the development of plot. Characterization can only be made by exploring the development of plot and plot can only advance through the actions of characters.⁹⁶ The way in which the narrator shapes the plot is crucial for making interpretive decisions because the narrator has complete control over how the plot is presented.⁹⁷ The plot organizes events in a purposeful way to provoke curiosity and emotion in the reader. The way the plot is crafted also seeks to add significance and meaning to each event recounted.⁹⁸

The simplest plot outline comes from Aristotle, who wrote that all plots have a beginning, middle, and end.⁹⁹ While the standard plot structure in the Hebrew Bible is

⁹⁵ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 195-196.

⁹⁶ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 93.

⁹⁷ Mathewson, "Old Testament Narratives," 413.

⁹⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 93; While not addressing plot directly, Berlin (*Poetics*, 101-110) provides a six stage discourse structure to explain how stories are shaped in the Hebrew Bible. She suggests that every story has (1) an abstract, (2) an orientation, (3) complicating action, (4) an evaluation, (5) a resolution, and (6) a coda.

⁹⁹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 46; Hofman, "Tamar," 21; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 93; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 110.

slightly more complicated than that, most plots unfold with the same stages and are generally “thrust forward by conflict.”¹⁰⁰ First is the *exposition*, which introduces background information, characters, and any detail required to fully understand the story and the significance of particular aspects of the plot.¹⁰¹ The narrator sometimes withholds certain expositional information until later in the story, which compels the narratee to re-evaluate characters, plot, and their significance.¹⁰² Second, a series of events moves the reader forward in the plot from an initial situation of tranquility toward a *moment of conflict*.¹⁰³ Third, the conflict escalates until it reaches a *climax*.¹⁰⁴ And fourth, after the climax resolution is quickly achieved and the plot is pacified by returning to a *point of calm*.¹⁰⁵ Sometimes this pattern repeats itself several times in a single plot before the final resolution is achieved and a full calm realized.¹⁰⁶ The normative plot in biblical narrative, then, can be sketched according to emotional intensity as follows:¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 93.

¹⁰¹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 47; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 111, 117; Mathewson, “Old Testament Narratives,” 414; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 110; Berlin (*Poetics*, 102-104) describes “orientation” within her discourse structure in a way that strongly resembles what I refer to here as “exposition”.

¹⁰² Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 112; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 110.

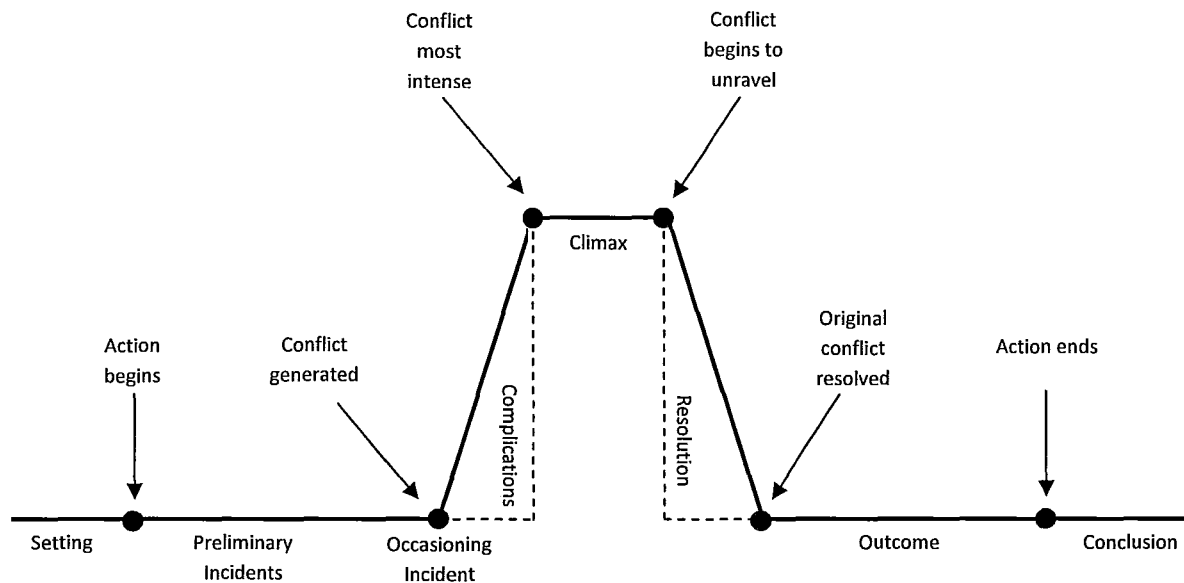
¹⁰³ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 47; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 121; Mathewson, “Old Testament Narratives,” 415; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 110; Berlin’s (*Poetics*, 104) description of “complicating action” within her discourse structure resonates with the idea that every plot has a moment of conflict that must be resolved. According to Berlin, complicating action is the temporal sequence of a story that describes what happened.

¹⁰⁴ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 47; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 121; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 110.

¹⁰⁵ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 47; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 121-125; Mathewson, “Old Testament Narratives,” 415; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 110; Berlin (*Poetics*, 107) also recognizes that every story requires resolution.

¹⁰⁶ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 124; Berlin (*Poetics*, 107-110) also recognizes that the resolution of any given action may not signal the end of a narrative discourse. In addition to a resolution, therefore, Berlin identifies a “coda,” which is a signal to the narratee that the narrative discourse has come to a final conclusion: Berlin.

¹⁰⁷ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 92.



The individual plots of each story work together to create an overarching plot in the book and, of course, the plot of each book contributes to the plot of the entire composition.

This plot diagram charts the emotional trajectory of a normal plot. Within this framework there are many different plot types, four of which can be categorized as concentric, comedic, tragic, and epic.¹⁰⁸ A plot may be a single plot type or a combination of more than one.

¹⁰⁸ Hofman ("Tamar," 24) and Rhodes, Dewey and Michie (*Mark 2nd ed.*, 36) define a concentric plot types as follows: A *concentric* plot is almost completely balanced so that circumstances are similar before the occasioning incident and after the resolution of the original conflict. Although circumstances are comparable at the beginning and end of a concentric plot, characters are usually affected and changed by the experiences endured throughout the escalating complications, the intensity of the climax, and the descending resolution. Hofman ("Tamar," 24) and Ryken (*Words of Delight*, 360) define a comedy as follows: *Comedy* is best understood as a plot involving initial loss and final gain. The occasioning incident usually initiates loss of wealth, health, or status, which reaches an ultimate point of disaster in the climax. The resolution, however, sees the return of that which had been lost so that the end result is equal to or better than the original circumstances. Exum (*Tragedy*, 4-15), Hofman, ("Tamar," 24), and Ryken (*Words of Delight*, 360) define tragedy as follows: *Tragedies* have the inverse pattern from comedies. Whereas some tragedies tell the story of a journey from bad to worse, others illustrate a loss that is never reversed by the resolution. Sometimes characters that are the focus of tragic plots bring the misfortune upon themselves and sometimes they are the unfortunate victim of relentless circumstances. Hofman ("Tamar," 24-25) and Ryken (*Words of Delight*, 360) define epic as follows: *Epic* plots usually focus on one or two key heroes who embark on a long journey with the assistance, guidance, and protection of a divine being. Along this journey the hero faces trials, which are resolved through his or her victory over them. Each trial has a

There are two distinct ways in which a narrator can develop any of the above plot types. Put simply, the narrator can *tell* or *show* the plot of a story. *Direct narration* is a report by the narrator, who tells the narratee what has happened and is happening in the story.¹⁰⁹ *Dramatic narration* is when the narrator shows the unfolding of a plot through the dialogue of characters.¹¹⁰ Dramatic narration has a more authentic feel to it and therefore provides a more “credible impression.”¹¹¹ Most plots in the Hebrew Bible are an intertwined combination of direct and dramatic narration.¹¹²

Plot gives body to the narrator’s ideological point of view. As Berlin advocates:

Most narrative would be considered deficient if it lacked evaluation, for evaluation is that which indicates the point of the narrative – its *raison d’être*. No one wants to hear a pointless story, so the narrator must have ways of letting his audience know why he is telling his story, why it is worth telling. It is through the evaluation that the point of the story is emphasized.¹¹³

The narrator is able to evaluate the story internally and externally. *Internal evaluation* is subtly woven into the quality of the resolution. For example, a character’s actions are often evaluated according to the consequences resulting. *External evaluation*, on the other hand, is an off-line comment spoken directly from the narrator to the narratee about an aspect of the plot. In these instances the evaluation stands outside the plot in order to comment on it.¹¹⁴

It is impossible to imagine a narrative without a plot because without a plot there is no story. While there are many plot types, including concentric, comedic, tragic, and epic, every plot follows a similar structure. This structure usually includes introductory

conflict, climax, and resolution of its own, creating a plot that has many ups and downs before a final point of calm is established.

¹⁰⁹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 49; Boda, “Prayer as Rhetoric,” 3; Hofman, “Tamar,” 23.

¹¹⁰ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 49; Boda, “Prayer as Rhetoric,” 3; Hofman, “Tamar,” 23.

¹¹¹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 49.

¹¹² Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 49-50.

¹¹³ Berlin, *Poetics*, 104-105.

¹¹⁴ Berlin, *Poetics*, 105-106.

and delayed exposition, initial incidents of action, an initial moment of conflict, escalating complications in the conflict, a climax, a resolution, and a return to calm. Through this pattern the narrator is able to embed the story with meaning according to his ideological point of view. Subtle and expressed evaluation about the plot by the narrator helps the narratee to understand what this point of view is so that she can best make appropriate judgments and applications for herself.

1.5.4 *Characterization*

The narrative critical study of characters is a purely literary adventure. While the narrative critic may not reject the historical existence of any given character, he or she is not interested in the flesh and bone person. Rather the aim is to discover the literary contours of that character within the story world of biblical narrative.¹¹⁵ Characters easily become the focus of the narratee because the interaction, speech, and fate of characters reveal aspects of the ideological point of view of the narrator.¹¹⁶ Accordingly, it is essential to understand how the narrator establishes and utilizes characters within the narrative. Major and minor characters are developed directly and indirectly by the narrator.

Major characters are often called *round characters* and can be identified by their role within the story as “full-fledged characters.”¹¹⁷ They are realistically portrayed as complex, sometimes contradictory, and difficult to predict. They are prone to change over the course of the story and are central to the plot.¹¹⁸ David is probably the best example of a round character in all the Hebrew Bible. As Bar-Efrat writes, “There is no doubt that

¹¹⁵ Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 88-89.

¹¹⁶ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 47.

¹¹⁷ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 82; Berlin, *Poetics*, 23; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 112.

¹¹⁸ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 71-72; Berlin, *Poetics*, 31-32; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 91; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 112; Walsh, *1 Kings*, xxi.

the most complex, deep and multi-faceted character in the Bible is David. We meet him in a large variety of situations, revealing different – and sometimes contradictory – aspects of his personality.”¹¹⁹ David’s centrality to the plot of 1 Samuel and to a coherent biblical theology suggests that a careful analysis of his character will reveal tremendous insight into the ideological point of view of the narrator of 1 Samuel.

Berlin makes a distinction between two categories of minor characters. *Flat characters* are simple, fleeting, one dimensional archetypes.¹²⁰ They usually embody a particular type of person and therefore lack distinctive personal features.¹²¹ *Agents*, on the other hand, have a purely functionary role within the story to progress the plot, to contribute to the setting, or to highlight aspects of round characters otherwise not revealed.¹²² Agents have no value in and of themselves as characters and no personal details are given about them.¹²³ Furthermore, they do not portray an archetype, such as *folly* or *wisdom*, as flat characters do.

All of these character types – round, flat, and agent – can be developed directly and indirectly. Direct characterization can be accomplished through description and declaration. Indirect characterization can be achieved through dialogue, action, and comparison between characters.

Direct characterization is a matter of fact statement by the narrator or by characters, including God, about any other particular character. Direct characterization may or may not be accurate. Normally, the narratee is best served by trusting the narrator

¹¹⁹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 91.

¹²⁰ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 82; Berlin, *Poetics*, 23; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 113.

¹²¹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 71-72; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 90; Berlin, *Poetics*, 31-32; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 91; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 113; Walsh, *1 Kings*, xxi.

¹²² Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 87-88; Berlin, *Poetics*, 32; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 113.

¹²³ Berlin, *Poetics*, 32.

and God (as depicted by the narrator in the story world), while being suspicious of direct characterization coming from any other character unless that character can be identified as a normative spokesperson for God (such as a prophet).¹²⁴

Although rare in Hebrew narrative, moments of description are obvious examples of direct characterization and can be identified as physical, inner-life, or personal descriptions. *Physical descriptions* paint a picture of the appearance or apparel of a character and are usually integral to the development of the plot.¹²⁵ *Inner-life descriptions* provide the narratee with information about the emotional, mental, or spiritual condition of a character, as well as his or her point of view and moral quality.¹²⁶ *Personal descriptions* may reveal the social status, vocation, or ancestry of a character, thus assisting the narratee to contextualize him or her within the story and in relation to other characters.¹²⁷

Closely related to description is *narrative declaration*. Declarative direct characterization is when the narrator makes an offline comment that clearly evaluates the action of a character.¹²⁸ An excellent example of this is the narrator's evaluative declaration in 2 Sam 11:27 about David's adultery, murder, and attempted cover up: "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." The narrator passes judgment on David's past action leaving no room for doubt.

Direct characterization by description and declaration advances the plot, provides insight into the personality of a character, and passes judgment on the motivation and

¹²⁴ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 75, 117; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 74-76, 95-102; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 54-64; Walsh, *1 Kings*, xxi.

¹²⁵ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48-49; Berlin, *Poetics*, 34; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 89; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 113.

¹²⁶ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 117; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 76; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 48-64; Berlin, *Poetics*, 37-38, 61; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 90; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 114.

¹²⁷ Berlin, *Poetics*, 36.

¹²⁸ Berlin, *Poetics*, 34.

action of characters. The accuracy of direct characterization depends upon how well it measures against the ideological point of view of the narrator. In some instances direct characterization will help the narratee to understand the narrator's ideological point of view and in other instances knowledge of the narrator's ideological point of view will help inform the narratee of the accuracy of the direct characterization. As previously mentioned, direct characterization from the narrator or from God normally informs the narratee of the narrator's ideological point of view. Direct characterization by characters, on the other hand, requires a sensitive comparison against the narrator's ideological point of view in order to be proved as accurate or disregarded as inaccurate.

Indirect characterization is developed by observing external aspects of a character, such as dialogue, action, and comparison between characters.¹²⁹ Indirect characterization is much more common in Hebrew narrative than direct.

Just as *dialogue* occasionally depicts a character directly, speech even more frequently occasions indirect characterization. What a character says and how he or she delivers this speech, including unique speaking styles and awkward syntax, always indirectly characterizes that individual by providing insight into his or her emotional, mental, or spiritual state, as well as his or her point of view, temperament, talent, social standing, or relationship with the interlocutor.¹³⁰ Occasionally the interlocutor is also indirectly characterized by his or her response, verbal or otherwise.¹³¹ Perhaps one of the most powerful uses of dialogue for indirect characterization is insight gained from a character's first words. Alter suggests that "the initial words spoken by a personage will

¹²⁹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 64.

¹³⁰ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 66-68; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 64-67; Berlin, *Poetics*, 38-39, 61-64; Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 100; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 114.

¹³¹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 64, 70, 72, 85; Berlin, *Poetics*, 64.

be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of character.”¹³² Each and every instance of speech, read in its proper context, is an opportunity to indirectly understand that character. Even when a character’s direct characterization of another character is deemed inaccurate, it is not superfluous. On the contrary, false direct characterization indirectly characterizes the one who has made the false statement. For example, a false statement may indicate deceit, naivety, or ignorance on the part of the speaker.

The way a character behaves in any given situation also suggests qualities in his or her personality.¹³³ “*Action* is the implementation of character, and individuals are disclosed through their deeds no less than through their words.”¹³⁴ Much like the real world, however, it can be very difficult to accurately discern a character’s motivation in any given action.¹³⁵ For this reason action contributes to the creation of vague inferences and must be understood in its proper context, with appropriate consideration of all evidence at hand.¹³⁶

Comparisons are often made between characters for a clearer and more complete understanding. For, whereas isolated portraits shed some light on an individual’s persona, the juxtaposition of characters more plainly defines each one.¹³⁷ So too, the correspondence of certain traits among two or more characters help to portray each person, enabling the narrator to import personality and temperament from one character to another by allusion.¹³⁸ Lastly, a character can be contrasted or paralleled with himself

¹³² Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 74.

¹³³ Berlin, *Poetics*, 38-39; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 114.

¹³⁴ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 77.

¹³⁵ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 77, 89; Longman, *Biblical Narrative*, 90.

¹³⁶ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 117; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 75.

¹³⁷ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 86-87; Berlin, *Poetics*, 40; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 116.

¹³⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 87-88.

or herself at different moments in the story to demonstrate a change or persistence of nature.¹³⁹

The major means of characterization in the Hebrew Bible is indirect. In many ways, therefore, the narratee learns about each character in very realistic ways, much like we come to know people in the real world. Speech, action, and character comparisons all contribute to the narratee's ability to understand and evaluate each person in the biblical story.

The narrator's ideological point of view is most often communicated through the depiction and interaction of characters. As Hofman argues, "The narrator emphasizes the lives of characters for didactic reasons, using them as examples of how one ought or ought not to live. Thus, characters often embody the meaning of the passage."¹⁴⁰ With the discovery of the ideological point of view as a primary goal of the methodology of this thesis, characterization will therefore feature paramount.

1.5.5 *Style*

In addition to the style inherent to narration, setting, plot, and characterization, the Hebrew Bible masterfully utilizes complex literary devices to achieve a timeless narrative that effectively communicates an ethic in accordance with the narrator's ideological point of view. For this reason many of the leading scholars in the field of narrative critical methodology refer to the *art* of biblical narrative:

Discussions of biblical narrative often have occasion to use the term 'art'... As I have come to understand it, 'art' in this context should not be understood only in the sense of 'skill', 'craft', 'technique' but in the sense of an art-form, like painting and music. Biblical narrative is a form of literary art.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Berlin, *Poetics*, 40.

¹⁴⁰ Hofman, "Tamar," 31.

¹⁴¹ Berlin, *Poetics*, 135.

As an art-form it follows that biblical narrative captures distinct styles by which we are able to recognize patterns of brilliance and creativity.¹⁴²

The study of style reveals shades of meaning that are subtly expressed by the narrator through the way a story is told.¹⁴³ From the many examples of style in biblical narrative this thesis will focus on the following: the sound of words, levels of meaning, repetition, and deliberate omission.

Although lost in translation and in the waning of oral tradition, the original biblical stories were written to have a distinct *sound of words*. Among these distinctions are paronomasia, alliteration, consonance, and rhyme.¹⁴⁴ Each of these sound techniques are deliberately employed by the narrator to tie words and passages together, thus linking their meanings as either emphasized, paralleled, or contrasted.

Word choice is an important element of style because all words and sentences have several *levels of meaning*. Words may be used to construct a metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, simile, irony, or rhetorical question.¹⁴⁵ All of these literary

¹⁴² Longman, *Biblical Interpretation*, 95.

¹⁴³ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 198.

¹⁴⁴ Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 201-202) writes that *paronomasia* is the repetition of words that sound similar but not identical. *Alliteration* is the repetition of a particular consonant at the beginning of words. *Consonance* is the repetition of vowel patterns in words. And *rhyme* is the repetition of sounds at the end of words.

¹⁴⁵ Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 207-208) writes that a *metonymy* is a word or phrase that is used in a non-literal sense even though the literal meaning is easily discerned. For example, in Esther 8:15 the narrator writes, "...while *the city* of Susa shouted and rejoiced." In this case, *the city* is a metonymy because we understand that the city did not rejoice, but rather *the people of the city* rejoiced; Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 208) also writes that A *synecdoche* is another example of a non-literal use of a word or phrase. In this case, however, the relationship between the literal and non-literal is between a part and the whole. For example, in Gen 3:6 we are told, "...the woman saw that *the tree* was good for food." Of course we understand that it was not the entire tree that was good for food, but rather *the fruit of the tree* that was appealing to the woman; Berlin (*Poetics*, 136) and Sternberg (*Poetics*, 165) write that a *metaphor* reveals commonality through analogy even through the two phenomena being compared originate from different spheres of meaning. Likewise, Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 209) gives the example of Num 16:30: "And the earth *opened its mouth and swallowed* them up." Clearly the earth does not have a mouth and it does not swallow as an animal would swallow. We understand, however, that this is a metaphor that adds layers of meaning to our understanding of the event; Sternberg (*Poetics*, 365) writes that A *simile* is comparable to a metaphor in that it creates an analogy between phenomena that come from dissimilar spheres of meaning;

devices confound a purely literal reading of the text because they add layers of meaning to words and phrases. Identifying when and why the narrator chooses to use them, therefore, is an important task *that promises to bear fruit*, metaphorically speaking.

Another important stylistic feature is *repetition*, which is manifested in many forms, including duplication, key words, leitwort, motif and type-scene.¹⁴⁶ Inherent to

Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 209-210) adds that The distinction between a metaphor and a simile is that a simile is an intentional comparison that usually employs the words *like* or *as*. For example, in 2 Samuel 2:18 it says, "Now Asahel was as swift of foot *as a wild gazelle*. The purpose of this simile is to compare Asahel's speed with the speed of a gazelle, even though it is doubtful that Asahel was truly that fleet; Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 210) writes that Parables are similes that have been expanded into miniature stories that draw comparisons within the overarching story; Longman (*Biblical Interpretation*, 98) writes that *Irony* is created when the literal meaning of a word or phrase is opposite to the intended meaning of that word or phrase; Bar-Efrat notices that in many ways, irony has a sarcastic tone, as in the case of Michal's retort to David in 2 Samuel 6:20, "But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, '*How the king of Israel honoured himself today*, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" Clearly, Michal does not mean to say that David honoured himself. Rather, her meaning is the exact opposite of her words, that David had shamed himself; Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 125), Ryken (*How to Read*, 55), and Hofman ("Tamar," 31) all make note that verbal irony, as just described, should not be confused with dramatic irony, which occurs when the narratee is privy to information that a character is not; Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 211) writes that a *rhetorical question* is asked to make a point, not to obtain an answer. The aim of the question is to persuade the audience by showing that the answer is plainly obvious. For example, in 2 Samuel 12:23 regarding his dead son David asks, "But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?" The answer is a resounding no; David cannot bring his son back from the dead.

¹⁴⁶ Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 211-212) and Sternberg (*Poetics*, 366) write that *duplication* is the verbatim or near verbatim repetition of a word or phrase. The duplication might be compounded by immediately repeating a word or phrase in order to add emphasis, or it may be separated by other words in order to create a symmetrical chiasm or to bond disconnected sections; Alter (*Biblical Narrative*, 27, 98-100), Longman (*Biblical Interpretation*, 96) and Sternberg (*Poetics*, 387-393) suggest that when duplication is not exactly verbatim the narratee is invited to ask why the alterations have been made. This is especially crucial if the duplication involves more than one character; Alter (*Biblical Narrative*, 92), Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 212-214) and Tate (*Biblical Interpretation*, 119) write that the repetition of *key words* or phrases in a story provides important hints as to the thematic undergirding of that particular narrative; Alter (*Biblical Narrative*, 95) posits that similar to key words and phrases is a *leitwort*, which is the repetition of a root-word in a variety of forms, which thus exhaust the semantic range of the word; Alter (*Biblical Narrative*) 92-95, Longman (*Biblical Interpretation*, 96), and Tate (*Biblical Interpretation*, 119) argue that like the employment of key words, a leitwort provides thematic cohesion and emphasis within a passage, as well as connection between otherwise unrelated passages and segments of passages. Identification of an important theme will undoubtedly help the narratee to recognize the narrator's ideological point of view; Alter (*Biblical Narrative*, 94-95) writes that Similar to leitwort is *motif*, which is the repetition of a tangible object, image, or action within a narrative that imports symbolic and thematic significance. Without the appropriate connection made, a motif lacks any significance in and of itself; Tate (*Biblical Interpretation*, 119) argues that On the other hand, comparisons between passages that share a particular motif will give the narratee superior understanding of each; Alter (*Biblical Narrative*, 49) writes that a *type-scene* is the predictable repetition of a particular literary structure in more than one passage or story. Alter identifies the presence of type-scenes by observing the "perplexing fact that in biblical narrative more or less the same story often seems to be told two or three or more times about different characters, or sometimes even about the same character in different sets of circumstances."; Alter (*Biblical*

both motif and type-scene is the idea of *allusion*, which occurs when one episode clearly refers to another through imagery, form, or direct quotation. This antecedent might be internal or external to the story or anthology of stories. Regardless, the reference by allusion infuses the current occurrence with meaning otherwise not understood.¹⁴⁷

A further example of repetition is the *envelope structure*, which duplicates words or themes at the beginning and end of a passage. By establishing a firm envelope the narrator is able to draw literary boundaries around a particular plot and this adds emphasis to that which is contained.¹⁴⁸ It is not uncommon for an envelope structure to include a *chiasm*, which is a series of envelope structures contained within one another creating a pattern such as the following: A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A'.¹⁴⁹ Each envelope in a chiasm accentuates a particular moment in the plot, often with heightened significance residing with the central keystone segment; "D" in the example above.

Repetition is used in a variety of ways. Duplication, key words, leitwort, motif, type-scenes, allusion, and envelope structures are all techniques meant to add cohesion and provide specific emphasis to a story. Repetition enables the narrator to skillfully impart meaning to words, phrases, and passages by highlighting a particular aspect of the story that would otherwise go unnoticed.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, the narratee must pay particular attention to moments of repetition in order to receive the full extent of the narrator's intentionality.

Narrative, 47-62, 95-96), Longman (*Biblical Interpretation*, 96), Sternberg (*Poetics*, 367) and Tate (*Biblical Interpretation*, 121) all agree that a type-scene can be identified by the recurrence of a fixed pattern of motifs, speech, or behavior in parallel situations.

¹⁴⁷ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 124.

¹⁴⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 216.

¹⁴⁹ Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 120.

¹⁵⁰ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 97; Berlin, *Poetics*, 136.

In contrast to the stylistic device of repetition, the narrator of biblical stories seems to frequently omit information that would be beneficial to the narratee. In comparison to contemporary Western literature the biblical narrative is filled with gaps. Many narrative critics have picked up on these gaps and have made a powerful argument that these holes in the story are actually sophisticated *deliberate omissions*.¹⁵¹

Though biblical narrative is often silent where later modes of fiction will choose to be loquacious, it is selectively silent in a purposeful way: about different personages, or about the same personages at different junctures of the narration, or about different aspects of their thought, feeling, behavior.¹⁵²

As Alter has indicated, deliberately omitted detail might be a moment of action, a plot structure, a clear analysis of cause and effect, definitive points of view, knowledge of a character's motive, plain overt characterization, or relationships between characters.¹⁵³ When any of these details is missing the narratee is required to enter into the story more fully in order to speculatively fill in the ambiguity. Of course some speculation is better than other speculation and therefore the narratee must be careful to look for direct or indirect corroboration of her hypotheses.¹⁵⁴ Sometimes a gap will even be filled in later by the narrator, thus resolving the suspense achieved by the deliberate omission.¹⁵⁵

Like all literature, biblical narrative has been written with great attention to style. Through the clever employment of paronomasia, alliteration, consonance, and rhyme, the narrator is able to draw aspects of the story together by the very sounds of words. He is also able to artistically play with the levels of meaning of words and phrases by appealing to metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, simile, irony, and rhetorical questioning. The

¹⁵¹ Sternberg, *Poetics*, 230.

¹⁵² Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 115.

¹⁵³ Sternberg, *Poetics*, 233, 235.

¹⁵⁴ Sternberg, *Poetics*, 240.

¹⁵⁵ Tannehill, "Narrative Criticism," 488 (as cited by Hofman, "Tamar," 29.)

repetition of verbatim and near verbatim duplication, key words, leitworts, motifs, type-scenes, allusions, and envelope structures instill deeper meaning to otherwise simple stories. And finally, by deliberately omitting information the narrator creates gaps in order to produce intentional ambiguity and dramatic suspense thus drawing the narratee into the story. The style of the Hebrew Bible has captivated audiences for thousands of years in a way that only a master storyteller could. Accordingly, the biblical story is one of tremendous depth, artistry, and adventure.

Not every aspect of style will be utilized in this thesis. Furthermore, analysis of style will be deliberately integrated into the execution of the four other elements of this methodology. Nevertheless, in setting up a comprehensive methodology it has been important to note the various aspects of style that contribute to narrative artistry.

1.5.6 Methodological Summary

By paying close attention to elements of narration, setting, plot, characterization, and style, the methodology of this thesis will observe and analyze details of storytelling that will enlighten our understanding of the Hebrew Bible. The objective is to identify the narrator's ideological point of view from all aspects of the story and apply our insight to achieve a better understanding of the ethics, worldview, and message being carefully recommended by the narrator.

1.6 Thesis Statement

In 1 Samuel David is a complicated and central character. Many commentators have suggested that David's rise to power showcases his phenomenal loyalty and fidelity. Others have argued that in 1 Samuel David demonstrates a much more ruthless pursuit of

power than traditional commentators are willing to recognize. Employing a narrative critical methodology, as outlined in this chapter, is the best way to determine which of these contrasting views best fits David's character in 1 Samuel. In so doing we will be able to investigate the narrative qualities that shape who the narrator has presented David to be.

In chapter two I will carefully and comprehensively study 1 Sam 25 according to the methodology outlined above. Observations made about the narration, setting, plot, characterization, and style will provide a solid foundation for chapter three, which will demonstrate that 1 Sam 25 is pivotal to the narrator's characterization of David in 1 Sam 24-26.

In chapter three, after having put 1 Sam 25 into context within the literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26, connections will be drawn between Nabal and Saul, David and his men, and David and Abigail. These parallels will help to prove that the narrator of 1 Sam 24-26 has portrayed David as a character who acts in a restrained and an unrestrained manner in each chapter. Although these two demeanors appear mutually exclusive, it will be demonstrated that they are not. The reason they seem opposed to one another is that whereas David's inclination toward unrestraint is rightly attributed to his immorality, far too frequently David's restrained disposition is accredited to a moral virtue intrinsic to his character. This thesis will demonstrate that his restraint is not an expression of moral virtue, but rather is an expression of his self-centered political ambition. Therefore, the narrator presents David as a man who is politically brilliant and morally deficient, a man who is not to be emulated.

Chapter Two: A Comprehensive Narrative Look at 1 Samuel 25

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this second chapter is to conduct a disciplined analysis of 1 Sam 25 according to the strict parameters described in the methodology. As a result, David, who is the focus of this thesis, will feature as a single part of the whole. Specific focus on David will be reserved for the conclusions of chapter three, which will seek to synthesize all aspects of the methodology as they relate to an understanding of the characterization of David in 1 Sam 24-26.

A second repercussion of rigorously adhering to the methodology outlined in chapter one is that there will be some overlap in each of the four sections to follow. The overlap will be minimized by the intentional focus each section will adopt. It is impossible to entirely extract narration, setting, plot, and characterization from each other since they all work together to accomplish the narrator's end. Nevertheless, there is merit in considering each aspect of narrative art separately in order that details pertaining to each can be identified and considered in their respective foregrounds.

The temptation that arises in narrative criticism is to favour one or two aspects of the methodology over and above the rest according to the interests of the critic who is conducting the study. In the case of this thesis, which is primarily a character study of David in 1 Sam 24-26, this potential pitfall is a very real one. A strict and exclusive character study, however, could not shed the appropriate and needed light required to accurately discern David's character. Therefore, to an exhaustive examination of 1 Sam 25 we now turn our attention.

2.2 *Narration*

As indicated in the summary of chapter one, the main objective of this methodological approach is to uncover the narrator's ideological point of view. The appropriate venue to draw conclusions concerning this ideological point of view is in the synthesis that will be accomplished after careful observation of narration, setting, plot, and characterization. In the case of this thesis, the narrator's ideological point of view will be apparent by the time we arrive at the conclusions of chapter three. This preliminary section on narration, therefore, will focus on the narrator's spatial, temporal, and psychological points of view.

2.2.1 *Spatial Point of View of the Narrator*

The narrator demonstrates spatial omnipresence and omniscience in 1 Sam 25 by his ability to be in all places at all times. He is able to report Samuel's death and burial in Ramah, David's movement from Ramah to the wilderness of Paran to the ravine near Carmel, the location of Nabal's homestead in Maon and sheep-shearing activity in Carmel, the movement of David's messengers back and forth from the wilderness of Paran to Carmel, Abigail's plotting and trekking to meet David in a ravine near Carmel, Abigail's return to Nabal, Nabal's death, David's response to Nabal's death, the retrieval of Abigail by David's messengers, David's taking of Ahinoam as a wife, and Saul's marrying of Michal to Palti. Furthermore, the narrator conveys the discourse between characters in each locale as if he were present and observing.

The narrator carefully controls the scope of his spatial point of view by intentionally divulging or withholding information. For example, although the syntax suggests that David was present at Samuel's funeral and burial in Ramah, the narratee

cannot be absolutely certain.¹ Likewise, at the end of the chapter the narratee is told that David took Ahinoam as his wife, but she is never told the circumstances surrounding this marriage. The narrator is also able to control the scope of his spatial point of view by the way he develops the plot. For example, the narratee has no option but to transition from Samuel's burial in Ramah to Nabal's sheep-shearing in Carmel. All of these examples illustrate the control the narrator exercises over the scope of the story. A more detailed analysis of the narrator's scope will be delineated in the upcoming sections concerning plot and setting. The important point to note in this section is that the narrator, who is spatially omnipresent and omniscient, has full authority over the presentation and development of the scope of the story.

2.2.2 Temporal Point of View of the Narrator

The narrator transcends the narrated time of 1 Sam 25, which means that he stands *outside* or *above* the passage of time internal to the story. Evidence of this supposition is the narrator's off-line comments signaled by the Hebrew construction of *simple-waw plus non-verb*. In such instances the narrator is signaling a break from the backbone of the sequentially unfolding story through the use of disjunctive syntax so that he can make a parenthetical statement.² Parenthetical statements are, by their very nature, external to the narrated time of the story and therefore demonstrate overt narration. Overt narration is the direct commentary of the narrator, which causes the narrator's presence to be concretely felt outside the space and time of the story. An example of this is 1 Sam 25:2, "Now there was a man in Maon..." This verse begins with וְאִי, a *simple-waw plus non-verb* indicating a break from the temporal progression of the story. Since the narrator

¹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 259.

² Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 577.

is able to stop the narrated time, in order to make off-line comments, it is clear that he is neither internal to it nor bound by it.³

2.2.3 *Psychological Point of View of the Narrator*

The narrator can further demonstrate his omniscience by revealing the inner-lives of characters in 1 Sam 25. For example, the narrator is aware that Abigail is “good of understanding” and that Nabal is “harsh.” Although both these qualities can and will be externally displayed through action, they are internal temperaments that the narrator is aware of from the beginning and he brings them to the attention of the narratee at the outset of the story.⁴ In 1 Sam 25:21 it is not clear if David is speaking to himself or to his men. If he is speaking to himself, or “in his heart,” then this would be another example of the narrator’s omniscient psychological point of view into the inner lives of characters.⁵

Through most of the chapter, however, the narrator is covertly reticent in his presentation of the inner-lives of the characters. Motive is never overtly delineated for any of the characters, which compels the narratee to ponder why Nabal, Abigail, and David each act the way that they do. Even YHWH’s motive for striking Nabal dead is not disclosed by the narrator, although David attributes Nabal’s death to divine validation for his cause. The narratee is not obliged to agree with David’s assessment of Nabal’s death since the narrator is carefully ambiguous on this matter.

The narrator’s discretion in disclosing the inner-lives of characters should not be considered to be a limitation of his knowledge, but rather the craftiness with which he has constructed this story, relying heavily on covert narration. On account of the narrator’s

³ For a list and translation of all parenthetical statements in 1 Sam 25, see *Appendix A* of this thesis.

⁴ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 53.

⁵ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 63.

silence surrounding the inner-motives of each character the narratee is invited into the messiness of the machinations of the chapter.

2.2.4 *Narration Summary*

By observing the spatial, temporal, and psychological points of view of the narrator it is clear that he is omnipresent and omniscient within the story and therefore he is reliable and authoritative. The following analysis of setting, plot, and characterization will depend on the attribution of these qualities to the narrator in order that conclusions may be drawn about the story. Careful analysis will be required since much of the chapter is narrated covertly. Ultimately, the narrator's ideological point of view, as it pertains to the characterization of David, will be highlighted in the conclusion of chapter three once the various narrative elements have been thoroughly analyzed.

2.3 *Setting*

This section will look at the setting structure of the chapter as well as the narrator's use of time and space.⁶

2.3.1 *Setting structure*

Within 1 Sam 25 there are events, scenes, and acts, which can be divided as follows:⁷

- I. Act One: Prelude
 - A. Scene One: Funeral of Samuel
 - i. Event One: Samuel dies (v. 1)
 - ii. Event Two: All Israel gathers to mourn (v. 1)
 - iii. Event Three: Samuel is buried at his house in Ramah (v. 1)
 - B. Scene Two: David goes to Paran

⁶ Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 258) recognizes that 1 Sam 25 begins with the introduction of time and space: "The introduction begins with time and place. The place: a property in Carmel. The time: shearing of the sheep."

⁷ For a different division, see: Biddle, "1 Samuel 25," 621; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 255-256.

- i. Event One: David arises and goes to wilderness of Paran (v. 1)

II. Act Two: David and the House of Nabal

A. Scene One: David's request

- i. Event One: David hears Nabal is shearing his sheep (v. 4)
- ii. Event Two: David commissions ten young men to go to Carmel to request supplies from Nabal (v. 5-8)

B. Scene Two: Nabal's reply

- i. Event One: David's ten young men entreat with Nabal (v. 9)
- ii. Event Two: Nabal rebuffs David's ten young men (v. 10-11)
- iii. Event Three: David's ten young men return to David (v. 12)

C. Scene Three: David's reaction

- i. Event One: David's ten young men report Nabal's rebuff (v. 12)
- ii. Event Two: David commands his men to gird their swords (v. 13)
- iii. Event Three: David girds his own sword (v. 13)
- iv. Event Four: David leads 400 of his men against Nabal (v. 13)

D. Scene Four: Abigail's response

- i. Event One: One of Nabal's men reports to Abigail (v. 14-17)
- ii. Event Two: Abigail prepares supplies to offer as a gift to David (v. 18)
- iii. Event Three: Abigail tells her men to ride ahead of her to meet David (v. 19)
- iv. Event Four: Abigail follows her men without informing Nabal (v. 19)

III. Act Three: David and Abigail

A. Scene One: David and Abigail meet

- i. Event One: Abigail approaches David (v. 20)
- ii. Event Two: David swears an oath against the men of the house of Nabal (v. 21-22)
- iii. Event Three: Abigail prostrates herself before David (v. 23)

B. Scene Two: Abigail persuades David

- i. Event One: Abigail delivers a long and profound speech to David (v. 24-31)
- ii. Event Two: David blesses YHWH and Abigail (v. 32-34)
- iii. Event Three: David accepts Abigail's gift and sends her home (v. 35)

IV. Act Four: Abigail and Nabal

A. Scene One: Abigail finds Nabal feasting

- i. Event One: Abigail returns home (v. 36)
- ii. Event Two: Nabal is feasting and is drunk (v. 36)
- iii. Event Three: Abigail retires without speaking to Nabal (v. 36)

B. Scene Two: The morning after

- i. Event One: Nabal is sobering up (v. 37)
- ii. Event Two: Abigail tells Nabal all that had happened (v. 37)

- iii. Event Three: Nabal's heart dies within him and he becomes like a stone (v. 37)

V. Act Five: Nabal is Dead

A. Scene One: Nabal dies

- i. Event One: YHWH strikes Nabal so he dies (v. 38)

B. Scene Two: David takes Abigail

- i. Event One: David hears Nabal is dead (v. 39)
- ii. Event Two: David sends for Abigail (v. 39)
- iii. Event Three: David's servants speak to Abigail (v. 40)
- iv. Event Four: Abigail prostrates herself and speaks to David's servants (v. 41)
- v. Event Five: Abigail returns with David's servants (v. 42)
- vi. Event Six: Abigail marries David (v. 42)

VI. Act Six: Postlude

A. Scene One: David's Other Wives

- i. Event One: David takes Ahinoam to be his wife (v. 43)

B. Scene Two: David's Other Wives, Part Two

- i. Event One: Saul gives Michal to Palti to be his wife (v. 44)

Identifying the setting structure of 1 Sam 25 is helpful because it divides the story into small sections that can be easily examined and discussed. The subdivisions of acts, scenes, and events create a literary setting through which the narrator and narratee are able to interact with one another. Within this setting structure time and space, which give volume to the setting, must be considered.

2.3.2 Time

The narration time of 1 Sam 25 is short, requiring mere minutes to read. The narrated time, on the other hand, spans several weeks, or even months, as the plot progresses from the death of Samuel to the marriage of David and Abigail. The focus of the plot, however, is much shorter, occupying a single day and the morning after.⁸

Act One (1 Sam 25:1) progresses swiftly as the narrator quickly summarizes the death, funeral, and internment of Samuel, as well as the movement of David. It is difficult

⁸ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 258.

to know exactly how much narrated time elapses in Act One but clearly the ratio between narration time and narrated time is considerable. The narrator quickly brushes through the narrated time by providing very few details. The importance of Act One seems to lie in the fact that Samuel has died and his presence therefore no longer looms over the narrative (at least until he is awakened in 1 Sam 28!).⁹ The narratee is free to assume that the details of Samuel's death are inconsequential since the narrator chooses not to linger over them.

Act Two (1 Sam 25:2-19) has the most verses of any act in the chapter. It opens with preliminary exposition that stops the narrated time. The narrator is careful to describe Nabal and Abigail in detail while the forward momentum of the story is frozen. It is clear, therefore, that the information provided in 1 Sam 25:2-3 will be important as the story unfolds. More attention will be given to the information imparted in these verses in the section on characterization.

Furthermore, it must be recognized that from this point forward, 1 Sam 25 becomes a narrative tangent that, on the surface, seems oddly placed between chapters 24 and 26:

As syntax suggests, it (1 Sam 25) goes disjunctive and lateral rather than forward, and so makes an odd fit between the stories involving pursuit of Saul and David. A less subtle way to say the same thing is that the story of David's interaction with two characters new to the story (Abigail and Nabal) seems oddly inserted.¹⁰

In addition to the jarring shift in plot progression, the syntax Green is referring to is the *simple-waw plus non-verb* that begins Act Two, ואיש במעון ומעשהו בכרמל (Now, there was a man in Maon and his business was in Carmel). The departure from the narrative

⁹ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 174-175.

¹⁰ Green, "1 Samuel 25," 4.

backbone (via the *waw-consecutive plus imperfect verb*) signals an offline comment that disrupts the forward movement of time.

Action resumes when David hears that Nabal is shearing his sheep. It is difficult to discern whether the return to narrative backbone resumes the story chronologically following after Act One, or whether the entire episode concerning Abigail and Nabal is temporally displaced. Nevertheless, action recommences.

David's instructions to his men create a 1:1 ratio between narration time and narrated time, indicating that the specific words David chooses are important to understanding the story. Otherwise the narrator could have summarized David's orders to his men, just as he summarizes the words of David's young men to Nabal in the first event of Act Two, Scene Two (1 Sam 25:9). In the second event of Act Two, Scene Two (1 Sam 25:10-11) the narrator again provides Nabal's exact words, demonstrating the importance of those words to the understanding of the story. And then again, the narrator does not report the words of David's young men when they report back, but rather he summarizes their speech by writing, "Then they came in and they told him in accordance with all these words" (1 Sam 25:12). This narrative strategy informs the narratee that the messengers are not important in this scene. Rather, it is the conversation taking place between David and Nabal that must be carefully observed.

To demonstrate the impulsiveness of David's reaction, the narrator further accelerates narrated time in 1 Sam 25:13 by crisply including David's command that each man gird his sword and then he quickly piles action on top of action: "So they girded, each man their sword and David also girded his sword. Then they went up after David..." Immediately on the heels of this fast tempo narration, the narrator momentarily pauses

the narrated time to tell the narratee that about 400 men went up with David, while 200 remained behind with the equipment. This detail, placed on the outer edge of accelerated narrated time, is therefore important for the narratee's interpretation of what is taking place. It may be, for example, that David was not in dire need of supplies if 200 men were required to guard what supplies he already had. His reaction, therefore, may be an overreaction.¹¹ Unless the narrator had paused narrated time to provide this small detail, the narratee would have no reason to consider this possible wrinkle in the story.

The setting changes location in Act Two, Scene Four (1 Sam 25:14), as one of Nabal's men reports to Abigail in favour of David and his men. The opening syntax suggests that there is a disjunction in the forward movement of time. Rather than the regular *waw-consecutive plus imperfect verb* structure that we would expect if the story were proceeding in chronological fashion, the verse opens with a *simple-waw plus non-verb*:

ולאביגיל אשת נבל הגיד נער-אחד מהנערים לאמר

(Now, to Abigail, the wife of Nabal, one young man reported saying...)

The result is that this episode is being introduced as a flashback with the effect being that the activity in Maon and the activity at David's camp are happening simultaneously.¹² By doing this the narrator heightens the suspense and dramatic effect of the unfolding story.¹³

Again, discourse slows narrated time to a ratio of 1:1 with narration time. The words of Nabal's young man, which strike a chord with David's words previously given, propel Abigail to action and narrated time again speeds up. Collecting supplies, Abigail

¹¹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263.

¹² Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 183; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 582.

¹³ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 150.

acts quickly and is on her way to meet David in a matter of verses. This hurried narration is pivotal in characterizing Abigail as a wise woman of action. She does not dally or need to deliberate for long.

The beginning of Act Three (1 Sam 25:20-35) unfolds quickly as David and Abigail rail toward one another on a collision course. Immediately the narratee is told that Abigail is in the ravine and that David and his men were coming right for her. Then, in 1 Sam 25:21, the narrator slows narrated time to record a flashback of David speaking to himself or to his men. The narratee knows David's speech is a parenthetical aside again because of the *simple-waw plus non-verb* syntax: **וְדָוִד אָמַר** (Now, David had said...).¹⁴ The purpose of this deceleration is to remind the narratee of David's irate state of mind and to intensify the suspense for the upcoming meeting. Narrated time again speeds up as Abigail, upon seeing David, again hurriedly dismounts her donkey and prostrates herself before the leader of the raging war party threatening Nabal's house. At this climactic moment, the narrator slows the narrated time to a ratio of 1:1 for the longest duration in the entire chapter as Abigail gives her masterful speech to David. The narrated time continues to proceed at the same pace until the end of the act when David blesses YHWH and Abigail and takes the supplies provided for him. Act Three, Scene Two (1 Sam 25:24-35) is the longest scene in the chapter and the most accurate to life, with a steady 1:1 ratio between narrated time and narration time. As it occupies the centre of the chapter as well, the narratee has good reason to consider it to be of substantial importance in the chapter.

¹⁴ Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 585.

Act Four (1 Sam 25:36-37) is a short fast moving sequence requiring only two verses. The purpose of this act is to bridge Acts Three and Five and therefore narrated time moves quickly as action is heaped on top of action. Abigail returns home to find Nabal feasting. She goes to bed without speaking to him and in the morning she divulges the previous day's happenings. The narratee will notice that the narrator does not record what Abigail says to Nabal. What she says does not seem to be as important as the reaction it solicits. Nabal's heart dies in his chest and he becomes like a stone.

Fast forward ten days and enter Act Five (1 Sam 25:38-42). It seems that the details surrounding the missing week and a half are of no concern to the narrator and, therefore, should be of no concern to the narratee. That said, the rhetorical effect of Nabal lingering in the throws of death is a powerful image for the narratee to consider, especially since it will help connect Nabal with Saul.¹⁵ After the announcement of Nabal's death, narrated time moves quickly as a sequence of events unfolds to ensure the marriage of David and Abigail.

Finally, Act Six (1 Sam 25:43-44) does not advance narrated time at all, but simply serves to inform the narratee of the state of David's other wives, including his loss of Michal to Palti. Since the narrator has appended these notices to the chapter the narratee must consider them significant, especially given they do not advance the narrated time of the story.

The focus of the chapter is clearly Acts Two to Five, which occur during a period of a few weeks from start to finish. The hastening and slowing of narrated time helps the narratee to focus on the details most important to the narrator. Dialogue dominates the

¹⁵ More will be discussed about this in the Nabal-Saul connection in chapter three.

foreground as conversations, which transpire in narrated time equal to narration time, have life and death consequences.

2.3.3 *Space*

The narrator creates a setting that includes space as well as time. The mention of real places and the description of environmental backdrops give the story an authentic and historic feel.¹⁶

Act One (1 Sam 25:1) opens in Ramah of Ephraim, Samuel's original hometown.¹⁷ Although Samuel had been raised by Eli in the cultic centre of Shiloh, Samuel's parents came from Ramah and Samuel returned periodically, ultimately relocating there (1 Sam 7:17).¹⁸ The burial at his home should not be considered an uncommon practice.¹⁹ From the funeral scene the narratee is told that David "arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran." This geographical notice is perplexing because Paran is located on the Sinai Peninsula, which is far to the south of the other locales that feature in this chapter. The LXX reads that David went down to the wilderness of Maon, which would seem to make more sense, given the proceeding setting of the chapter. Accordingly, many commentators are comfortable emending the MT to fit more precisely

¹⁶ Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 257) cites Nabal's residence in Maon and farming base in Carmel as an example of "realism" in the storytelling.

¹⁷ Klein (*1 Samuel*, 5) wrestles with the location of Ramah: "On the basis of Eusebius and Jerome, scholars identify Ramathaim with Rentis, about 16 miles E. of Tel Aviv. This Ephraimite locale is also intended in [1 Sam 1:19] though in subsequent chapters (e.g. 1 Sam 7:17) Ramah is probably the Benjaminite city of er-Ram, situated about 5 miles N. of Jerusalem. Ramathaim is the same as Arimathea in the NT (Matt 27:57). While the bulk of tradition associates Samuel with the Ramah of Benjamin (er-Ram), the first verse of the book – and possibly v 19 and 2:11 – represent an alternate Ephraim tradition. According to 9:5-6 the home of Samuel was in the land of Zuph, also in Ephraim."

¹⁸ There is debate concerning whether Samuel relocated to Ramah of Benjamin or Ramah of Ephraim.

¹⁹ Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 199.

with the LXX.²⁰ However, there is no need to emend the text from Paran to Maon because it is entirely plausible that David is traversing a wide terrain at this point in his career.²¹ By keeping with the MT the narratee is astonished to discover how much ground David is navigating as a fugitive while in exile from Saul. As Bodner writes: “At times David attempts to get as far away from Saul as possible (e.g. Paran in the south), while at other times he is content to advance his cause closer to home (e.g. Maon in Judah), as we see in the next sentence.”²²

In Act Two (1 Sam 25:2-19) the setting shifts to Maon and Carmel, which are located a few miles apart near Hebron in Judah.²³ Maon is named after one of the descendents of Caleb (1 Chron 2:45), who was given Hebron as an inheritance from Joshua. It was in Carmel that Saul erected a monument in his own honour (1 Sam 15:12) and it is in the wilderness of Maon where Saul almost catches David (1 Sam 23), which suggests that those living and working in Maon/Carmel may be exceedingly pro-Saul subjects.²⁴ This detail adds some texture to the interchange between David and Nabal later in the chapter.

In 1 Sam 25:4 the narratee is ambiguously informed that David is in the wilderness. It is not clear if David is in the wilderness near Maon and Carmel or still in the wilderness of Paran. Furthermore, David’s camp is not well described. Upon the

²⁰ Alter, *David Story*, 152; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 147; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 256; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 199; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 245, 247; Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 12; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 133.

²¹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 259; Fox (*Give Us a King*, 121) preserves the MT tradition, maintaining that David went into the wilderness of Maon; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 575.

²² Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 260; Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 259) mentions that it is interesting that Ishmael was banished to Paran after being estranged from Abraham (Gen 21). David is also in a state of banishment, making the connection with Ishmael a powerful statement on David’s current situation.

²³ Alter, *David Story*, 152; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 260; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 201; Tsumura (*1 Samuel*, 576) notes that this is not Mt. Carmel located to the north, but rather a town near Hebron.

²⁴ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 260; Bodner, *National Insecurity*, 172; Edelman, *King Saul*, 215 (also cited by Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 268); Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Green, “1 Samuel 25,” 10; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 247.

return of the dispatched ten young men the only description of the camp that is given is that there is a stash of equipment requiring the guardianship of two hundred able bodied soldiers. The precise location remains a mystery.

The story quickly shifts to Abigail who may be in Carmel or may be in Maon. No description is given of Abigail's exact whereabouts but the narratee is sure to assume that Abigail is at one of her two home bases near Hebron, for she is able to quickly muster an impressive consignment of supplies for David.

Act Three (1 Sam 25:20-35) opens with Abigail "going down into the ravine of the mountain and behold, David and his men were coming down to meet her." The topographical description of a ravine effectively sets a limited stage with no clear escape route for Abigail should her effort of diplomacy fail. The narratee can imagine the ravine to be narrow and surrounded by higher ground, which means that Abigail has no choice but to meet the approaching David head on. In 1 Sam 25:20, David is not aware of Abigail's approach because she is hidden by the lay of the mountain, but she can see David armed and ready for battle.²⁵ This spatial setting adds texture to the plot and heightens the suspense of the story.²⁶

The mountain setting reminds the narratee of 1 Sam 23, when David and Saul were on a similar collision course for armed conflict.²⁷ In the previous chapter, an envoy arrived announcing a Philistine raid, thus whisking Saul away to foreign war and preventing a clash with David. In this chapter, a similar stroke of fate stops the potentially bloody grudge match. This time, however, it is Abigail who is the pacifier.²⁸

²⁵ Alter, *David Story*, 155.

²⁶ Alter, *David Story*, 155.

²⁷ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 249.

²⁸ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 266.

In Act Four (1 Sam 25:36-37) Abigail returns home, probably to Maon, and finds Nabal feasting in his house like a king. The narratee may presume that Nabal died in Maon and that Abigail remained in Maon until she is summoned by David to be his wife.

The last mention of space in the chapter is in Act Six (1 Sam 25:43-44), when the narrator mentions that Michal's new husband, Palti, is from Gallim. This information is not of great significance to the unfolding of the story.

As is usual in Hebrew narrative, space is not very well described or developed in 1 Sam 25. The main city names of Maon and Carmel anchor the story near Hebron, which will become an important area for David as he aspires to kingship in Judah. David's camp remains elusive, which is compounded by the differing glosses of the MT and LXX.

2.3.4 *Setting Summary*

The setting is a container for the story, which includes a setting structure and the development of time and space. The setting structure of 1 Sam 25 can be divided into six acts. The contours of narrated time give priority to acts two through five, with a special focus on acts two and three, which require 34 of the 44 verses. Although the space is not described in detail, the story is clearly centered on Maon and Carmel, which are the home and work hubs of Nabal and Abigail.

Analysis of the setting will become increasingly significant in chapter three as 1 Sam 25 is contextualized within 1 Sam 24-26. In order to make suppositions about David's character, connections must be made between these three chapters. Accordingly, although it seems at this juncture that little profit is made as it relates to David's characterization, setting will play a role in the broader intent of this thesis, which is to tie

1 Sam 25 into the literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26 in order to understand the narrator's characterization of David more clearly.

2.4 Plot

In this section the plot structure and type of 1 Sam 25 will be considered. Plot evaluation will be integrated into the narrator's ideological point of view in chapter three.

2.4.1 Plot Structure²⁹

The death of Samuel provides a curious expositional introduction to a chapter that seemingly has nothing to do with Samuel.³⁰ The death of Samuel, however, provides an integral backdrop to the dynamic of the characters, especially between David and Saul, even though Saul does not overtly feature in this chapter. Although Samuel has been largely absent in the narrative since 1 Sam 16, Samuel has had a lasting presence:

Since the initial anointing (16:1-13), Samuel has been absent from the David narrative, except for the odd interaction of 19:18-24. Nevertheless, Samuel has been a powerful presence for David. Samuel's promissory act of anointing has energized David, nullified Saul, and given the narrative its forward thrust. Such a decisive agent will characteristically shape narrative history far beyond his visible appearance.³¹

With Samuel's death announcement, the narratee must come to terms with the end of his influence in the narrative.³²

In addition, it may simply be that Samuel's death is announced at this juncture in the plot because it fit chronologically at this point in the story.³³ It also affords the

²⁹ For other plot summaries, read: Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 255-256; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 246; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 133-136.

³⁰ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 116.

³¹ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 175.

³² As far as the narratee is aware, the death of Samuel inaugurates the end of his appearances in the story. Samuel's appearance in 1 Sam 28, therefore, will come as a shocking surprise demonstrating that even in death Samuel looms large over the narrative.

³³ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 35; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 259; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 198.

narrator the opportunity to locate David in the wilderness of Paran directly following Samuel's funeral.³⁴

As a second part to the exposition, the narrator introduces two new characters, Nabal and his wife Abigail.³⁵ The narratee is informed of Nabal's living and working quarters and of his tremendous wealth. Nabal is characterized as a harsh and wicked man and Abigail as a wise and beautiful woman. These traits will quickly become important in the unfolding of the plot.³⁶

Action begins once David is alerted that Nabal is shearing his sheep.³⁷ Immediately a string of preliminary incidents thrusts the plot forward from a moment of tranquility to a moment of conflict. David sends ten young men to Carmel to entreat Nabal for supplies. After hearing David's request through these young men Nabal refuses to acquiesce to David's demands. This is the occasioning incident that generates conflict.³⁸ The conflict escalates quickly as David calls for his men to gird their swords in order to extinguish all the men in Nabal's house. Meanwhile, the conflict is also escalating back at Nabal's house, as one of Nabal's young men approaches Abigail and apprises her of the dire situation. Abigail acts quickly to save her husband's house from

³⁴ McCarter, *I Samuel*, 388.

³⁵ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 113.

³⁶ Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 119) observes that Abigail is well introduced at the beginning of the plot in which she features. This demonstrates that she will play a leading role in the unfolding of the plot; Bodner, *National Insecurity*, 172; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 175.

³⁷ Nabal's sheep-shearing activity in 1 Sam 25:2 is reminiscent of Laban's sheep-shearing in Gen 31:19-20. As Bodner (*I Samuel*, 261) muses: "The reader first encounters sheep-shearing in Gen. 31:19-20. When Laban the Aramean goes to shear his sheep, Rachel steals his gods and Jacob steals his heart by not telling his father-in-law that he is about to flee. Now, commentators are most helpful when they point out that the name Nabal is Laban spelled backwards. At a minimum, such nomenclature presents the reader with the very real possibility that Nabal is about to get fleeced." also: Biddle, "1 Samuel 25," 623; Fox (*Give Us a King*, 121) also muses that Nabal is an anagram of Laban. The motif of sheep-shearing, therefore, alerts the narratee to the potential for shady undertakings to transpire, as they surely do in 1 Sam 25.

³⁸ Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 15.

certain destruction by putting together an abundant care package in an effort to pacify David and his men.³⁹

The climax is most intense as David and Abigail approach one another in the ravine and the narratee is reminded of David's oath: "So, may God do severely to the enemies of David, and so may he do more, if I spare – from all which are his – by the morning any who piss against a wall" (1 Sam 25:22). This is the most intense part of the climax because David is symbolically attacking Nabal with his words, much like he symbolically attacks Saul by cutting the hem of his robe (1 Sam 24:4) and steals his spear and water jug (1 Sam 26:12). Abigail sees David and throws herself prostrate before the seething king-in-waiting and the narratee is not sure how David will react to Abigail's vulnerable display. Abigail's prolonged speech successfully begins to unravel the conflict and resolution is initiated.⁴⁰

The plot decelerates as David affirms Abigail's intervention by blessing YHWH and Abigail. The original conflict is resolved in full when David takes the supplies offered to him by Abigail: "Then David took from her hand that which she had carried for him and to her he said, 'To me, for peace for your house! See, I have heard your voice and I will lift up your faces'" (1 Sam 25:35).

The outcome of the plot requires Abigail to return home to find that Nabal is feasting like a king and that his heart is good within him because he had been drinking exceedingly. In the morning Abigail tells Nabal all that had happened the day before and

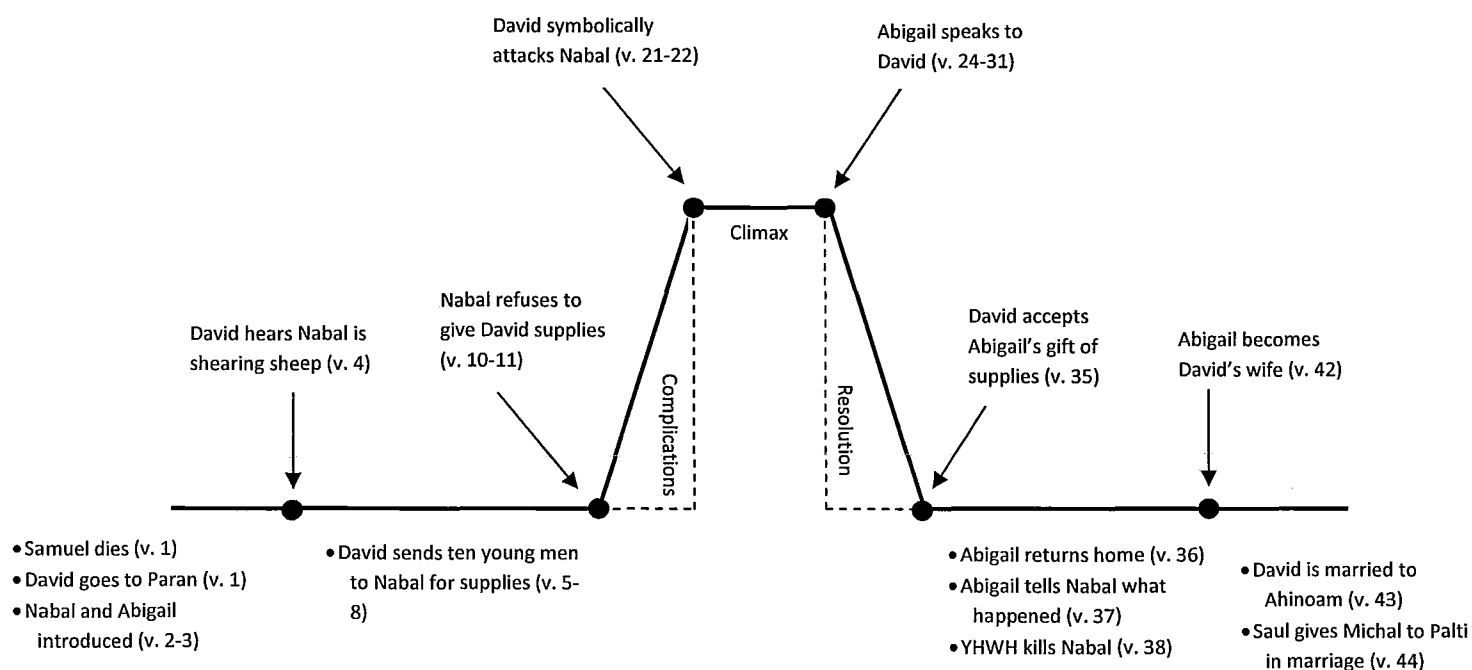
³⁹ Abigail's pacifying tactic is another allusion to the Genesis narrative. Abigail packs a considerable peace offering for David in much the same way Jacob prepared a gift package for Esau, who, like David, was approaching with a small army of four hundred men. In both instances the gift-bearing personage is spared from violence.

⁴⁰ Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 95, 125) affirms that the climax of this plot is the turning point induced by Abigail. She, therefore, features as the climactic heroin of the story.

his heart dies within him and he becomes like a stone. Ten days later YHWH strikes Nabal and he dies. When David hears that Nabal has died, he sends for Abigail to be his wife. Upon her arrival, and her assumption within the small but growing harem, the action ends.

The chapter concludes with a few pieces of additional expositional information. The narratee is informed that Abigail is David's third wife, after Michal and Ahinoam. We are also told that Saul took Michal, David's first wife, and gave her in marriage to Palti.

The diagram of this plot structure is as follows:



2.4.2 Plot Type

Determining the plot type of 1 Sam 25 depends largely on which point of view the narratee chooses to view it from. From a Davidic point of view the plot type is concentric, meaning that circumstances are relatively similar at the beginning and end of the chapter. From Abigail's point of view, the plot type might be considered to be

comedic. Although Abigail does not lose much (except for a husband!), the risks are great and her final gain, appropriation into a future royal harem, could be construed as terrific.⁴¹ From Nabal's point of view this chapter is nothing short of tragic. At the outset Nabal is enormously wealthy and prominent and by the end he is struck dead. At one moment Nabal is feasting like a king with a merry heart and the next morning his heart is struck in him and he becomes like a stone. Since plot types are not necessarily mutually exclusive, it may be that there is a multiplicity of plot types in 1 Sam 25.

The broader plot arch, however, focuses on David, not Nabal or Abigail, and therefore, the plot type of this chapter is best viewed from the Davidic perspective.⁴² Notice the concentric shape of the plot structure. The action begins when David hears that Nabal is shearing his sheep, thus prompting him to move to acquire goods from Nabal. The end of action in this plot is David's taking of Abigail to be his wife. Although to balance these two incidents in many ways objectifies Abigail's personhood, the narratee cannot help but notice that at the conclusion of this plot David has received what he had set out to acquire, and more.⁴³

The next plot points to be balanced are the occasioning incident and the resolution of original conflict. The occasioning incident, which is Nabal's refusal to provide David's ten young men with their requested supplies, is perfectly balanced by David's acceptance of Abigail's gift of supplies, which is the point of final resolution of the original

⁴¹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 266-267.

⁴² Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 257-258) asserts that this is a story about David, not about Abigail or Nabal.

⁴³ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 146.

conflict.⁴⁴ Green aptly observes the balance between Nabal's refusal and Abigail's accommodation:

The Abigail gives from the stores of the Nabal what the David had asked, and generously, easily, quickly, not arguing out the matter of entitlement at all. She not only divests him (and I am stressing the goods as 'his' since that is his claim, even though we might be prepared to see them in a more communal way), but she undercuts the 'no' the Nabal has just thundered by the 'yes' of the donkeyloads of payment hurrying now toward the claimant.⁴⁵

The occasioning incident was Nabal's refusal and the resolution of conflict is clearly Abigail's reversal of this snub. It is peculiar how many commentators suggest or seem to suggest that the counterbalance to Nabal's refusal is his death by the hand of YHWH.⁴⁶ This hypothesis, though popular, is not accurate. The original conflict is resolved before Nabal's death, as the plot structure indicates.

Finally we move to the climax. Within the climax there are two closely situated, but balanced incidents. First comes the moment when the conflict is the most intense and then comes the moment when the conflict begins to unravel. The conflict is most intense when the narratee is reminded of David's murderous intent while he and Abigail approach one another in the ravine. Then, as Abigail throws herself before David not knowing if he will stay his sword and she begins to speak, the conflict begins to unravel on account of her wise counsel and undoubtedly because of her good looks.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Boyle, "Law of the Heart," 416; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 260.

⁴⁵ Green, "1 Samuel 25," 14.

⁴⁶ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 152; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 262; Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 204; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 252; McKane, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 153; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 136; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 593.

⁴⁷ Biddle ("1 Samuel 25," 629, 635) argues that Abigail's beautiful appearance does not effect the plot until, perhaps, the end when David sends for Abigail to be his wife. Even then, he mentions that there is no overt comment by David about Abigail's appearance: "Perhaps significantly, Abigail's beauty, emphasized in the introduction, plays no overt role in the development of the plot in 1 Samuel 25... In fact, the only indication that he may have noted her beauty comes at the end, when he sends for her to become his wife. Unlike the others said to be beautiful, Abigail's beauty does not precipitate the events that unfold in her story. Apparently, the allusion functions primarily to predispose the reader to regard her in matriarchal/royal light (p 629)."

This plot is a perfectly balanced concentric plot. David is changed by his experience, but the situation before and after are relatively the same. This is further accentuated by the similar qualities of 1 Sam 24 and 26. Before the concentric plot of 1 Sam 25 David is in exile while being hunted by Saul. After this brief reprise with the house of Nabal, David is still being pursued by the king.

2.4.3 *Plot Summary*

The plot of 1 Sam 25 is a well balanced concentric plot.⁴⁸ The chapter is bookended by expositional information, beginning with a funeral and ending with a series of weddings.⁴⁹ The action begins with David hearing that Nabal is shearing sheep, which prompts him to consider how he might gain from Nabal's wealth, and the action ends with David not only gaining supplies from Nabal's house, but also a wife. The occasioning incident that generates conflict is Nabal's refusal to provide David with any supplies and the resolution to this conflict occurs when David receives his demanded supplies from the hand of Abigail, Nabal's wife. The climax is most intense as the narratee is reminded of David's murderous rant and Abigail's intervention is the beginning of the unraveling of the emotional tension. Both Nabal and David contribute to the creation and escalation of tension. Nabal initiates conflict and David intensifies it by his reaction, ultimately culminating in his symbolic verbal attack on Nabal and his house. Abigail is the agent of restraint that stands between David and Nabal, effectively resolving this plot in the best interest of both men. The narrator evaluates the plot

⁴⁸ Berlin ("David's Wives," 77; *Poetics*, 31) suggests that the plot is unrealistic: "It (the plot) could be reduced to: 'fair maiden' Abigail is freed from the 'wicked ogre' and marries 'prince charming'. This suggest that this is not just another episode in the biography of David, but an exemplum. Chapter 25 presents more abstractly the theme found in chapters 24 and 26 – David has the power to kill but declined to use it. He triumphs over his opponent without the need to kill him himself, for God sees to it."

⁴⁹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 258.

internally, with a large focus on the characterization of the main personages in the chapter. To a closer look at characterization, therefore, we now turn our attention.

2.5 *Characterization*

In this section every character will be analyzed according to the methodology outlined in chapter one. The characters will be studied in the order of their first appearance in 1 Sam 25.

2.5.1 *Samuel*

Although he is a round character in 1 Samuel, in this chapter Samuel is an agent character mentioned here to give additional emphasis to the thorny and irreconcilable relationship between Saul and David.⁵⁰ Samuel is directly characterized as having died and been buried and the narratee is indirectly reminded that he was a significant personality in the history of Israel since “all Israel mourned for him” at his burial.⁵¹

The most pressing question is why the narrator chose to make known Samuel’s death and entombment at this point in the story. The narratee might consider three observations about the peculiar placement of Samuel’s death. One, the funeral of Samuel unequivocally announces that the prophet-judge is dead, which will become increasingly important in 1 Sam 28.⁵² Two, “the death of Samuel marks the end of an era,” and presumably inaugurates a transition in the story.⁵³ And three, Samuel’s death is announced almost immediately after Saul identified David, by public confession, as the sure fulfiller of Samuel’s prophetic word (1 Sam 15:28), that another will reign in Saul’s

⁵⁰ Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 574.

⁵¹ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 247.

⁵² Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 259; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 247.

⁵³ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 146; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 259; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 257.

place (1 Sam 24:20).⁵⁴ The timing could not be more poetic. For our purposes the latter two remarks are the most critical. The narratee witnesses in 1 Sam 24-26 the messy initial outworking of the transition of power from Saul to David and, in case she is prone to forget about this unfolding dynamic in 1 Sam 25, the death of Samuel at the outset ought to keep her vigilant. The inclusion of Samuel's death notice strongly suggests that this chapter addresses the interplay between Saul and David, though Saul is not directly mentioned by name until the very end.⁵⁵

As king-maker Samuel anointed both Saul and David for the highest royal office. His funeral is an apt reminder of these conflicting appointments so that even in death Samuel underscores the conflict between Saul and David, and even reminds the narratee that he, as YHWH's representative, is the source of the tension that is so palpable between these two kings.⁵⁶

2.5.2 *All Israel*

Like Samuel, *all Israel* acts collectively as an agent character. They are directly characterized as being united in their grief over the death of Samuel. As an agent character *all Israel* provides an intriguing backdrop for this chapter. With the passing of Samuel a void is established in the upper echelons of Israel's leadership.⁵⁷ The narratee is therefore invited to ponder if either king, Saul or David, will be able to unite all Israel as Samuel had.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 146; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 259; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 175; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 257; Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 149.

⁵⁵ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 258; Green, "1 Samuel 25," 5; Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 149.

⁵⁶ Green (*King Saul*, 101) suggests that the death of Samuel now forces Saul and David to "resolve their problem themselves."

⁵⁷ Evans, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 112.

⁵⁸ Hertzberg, *1 & II Samuel*, 198-199.

2.5.3 *David*

David, one of three central characters in this chapter, is portrayed as a round character of the highest degree. He is complicated, unpredictable, and seemingly contradictory. This is especially evident in 1 Sam 25 since the way that David behaves in this chapter seems to stand in stark contrast to his conduct in 1 Sam 24 and 26.⁵⁹

David's actions throughout the chapter give strong moments of indirect characterization. Although ambiguously reported by the narrator, the narratee is invited to wonder about David's attendance at Samuel's interment.⁶⁰ His presence at Samuel's funeral would suggest that David was willing to risk his own safety to honour the man who anointed him while he was still a boy tending his father's sheep (1 Sam 16). Indirectly, this would suggest that David maintained some form of relationship with Samuel after his anointing, that he understands and practices some degree of loyalty, and that he possesses the courage (or brassiness) required to make such an appearance while being officially in exile and while being hunted by the reigning king. The narratee cannot help but ponder whether or not Saul and David laid aside their swords long enough to each attend Samuel's funeral.⁶¹ The narrator is ambiguous in his transition from Samuel's burial in Ramah to David's going down to the wilderness of Paran (1 Sam 25:1). Although the narrator is not explicit, 1 Sam 25:1 easily reads as though David departed from the burial service of Samuel to go down to Paran.

In 1 Sam 25:4 the narratee is told that "David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep." From this the narratee may decipher that David is attentive and resourceful or that he has proactively incited Nabal. Since news does not come to the

⁵⁹ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 174.

⁶⁰ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 149.

⁶¹ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 149.

wilderness by chance it is most probable that David set up an impromptu information gathering network capable of keeping tabs on activity in the area that might be of benefit to him and his band of outcasts.

Immediately David sends a contingent of ten young men to entreat Nabal (1 Sam 25:5-9). On the surface, David's magnanimous message of shalom seems polite and diplomatic. Upon deeper consideration, however, the narratee discovers that David may not be treading the high ground he seems to be trafficking.

First, "David's initial instruction to his men is an act of masterful intimidation."⁶² He sends word to Nabal during the festival of sheep-shearing, "when his wealth is especially available, visible, and hence vulnerable."⁶³ David's message to Nabal includes the threefold duplication of the word שלום (peace). This duplication emphasizes the main message David wishes to express to Nabal.⁶⁴ The narratee, however, has to sort through David's motivation. Does David truly wish peace to Nabal and his house, or does David wish to emphasize what is at stake should Nabal refuse his request? Alter suggests that David's emphasis on shalom is actually a veiled threat against Nabal, meaning that shalom may be maintained only at the cost of these requested supplies.⁶⁵

Upon receipt of Nabal's refusal to provide supplies, David arms himself and his men for battle. In perfect balance with the thrice mentioned shalom, three times the word חרב (sword) is employed as an appropriate antithesis.⁶⁶ The three invocations of shalom, balanced by the threefold call to arms, supports the idea that David's initial act of diplomacy has teeth. Clearly David was threatening Nabal from the outset. Bodner

⁶² Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 176.

⁶³ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 176.

⁶⁴ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 212; Green, "1 Samuel 25," 11.

⁶⁵ Alter, *David Story*, 153.

⁶⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262.

argues: “The sword is exactly what David does not use in the wilderness. He claims that nothing belonging to Nabal was harmed, but now the opposite situation is poised to take place.”⁶⁷ David cancels out the effectiveness of his own protection (*shalom*) by becoming a greater threat than anything or anyone he claims to have protected Nabal from.

Second, David concludes his diplomatic request with: “Give, please, whatever your hand can find, to your servants and to *your son* David.” This self-professed epithet, “your son,” seems out of place here. Bodner observes: “... given the fact that he and Nabal have not been recorded as spending much time with each other, this is a surprising term of endearment.”⁶⁸ This term is also reminiscent of David’s interaction with Saul at the cave in the previous chapter.⁶⁹

Third, David sends *ten* young men to Nabal (1 Sam 25:5). Is this a courtesy to Nabal or does David expect Nabal’s “gift” to require the able lifting of ten strong men?⁷⁰ Even if the contingent of ten young men is merely practical, it demonstrates a gross assumption on David’s part.

Fourth, via his messengers David voices an irrational assumption, which is that Nabal entered into his debt because David and his men did *not* disgrace or rob Nabal’s shepherds (1 Sam 25:7). This argument has a ring of organized crime to it, suggesting that David is *the godfather* for “the ancient Near Eastern equivalent of a ‘protection racket’.”⁷¹ Biddle points out that Nabal, in fact, did not owe David anything: “[Nabal]

⁶⁷ Bodner, *1 Samuel* 262.

⁶⁸ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 261; Baldwin (*1 & 2 Samuel*, 148) suggests that the employment of “son” terminology is typical diplomatic language that signals an attempt to establish a covenant.

⁶⁹ Alter, *David Story*, 154; Green, “1 Samuel 25,” 11; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 248.

⁷⁰ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 261; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 202; Miscall, *I Samuel*, 150; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 579.

⁷¹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 261; also: Alter, *David Story*, 153; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 148; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 176; Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 259) considers this possibility without resolution; Kessler, “Sexuality,” 411; McKane, *I & II Samuel*, 152; Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 150.

had not contracted for David's protection. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that, in fact, the only threat to Nabal's flock had been David himself. Surely, Nabal did not owe David payment for a theft not committed."⁷² Levenson and Halpern suggest that David's assumption here is actually a challenge to Nabal's political authority: "[It is] another way of saying that Nabal, despite his wealth and his marriage, does not control Judah or even his immediate territory."⁷³

Nabal's reply to David's messengers is telling: "Who is David? And, who is the son of Jesse? Today many servants are rebelling; each man from the presence of his lord" (1 Sam 25:10). The narratee hears in Nabal's voice a strong indictment of contempt against David.⁷⁴ In effect, Nabal is directly accusing David of disloyalty, of being a "rogue and runaway servant."⁷⁵ Clearly he knows who David is, as is apparent in his query, "And, who is the son of Jesse?"⁷⁶ There is no mention of this information being provided to Nabal in the text and therefore the narratee is permitted to presume that Nabal is familiar with David and his posse.⁷⁷ The main question here is what the narratee is supposed to make of Nabal's accusation against David. It certainly runs counter to the portrait of the "loyal" and "faithful" David seemingly presented in 1 Sam 24 and 26. As a result, this characterization of David by Nabal is frequently dismissed by commentators

⁷² Biddle, "1 Samuel 25," 637 (also cited by Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 261); also: Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 75; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 183; Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 202) and Klein (*1 Samuel*, 248) strongly disagree with this position.

⁷³ Levenson and Halpern, "David's Marriages," 513.

⁷⁴ Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 581.

⁷⁵ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262; also: Alter, *David Story*, 154; Polzin (*Deuteronomist*, 211) observes the literary relationship between Nabal and Ahimelech in 1 Sam 21-22: "Nabal goes on the speak very much as Saul would have liked Ahimelech to speak when David similarly requested food from the priests... In both chapters 21-22 and chapter 25, David requests food from someone whose life is subsequently put in jeopardy by the request: Saul kills Ahimelech and his entire house for giving the food, while David wants to kill Nabal and his house for refusing it."

⁷⁶ Baldwin, *I & 2 Samuel*, 148-149.

⁷⁷ Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 177) suggests that Nabal's knowledge of David is irrelevant and ambiguous.

as being indicative of the boorish nature of a fool.⁷⁸ Perhaps, however, Nabal's assessment of David is more accurate than many have realized:⁷⁹

While many readers in the past have taken offense at Nabal's churlish dismissal, Joel Rosenberg (1986: 150) contends that something more may be happening than simply a 'benighted cynicism' of Nabal: 'This is the first recorded protest in the narrative against Davidic taxation'. Following Rosenberg's lead, we are encouraged to look for other signs of David's future reign in this chapter.⁸⁰

Ironically, Nabal (whose name means "fool") may have made an apt observation about David and what the narratee can expect from a Davidic kingdom.

In response David prepares himself and his men to react violently to Nabal's dismissal. In the whole of 1 Sam 25 David is directly characterized by the narrator this single time, being described physically as having "girded his sword" for battle against the house of Nabal (1 Sam 25:13). In this moment the narratee witnesses the impulsive and enraged David that has been hidden thus far in the story. This violent retort demonstrates that David is undoubtedly capable of vengeance. The contrast of David's demeanor in this chapter, as compared to his restraint against Saul in 1 Sam 24 and 26, cannot be missed.⁸¹ The narratee is compelled to question which portrait of David – the impulsive, the restrained, or both – is normative.

As David and his men approach Nabal's house David candidly reveals his inner-emotional condition and his murderous motivation:

⁷⁸ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 76.

⁷⁹ By employing Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory of double voiced discourse Bodner ("Eliab," 55-71) makes the argument that Eliab's characterization of David as having an "evil heart" (1 Sam 17:28) can be understood on a number of levels, "One meaning in the immediate context that the speakers and hearers readily understand, and a second meaning that is directed toward a larger theme or ideological component of the author's literary work." In other words, while it is possible that Eliab's assessment of David's heart comes from the jealous rumblings of a bitter older brother, it is also possible that the Deuteronomist has chosen to characterize David through the lips of Eliab. Nabal's indictment here might be another example of double voiced discourse. Perhaps the fool, Nabal, is speaking foolishly. Or, as I will argue in this thesis, Nabal is more right than many commentators are willing to admit.

⁸⁰ Rosenberg, *King and Kin*, 150 (also cited by: Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262).

⁸¹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262; Green, "1 Samuel 25," 19.

Surely, for vanity I guarded all which [belongs] to this [one] in the wilderness. And, he did not miss – from all which is his – anything! Then he returned to me evil instead of good. So, may God do severely to the enemies of David, and so may he do more, if I spare – from all which are his – by the morning [any] who piss against a wall (1 Sam 25:21-22).

By David's own admission the narratee is introduced to a man who is willing to kill out of impulse and virtual pettiness. As Levenson writes:

In short, the David of chaps. 24 and 26 is the character whom we have seen since his introduction in chap. 16 and whom we shall continue to see until 2 Samuel 11, the appealing young man of immaculate motivation and heroic courage. But the David of chapter 25 is a man who kills for a grudge. The episode of Nabal is the very first revelation of evil in David's character. He can kill.⁸²

In this scene the narratee enters uncharted waters as a very dark side to David's character is blatantly exposed for the first time. As Green so bluntly reports: "The David has lost it here."⁸³

In this quotation (1 Sam 25:21) the narrator captures David musing to himself about Nabal returning to him evil instead of good. The narratee is encouraged to see the allusion in David's voice to Prov 17:13: "Evil will not depart from the house of one who returns evil for good."⁸⁴ The unfolding plot in this chapter seems to be the outworking of that pithy proverb. If David had his way evil would have torn apart Nabal's house on account of the perceived evil Nabal had extended toward David. It is up to the narratee to evaluate whether David is accurate in his assessment. Nevertheless, the allusion to this proverb gives the narratee a clear view into David's state of mind. He believes he has been wronged and therefore he perceives he is right to act with vengeance. Interestingly enough, the allusion to the proverb demonstrates that David is an agent of evil in that

⁸² Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 23 (also cited by: Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 265).

⁸³ Green, "1 Samuel 25," 15.

⁸⁴ Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 585.

“evil will not depart from the house of one who returns evil for good.” The evil approaching Nabal’s house is David himself!

Many have also observed that David, who has to this point demonstrated stunning oratory abilities, speaks in an awkward and crude manner:⁸⁵ “David is earlier characterized as ‘sensible of speech’ (16.18), and thus far in the story he has distinguished himself as an orator. Yet this particular speech – about annihilating Nabal’s house – presents a contrast.”⁸⁶ In addition to clearly identifying the male gender, the phrase, “any who piss against a wall,” is only used in a derogatory way for those who are despised.⁸⁷ Tsumura makes the further observation that this unsophisticated colloquialism is always used with reference to the killing of all males of a group (cf. 2 Sam 25:34; 1 Kgs 14:10; 16:11; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8).⁸⁸

Before David arrives to obliterate Nabal and his house Abigail intercepts him and his men. During her impressive protestation she makes a stunning forecast about David’s rise to power: “...YHWH will most certainly make for my lord an enduring house” (1 Sam 25:28). Whereas Saul openly professed that David “will reign” in 1 Sam 24:21, here Abigail goes further by insisting that YHWH will ensure that an enduring dynasty be David’s legacy.⁸⁹ It will not be until 2 Sam 7 that the narratee will be able to confirm Abigail’s prophetic utterance, which puts Abigail well ahead of the curve by any

⁸⁵ Rosenberg, *King and Kin*, 151.

⁸⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 265.

⁸⁷ Alter, *David Story*, 156; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 178; Fox (*Give Us a King*, 125) suggests that the phrase, “piss against the wall,” reinforces the “doglike” image of Nabal derived from his Calebite (doglike) heritage; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 250.

⁸⁸ Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 586.

⁸⁹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 267.

standard.⁹⁰ David is not yet king and she is already reassuring him of an enduring dynasty.⁹¹

On the heels of this extraordinary foreknowledge, Abigail makes another declaration about David's character that, in light of David's racketeering, clearly misses the mark: "...wickedness will not be found in you for [all] of your days" (1 Sam 25:28). Whether this direct characterization is sincerely inaccurate or mere flattery the narratee is already well aware of David's propensity to fall into wickedness.⁹² As discussed, David's current impulsive campaign against Nabal is born out of impious intent. Even those who would give him the benefit of the doubt in 1 Sam 25 surely abandon a moral defense of David by 2 Sam 11.⁹³

Another allusion by Abigail is of David's valiant slaying of Goliath. In 1 Sam 25:29 Abigail says to David:

Should a man arise to pursue you and to seek your soul (life), then the soul (life) of my lord shall be protected in the pouch of the living with YHWH, your God. But, the soul (life) of your enemies He will hurl in the midst of the pocket of the sling.

The imagery of God hurling a person like a stone out of a sling is reminiscent of David's victory over Goliath with just a handful of stones and a sling. The effect of this allusion enables Abigail to demonstrate her knowledge of David's reputation, which affords her

⁹⁰ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 178; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 183, 185. Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 134-135.

⁹¹ Alter (*King David*, 157) reminds the reader of the prophesy concerning Eli: "A stalwart, or enduring, house is precisely what was promised the priestly line that was to replace the house of Eli (2:35)."

⁹² Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 179.

⁹³ Green ("1 Samuel 25," 16) writes: "In 25:28-31 she (Abigail) goes on to speak about what is going to come about for the David, thanks to God's agency: 'The LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD; and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live.' That is surely a blessing ill-suited to the story we know lies ahead. The Abigail here sounds like Hannah of 1 Samuel 2, proclaiming reversals in a triumphant mode, but promising things that will not come to pass at all."

this opportunity for flattery.⁹⁴ The narratee is also reminded that David has a special place in God's plan for Israel and, therefore, just as YHWH protected him from Goliath, so He will protect David in the future.⁹⁵ The narratee is caught in suspense wondering if David will ruin his special place in this plan by incurring bloodguilt.

Ultimately, Abigail does successfully derail David's murderous plot and thus saves Nabal's house from destruction and David from bloodguilt. David accepts the gift prepared for him and sends Abigail back to Nabal but not before acknowledging the favour she had done for him:

Blessed be YHWH, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me. And blessed be your discernment and blessed be you, who stopped me this day from coming in with blood (from entering into bloodguilt) and saving, by my hands, myself (1 Sam 25:32-33).

David then proceeds to admit that had Abigail not interceded then surely he would have obliterated Nabal's house (1 Sam 25:34). Interestingly, David admits that what he was determined to do against Nabal was wrong, leaving little doubt in the mind of the narratee that David was moving in a disagreeable direction.⁹⁶ While this admission is admirable, it is difficult for the narratee to miss the unsophisticated language David employs, "... unless you had acted quickly to come to meet me, then there would not remain to Nabal by the light of the morning any who piss against the wall" (1 Sam 25:34).

⁹⁴ Alter, *David Story*, 158; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 268.

⁹⁵ Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 261.

⁹⁶ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 74.

Furthermore, in spite of David's self disclosure to Abigail, it is jarring to read how little David actually says in response to her remarkable testimony concerning David's future and her invitation for David to "remember her":⁹⁷

After Abigail departs, the reader ruminates on the fact that David really does not say that much in his rejoinder to a very long speech full of optimism for his future. For instance, David does not contest her forecasts, and proffers no interrogation about her relationship with Nabal... when David takes the gift, he may well see it as a mere deposit, without any direct response to her invitation to 'remember me'. One recalls his words to Saul's servants at 18.23, 'Is it a light thing in your eyes to become the king's son-in-law?' It appears that David is showing the same reticence with Abigail.⁹⁸

The narratee does not have to wait very long, however, to see that David did indeed hear Abigail's "proposal." Immediately following Nabal's death, David sends for her to be his wife (1 Sam 25:39).⁹⁹

The death of Nabal, which the narrator clearly indicates is induced by YHWH, seems to be a peculiar moment of validation for David and the narratee is caught pondering how to interpret this sequence of events. On the one hand, YHWH *seems* to support David's cause against Nabal and reward his restraint.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, things may not be all that they seem, for there is a strong argument against interpreting YHWH's action to be supporting David's actions throughout this chapter.¹⁰¹ This episode has strong ties to 2 Sam 11, where "David moves to kill a man and marry his wife."¹⁰² The differences between these two episodes hinge on Abigail's intervention,

⁹⁷ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 157; Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 179) disagrees with this perspective, "David's speech in response is a worthy match for Abigail's eloquence. It is as though through Abigail's words of warning David recognizes for the first time how his vengefulness would have put his own future at risk."

⁹⁸ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 269.

⁹⁹ Alter, *David Story*, 160.

¹⁰⁰ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 180-181; Exum, *Tragedy*, 106; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 204; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 252; Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 154-155; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 136; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 593.

¹⁰¹ More will be discussed about YHWH's striking of Nabal in the character analysis of YHWH.

¹⁰² Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 272; also: Klein, *1 Samuel*, 250; Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 24 (also cited by).

which prevents the massacre and ultimately makes possible the marriage.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, 1 Sam 25 “is a prophetic glimpse, within David’s ascent, of his fall from grace.”¹⁰⁴

Either way, David does not come out of this chapter without some reputable damage. His taking of Ahinoam from Jezreel to be his wife (1 Sam 25:43) stains any purity the narratee might be inclined to invoke on David. The narrator’s inclusion of this information at this point in the story is most definitely intentional as it sours David’s character in a number of ways. First, as king-in-waiting David is clearly in violation of Moses’ instructions in Deut 17:17 that kings must not “multiply wives.” Second, the only other Ahinoam in the Bible is the wife of King Saul (1 Sam 14:50). While only mere speculation connects Saul’s wife with the Ahinoam from Jezreel, the narrator seems intent to leave a bad taste in the mouth of the narratee.¹⁰⁵ Regardless of Ahinoam’s full identity, David is not demonstrating high moral values at the close of this chapter, which soils the narratee’s interpretation of him throughout.

First Samuel 25 presents a portrait of David that is dark and contrary to the character the narratee has come to know since 1 Sam 16. This chapter compels the narratee to reconsider who she thought David to be.

2.5.4 *Nabal*

Although Nabal is the second of three central characters in this chapter he is a flat character who stands more as an archetype than as a distinct personality in his own right.¹⁰⁶ His name, meaning “fool” or “wineskin,” expresses the type of character the

¹⁰³ Berlin, “David’s Wives,” 76; Berlin, *Poetics*, 30; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 180; Exum, *Tragedy*, 138; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 185; Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 23-24; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 589, 592.

¹⁰⁴ Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 23-24 (also cited by Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 272.).

¹⁰⁵ More will be discussed about the potential connections between David’s wife, Ahinoam, and Saul’s wife, Ahinoam, in the character study of Ahinoam.

¹⁰⁶ Berlin (*Poetics*, 30) suggests that Nabal is an exaggerated stereotype; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 88; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 257, 263.

narratee can expect Nabal to be.¹⁰⁷ In many ways Nabal personifies folly by the way in which he has been characterized: “Nabal’s folly corresponds to that of the typical fool, who utters foolishness, plots evil, and neither feeds or gives drink to those who are hungry or thirsty (Isa 32:5-8; Prov 16:2).”¹⁰⁸

Abigail affirms this connection midway through the chapter when she is speaking to David: “May my lord please not set his heart against this man of Belial, against Nabal, because like his name is so he is. Fool is his name and folly is with him” (1 Sam 25:25). This level of slander by a wife is nearly unprecedented in the biblical narrative which might shed light on Nabal as husband: “[Abigail] clearly has been chafing over her marriage with a boorish, unpleasant, and probably older man, and she sees an opportunity here.”¹⁰⁹

Nabal’s men also assert that Nabal is as his name implies. In response to Nabal’s churlish dismissal of David’s messengers, Nabal’s own men appeal to Abigail to make the situation right:

Now, to Abigail, the wife of Nabal, one young man from the young men reported saying, “Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to bless our lord but he shouted insults at them! (1 Sam 25:14) ... And now, know and see what you should do because evil is intended concerning our lord and against all his house; and he is the son of Belial to speak to him (1 Sam 25:17).”

¹⁰⁷ Alter, *David Story*, 152; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 147; Berlin, “David’s Wives,” 76-77; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 260; Boyle, “Law of the Heart,” 414; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 175; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 257-258; Green, “1 Samuel 25,” 11; Hertzberg, *1 & II Samuel*, 202; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 248, 252; Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 13-14, 22; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 132; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 577; In addition to these puns on his name, some have argued there is an allusion to Laban, Jacob’s father-in-law, because Nabal backward spells Laban: Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 261.

¹⁰⁸ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 248; also: Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 147; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 176; Exum, *Tragedy*, 106; Gordon, *1 & II Samuel*, 184; Kessler, “Sexuality,” 411; Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 13.

¹⁰⁹ Alter, *David Story*, 156; also: Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 150; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 260; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 250; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 588; Jael similarly acts against the political interests of her husband, Heber the Kenite, by killing Sisera (Judg 4-5).

Having validated the report by David's men, Nabal's men refer to their master as a son of Belial, which is clearly meant as a disparaging slur, often translated "good-for-nothing," or, "ill natured."¹¹⁰ Nabal may be in charge, but he clearly does not command the respect or admiration of even his own men or his own wife.¹¹¹ It would seem that the characterization made here by Nabal's men matches the narrator's characterization made at the outset of the chapter.¹¹² Nabal's foolishness, therefore, is reliably reinforced and important to the story.¹¹³

There is an additional play on Nabal's name in 1 Sam 25:37, which reads: "Then it came about in the morning, when the wine was out from Nabal..." A nabal can also be translated, "wineskin." Therefore, the verse could read: "Then it came about in the morning, when the wine was out from [the] *wineskin*." The pun on Nabal's name is clearly meant derogatorily.¹¹⁴ Referencing Leithart, Bodner argues that the Hebrew structure of this line accentuates the play on Nabal's unfortunate name:

...the Hebrew infinitive construct could well be understood as happening at the same time as the main verb of the sentence, thus yielding the following translation: 'while the wine was going out from Nabal, his wife told him'. Aside from the obvious earthiness of the moment, there are two immediate advantages in Leithart's translation. First, it exploits the nameplay between 'Nabal' and 'wineskin'. When Abigail chooses to approach Nabal, it is while the wineskin is bursting, so to speak.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Campbell, *I Samuel*, 259; Klein, *I Samuel*, 249; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 583.

¹¹¹ Berlin, *Poetics*, 30-31; Bodner, *I Samuel*, 263, 266; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 177; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 183; Green, "1 Samuel 25," 13.

¹¹² Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 55; Berlin, *Poetics*, 30-31.

¹¹³ Levenson ("1 Samuel 25," 15) writes: "As if all this unsubtle characterization were not enough to convince us of Nabal's viciousness, both his servants and his wife unapologetically describe him (not to his face!) as 'a worthless man,' 'a good for nothing.' All of the namecalling amounts to a kind of descriptive overkill, which, as we shall show, constitutes part of the narrator's peculiarly artistry."

¹¹⁴ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 186; Fox, *Give Us a King*, 127; Klein, *I Samuel*, 252; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 593.

¹¹⁵ Bodner, *I Samuel*, 270 (referencing Leithart, "Nabal," 25-27); also Bodner, *National Insecurity*, 173.

The second advantage to Leithart's translation is that it connects Nabal with Saul in 1 Sam 24. Just as Saul was overshadowing his feet (relieving himself) in the cave when David could have killed him, here Nabal is also relieving himself when he learns that David had nearly slaughtered him the night before.¹¹⁶

The narrator initially characterizes Nabal as being very important and resplendently wealthy, possessing a large flock of three thousand sheep and one thousand goats (1 Sam 25:2). In fact, the narrator duplicates the word נָאִי (man) three times before mentioning Nabal's name even once. This duplication emphasizes the anonymous description of the man as one who is important and abundantly wealthy over and above his specific identity, which is not disclosed until the following verse.¹¹⁷ The anonymous frontloading of information about Nabal before his name is revealed suggests that these details will feature important in understanding the plot: "Nabal's wealth is probably given pride of place in order to hint at its significance for the central theme."¹¹⁸ Such wealth suggests that Nabal is well positioned to respond to any request for supplies with generosity rather than miserliness.¹¹⁹

Nabal is also directly characterized as being a *Calebite* who is "harsh and wicked of deeds" (1 Sam 25:3). Nabal's Calebite heritage is important because it qualifies him as a prominent member of the powerful clan descended from Caleb and based in Hebron.¹²⁰ On account of his faithfulness Caleb had been assured possession of land by Moses (Deut

¹¹⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 270.

¹¹⁷ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 175; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 247; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 577.

¹¹⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 115; also: Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 175; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 247; Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 15; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 582.

¹¹⁹ Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 259.

¹²⁰ Fox, *Give Us a King*, 122.

1:35-36) and Hebron had been given to him by Joshua (Josh 14:13-14).¹²¹ Nabal's lineage, therefore, will become essential in David's quest to secure power in Judah since Hebron, which will serve as David's Judean capital, was settled and controlled by the Calebites.¹²² On the surface Nabal's lineage has a positive, not pejorative, connotation making the further personal disclaimer about his personality confounding.¹²³

Alternatively however, there may be a derogatory play on Nabal's epithet since the Hebrew word כַּלְבִּי (Calebite) could also mean "doglike," which would more aptly explain the additional direct characterization of Nabal as being a man who is "harsh and wicked of deeds."¹²⁴ In summary the narratee is invited to see David's quandary with respect to Nabal. As a powerful Calebite, Nabal is politically essential to David. On the other hand, Nabal's nature ensures that he will prove to be a prickly problem to the king-in-waiting. The way in which David interacts with Nabal will test his cunning and will have deep ramifications on his desire to claim the office to which YHWH has called him.¹²⁵

In response to David's request for provisions Nabal asks, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? Today many servants are rebelling; each man from the presence

¹²¹ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Klein, *I Samuel*, 248; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 577.

¹²² Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 181; Klein, *I Samuel*, 247; Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 25.

¹²³ Bodner, *I Samuel*, 260; The importance of the Calebite clans can be seen in the genealogies listed in 1 Chr 2-4. Although the David line is central (1 Chr 3), the lineage of the Calebite clans surround it (1 Chr 2 and 4) indicating their import role in supporting the Davidic line.

¹²⁴ Alter, *David Story*, 153; Baldwin, *I & 2 Samuel*, 148; Fox, *Give Us a King*, 122; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 202; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 133; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 577.

¹²⁵ Levenson ("1 Samuel 25," 26-27) comments directly on the import of Nabal's social status and David's cunning move to take that status for himself: "If this practice (of claiming royal authority through marriage alliances) is relevant to the David's marriage to Abigail, then the man whose name has been altered to Nabal must have been a very powerful figure in the Calebite clan of his day. If his three thousand sheep and one thousand goats (1 Sam 25:2) are not a gross exaggeration, then it was perfectly true that his feast was 'fit for a king' (v 36), for he must have been at the pinnacle of social status... Obviously, Nabal was no commoner. I suspect he was the *rosh bet ab* or the *nasi* of the Calebite clan, a status to which David laid claim through his marriage to Nabal's lady. It may well be that David picked a quarrel with Nabal with precisely such a marriage in mind."

of his lord” (1 Sam 25:10).¹²⁶ While many commentators believe Nabal is sincerely unaware of David’s identity, it seems more probable that Nabal does know who David is.¹²⁷ This is especially clear in Nabal’s second question, “Who is the son of Jesse?”¹²⁸ Having a keen awareness of David’s heritage indicates some level of awareness.¹²⁹ Accordingly, Nabal’s response is especially sarcastic, demeaning, and may even be meant as a pro-Saul slur against David.¹³⁰ Nabal, therefore is formally rejecting David’s invitation for covenant by tribute.¹³¹

In light of David’s divine anointing, made known to the narratee and somehow to Nabal’s wife, a certain amount of dramatic irony is at play here to the effect that his question epitomizes his name, *The Fool*. Whether or not Nabal was aware of the consequences of his rebuff, his words do ring foolish. After all, both the narratee and Abigail are keenly aware of who David is.

At the same time, however, as discussed in the characterization of David, the narratee may also play *The Fool* if she too quickly casts aside Nabal’s against-the-grain insight into David’s character. In many ways Nabal accurately assesses David as a

¹²⁶ Exum (*Tragedy*, 120) writes, “The answer to Nabal’s question in 1 Samuel 25:10 remains complex and elusive (and that Nabal died for his lack of perception serves as a sobering warning to the adventuresome critic).” This question, “Who is David?” is a central question in the David story. It is therefore interesting that it is presented from the mouth of a fool!; Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 264) observes the irony that later transpires as Nabal’s own servant rebels against him: “At the end of this extensive speech (1 Sam 25:14-17) the reader is left with a substantial irony. As Jon Levenson has observed, Nabal earlier says that many slaves are breaking away from their master, and now here is a slave breaking away from his master, Nabal himself”; Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 16.

¹²⁷ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 148; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262.

¹²⁸ Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 259) makes the interesting observation that this is the central question of 1 Samuel and therefore, “The question is not directly addressed by the story, but it is present at all times. Abigail’s answer: David is the future prince over Israel. The structure’s answer: David is the touchstone of future destiny.”

¹²⁹ Alter (*David Story*, 154) suggests that Nabal’s awareness of who David is even in light of this question reminds the narratee of Saul’s question to Abner in 1 Sam 17:55-58, “Who’s son is this?”

¹³⁰ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262; Green, “1 Samuel 25,” 11; Gordon, “David’s Rise,” 45; Klein (*1 Samuel*, 249) observes that this epithet, “Son of Jesse,” is generally used of David in negative comments; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 581.

¹³¹ Wiseman, “Is it Peace,” 318 (also cited by Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 581).

runaway servant who has rebelled against Saul, his master.¹³² Nabal's perspective is extremely sympathetic to Saul's cause and should not be too quickly dismissed. After all, "his parvanimity notwithstanding, Nabal was technically in the right, for he had not asked for David's protection."¹³³ Nevertheless, even if Nabal accurately exposes David, that he is unwilling to part with any of his surplus clearly advises the narratee that Nabal is a selfish hoarder.¹³⁴ This self-centeredness is underscored by Nabal's eightfold use of the first person singular "I" or "my" in 1 Sam 25:11.¹³⁵ A wiser individual in Nabal's affluent situation might capitulate to David's demand in spite of its lack of moral fortitude.¹³⁶

Later in the chapter the narratee is told that Nabal held a feast "like the feast of the king" and that his heart "was good within him" because he had been "drinking exceedingly" (1 Sam 25:36). In addition to highlighting the great wealth Nabal enjoyed and reemphasizing his snub toward David, the simile that Nabal was gorging himself at a feast *like the feast of the king*, intentionally draws comparisons between Nabal and Saul.¹³⁷ It may even suggest that Nabal thought very highly of himself, aspiring to lordship and perhaps even status equal to a king.¹³⁸ Furthermore, this excessive gluttony

¹³² Alter, *David Story*, 154.

¹³³ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 183; also: Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 581.

¹³⁴ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 149; Berlin, *Poetics*, 36.

¹³⁵ Alter, *David Story*, 154; also: Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 183.

¹³⁶ Berlin, *Poetics*, 36; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 183; Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 176-177) also suggests that Nabal considered David and his men to be terrorists and that he "does not deal with beggars, marauders, gypsies, or tramps. He refuses to pay protection money, either believing the threat is not real or believing he can handle the threat on his own." Either way, Nabal's response demonstrates a lack of wisdom.

¹³⁷ Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 269), observes that this is not the only time the Deuteronomistic history makes an example of kingly characters who overindulge: "In the Deuteronomistic history, it is usually not a good idea for kingly figures to over-imbibe on the fruit of the vine. For instance, in 1 Kings 20, Ben-hadad and the 32 kings allied with him are getting drunk at high noon. When he is told that men are advancing from Samaria, Ben-Hadad orders – without a great deal of coherence – the following: 'If they have come out for peace, take them alive, but if they have come out for war, take them alive!' Unwisely, Nabal is in the same general category as Ben-Hadad; not only is he feasting like a king, but a lengthy description is provided of Nabal's inebriation..."

¹³⁸ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 154.

underscores Nabal's selfish stockpiling of essentials and luxuries for, just after he had refused to give David any supplies did he inaugurate a festive celebration of royal proportions.¹³⁹ Nabal's debauchery also highlights that had Abigail not intercepted David's war party, Nabal's festive party would not have been equipped or prepared to put up a credible and sober defense.¹⁴⁰

The next morning, as the "wine was [coming] out from Nabal," Abigail told her husband about all that had transpired the day before. Here the narrator paints a vivid picture of Nabal in the midst of evacuating the wine consumed the night before while probably fighting a wickedly painful hangover.¹⁴¹ It is unlikely that Nabal is in any condition to hear the news he receives from Abigail.

The narrator directly characterizes Nabal as a person who "became like a stone" because "his heart died within him" (1 Sam 25:37). There is much speculation about what the narrator is hinting at by using these words. Nabal may have suffered a heart attack or a stroke instantly upon hearing the *petrifying* news of David's near massacre.¹⁴² Or, it may simply have been that a wave of anxiety flooded Nabal, contributing to the worst hangover in history. Whatever happened physiologically, it is clear that Nabal took the news very hard and finally, ten days later, Nabal was struck down by YHWH and he died (1 Sam 25:37).

¹³⁹ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 152; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 251.

¹⁴⁰ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 269.

¹⁴¹ Alter, *David Story*, 159; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 271.

¹⁴² Alter, *David Story*, 160; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 152; Boyle ("Law of the Heart," 401-427) wrestles with the medical options and opinions put forward by exegetes over the ages for best understanding the details of Nabal's death before concluding that the intent of the narrator is not medical at all. Rather, she posits, Nabal died because of his "grave lawlessness." The reference to a heart of stone has theological, not medical, implications. Boyle writes in her final conclusion (p. 427): "The texts are clear and cogent without recourse to medical diagnosis. The heart relates to the law (Deut 6:6; 30:14; Ps 37:31; 40:8; Isa 51:7). Nabal of the stony heart dies for grave lawlessness."; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 180; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 593.

Nabal, the typical fool and bursting wineskin, is a simple archetype of folly. Even in his accurate assessment of David's character and motivation Nabal epitomizes foolishness by not providing supplies out of his bountiful wealth. Ultimately his fate is the fate of all who walk in the ways of foolishness, certain though untimely death.¹⁴³

2.5.5 Abigail

Abigail, the third of three main characters in this chapter, is a round character who confounds expectations and is privy to exceptional knowledge about David and the divine promises of YHWH.¹⁴⁴ In many ways Abigail resembles a flat archetype character because she seems to personify beauty and wisdom, acting as the antithesis of her husband.¹⁴⁵ The insertion of a chiasm in 1 Sam 25: 3 reinforces this point by repeating the words אִישׁ (man), אִשָּׁה (wife), אִשָּׁה (woman), אִישׁ (man); AB/BA. This chiasm creates a contrast that exposes the unequal yoking of these two people in marriage.¹⁴⁶ Whereas the man is harsh and wicked in deeds, his wife is beautiful and good of understanding. While these qualities ring true, there is more to Abigail than initially meets the eye.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Boyle, "Law of the Heart," 414; Levenson (1 Samuel 25," 17) writes: "Nabal suffers a fatal stroke over a negligible loss. How the death fits the life!"

¹⁴⁴ Campbell (*1 Samuel*, 263) disagrees that Abigail is a round character: "...Nabal and Abigail are type characters. Those who resist and reject David involve themselves in folly (so Nabal); God so will return their evildoing upon their own heads... Those, however, who respond graciously to David, receive him, and bless him will in their turn be richly rewarded (so Abigail)."

¹⁴⁵ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 147; Berlin ("David's Wives," 76-77; *Poetics*, 30, 40) suggests that Abigail, like Nabal, is an "exaggerated stereotype"; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 260; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 175-176; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 257; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 202; Kessler, "Sexuality," 411; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 253; Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 17, 22; Robinson, *Like The Nations*, 132; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 577.

¹⁴⁶ Berlin, *Poetics*, 40; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 258; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 577.

¹⁴⁷ Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art*, 87) acknowledges it is difficult to decide whether Abigail should be "regarded as a principal or subsidiary character." What is most important, however, is observing how Abigail's characterization complements or contrasts David's characterization in the chapter.

The narratee is immediately informed that Abigail, the wife of Nabal, is “good of understanding and beautiful in appearance” (1 Sam 25:3).¹⁴⁸ Both of these qualities will be put to immediate use in the story.¹⁴⁹ As Alter points out, “Her shrewd intelligence will be vividly demonstrated in her brilliant speech to David, and her physical attractiveness will stir his matrimonial interest in her.”¹⁵⁰

The name, Abigail, means “my father is jubilant,” which aptly characterizes Abigail’s character, since she is a woman of great intelligence and beauty. Any father would be delighted to have a daughter of Abigail’s quality.¹⁵¹

In 1 Sam 25:14 one of Nabal’s servants appeals to Abigail on behalf of David against Nabal. The servant employs a metaphor in 1 Sam 25:16, saying that David and his men had been “a wall around us.” Clearly David and his men did not form a physical wall around Nabal’s shepherds. Nevertheless, the imagery heightens the power of his statement to Abigail by expressing just how effective David’s protection had been.¹⁵² The words and action of this servant indirectly characterizes Abigail in a number of ways. First, this servant must be aware of Abigail’s wise and prudent demeanor. Otherwise it would prove fruitless to approach her.¹⁵³ Evidence of his confidence in Abigail’s intelligence can be seen in what the servant does not say. Notice he refrains from giving Abigail specific instructions, but rather provokes her to action trusting in her ability to

¹⁴⁸ Biddle (“1 Samuel 25,” 627) observes: “Hebrew narrative does not often describe people of either gender in terms of their physical beauty. In fact, only thirteen people are described as ‘good-looking’ in Genesis-2 Kings with the language employed in 2 Sam 25. All three of Israel’s matriarchs and five of the women in David’s life are distinguished for their particular beauty. Joseph, David, Absalom, Adonijah, and an unnamed Egyptian soldier are the five men noted for their good looks.”

¹⁴⁹ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 176; Miscal, *1 Samuel*, 151.

¹⁵⁰ Alter, *David Story*, 152; also: Berlin, “David’s Wives,” 76.

¹⁵¹ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 147; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 248; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 577.

¹⁵² Alter, *David Story*, 155; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 149; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 202.

¹⁵³ Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 134.

proceed appropriately: “And now, know and see what you should do...” (1 Sam 25:17).¹⁵⁴ Second, the audacity of this servant, calling his lord a “son of Belial” to his master’s wife, suggests that the ruptures in Abigail’s marriage to Nabal are well known. As Bodner muses, “By any measure, these are rather scathing words from an underling.”¹⁵⁵ To employ these “scathing words” to Abigail necessitates some confidence that there will be no repercussions for speaking so daringly.¹⁵⁶ Third, this servant implies that Abigail is familiar with David and his presence in the area.¹⁵⁷

The servant’s gamble pays off as Abigail acts quickly to try and turn the tide. In contrast to Nabal’s stark denial of supplies, Abigail prepares abundant and luxurious provisions without her husband’s knowledge.¹⁵⁸ In many ways Abigail’s assistance to David mirrors Jonathan’s loyalty.¹⁵⁹ Both Abigail and Jonathan work against their respective houses in favour of David’s best interest and, in both cases, the narratee is prone to conjecture whether Abigail and Jonathan are motivated by self interest. In his pact with David, Jonathan secures the second most powerful position in a Davidic monarchy (1 Sam 23:17). Perhaps Abigail is also keenly aspiring to a royal promotion should David become king.¹⁶⁰ Supporting the winning side is, after all, a very intelligent play.

Abigail leads her caravan to cut David off from his war path. When she sees David Abigail hurries just as she had hurried after receiving the message from Nabal’s servant. The duplication of the *piel* construction of the verb, **פָּעַל**, which means “to act

¹⁵⁴ Alter, *David Story*, 155.

¹⁵⁵ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263.

¹⁵⁶ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 183.

¹⁵⁷ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263.

¹⁵⁸ Again, Abigail’s action resonates with Jael’s action in Judg 4-5.

¹⁵⁹ Green, “1 Samuel 25,” 14.

¹⁶⁰ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 264.

quickly,” is repeated three times (1 Sam 25:18, 23, and 42), each time signifying Abigail’s decisive action. The repetitive use of this verb aptly characterizes Abigail as a woman of decisive action.¹⁶¹ This is yet another way she is contrasted with Nabal, who took his time to refuse David’s ten young men in 1 Sam 25:9.¹⁶²

The narrator then records a dramatic scene as Abigail “fell toward the nostrils of David, upon her face, and she prostrated herself [on the] ground” (1 Sam 25:23). David’s introduction to Abigail is a welcome one since she communicates very clearly by her exaggerated actions that she comes with humble servitude, not aggression.¹⁶³ Abigail’s “extravagant gestures of obeisance” are motivated by self preservation, since she is seeking to intervene in a very dangerous situation where she might be killed on the spot.¹⁶⁴ She then launches into the longest recorded speech between an unmarried man and woman in the entire Deuteronomistic history:¹⁶⁵

Against me, even me, my lord be the guilt. Now may your maidservant speak, please, in your ears? Now hear the words of your maidservant. May my lord please not set his heart against this man of Belial, against Nabal, because like his name is so he is! Fool is his name and folly is with him. Now I, your maidservant, did not see the young man of my lord, whom you sent. And now my lord, by the life of YHWH and the life of your soul, since YHWH has kept you from coming in with blood (entering into bloodguilt) and saving yourself by your [own] hand, and now may they be like Nabal, your enemy, and those who are seeking evil against my lord. And now, this blessing, which your maid has carried to my lord, [may it] be given to the young men walking themselves at the feet of my lord (following my lord). Forgive, please, for the rebellion of your maidservant because YHWH will most certainly make for my lord an enduring house because of the wars of YHWH my lord is fighting and wickedness will not be found in you for [all] your days. Should a man rise to pursue you and to seek your soul (life), then the soul (life) of my lord shall be protected in the pouch of the living with YHWH, your God. But, the soul (life) of your enemies He will hurl in the

¹⁶¹ Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 203; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 249; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 587.

¹⁶² Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 176.

¹⁶³ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 178; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 203; Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 152.

¹⁶⁴ Alter, *David Story*, 156.

¹⁶⁵ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 266; Tsumura (*First Samuel*, 587) connects Abigail’s forthcoming speech with the speeches of two other “wise women in Samuel,” the wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:2) and the wise woman of Abel of Beth-maacah (2 Sam 20:16-19).

midst of the pocket of the sling. Now, it will be because YHWH will do for my lord all that He spoke – the good thing – to you and He will appoint you as leader over Israel. And this will not be for you as staggering, or as a stumbling block of the heart to my lord; nor to shed blood without cause or to deliver my lord by himself. When YHWH has done good for my lord, remember your maidservant (1 Sam 25:24-31).

There are several aspects to this speech that deserve attention. First, its great length and persuasive style suggests Abigail, like David, is an accomplished orator.¹⁶⁶ Her use of figurative language corroborates the narrator's initial characterization that Abigail is "good of understanding."¹⁶⁷ Abigail's ability to influence by speech is apparent from the very beginning. She begins by pleading that against her be placed all the guilt. This simple opener has a twofold effect. It puts David in the difficult position of having to unleash his violent wrath on a beautiful, subservient, and gift bearing woman if he is to continue with his act of vengeance.¹⁶⁸ It also removes Nabal from the story: "Her presence has in fact effectively eliminated Nabal. He has ceased to exist as a serious character in the narrative."¹⁶⁹ All the focus is now on the interaction between David and Abigail as the future of Nabal's house rests in Abigail's capable hands.¹⁷⁰ Her persuasiveness then continues through the remainder of the speech.

Second, Abigail's disparagement of Nabal as a "man of Belial" and "fool" demonstrates remarkable disloyalty by a wife toward her husband.¹⁷¹ Some have

¹⁶⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 269; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 178; Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 151.

¹⁶⁷ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 66; Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 18.

¹⁶⁸ Alter, *David Story*, 156; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 150; Gordon, *1 & II Samuel*, 184; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 203; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 588.

¹⁶⁹ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 178.

¹⁷⁰ Berlin (*Poetics*, 30) makes the strong point that although Abigail seems to be acting against Nabal, she is actually acting in such a way as to save her husband's life.

¹⁷¹ Levenson ("1 Samuel 25," 19) suggests that Abigail walks a fine line between loyalty and disloyalty toward her husband. On the one hand, she does speak disparagingly of Nabal. On the other hand, she does so in order to save him from violence: "To deny her husband's guilt is to sink to his level, earning the undying enmity of David. To 'call a spade a spade' is to break faith with her husband and thus prove her unfitness for the wifely role... Abigail devises the perfect solution to the dilemma: she intercedes in behalf of Nabal (1 Sam 25:24), although conceding that he has no case and no hope of survival (vv. 25-26).

understood Abigail's defamation of Nabal not only as a means to save herself (by creating distance between her and her husband), but also as a ploy to join the Davidic royal harem.¹⁷² As Edelman writes:

Abigail's self-characterization also carries with it deliberate sexual overtones associated with being a mistress or concubine, which, in light of Abigail's earlier description as physically beautiful, would seem to imply an invitation to David to settle any remaining debt or 'punishment' through sexual [favours].¹⁷³

Clearly Edelman is exploring an extreme possibility. That said, the narratee cannot help but consider, as Bodner makes explicit, that a mistress or marital relationship with David, the future "prince of Israel," would constitute a significant promotion for Abigail.¹⁷⁴ This point is made even clearer by Abigail's expressed desire that all enemies of David would be like Nabal, thus suggesting that she anticipates, or even wants her husband dead!¹⁷⁵ Abigail's closing request that David remember her when he comes into his kingdom is a coded but sure proposal for alliance, marriage and otherwise. It seems that in her shrewdness, Abigail is making it clear to David which side she would prefer to play for.¹⁷⁶ This final appeal adds further credence to the suggestion that Abigail has her eye set on queen status.

Third, Abigail makes a spectacular prophecy about YHWH granting David an enduring house. How Abigail is able to make this forecast about the divine promise of a

In other words, while overtly defending him, she covertly dissociates herself from him, so that by the end of her address only she appears as the potential beneficiary of David's change of heart."

¹⁷² Alter, *David Story*, 156; Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 75; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 266; Miscall, *First Samuel*, 152.

¹⁷³ Edelman, *King Saul*, 214 (also cited by Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 266).

¹⁷⁴ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 266.

¹⁷⁵ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 150; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 266-267; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 181; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 185; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 588-589.

¹⁷⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 268; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 179; Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 152; Alter (*David Story*, 159) suggests that Abigail may be "proposing to David that she carry out a kind of contract killing of her husband, with the payoff that she will become the wife of the handsome young warrior and future king." If this is true, the narratee is invited to pay close attention to the role Abigail plays in the death of Nabal; Baldwin (*1 & 2 Samuel*, 153) strongly objects to the inference that Abigail or David were angling toward marriage. Rather, she attests that the hand of the LORD ordained all these happenings.

lasting dynasty for David is unclear.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, as the story unfolds, and this prediction is confirmed in 2 Sam 7, the prophetic wisdom of Abigail is clearly validated.¹⁷⁸

Fourth, Abigail cunningly moves to flattery suggesting that this enduring house will come about because David is fighting the wars of YHWH and that wickedness will not be found in David all the days of his life.¹⁷⁹ She also employs sling and stone imagery which celebrate David's victory over Goliath and are sure to feed his bravado.¹⁸⁰ Abigail says: "...the soul (life) of my lord shall be protected in the *pouch of the living* with YHWH, your God. But, the soul (life) of your enemies He will hurl *in the midst of the pocket of the sling*" (1 Sam 25:29). There is no actual pouch of the living in which David's life will be protected. The effect, however, is such that she effectively communicates the security of David's life under YHWH's care and protection.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Brueggeman (*David's Truth*, 74, 87, 90-92, 94-95) perceives this early affirmation that YHWH will make David a sure house prepares the way for the formulation of the pivotal theological assertions made in the narrative in 2 Sam 7:15-16: "This text of 2 Sam 7:14-16 is not given *ex nihilo*, however. Nathan's oracle about a 'sure house' sounded already in the tribal narrative. In 1 Sam 25:28, the vision of the tribe is placed in the mouth of Abigail: 'Yahweh will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of Yahweh; and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live.'" This statement is embedded in Israel's early narrative. We may suggest that here we are at the primal claim of the tradition. The claim made by Abigail is also heard in 1 Sam 26:23; 27:12. These three texts evidence the emergence of Davidic theology in an early form. Already here, the words 'sure' and 'steadfast love' are operative. They stand at the beginning and starting point of the theological trajectory that then becomes more disciplined, more sophisticated, and probably more cynical."

¹⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 178, 182; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 185; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 203-204; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 583, 589; Alter (*David Story*, 157) reminds the reader that the promise of "a stalwart, or enduring, house is precisely what was promised the priestly line that was to replace the house of Eli (2:35)."

¹⁷⁹ Baldwin, *I & 2 Samuel*, 151; Abigail constructs several allusions in her speech to David. Abigail suggests, as a rationale for YHWH establishing "an enduring house" for David, that David is fighting the wars of YHWH (מלחמות יהוה). As Bodner (*I Samuel*, 267) and Klein (*I Samuel*, 251) point out, there is a subtle echo here to Saul's exhortation to David during betrothal negotiations in 1 Sam 18:17: "Then Saul said to David, 'Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the Lord's battles (מלחמות יהוה).'" For Saul thought, "My hand shall not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him" (NASB '95 translation). Interestingly, these are the only two occurrences of this phrase, מלחמות יהוה, in the entire Deuteronomistic History. In both instances David is knowingly or unwittingly in the midst of marital negotiations.

¹⁸⁰ Alter, *David Story*, 158; Bodner, *I Samuel*, 268.

¹⁸¹ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 185; Klein, *I Samuel*, 251.

Conversely, YHWH will not actually hurl the lives of David's enemies from a sling, though her intent is well understood to mean that the opposite fate promised to David awaits his enemies.¹⁸² The narratee is left guessing whether Abigail is sincere in these comments or whether she is employing a flirtatious tactic which, coupled with her stunning beauty, are sure to win David over.¹⁸³

Fifth, Abigail successfully saves her (Nabal's) house from certain destruction while simultaneously saving David from incurring bloodguilt.¹⁸⁴ In many ways this is a win-win, which comes about only because of Abigail's wise and prompt action.¹⁸⁵ Accordingly, Abigail establishes herself as a proficient leader, even in spite of the subservient language she employs throughout the chapter: "Though she speaks as a 'handmaid' to her lord, Abigail is master of the situation."¹⁸⁶ The contrast between Abigail's self presentation and her actual accomplishments demonstrate political brilliance matched only by the broader characterization of David in 1 Samuel.

The plot indicates that Abigail's intervention is the emotional highpoint of 1 Samuel 25. Her speech initiates the resolution of conflict, which is ultimately restored to calm when David accepts her gift and sends her home. Clearly, therefore, Abigail is the heroin of the story in this chapter.

Abigail triumphantly returns to her house to find her husband in a state of revelry, although he is oblivious to the entreaty his wife has just made with his enemy. Abigail is

¹⁸² Alter, *David Story*, 158; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 151; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 209; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 268; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 185-186; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 251.

¹⁸³ Berlin (Poetics, 30) recognizes that although illicit sex does not feature in the Abigail story, as it does in the Bathsheba story, in both instances David is charmed by the feminine beauty of Abigail and Bathsheba; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 178-179.

¹⁸⁴ Alter, *David Story*, 158; Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 151-152; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 179-180; Exum, *Tragedy*, 138; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 204.

¹⁸⁵ Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 261.

¹⁸⁶ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 151; Evans, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 114; Again, Abigail's master mirrors Jael's mastery of the situation with Sisera in Judg 4-5.

delicately characterized by the way in which she responds to Nabal's feasting. In 1 Sam 25:36 the narrator tells the narratee that "she did not tell him a thing, small or great, *until the light of the morning*" (עד־אור הבקר). This same phrase had just been used by David in 1 Sam 25:34: "...unless you had acted quickly to come to meet me, then there would not remain to Nabal *by the light of the morning* (עד־אור הבקר) any who piss against the wall." As Bodner observes, "This is the exact phrase that David has just used, and to see it recycled as part of Abigail's consciousness already illustrates her solidarity with David even at her husband's expense."¹⁸⁷

In addition to the solidarity with David expressed here, Abigail's decision to wait until the morning light is a peculiar approach. Whatever her reasons, Abigail delivers a fatal blow to Nabal by reporting her dealings with David the night before. Perhaps Abigail hesitates knowing that Nabal may muster some liquid courage and set out to seek vengeance against David. Or, perhaps Abigail waited for the most opportune time to tell Nabal this news knowing some of his certain health weaknesses. A bad heart, for example, might be negatively impacted by such information.¹⁸⁸ Regardless, Nabal's heart dies within him and he becomes stone-like until he finally expires ten days later.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 270.

¹⁸⁸ Alter, *David Story*, 160; Biddle ("1 Samuel 25," 633) writes: "She (Abigail) utilized his (Nabal) foul temperament as a weapon against him. She killed him with his own temper just as she spared David the consequences of his."; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 270.

¹⁸⁹ The narrator deliberately chooses the scope of the story presented. What the narrator chooses not to impart, therefore, is almost as important as what he does include. In the entire chapter, the most intriguing and glaring narrative omission occurs near the very end of the chapter. The narratee is told in 1 Sam 25:37 that the morning after Nabal had been feasting like a king "his wife told him these things." The narratee is not told what Abigail says to Nabal. As Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 270) writes: "Curiously, the reader is only indirectly informed of Abigail's communication with Nabal; after we hear one of the longest speeches from a woman in the entire Deuteronomistic History, we are not privy to what she says to Nabal!" Edelman (*King Saul*, 219) agrees that all the narratee learns is that the effect of her telling him "all these things" is fatal. Nabal's heart dies within him and within a week and a half he is struck dead. The narratee is left wondering what exactly caused Nabal to react with such devastation. According to Alter (*David Story*, 160) and Biddle ("1 Samuel 25," 633), this deliberate omission invites the narratee to ponder the role Abigail

Without any record of mourning the loss of her husband, Abigail is summoned to be David's wife. As before, she acts quickly, following David's messengers to become a future queen before vanishing from the narrative altogether.¹⁹⁰ And, as before, Abigail aptly demonstrates her cunning ability to play to David's superciliousness. In addition to her repeated prostrated body language, Abigail communicates subservience by her speech in 1 Sam 25:41: "Behold, your maidservant, as a maid, to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." As Berlin points out: "Abigail is an אֲמָלָה (handmaid) but wants to further reduce herself to a שֹׁפְחָה (maid) *vis-à-vis* David."¹⁹¹ Without doubt, Abigail is off to a good start in her quest to be queen.

Undoubtedly Abigail fulfills a niche role in the story, which often causes commentators to reduce her import from round to flat character status. Her shrewd conniving, however, is multidimensional and is more than a mere counterbalance to Nabal's foolishness.

2.5.6 *David's Ten Young Men*

David's ten unnamed young messengers are crucial to the unfolding of the plot of this chapter but they never attain full personalities in the unfolding of the drama.

plays in the death of her husband. It may be that, knowing her husband well, she chooses her words carefully enough to exploit his temperament and health weaknesses, thus acting as the agent of Nabal's demise. As Alter (*David Story*, 159) writes: "Abigail has matrimony in view, once her cantankerous old husband is out of the way, but why does she think she will deserve so signal an [honour] or reward from David? Shalev argues that when Abigail dissuades David from killing Nabal, repeatedly assuring him that the LORD will pay off David's scores against him, she is really suggesting herself as the agency for 'the LORD.' She is, in other words, proposing to David that she carry out a kind of contract killing of her husband, with the payoff that she will become the wife of the handsome young warrior and future king." The accuracy of this assessment of Abigail's involvement cannot be proven beyond speculation. However, the narrator's intentional omission at the end of the chapter opens the door for those who choose to venture in this direction. The result is expert storytelling by the narrator with appropriate ambiguity.

¹⁹⁰ Alter, *David Story*, 160; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 186.

¹⁹¹ Berlin, *Poetics*, 89.

Accordingly, they serve the story as agent characters, who function primarily to progress the plot.

As messengers they bridge the characterization of Nabal and David, who never directly interact in the entire chapter.¹⁹² In effect, they act as extensions of David first, and then of Nabal as they deliver his reply. As previously stated, that David sends ten men to Nabal is indicative of his expectation for a gift that required the strength of ten young men to carry.¹⁹³

2.5.7 *David's Men*

David's men are reticently mentioned in the context of David's attack on Nabal's house. They really serve to fill in the backdrop of the story and are almost mere extensions of David's character. As agents they progress the plot by providing texture to David's assault. The only direct characterization of David's men is that they gird their swords on David's orders (1 Sam 25:13).¹⁹⁴ The astonishing loyalty and immediate obedience by David's men is inspiring and contrary to the way Nabal's men treat their master.

It is interesting that four hundred go with David, prepared to do battle, while two hundred stay behind to look after the equipment. Since one third of David's men are required to guard provisions the narratee is bound to question the legitimacy of David's request of Nabal:

His motives concerning Nabal now become suspect. Has he deliberately forced a confrontation in order to seem to have a legitimate grievance and basis for gaining

¹⁹² Biddle, "1 Samuel 25," 627.

¹⁹³ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 261; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 202; Miscall, *I Samuel*, 150; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 579.

¹⁹⁴ Gordon (*I & II Samuel*, 183) suggests that David's response of 400 armed soldiers demonstrates a "wildly exaggerated response to Nabal's rebuff." It may be an exaggerated response or it may be that Nabal's house was of such a size that it required 400 men to overtake it.

control over Nabal's flocks and wool? Has this been a longstanding plan, formulated months ago in Carmel when Nabal's shepherds first appeared on the scene? Has David set up Nabal?¹⁹⁵

It would seem that David is not in dire need of additional goods for survival and accordingly it is reasonable for the narratee to become suspicious of David's motives. The quick mention and characterization of David's men makes this distrust possible and therefore, although fleeting in the story, they serve an important role in this chapter as agent characters.

2.5.8 *Nabal's Young Man*

Nabal's young man approaches Abigail with news of David's approaching assault and background information about David's involvement with Nabal's shepherds in the wilderness. His role is pivotal but not developed and therefore he is an agent character. As an agent character his role in the story is crucial. If this young man did not intervene the story would have ended differently.¹⁹⁶ Bodner compares the role of this young man with Saul's young man in 1 Sam 16:18:

When 'one from the lads' speaks, we are immediately reminded of an earlier speech by 'one from the lads' in 16.18, when 'one from the lads' gives effusive testimony about a son of Jesse in Saul's court. In 16.18, the servant lad tells Saul about a gifted young man, with the serendipitous result that David is brought before Saul. Now, here is another 'one from the lads' who, at a timely moment, proffers vast information about David's good actions, and likewise appears well-informed, opinionated, and deeply sensitive to David and his cause.¹⁹⁷

Both these young men fortuitously put David on the right side of providence thus propelling and protecting him as he steps toward his destiny.

¹⁹⁵ Edelman, *King Saul*, 209-210 (also cited by Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263.)

¹⁹⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263.

¹⁹⁷ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263.

2.5.9 *Abigail's Men*

Abigail's entourage accompanies her to meet David in the ravine. Like David's men, they create a texture to the rendezvous between Abigail and David. Their betrayal and malcontent toward Nabal is as striking as the contrary devotion of David's men to David. There is a clear contrast being established between the two groups of men in this chapter.

2.5.10 *YHWH*

YHWH's unpredictable divine sovereignty and his mysterious but crucial intervention in this chapter ensure that He emerges as a round character. The name of YHWH is invoked several times in 1 Sam 25. The first instance is when David employs the non-personal epithet for YHWH, אֱלֹהִים (God), in an oath formula: "So, may God do severely to the enemies of David, and so may he do more, if I spare – from all which are his – by morning [any] who piss against a wall" (1 Sam 25:22). The use of אֱלֹהִים in this instance is less hallowed than the personal name of God, יְהוָה (YHWH), and therefore it may be used intentionally in this phrase since David is, in many ways, speaking profanely. In any case, by appealing to God, David is demonstrating the strength of his resolve to destroy the men in Nabal's house. It is not clear in this isolated appeal to God if YHWH supports David's action or not.

The second mention of YHWH is Abigail's two fold invocation of His name in 1 Sam 25:26:

And now my lord, by the life of YHWH and the life of your soul, since YHWH has kept you from coming in with blood and saving yourself by your hand, and now may they be like Nabal, your enemy, and those who are seeking evil against my lord.

Abigail is persuasively making the case that it is on account of divine intervention that she has intercepted David. Many commentators accept Abigail's claims as reliable representations of the truth, that she *is* on a mission from YHWH to stop David.¹⁹⁸ For example, Klein writes:

Abigail's actions are the proximate cause for David escaping guilt, but the real protector of the future king's integrity is Yahweh himself... Abigail's journey to David is understood not as a valiant attempt to save her husband, much less an opportunistic attempt to join David's side. Rather, it was part of Yahweh's plan.¹⁹⁹

If Abigail is on a mission for YHWH, however, the narrator has not revealed such information to the narratee. The narratee is only aware of Abigail's plotting on account of the urgent appeal made by one of Nabal's men. YHWH's involvement to this point in the story requires mere speculation on the part of the narratee since it is not clear if Abigail is sincere or accurate in her interpretation that YHWH's hand is directing the unfolding of these events.

Abigail continues to invoke the name of YHWH during her theological oration about YHWH's intentions for David:

... YHWH will most certainly make for my lord an enduring house because of the wars of YHWH my lord is fighting (1 Sam 25:28)...

... the soul (life) of my lord shall be protected in the pouch of the living with YHWH, your God (1 Sam 25:29).

... YHWH will do for my lord all that He spoke – the good thing – to you and He will appoint you as leader over Israel (1 Sam 25:30).

When YHWH has done good for my lord, remember your maidservant (1 Sam 25:31).

¹⁹⁸ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 150; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 180; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 261; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 203; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 134; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 585.

¹⁹⁹ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 250-251.

There are several layers to Abigail's claims. First, she affirms what David and the narratee already know (from 1 Sam 16), that David has been appointed as "leader over Israel." However, just previous to this *old news*, Abigail delivers a divine promise to David of an "enduring house," which both David and the narratee have not heard before (Nor will either hear this promise confirmed until 2 Sam 7). Second, Abigail proposes that YHWH will make David an enduring house *because* David is "fighting the wars of YHWH."²⁰⁰ Third, Abigail strongly asserts that YHWH will protect David until He brings these things about. As before, the narratee is not able to affirm or deny Abigail's assertions at this point in the story because YHWH's involvement remains elusively veiled. Even though Abigail seems all the more sincere by making a personal appeal, that David remember her, nevertheless she *may* be intentionally misleading David by this request in order to save her house from complete annihilation.²⁰¹ Nor can the narratee be certain that Abigail is speaking truthfully on YHWH's behalf even if she is entirely sincere.²⁰² As Miscall writes, "Abigail, like Hannah, is a knowledgeable woman – in fact, her whole speech can be considered a pastiche of previous texts – and we are left

²⁰⁰ Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 178-179) comments, "...either in shrewdness or in theological extravagance, Abigail confirms that David is 'fighting the battles of Yahweh' and will do no evil. This remarkable claim seems remote from the actual David of this chapter, who is engaged in racketeering. But Abigail, as the narrator renders her, is playing for high stakes: namely, her own well-being and future. High stakes call for the playing of high cards."

²⁰¹ Amit, *Biblical Narratives*, 75; Alternatively, many commentators suggest that Abigail is sincerely convinced about the claims she makes to David: Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 151; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 587-588.

²⁰² Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 203-204) believes Abigail is a normative spokesperson for YHWH in this chapter, "In this section Abigail represents the prophetic voice. We can see this in detail: the remark of v. 26b which leads the reader to guess at Nabal's early death, and the request that David will later 'remember his handmaiden', by which the reader's attention is focused on what happens at the end of the story, are meant to show that more stands behind her words than she herself knows. The prophetic element in her speech occurs still more clearly in her vision of David as the predestined ruler over 'Israel', which here means all Israel."

wondering about the source of her knowledge and about its limits.”²⁰³ Indeed, in spite of Abigail, YHWH’s intent remains hidden from the narratee’s unobstructed view.

Regardless of the narratee’s opinion, David clearly accepts Abigail’s testimony at face value, validating her words: “Blessed be YHWH, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me” (1 Sam 25:32). Whether or not YHWH actually sent Abigail, and whether or not Abigail believes she is on a mission from God, David seems persuaded to this effect.²⁰⁴ David then proceeds to repeat the essence of the oath he made previously, only this time he employs the name of YHWH rather than the generic term for God:

...as surely as the life of YHWH, the God of Israel, who kept me from harming you, unless you had acted quickly to come to meet me, then there would not remain to Nabal by the light of the morning any who piss against the wall (1 Sam 25:34).

Here David reaffirms Abigail’s divinely orchestrated assignment and then goes a step further by adding that YHWH prevented David from harming her. We know that David is referring to Abigail specifically and not to Nabal’s house collectively, of which Abigail is but one member, because the pronoun employed has the direct object marker with the second person feminine singular suffix (נָתַתְּ). David and Abigail, then, seem to be on the same page, attributing the prevention of this near genocide to YHWH.

The narrator finally directly characterizes YHWH (this single time in the entire chapter) by the death of Nabal. The narrator’s clear declaration that “YHWH struck Nabal so he died” clearly establishes who is ultimately responsible for Nabal’s death. YHWH killed Nabal. Many commentators understand this very clear narrative

²⁰³ Miscall, *First Samuel*, 151-152.

²⁰⁴ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 151; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 261; Exum, *Tragedy*, 124; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 204; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 136; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 592.

announcement as grounds for validating all that Abigail and David have attributed to YHWH so far in the chapter.²⁰⁵ For example, Brueggemann writes:

...the narrator is quite explicit about the cause of death. Yahweh smote him (v. 38). What David refrained from doing, Yahweh did. Yahweh took vengeance, as David did not dare to do. Nabal (unwittingly) had affronted the coming king. And he paid.²⁰⁶

The narratee, however, must be careful in her application of this statement. Yes, YHWH struck Nabal so he died. This does not necessitate, however, His sending of Abigail or authenticate her statement that David will be granted an enduring house *because* he is fighting the wars of YHWH.

Of course David immediately perceives Nabal's death to be a pro-David divine corroboration:

Then David heard that Nabal had died and he said, "Blessed be YHWH who pleaded the case of my scorn from the hand of Nabal; and his servant he restrained from evil; and the evil of Nabal YHWH returned on his head" (1 Sam 25:39).

While David's assessment *may* be accurate, it is not *necessarily* accurate.²⁰⁷ All the narratee knows for sure is that YHWH struck Nabal so he died.²⁰⁸ Motive is never expounded by the narrator and therefore the narratee is still left wondering the extent to which YHWH has been involved in the machinations of this chapter.²⁰⁹

Green observes that YHWH seems to feature paramount in the chapter although in reality He does not play a significant role in the foreground:

²⁰⁵ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 152; Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 262. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 204; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 252; Robinson, *Like the Nations*, 136; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 593.

²⁰⁶ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 180.

²⁰⁷ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 271-272.

²⁰⁸ Green ("1 Samuel 25," 18) goes so far as to ask: "Is the YHWH reliably the agent of the Nabal's death? How does the powerful man meet his end? How has it come about, can it be discussed, understood?" Green has effectively put her finger on the ambiguity of Nabal's death that is so readily overlooked by so many commentators.

²⁰⁹ Miscal, *First Samuel*, 154-155.

This time if we turn off the video, put down the transcripts, and listen to a radio play of chs. 24-26, God sounds prominent. But in fact God is wholly silent and only talked about by others. Of some twenty-five assertions made about God in ninety-one verses of 24-26, most are rendered dubious in some way.²¹⁰

The characterization and role of YHWH, as Green has rightly observed, is much more uncertain than initially *meets the ear*. In actuality, very little can be said about YHWH's involvement except that "He struck Nabal so he died." Anything beyond this assertion is mere speculation.

The ambiguity surrounding YHWH's character does not necessitate the narratee to consider Him to be a flat character. To the contrary, YHWH's mysterious presence in this chapter endows him with unpredictability, complexity, and unique personality. Therefore, YHWH is a round character who remains obstructed from clear view.

2.5.11 Ahinoam

At the end of the chapter the narrator informs the narratee of David's marriage to Ahinoam. The purpose for this inclusion has more to do with David than it does with Ahinoam, who will be scarcely mentioned again. She is therefore another example of an agent character that is included for reasons other than her own personal integrity within the story.

Ahinoam is directly characterized as coming from Jezreel and becoming David's wife. The only other Ahinoam recorded in the Bible is the wife of Saul. While there is no absolute and unequivocal connection between Ahinoam, the wife of Saul, and Ahinoam, the wife of David, that it is possible that they are one and the same person surely sullies David's characterization in 1 Sam 25. As Bodner reasons:

²¹⁰ Green, "1 Samuel 25," 20; Green ("1 Samuel 25," 21) goes on to say: "...characters move into that silence and speak for God, constructing confidently what God has done, urging what God should and will do, making God's willingness to assist part of their prayers and pleas, oaths and exclamations."

A number of recent studies are taking the view that, at some point, David appropriates Saul's wife. Such an inference can help to explain Saul's outburst at Jonathan in 20.30 (where Jonathan's mother is referred to in unbecoming terms, including 'perverse, rebellious woman'), and Nathan's prophetic indictment of 2 Sam. 12.8 ('I gave your master's house to you and your master's women into your bosom'). The notion of David marrying Saul's wife remains speculative, but the very fact that Ahinoam is mentioned right after marriage to Abigail may well leave a bad taste in the mouths of some readers.²¹¹

Whether or not Ahinoam, the wife of Saul, is the same woman as Ahinoam, the wife of David, the intentional ambiguity by the narrator cannot be missed. The mention of Ahinoam at the close of this chapter seems intended to raise curiosities and suspicions in the mind of the narratee.²¹²

2.5.12 *Saul*

On the surface it would seem that Saul is an agent character in 1 Sam 25. He is mentioned by name only once and only in reference to his giving of Michal to Palti. Within this section of our analysis, therefore, we will consider Saul to be an agent character, mentioned only to inform the narratee of the situation with David's first wife. It is interesting that the narrator does not reveal Saul's motive for taking Michal from David and giving her away in marriage to Palti.²¹³ The narratee is left speculating whether Saul reacted to David's taking of Ahinoam and Abigail as wives, whether Saul's actions reflect the personal division between him and David, or whether there was another motivation altogether.²¹⁴ Whatever the reason, Saul's action further demonstrates his lack of political savvy. Even if Saul is trying to weaken David politically by removing

²¹¹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 272; also: Fox, *Give Us a King*, 128; Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 27; Levenson and Halpern, "David's Marriages," 513.

²¹² Levenson and Halpern ("David's Marriages," 516-517) suggest that taking Saul's wife, Ahinoam, would be a political move on David's part that "established his candidacy for the position (of king)."

²¹³ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 273.

²¹⁴ Levenson ("1 Samuel," 27) writes: "Saul's action in v 44 is a quid pro quo to David's in v 43. He deprived David of Michal when David asserted his right to the throne through his marriage with Ahinoam."

his connection with the royal family, with David on the rise, a politically marked marriage alliance may have served Saul well.²¹⁵

2.5.13 Michal and Palti

The narrator clearly mentions Michal because of her marital affiliation with David. Palti, Michal's new husband, is introduced as David's spousal replacement for Michal. Both Michal and Palti, therefore, are agent characters who are inserted here by the narrator in order to comment on David. Michal is directly characterized as Saul's daughter. Palti is directly characterized as "the son of Laish, who was from Gallim." David lost Michal to Palti by the hand of Saul. Since David is unwilling or unable to stop Michal's marriage to Palti, resolution to this side plot will not be found until after the death of Saul and David's emergence as the top player on the royal stage (2 Sam 3:13).²¹⁶

2.5.14 Characterization Summary

The three main characters in 1 Sam 25 are David, Nabal, and Abigail. YHWH plays an important role but remains heavily veiled throughout the chapter so that even at the end the narratee is not sure how to interpret YHWH's involvement. Samuel and Saul, mentioned only once each by name, stand in the shadows of this chapter with no overt purpose in the story. As we will see in chapter three, however, Samuel and Saul may have a starker presence than immediately perceived. Ahinoam, Michal, and Palti are all included in the concluding verses of the chapter as a commentary on David's characterization. The other characters in the chapter – David's ten young men, David's men, Nabal's young man, and Abigail's young men are all agent characters that progress the plot and act as extensions of the main players.

²¹⁵ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 121; Alter, *David Story*, 161; Bodner, *1 Samuel* 273; Exum, *Tragedy*, 83; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 187; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 594.

²¹⁶ Berlin, *Poetics*, 24; Exum, *Tragedy*, 83.

First Samuel 25 is vital to the overarching plot of 1 Sam 24-26 because it sheds new light on David's character. Nabal and Abigail, who are fleeting characters in the broader story, both serve to accentuate David's character. Nabal does this by being rhetorically twinned with Saul and Abigail helps the narratee understand David by being presented as his alter-ego. These parallels will be closely studied in the next chapter.

2.6 *Chapter Summary*

First Samuel 25 is an intricate and layered chapter that invites the narratee to be alert to the many nuances presented by the narrator. While the chapter seems to be a self-contained story, sandwiched between similar episodes that more aptly tie into the broader narrative, there is more happening in 1 Sam 25 than is normally initially observed. By carefully examining the narration, setting, plot, and characterization of this chapter, the narratee is able to enjoy the deep contribution 1 Sam 25 makes to the broader David story.

Conclusions drawn about the narrator being omnipresent and reliable will be absolutely crucial in order for the narratee to make sense out of the story that has been constructed and the scope that has been presented. The ultimate goal of chapter three will be to draw all conclusions together in order to perceive the narrator's ideological point of view as it pertains to David's character.

The observations noted about the structural, temporal, and spatial setting will be essential in anchoring 1 Sam 25 within the broader literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26. It will be noted that the narrator was not compelled to place 1 Sam 25 between 1 Sam 24 and 26 on account of strict chronology. The middle chapter's tangential syntax signals a break in the

forward development of narrated time. Reasons other than chronology, therefore, contribute to the placement of 1 Sam 25. Similarities in the pace of narrated time and spatial setting will all contribute to a hypothesis that the narrator deliberately constructed 1 Sam 24-26 as it is.

The individual plots of each chapter in 1 Sam 24-26 will be compared and contrasted to demonstrate a narrative harmony integral to understanding David's characterization. Abigail's intervention will be identified as much more than the climax of 1 Sam 25. Indeed, Abigail's speech represents a climax in the literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26, holding the three chapters together by underscoring the central theme of Davidic restraint.

The characterizations of Samuel, David, Nabal, Abigail, YHWH, and Ahinoam in 1 Sam 25 will all play a direct role in understanding David in 1 Sam 24-26. Nabal and Saul will be analyzed as rhetorical twins in order to prove that David's interaction with Nabal is as his interaction with Saul. Abigail will be identified as David's alter-ego in 1 Sam 25 and she will be compared to David's men (including Abishai), who act as David's alter-egos in 1 Sam 24 and 26. The differences between the role of Abigail and the role of David's men in their respective contexts will highlight two opposing manifestations of David's consistent ego. By doing all this, a different hue will shine through David's characterization throughout 1 Sam 24-26.

This second chapter was intended to conduct a detailed examination of all the elements of Hebrew storytelling in 1 Sam 25. Accordingly, David was not the sole focus, though his characterization played a pivotal role in understanding the whole. The concluding chapter in this thesis will utilize the observations made in this chapter with

the specific aim of better understanding the narrator's ideological point of view as it relates to the characterization of David in 1 Sam 24-26.

Chapter Three: Discovering David in Light of 1 Samuel 25

3.1 *Chapter Introduction*

The objective of this final chapter is to demonstrate that 1 Sam 25, as an integral component of 1 Sam 24-26, is required to fully understand the narrator's characterization of David. Without a comprehensive understanding of how these three chapters work together it is impossible for the narratee to appreciate the intricate and multidimensional characterization of David in the story. Therefore, this chapter will investigate the literary coherence of 1 Sam 24-26 and identify the role 1 Sam 25 plays in this larger literary unit.

The parallelism occurring between characters in these chapters will then be closely evaluated in order to better understand the narrator's portrayal of David. The interconnectedness between Nabal and Saul will be exposed and David's alter-egos, his men and Abigail, will be identified, described, and applied. In accordance with this analysis, David will be characterized in 1 Sam 24-26 as a man who demonstrates both restraint and unrestraint. It will then be shown how these seemingly opposite manifestations of character both stem from David's political brilliance and moral deficiency.

3.2 *First Samuel 25 in 1 Samuel 24-26*

To this point this thesis has focused on the study of 1 Sam 25. First Samuel 25, however, is not isolated from the broader David story. In fact, 1 Sam 25 serves a distinct purpose in the greater plot in which it is embedded, and especially within the literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26.

Indeed, the similarities between 1 Sam 24 and 26, and even 25, have encouraged many redaction critics to cry out, “Duplication!”¹ Polzin, however, is not content to concede the literary coherence of these three chapters so easily:

But what if I foolishly refuse to hand over the fruits of my interpretive labors to anonymous redactors who, as Nabal would say, “come from I do not know where”? And what if the story of David’s sparing of Nabal’s life, flanked by the twin stories of David sparing Saul’s life comprise a narrative unit that, like Abigail herself, has discretion and good judgment, quite apart from any literary-historical considerations one might entertain?²

Following Polzin’s lead, this section of the thesis will contextualize 1 Sam 25 within 1 Sam 24-26 in order to demonstrate how these three chapters work together.

3.2.1 *The Similarities of 1 Samuel 24 and 26*

First and foremost the outside chapters need to be studied in order to establish the boundaries of this literary unit. The similarities in setting, plot, and characterization between 1 Sam 24 and 26 oblige the narratee to consider these two chapters together:

At a surface reading, the two versions are parallel and in some sense the second is redundant. The story line is the same in the two tellings. David by stealth has sleeping Saul in his power. David can kill Saul but he refuses. David will not strike the life of the “LORD’s anointed.” In both cases, the narrative ends with an exchange of speeches between the two. Saul is grateful and yields to David. David is noble, reticent, and confident. Both accounts show how the flow of the narrative and of the historical process is toward David’s success and Saul’s demise.³

These glaring similarities compel the narratee to consider 1 Sam 24 and 26 as having been intentionally written to be considered together for several reasons.⁴

¹ McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 386-387, 409-411.

² Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, 205.

³ Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 183) continues to voice the differences between the two chapters in order to conclude that the inclusion of both chapters in the narrative is not actually redundant.

⁴ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 274; Tsumura (*1 Samuel*, 563-564, 594) identifies Polzin’s (*Deuteronomist*, 203-215) position that 1 Sam 24-26 acts as a transition for David from being the one who is endangered to becoming the one who chooses to spare life.

First, both chapters are relatively the same in length and they share a similar two act setting structure:⁵

Act	1 Sam 24	1 Sam 26
One: “Who is the Hunter and who is the Hunted?”	<p>Sc. 1: Saul Pursues David <i>Ev. 1:</i> David goes to En-Gedi (v. 1) <i>Ev. 2:</i> Saul returns from pursuing Philistines (v. 2) <i>Ev. 3:</i> Saul hears David is in En-Gedi (v. 2) <i>Ev. 4:</i> Saul takes 3000 men to seek after David (v. 3)</p> <p>Sc. 2: David Encounters Saul <i>Ev. 1:</i> Saul arrives at a cave by Sheep Pen of the Flock (v. 4) <i>Ev. 2:</i> Saul enters cave to relieve himself (v. 4) <i>Ev. 3:</i> David and his men are in same cave (v. 4);</p>	<p>Sc. 1: Saul Pursues David <i>Ev. 1:</i> Saul hears David is in the hill of Hachilah (v. 1) <i>Ev. 2:</i> Saul takes 3000 men to seek after David (v. 2)</p> <p>Sc. 2: David Encounters Saul <i>Ev. 1:</i> Saul camps in the hill of Hachilah (v. 3) <i>Ev. 2:</i> David and his men are in the same wilderness; David sees that Saul had arrived (v. 3) <i>Ev. 3:</i> David sent spies after Saul (v. 4) <i>Ev. 4:</i> David goes to Saul’s camp; he sees Saul and Abner sleeping (v. 5) <i>Ev. 5:</i> David asks Ahimelech and Abishai, “Who will go down with me to</p>

⁵ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 274; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 166; Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 183) suggests that 1 Sam 24 and 26 are not exactly paralleled so that the latter chapter can serve as an intensification of the former; For an alternative outline that compares similarities and differences between these two chapters refer to Tsumura (*1 Samuel*, 595), Green (“1 Samuel 25,” 3), Klein (*1 Samuel*, 236-237), and Robinson (*Like the Nations*, 127).

	<p>David's men encourage David to kill Saul (v. 5)</p> <p><i>Ev. 4:</i> David cuts hem from Saul's robe (v. 5)</p> <p><i>Ev. 5:</i> David's heart strikes him (v. 6)</p> <p><i>Ev. 6:</i> David refuses to strike YHWH's anointed (v. 7)</p> <p><i>Ev. 7:</i> David rebukes his men (v. 8)</p>	<p>Saul?" (v.6)</p> <p><i>Ev. 6:</i> David and Abishai go down to Saul's camp (v. 7)</p> <p><i>Ev. 7:</i> Abishai asks David for permission to kill Saul (v. 8)</p> <p><i>Ev. 8:</i> David rebukes Abishai, saying no one is to kill YHWH's anointed (v. 9)</p> <p><i>Ev. 9:</i> David predicts YHWH will strike Saul; David commands Abishai to take Saul's spear and water jug (v. 10-11)</p> <p><i>Ev. 10:</i> David takes Saul's spear and water jug (v. 12)</p>
<p>Two:</p> <p>"Speaking to YHWH's Anointed"</p>	<p>Sc. 1: Saul and David Meet</p> <p><i>Ev. 1:</i> David goes out from cave (v. 9)</p> <p><i>Ev. 2:</i> David calls after Saul (v. 9)</p> <p><i>Ev. 3:</i> Saul looks for David (v. 9)</p> <p><i>Ev. 4:</i> David prostrates himself before Saul (v. 9)</p> <p><i>Ev. 5:</i> David speaks to Saul (v. 10-16)</p> <p><i>Ev. 6:</i> Saul asks David if it is him (v. 17)</p> <p><i>Ev. 7:</i> Saul weeps (v. 17)</p>	<p>Sc. 1: Saul and David Meet</p> <p><i>Ev. 1:</i> David goes to the head of the mountain (v. 13)</p> <p><i>Ev. 2:</i> David calls after the people and Abner (v. 14)</p> <p><i>Ev. 3:</i> Abner looks for David and asks him to identify himself (v. 14)</p> <p><i>Ev. 4:</i> David speaks to Abner (v. 15-16)</p> <p><i>Ev. 5:</i> Saul recognizes David's voice and asks David if it is him (v. 17)</p>

	<p><i>Ev. 8:</i> Saul responds to David and concedes that David will be king (v. 18-22)</p> <p><i>Ev. 9:</i> David swears an oath to Saul that he will not cut off Saul's seed after him (v. 23)</p> <p>Sc. 2: Saul and David Part</p> <p><i>Ev. 1:</i> Saul goes to his house (v. 23)</p> <p><i>Ev. 2:</i> David and his men go up to the stronghold (v. 23)</p>	<p><i>Ev. 6:</i> David affirms that it is him who is speaking (v. 17)</p> <p><i>Ev. 7:</i> David speaks to Saul (v. 18-20)</p> <p><i>Ev. 8:</i> Saul responds to David and concedes that he has sinned by pursuing David (v. 21)</p> <p><i>Ev. 9:</i> David responds to Saul (v. 22-24)</p> <p><i>Ev. 10:</i> Saul blesses David (v. 25)</p> <p>Sc. 2: Saul and David Part</p> <p><i>Ev. 1:</i> David goes on his road (v. 25)</p> <p><i>Ev. 2:</i> Saul returns to his place (v. 25)</p>
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Although the setting structures of 1 Sam 24 and 26 are not absolutely identical, the many similarities between them cannot be missed.

The main dissimilarity between the two chapters is that they do not exhibit a true linear parallelism. Most obviously, Act Two, Scene Two is inverted in 1 Sam 26:25 from 1 Sam 24:23. A second glaring inversion occurs in Acts One of each chapter. In 1 Sam 24:7-8, Act One, Scene One, Events 6-7 are mirrored by Act One, Scene One, Event 8 in 1 Sam 26:9. Therefore, David's symbolic attack on Saul (1 Sam 24:5 and 26:12), which is the paralleled event in these two chapters, occurs *after* David's rebuke to his men in 1 Sam 24 but *before* his rebuke to Abishai in 1 Sam 26. This inversion interrupts the linear comparison and introduces a chiasm. This chiasm is an important literary construction and will be discussed in section 3.4 of this chapter.

Second, in addition to a similar pattern of acts, scenes, and events, the temporal and spatial settings between these two chapters are also very comparable. The temporal pace in each chapter is strikingly the same. In both chapters the narrated time of Act One, Scene One (1 Sam 24:1-3 and 26:1-2) transpires very quickly, giving the narratee a quick sweeping panorama required to set up the chapter. Narrated time then slows down in Act One, Scene Two (1 Sam 24:4-8 and 26:3-12), almost to a 1:1 ratio between narrated time and narration time throughout. Finally, in Act Two, Scene One (1 Sam 24:9-23 and 26:13-25), dialogue dominates each chapter bringing narrated time into even step with narration time.⁶ Act Two, Scene Two (1 Sam 24:23 and 26:25), by contrast reaccelerates narrated time in order to relocate Saul and David to their respective dwelling places.

Spatially, both chapters occur in the wilderness where David is living in exile.⁷ Each chapter opens and closes with Saul in his territory and David in hiding. First Samuel 24 has David and his men hiding in the very cave Saul enters to relieve himself.⁸ Similarly, in 1 Sam 26 Saul and his men camp at the very hill where David and his men are hiding. It might be suggested that the spatial setting of 1 Sam 26 is merely a larger stage than the cave in 1 Sam 24. Whereas Saul entered the cave alone in the earlier chapter, in 1 Sam 26 he enters “the cave” with all 3000 of his men. The parallels are strengthened by noticing that the latter chapter transpires at night. The darkness of the

⁶ There are some exceptions to this statement in 1 Sam 26. For example, narrated time moves quickly when David and Abishai go down to Saul’s camp and when they return to the head of the mountain. The purpose in these accelerations is to focus the attention of the narratee on the dialogue that dominates Act Two, Scene One.

⁷ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 257; Tsumura (*1 Samuel*, 595) notes, however, that in 1 Sam 24 David is in the wilderness of En-Gedi and in 1 Sam 26 David is in the wilderness of Ziph.

⁸ Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 250) references Miscall (*1 Samuel*, 144): “In the symbolic lexicon of the narrative to this point, a ‘cave’ is highly appropriate spatial setting. As Peter Miscall reflects, ‘At this point of the story, we can say that Saul’s career has been marked by seeking and not finding or by seeking one thing and finding another. Here Saul finally finds David, but the outcome of the encounter is not what he sought.’”

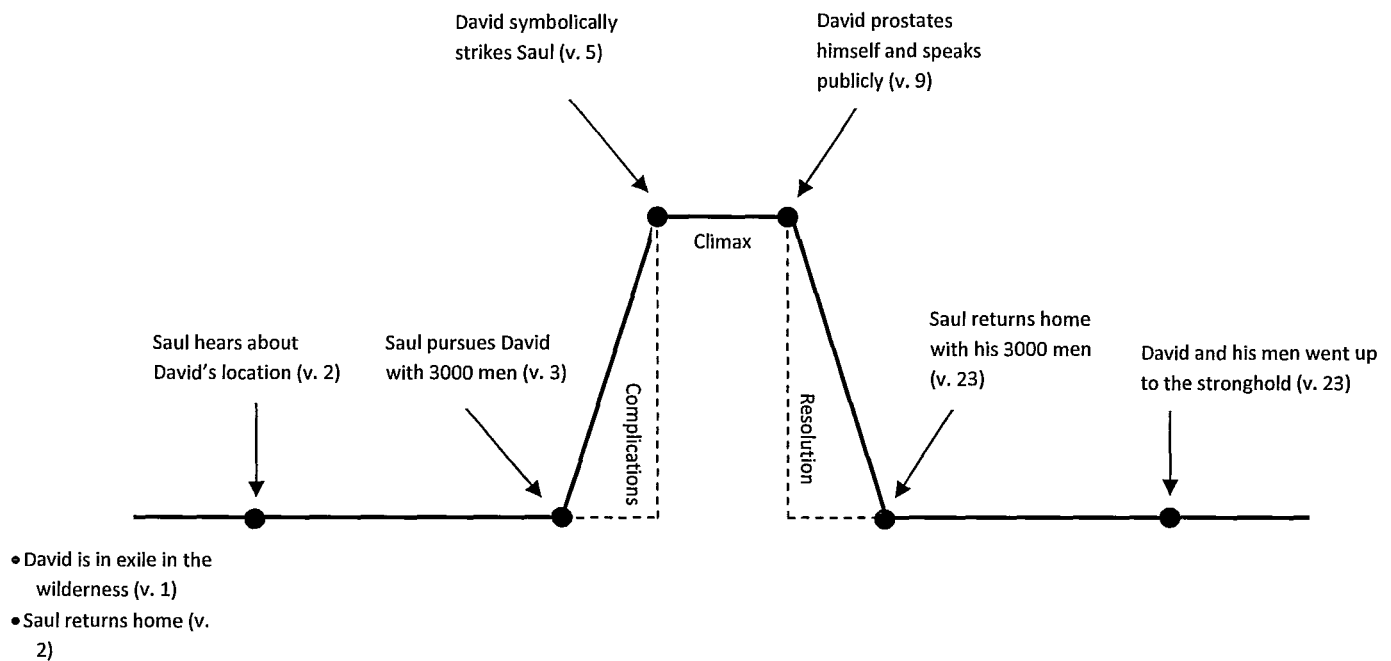
cave is maintained by the darkness of the night in Saul's camp.⁹ In addition, both chapters contain a scene (Act Two, Scene One) where Saul and David participate in a very public, yet transparent, conversation. The narratee can imagine all 600 of David's men and 3000 of Saul's men listening in on the honest discourse occurring between the two leaders.

Third, as already subtly indicated by the comparison between each setting structure, these two chapters share common plots. The plot structure for 1 Sam 24 is as follows: (1) The exposition introduces Saul at his home and David in exile (1 Sam 24:1); (2) Action begins when Saul hears a report about David's whereabouts (1 Sam 24:1); (3) The occasioning incident that generates conflict in the story occurs when Saul leaves his home with 3000 of his men to pursue David in the wilderness (1 Sam 24:2); (4) The conflict escalates as Saul stops to relieve himself in the very cave where David and his men are hiding (1 Sam 24:3) and David is exhorted to strike Saul dead (1 Sam 24:4);¹⁰ (5) The climax is most intense when David symbolically attacks Saul by cutting the hem of Saul's robe (1 Sam 24:4) and then rebukes his men for suggesting he raise his hand against YHWH's anointed (1 Sam 24:5-6); (6) The climax begins to be resolved when David prostrates himself before Saul and launches into an impassioned public oration (1 Sam 24:8-15); (7) The conflict deflates as Saul acknowledges David's clemency and declares that David will be exalted (1 Sam 24:16-21); (8) A point of final resolution is accomplished when Saul and his men return home (1 Sam 24:22); (9) Action ends as Saul and David arrive at their respective dwellings (1 Sam 24:22).

⁹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 278.

¹⁰ In both instances the exhorters appeal to YHWH to justify their motive: Alter, *David Story*, 164; Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 276-277) notes that in 1 Sam 24 David's men provide an alleged divine quotation and in 1 Sam 26 Abishai does not quote YHWH. Nevertheless, in both chapters David's men appeal to God as having provided an opportunity to strike Saul; Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 600; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 257.

The plot structure of 1 Sam 24, therefore, can be sketched as follows:

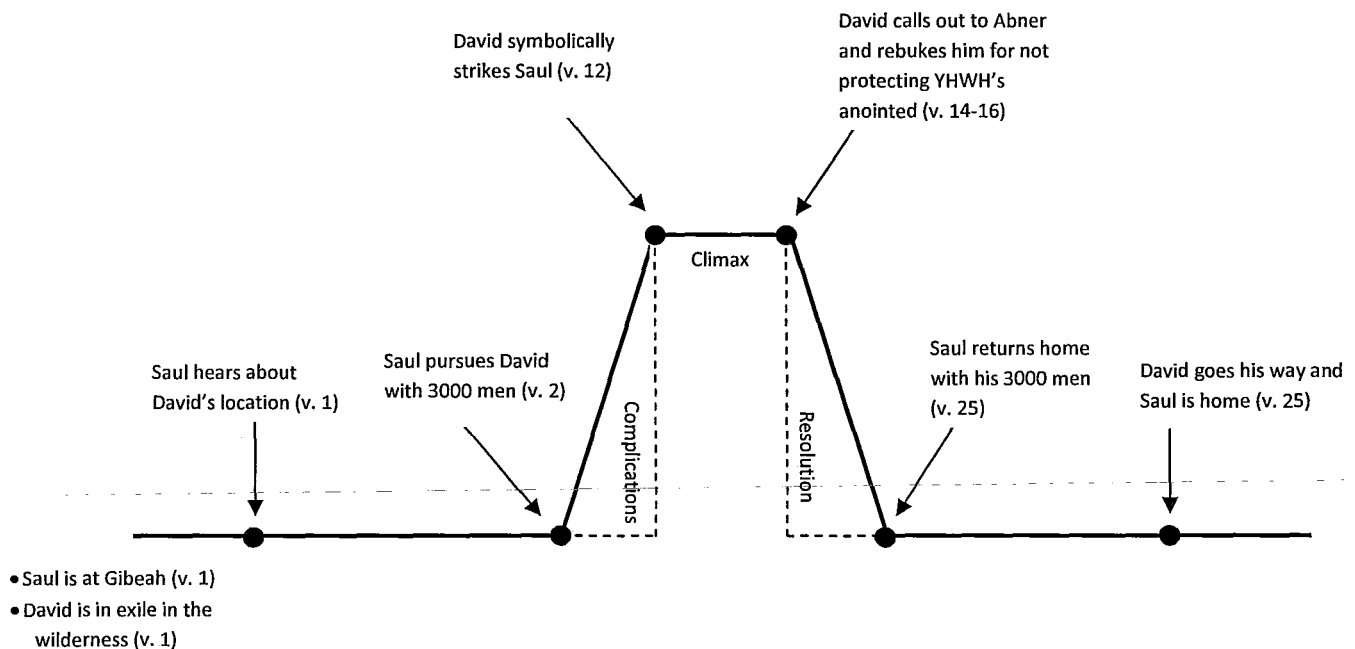


The plot structure for 1 Sam 26 is similar: (1) The exposition introduces Saul at Gibeah (1 Sam 26:1); (2) Action begins when Saul hears a report about David's whereabouts (1 Sam 26:1); (3) The occasioning incident that generates conflict in the story occurs when Saul leaves his home with 3000 of his men to pursue David in the wilderness (1 Sam 26:2); (4) The conflict escalates as David sends spies to observe Saul's location (1 Sam 26:3-4) and then goes to Saul's camp himself (1 Sam 26:5). Dramatic tension continues to rise when David recruits Abishai to go down to the camp with him (1 Sam 26:6-7). Abishai then exhorts David to permit him to run Saul through with his own spear (1 Sam 26:8).¹¹ David rebukes Abishai by instructing him never to raise his hand against YHWH's anointed and then instructs him to steal Saul's spear and water jug

¹¹ In both instances the exhorters appeal to YHWH to justify their motive: Alter, *David Story*, 164; Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 276-277) notes that in 1 Sam 24 David's men provide an alleged divine quotation and in 1 Sam 26 Abishai does not quote YHWH. Nevertheless, in both chapters David's men appeal to God as having provided an opportunity to strike Saul; Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 600; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 257; Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 209) recognizes that Abishai's insistence acts as a mirror to David's men in the cave in 1 Sam 24.

instead (1 Sam 26:9-11); (5) The climax is most intense when David – not Abishai – symbolically attacks Saul by stealing his spear and water jug (1 Sam 26:12);¹² (6) The climax begins to be resolved when David goes to the top of the opposite hill and calls out to Abner, accusing him of not adequately protecting the king (1 Sam 26:13-16); (7) The conflict deflates as David pleads his innocence and Saul acknowledges his own sin (1 Sam 26:17-24); (8) A point of final resolution is accomplished when Saul blesses David as he and his men return home (1 Sam 26:25); (9) Action ends with Saul and David once again in their respective dwellings (1 Sam 26:25).

The plot structure of 1 Sam 26, therefore, can be sketched as follows:



As these diagrams illustrate, the plots of these two chapters are remarkably similar to one another.¹³ Although the details of each chapter are different, these respective details can be added to this basic plot structure easily. As previously

¹² Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 278) writes: "Because David takes the spear and jug, there is a nice symmetry with chap. 24, as once more David creeps up to Saul in the darkness."

¹³ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 181; Green, "1 Samuel 25," 4.

mentioned the greatest difference between these plot structures is the inversion of events that serve to transition the story from one point in the plot graph to another. For example, in 1 Sam 24:8 David rebukes his men after the climactic moment when he cuts the hem from Saul's robe (1 Sam 24:5). By contrast, David rebukes Abishai in 1 Sam 26:9-11 before the climactic moment when he steals Saul's spear and water jug (1 Sam 26:12). Whereas David's rebuke in 1 Sam 24 is a part of the climax, in 1 Sam 26 David's rebuke contributes to the escalation of tension before the climax. This chiasmic structure is a deliberate narrative technique and will be further analyzed in section 3.4.

Both 1 Sam 24 and 26 are concentric plots. In spite of Saul's remarkable admissions, at the beginning and end of each chapter Saul is at home and David remains in exile. While the situation seems unaffected, both David and Saul are changed by their experience with one another.¹⁴ David has effectively challenged Saul's honour, stripping him of all self-respect in the presence of 3000 of his men.¹⁵ Entirely shamed by David, Saul has all but abdicated the throne by recognizing the divine plan that is protecting David and will ensure his rise to power. The public exchanges between Saul and David have, therefore, proven to be a public relations dream for David, as popular opinion among the troops is probably swayed by the oratory skills of David and the self-admitted bungling of the reigning king.

Fourth and finally, although there are more personages in 1 Sam 26, the characters featured in both chapters are comparable. The most obvious examples of this are Saul and David, who are the two main characters in both chapters. Saul is characterized in much the same way by both chapters. In his rabid pursuit of David, Saul

¹⁴ Green, "1 Samuel 25," 4.

¹⁵ Kirkpatrick ("Honor," 21-24) has succinctly presented the model for understanding honour and shame as it relates to Hebrew narrative.

is naïve of David's presence even though he is told at the outset where David is. Saul's ignorance is amplified for the narratee by the coupling of a dark spatial setting with Saul's extreme vulnerability. In 1 Sam 24, Saul is relieving himself in a dark cave and in 1 Sam 26 Saul is sleeping in a dark camp. In each instance unbeknownst to Saul, David is lurking in the shadows with the opportunity – and ample encouragement – to kill.

In contrast, David, who is supposedly the one being hunted, is presented as the hunter in each chapter.¹⁶ In 1 Sam 24 David has a serendipitous advantage over Saul in the cave and in 1 Sam 26 he has a similar edge in Saul's camp. Both times David refuses to raise his hand against YHWH's anointed.¹⁷

The dynamic of Saul's ignorant vulnerability and David's sly mastery of the situation is accentuated through their discourse in each chapter. David publicly pleads his innocence by producing evidence (the hem of Saul's robe in 1 Sam 24 and Saul's spear and water jug in 1 Sam 26) that he forewent his opportunity to slay the unsuspecting king.¹⁸ As Baldwin reflects:

Holding in his hand a piece of Saul's robe, David brought home to Saul how close he had been to losing his life. If David had really wanted to kill Saul, he would certainly have done so in the cave... Having now proved his innocence beyond doubt, David points out to Saul that, in seeking to kill him, Saul is the one who is in the wrong.¹⁹

¹⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 253; Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 182) notices this reversal in 1 Sam 26.

¹⁷ Polzin (*Deuteronomist*, 206) suggests that David's two time mercy to Saul is mirrored by his mercy to Nabal, thus connecting Nabal and Saul.

¹⁸ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 254; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 168; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 179; Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 566, 570.

¹⁹ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 145.

In response Saul admits his blame and exalts David in the presence of all their men. The result of both chapters is a public relations disaster for Saul and a populist masterpiece for David. Saul is shamed and David is accredited the king's honour.²⁰

As mentioned, there are more individual characters in 1 Sam 26 than in 1 Sam 24. Abner acts as an extension of Saul and Abishai as an extension of David. Abner's correlation with Saul can be easily seen in the setting structure comparison made above. Whereas David calls after Saul in 1 Sam 24:9, in 1 Sam 26:14 David calls after Abner. In 1 Sam 24:9 Saul looks for David and in 1 Sam 26:14 it is Abner who is looking for David. In 1 Sam 24:10-16 David launches into his speech by addressing Saul, but in 1 Sam 26:15-16 David initiates his speech by addressing Abner. These comparisons tie Abner to Saul in order to accentuate character traits in the failing king. Abner's lack of knowledge and extreme vulnerability is mirrored by Saul, who is equally unprepared to meet David. Introducing Abner, therefore, draws additional attention to Saul's folly. Not only is Saul characterized as a foolish king on a fool's errand, but Abner, his second-in-command, is in no better position to help the flailing monarch. In the same way, Abishai's rash impulse to kill Saul while he sleeps mirrors David's innate desire to see Saul dead.²¹

The perceptible similarities in the setting structures, the temporal and spatial settings, the plot structures and plot types, and the characterizations made in each chapter all work together to defend the hypothesis that the narrator intended 1 Sam 24 and 26 to

²⁰ Kirkpatrick ("Honor," 21-24) has succinctly presented the model for understanding honour and shame as it relates to Hebrew narrative.

²¹ Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 276) cites Ackerman ("Abishai," 14): "Moreover, in view of the larger portrait of Abishai that eventually emerges from the narrative, James Ackerman reflects: 'More than any other character Abishai is depicted as David's alter-ego, the consistent voice of his dark side, who advocates use of violence to advance David's honour and self-interest.'"

be considered in conversation with one another. In the middle of these chapters is 1 Sam 25, which seems irregular and disjunctive in comparison. As mentioned in chapter two, even the syntax at the outset of 1 Sam 25 seems to indicate a lateral move in the narration as opposed to the expected forward unfolding of the story.²² This being the case, the narratee has no choice but to wrestle with the placement of 1 Sam 25.²³ To this task we now turn our attention.

3.2.2 *The Apparent but Erroneous Dissimilarity of 1 Samuel 25*

First Samuel 24 and 26 create a balanced and noticeable envelope structure around 1 Sam 25.²⁴ While this middle chapter appears to be dissimilar to the chapters that surround it, there are several elements that tie 1 Sam 25 into 1 Sam 24-26.²⁵ As Bodner writes:

By means of the thematic links with chap. 24 (and chap. 26, as we will have occasion to see), we are provided with a new lens that opens our eyes to nuances of the story that we may otherwise have missed. Consequently this chapter (1 Sam 25) becomes an important one for both the overall storyline and the unfolding characterizations of both Saul and David.²⁶

As Bodner here suggests, it is erroneous to conclude that 1 Sam 25 is out of place between its bordering chapters. Green also states: “The reverie of ch. 25 provides a

²² Green, “1 Samuel 25,” 4.

²³ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 181; Klein, *I Samuel*, 252.

²⁴ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 187; Green, “1 Samuel 25,” 1.

²⁵ Evans (*1 & 2 Samuel*, 112) writes: “Sandwiched between the two parallel incidents in which David has the opportunity to destroy Saul but chooses to spare his life is this very different account of David’s activities during this period. At first sight it appears out of place in the overall schema of the books of Samuel, where the focus is on the question of power, primarily in national leadership. But here too power is a key motif, and there are several reasons the writers might consider this incident to be relevant.”

²⁶ Bodner, *I Samuel*, 258.

sideshadow of the action in its two framing episodes, rehearses representationally and bluntly what almost happens but which must ultimately be avoided.”²⁷

The most obvious points of connection are as follows: First, the focus of the temporal setting in all three chapters is each a single day. Second, the spatial setting in all three chapters orbits around the wilderness of David’s exile. Third, the plot of each chapter focuses on David’s dilemma over whether to exercise restraint or unleash violence.²⁸ Fourth, the climax of each plot is most intense when David symbolically attacks Saul or Nabal. Fifth, the climax of each plot deflates with David’s decision to exercise restraint instead of violence.²⁹ Sixth, David is the main character in all three chapters. Seventh, each chapter describes David interacting with a foe (Saul in 1 Sam 24/26 and Nabal in 1 Sam 25). Eighth, in all three chapters David becomes the “hunter.” These eight main similarities buttress the cohesion of 1 Sam 24-26 in spite of the apparent dissimilarities present.

The placement of 1 Sam 25 is not coincidental. Rather the narrator deliberately located it between two matching chapters with a particular purpose in mind. Given that David features as the dominant personality in all three chapters, the purpose of 1 Sam 25 within 1 Sam 24-26 hinges on the characterization of David.

The seeming contrasts exhibited in David’s character between 1 Sam 24/26 and 1 Sam 25 provide an apt starting point for considering the narrative purpose of this middle chapter. On the surface it appears to the narratee as though David is restrained and

²⁷ Green, “1 Samuel 25,” 1; Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 274) references Jobling (*1 Samuel*, 92): “David Jobling argues that chap. 25 ‘stands in an allegorical relation’ to chaps. 24 and 26, and I will be alert to such nuances in my analysis below.”

²⁸ Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 575.

²⁹ Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 575.

composed in 1 Sam 24/26 and that he is violent and impulsive in 1 Sam 25.³⁰ What appears at first to be contrast, however, is not actually contrast but is rather *narrative commentary*.³¹ Baldwin suggests that 1 Sam 25 serves as a narrative analogy to help the narratee better understand 1 Sam 24 and 26. She quotes Gordon to describe narrative analogy:

[Narrative analogy is] a device whereby the narrator can provide an internal commentary on the action which he is describing, usually by means of cross-reference to an earlier action or speech. Thus narratives are made to interact in ways which may not be immediately apparent; ironic parallelism abounds wherever this technique is applied.³²

Accordingly, by employing this narrative strategy the narrator is able to covertly comment on the characterization of David in 1 Sam 24/26 through an intricate series of ironic parallelisms, which will be investigated in detail in the following sections of this chapter.

Without 1 Sam 25, it would be much more difficult for the narratee to detect the darker characterization of David that lurks beneath the surface in 1 Sam 24/26. The narrator presents David covertly in these chapters so that the narratee is able to observe David from a limited perspective in 1 Sam 24/26. In 1 Sam 25, on the other hand, the narrator pulls back the curtain and invites the narratee to glimpse a David not yet seen clearly in the story. Through dramatic narration the narratee learns that David is capable of revenge and murder. The outward actions of David in 1 Sam 25 betray an inner David that is well hidden in 1 Sam 24/26. This inner David is not unique to 1 Sam 25, but rather he is normative throughout 1 Sam 24-26. This is true even though the “David” clearly

³⁰ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 252; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 174-175.

³¹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 258.

³² Baldwin (*1 & 2 Samuel*, 147) quoting Gordon (“David’s Rise,” 42-43); also: Long, “Literary Artistry,” 40.

presented in 1 Sam 25 remains largely hidden in the bracketing chapters. The result is a brilliant multifaceted presentation of David. The task of the narratee is to synthesize what seems to be contradictory in order to fully comprehend David as he is portrayed by the narrator.

3.2.3 *Contextual Summary*

First Samuel 24-26 is a coherent and unified literary unit. The conspicuous similarities between 1 Sam 24 and 26 strongly suggest that the narrator intended these two chapters to be read in light of each other. Furthermore, since these two chapters surround 1 Sam 25, this middle chapter must also be read in light of the chapters before and after it. A surface reading seems to indicate that 1 Sam 25 is unrelated to 1 Sam 24 and 26. A closer reading, however, makes obvious the many aspects of the chapter that tie it to the larger literary unit.

To more clearly defend the hypothesis that David is consistently characterized throughout all three chapters requires a closer look at some of the ironic parallels that exist between 1 Sam 25 and 1 Sam 24/26. Among these parallels are the narrative function of Nabal in relation to Saul, and the role of David's men and Abigail in understanding David's waxing between restraint and unrestraint. These points of connection will dominate the remaining pages of this thesis.

3.3 *The Nabal-Saul Connection*

Nabal and Saul are linked to one another in order to create an astounding ironic parallel. Although these two personages are different characters, the narrator uses Nabal

as a rhetorical stand-in for Saul.³³ As Bodner writes, while commenting on Nabal: “Any parallels with Saul are entirely intentional.”³⁴ This Nabal-Saul connection is essential because, by identifying it, the narratee is able to apply David’s reaction against Nabal to the below-the-surface dynamic being played out between David and Saul. Put simply, the way David feels and acts toward Nabal is precisely how he feels and *wants to act* toward Saul.³⁵

The purpose of this section is to unequivocally demonstrate that the narrator intentionally connects the Nabal and Saul characters. In so doing the groundwork will be laid to further comment on the narrator’s presentation of David. The literary connection between Nabal and Saul is made evident in many ways, even though some ways are more conspicuous than others. The narratee is able to discern hints planted by the narrator in his descriptions of setting and characterization. Within a survey of their respective characterizations the narratee is invited to notice that Nabal and Saul are joined rhetorically both in life and in death.

3.3.1 *Linked by Setting*

The spatial setting of 1 Sam 25 immediately draws Nabal and Saul together.

Nabal is a well established businessman in Carmel with a homestead in Maon. Carmel and Maon are significant for two reasons. First, it is in Carmel that Saul erects a monument to honour himself (1 Sam 15:12) and it is in Maon that Saul almost catches

³³ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 147; Biddle (“1 Samuel 25,” 623-626) compares Nabal and Laban, Laban and Saul, and therefore Nabal and Saul; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 258; Evans, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 113; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 181; Godon, “David’s Rise,” 43; Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, 210-211; Whitlam, “Defence of David,” 76.

³⁴ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 268.

³⁵ Tsumura (*1 Samuel*, 572) notices that David views both Nabal and Saul as agents of evil against him in spite of the good David perceives he returns to them. David, therefore, views his relationship with Saul in a similar way as his relationship with Nabal. The implications of this Davidic perception are far reaching; also: Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 184.

David (1 Sam 23).³⁶ The narratee, therefore, is immediately reminded of Saul in the expositional verses of this chapter.

In contrast to Nabal's doubly described Saulide home base, David is depicted as being in the wilderness. This detail is reminiscent of David's predicament in 1 Sam 24 and 26. Carmel and Maon are undoubtedly pro-Saul locales in the story, thus inviting the narratee to consider from the outset that Nabal and Saul may share something in common.³⁷

3.3.2 *Linked in Life*

There is a superfluity of instances where the narrator conjoins Nabal with Saul through their characterizations. Nabal is immediately characterized by his name, which means "fool" or "wineskin." In lockstep, Saul is consistently drawn by the narrator as a fool. In 1 Sam 24 and 26, Saul's ignorance and vulnerability make him look abundantly foolish. Although he is hunting David to take his life, David quickly becomes the hunter who decides to spare the king's life. By this Saul plays the fool in each chapter. Saul himself admits that he has acted foolishly when he is speaking to David in 1 Sam 26:21: "I have sinned. Return my son David because I will not harm you because my soul was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have been *foolish* and I have sinned very greatly." Likewise, in 1 Sam 13:13 Samuel says to Saul: "You have been *foolish*; you have not kept the commandment of YHWH your God..." The Hebrew root, which is translated "fool," that both Saul and Samuel use in these instances is סכל, not נבל.

Nevertheless, the semantic overlap is clear.

³⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 260; Bodner, *National Insecurity*, 172; Edelman, *King Saul*, 215 (also cited by Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 268); Evans, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 112; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 182; Green, "1 Samuel 25," 10; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 247; McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 396; Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 576.

³⁷ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 260; Gordon, "David's Rise," 43-44; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 247.

This idea of ‘fool’ creates an obvious thematic connection with the previous chapter: Nabal is a fool, and here Saul confesses to be one. Even though two different words are used, it serves to equate further Saul and Nabal, both of whom – in David’s estimation – have returned good with evil.³⁸ Nabal means fool and סכל means fool. Samuel accuses Saul of acting foolishly and Saul admits that he played the fool. Nabal may be a נבל, and Saul a סכל, but both are first class fools.³⁹

A second direct characterization made about Nabal in the opening exposition is that he is magnificently wealthy. By inference, therefore, Nabal is a prominent man of considerable power.⁴⁰ This characterization is further focused when the narratee learns that Nabal is a descendent of Caleb, a significant figure in Israel’s history who received Hebron, David’s future Judean capital, as an inheritance from Joshua (Josh 14:13-14). It would seem, therefore, that Nabal stands between David and the throne of Judah for without his support it will be very difficult for David to aspire to the highest royal office in Hebron.⁴¹ In the same way, Saul stands in David’s way from becoming king over all Israel.⁴² All of these qualities make Nabal “kingly” in every way but title, thus further connecting him with Saul.

In 1 Sam 25:5-8 David sends ten young men to request supplies from Nabal’s abundance. During this entreaty, David calls himself Nabal’s son (1 Sam 25:8). In 1 Sam 24 and 26, David once refers to Saul as his father (1 Sam 24:11) and Saul calls David his son four times (1 Sam 24:16, 26:17, 21, 25). In addition to its courteous and diplomatic

³⁸ Bodner, *I Samuel*, 280; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 190.

³⁹ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 187; Gordon, “David’s Rise,” 50-51.

⁴⁰ Gordon, “David’s Rise,” 44; Klein, *I Samuel*, 147.

⁴¹ Tsumura, *I Samuel*, 576.

⁴² Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 153.

language, therefore, David's words to Nabal echo his precarious relationship with Saul. The use of this epithet, therefore, further connects Nabal and Saul.⁴³

In response to David's request, Nabal asks: "Who is David? And, who is the son of Jesse?" Saul has previously asked a similar question about David in this story.⁴⁴ In 1 Sam 17:55, immediately following David's slaying of Goliath, Saul turns to Abner and asks: "Whose son is this young man?" Many commentators have ruminated over this question since David, the son of Jesse, is well known to Saul by this time, having been fetched as his music therapist and promoted to be his armor bearer in 1 Sam 16:21. To resolve this apparent contradiction in the narrative, many have suggested source and redaction theories to explain away the confusion.

There are other options, however, available to the narratee. Rather than jettisoning the apparent contradiction as irregular, it is possible that Saul, like Nabal, is perfectly aware of David's identity – including whose son he is – but that the question has other rhetorical functions and effects. In Nabal's case, his rhetorical questions serve as pro-Saul slurs against David.⁴⁵ In Saul's case, this question to Abner, who is the king's second-in-command, serves as a dire warning that they together had better keep their eye on this impressive young upstart because he might become a dangerous rival to Saulide interests.

As Bodner writes:

Saul has to address Abner because, after Saul himself, Abner's interests are most threatened by the rise of a rival. Abner swears by the king's own life that he does not know the answer to the king's question, but this is missing Saul's drift. Saul is warning Abner about this rival, but Abner misses the signal.⁴⁶

⁴³ Biddle, "1 Samuel 25," Gordon, "David's Rise," 47-48.

⁴⁴ Biddle, "1 Samuel 25," 626; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262; Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, 211.

⁴⁵ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262.

⁴⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 189.

Saul's rhetorical question, like Nabal's, is not seeking an answer, but rather is communicating an anti-David message that identifies him as a rival. That both Nabal and Saul ask a similar question about David's identity and ancestry, in spite of their knowing, connects them to each other.

While Abigail is intercepting David, Nabal is feasting and becoming increasingly drunk in his house. Abigail returns home after petitioning David. The narrator writes: "Then Abigail went to Nabal. Now, behold, there was a feast for him in his house *like the feast of the king*..." This is a powerful simile that reinforces the point that Nabal is described as a kingly figure in 1 Sam 25. Not only is he wealthy, powerful, and the heir of a prominent Calebite heritage, but here he is described by use of a simile as "feasting *like a king*." This simile is an intentional linking of Nabal with Saul, who is the reigning king in the story.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Nabal's ignorant and intoxicated susceptibility shares a strong affinity with Saul in 1 Sam 24 and 26. In 1 Sam 24 Saul is vulnerably relieving himself in the cave while David considers whether or not to appease his men by striking the unwitting king. In 1 Sam 26, the sleeping Saul is similarly defenseless while David restrains Abishai from running the king through with his own spear. In all three instances should David decide to strike a lethal blow, his victim has no ability to protect himself.⁴⁸ In each case, however, David chooses – for one reason or another – not to follow through with easy murder.

⁴⁷ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 186; Gordon, "David's Rise," 46; Kessler ("Sexuality," 412) notices the connection between Saul and Nabal here, but does not go further.

⁴⁸ Bodner (1 Samuel, 269) comments on Nabal's drunken defenselessness in light of David's near massacre.

The next morning, in 1 Sam 25:37, an interesting scene unfolds as Abigail reports to Nabal all that had happened the previous day. While Abigail approaches Nabal it is possible that he is in the midst of relieving himself of his debauchery the night before. If this is the case, there is a subtle allusion to Saul relieving himself in the cave in 1 Sam 24:4. Both men are described in the act of urination or defecation, which is not common in the Hebrew Bible and therefore makes them a rare pair in this story.⁴⁹

David's marriage to Abigail, the wife of Nabal is matched by the narrator's passing addition that David also married Ahinoam from Jezreel. As mentioned in chapter two, the name of Saul's wife is also Ahinoam. It remains purely speculative that Ahinoam, the wife of David, and Ahinoam, the wife of Saul, are one and the same woman. Nevertheless, the answer to that riddle is inconsequential for our purposes here. What matters most is that the narrator presents Ahinoam in 1 Sam 25:43 ambiguously enough that the narratee is compelled to wonder.⁵⁰ Even if David's wife is not the same Ahinoam as Saul's wife, the rhetorical purpose of including this information about David's wives is made clear. The narrator mentions David's marriage to Ahinoam precisely to connect Nabal and Saul. Just as David took Nabal's wife to be his own, so too he took Saul's wife, or a woman who shares the same name, to be his own. Nabal and Saul are represented as equal twin losers in the face of David's rise to power.

With a few precise strokes the narrator characterizes Nabal in a very Saulide fashion. The foolishness described of each man acts as a cornerstone to their characterization and yet, in spite of this foolishness, both Nabal and Saul are depicted as wealthy, powerful, and kingly.

⁴⁹ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 270.

⁵⁰ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 272-273; Gordon, "David's Rise," 44; Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 27.

3.3.3 *Linked in Death*

Just as Nabal and Saul are connected in life, the narrator also connects them by their deaths. In the closing moments of 1 Sam 25 the narrator reports that “YHWH struck Nabal so he died.” The fate of Saul is similar. Saul is severely wounded by an archer while fighting the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. To avoid being abused by the Philistine soldiers Saul commits suicide by falling on his own sword (1 Sam 31:1-4). Although the circumstances surrounding their respective deaths are different, there are some strong resemblances. Both Saul and Nabal die in accordance with divine providence.⁵¹ Although the narrator does not confirm YHWH’s hand in Saul’s death, in 1 Sam 28:16-19 Samuel says to Saul:

“Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has departed from you and has become your adversary? The Lord has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David. As you did not obey the Lord and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the Lord will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the Lord will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!”⁵²

There are six observations stemming from this speech that connect Nabal and Saul in death.

First, Samuel’s words to Saul are paralleled by Abigail’s words to Nabal (1 Sam 25:37). In both instances, Nabal and Saul are presented with words that ultimately effect or warn about their upcoming deaths.

Second, Samuel notifies Saul that YHWH had taken the kingdom away from him and given it to David. Similarly, David receives Nabal’s chieftdom and political

⁵¹ Biddle, “1 Samuel 25,” 626; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 253; Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, 211; Tsumura (*1 Samuel*, 593) writes: “It is stated that ‘the Lord struck Nabal.’ One may assume that the Lord will eventually strike Saul too.”

⁵² NASB ‘95 Translation.

prominence in Hebron, where he is later to be crowned king over Judah (2 Sam 2:1-4). As Polzin writes: “The story of Nabal further reveals Saul’s fate by having Nabal’s fate prefigure it: each must die to enable, or at least benefit, David’s rule.”⁵³ Whatever it is that Abigail says to her husband it has a lethal effect enabling David to take all that had once been Nabal’s, including his wife! Just as David receives the kingdom (of all Israel) from Saul, so he receives hegemony in the Hebron region, which leads to the kingdom (of Judah), from Nabal.⁵⁴

Third, Samuel warns Saul that YHWH will give Saul into the hands of the Philistines with the result that he will be with Samuel in Sheol by the end of the next day. Although the role of YHWH is not overtly narrated at the death of Saul, the narrator covertly attributes the death of Saul to the hand of YHWH through Samuel’s words. Just as “YHWH struck Nabal so he died,” so YHWH gave Saul into the hands of the Philistines so he died. Samuel’s words strike the narratee as reliable on account of his perspective from the other side of the grave and because his prophetic words find fulfillment in 1 Sam 31. In each instance, however, the narratee is not entirely sure about the role of YHWH. In the case of Nabal, YHWH clearly killed Nabal, but no motive is given. In the case of Saul, motive is clearly ascribed, but confirmation of YHWH’s involvement is lacking. Nevertheless, the two deaths share many affinities and, therefore, are best considered in light of one another.

Fourth, both Nabal and Saul are suspended in life as they anticipate their impending doom.⁵⁵ Nabal has to wait ten days to die, even though the narratee waits a

⁵³ Levenson and Halpern (“David’s Marriages”) provide an in depth and provocative look at the political benefits of David’s marriages.

⁵⁴ Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, 211.

⁵⁵ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 271.

mere single verse. Saul, on the other hand, has a single day to wait, but the narratee is left lingering in anticipation for three chapters. Once each character finally meets his end word is sent to David, who then acts in such a way as to benefit from each death. In Nabal's case, David takes Abigail to be his wife and then moves to consolidate power in Nabal's home region. In Saul's case, David fights a civil war to inherit Saul's kingdom.

Fifth, before their death both Nabal and Saul indulge in a last meal.⁵⁶ Nabal feasts in debauchery in his house and Saul is served a fattened calf and unleavened bread by the witch of En-Dor (1 Sam 28:22-25).

Sixth and finally, Nabal's reaction to Abigail's words to him are strongly paralleled by Saul's reaction to Samuel's words. Nabal "became like a stone" because "his heart died within him" (1 Sam 25:37). Similarly, Saul "quickly filled his height over the ground and was very afraid because of the words of Samuel" (1 Sam 28:20).

These six aspects that Nabal and Saul share in common in their deaths encourage the narratee to connect the dots between these two men in the story.

3.3.4 *Nabal-Saul Summary*

There are a plethora of ways the narrator intentionally connects Nabal and Saul in 1 Samuel, both in their lives and in their deaths. The main purpose in thoroughly linking Nabal and Saul is to shed light on David's character. It may seem that David responds one way to Saul and another way to Nabal but this is not accurate. Since Nabal is Saul's rhetorical stand-in, the message to the narratee is that just as David is with Nabal, so he is with Saul.

⁵⁶ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 271.

3.4 *David's Alter-Egos*

A second ironic parallel that demonstrates cohesion between these three chapters is the theme of Davidic restraint that is threaded throughout. In 1 Sam 24 and 26 David restrains himself from striking Saul in spite of the exhortations to kill from his men. In 1 Sam 25 the inverse occurs, as David girds his sword for battle against Nabal – Saul's rhetorical stand-in – only to be restrained by Abigail.

The theme of Davidic restraint is carefully presented throughout 1 Sam 24-26. To accentuate the importance of this theme the narrator has deliberately structured the narrative with it in mind. The narratee is invited to notice an interesting chiasm that is delicately built into the background of these chapters:

A: David's men suggest YHWH has delivered Saul into his hand (1 Sam 24:5).

B: David cuts the hem of Saul's robe (1 Sam 24:5).

C: David rebukes his men for suggesting he should strike "YHWH's anointed" (1 Sam 24:7-8).⁵⁷

D: David girds his sword, swearing an oath in the name of God that he will destroy Nabal and his house (1 Sam 25:13, 22).

KEYSTONE: Abigail restrains David (1 Sam 25:24-31).⁵⁸

D': David blesses YHWH and Abigail for protecting him from incurring bloodguilt and, sheathing his sword, he repeats his oath (1 Sam 25:32-34).

C': David rebukes Abishai for wanting to strike "YHWH's anointed" (1 Sam 26:8-9).

⁵⁷ Many commentators, including Klein (*1 Samuel*, 238), Robinson (*Like the Nations*, 128), and Tsumura (*1 Samuel*, 566), suggest that B and C seem to be out of order. To remedy this problem redaction theories abound. A better reason for this order, as presented in the MT, is the existence of a subtle chiasm weaved throughout the three chapters so that the fulcrum moment rests on Abigail's intervention.

⁵⁸ Dorsey (*Literary Structure*, 132) places Abigail's intervention as the central point of a much broader chiasm that spans 1 Sam 21-31.

B': David takes Saul's spear and water jug (1 Sam 26:12).

A': David suggests that YHWH has delivered Saul into his hand (1 Sam 26:23).

At the centre of this chiasm is Abigail's intervention. Rhetorically, therefore, she shoulders a tremendous responsibility in restraining David from incurring bloodguilt.

Abigail's intervention is the narrative centre of 1 Sam 24-26 for a number of reasons. First, Abigail's speech to David occupies the actual middle of this literary unit. In the BHS MT there are 805 words before and 860 words after she begins speaking. The beginning of her appeal to David, therefore, marks a literary centre to these three chapters.

Second, as the keystone of this delicate chiastic structure Abigail's intervention marks the rhetorical fulcrum of 1 Sam 24-26. Abigail articulates the major dilemma that is before David in each of these chapters; David must decide whether to kill or not to kill. Abigail is firmly entrenched on the latter side of this dilemma, not to kill, and she effectively persuades David to this effect. As will be discussed, this dilemma is also addressed by David's men in the chapters before and after. Their advice to David runs counter to Abigail's counsel but is not heeded by David.⁵⁹ Abigail's rhetorical presence, therefore, is felt in 1 Sam 24 and 26 although she is not mentioned by name.

Third, in both instances David's rationale for not killing Saul is remarkably similar to Abigail's defense against Nabal's slaughter.⁶⁰ David refuses to lift his hand to kill YHWH's anointed. Why? Put simply, to kill Saul would cause David to incur bloodguilt, thus sully his awaited ascension to the throne.⁶¹ Of course, there is also a

⁵⁹ Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 575.

⁶⁰ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 151.

⁶¹ Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 567.

practical consideration in David's mind. Since he too is YHWH's anointed it is a good policy to practice, teach, and reinforce the sacred nature of the royal office.

With this chiasm in mind, the following three sub-sections will consider the role of David's men and Abigail as two opposing alter-egos for David, each seeking to appeal to a quality in David's character.

3.4.1 *David and His Men*

In 1 Sam 24:5, David's men urge him to kill Saul by saying: "Behold, the day which YHWH said to you, 'Behold, I am giving your enemy into your hand and you shall do to him according to that which is good in your eyes.'"⁶² David then approaches Saul in silence and cuts the hem of his robe, but does not kill him. Likewise, in 1 Sam 26:8 Abishai asks David for permission to murder Saul while he sleeps: "God delivered – today – your enemy into your hand and now may I strike him please with the spear and the ground with one stroke; and I will not repeat a second time for him." David then rebukes Abishai and instructs him to retrieve Saul's water jug and spear, before having second thoughts and deciding to take these items himself (1 Sam 26:9-12). In both instances David demonstrates remarkable restraint given his situation and the opportunity presented.

It may be, however, that David's men in 1 Sam 24 – and Abishai in 1 Sam 26 – reflect a quality within David's character that remains in check, but is nevertheless present. As a manifestation of David's *unrestrained alter-ego*, these men give voice to the side of David that would relish the death of Saul and the initiation of his own rise to power. An affinity between David and his men in 1 Sam 24 is established by the very

⁶² McCarter (*I Samuel*, 383) reminds us that no such promise from YHWH has been previously mentioned in the narrative.

chiasm outlined above. Notice that A is balanced by A'. In A (1 Sam 24:5), it is David's men who suggest to David that YHWH delivered Saul into his hands. In A' (1 Sam 26:23), it is David himself who makes this claim directly to Saul. In 1 Sam 26:8 Abishai also proposes that God had delivered Saul into David's hands. On this point, therefore, these three groups – David's men, Abishai, and David – all seem to agree. Rhetorically, therefore, it is conceivable that an aspect of David's character is reflected by the instincts of his men. This is especially poignant in 1 Sam 26, where Abishai's immediate proclivity to kill Saul may reflect David's intrinsic yearning.⁶³

If this is the case, however, then what restrains David from making it so? What prevents David from taking the throne of Israel by force? Herein lays the crux of the dilemma concerning the characterization of David and the main rhetorical function of 1 Sam 25. The appeal of David's men is overpowered by a stronger more central voice. The voice of Abigail petitions David's opposite ego with words of political wisdom strong enough to pacify his regicidal inclinations. The might of Abigail's intervention is reinforced by its keystone placement in the chiasm that ties these three chapters together. Whereas David's men speak in the periphery of the rhetorical structure, Abigail's voice is central.

⁶³ Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 276) cites Ackerman ("Abishai," 14).

3.4.2 *David and Abigail*

Abigail successfully persuades David to refrain from striking Nabal and his house in order to avoid incurring bloodguilt (1 Sam 25:24-31).⁶⁴ As previously noted, Abigail's intervention reverberates across the entire literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26:

David's avoidance of bloodguilt is the key issue in the narrative, just as it is in his relationship with Saul during the whole of his fugitive days. The sparing or killing of Nabal therefore has its symbolic aspect, in that David, consciously or otherwise, is even now laying the foundation of his future rule.⁶⁵

Since the avoidance of bloodguilt is of such high importance to all three chapters, Abigail must be seriously considered as a central figure for understanding this theme as it relates to David's deliberations.⁶⁶

In 1 Sam 25 Abigail typifies the *restrained David* portrayed in 1 Sam 24 and 26, thus enabling the narratee to see the *unrestrained David* with greater clarity. As Green writes: "The prominence of pursuit, especially in ch. 25, makes more obvious the more subtle dance enclosing it, shows more boldly the unthinkable: the slaying of the reigning king, especially by his successor."⁶⁷ David's affinity with his men in 1 Sam 24 and 26 would be much more difficult to discern if it were not for David's interaction with Abigail in 1 Sam 25. In this middle chapter the narratee is invited to see a David that matches the murderous ranting of his men. David is girded for battle and prepared to offensively strike a fatal blow against Nabal, who is clearly meant to represent Saul. Although Abigail's intervention only directly prevents David from killing Nabal and his

⁶⁴ Polzin (*Deuteronomist*, 208) argues that Abigail prevents David "from killing that Saul figure."; Whitelam, "Defense of David," 73.

⁶⁵ Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 185.

⁶⁶ Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 184) acknowledges the connection between 1 Sam 24 and 1 Sam 26: "David has spent the long chapter 25 avoiding bloodguilt against Nabal. How much more will he avoid it with Saul, the anointed!"; Gordon ("David's Rise," 43) recognizes the thematic link that David refrains from incurring bloodguilt as a common thread throughout 1 Sam 24-26.

⁶⁷ Green, "1 Samuel 25," 5.

house, her place in the narrative structure suggests that she embodies Davidic restraint throughout 1 Sam 24-26. David's mercy toward Nabal, therefore, is paralleled by his mercy to Saul.⁶⁸ Whereas David finds the resolve within himself to restrain from violence in 1 Sam 24 and 26, in 1 Sam 25 Abigail is required to externally remind David of this inner-quality in his character.⁶⁹

Just as David is linked to his men by their threefold individual assertions that YHWH delivered Saul into David's hands, so too is David rhetorically linked with Abigail. As discussed, the phrase, "*until the light of the morning*" (עַד־אֹרֶר הַבֹּקֶר), is recycled in Abigail's consciousness (1 Sam 25:36) although previously it was a part of David's verbal response to her (1 Sam 25:34). Bodner asserts that this repetition is an intentional narrative strategy to demonstrate the solidarity between Abigail and David.⁷⁰ Therefore, in addition to the many thematic links between David and Abigail, the narrator has also hinted at their inter-connectedness by the repetition of this phrase. Once it comes from the mouth of David and once from the point of view of Abigail's character.

There is a second way in which David and Abigail are linked rhetorically. In 1 Sam 24 and 26 the climax begins to subside when David begins a long and impassioned speech to Saul and Abner, respectively. In 1 Sam 25 Abigail occupies this place in the plot, disarming David with her wise council.

⁶⁸ Polzin (*Deuteronomist*, 210-211) writes: "Nabal is obviously related to the Saul of chapters 24 and 26 insofar as he is a similar object of mercy: David chooses not to kill the man who has returned evil for good."

⁶⁹ Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 575-576.

⁷⁰ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 270.

Abigail rhetorically acts as David's *restrained alter-ego* to counter the *unrestrained alter-ego* personified by David's men in 1 Sam 24 and 26.⁷¹ The narrator achieves the near equivalent of Christopher Marlowe's graphic image of an angel whispering in one ear of Doctor Faustus and a demon whispering in the other.⁷² On one of David's shoulders are his men, who appeal to his desire to see Saul dead. On his other shoulder is Abigail, who appeals to David's shrewd political sensitivities. Although both David's men and Abigail illuminate a facet of his character, David is presented with a series of situations that force him to choose to exercise one or the other. Although David chooses to employ the equivalent of Abigail's counsel in each circumstance, the character qualities that resonate with his men are nevertheless internally present.⁷³ David's behavior in 1 Sam 25 ensures the narratee of this.

3.4.3 *David's Alter-Egos in Conversation*

The "David" conspicuous to the narratee in 1 Sam 25 is equaled by his men in 1 Sam 24 and Abishai in 1 Sam 26. In each chapter, therefore, there is an agent of unrestraint, with David himself acting as this agent in the middle chapter. In simple terms, as regards unrestraint, the three chapters form a chiasm:

⁷¹ Green ("1 Samuel 25," 14) suggests a different parallel here. She presents that Abigail is representative of Jonathan since both work against their respective houses for David's benefit; In order to fully grasp Abigail's role as David's alter-ego, the narratee is required to see the narrator's purpose "below the surface" of the narrative. Green ("1 Samuel 25," 6) suggests that 1 Sam 25 is allegorical or parabolic in genre: "There is a discernible shift in characterization in ch. 25, occasionally noted in commentary though without adequate explanation. The tone becomes more allegorical than in the surrounding frame. The three main characters are made more didactic than usual as they execute their dance of tacit collusion. In this instance, I suggest that the 'parable' genre assumes the particular features of a dream or reverie, a claim resting on several factors." Although I am not making that exact claim, the characterization of Abigail as David's alter-ego does share some qualities in common with Green's assessment of genre.

⁷² Marlowe, *Faustus*: Unlike Marlow, the narrator of 1 Sam 24-26 does not proffer David's character a choice between good and evil, but rather two alternative forms of moral failure.

⁷³ Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 196) acknowledges the internal struggle likely happening within David, but he acknowledges that this is not clear by the narration of 1 Sam 24.

A: David's men act unrestrained (1 Sam 24).

KEYSTONE: David acts unrestrained (1 Sam 25).

A': David's man (Abishai) acts unrestrained (1 Sam 26).

Since David's men in 1 Sam 24 and 26 reflect David's character in 1 Sam 25, it seems accurate to suggest that they rhetorically serve as David's alter-ego in the outside chapters.

At the same time, the "David" conspicuous to the narratee in 1 Sam 24 and 26 is mirrored in 1 Sam 25 by Abigail. In each chapter, therefore, there is an agent of restraint, with David acting as this agent in the outside chapters. Like above, therefore, the three chapters form a mirror-image chiasm around the theme of restraint:

A: David promotes restraint (1 Sam 24).

KEYSTONE: Abigail promotes restraint (1 Sam 25).

A': David promotes restraint (1 Sam 26).

Just as David's men are considered to be David's alter-ego in 1 Sam 24 and 26, so Abigail is David's alter-ego in 1 Sam 25.

The result of the presence of these two alter-egos is a confounded construction of
David's character that can most aptly be illustrated by a merging of the two chiasms above:

A: David's men act unrestrained but are restrained by David (1 Sam 24).

KEYSTONE: David acts unrestrained but is restrained by Abigail (1 Sam 25).

A': David's man (Abishai) acts unrestrained but is restrained by David (1 Sam 26).

According to this analysis, and in keeping with the conclusions about David's opposing alter-egos, David emerges as a man who is both the restrainer and the restrained. As David's men are (in 1 Sam 24 and 26), so David is (in 1 Sam 25), and as Abigail is (in 1 Sam 25), so David is (in 1 Sam 24 and 26). For the purpose of rhetorical analysis, if "David" is substituted for his alter-ego in each chapter, the chiasm then delivers an astounding observation:

A: "David" acts unrestrained but is restrained by David (1 Sam 24).

KEYSTONE: David acts unrestrained but is restrained by "David" (1 Sam 25)

A': "David" acts unrestrained but is restrained by David (1 Sam 26).

Therefore, by constructing the literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26 in such a way, the narrator has achieved a masterful and complex portrayal of David's character. David is divided against himself, encouraged in opposite directions by external alter-egos, and consistently characterized throughout each of the three chapters. In each chapter Davidic restraint wins the inner-contest. The difference between 1 Sam 25 and 1 Sam 24/26 is the scope and perspective from which the narrator illustrates David through his alter-egos.

3.4.4 *David's Alter-Egos Summary*

The main theme in 1 Sam 24-26 is Davidic restraint. David spares Saul in 1 Sam 24 and 26, and he spares Nabal in 1 Sam 25. In 1 Sam 24 and 26 David summons restraint in spite of the advice and encouragement of his men. In 1 Sam 25, David is prepared to strike until he is restrained by Abigail. The subtle yet masterful chiasm that unites all three chapters accentuates the pivotal role Abigail plays in helping the narratee more fully understand the inner crisis present in David's character throughout.

3.5 *Discovering David: The Narrator's Ideological Point of View*

Thus far, chapter three has demonstrated that 1 Sam 24-26 is best considered as a coherent literary unit and that the middle chapter is pivotal in understanding the whole, especially as it pertains to the characterization of David. Once the unity of these three chapters had been established we were able to identify ironic parallels between characters in 1 Sam 25 and 1 Sam 24/26. Nabal and Saul were considered as rhetorical twins enabling the narratee to speculate that as David is with Nabal, so he truly is with Saul. We then considered the role of David's men and Abigail as opposite alter-egos for David's character.

The result of all this effort has been that David emerges as a character that seems restrained in some instances and unrestrained in others. He seems restrained in relation to Saul and not restrained in relation to Nabal. He mirrors the unrestraint of his men in 1 Sam 25 and reflects the restraint natural to Abigail in 1 Sam 24 and 26. David, therefore, seems contradictory and confounded.

From these observations, the narratee must make a judgment about the narrator's ideological point of view, which has the potential to go in two distinct directions. On the one hand, the narratee might suggest that in 1 Sam 24 and 26 David overcomes his inner-demons, which are so thoroughly presented in 1 Sam 25. There are two contradictory observations, however, which make this option unappealing to the narratee.

In 1 Sam 24:6 the narratee learns that David internally acknowledges the immorality of his symbolic attack on Saul: "Then it was after this that the heart of David struck him because he had cut the hem which [belonged] to Saul." On the surface,

David's tweaked conscience seems to suggest a moral victory. However, the incongruity of David's continued action suggests otherwise.

David presents the hem of Saul's robe (1 Sam 24:12) as evidence of his innocence and moral purity. To adopt the position that David has resisted the immoral temptations that are so conspicuous in 1 Sam 25, therefore, the narratee must make sense of why David's heart struck him. If the cutting of Saul's robe is an innocent act, void of the immorality showcased in 1 Sam 25, David's heart would have no reason to strike him. If, on the other hand, the cutting of Saul's robe is an immoral act, David's heart rightfully strikes him. Therefore, since David's heart *did* strike him, the narratee recognizes that the cutting of Saul's robe is itself an immoral act, at least in the mind of David's character. By inference, therefore, the parallel episode of David stealing Saul's water jug and spear (1 Sam 26:12) is equally immoral.

The moral victory David publicly claims in 1 Sam 24 and 26 implodes on itself upon serious scrutiny. So too, the argument that David conquers his immoral tendencies fails to adequately capture the narrator's ideological point of view pertaining to David's characterization in 1 Sam 24-26. In 1 Sam 24:6 David may momentarily feel conscience-stricken about his immoral action against Saul. Nevertheless, David uses this morally repugnant act in his political favour as an argument for his innocence, effectively compounding the immorality of the act itself by using it for the public shaming of Saul.⁷⁴ There is no repentance in David's propaganda, but rather he uses his own immorality to further his political interests. Furthermore, David repeats this pattern in 1 Sam 26 with no mention by the narrator of a troubled conscience.

⁷⁴ Kirkpatrick ("Honor," 21-24) outlines the model of shame and honour operating here. More will be said about this in the proceeding sections.

Accordingly, the narratee is invited to consider an alternative reading of these chapters that suggests that in spite of his restraint in 1 Sam 24 and 26 David does not overcome the obvious immorality showcased in 1 Sam 25. There is more rhetorical evidence in these three chapters to surmise that the ideological point of view of the narrator is that David is consistently characterized in 1 Sam 24-26 as politically brilliant and morally deficient, a man who is not to be emulated.

Political aptitude and immorality are not nearly as contradictory as restraint and unrestraint seem to be. Therefore, the task of this section will be to demonstrate that the outworking of David's character is entirely rooted in the marriage between David's political ambition and moral failure, which is then manifested as unrestraint and restraint.

3.5.1 *The Unrestrained David*

As already established, David's lack of restraint is most striking in 1 Sam 25. David's encounter with Nabal demonstrates glaring moral deficiency in David's character. In 1 Sam 25 the narrator presents a scope to David that is reticently sketched elsewhere in the story. In this chapter David is prepared to brutally kill a man and his house because of simple resentment.⁷⁵ The narratee is able to see clearly from this dark chapter that David is impulsive, violent, and morally repulsive.

David's moral insufficiency is stressed as a result of Nabal's rhetorical association with Saul. The Nabal-Saul connection is essential to understanding the interplay between David in 1 Sam 25 and David in 1 Sam 24/26. Since Nabal represents Saul, the narratee can be confident in her assumption that as David is with Nabal, so he is with Saul. The implications of this hypothesis are immense. Green observes the lethal attitude David bears in a subtle but real way throughout 1 Sam 24-26:

⁷⁵ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 265.

In ch. 24 David cuts the edge of Saul's garment, whether we construe the gesture as a castration, an assassination, or some more minimal threatening disrespect. In ch. 26 David takes from a man in the Judean wilderness his water bottle and spear, thus rendering him helpless before the desert elements. And in ch. 25 he prepares, though does not effect, extermination of a whole household and lineage.⁷⁶

Even in 1 Sam 24 and 26, there are clear hints that a lack of restraint is seething below the surface of David's character. This is seen clearly by his actions. Therefore, even in his restraint, David exhibits elements of unrestraint that, like an iceberg, are much greater below the surface than above. Since Nabal is Saul's surrogate in the narrative, the narratee learns just how close David comes to committing regicide against Saul and his entire household.⁷⁷ According to this supposition, David demonstrates some measure of restraint regarding Saul with enormous immoral frustration. The narratee witnesses this frustration firsthand in 1 Sam 25, as David girds his sword for battle and speaks profanely against the house of Nabal. The pairing of Nabal and Saul, therefore, enables the narratee to hear David's speech with new ears:

Surely, for vanity I guarded all which [belongs] to this [one] in the wilderness. And, he did not miss – from all which is his – anything! Then he returned to me evil instead of good. So, may God do severely to the enemies of David, and so may he do more, if I spare – from all which are his – by the morning [any] who piss against a wall (1 Sam 25:21-22).

In its original context, David is speaking about Nabal. As a result of Nabal's rhetorical association with Saul, however, the narratee can hear David inwardly seething with this same intent against Saul. David spares Saul's life, but he does strike him twice. Likewise, David also spares Nabal's life, though he was armed and ready to kill.

⁷⁶ Green, "1 Samuel 25," 9.

⁷⁷ Gordon ("David's Rise," 46) mulls over the possibility that David's mobilization against Nabal presents a narrative "double entendre" that hints at the potential fate of the Saulide house.

Whereas David voices his frustration against Nabal/Saul in 1 Sam 25, he stops himself in 1 Sam 24 and 26. Nevertheless, since David's men and Abishai are David's rhetorical alter-egos, the narratee is invited to hear expressions of David's aggravated immorality vocalized by his supporting cast. In 1 Sam 24:5 David's men say: "Behold, the day which YHWH said to you, 'Behold, I am giving your enemy into your hand and you shall do to him according to that which is good in your eyes.'" And, in 1 Sam 26:8 Abishai says: "God delivered – today – your enemy into your hand and now may I strike him please with the spear and the ground with one stroke; and I will not repeat a second time." As David's alter-egos, therefore, they give voice to thoughts and desires innate to David's character.

When the narratee follows this line to its appropriate end, she discovers some frightening conclusions. Just as David girds his sword to eliminate Nabal and his house, so also David longs to violently eliminate Saul and his house. Just as David believes he has been wronged by Nabal, so also he believes he has been wronged by Saul. Just as David desires to return evil to Nabal, so also he wishes to return evil on Saul. And, just as David believes he has the God-given right to act against Nabal, so also he believes he has the God-given right to silence Saul once and for all. The narratee is able to make these assertions because as David is with Nabal, so he is with Saul.

Fortunately, Abigail restrains *this* David before he is able to fulfill his immoral inclinations and thus incur bloodguilt by killing Nabal (and therefore symbolically Saul!). The restraint Abigail brings to David from without in 1 Sam 25, David finds from within in 1 Sam 24 and 26. In all three instances, however, this restraint is not a moral correction, but rather it is a political calculation.

Furthermore, even though David restrains himself from killing, he is not entirely reticent in his actions. Just as David is prepared to attack Nabal, so he is prepared to attack Saul. David symbolically attacks Saul in the cave (1 Sam 24:5) and in the camp (1 Sam 26:12), thus providing himself with a two-time opportunity to shame Saul publicly. Kirkpatrick aptly defines a model of honour and shame that is at work here:

[Honour] is “a claim to worth and the social acknowledgement of that worth” (Malina 1993:32). [Honour] is thus a social commodity. It entails thoughts and feelings as well as [behaviors], includes both personal claims as well as public recognitions, and finds its locus both in the individual and in the social interchange between people, whether individually or corporately (Pitt-Rivers, 1968)... The ancient world conceived of [honour] as a limited commodity. One acquired [honour] only at the expense of another’s [honour]. Thus, social interactions were a constant battlefield to protect [honour] and/or gain more [honour] from others (Pitt-Rivers, 1977:4-13).⁷⁸

In 1 Sam 24:12 and 1 Sam 26:22 David makes a public *claim to worth, and the social acknowledgement of that worth*, by producing the hem of Saul’s robe and Saul’s spear. Since honour is a social commodity, for David to gain this honour Saul must be shamed, which is exactly what happens in these chapters. Saul may keep his life, but he loses his dignity and his honour, which are precious properties for a reigning king. To say that David acts with *complete* restraint in these instances, therefore, is to overlook the public spectacle he makes of Saul. As David proves in 1 Sam 24 and 26 there is more than one way to take the life of the king!

Throughout 1 Sam 24-26 David acts unrestrained. The most obvious case is the middle chapter, where David erupts in a violent fury against the house of Nabal. Nabal’s rhetorical association with Saul makes this outburst shocking and obscene. While this same level of blunt impulsiveness is not demonstrated in 1 Sam 24 and 26, the narratee is

⁷⁸ Kirkpatrick, “Honor,” 21-22 (citing Malina, *New Testament World*, 32; Pitt-Rivers, Julian, “Honor,” Pitt-Rivers, Shechem, 4-13).

still able to recognize an unrestrained David who grasps at two opportunities to shame the sitting king.

The impressive narrative quality of these chapters, however, is that even while David demonstrates a clear lack of restraint against Nabal/Saul, he concurrently conjures a remarkable self-control, invoked internally (in 1 Sam 24 and 26) and externally (in 1 Sam 25), so that he stops himself three times from striking a lethal blow. To the restrained David we now turn our attention.

3.5.2 *The Restrained David*

David's restraint is best portrayed by his the sparing of Saul's life in 1 Sam 24 and 26. Although David is not entirely restrained, as discussed above, he nevertheless does exercise some self-control. In both chapters Saul is practically gift wrapped for David and, should he choose to lethally strike the king, Saul would be defenseless to try and stop him. In spite of this, David shrewdly decides to let YHWH's anointed live to see another day. Even though many commentators cite David's refusal to kill Saul as evidence of his purity of heart and obsession with innocence, there may be other reasons he stops his hand.⁷⁹

The narratee is given significant insight into the reasons why David refrains from killing Saul in 1 Sam 25:32-33:

Blessed be YHWH, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me. And blessed be your discernment and blessed be you, who stopped me this day from coming in with blood (from entering into bloodguilt) and saving, by my hands, myself.

Although David is here speaking to Abigail about Nabal, the ironic parallels between Abigail-David and Nabal-Saul enable the narratee to import this same sentiment into

⁷⁹ Alter, *David Story*, 148; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 252; Tsumura (*1 Samuel*, 567) accepts the sincerity of David's restraint based solely on Saul's position as YHWH's anointed.

David's relationship with Saul. As is evident in this short speech, David's mercy is not an act of moral benevolence. Rather, David spares Nabal/Saul's life because it is politically astute for him to do so. To kill Nabal/Saul would cause David to enter into bloodguilt, which has both theological and political consequences. Here we will examine the political benefits of sparing Nabal/Saul.

First, each moment provides David with a profound opportunity to disciple his fellow bandits by teaching and demonstrating that it is never acceptable to kill the king.⁸⁰ This is a practical lesson given David's expectation that he will one day become king in Saul's place (according to the promise of Samuel's anointing of him in 1 Sam 16).⁸¹

In 1 Sam 26 Abishai receives a personal one-on-one teaching moment with David as they go down to Saul's camp together. This intimate moment with David is valuable because of Abishai's familial connections.⁸² His brother, Joab, will become David's general for most of his reign as king. This opportunity to teach and reinforce the value of the life of the king is especially important for Abishai (and indirectly with Joab) since they will wield considerable power in David's future administration.⁸³ The foresight required in this instance further exposes that David is established as a character with a fascinating political mind.

Second, by sparing Saul's life, David is afforded an opportunity to speak publicly in his own defense. The long intercourses between Saul and David in 1 Sam 24 and 26 are stunning works of propaganda for David's character.⁸⁴ By producing real evidence of

⁸⁰ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 277.

⁸¹ Alter, *David Story*, 148; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 253; Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, 210.

⁸² Alter, *David Story*, 163.

⁸³ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 276-277; Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 158; Day ("Abishai," 547) notices that Abishai learns the lesson, not to raise a hand against YHWH's anointed, so well that when Shimei curses and throws stones at David (2 Sam 16:5-8), Abishai offers to decapitate him (2 Sam 16:9).

⁸⁴ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 253; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 169-170.

Saul's vulnerable brush with death (the hem of Saul's robe and Saul's spear and water jug), David is able to physically demonstrate his innocence and, therefore, claim to have taken the high road even in spite of Saul's ravenous quest to take his life.⁸⁵

At the same time, David is able to publicly shame Saul by suggesting that the king is wrong for pursuing him. Kirkpatrick asserts: "The court of public opinion is the final arbiter of [honour] and shame, making reputation one of the most important valuables to possess."⁸⁶ Likewise, Olyan writes:

In short, [honour] and shame communicate relative social status, which may shift over time... [Honour] is meant to be recognized and acknowledged; it is very much a public phenomenon. Loss of [honour] or diminishment results in shame; diminishment communicates a loss of social status. Like [honour] and its inscription, diminishment and shame also have a public dimension...⁸⁷

By his very public displays of "innocence," David cunningly shames Saul. Surely David's men and Saul's men, who are present during these interchanges, would be affected by such a profound moment.⁸⁸ In addition, it is likely that David is aware that sympathy not antipathy from Saul's army will prove to be most beneficial in order to become king. This double exposure before the troops, therefore, works beautifully to David's political advantage.

Even while David is careful to portray his innocence by producing the hem of Saul's robe and Saul's water jug and spear for all to see, he simultaneously makes two subliminal claims for the throne by his symbolic attacks on Saul.⁸⁹ In 1 Sam 24 David actually makes an audacious claim on the throne by cutting Saul's robe:

⁸⁵ Alter, *David Story*, 149; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 278; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 197; Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, 207.

⁸⁶ Kirkpatrick, "Honor," 22.

⁸⁷ Olyan, "Honor," 204 (cited by Lapsley, "Shame," 147).

⁸⁸ Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 279.

⁸⁹ Green ("1 Samuel 25," 9) notes: "Common is David's verbally organized picture of himself as sparing Saul while in face he commits two – and symbolically three – lethal deeds."

In the present chapter David cuts off the corner of Saul's robe, and symbolically makes a bid for his status as king, for the royal robe stood for the royal office, and already the robe-tearing had been interpreted by Samuel as a symbol of the cutting off of Saul's dynasty (1 Sam 15:28). Now David had 'grasped at' the kingship of Israel by cutting away part of Saul's robe, and by calling the king his 'father' he was preparing the way for a legitimate claim to the throne after Saul's death.⁹⁰

Likewise, in 1 Sam 26, knowing how he is about to use the confiscated item to his political benefit, David carefully chooses to steal Saul's spear:

In the episode at the cave, David carried away the cut-off corner of Saul's garment, which had been symbolically linked with kingship. The spear is an alternative image of kingship, obviously more directly associated with the martial potency, and so this version conveys a greater sense that David is depriving Saul of something essential in the token of kingship he bears off.⁹¹

David's political brilliance in these two instances is showcased by his ability to communicate two opposite claims concurrently. In one respect, the ripped-robe and the spear convey his innocence because they demonstrate that David had been afforded the opportunity to kill Saul but decided not to.⁹² In the other respect, however, David is holding two items of potent kingly symbolism in his very hands. Therefore, when David asserts, "Know and see that nothing in my hand is evil or rebellion," in 1 Sam 24:12, he is speaking a half truth. Yes, David spared Saul's life, but at the same time he is holding

⁹⁰ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 146; Bodner (*1 Samuel*, 251-252) suggests that the cutting of Saul's robe is impregnated with symbolism. Saul ripped Samuel's robe unintentionally in 1 Sam 15:27 and received a prophetic indictment that his kingdom, like the robe, would be ripped from his hand. Here, David cuts Saul's robe intentionally. The narratee is invited, therefore, to connect the two incidents and recognize that this "innocent act" by David has deep symbolic implications. Saul will lose the kingdom to David; Evans (*1 & 2 Samuel*, 107) agrees that the cutting of Saul's robe has symbolic implications: "Royal garments have symbolic significance, and to take part of Saul's robe in this way, given the relationship between Saul and David, symbolizes seizing power."; also: Alter, *David Story*, 148; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 179; Gordon, "David's Rise," 55-56; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 239; Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, 209; Tsumura (1 Samuel, 566) does not agree that this episode should be connected to 1 Sam 15: "The two occasions are totally different and the significance of 'cutting off' and of 'tearing' of the garment is not the same; see on 15:27. If nothing else, in the earlier case, the one who tore the robe would have things torn from him, while in the later, the one whose robe was cut would lose. Symbols must be taken in context."

⁹¹ Alter, *David Story*, 164.

⁹² Klein, *1 Samuel*, 239.

Saul's very kingship in his hand. This is true for both chapters. The poetry of the moment is thick with David's trademark brilliance.

Third, in both instances David secures a public admission of guilt from Saul. In 1 Sam 24:18-20 Saul declares:

"You are more righteous than me because you recompensed me with good, but I recompensed you with evil. And you declared today that you did good to me when YHWH delivered me into your hand but you did not kill me. Now, if a man finds his enemy will he send him on a good road? Therefore, YHWH, may he recompense you with good on account of this day; what you did for me."

Likewise, in 1 Sam 26:21 Saul announces:

"I have sinned. Return my son David because I will not harm you in exchange for which my soul was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have been foolish and I have sinned very greatly."

In many ways, these royal admission are a greater political coup than the slaying of Saul ever could have been. As Brueggemann acknowledges:

Unless Saul knows and acknowledges David's right to the future, the tension, the conflict, the restlessness in Israel will never stop. If Saul does not acknowledge, the old hopes of failed Israel can fight a destructive rearguard action for a very long time. Even in his failure, Saul has it in his power to prevent the fruition of David's promised kingdom, to thwart Yahweh's resolve about Israel's future... Finally in a desperate instant of truth, Saul says, 'You shall be king.'"⁹³

These are also the key moments when Saul capitulates to David's public shaming of him.

Kirkpatrick explains:

A claim against one's [honour] can be perceived in the words or the deeds of another party. In both cases, it is a claim to enter the social space of another either positively, to share in the prestige of the other, or negatively, to take away or diminish the other's reputation. This action is then interpreted according to the seriousness of the challenge to one's [honour]. The riposte, or response, can take many different forms. Three main responses are possible. First, positive rejection, that is scorning the challenge, is the proper response from the one who is challenged by a social inferior... Second, negative refusal, on the other end of the

⁹³ Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 172-173.

range, also consists in not responding... Third, the counter-challenge is another possible, and frequent, response in riposte.⁹⁴

David twice (1 Sam 24:8-15 and 26:14-20) makes *a claim to enter the social space* of Saul and rather than meet David's challenge by one of the three ways listed above, Saul surrenders his honour to David. David's "restraint," therefore, pays off with great dividends of political capital.⁹⁵ This windfall of capital will be needed if David hopes to take hold of the office for which he has been anointed.⁹⁶

Fourth, in addition to Saul's self-incriminating admissions, he also makes spectacular proclamations about David in the presence of his men.⁹⁷ In 1 Sam 24:21-22 Saul says:

"And now, behold, I know that as king you will reign and into your hand the kingdom of Israel will rise up. But now, swear an oath to me in YHWH that you will not cut off my seed after me and that you will not destroy my name from the house of my father."

With much the same sentiment, Saul declares in 1 Sam 26:25: "Blessed are you my son David, for you will surely profit and also you will surely overcome." In many ways, Saul's reign is all but over by the end of 1 Sam 26. He has admitted his faults and exalted David's destiny in the presence of his army and David's men. David never could have received an equal endorsement had he killed Saul in either chapter.

At this point in David's career, Saul is much more valuable to him alive rather than dead. David's ability to discern the importance of playing the long-game instead of giving in to the temptations of the short-game demonstrates his rare and astute political

⁹⁴ Kirkpatrick, "Honor," 24.

⁹⁵ Alter, *David Story*, 151, 167; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 255-256; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 174.

⁹⁶ Baldwin (*I & 2 Samuel*, 146) acknowledges the significance of Saul's public recognition that David will succeed him as king.

⁹⁷ Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 197.

acumen.⁹⁸ A less able man would surely take the shortcut to power unknowingly crippling himself in the process. By demonstrating restraint David disciplines his followers so that they see and learn that under no circumstances is anyone to kill YHWH's anointed. In addition, he has secured a ringing endorsement from Saul to succeed the reigning king. Now, all David has to do is wait.

3.5.3 *The Unrestrained and Restrained David*

In all three chapters David is ultimately restrained. David does not kill even though he symbolically attacks Nabal/Saul in each chapter (1 Sam 24:5, 25:21-22, 26:12). At the same time, in all three chapters David wrestles with his lack of restraint, as is evident by his symbolic attacks on Nabal/Saul. In 1 Sam 24 and 26, David musters restraint internally against external exhortations of unrestraint. In 1 Sam 25 David recklessly abandons all restraint but is persuaded toward restraint externally via Abigail. Although there are external agents in each chapter coaxing David in opposite directions, 1 Sam 24-26 exhibits consistency in David's character.

On the surface these two alternatives, to be unrestrained and to be restrained, seem mutually exclusive. The reason for this is that moral decency is far too often associated with David's restraint. In David's case, however, he does not stop himself from killing to appease his moral conscience. His reticence is rather self-motivated and rooted in political mastery. In many ways, therefore, even David's restraint is laced with traces of immorality, which is most apparent by his clever two-time public shaming of Saul. David's political ambition manifests itself as restraint and his unhindered immorality is the well spring of his unrestraint. This being the case, David is consistently

⁹⁸ Brueggemann (*Samuel*, 184) writes: "David would rather have Saul's emblem of power than Saul's life. There is not bloodguilt attached to spear-taking."

characterized in 1 Sam 24-26 even though he appears to be acting in contradictory ways. Even while the narratee cannot help but appreciate David's fascinating political mind, David is not a man to be emulated. David may be doing the right things, but he does them for the wrong reasons.

3.6 *Chapter Summary*

This third chapter has endeavored to integrate the scrutiny conducted of 1 Sam 25 into a broader analysis of 1 Sam 24-26 as these chapters pertain to understanding the characterization of David. The chiasmic symmetry of 1 Sam 24 and 26 was established by exploring the similarities in setting, plot, and characterizations of each chapter. The thematic and structural integrity of 1 Sam 25 was then established within the context of the literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26.

All this was necessary in order to recognize the ironic parallels existent as a result of the narrative analogy being produced in this unit by 1 Sam 25. Nabal was recognized as Saul's rhetorical twin, demonstrating that as David is with Nabal, so he is with Saul.

David's men and Abigail were also considered as opposite alter-egos for David. As a result of his unrestraint (reflected by David's men in 1 Sam 24 and Abishai in 1 Sam 26), David's moral deficiency was made apparent. And as a result of his restraint (reflected by Abigail in 1 Sam 25), his political brilliance became clear. Moral ineptitude and political expertise are not necessarily opposed to one another and, therefore, sense can be made out of both David's unrestraint and his restraint. Although unrestraint and restraint appear contradictory, in David's case they stem from complimentary dispositions, political gain and moral deficiency, and thus are easily married into David's single character. In 1 Sam

24, 25, and 26 political gain and moral depravity drive David's decisions and shape his character.

Chapter Four: Thesis Summary and Conclusion

4.1 *Thesis Summary*

This thesis has carefully outlined and employed a narrative critical methodology to investigate 1 Sam 24-26, with a special focus given to 1 Sam 25. The final goal of this examination has been to gain a better understanding of the narrator's ideological point of view as it pertains to the characterization of David. This thesis concluded that the narrator portrays David in 1 Sam 24-26 as politically brilliant and morally deficient, a man to be appreciated but not emulated. Three independent but collaborative chapters were required to defend this conclusion.

The first chapter established a foundation on which the second two chapters are firmly built. This thesis first identified the main branches of research regarding David's characterization in 1 Sam 24-26 and called them (1) traditional, (2) non-traditional, and (3) radical. Traditional scholars have understood *the* David of 1 Sam 24 and 26 as a man of great fidelity.¹ David in 1 Sam 25 is, therefore, largely understood to be anomalous or purposefully sketched in order to be contrasted with his portrait in the bordering chapters, thus further highlighting his innocence and faithfulness. Non-traditional academics are less sympathetic to the characterization of David and tend to highlight David's political ambition, even in 1 Sam 24 and 26. They are not inclined to support the idea that David is uncharacteristically depicted in 1 Sam 25, even if they do agree that this middle portrait is shocking. Radical scholars have attempted to understand David entirely against-the-grain of traditional scholarship. They have appealed to many methodologies, including narrative, historic, and redaction, often filling gaps in the narrative with their own

¹ McCarter (I Samuel, 386), for example, write: "[In 1 Sam 24] David is portrayed as innocent and pious in the extreme in his fastidious treatment of Saul and elaborate professions of reliance on Yahweh."

imaginative mulling. This thesis has deliberately interacted with writers in all three streams, although the conclusions of this thesis best fit with the non-traditionalists.

To tackle a characterization of David in 1 Sam 24-26, this thesis then suggested that the most effective methodology is narrative criticism. The history and development of Old Testament narrative criticism was briefly explored so as to root the methodology of this thesis in the broader scholarship. The process of communication was then outlined, which included both a diachronic approach and synchronic approach to examining a narrative. Finally, the details of this synchronic methodology were clearly articulated under the categories of narration, setting, plot, characterization, and style. These five categories served as the strict structure for analyzing 1 Sam 24-26 in chapters two and three.

The thesis statement was included at the end of chapter one in order to put the remainder of the thesis into context. As already presented in the introduction to this summary, the core of this thesis statement is that the narrator renders David as a man who is politically brilliant and morally deficient, a man who is not to be emulated.

The second chapter, which is the longest of the three, focused solely on 1 Sam 25.

The methodology was rigorously applied to all elements of 1 Sam 25 even though some portions were more pertinent than others. In so doing, this thesis demonstrated the full execution of a narrative critical methodology, which is an accomplishment in its own right. Aspects from the narration, setting, plot, characterization, and style each played a critical role in the synthesis of information required to defend the thesis statement. For example the omnipresence and reliability of the narrator is essential to all conclusions drawn. The temporal and spatial setting of 1 Sam 25 needed to be explored in order to tie

1 Sam 25 to its bordering chapters. The plot of 1 Sam 25 helped to establish parallels between all three chapters. This is especially true in the “Davidic” role that Abigail plays in the resolution of the climax of 1 Sam 25. The characterization of Samuel, all Israel, David, Abigail, Nabal, YHWH, Saul, Ahinoam, and Michal all directly effected conclusions drawn in chapter three. By thoroughly studying 1 Sam 25 in accordance with the narrative critical methodology, chapter two laid the groundwork for everything that was accomplished in chapter three.

The third chapter of this thesis contextualized 1 Sam 25 within the literary unit of 1 Sam 24-26 in order that aspects of the three chapters could be considered together. Only once the coherence of 1 Sam 24-26 was well established could details in each chapter be brought into conversation with one another, with 1 Sam 25 serving as a narrative analogy for the outside two chapters. The next task was to demonstrate the rhetorical associations that existed between Nabal-Saul, David’s men-David, and Abigail-David. The intertextual dynamic between these pairs resulted in tremendous insights into David’s character.

The association between Nabal and Saul helped the narratee to consider David’s actions and attitude toward Nabal as being consistent with his actions and attitude toward Saul. The way David reacted against Nabal was rhetorically applied to Saul, demonstrating just how much anger and resentment for Saul seethes below the surface of David’s character. Reasons for David’s restraint toward Saul were also gleaned by studying Nabal. David stops from killing Nabal in order not to incur bloodguilt upon himself. In the same manner, David refrains from killing Saul to avoid bloodguilt, not on account of any moral correction or internal fidelity toward Saul. If David were to incur

bloodguilt for killing Nabal or Saul, his immediate political victory would be short lived. Accordingly, David is motivated by political wisdom, not high morals.

David's rhetorical connection with his men and Abigail also demonstrated that David exhibits both unrestraint and restraint in 1 Sam 24-26. In order to more fully grasp how it is that David can be both restrained and unrestrained, this thesis was able to demonstrate that his restraint stemmed not from moral propriety, but rather from political machination. Likewise, David's unrestraint flowed from his raw immorality. Since David's political conniving and his immoral disposition are not necessarily mutually exclusive, consistency in David's characterization emerges.

4.2 *Thesis Conclusion*

This thesis has made a strong case for David's characterization in 1 Sam 24-26 as one of political brilliance laced with moral deficiency, not fidelity. As a result, the narrator's ideological point of view is that *the* David of 1 Sam 24-26 is not a man to be emulated.

Further analysis, which roots these conclusions in the broader David novella (of 1 Sam 16 – 1 Kgs 2), would strengthen the hypothesis of this study. The goal of further examination would be to demonstrate that all that transpires in David's life – the highs and the lows – is the outworking of his political brilliance and the lack of his moral fortitude. To make sense of a character so depraved and yet so central to Biblical theology the study must also consider the role of YHWH, especially regarding the unconditional favour He bestows on David. The final result of this extended work would hopefully demonstrate the power of God's grace to redeem David for His purposes.

Accordingly, it would highlight the hope that we, depraved men and women, also have in YHWH, David's God, for our own redemption.

Appendix A: Parenthetical Statements in 1 Samuel 25

Verse	Hebrew	English Translation
v. 2	ואיש במעון ומעשהו בכרמל	Now, a man was in Maon and his business was in Carmel.
v. 2	והאיש גדול מאד	Now, the man was very great.
v. 2	ולו צאן שלשת־אלפים ואלף עזים	Now, his sheep were 3000 and 1000 goats.
v. 3	ושם האיש נבל	Now, the name of the man was Nabal.
v. 3	ושם אשתו אבגיל	Now, the name of his wife was Abigail.
v. 3	והאשה טובת־שכל ויפת תאר	Now, the woman was good of understanding and beautiful in appearance.
v. 3	והאיש קשה ורע מעללים	Now, the man was harsh and wicked of deeds.
v. 3	והוא כלבו	Now, he was a Calebite.
v. 14	ולאביגיל אשת נבל הגיד נער־אחד מהנערים	Now, to Abigail, the wife of Nabal, one young man from among the young men...

v. 19	ולא־יִשָּׂה נָבָל לֹא הִגִּידָהּ	Now to her husband, Nabal, she did not tell.
v. 36	והִנֵּה־לּוֹ מִשְׁתֶּה בְּבֵיתוֹ כַּמִּשְׁתֶּה הַמֶּלֶךְ	Now, behold, for him a feast was in his house, like the feast of a king.
v. 36	וּלֵב נָבָל טוֹב עָלָיו	Now, the heart of Nabal was good within him.
v. 36	והוּא שָׁכַר עַד־מָאֹד	Now, he was exceedingly drunk.
v. 36	וּלֹא־הִגִּידָהּ לוֹ דָּבָר קָטָן וְגָדוֹל עַד־אֹר הַבֹּקֶר	Now, she did not tell him a thing, small or great, until the light of the morning.
v. 43	וְאַת־אַחִינוֹעַם לָקַח דָּוִד מִיִּזְרְעֵאל	Now, Ahinoam David took from Jezreel.
v. 44	וְשָׂאוֹל נָתַן אֶת־מִיכָל בִּתּוֹ אִשְׁתֵּי דָוִד לִפְלִטִי	Now, Saul gave Michal, his daughter, the wife of David, to Palti...

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