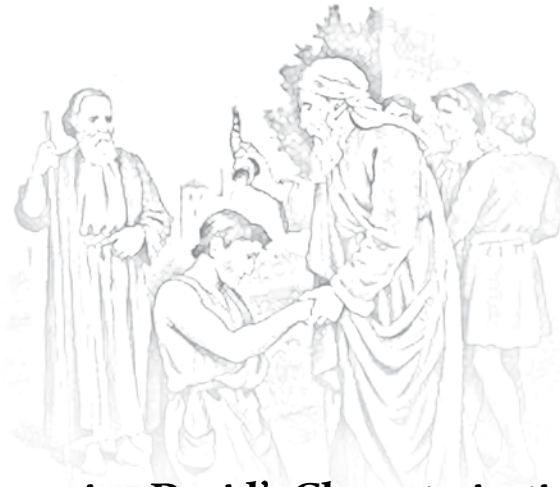




Preserving David's Characterization (A Narrative Reading of 1 Sam 25)

Wenifredo V. Padilla III, O.P.

This is an example of reading a biblical text as a narrative unity. The article argues for the holistic reading of the whole of 1 Sam 25. What some scholars argue for an appended v. 1 and vv. 43-44, will be seen as integral part of the whole narrative of trying to preserve the characterization of David as a divinely-appointed king, an act that is given a suspenseful start in the loss of David's protector in the person of Samuel (v. 1), and provided with a theological support in David's marriage to Abigail, a marriage that is set as an ideal one compared to David other marriages mentioned in the narrative (vv. 43-44).

Keywords: *narrative criticism, narratology, narrative unity, characterization, accession narratives*

Introduction

*"the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living
under the care of the LORD" (1 Sam 25,29)*

R. Polzin insightfully remarks that Saul's quest for David, which is one of the most persistent themes in the last half of 1 Samuel, "mirrors the reader's quest for the identity of David and for a key that will unlock the mystery surrounding God's favorite".¹ This thesis hopes to take part in such a quest. Employing narrative criticism, this will attempt to critically read 1 Sam

¹ As quoted by P. Borgman, *David, Saul, and God*. Rediscovering an Ancient Story (Oxford - New York 2008) 4.

25 in the hope of recognizing a picture of David within the moral and theological lens upon which the whole chapter bases itself. This reading will be considered significant even if a much wider picture—one that places this narrative within the context of a triptych that runs from chs. 24 to 26²—remains as a major interpretative reading of most scholars.

In a recently published book, S. Ramond correctly notices two versions of the David narrative within the history of accession to the throne. Within these two versions is a tension between divine election and political strategy.³ Located at the heart of the accession narratives, 1 Sam 25 is a miniature case in point. Following R. P. Gordon,⁴ S. Ramond remarks that the question revolves not on whether David will be king but on *how* he will become king.⁵ The manner (*how*), however, is dependent on David's fleshing out of his character as divinely-anointed king which the narrative takes pain to relate.

The difficulty is at once noticeable as soon as the reader realizes the dynamics of David's character. J. D. Levenson's differentiation between a David "of immaculate motivation and heroic courage" who appears from 1 Sam 16 until 2 Sam 11 and a David "who kills for a grudge" is highly significant.⁶ It points the reader to another dimension of the enigmatic character of David. "The episode of Nabal is the very first revelation of evil in David's character. He can kill. This time he stops short. But the cloud that chap. 25 raises continues to darken our perception of David's character."⁷

² We can rely on P. K. McCarter Jr.'s formulation: "In the present shape of our text the account of David's dealings with Abigail and Nabal is embraced by two passages in which David, out of respect for Saul's status as the anointed of Yahweh, refuses an opportunity to lay violent hands on him. Here, too, thanks primarily to the good offices of Abigail, David refrains from violence against an enemy. So in contrast to the many places earlier in our story in which he was saved from some external danger, these chapters (24, 25, 26) show David being saved from himself, or rather from the consequences of deeds potentially disastrous to his own interests," cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel. A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB 8; Garden City, NY 1980) 400; cf. also R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel. A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI 1986) 181: "The Nabal story is wedged between two accounts of David's sparing of Saul when he had it in his power to finish him off, and it addresses the same issue: revenge by David's hand, or by God in his own time?... The key to his apparent insouciance is found in the present narrative, for, from the contretemps with Nabal, David learns that, if he withholds the avenging sword, God will act on his behalf (vv. 38f.). It is once more the question of blood-guilt, and of how David may reach the throne without incurring Yahweh's displeasure;" cf. also J. Vermeylen, "David le non-violent, ou: que venait-il faire dans le camp de Saül? (Propositions pour une lecture de 1 Samuel 24-26)" In *La Bible en Récits. L'exégèse biblique à l'heure du lecteur* (ed. D. Marguerat) (Le Monde de la Bible 48; Genève 2003) 135.

³ cf. S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence pour David. Une analyse narrative et littéraire de 1 Samuel 24-26* (Lire la Bible 145; Paris 2007) 25-26.

⁴ R. P. Gordon, "David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24-26" *TynB* 31 (1980) 37-64.

⁵ S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 28.

⁶ J. D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History" *CBQ* 40 (1978) 23.

⁷ J. D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25", 23.

Within 1 Sam 25 lies an underlying original narrative, namely David's meeting with Abigail which "has been employed as a vehicle for an early reference to the promise of dynasty to David".⁸ The narrator, moreover, takes much effort in portraying the meeting and eventual marriage as intended right from the beginning of the narrative: "The story is designed to illustrate the excellent qualities of one of David's wives and to show that she became his wife precisely because of her excellence (and Yahweh's help), not because of mere accident or (emphatically) any wrongdoing on David's part".⁹ The narrative core is also revealed in the way the notices of David's other marriages have been appended, especially when seen in the context of a political advantage or opportunity. Thus, in the case of David and Abigail, the marriage has been interpreted as politically advantageous to David. "The partnership of such a wife bodes well for David's future, not only because of her "good intelligence" (v 3) and counseling skills but also because she is the widow of a very rich Calebite landowner".¹⁰

The richness of the narrative, however, is seen more clearly in the way the narrator embellishes an underlying original narrative with an important moral and theological lesson for the king-in-waiting. David. J. D. Levenson sees an allusion to the Book of Proverbs where David is like the young man who finds himself in contact with both the proverbial "fool" (נָבִיל) and the proverbial "stalwart woman" (cf. Prov 31,10), who "opens her mouth to speak of wisdom" (cf. Prov 31,26). From such "stalwart woman" he learns the importance of self-control and reliance upon YHWH.¹¹

The lesson on reliance upon YHWH seems to be an issue right at the opening of the narrative. Having begun with the report on Samuel's death (v. 1), 1 Sam 25 runs with the premise that with the death of Samuel, David is left on his own.¹² Moreover, after the reader has read the whole narrative, s/he realizes that aside from

⁸ P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 402.

⁹ P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 402.

¹⁰ P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 402: "David has lost his newly acquired base of power in consequence not only of his exile from Gibeah, where he had become a popular hero, but also, as we learn in v 44, the loss of his royal-blooded wife, Michal. He has been required to return to his homeland. Now we find him marrying the widow of a high-ranking member of the clan that controlled Hebron as well as another woman from nearby Jezreel (v 43). He is becoming a prominent figure in the heartland of Judah. To be sure, the narrative does not suggest that he is deliberately building a base of power – all of this is the working out of a divine plan in which he, too, is caught up – but when the time comes – that is, when Saul falls – David will be ready. And he will become king first at Hebron (2 Sam 2:1-4)."

¹¹ cf. J. D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 19; P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 401.

¹² B. Green suggests that "the death of the prophet eliminates for Saul and David (and ourselves) any likelihood that the prophet will intervene between these two whom he anointed king," cf. B. Green, *How are the Mighty Fallen?* (JSOTSS 365; Sheffield 2003) 393; D. Bosworth argues that the notice of Samuel's death in 1 Sam 25,1a "has no apparent relation to what precedes or follows. If it explains David's movement from his stronghold (24:23) to Maon (reading LXX, 25:1b), the connection is not clear," cf. D. Bosworth, *The Story Within a Story in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 45; Washington, DC 2008) 85.

the complication resulting from the death of David's theological supporter, another complication frames the entire story, that is, Saul's removal of Michal from David, thereby removing any political opportunity from David. This is an important point for it differentiates clearly 1 Sam 25 from the framing narratives, 1 Sam 24 and 26. While in the framing narratives, Saul's pursuit of David in order to kill him is highlighted, in 1 Sam 25 the same issue is not the main concern. Rather, it is about David being prevented from taking into his own hands what is reserved to YHWH.

Two complicating problems, therefore, frame the narrative. First of all, the prophet's absence, rather than give an anti-climactic start, is precisely what makes the narrative of 1 Sam 25 filled with suspense. Against a David who will be seen deteriorating without the guiding voice of a prophet, the narrative presents how David will finally come to recognize who he is and who YHWH is in his life when he hears His voice from the mouth of Abigail acting in lieu of the prophet Samuel. Just as David's encounter with Abigail forms the central part of the narrative, so will Abigail's voice act a crucial part in David's attempts to claim the throne. Secondly, having been deprived of a political opportunity for kingship through marital politics, the narrative makes way for a David who will also be rewarded of a similar opportunity when he will marry Abigail in a most legitimate way.¹³

Indeed, the theme of reliance on YHWH becomes very significant for David who lost both a theological supporter (Samuel)¹⁴ and a political opportunity for the kingship claim (Michal). Within 1 Sam 25, therefore, is a temptation for David to consider everything solely within the purview of human endeavor – something Saul irreparably committed in his rule and which the reader is again reminded of in 1 Sam 25 where s/he is to consider that accession to the kingship can be achieved by a mere political maneuver. By taking Michal from David, Saul must have been thinking that he had removed a significant opportunity from David to reign in his stead.¹⁵ But the crafting of the narrative is that, colored as it is by a story of a marriage, the deeper theological thrust is also brought forward. Indeed, the story is about a marriage. But not a marriage that Saul must have had in mind. Nor is it a simple one as David probably thought with Ahinoam of Jezreel.¹⁶ It is rather a marriage that unites YHWH's voice with his anointed king, with Abigail having been sent to David to remind him always of YHWH's voice. Therefore, not by political maneuvering will he gain the throne but by uniting himself with YHWH. Abigail will remind David of his past successes, namely, his victory over Goliath which David, in his younger years, attributed purely and simply to YHWH.

¹³ Thus differing heavily from his future affair with Bathsheba.

¹⁴ cf. for example, D. V. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (JSOTSS 121; Sheffield 1991) 204-205.

¹⁵ cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 398.

¹⁶ Granting, *contra* J. D. Levenson, that Ahinoam was not Saul's wife.

1. Preliminary Analysis

Here we shall determine the limits of the narrative using narratological criteria. We shall also provide a literal translation accompanied by significant textual-critical and philological notes. We shall adopt the NRSV translation as our base English translation while putting in italics significant changes demanded by the critical reading of the variants.

1.1 Delimitation of the Narrative

1 Sam 25 is first of all demarcated as a distinct narrative unit by being located at the center of the triptych that runs from chs. 24 to 26. As far as plot is concerned, the framing narratives revolve around Saul's pursuit of David while 1 Sam 25 revolves around David's murderous intent against Nabal and his household after the latter not only rejected David's request but also insulted his person. David is restrained from bloodguilt thanks to Nabal's wife, Abigail who hastily gives what her husband denied David and proclaims a prophecy concerning David and his future dynasty and reminds him of YHWH's providence over his life. In the end, after YHWH strikes down Nabal, David marries Abigail. 1 Sam 25 is also distinct with the appearances of new characters in the person of Nabal and Abigail while the surrounding narratives have Saul and David as main characters. These characters appear within a new setting, namely, Maon and Carmel where Nabal's sheep-shearing takes place. Finally, a temporal setting, that is, the death of Samuel marks 1 Sam 25 off as a distinct narrative unit.¹⁷

1.2 Textual Criticism, Philological Analysis and Translation

^[1]Samuel died and all Israel assembled and mourned for him. They buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David got up and *came down*¹⁸ to the wilderness of *Paran*.¹⁹

¹⁷ The delimitation of the narrative unit has been achieved following J.-L. Ska who argues that the chief criteria are dramatic criteria: change of place, change of time, change of characters, or change of action, cf. J.-L. Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us." Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives (SubBib 13; Rome 1990) 1.

¹⁸ 25,1 [יירד] There is no mention of place from which David 'came down.' It could be that, on hearing of Samuel's death, David came down from some unnamed higher spot in Judah to the wilderness of Maon (cf. S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford 1913) 195. Moreover, the preference for the MT reading over ילך runs consistently with David's command in v. 5 (עלו כרמלה), thereby providing a 'coming down - going up' movement.

¹⁹ 25,1 [פארן] The choice of the LXX's reading 'Maon' over the MT's 'Paran' resolves the difficulty of geographical identification since "unless there is some other place called Paran, it would refer to the Sinai desert, where it would make no sense for David to go and where he could scarcely be if he and his men are engaged with Nabal's shepherds in Judea." (R. Alter, *The David Story. A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York 1999) 152; cf. also S. R. Driver, *Notes on Hebrew*, 195). 'Maon' also helps connect the narrative to the preceding mention of David's residence in 1 Sam 23,24ff and prepares very well for the immediately following locality where Nabal resides (cf. D. Barthelemy,

[2] There was a man in Maon, whose business was in Carmel. The man was very *wealthy*;²⁰ he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He *was shearing*²¹ his sheep in Carmel. [3] Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. *The woman was clever and beautiful*,²² but the man was surly and mean; he was a Calebite.²³ [4] David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. [5] So David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, “Go up to Carmel,²⁴ and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name.”²⁵ [6] And you shall say: “*Thus for the revolving season!*”²⁶ Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that belongs

Critique Textuelle de l'Ancien Testament. Rapport final du comité pour l'analyse textuelle de l'ancien Testament hébreu institué par l'Alliance Biblique Universelle (OBO 50/1: Josué, Juges, Ruth, Samuel, Rois, Chroniques, Esdras, Néhémie, Esther; Göttingen 1982, 211).

²⁰ 25,2 [גדול מאד] Nabal was considered ‘very important’ or ‘very great’ as far as influence in concerned owing to his properties, thus, the adjective is rendered ‘wealthy.’ A similar adjectival reference is made concerning Barzillai in 2 Sam 19,33 and the Shunammite woman in 2 Kgs 4,8, (cf. S. R. Driver, *Notes on Hebrew*, 195; cf. also S. Goldman, *Samuel*. Hebrew Text & Translation with an Introduction and Commentary (ed. A. Cohen) (London – New York 1959) 149).

²¹ 25,2 [ויהי בגזז] S. R. Driver argues that here “one expects a participial construction, either גזז ויהי or ויהי גזז” (cf. S. R. Driver, *Notes on Hebrew*, 195-196). GKC § 111f,g, however, notes that such construction is normally used to introduce a new sequence of narrative, in this case, the temporal clause of v. 2b is taken up by a narrative WAYYIQTOL in v. 4, with v. 2b serving as protasis and v. 4 functioning as the apodosis (cf. also P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 396).

²² 25,3 [והאשה טובת־שכל ויפת תאר] Literally, the phrase could be rendered: “the woman was great as to discretion and beautiful as to form.” Such literal translation reveals the epexegetical use of the construct forms and provides a stark contrast to the following description of Nabal: “while the man was evil as to his doings” (cf. IBHS § 9.5.3c.28).

²³ 25,3 [כלבי] Support for the gentilic use has political undercurrents since Caleb occupies an important district in Judah with Hebron as center (cf. Jgs 1,20) (cf. S. Goldman, *Samuel*, 149). However, E. van Wolde questions the use of this phrase as *nomen gentilicium* saying that (1) this is the only time in the HB that this *nomen gentilicium* occurs; (2) Nabal is referred to elsewhere in Samuel and Chronicles as ‘Nabal the Carmelite’; and (3) *nomen gentilicia* in Biblical Hebrew have the article (cf. J-M § 137c). Thus, against this interpretation, she favors the use of the phrase as an adjective whereby “the narrator activates the connotation ‘dog’ as if he were denoting the man’s tribal name. The narrator is poking fun at Nabal: he presents Nabal as belonging to the ‘tribe of dogs.’ He thus underlines his negative presentation of Nabal, which does not bode well as regards the future actions of this man” (cf. E. van Wolde, “A Leader Led by a Lady: David and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25,” ZAW 114 (2002) 356-357).

²⁴ 25,5 [עלו כרמלה] cf. notes on 25,1. The topographical location of Carmel (2887 ft.) compared to the wilderness of Maon (c. 2500 ft.) explains the use of the verb (cf. S. R. Driver, *Notes on Hebrew*, 195-196).

²⁵ 25,5 [לו בשמי לשלום] This is an instance of the traditional greeting formula (שאל לו לשלום) which means ‘ask him how he is’ (cf. e.g. Gen 43,27; Exo 18,7; Jgs 18,15; 1 Sam 10,4; 17,22; 30,21; 2 Sam 8,10; 11,7).

²⁶ 25,6 [כה לחי] The best explanation of this difficulty is given by G. R. Driver who sees in this idiom an expression of a wish that the person addressed (in this case Nabal) may be as prosperous as the year comes round as the speaker (David, through his young men) finds him at the present time. It is a colloquialism “exactly corresponding to our ‘many happy returns of the day,’ it was, however, not restricted to good wishes on a birthday but was of general application” (cf. G. R. Driver, “A Lost Colloquialism in the Old Testament (1 Samuel XXV.6),” JTS 8 (1957) 273; cf. also H. J. Stoebe, *Das erste Buch Samuelis* (KAT 8/1; Gütersloh 1973) 447); D. Barthelemy, *Critique Textuelle*, 212; A. Campbell, *1 Samuel* (FOTL 7; Grand Rapids, MI 2003) 256; cf. also J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*

to you. ^[7]I have heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds *have been with us*,²⁷ *and*²⁸ we did not harm them, and they missed nothing, all the time they were in Carmel. ^[8]Ask your young men, and they will tell you. *Now therefore*²⁹ let the young men find favor in your sight; for we have *come*³⁰ on a good day. Please give whatever you find *to your servants*³¹ and *to your son*³² David.”

^[9]When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David; and then *they waited*.³³ ^[10]But Nabal answered David's servants, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are breaking away from their masters. ^[11]Shall I take³⁴ *my food and my drink*³⁵ and the meat that I

and Poetry in the Books of Samuel. A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses, Vol II: The Crossing Fates (1 Sam 13-31 & II Sam 1) (Assen 1981-1986) 484: “It is a wish which co-operates with v.6b: may you continue to enjoy such prosperity for the year ahead, you and your household and all that is yours!”

²⁷ 25,7 [οἱ ἡσσαν μεθ' ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ] The LXX adds these words in square brackets but such addition is probably meant to harmonize the text with v. 21. Thus the MT rendering must be preferred.

²⁸ 25,7 [ולא] The LXX adds the connecting *waw* and we follow it here (cf. H. J. Stoebe, *Das erste Buch*, 447).

²⁹ 25,8 [וימצאוי] A series of imperatives and jussives is frequently connected by ו (cf. HALOT, vol. 1, 258). The sense of this last imperative in the series (וימצאוי), however, demands that it be translated as conclusive hence the Vulgate's rendering (which translates the ו as *nunc ergo*).

³⁰ 25,8 [בנו] cf. GKC § 74k: “Frequently an a which is quiescent is omitted in writing in the middle of the word, e.g. בנו.”

³¹ 25,8 [לדוד] David's identification of himself as Nabal's 'son' is a voluntary one on David's behalf as indicated by the ל before both בן and דוד. It is David himself who alleges that he is Nabal's 'son.' (cf. D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 208).

³² 25,8 [ולבנך] P. K. McCarter, Jr. sees in David's self-characterization to Nabal an act of deference to the wealthy and influential Nabal, an example of petition as in 2 Kgs 8,9 or as a formal gesture of fealty as in 2 Kgs 16,7 (cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 397).

³³ 25,9 [וינוחו] “The LXX has Nabal as subject for *he behaved arrogantly* We read *ωπληζ*. MT³³ 33 MT The Masoretic Text has *wynwḥw*, “and they (i.e. the young men) rested (waited for a reply?),” but the correct reading can be recovered from LXX³³ 33 LXX The Septuagint with the help of the evidence of 4QSam^b for 20:34. In both places LXX has *kai anepēdēsen*, “and he sprang up,” which corresponds to *ωπληζ* in 4QSam^b in the earlier passage... In the present passage it is easy to see how *ωπληζ* became *wynwḥw*: *p* and *n* on the one hand and *z* and *w* on the other are among the most easily confused letter-forms in the scripts in which the biblical manuscripts were transmitted” (P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 399). The *lectio difficilior* given by the MT, however, should be retained. The LXX rendering, even if agreeing with the DSS witnesses, appear to be an explanatory summary of Nabal's reply to David's messengers. By thus introducing Nabal's words with a negative description of his behavior, the sense of Nabal's question (“Who is David?...”) becomes a narrator's comment of an unambiguous insult on David's person.

³⁴ 25,11 [יתחקלי] The *weqatalti* is used to introduce the question (cf. GKC § 112cc; E. P. Dhorme, *Les livres de Samuel* (Paris 1910) 222; H. J. Stoebe, *Das erste Buch*, 447).

³⁵ 25,11 [לחמי ואתמימי] The LXX's 'my wine' is preferred by most modern translations. The mention of 'water' in this verse constitutes a *lectio difficilior*, a phrase which also appears in Hos 2,7 (לחמי ומימי) and which, in Biblical Hebrew, evokes not specifically 'my bread and my water' but 'my food and my drink', that is, 'food available to me.' That the reading should evoke 'wine' is important in the narrative inasmuch as 'wine' is explicitly mentioned as that which Abigail (cf. v. 18) prepares to give to David and which intoxicates Nabal (cf. vv. 36ff) (cf. D. Barthelemy, *Critique textuelle*, 213).

have butchered for my shearers, and give it to men who come from I do not know where?”^[12] So David’s young men made their way back, and returned, and came in and told him all these words. ^[13]David said to his men, “Every man strap on his sword!” And every one of them strapped on his sword; David also strapped on his sword; and about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

^[14]But *one young man*³⁶ from the young men told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, “David sent messengers from the wilderness to *bless*³⁷ our master but he shouted angrily at them. ^[15]But the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we never missed anything all the time we walked with them when we were in the wilderness. ^[16]They were *a wall*³⁸ to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them pasturing the sheep. ^[17]Now therefore know and consider what you should do; for evil has been decided against our master and against all his house; he is so ill-natured that no one can speak to him.”

^[18]Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs and loaded them on donkeys. ^[19]Then she said to her young men, “Go on ahead of me; I am coming after you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal. ^[20]*While she was riding on the donkey and coming down*³⁹ under cover of the mountain, David and his men were going down toward her; and she met them. ^[21]*Now David had just been saying*,⁴⁰ “Surely it was in vain that I protected all that belonged to him in the wilderness, so that nothing was missing of all that belonged to

³⁶ 25,14 [נער-אחד] The LXX has only ‘one’ (ἓν). The specification of a ‘young man’ does well to the important distinction when ‘young men’ are associated either with Nabal or David and Abigail. On the one hand, when mentioned in connection with their leader, David’s men are termed נערים (‘boys, servants’, vv. 5.9.12) or אנשים (‘men’, v. 13). On the other hand, when the focus is on Nabal, they are termed עבדים (v. 10 twice) (cf. J. D. Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 16).

³⁷ 25,14 [לברך] J. P. Fokkelman notices this as one of the revaluations that the servant does before Abigail. “The prosperity wish is now called a ‘blessing’ (*brkh*) and appears to be all that the messengers conveyed - the servant omits the actual request (cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 491). Later on (cf. v. 27), Abigail will herself call what she presents before David as a ‘blessing’ (*hbrkh*) (cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, 397).

³⁸ 25,16 [חומה] The LXX³⁸ 38 LXX The Septuagint, deeming the metaphor too strong, has softened it to a simile (ὡς τείχος) (cf. cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, 397). The MT’s rendering provides a better reasoning for the wording of David’s oath where he refers to Nabal and his men as “pisser against the wall” referring to the spurning of David.

³⁹ 25,20 [והיה] The *wehayah* here functions like the *wayehi* construction (cf. vv. 2b-4; 39) “In the apodosis of the two-member syntactic construction, in fact, weQATAL expresses the future (in discourse) or a continued action (in narrative) while the past is expressed by the simple QATAL or WAYYIQTOL” (cf. A. Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (tr. W. G. E. Watson) (JSOTSS 86; Sheffield 1990) 187).

⁴⁰ 25,21 [ודור אמר] The NAB rendering captures the right sense (cf. A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 260).

him; but he has returned me evil for good. ^[22]God do so to *David's enemies*⁴¹ and still more, if by morning I leave so much as *a single piss* against the wall⁴²."

^[23]Then Abigail saw David, and she hurried and alighted from the donkey, and fell before David on her face, bowing to the ground. ^[24]She fell at his feet and said, "*Upon me alone my lord, be the guilt*;⁴³ let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. ^[25]Let not my lord take seriously this ill-natured fellow, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I, your servant, did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. ^[26]*Now then*,⁴⁴ my lord, as the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, since the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt and from taking vengeance with your own hand, now let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be like Nabal. ^[27]And now let this *blessing* that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. ^[28]*Please forgive the transgression of your servant*;⁴⁵ for 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*⁴⁶ in you so long as you live. ^[29]If anyone should rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound *in the bundle of the living*⁴⁷ with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the

⁴¹ 25, 22 [לֹא־יִבִּי דָוִד] The LXX's reading should be favored. The MT reading is probably a scribal correction (cf. A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 256; D. Barthelemy, *Critique textuelle*, 213); cf. also P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, 394: "Analogy (cf. e.g. 20,13) requires the imprecation to be uttered by the speaker against himself. The insertion of לֹא־יִבִּי is probably intentional, to avoid the appearance, as the threat in *b* was not carried out, of the imprecation recoiling upon David himself."

⁴² 25,22 [מִשְׁחִין בְּקִיר] This is a stereotyped formula referring to all male members of a household. The term always refers to the killing of all males of a group (cf. 1 Kgs 14,10; 16,11; 21,21; 2 Kgs 9,8) (cf. D. T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI 2007) 586); cf. notes on vv. 34 and 37.

⁴³ 25,24 [בִּי־אֲנִי אֲדֹנִי הָעוֹן] The formula is attested in Gen 43,20; 44,18; Num 12,11; Jgs 6,13-15; 13,18; 1 Sam 1,26; 1 Kgs 3,17-26. J. P. Fokkerman prefers to interpret the nominal clause as an optative. (cf. J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art*, 498); cf. also P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, 398: "This is the polite way of initiating a conversation with a superior; the expression is most often used elliptically as *bī 'ādōnī*, 'Let it (i.e. the possible burden of guilt) be mine, my lord!' Note especially that this reference to guilt has nothing to do with Nabal's misbehavior or David's danger of bloodguilt (v 26), as unanimously supposed by the commentaries; instead it is simply a part of the conventions of courteous and respectful behavior."

⁴⁴ 25,26-27 [וְעַתָּה...וְעַתָּה] The word is repeated after a long intervening clause (cf. S. R. Driver, *Notes on Hebrew*, 200).

⁴⁵ 25,28 [שָׁא נָא לְפָשַׁע אִמְתֶּךָ] Like the formulaic expression in v. 24, this is another form of politeness, asking to "forgive me for speaking further" (cf. note on v. 24 above). "Abigail has delivered her gift, but she has more to say. Her purpose in looking ahead to David's career in vv 28b-30 is apparently to establish a further basis for dissuading him from wreaking vengeance on her husband" (cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, 398).

⁴⁶ 25,28 [לֹא־הַמָּצָא] R. Alter here notices the temporal ambiguity of the Hebrew imperfect that Abigail exploits "to make a statement that is both descriptive of the way David has conducted himself and predictive of the way he will, or should, conduct himself" (cf. R. Alter, *The David Story*, 157).

⁴⁷ 25,29 [בְּצִרּוֹר הַחַיִּים] The phrase could mean either (1) 'the document of the living,' a document tied up with a string and sealed with a lump of clay (cf. Job 14,17); or (2) 'the bundle of the living' where as R. P. Gordon explains, David's life is kept securely as the tally stones in a shepherd's bag (cf. D. T. Tsumura, *Samuel*, 590).

hollow of a sling.^[30] When the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel,^[31] this shall not be for my Lord cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause or for having saved himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.”

^[32] David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! ^[33] Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me today from bloodguilt and from avenging myself by my own hand! ^[34] However,⁴⁸ as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there would not have been left to Nabal so much as *a single pisser against the wall*.”^[35] Then David received from her hand what she had brought him; he said to her, “Go up to your house in peace; see, I have heeded your voice, and *I have granted your petition*.”⁴⁹

^[36] Abigail came to Nabal; he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. Nabal’s heart was merry within him and was very drunk; so she told him nothing at all until the morning light.^[37] In the morning, *when the wine was going out of Nabal*,⁵⁰ his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him; he became like a stone.^[38] About ten days later the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.

^[39] When David heard *that Nabal was dead*,⁵¹ he said, “Blessed be the Lord who has judged the case of Nabal’s insult to me, and has kept back his servant from evil; the Lord has returned the evildoing of Nabal upon his own head.” Then David sent and *wooed*⁵² Abigail, to make her his wife.^[40] When David’s servants came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, “David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.”^[41] She rose and bowed down, with her face to the ground, and said,

⁴⁸ 25,34 [ואולם] The conjunction must be understood in the adversative sense since there is a clear parallelism between vv. 32-33 and v. 34 (cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 512).

⁴⁹ 25,35 [ואשא פניך] Literally, “I have lifted up your face,” cf. Gen 19,21; Job 42,8-9 (cf. D. T. Tsumura, *Samuel*, 592).

⁵⁰ 25,37 [בצאת היין מנבל] P. J. Leithart notices a very important nuance in the use of the particle ב with the infinitive construct which, when expressing temporal relation, commonly denotes action simultaneous with the main verb (cf. also Gen 41,46; Josh 5,13). Thus, he prefers the translation “*while the wine was going out from Nabal*, his wife told him.” “[T]his suggests that Abigail tells Nabal about the encounter with David while he is emptying his bladder, that is, while he is urinating after a night of heavy drinking.” Understood thus, it also enlightens the rather vague expression in vv. 22 and 34 where David vows to eliminate ‘every single pisser against the wall’ (referring to Nabal’s household). “The repetition of ער-אור הבקר in v. 34 and v. 36 makes it clear that the main ‘pisser’ is Nabal himself: As David had threatened, he is no longer alive at morning light.” (cf. P. J. Leithart, “Nabal and His Wine,” *JBL* 120/3 (2001) 525-526.

⁵¹ 25,39 [כי מת נבל] The MT adds this phrase thereby providing a smooth connection with the earlier verses concerning Nabal’s death.

⁵² 25,40 [וידבר באביגיל] When the verb דבר (‘to speak’) is followed by the preposition ב instead of the usual אל (‘to’), it means “to enter into discussion about a betrothal” (cf. R. Alter, *The David Story*, 160).

“Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.”^[42] Abigail got up hurriedly and rode on a donkey *while*⁵³ her five maids went after her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife.

^[43] Now David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel; both of them became his wives. ^[44] Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Palti son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

1.3 Some Notes on Verbal Forms in Narrative

Since the narrative structure is deemed highly important in the analysis of the plot, we limit ourselves to an analysis of the verbal forms in the narrative.

The whole narrative of 1 Sam 25 begins right away with a WAYYIQTOL informing the reader of Samuel's death. The choice for a WAYYIQTOL construction is significant since there appears at once an intended mention of Samuel's death as propelling the narrative. Three other WAYYIQTOLs connect themselves to the death and burial of Samuel. These WAYYIQTOLs which form a series develops into a short independent narrative which remains, however, antecedent to the main narrative (vv. 2-42). Moreover, the high discrepancy between narrated time and narration time in the whole series of WAYYIQTOLs in v. 1a is enough reason to consider it a summary, namely, requiring merely half a verse to recount the many days assumed to have elapsed for the period of mourning Samuel's death.

The same can be said of the next series of WAYYIQTOLs that has David as subject (v. 1b) since, as the reader will know later on in vv. 7.15-16, David must have stayed in the wilderness for some period of time long before the season of sheep-shearing.

The narrative sequence is maintained throughout the whole chapter beginning with a WAYYIQTOL in v. 1 and develops into a series of the same verbal form until v. 42. The discourses are carefully introduced by WAYYIQTOL of verbs for speech (cf. אָמַר, vv. 5.13.19.24.32.39.41; עָנָה, v. 10). The וְלֹא QATAL construction (cf. vv. 19.36) is simply the negative equivalent of a WAYYIQTOL.⁵⁴

As summary, the whole v. 1, although formulated in WAYYIQTOLs, remains antecedent to the main narrative. Only with a *wayehi* construction⁵⁵ will the beginning of the main story be indicated. In v. 2, the *wayehi* introduces a temporal circumstance

⁵³ 25,42 [וַחֲמִשָּׁה] The *waw* should be understood in the adversative sense in order to avoid the ridiculous interpretation of having six women on only one donkey.

⁵⁴ cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 63.

⁵⁵ cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 48: “The presence of a *wayehi* is enough to mark the passage as narrative...The textual function of *wayehi* is to introduce a new element into the main narrative thread so that that element becomes an integral and important part of the account.”

(בכרמל את-צאנו ויהי בנוז) that serves as a protasis and which will be connected to the WAYYIQTOL of v. 4 that serves as the apodosis (דוד במדבר כיהנוז נבל את-צאנו) (וישמע).⁵⁶ The temporal circumstance introduced by *wayehi* here is expressed by a preposition+infinitive (בנוז).⁵⁷

The function of *wayehi* to introduce a temporal clause that comes before the main action is clearly seen in another occurrence in vv. 37-38. In v. 37 there are two formulations used to describe the temporal circumstance: (1) preposition+noun (בבקר); and (2) preposition+infinitive (בצאה). The main action follows (WAYYIQTOL, והגד). In v. 38, we have an adverb of time that describes the temporal circumstance (כעשרת הימים) followed by the main action (WAYYIQTOL, ויגף).

In the narrative section of 1 Sam 25, we only have one instance of a *weQATAL* construction and which comes in the form ויהי (v. 20). The construction in v. 20 has a function different from the usually termed ‘inverted perfect’ which denotes the future and repetitive actions, as A. Niccacci notes:

The greater autonomy of ויהי is explained by its syntactic status which has an analogy with *wayehi*. Like *wayehi* the function of ויהי is not in the individual sentence but in the unit of discourse or narrative to which it belongs. This function consists in placing the circumstance, or rather the paragraph which follows it within the main thrust of the message and of connecting this with the preceding context.⁵⁸

In the case of v. 20, the actions of Abigail are placed simultaneously with that of David and his men but seen within the perspective of Abigail.⁵⁹ The following WAYYIQTOL (והפגש) with Abigail as the subject will confirm this. The narrative sequence is maintained since the last actions (the context to which this verse is connected) have also Abigail as subject, namely, the WAYYIQTOL (והאמר) and the WAW-x-QATAL (ולאיש נבל לא הגידה).⁶⁰

⁵⁶ cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 50-51: “*wayehi* has the function of introducing a temporal clause which must come before the main action.”

⁵⁷ cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 51.

⁵⁸ cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 182.

⁵⁹ P. K. McCarter, Jr. sees the same syntax with vv. 2b-4: “The syntax is the same as in 2b-4 above, except that here the parenthetical material (vv 21-22) is even more extensive. We must repeat the protasis in English (“When she fell in with them”) to be sure that the translation is intelligible; but no such device was necessary in Hebrew, where the disjunctive syntax of vv 21-22 clearly sets off the parenthesis, and the resumption of the syntax of ordinary past narration in v. 23 returns us smoothly to the main narrative line” (cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 397). The narrator adopts the perspective of Abigail and this s/he does not only through the *wehinneh* but also the prepositional phrase לקראתה that follows the participle describing David and his men’s action. David did not know that he will encounter Abigail *en route* to Nabal’s house. By thus adopting her perspective, Abigail on seeing David and his men taking the same road, thinks they are coming towards her.

⁶⁰ The WAW-x-QATAL here does not interrupt the narrative sequence but could simply be understood as a necessary construction since the negative verb demands it.

From the beginning of the narrative proper in v. 5, the sequence is tightly observed up until v. 13, with the narrative being shared between two main characters, David and Nabal, formed like a dialogue between the two. The last part of v. 13 contains a WAW-x-QATAL construction.⁶¹ This construction is non-initial and merely serves to provide a peripheral information being contrasted to the action (in WAYYIQTOL) of the four hundred men who went up after David.

A new scene begins with v. 14 signaled by a presence of an initial WAW-x-QATAL construction (וְלֹא־בִיגַיִל אִשְׁתּוֹ נָבָל הָיָה), where an antecedent information is given to the reader, that is, an event that probably happened after David's young men left Nabal's presence. While David and his men are strapping on their swords, the narrator places the reader to a new scene in Nabal's house. The scene gives way to a new main character, Abigail. In this construction, the narrator decides to put in first place Abigail even if acting merely as recipient of the information that the servant gives. The 'retrospective' information is clear when one sees the same event (cf. vv. 5-12) referred to again by the direct discourse of Nabal's servant. The interruption and emphasis on her person is crucial to the narrative since by the time the narrative sequence is resumed (v. 17), she will act as the subject of the verbs until v. 20.

In v. 21 another WAW-x-QATAL construction will interrupt the narrative sequence (וְתַפְנֹשׁ...וְהָיָה הִיא רַכְבָּתָהּ) by a comment on David's soliloquy. This communicates to the reader a recovered information (retrospective) that happened before the last main event in the sequence. Thus, before Abigail overtook David and his men, David had already sworn an oath to kill Nabal and all male members of his household. In other words, while the narrator places such WAW-x-QATAL construction after Abigail's act of overtaking them (WAYYIQTOL),⁶² the event itself in the WAW-x-QATAL construction happened before Abigail overtook them.⁶³ Since the event is a 'recovered' information, it should be rendered in the pluperfect.⁶⁴

The last two WAW-x-QATAL constructions (vv. 43-44) should be considered non-initial and serve to express an antecedent circumstance to Abigail becoming David's wife (cf. WAYYIQTOL of v. 42, וְתַהֲיֶלְוּ לְאִשָּׁה). As such, they have the value of the pluperfect.⁶⁵

⁶¹ "Depending on where it is in relation to the narrative WAYYIQTOL the WAW-x-QATAL can be: (1) initial, when it precedes the narrative form, (2) non-initial when it follows. In the first case it communicates recovered information (antecedent), in the second, peripheral information (background)" (cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 35).

⁶² cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 41.

⁶³ As 'retrospective,' the information given in v. 21-22 should be understood in conjunction with the events described as early as v. 13, where David and his men gird on their swords and continuing until v. 20 where the narrator confirms further that they were in fact on their way to Nabal's house (cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 36-37).

⁶⁴ cf. S. R. Driver, *Notes on Hebrew*, 199.

⁶⁵ cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 63; cf. also J-M § 118d.

2. The Plot and the Narrative Program

Here we shall present in detail the principal parts of the dramatic action and argue for the narrative unity of the whole chapter 25.

2.1 *Principal Articulations of the Dramatic Action*

The whole narrative of 1 Sam 25 is framed by a prelude notice on Samuel's death (v. 1) and a postlude information concerning David's two other wives (vv. 43-44) allowing K. Bodner to remark that the whole chapter "begins with a funeral and ends with a wedding".⁶⁶

As far as narrative rhythm is concerned, A. S. Brown provides a summary: "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".⁶⁷

The main story can be easily subdivided into six scenes where only two characters appear at the same time and at a given (alternating) setting.

	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Characters</i>
<i>Exposition</i> (vv. 1-3)		
Scene 1 (vv. 4-8)	Nabal's homestead	David and Nabal
Scene 2 (vv. 9-13)	David's camp	David and his men
Scene 3 (vv. 14-19)	Nabal's homestead	Servant and Abigail
Scene 4 (vv. 20-34)	David's camp (<i>en route</i> to Nabal's place)	Abigail and David
Scene 5 (vv. 35-38)	Nabal's homestead	Abigail and Nabal
Scene 6 (vv. 39-42)	David's camp	David and Abigail
<i>Postlude</i> (vv. 43-44)		

2.1.1 *Exposition* (vv. 1-3)

A notice on Samuel's death opens the narrative (v. 1). The WAYYIQTOL formulation for the death notice differentiates it well from its other mention in ch. 28 suggesting that it is probably at this point of the narrative when Samuel died, while the mention in ch. 28 recalls for the reader that Samuel has indeed been dead for quite some time.

⁶⁶ K. Bodner, *1 Samuel. A Narrative Commentary* (Sheffield 2008) 258. A. S. Brown provides a clear diagram of the plot structure, cf. A. S. Brown, "Discovering David in Light of 1 Samuel 25: A Narrative Critical Reading of 1 Sam 24-26", *Open Access Dissertations and Theses* (Paper 5355 2009; <http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/opendissertations/5355>) 61.

⁶⁷ A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 48.

D. V. Edelman argues that

by reporting Samuel's death at this juncture, the audience is led to feel that no further developments in the divine plan can or will occur because of the removal of Yahweh's designated prophetic agent...Samuel's removal leaves both king and king-elect on their own to establish their destiny without divine intervention or direction. David must seek to attune his heart to God's and learn the type of behavior fitting for a future king".⁶⁸

P. Miscall, furthermore, comments: "With David, there is no 'word of the Lord' present in the sense of some command, directive, oath, or vow that he must obey or follow....David is on his own".⁶⁹

This, however, does not mean that Samuel's death is not relevant to the story that will unfold. Samuel's impact is far from over even after a report of his death. As W. Brueggemann points out: "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".⁷⁰ By further reading on until ch. 28, the reader will be surprised to know Samuel's presence looming large over the narrative.⁷¹

In the case of 1 Sam 25, Samuel's death simply provides for David a complicating issue which adds suspense to the story: How will David claim the kingship now that Samuel, his theological supporter is dead?

The mention of David right after the funeral of Samuel (v. 1b) can be connected to 'all Israel being gathered' at Samuel's funeral which could mean that David was in attendance to mourn Samuel's death but soon after departs on his way.⁷² However, since no mention is made of Saul, there should be another reason why David alone is mentioned right after Samuel's death and funeral and that probably has got something to do with the important role David will play in such a period of transition. After all, Saul seemed to have ceded to David the monarchy in the preceding episode of 1 Sam 24.

The next verses appear to be a static presentation of two of the main characters, Nabal and Abigail. Nabal's characterization is almost at once complete the moment he is introduced. He is presented in two stages, the first one as he is (that is, as a rich man at a period of sheep-shearing) and the second, as he is in relation to his wife Abigail. These two stages are separated by a *wayehi* construction (v. 2b) that

⁶⁸ D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 204-205.

⁶⁹ P. Miscall, *1 Samuel. A Literary Reading* (Bloomington 1986) 149.

⁷⁰ W. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY 1990) 175.

⁷¹ cf. A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 58.

⁷² cf. K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 259.

gives way to a new temporal structure and which is taken up by the main action in v. 4. In the first stage of Nabal's characterization, J. Fokkelman observes that

what is foremost to this man from Maon-Carmel is not his identity or origin, but his livestock holdings; he identifies with his business and his wealth and could well serve as an illustration to the parable of Nathan. By its chiastic closure, the literary word order 'sheep three thousand and a thousand goats' of v. 2c suggests the egocentricity of the owner who oversees and self-complacently counts his herds...⁷³

Nabal's characterization at this stage will be crucial in the later evaluation of his action towards David.⁷⁴ The next stage of presentation (v. 3) has a clearer chiastic structure but employed in order to bluntly emphasize a "perfect mismatch".⁷⁵ R. P. Gordon adds a careful note that "Abigail is delectable, and fit to marry a king-in-waiting (vv. 39-42)".⁷⁶ Indeed, the narrator's characterization of Abigail as "good in respect to insight" and "pretty in respect to physical appearance" resonates with a courtier's description of David to Saul in 1 Sam 16,18.⁷⁷ While D. V. Edelman sees in the characterization of Nabal a surrogate Saul and that of Abigail a surrogate David,⁷⁸ there is more to such description that prepares for the perfect matching between Abigail and David.⁷⁹

As we noted, the *wayehi* construction (v. 2) refers the reader to the time of "sheep-shearing" (זר) which is both a time of work and also festivity (cf. 2 Sam 13,23ff).⁸⁰ This is an important note not only because the main storyline transpires within such a temporal structure but also because it provides a significant reference for the evaluation of the conduct of both Nabal and David.

2.1.2 Inciting Moment: (vv. 4-8)

The first action reported (WAYYIQTOL) is that of David hearing about Nabal's shearing his sheep. This action forms the apodosis part of the *wayehi* construction (cf. v. 2b). When connected to the next WAYYIQTOL, that is, of David's

⁷³ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 481.

⁷⁴ S. Bar-Efrat notes, for example, that "In the case of Nabal his great wealth makes his parsimony and inhospitality to David and his men stand out more conspicuously," cf. S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSS 70; Sheffield 1989) 53.

⁷⁵ cf. R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 182; cf. also S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 45: "Le narrateur lui rend Abigayil sympathique et Nabal antipathique."

⁷⁶ cf. R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 182.

⁷⁷ cf. D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 206; cf. also W. Vogels, *David et son histoire* (1 Sam 16,1-1 Rois 2,11) (Montreal 2003) 101: "...elle a comme David (16,12) de belles qualités intérieures et extérieures..."

⁷⁸ cf. D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 206.

⁷⁹ This forms part of the contract between the narrator and the reader, cf. J.-L. Ska, "Our Fathers," 21.

⁸⁰ cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 396.

sending ten of his men, the inciting moment becomes complete and effective. To hear of a sheep-shearing activity remains a 'passive' act. By hearing of Nabal's sheep-shearing activity, David simply confirms to the reader the static situation within Nabal's household. The action that disturbs such a static scene is when David sends ten young men to greet Nabal and ask for provisions.⁸¹

All the rest of the actions preceding such a feast should be considered part of the repeated (habitual) actions, even if, to the reader they appear as gaps.⁸² Only with David's words in v. 7 does the reader realize that David knew of Nabal's flocks and shepherds long before the sheep-shearing activity. This part allows us a glimpse concerning David's activities in the wilderness. D. M. Gunn (along with many others) suggests that David was a bandit leader who provides 'protection' for the shepherds of the Carmel region.⁸³ Such protection is necessary as is well-attested in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Job attests to attacks from raiders (cf. Job 1,14ff) while David himself recounts his experience how as a shepherd he saved his flock from wild beasts (cf. 1 Sam 17,34ff). The syntax of vv. 7 and 15 attests to a period of 'protection' that was prior to the sheep-shearing period. Nevertheless, the long period of protecting Nabal's flocks (repeated acts in the past, thus expository in nature), while providing a glimpse of David's activities, does not necessarily put David's request in a bad light. Scholars who view the request in a negative light tend to question David's intentions. B. Green, for example, asks: "Is this the humble presentation of a bill, or is it an extortionate demand for payment which had better not be refused?"⁸⁴ But one should not neglect the temporal structure of David's request. By sending his request during the period of sheep-shearing, David wants to share in a tradition and partake of the fruits, knowing fully that the owner of the flocks was expected to be generous on such an occasion.⁸⁵ This is an important point against those who merely consider David's extortionate racket. Had he wanted merely to ask for protection money, he could have asked for it in any ordinary day or at any day before the sheep-shearing

⁸¹ cf. A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 258: "It is David's request that triggers the encounter with Nabal."

⁸² "1 Samuel 25 exhibits a number of these omissions or gaps. David hears that Nabal is shearing sheep, and he sends messengers to Nabal seeking gifts (vv. 4-5). No mention is made of the necessary intermediate step - David's going to the location of Nabal's flocks - until that information is supplied, first in David's communication to Nabal (v. 7) and later as confirmation in the servant's conversation with Abigail (vv. 15-16), cf. M. E. Biddle, "Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization" *JBL* 121 (2002) 632-633.

⁸³ D. M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*. An Interpretation of a Biblical Story (JSOTSS 14; Sheffield 1980) 96; cf. also G. G. Nicol, "David, Abigail and Bathsheba, Nabal and Uriah: Transformation Within a Triangle," *SJOT* 12 (1998) 131-132.

⁸⁴ B. Green, *How are the Mighty*, 397.

⁸⁵ D. M. Gunn affirms this when he says: "Hearing that a wealthy farmer, Nabal, is 'having shearers' - which will mean a feast - David sends his men to take a share of the bounty", cf. D. M. Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, 96; cf. also A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 259: "The request is for whatever Nabal is able to give; the context suggests that Nabal is well enough placed to be able to respond generously"; cf. also H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*. A Commentary (OTL; Philadelphia 1964) 202: "This is all completely grounded in the relationships of the open wilderness, and Nabal is really a 'fool' if he takes no notice."

festival. By thus requesting during the sheep-shearing festival, the refusal of Nabal (to whom the request was given) comes to be focused more. Thus, while the text does not specify David's intentions for requesting provisions, an attentive reading allows for a justification of David's reaction in the face of the refusal of Nabal.⁸⁶

2.1.3 First Complication (vv. 9-13)

David's placement of his request at a time of sheep-shearing means he was expecting a positive response. The complication begins, however, when the unexpected happens. The request is rejected. K. Bodner makes an interesting note that "...it is as if David is *expecting* an objection from Nabal, which he pre-empts in the message by encouraging Nabal to ask his own shepherds about what happened in the wilderness".⁸⁷ On the other hand, his sending ten (unarmed young men) could also mean that David was expecting that Nabal will accede to his request and that the young men will help transport all the gifts David will receive. In any case, Nabal's negative response coupled with insults on the personality of David emphasizes more Nabal's foolishness. J. P. Fokkelman observes that Nabal's words is "full of scorn in its longest line, 11a, in which he displays his wealth in *three* objects in order then completely to withhold them from the person making the request".⁸⁸ Nabal's hold on his position and power is also the basis for his insulting question concerning David's person:

The first thing that he says, 'who is David?', sounds like a question as to origin, but that possibility is immediately smothered by the second question, 'who is the son of Jesse?', so that the true meaning of the initial question is: what is the worth of David, who I know comes from Judah? What does he stand for? In 10c Nabal immediately gives the answer himself, in the only indicative clause of the speech, and the venom of this reactionary 'social criticism' by a conservative lies in the fact that David the individual has gone completely under in a detested crowd: he is only one of a whole band of 'slaves who have run away, each from his master'.⁸⁹

For Nabal to react in such a manner, however, is already expected by the reader, having been prepared by the narrator's characterization of Nabal in the exposition. But s/he is not prepared to see David's reaction. P. Borgman correctly notices the ambiguity in David's reaction to Nabal's insulting remark: "David is capable of ascribing to himself, perhaps with rhetorical flourish, a rather low status,"

⁸⁶ cf. also D. Bosworth, *Story Within a Story*, 100: "Since Nabal's refusal is not as judicious as David's request, we have no way of knowing whether David would have taken a polite no for an answer. It is even possible that he would have left Nabal alone if Nabal had pleaded fear of Saul in light of events at Nob (cf. 1 Sam 22:22-23)."

⁸⁷ K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 261.

⁸⁸ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 488: "He manages to use the morpheme of the first person singular no less than six times in 11a; it is even attached as an affirmative or possessive suffix to each meaning-carrier and has the stress 5x;" cf. also W. Vogels, *David et son histoire*, 102-103.

⁸⁹ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 488-489.

that is, as a 'dead dog' or 'a single flea' (1 Sam 24,15) a self-devaluation he repeats in 1 Sam 16, 20. But he is not capable of hearing a devaluation from someone else: "Hearing of Nabal's belittling question, David has his men buckle on their swords, and they all start on down the mountain to wipe out Nabal and his household".⁹⁰ For the reader, this is the first time s/he sees what evil David can do.

Having been thus offended "in the coarsest way possible",⁹¹ the only solution David sees is war. The reaction of David is that of total reversal symbolized by a change from peace to war as K. Bodner notes: "David includes three greetings of *shalom* in his message to Nabal, whereas now the 'sword' is mentioned three times as an antithesis. 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".⁹²

This complication bears its impact in the way it empties out a particular dimension in David's characterization, something which the narrative so far has not called him to do. That is what makes 1 Sam 25 truly different from the framing episodes (1 Sam 24 and 26). Whereas in the framing episodes, the character of David as a peaceable man is seen; here, for the first time, the reader sees the evil side in David.

When Nabal is understood as Saul's surrogate, then his character will have to be viewed as being emptied out in the service of the plot of 1 Sam 25, something which D. Jobling insightfully notices: "Saul is rejected, David elected, and the character and experience of each bears out that rejection and that election; must bear them out, for the success of the narrative....The rejected is frustrated by events (so that his bad acts turn out for good!), while the elected is advanced by events".⁹³ In this case, however, there is a danger that David will fall out of the characterization set for him by the narrative. Somebody will have to stop him from such danger.

2.1.4 Second Complication (vv. 14-19)

From the inciting moment (vv. 4-8) and the first complication (vv. 9-13) there is spatial unity, the distance between Nabal and David being bridged by David's messengers.⁹⁴ With v. 14, however, a change of space is given by the narrator when the

⁹⁰ P. Borgman, *David, Saul, and God*, 83.

⁹¹ H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 202.

⁹² K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 262; cf. also P. Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 151; cf. also D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 209. The narrator's rendering of a ternary structure for David's violent reaction "indicates that David's command is executed promptly and exactly, and conjures up a picture marching in closed formation, of a well-oiled war machine" (cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 489).

⁹³ D. Jobling, "Jonathan: A Structural Study in 1 Samuel," *The Sense of Biblical Narrative. Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible*, Vol. 1 (JSOTSS 7; Sheffield 1986) 27.

⁹⁴ cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 490.

events in Nabal's house is presented to the reader's perspective (but withdrawn from David's).⁹⁵ This is made possible by the WAW-x-QATAL construction which serves to put the two events simultaneously.⁹⁶

One from Nabal's young men informs Abigail of the recent events. In his testimony about David and his men, the young man enhances what has earlier been said from David's own mouth (vv. 7.10-11). Not only does he rename David's 'prosperity wish' into a 'blessing' (בִּרְכָה) omitting the words of the actual request,⁹⁷ but he also exceedingly describes David's guarding their flock in the wilderness as being "a wall to them night and day".⁹⁸ To serve as a wall to them means that David and his men kept off dangers from other quarters.⁹⁹ With the words of one from Nabal's young men "the narrator authorizes David's reading with various means and by word of mouth of a character from the other side".¹⁰⁰ The testimony of Nabal's servant before Abigail attests to the veracity of David's words and character and puts the deed of Nabal as unjust.¹⁰¹

D. Bosworth finds two interesting points in the testimony of Nabal's servant to Abigail. First, concerning the location of Nabal's flocks which made David's protection necessary: "The reference to the 'highland' (בְּשָׂדֵה) emphasizes the exposed position of Nabal's flock and the ease with which it might have been plundered, for the 'highland' or 'open country' can be a place of danger where none can help".¹⁰² Second, concerning Nabal's shepherds being accorded hospitality by David's men: "The servant also says that they were living among David's men, not *vice versa* (הִתְהַלַּכְנוּ אִתּוֹ, 25:15; cf. v. 7). This expression suggests that they were in a sense guests near David's encampment, not that David sought them out and solicited their friendship".¹⁰³

⁹⁵ cf. J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art*, 490.

⁹⁶ "Nous nous situons, en effet, certainement après cet instant où Nabal a rabroué les serviteurs de David. Mais l'intervention du serviteur de Nabal auprès d'Abigayil ne suit pas nécessairement la décision de David de riposter. Elle peut se situer dans le même laps de temps que celui qui est nécessaire aux serviteurs de David pour retourner auprès de leur maître, l'informer de la réponse de Nabal, entendre l'ordre de ceindre chacun son épée" (S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 49); cf. also A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 51: "...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. By doing this the narrator heightens the suspense and dramatic effect of the unfolding story."

⁹⁷ cf. J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art*, 491.

⁹⁸ The merism "night and day" praises the completeness of the protection (cf. J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art*, 491).

⁹⁹ H. W. Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 202.

¹⁰⁰ cf. J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art*, 492.

¹⁰¹ cf. S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 50: "Nous apprenons ainsi que David n'a pas menti et que Nabal est, par conséquent, réellement injuste"; cf. also E. van Wolde, "Led by a Lady", 360: "The reader has it on unimpeachable authority and should be convinced by now of the truthfulness of David's words to Nabal."

¹⁰² cf. D. Bosworth, *Story Within a Story*, 91.

¹⁰³ cf. D. Bosworth, *Story Within a Story*, 91.

Having said thus, the young man turns from the past to the present for his conclusion which he presents to Abigail as an urgent call to action.¹⁰⁴ The young man leaves it to Abigail's discretion to do what needs to be done. By so doing he corroborates the narrator's description of Abigail in v. 3 and which is confirmed when Abigail herself performs all the actions necessary to appease David and so save Nabal and his entire household. K. Bodner further observes that "the most intriguing aspect of the lad's speech is his forecast of evil: 'So now, know and see what you should do, for evil has been determined against our master and against all his house.' While the servant lad argued that David has been a man of blessing, his warning implies that David is capable of extreme action as well".¹⁰⁵ Thus, the servant's testimony confirms both David's legitimate request (the good dimension of David's character) and David's rage that will lead to massacre (the negative dimension of David's character).

It remains curious though why the servant does not report to Abigail the request of David. But when Abigail prepares the supplies (even without being informed by the servant of David's request) her generosity speaks well of what should have been done by Nabal for someone 'on a good day.' This again gives us an idea of the required generosity on the part of the owner of the flocks. David's past protection of Nabal's flock is irrelevant for Abigail who quickly prepares something to reciprocate the greetings made by David. B. Green's description is very instructive: "...[S]he undercuts the 'no' he has just thundered by the 'yes' of the donkeyloads of payment hurrying now toward the claimant. Might a more conciliatory Nabal have chosen more frugally? Perhaps so, but he has lost that option".¹⁰⁶

From this point of the narrative the focus is on Abigail and the reader asks the question: "Will she be able to act appropriately to avert the impending attack?"¹⁰⁷ The verb 'to hurry' is typical of Abigail since with all the preparations she has made, she was able to meet David halfway.

2.1.5 Climax (vv. 20-34)

The climax is seen as the high point in the actions of the main characters David and Abigail. Seen in this way, one can say that it is the peak of the two complications. If a complication is the series of actions that the characters employ to achieve resolution, then the placement of the climax at this point fits well, thus, heightening the suspense. It is at this time when both characters find themselves in the middle of

¹⁰⁴ cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 492.

¹⁰⁵ K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263-264.

¹⁰⁶ B. Green, *How are the Mighty*, 400.

¹⁰⁷ cf. D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 212; cf. also S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 50: "Le fait qu'elle tienne secrète son entreprise est également source de tension narrative. Réussira-t-elle dans sa tentative? Son mari déjouera-t-il sa ruse? Quelle sera sa réaction lorsqu'il prendra conscience de l'affaire? Le secret crée un suspense pour le lecteur."

the road that they hope will lead them to their respective goals: Abigail, in order to appease David; and David, in order to exterminate Nabal's household. The particle *וְהִנֵּה* signals such simultaneity inasmuch as the circumstances of David's and his men's location are closely connected to the ensuing action of Abigail.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the same particle is used by the narrative in privileging Abigail with her visual perspective.¹⁰⁹ The climax is highlighted, furthermore, by the fact that even as the narrator privileges Abigail's quick action (*וְהִנֵּה*, v. 18), a space is given to enunciate David's resolve to achieve his own objective of exterminating Nabal's household.¹¹⁰ Thus, with Abigail's quickness is matched David's resolve. "By putting the speech immediately before the face-to-face contact, the narrator makes us aware of the battle facing Abigail's intelligence and effort: it appears an impossible job".¹¹¹

The intensity is sustained until the very moment when Abigail throws herself down before David without knowing whether the latter will stay his sword. The conflict begins to unravel on account of Abigail's wise counsel.¹¹² "With this (Abigail's) speech, the story reaches its high point".¹¹³

P. K. McCarter Jr.'s division of Abigail's speech is instructive: "Abigail's speech falls into two clear parts: first, concerning the offense that has been given to David; second, concerning the future that awaits David".¹¹⁴ Each part is introduced by a formula of request to be heard, "part of the conventions of courteous and respectful behavior".¹¹⁵ By constructing her speech in this way, "[h]er almost exaggerated courtesy is meant to stand in intentional contrast to the boorishness of her husband".¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ cf. A. Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, 101.

¹⁰⁹ cf. R. Alter, *The David Story*, 155; cf. also E. van Wolde, "Led by a Lady," 360: "The word *we-hinneh* enables the reader to look with her eyes...Her actions and reactions are presented as the story's main line."

¹¹⁰ cf. H. W. Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 202: "David's angry monologue is once again meant to show the seriousness of the situation: he will leave no man alive. This time, not as in the occasion with Saul, he is convinced that he is right to take up the sword."

¹¹¹ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 490; cf. also A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 60: "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);" cf. also S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 124: "The communication of David's intentions at this moment shows us clearly how the story line is developing towards a climax of violent revenge. David has made up his mind to destroy everything that belongs to Nabal, even giving his decision the force of an oath."

¹¹² cf. A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 63.

¹¹³ A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 260.

¹¹⁴ A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 260.

¹¹⁵ cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, 398.

¹¹⁶ H. W. Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 203; cf. also S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 52: "Le lecteur est ainsi conduit à penser qu'il y a vraiment du calcul de la part d'Abigayil dans cette attitude, certes respectueuse, mais peut-être aussi obséquieuse."

Abigail encourages David not to set his heart on Nabal. Earlier in his words to Abigail, the servant confirms David's goodness while at the same time characterizing Nabal as a 'good for nothing' (אִישׁ הַבְּלִיעַל, v. 25). Here, Abigail confirms Nabal's characterization and warns David from 'setting his heart' on him otherwise he would end up like Nabal who is destined to ruin (as the servant himself has predicted: "for evil has been decided against our master and against all his house", cf. v. 17). Instead of setting his heart on Nabal, David is to put his heart on YHWH and thus avoid being the arbiter of the situation.¹¹⁷

Using Abigail's words, the narrative here clarifies the contrast between Nabal and David as far as their end is concerned. Abigail's words in v. 26 confirms what the servant said to her:

Abigail's speech (referring to Nabal)	"now let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be like Nabal" (v. 26)
Abigail's speech (referring to David)	"for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house" (v. 28)

The narrative, however, does not fail to notice the ambiguity of the reference of the servant's testimony to Abigail. The words, in fact, could refer either to Nabal or to David:

Servant's testimony (referring to Nabal [and to David?])	"for evil has been decided against our master and against all his house" (v. 17)
--	--

The servant's testimony to Abigail can be read as a kind of transfer of allegiance from Nabal to David with the ambiguous reference to "our master" (Nabal? or David?) leading to such an interpretation. When thus interpreted, then the testimony of the servant is taken up by Abigail when she uses a similar reference as a warning before David. Thus, Abigail admonishes David not to stoop to Nabal's level¹¹⁸ otherwise the bad thing that threatens Nabal and his house may happen to David and his house, too.¹¹⁹

Instead of taking the road of violence, Abigail asks David to put his trust in YHWH. She does this while speaking with allusions to David's past when YHWH's

¹¹⁷ cf. S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 52: "C'est un discours qui est une leçon de sagesse: celle de remettre à Dieu sa propre cause, en évitant de se faire arbitre de la situation. Saül s'était obstiné à ne pas apprendre une telle leçon, et David était prêt à tomber dans la même tentation, malgré la preuve de grande magnanimité donnée précédemment, lorsqu'il repousse l'occasion de tuer Saül."

¹¹⁸ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 501.

¹¹⁹ E. van Wolde, "Led by a Lady," 360; cf. also J. Vermeylen, "David le non-violent," 139: "...si David répondait à la violence par la violence, il serait 'comme Nabal', fou furieux, et se ferait ainsi son propre ennemi."

hand was clear in all his undertakings. Abigail's words in vv. 28-29 contain clear allusions to David's slaying of Goliath in 1 Sam 17. What is noteworthy in this intertextual reference are two things that the reader will remember in that encounter between David and Goliath, namely: (1) the lot of David's enemies:

"but the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling" [1 Sam 25,29]

"David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand." [1 Sam 17, 49-50]

and (2) the promise of a sure house which may be seen in Saul's promise to give his daughter to whoever slays Goliath and fight YHWH's battles:

"for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD" [1 Sam 25,28]

"The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel." [1 Sam 17,25]

"Then Saul said to David, "Here is my elder daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife; only be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles." [1 Sam 18,17]

All that Abigail did in fact was to remind David that YHWH is the prime mover of the monarchy. Thus Abigail "ends with a statement assuring David that Yahweh will 'do' on his behalf all (the good) that he spoke concerning him and will guide him as official *nāgîd* over Israel so that this shedding of blood without cause and self-delivery must not become for him a tottering or a stumbling block of the heart".¹²⁰ Abigail, moreover, looks to the future critique of David's rule, as A. F. Campbell correctly notices: "The future ruler (*nāgîd*) should not be burdened by needless bloodshed or by the taking of vengeance. This is the exact accusation that David's supporters needed to refute: that he was a man burdened by bloodguilt".¹²¹ Thus, Abigail's reminder aims to "undermine this accusation before it is even voiced".¹²²

¹²⁰ cf. D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 217-218; S. Bar-Efrat enumerates the number of purposes of this part of Abigail's speech: "...[H]er words serve as an element in the plot, because they cause a change in David's intention to destroy Nabal and his household, as a way of characterizing Abigail, indicating her perspicacity, and as a means of expressing the significance of the narrative, negating David's intention to shed blood and take the law into his own hands", cf. S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 95; cf. also S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 53.

¹²¹ A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 261: "Shimei ben Gera of the house of Saul later gives voice to this accusation: "Murderer! Scoundrel! On you the Lord has avenged all the blood [Heb.; NRSV, on all of you the blood] of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned You are a man of blood" (2 Sam 16:7-8)."

¹²² A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 261.

Only as a closing does Abigail ask David to remember her (his maidservant) when YHWH will have done well for him.

2.1.6 Transforming Action (v. 35)

The reader who asked the question whether Abigail will succeed in her efforts to prevent David from bloodshed finds the answer in the transforming action of v. 35. The inciting moment was Nabal's refusal of David's request and thus is matched by the transforming action of David's acceptance of the offering prepared by Abigail.

The words of David before Abigail confirms the former's change of decision.¹²³ Important in David's words is his recognition of YHWH as the prime mover of his life. Having recognized YHWH's over-all action towards David, he in turn extends such blessing to Abigail. From this transforming action, "[t]he 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".¹²⁴

2.1.7 Resolution (vv. 36-38)

The change of place is important at this point primarily because it puts emphasis on YHWH's intervention and so distances the act from the hand of David. The description of Nabal's death is clear and unambiguous, "YHWH struck Nabal..." (וַיַּגֵּף יְהוָה אֶת-נָבָל וַיָּמָת, v. 38). S. Ramond notices well the strategic location of YHWH's action at this point: "Il faut cependant noter que cette phrase change les protagonistes de tour le récit: c'est la seule occurrence où il est dit que le Seigneur agit. Jusque-là on voyait les protagonistes humains agir et parler".¹²⁵

Abigail, who acted to prevent David from bloodshed mediates here also YHWH's intervention. The narrative is silent on what she told Nabal the morning after. "...[W]e are not privy to what she says to Nabal! Whatever she says, it has a fatal effect: 'his heart died in his midst, and he became like a rock'".¹²⁶

As to Nabal's reaction to what Abigail said or its effect on him, D. V. Edelman wonders: "The audience is left to decide whether his condition resulted from fear over what he had narrowly escaped at David's hands, reaction to loss of his wife's support and guidance, or reaction to the loss of a small fraction of his vast possessions".¹²⁷ Any of these or a combination of all three could have been the cause.¹²⁸

¹²³ cf. S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 54: "Lors de la rencontre entre David et Abigayil, qui est racontée immédiatement après, la femme réussit à modifier le plan de David, et c'est là le tournant de l'histoire."

¹²⁴ A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 60.

¹²⁵ S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 55-56.

¹²⁶ K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 270.

¹²⁷ D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 219.

¹²⁸ K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 270.

The way Nabal dies becomes a prefiguration of Saul's. "Like Nabal, Saul is 'dead' as a king for quite some time, until the final day of his death".¹²⁹ M. O. Boyle presents an interesting interpretation of the meaning of Nabal's death:

When Nabal shut his hand against David he initially hardened his heart, as Deuteronomic law had forbidden. "You shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother" (Deut 15:7)...Although by her (Abigail's) successful negotiation she spared her household retributive justice, Nabal himself did not escape punishment for his sin. Refusing a change of heart even after her action, his hardening of heart solidified mortally. Precisely in response to his wife's report about her diplomatic success, 'his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And about ten days later the Lord smote Nabal; and he died' (1 Sam 25:37-38).¹³⁰

The death of Nabal has a further implication, namely, his definitive separation from David's life, something already predicted by Abigail in her speech before David: "The lives of your enemies he will sling out as from the hollow of a sling" (1 Sam 25,29).¹³¹ P. Miscall beautifully puts it: "The true reason for Nabal himself becoming a stone is that in that form he fits in the hollow of God's sling; God intends to fling away his life, into the fathomless depths, away from David".¹³² D. V. Edelman concurs: "In ten days, Nabal becomes ammunition for Yahweh's slingshot (v. 38), fulfilling Abigail's desired fate for all of David's enemies from v. 29. Yahweh has vindicated the insult to his anointed".¹³³

2.1.8 Dénouement (vv. 39-44)

David acknowledges YHWH's powerful intervention to remove the 'disgrace' (חרפה), namely, the bloodguilt that he almost committed. The narrative's employment of such word is noteworthy because of its allusion to past events having been used to describe Goliath's defying Israel (cf. 1 Sam 17,26). David's acknowledgment, therefore, is filled with intertextual allusions to bring him back to his pristine beginnings where he merely served as YHWH's instrument.

Having been delivered from such a 'disgrace,' he now remembers Abigail in order to deliver her from the 'disgrace' of widowhood. He then woos her to be his wife. Abigail's positive response contrasts well with Nabal's refusal allowing scholars to interpret the narrative as embodying two different responses to the kingship of David and the attendant results of such acceptance or refusal.

¹²⁹ K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 271.

¹³⁰ cf. M. O. Boyle, "The Law of the Heart: The Death of a Fool (1 Samuel 25)", *JBL* 120 (2001) 417, 419.

¹³¹ cf. M. O. Boyle, "Law of the Heart," 424.

¹³² cf. P. Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 154; cf. also M. O. Boyle, "Law of the Heart," 424: "Nabal becomes a stone in Yahweh's sling to be cast away from David's possession of the land and progress towards the monarchy."

¹³³ cf. D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 219.

The final section of the story moves swiftly to its end. It must not be overlooked, for it completes the story's structure. Nabal and Abigail have each encountered David. Each has responded to that encounter according to their nature, he churlishly and she intelligently. Now the consequences of these encounters are told. Nabal dies, struck by YHWH. Abigail becomes David's wife.¹³⁴

Abigail is reported (for the second time) as hurrying. She becomes the wife of David who has certainly remembered her just as she requested.¹³⁵ David's wooing Abigail immediately after his recognition of YHWH should be understood as his fulfilling what Abigail requested him in v. 31, that is, "when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant."

There is a strong debate as to the identity of the other woman named as wife of David, namely, Ahinoam. J. D. Levenson argues that she was Saul's wife and thus provides a motive for David's political maneuver.¹³⁶ If such interpretation is considered, then Saul's taking Michal from David seems to be a response to such political maneuver that David has made. However, even if Ahinoam is not Saul's wife, Saul's action is still to be interpreted as the king's attempt to weaken David's political base, having thought, as R. P. Gordon notices "...to undermine David's position by breaking his marriage tie with the royal house".¹³⁷

A. F. Campbell sees that the placement of David's marriages at the end of 1 Sam 25 means that "David is established independently, no longer dependent on Saul".¹³⁸ This dénouement connects well with the notice of Samuel's death which began the narrative:

At the end of the Carmel story, David has taken not only Abigail as his wife but also Ahinoam of Jezreel. David has his own wives; he is not dependent on Saul, who has given Michal to Palti ben Laish. Samuel's role as protector is over. A beautiful and intelligent woman has recognized David's destiny. Wives have joined David realizing the possibility of a dynasty.¹³⁹

2.2 *The Plot and Narrative Unity*

The main problem concerning David's accession to the kingship is the *how* or *manner* and 1 Sam 25 provides a miniature dramatization of the accession narratives

¹³⁴ A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 261.

¹³⁵ cf. K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 271.

¹³⁶ "At the very least, the name of Ahinoam and David's multiple marriages serves to foreshadow the negative way women will be treated as objects of political maneuverings," cf. K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 272.

¹³⁷ R. P. Gordon, *1 Samuel*, 187; S. S. Brooks considers Saul's attitude towards David as "a reasonable response to David's manipulative and devious behavior," cf. S. S. Brooks, *Saul and the Monarchy. A New Look* (Ashgate 2008) 72.

¹³⁸ A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 243.

¹³⁹ A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 249.

that covers 1 Sam 16 to 2 Sam 5. The plot of resolution is evident inasmuch as the main protagonist, Abigail sets upon a journey that will lead her to resolve a problem resulting from David's decision to exterminate Nabal and his household. We find a summary of the employment of the plot of resolution in S. Bar-Efrat:

David has made up his mind to destroy everything that belongs to Nabal, even giving his decision the force of an oath. At the meeting between David and Abigail, which is recounted immediately afterwards, Abigail succeeds in altering David's plan, and this serves as the turning point of the story. David relinquishes his ideas of vengeance and Nabal is punished by God.¹⁴⁰

The plot is, moreover, to be connected with the preservation of David's character. Having seen the danger of David's degradation owing to his murderous intent, Abigail sets out to persuade David to change his course and to stick to his characterization as a divinely-anointed king.

We have taken the whole 1 Sam 25 as a narrative unit thereby considering the framing events, namely, the notice on Samuel's death and the notices on David's other marriages as integral to the plot. Samuel's death provides an element of suspense as regards the general question of David's accession to the throne. In the absence of his theological supporter, it falls upon Abigail to remind David of sticking to his characterization as a divinely-anointed king. The notices on David's other marriages (which includes Michal) provides an important dimension as regards the manner of his accession to the throne. Not by political maneuver nor by mere human endeavor will he gain the kingship. Saul's act is, therefore, given as a foil that David should not imitate if he is not to end up like his predecessor.

3. Theme of the Narrative: Preserving the Character of David

In describing the genre of 1 Sam 25, A. F. Campbell observes:

There is theology here, politics here, perhaps even history here, but above all this is a story. It is a story told with every possible invitation offered to a first-rate storyteller. With the wide horizons of its vision, it is in a class of its own over against the other stories of David's flight; its only competition is, perhaps, 1 Sam 26. Yet it has in common with these Davidic stories a theological understanding and probably a political aim in the portrayal of David's rise.¹⁴¹

S. Ramond notes that as early as David's anointing and his combat against Goliath, there is already the tension between divine election and political strategy, a theme that will pervade throughout the history of the accession narratives: "À la

¹⁴⁰ S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 124.

¹⁴¹ A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 262.

figure d'un jeune homme, de belle apparence, choisi par Dieu, est donc juxtaposée celle d'un jeune homme habile et entreprenant, plein de ressources. Cette tension entre élection divine et stratégie politique se retrouvera tout au long de la narration".¹⁴²

This tension lends the identification of David's character difficult. When the reader begins to see that Nabal (Saul's surrogate) performs his role in the narrative, then s/he sees David at a loss, that is, left to his emotions in deciding what road to take. From the time he decides to exterminate Nabal's household, Samuel's presence as guide and theological supporter will be sorely missed.

What 1 Sam 25 gives us, therefore, is a picture of the struggle already evident in the wider narrative but which is focused and dramatically depicted in a struggle with Nabal whose actions and role-performance in the narrative resembles much the Saul of the macro-narrative. This is the reason D. Bosworth sees a *mise en abyme* in 1 Sam 25 vis-à-vis the meta-narrative of Saul and David. Understood thus, 1 Sam 25 duplicates the larger context in 1 Sam 13,1 - 2 Sam 5,3.¹⁴³

In the absence of Samuel, the role of guide and theological supporter falls on Abigail's hands, whose wise discernment the narrative has prepared her for the job. Having thus set upon her such role, Abigail aims to achieve the following: (1) remind David to flesh out his role as set by the narrative; (2) mediate Abigail's knowledge concerning David and his future; (3) remind David of YHWH's role and providence in his life; and (4) mediate a holistic understanding of marriage.

3.1 *Fleshing Out David's Character as Set by the Narrative*

K. Bodner sees the thematic links between 1 Sam 25 and the surrounding chapters (24 and 26) as providing "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".¹⁴⁴ When considered as such, there seems to be an underlying intent of preserving the characterization set by the narrative on David. B. Green in fact notices: "The reverie of ch. 25 provides a sideshadow of the action in its two framing episodes, rehearses representationally and bluntly what almost happens *but which must ultimately be avoided*".¹⁴⁵ True, without 1 Sam 25, the reader would not have seen the other (negative) side to David's character. Equally

¹⁴² S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 26.

¹⁴³ cf. D. Bosworth, *Story Within a Story*, 2: "The story in 1 Samuel 25, then, serves as a narrative reflection on the larger narrative, of David's conflict with the house of Saul, not just the two incidents in which David spares Saul's life (1 Samuel 24 and 26).

¹⁴⁴ K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 258.

¹⁴⁵ B. Green, "Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul," *BI* 11/1 (2003) 1 (emphasis mine).

true, however, is the fact that such manifestation serves only a higher purpose, namely, to preserve David's character as the divinely-anointed king.

The narrative demonstrates this well when, as soon as David endangers himself for having commanded his men to gird their swords, Abigail acts quickly (וַתִּמְהַר, v. 17) to arrest such a degradation. Abigail becomes a picture of a quick response if only such degradation of David's character is to be prevented from happening.

When Abigail admonishes David to "not set his heart on Nabal" (אַל-נָא יֵשִׁים אֶת-לִבּוֹ, cf. v. 25) she wants David to stick to the characterization set upon him by the narrative, that is, to the character of being YHWH's anointed king just as the wider narrative also demands that Saul stick to his character of a rejected king, with Nabal in 1 Sam 25 acting as Saul's surrogate. The reason Abigail puts forward clarifies this: "for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him" (כִּי כַשְׁמוֹ כִּן-הוּא נָבָל שְׁמוֹ וְנִבְלָה עִמּוֹ, v. 25). In other words, if Nabal has acted the way he did, it is because he is merely fleshing out the kind of character the narrative has imposed on him. David, on the other hand, has a different characterization, namely, a "prince over Israel" (נָגִיד עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, v. 30) which is now endangered of not being fleshed out by his murderous intent. Thus, when Abigail admonishes him to "not stoop to Nabal's level"¹⁴⁶ it could, in a wider perspective, also mean that "...the bad thing which threatens Nabal and his house' (v. 17) refers to David, too".¹⁴⁷ The ambiguous reference of the servant, when he speaks before Abigail, needs to be maintained in order to see such danger to David's character as well. Abigail reminds David of his being a divinely anointed king, as 1 Sam 24 and even a much earlier chapter (1 Sam 16,1.12-13) have indicated. When J. D. Levenson sees another dimension of David's character in 1 Sam 25, it is in fact, presented as a grave temptation for David to veer away from this characterization - a temptation which, thanks to Abigail, David does not fall into. Seen thus, David becomes a clear counterpoint to Saul.

David is presented as the man chosen and supported by Yahweh in the face of all opposition, and this is accented by setting him over against the divinely rejected and insane Saul, whose deterioration marks a counterpoint to the able youth of 1 Samuel 17-20 who becomes the heroic warrior, outlaw and future king (21-22; 23; 27:1-28:2; 29-30, and on into 2 Samuel 1-5).¹⁴⁸

Armed by her wise discernment, Abigail performs the role of a narrator of David's life in order to remind him to stick to his fleshing out of his character in the

¹⁴⁶ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 501.

¹⁴⁷ E. van Wolde, "Led by a Lady," 360; cf. also J. Vermeylen, "David le non-violent," 139: "...si David répondait à la violence par la violence, il serait 'comme Nabal', fou furieux, et se ferait ainsi son propre ennemi."

¹⁴⁸ W. L. Humphreys, "The Rise and Fall of King Saul: A Study of an Ancient Narrative Stratum in 1 Samuel", *JSOT* 18 (1980) 75-76; cf. also S. S. Brooks, *Saul and the Monarchy*, 69-70.

narrative. Otherwise, he would have ended like Saul, the rejected one. R. Polzin correctly notices the dangerous parallel that must be avoided:

Here in chapter 25, the contrast between David and Saul, therefore, is not simply between one man who seeks to murder the other and the other who does not; it is between Saul, who in fact slaughtered an entire house, and David, who also wants to slaughter an entire household but is restrained from doing so by the LORD. Once again, as in chapter 24, the contrast is between past decisions of Saul that are condemned and present actions of David that are shielded from condemnation.¹⁴⁹

Thus, the narrator's presentation of David in 1 Sam 25 and illumined by the surrounding chapters graphically depict the inner struggle within David's character. The reader sees a gradual manifestation of David's character. The first (good) dimension of David's character takes on stages in its development, namely, from David's words in v. 7 and from its confirmation by one of Nabal's servant in vv. 15-16. While there is still some room for doubt concerning David's request for provisions in v. 7, one of Nabal's servants (an independent witness) clarifies the ambiguity by his testimony ("a wall they were to us, all night and day, all the time we were with them shepherding the flocks, v. 16").¹⁵⁰ For the reader this is an important clarification inasmuch as this assures him/her that "...David's protection was a legitimate and active thwarting of outside hostile threats and not a restraint of his own men from harming Nabal's shepherds. By implication then, his request for food and payment from Nabal is legitimate after all".¹⁵¹

However, as soon as the reader sees the immediate reaction of David upon learning the rejection and insulting remarks of Nabal, the other (evil) dimension of David's character comes to the fore. Here also, we can identify stages where David's impulsiveness and rage slowly become manifest. In v. 13, a combination of David's words and the narrator's comment describes the impulsiveness of the planned attack employing an acceleration of narrated time "by crisply including David's command that each man gird his sword and then he quickly piles action on top of action".¹⁵² In v. 21, David's soliloquy will confirm his rage and irate state of mind.¹⁵³ Even after we reach the resolution, we still see an echo of David's resolve to annihilate Nabal and his household when he blesses Abigail for having prevented him from such bloodshed (cf. v. 34).

Having seen these two dimensions, we notice how the narrative is wont to preserve the first (and good) dimension of David's character owing to his being

¹⁴⁹ R. Polzin, *Samuel and Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of Deuteronomistic History: Part Two: 1 Samuel* (Indianapolis 1989) 211.

¹⁵⁰ D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 210.

¹⁵¹ D. V. Edelman, *Historiography of Judah*, 211.

¹⁵² A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 50.

¹⁵³ cf. A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 52.

YHWH's anointed. Save for Nabal (who acts as counterpoint and Saul's surrogate), all the characters will lend their role in the attainment of this objective. Thus, the minor characters, namely, David's servants (who serve as bridge between David and Nabal) and Nabal's servant (who inform Abigail of Nabal's negative response to David's request) mediate the descriptions provided by the main characters. Though minor compared to Abigail's role, the servant's mediation (in particular), nevertheless, becomes indispensable to the objective of preserving David's character since without such intervention the end would have been a lot different.¹⁵⁴

As far as Abigail's role is concerned, D. Bosworth phrases it well: "Abigail's speech identifies David as one in the right, but asks him to stay in the right by not killing Nabal".¹⁵⁵ Moreover, she acts like a prophet thereby playing the role that Samuel should have performed.

In her words she always sees David's conduct in the light of his promised future; she is an instrument of the Lord to keep the future king's escutcheon clean for David. It is expressly emphasized that David is already acting in accordance with his future by waging Yahweh's war. The appeal to his generosity also belongs to the same theme.¹⁵⁶

Abigail's speech, then, occupies a most significant part in the plot for it serves various objectives as S. Ramond notes:

Il est intéressant de remarquer de le discours d'Abigayil sert plusieurs but. Les paroles qu'elle prononce soutiennent l'intrigue, parce qu'elles sont la cause du changement d'intention de David qui renonce à détruire Nabal et sa maison; mais elles servent aussi de moyen au narrateur pour caractériser Abigayil elle-même, en indiquant sa perspicacité; enfin, elles sont un moyen pour exprimer la signification du récit, en condamnant de dessein de David de verser le sang et de se faire justice par lui-même.¹⁵⁷

The central role of Abigail becomes clear, moreover, when one realizes how the narrator, omniscient as s/he is, allows her to 'narrate' within the narrative¹⁵⁸ the life of David - a life that serves as an ideal alternative to what David contemplates on living after having sworn the extermination of his enemy, Nabal. Abigail unfolds before David's eyes a life that he has begun to live but which he may have forgotten owing to the amount of persecution that he suffered under Saul. By becoming a narrator herself, Abigail reminds David of his character in the story and asks him to flesh it out rather than veer from it.

¹⁵⁴ K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 263.

¹⁵⁵ D. Bosworth, *Story Within a Story*, 79.

¹⁵⁶ H. W. Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 203.

¹⁵⁷ S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 53.

¹⁵⁸ I would argue that within Abigail's speech is a 'narration within a narration' whereby she uses the knowledge she is privileged of having 'to narrate' the life of David and so to convince the latter not to pursue his murderous intent. For 'narration within a narration' see J.-L. Ska, "Our Fathers," 40ff, esp. 46-47.

When 1 Sam 25 is viewed within the context of its surrounding narratives (1 Sam 24 and 26), then the role of Abigail all the more is emphasized: “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”.¹⁵⁹ In so doing Abigail “reconduit le coeur de David au bon sens et à une juste appréciation de la réalité”.¹⁶⁰

The whole drama of preventing David from veering away from the characterization is also directly connected to the theme of non-violence which David, thanks to Abigail, succeeds in choosing to walk on thereby earning YHWH's reward and avoiding the lot of those who walked the road of violence.

...David - le guerrier par excellence, dans la mémoire biblique! - choisit la voie de la non-violence. Bien plus: le narrateur attribue la réussite du héros à ce choix délibéré. Saül, Nabal et plus tard Absalom périront lamentablement sans avoir atteint leur objectif. En revanche, Abigail (1 S 25,28) et même Saül (24,21; 26,25) annoncent à David que, grâce à son refus d'exercer une vengeance pourtant légitime, il réussira, qu'il deviendra roi et qu'il aura une maison solide; la suite du récit dira la réalisation effective de ces paroles. La leçon est évidente: le crime ne paie pas, mais YHWH donne sa faveur au non-violent, qui renonce à se faire justice. Cela dit l'idéal de la royauté, donne David est comme l'incarnation.¹⁶¹

The prophecy that Abigail pronounces in v. 29 is more of an admonition to David to stand his ground even if the other characters (Nabal and Saul) “return evil for good” (cf. v. 21). Thus, to “be bound in the bundle of the living” (נפש אדני צרורה, v. 29) may refer to David's sticking to his characterization as imposed upon him by the narrative and by YHWH who has chosen him in the place of Saul (cf. “under the care of the LORD your God”, v. 29).

3.2 Knowledge in the Service of the Plot

The narrative achieves its objective thanks to Abigail's wise discernment. D. Jobling's insight in his analysis of the role of Jonathan as mediator of the kingship¹⁶² is very instructive in that he also views a similar role in the case of Abigail. Just as Jonathan mediates the kingship from Saul to David, so does Abigail. But both mediations are made possible through a knowledge that both Jonathan and Abigail are privileged of having. Abigail seems to know perfectly who David is and what kind of future awaits him. And this privileged information she carefully mixes with her discernment in order to achieve the objective of the narrative. Without being informed by the servant of David's request, she nevertheless prepares the provisions.

¹⁵⁹ cf. A. S. Brown, “Discovering David,” 138; D. T. Tsumura, *1 Samuel*, 270.

¹⁶⁰ S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 53.

¹⁶¹ J. Vermeylen, “David le non-violent,” 137.

¹⁶² cf. D. Jobling, “Jonathan,” 12-30.

Having received no revelations, she nevertheless pronounces a prophecy concerning David's future reign and dynasty. E. van Wolde categorically connects her role with that of Samuel:

And Abigail's part? She represents Samuel, as is shown by the words only a prophet would use: she knows about YHWH's intentions with regard to David; she alludes to words David thought before (as recorded in v. 22); she endows him with the status of a leader. The great prophet Samuel is gone, as was reported before these events in 1 Sam 25,1. For lack of an Israelite prophet, she acts as a prophetess.¹⁶³

What Abigail is privileged of having and which she shares with David is the same thing that is denied of Nabal in the narrative of 1 Sam 25. When understood within the macro-narrative, it alludes to the ignorance of Saul about David, as D. Jobling notes:

Saul does not learn who his successor is, but he does learn of the rejection of his throne, so that ignorance of this on his part is *refusal to know*....It is tempting to find a marker of this 'epistemological' rebellion in Samuel's words to Saul: 'Rebellion is as the sin of divination' (15.23). The one who refuses to know by direct prophetic oracle (13.13-14) seeks to know by witches.¹⁶⁴

This *refusal to know* becomes manifest with the insulting question of Nabal: "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are breaking away from their masters" (cf. v. 10).

Armed with a privileged knowledge, Abigail also predicts how David's enemies are to be eliminated, namely, not by David's but by YHWH. The key problem of the narrative (namely, how will David be king when his predecessor is fully alive? how will the predecessor be eliminated?) is given a resolution. Without Abigail's intervention, David would have succumbed to the temptation to eliminate his rival counseled as he is by a strong argument voiced out (by his men) as if it were divine will (cf. 1 Sam 24,5; 25,22; 26,8).¹⁶⁵

Abigail thus performs two important functions in the service of David, namely, (1) restrains David from usurping divine providence and from bloodguilt;¹⁶⁶ and (2) leads David to recognize YHWH.

In the first "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".¹⁶⁷ Was

¹⁶³ E. van Wolde, "Led by a Lady," 367.

¹⁶⁴ D. Jobling, "Jonathan," 28.

¹⁶⁵ J. Vermeylen, "David le non-violent," 136.

¹⁶⁶ "The difference between 1 Samuel 25 and its neighbors is that in the latter, David seeks out Saul solely in order to demonstrate his good will, whereas in our tale, only the rhetorical genius of Abigail saves him from bloodying his hands" (cf. J. D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25", 23).

¹⁶⁷ A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 139.

Abigail referring to David's immediately preceding act before Saul? R. Alter responds in the affirmative: "Abigail is no doubt speaking in general, but the reader can scarcely forget the immediately preceding episode, in which David refused to harm Saul when he had him in his power".¹⁶⁸ Thus in 1 Sam 25, "the narratee is invited to see a David that matches the murderous ranting of his men".¹⁶⁹

By appealing to David's self-interest, Abigail "illustrates that David will be fouling his own nest if he spills blood".¹⁷⁰ This Abigail does by asking David "whether he wishes to create a breach between the present and the future by bringing about a bloodbath or whether he will let the present and the future merge smoothly into one another by not dirtying his hands and by rejecting revenge. If he chooses the latter, v. 28d becomes timeless inasmuch as really 'no wrong is ever to be found in you'".¹⁷¹

Secondly, Abigail becomes instrumental in David's recognition of YHWH, a fact David himself acknowledges in his response to Abigail's long speech: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today!" (v. 32).

There is a two-stage process in David's recognition of YHWH, the first one after Abigail's convincing speech where David pronounces a blessing to YHWH and the second after the death of Nabal. The second is a confirmation. The plot of recognition (albeit secondary to the plot of resolution) achieves its objective in v. 39 where David recognizes fully YHWH's intervention on his behalf. "He now calls himself the 'servant' of God in 39c and confirms in as many words that God, as she had asserted, really deals with the evil ensnaring him".¹⁷²

The recognition of YHWH results in David's recognition of who he is. As soon as he realizes this then the main difference between 1 Sam 25 and its surrounding narratives comes interpreted in the light of such self-recognition. Thus, while in the surrounding narratives, David spares killing Saul because the latter is the Lord's anointed, in 1 Sam 25, David spares Nabal because he (David) is the Lord's anointed and should comport accordingly.

3.3 *The Role of YHWH in the Development of the Plot*

While the narrative is replete with verbs having Abigail as subject, Abigail herself is quick to deflect the responsibility of preventing David from bloodshed to YHWH. As soon as David lends his ears to Abigail, the latter introduces YHWH. Thus, after her introduction in v. 25 (which, according to P. K. McCarter Jr., forms part of a formula of request to be heard¹⁷³), Abigail refers to YHWH as He who has

¹⁶⁸ cf. R. Alter, *The David Story*, 157.

¹⁶⁹ A. S. Brown, "Discovering David," 137.

¹⁷⁰ cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 509-510.

¹⁷¹ cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 510.

¹⁷² J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 523.

¹⁷³ cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, 398.

“restrained you from bloodguilt and from taking vengeance with your own hand” (cf. v. 26). Then she puts forward a picture of the future for David that is based upon YHWH’s initiative.

What Abigail mediates to David is in fact the presence and providence of YHWH over David’s life. She brings back memories where David himself experienced that “YHWH was with him” (1 Sam 18,14). Through Abigail’s mediation the role of YHWH as a major character in the overarching plot is, therefore, brought to light.

In addition to these, another character casts a giant shadow across the story. In the long prophetic section of her speech to David (vv 26-31), Abigail makes frequent references to Yahweh. The divine name occurs seven times in her speech, beginning with the introductory oath formula, ‘as Yahweh lives (הִי יְהוָה)’. Next, Yahweh is mentioned as the one who has restrained David from his evil purpose and vengeance (v 26), and as the one who will provide David’s house with security (v 28), because he is fighting Yahweh’s battles (v 28). Abigail further affirms that David will be preserved from his enemies in the care of Yahweh his God (v 29). Finally, in the concluding section of her speech, which functions as a petition that, after the promise has been fulfilled, David will remember her service in keeping her from bloodguilt, she refers to Yahweh as the one who will bring this promise concerning David to fulfilment (vv 30, 31). In reply, David first blesses Yahweh, then uses the divine name again in an oath that declares what his intentions had been towards Nabal in setting out against him (v 34).¹⁷⁴

The role of YHWH in the plot is put forward as a direct alternative to what David can do but must avoid doing. It is YHWH who will make for David a ‘sure house’ and thus it is not upon David to build himself a sure house by exterminating the whole house of his enemy.

In his response to Abigail, David recognizes YHWH as the key actor in the narrative¹⁷⁵ which then provides the narrative an over-all theological color as S. Ramond correctly notes: “La présence active du Seigneur renvoie l’ensemble du récit à un niveau supérieur et le narrateur introduit ainsi clairement le lecteur sur un plan théologique”.¹⁷⁶

From the time David recognizes YHWH’s active presence, his words will be replete with historical references or allusions beginning with the most recent, namely, that of having been preserved from bloodshed (vv. 32-34, cf. especially the use of ‘today’, הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, v. 32) and recalling the past interventions, namely, the allusions to the rejections made against him by Saul, played out in the narrative by

¹⁷⁴ G. G. Nicol, “David, Abigail and Bathsheba,” 133.

¹⁷⁵ cf. S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 54: “La louange s’adresse aussitôt au Seigneur car David reconnaît que c’est Lui qui intervient, par la médiation d’Abigayil...Sa prière inscrit en clair Dieu comme acteur dans le récit.”

¹⁷⁶ S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 56.

Nabal (vv. 39, cf. especially the use of 'reproach', *hprj*). When read as part of the triptych (chs 24-26), YHWH's providence upon David becomes all the more explicit as R. Polzin notes: "In chapters 24 and 26, where David's impulses are most laudable, the Lord protects him when he is most vulnerable; in chapter 25, when he is once more vulnerable – but this time because his impulses are most damning – the Lord again protects him".¹⁷⁷

The later events in David's life will again confirm this divine providence when the reader will know that through his marriage to Abigail, the widow of Nabal whose importance in the Hebron area was mentioned, David would begin his growing importance in the heartland of Judah.¹⁷⁸

Finally, 1 Sam 25's unambiguous reference to YHWH's striking Nabal is the narrator's voicing out of David's freedom from bloodguilt. Once Nabal is seen as Saul's surrogate, then his death becomes a narrator's statement that removes suspicion of David being guilty of taking part in Saul's death, a theme that runs not only through the triptych but throughout the struggle between the house of Saul and the house of David.

3.4 Marriage in the Narrative Program

The theme of divine providence serves also as a starting point for the eventual marriage between David and Abigail as D. T. Tsumura observes: "Readers should know that the Lord was guiding everything in David's life providentially according to his plan and purpose, though David himself did not know that this incident would lead to his marrying this prudent, God-fearing woman".¹⁷⁹

The manner by which the marriage between David and Abigail is dramatized is contracted in a legitimate manner since David acquires Abigail as an 'inheritance' that the 'son-heir' (David) acquires after the death of the 'father-king' (Nabal). J. Vermeylen, viewing the triptych of 1 Sam 24-26, remarks that the three chapters have the same object which is the possibility of the death of the father-king for the son-heir only that in this case the son-heir is not a biological son.¹⁸⁰ D. Bosworth develops the implications of the textual connection that places David in a father-son relationship with Saul (cf. 1 Sam 24,12.17; 26,17.21.25) and Nabal (1 Sam 25,8) and connects them to the eventual marriage between David and Abigail:

David situates himself as the heir to each man. When Nabal dies, David evidently inherits Nabal's wealth and status in the clan of Caleb by marrying his widow Abigail. Similarly, David seeks to inherit Saul's throne

¹⁷⁷ R. Polzin, *Samuel and Deuteronomist*, 208.

¹⁷⁸ cf. D. T. Tsumura, *Samuel*, 576.

¹⁷⁹ D. T. Tsumura, *Samuel*, 585.

¹⁸⁰ J. Vermeylen, "David le non-violent," 137.

through marriage with Saul's daughter Michal and a covenant with the heir-apparent Jonathan. The text even shows Jonathan giving his birthright to David in 1 Sam 23:16-18. The father-son language indicates David's similar relationship to Nabal and Saul and his eventual inheritance from each man.¹⁸¹

A "sure house" for David will begin through marriage. Such was the original reward that Saul should have long granted to David when, in 1 Sam 18,17, he promised to give his daughter Merab: "I will give her to you as a wife; only be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles". A similar promise was also given much earlier in the narrative before David fought Goliath, this time voiced by the Israelites in 1 Sam 17,25: "The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel." In both instances, marriage appears not only as a reward for courage but also as a stepping stone towards a "sure house."

It is thus not surprising that the narrative will include a notice on Saul's taking Michal from David. Having realized the political danger of David's marriage to his daughter, Saul removes from David any such opportunity.

Thus, while the narrative is mainly characterized by Abigail's role in preventing David from bloodshed, the reader also notices an internal plot that seeks the union between David and Abigail. As early as the description of Abigail, there is already the initial question of the reader of how such a perfect description for a wife of a king-in-waiting will be matched by a marriage with the possessor of the other perfect description.

The movement intended by the narrative is from dialogue to marriage. In fact, a parallel structure (ABCA¹B¹C¹) can be discerned with verbs and information related to knowledge and/or being informed:

A	David hears of Nabal's shearing of his sheep	v. 4
B	Abigail is told of Nabal's response to David's men	v. 12
C	Abigail and David meet (DIALOGUE)	vv. 24-34
A¹	David hears of Nabal's death	v. 39
B¹	Abigail is told by the servants of David of the latter's plan to marry her	v. 40
C¹	Abigail becomes David's wife (MARRIAGE)	v. 42

S. Ramond notices the parallel:

Au verset 4, c'est parce que David avait entendu dire que Nabal avait les tondeurs que l'action avait été déclenchée. Ici encore, c'est une information

¹⁸¹ D. Bosworth, *Story Within a Story*, 77.

parvenant aux oreilles de David qui provoque une nouvelle action: pour avoir entendu que Nabal est mort, David envoie chercher Abigail pour la prendre comme femme. Toute l'apparition sur scène de Nabal est située entre les deux perceptions auditives de David. Entre les deux, c'est aussi, pour David, l'espace de la tentation et de sa résolution.¹⁸²

At the center of the narrative is the dialogue between David and Abigail which is but preliminary for the final union that will be consummated in marriage (v. 40) as G. G. Nicol also notices:

Abigail's request had been twofold: that David should not requite himself of the insult which he had suffered, and that he should remember her when her prophetic words were fulfilled. David's reply also has a twofold aspect in a somewhat parallelistic statement, 'I have hearkened to your voice, I have granted your petition.' While this statement no doubt refers primarily to Abigail's plea that David should call off his offensive against Nabal's estate, in view of the last part of her petition, the circumstance that David did remember her as soon as he heard of Nabal's death, and the speed with which he married her (there is no indication that she observed even a formal period of mourning), it cannot be doubted that David's speech also signals his intentions towards Abigail. He affirms that he will remember her.¹⁸³

Since notices on marriages have been rendered in vv. 43-44 as pluperfect, the marriage of David and Abigail seems to serve as corrective of the other mentioned marriages. It becomes symbolic of what a marriage should be if David is to take a firm hold on his kingship. Unlike the two other marriages of David (to Ahinoam of Jezreel and to Michal), his marriage to Abigail contains a unique element, that is, Abigail's free offering of herself. When she speaks before David, she requests that she be remembered after all the things are given to David. The other two marriages are different. Saul offers his daughters (first his daughter Merab, 1 Sam 18,17, then Michal, 1 Sam 18,21-25) in marriage to David as a snare so that David may be killed. If Ahinoam of Jezreel was formerly Saul's wife (as J. D. Levenson argues) then David's marriage to her was prompted by a political maneuver (a practice in Israel, cf. Absalom, Adonijah, Abner, etc.¹⁸⁴) which is an example of putting his hand before YHWH. With the free offering of herself to David, the marriage between David and Abigail becomes a picture of a legitimate union as G. G. Nicol further remarks:

Whether David is swayed by Abigail's (prophetic) argument, her substantial gift of provision, her beauty, or a combination of all three, is not stated by the text. Yet he is honourable too in that, despite Abigail's great

¹⁸² S. Ramond, *Leçon de non-violence*, 57.

¹⁸³ G. G. Nicol, "David, Abigail and Bathsheba," 134.

¹⁸⁴ For a detailed treatment of the political import of marriages cf. J. D. Levenson – B. Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages" *JBL* 99/4 (1980) 507-518.

beauty and intelligence, he does not so much as contemplate an adulterous relationship with her”.¹⁸⁵

The narrative’s reticence in this case “marks out the David of this story as a character who is altogether more noble than the David who grasps at Bathsheba and then kills her husband”.¹⁸⁶

David’s marriage to Abigail could also be seen as David’s union with the prophetic voice. This is significant if such prophetic voice, at a time when Samuel has been declared dead by the narrative, will have to remain with David. This is something of a privilege that his rival Saul will be denied of having. From the time Samuel died (1 Sam 25,1) Saul will not receive any answer from YHWH neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets (cf. 1 Sam 28,6). When finally Samuel will speak to him, after being conjured by a medium, Saul will receive from Samuel the final prophecy regarding his death and the collapse of his kingdom (cf. 1 Sam 28,16-19). On the other hand, from the time David marries Abigail, all fortunes seemed to have turned to his favor.

Indeed, David’s marriage to Abigail provides more positive points in it than Saul was able to see when he proposed and then changed his mind concerning the marriages of his daughters, Merab and Michal to David. It is a marriage more worthy of David because through Abigail he was able to recognize YHWH’s hand in his hold on the monarchy and were he to remain in such state, then her union with Abigail, who now symbolizes the voice of prophecy, needs to be cemented by a marriage. Thus, when we interpret the whole narrative as having YHWH’s guidance and intervention over David’s actions, then we could see how YHWH Himself prevented David from contracting marriage with Michal, as J. Vermeylen notes:

...Mikal représente le lien du sang avec Saül, et, à ce titre, elle reste dangereuse pour David tant qu’ils vivent ensemble. Comme le dit le proverbe: ‘Ne soit pas l’ami d’un homme irascible (littéralement: d’un maître de colère), et avec un homme d’emportement ne va pas, de peur que tu n’apprennes ses chemins et ne trouves un piège (מִוֶּקֶשׁ) pour ta vie’ (Pr 22,24-25)...C’est lorsqu’il en est dépouillé par Abigail que le mariage avec Mikal est annulé (25,44), et son union avec la même Abigail scelle son option pour la sagesse, c’est-à-dire ici pour la non-violence.

Concluding Remarks

This reading, one of the many approaches to the David narratives, has, first of all, brought forward a common perception on David, namely, as the most colorfully dramatized biblical character but who is also the most enigmatic one. The enigma

¹⁸⁵ G. G. Nicol, “David, Abigail and Bathsheba,” 136.

¹⁸⁶ cf. G. G. Nicol, “David, Abigail and Bathsheba,” 136.

is all the more emphasized when except David, two of the other main characters of 1 Sam 25 will receive a direct characterization from the narrator in the expository part (cf. v. 3).¹⁸⁷ David, on the other hand, is left to be disputed and the reader follows the zigzagging of descriptions concerning his person. Thus, from his own words in vv. 7-8, the reader is given a positive view of David only to be smothered by the insulting response from Nabal in vv. 10-11. A positive view is again brought forward by one of Nabal's servants in his speech before Abigail in vv. 14-16 which, however, hangs in a very precarious situation when the same servant warns Abigail to act quickly otherwise such a positive appraisal of David may be lost by his vengeful and murderous decision. The tension is such that when the positive appraisal of David's character appears to be tipping the scales, the same positive appraisal runs the risk of being lost forever. There is a need to arrest such a degradation. And so the narrative empowers another character, already described as wise and discerning in the exposition and, more importantly, armed by a privileged information about David that the reader will only discover in her speech.

When Abigail will thus speak (direct characterization by a character in the narrative), the positive appraisal of David will again come out this time with a clear warning for David to stick to the characterization set upon him by the narrative. By doing so, Abigail mediates a privileged knowledge to David who will use his self-recognition and knowledge of YHWH to try to stay on the role the narrative has set upon him. Abigail's speech, therefore, provides the fulcrum upon which all the zigzagging on the appraisal of David's character will find their necessary confirmation.

The plot reveals also the problem of the manner of David's accession to the throne given an element of suspense in the death notice of Samuel and provided with a kind of warning against mere human and political maneuvers in the other notices of David's marriages (including Michal). How will David be king? The narrative puts premium on the privileging of knowledge upon one main character, Abigail in order to mediate such knowledge to David and so also to the reader. Thanks to Abigail, David will know himself and will know YHWH who protects him and thus also realize what is store for him in the future.

¹⁸⁷ Of course it can be argued that David's direct characterization is unnecessary since he has been known by the reader long before this narrative (cf. S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 111). I would argue, however, that by considering 1 Sam 25 as a distinct narrative unit, there is reason why David's characterization will only come later on in the speech of Abigail since there is an intent to gradually develop his character from the perceptions of the other players in the narrative. Thus, his men and Nabal's men will see him as a 'protector' while Nabal will consider him a 'runaway slave.' Only with Abigail, armed with a privileged information about David's real character, will a direct characterization be expressed and, once expressed, will be admonished to be preserved if David is to claim the throne (for this, cf. S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 117-118: "The biblical narrator frequently makes use of this technique of introducing people and mentioning background details *in their proper place*, that is, at the point when they are discerned by the chief characters or become important as regards the development of the plot.").

After all is said and described, however, there remains the temptation for David to veer away from such characterization. 1 Sam 25 is a story where David has been preserved but the later narratives will paint a different picture, the seeds of which the same narrative of 1 Sam 25 has already allowed the reader to glimpse. We began with R. Polzin's comment on the search for the identity of David. Did we succeed in recognizing David in 1 Sam 25? Definitely yes. But R. Polzin, analyzing the rest of the narratives, remarks on the precarious state of our recognition of David and his kingship and so provides an apt reminder to the reader of the wider narrative:

But the tragedy of Saul's reign, like that of Job's life, strikes a responsive chord in one's heart that will never go away; nor will the triumph of David's reign, like Job's reinstatement in God's good graces, ever dissolve it. For Saul's reign is simply a preview of David's, and of every king of Israel and Judah after him.¹⁸⁸ ■

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¹⁸⁸ R. Polzin, *Samuel and Deuteronomist*, 213.

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Fr. Wenifredo V. Padilla III, O.P. belongs to the Dominican Province of the Philippines and is currently assigned to the Priory of St. Thomas Aquinas. He holds a Licentiate and Master in Sacred Theology (STL-MA) from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila and Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures (SSL) from the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Biblicum), Rome, Italy. He is pursuing a Doctorate in Biblical Studies at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He can be contacted at wenifredopadilla@gmail.com.