# Narrative Voice and Chronology in the Books of Samuel

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*ABSTRACT*

*Although the importance of chronology as a device employed within the Old Testament is widely recognised, its analysis has not employed some of the tools made available by literary theorists. This article adopts Genette's fourfold model of the relation between narrative voice and chronology to the books of Samuel, arguing that they employ all four types (subsequent, prior, simultaneous and interpolated) in a sophisticated interplay between narrative voice and chronology, with the different modes used to indicate the relative knowledge of the characters in comparison with the extradiegetic narrator. Exegesis of Samuel therefore needs to consider the rhetorical goals made evident through such analysis.*

## A    INTRODUCTION

Chronology is a widely recognised feature of any narrative because all narratives have some relationship to time. At its simplest, chronology is the means by which a narrative is able to arrange the events which occur within it in an order relative to one another whilst placing those events within a larger framework. As Bar-Efrat (1989: 141, cf. Alter 1981: 80)[1] notes, a narrative has a twofold relationship to time, "it unfolds within time, and time passes within it". This, of course, is true of all narratives, not just the biblical ones, but at the same time it is appropriate to note that although there are aspects of chronology which are universal, there are also distinctive emphases within the biblical material that bear reflection.

Studies of narrative technique in the Old Testament have noted that it frequently manipulates chronology for a variety of ends (Sternberg 1987: 378 – 380), especially to create and then fill gaps in a variety of ways. Sternberg points to Genesis 50:15 – 17 to illustrate this, showing that because the statement by Joseph's brothers about a supposed statement by their father requiring Joseph to forgive them lacks any correlation in earlier narration when this event would supposedly have occurred, we can therefore fill this gap by assuming that the brothers' claim is false (1987: 379). Within the twofold relationship pattern identified by Bar-Efrat, this would be analysed as how the narrative unfolds within time since as well as the chronology of each individual episode within the Joseph narrative, there is also a chronology that can be seen for the whole cycle.

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[1] By contrast, Gunn and Fewell (1993: 102 – 104) set up the possibility of discussing chronology but focus instead on narrative structure.

Narrators are also free to play with the pace at which time passes within an individual narrative, moving quickly through some periods whilst slowing down at others in order to emphasise certain points. This represents the second pole of Bar-Efrat's pattern, analysing time as it is presented internally within a narrative. Staying with the Joseph narrative, we can note that although the recounting of Joseph's dreams would not have taken terribly long, the narrative of Genesis 37 slows its pace to allow them to be recounted in full (Gen 37:5 – 11). Conversely, although Joseph's journey to Shechem and then Dothan would have taken several days the narrative pace here is rapid, pausing only to recount Jacob's instructions (Gen 37:13 – 14) and the conversation with the unnamed man who found Joseph and sent him on to Dothan (Gen 37:15 – 17). Roughly the same amount of space is thus devoted to the recounting of the dreams, each of which could be told in only a few minutes, and a journey which would have taken several days. Once Joseph reaches Dothan, the narrative pace slows once again to enable the narrator to focus on the different actions of Joseph's brothers (Gen 37:18 – 30), before accelerating once again so as to allow for Jacob's reaction to the supposed death of his son (Gen 37:31 – 35) and then to note Joseph's sale to Potiphar (Gen 37:36). This technique enables the narrator to dispense with matters that are irrelevant to the narrative (such as the brothers' journey back to their father) and to foreground those issues which are of most importance – Joseph's dreams, the brothers' attempt to overcome the dreams by selling him to Egypt and the deception of their father, each of which will prove to be of some importance later in the Joseph narrative. The pace at which time passes is crucial for generating interest within the narrative of Genesis 37:2 – 36, but it also enables the narrator to set in place matters of interest for the larger narrative. In this way, both Bar-Efrat's elements work together, so that the chronological concerns internal to one narrative also interact with the passing of time outside of it.

## B    GENETTE AND NARRATIVE CHRONOLOGY

The standard works thus highlight the importance of chronology for the biblical narratives, but in examining the books of Samuel it becomes evident that chronology is employed in a range of ways that exceed previous analysis, and that more detailed tools are required to appreciate the artistry with which narrative chronology is employed.[2] Hence, in addition to the standard works on chronology in biblical narratives, we can also draw on the insights of Gerard Genette (1980) since he offers one of the most complete analytical models for considering narrative chronology. Genette explores chronology from several perspectives, examining its employment both from the perspective of the narrator and the order in which the narrative elements are presented. Narrative voice and order are thus separate elements of narrative chronology, each of which requires separate analysis (Genette 1980: 215 – 227). For the purposes of this

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[2] The suggestion is not that the books of Samuel are unique in employing such sophisticated chronological models, merely that they do so to such a level that a study of their chronological models is important for the book's interpretation.

paper, we will consider only the issue of the relationship between narrative voice and chronology.

From the perspective of the narrator, events may be subsequent, prior, simultaneous or interpolated. We can summarise them as follows:

- *Subsequent narration* is by far the most common, and most of the episodes in the books of Samuel conform to this pattern. Thus, although there are a number of narrative voices which emerge, usually because of the need to record a report from a character within it, most of them describe events which occurred in the past from their perspective, and always past from the perspective of the controlling narrative voice (what Genette [1980:227 – 231] calls the extradiegetic narrator) which runs through the book.

- *Prior narration* occurs when a narrator describes events in advance of their occurrence. This is most commonly seen in the form of dreams or prophecies, but is not restricted to them.

- *Simultaneous narration* occurs when a narrator tells a story as it occurs, describing what the characters see around them. Again, this is not a significant model within Samuel, but it does occur with embedded narration such as Achish's decision to send David away from the Philistine camp.

- Finally, *interpolated narration* occurs when a narrator combines different levels of narration. Typically, this includes both narration of earlier events and a reflection on their current meaning. An important example of this occurs in the two songs of the Samuel Conclusion (2 Sam 22:1 – 23:7) which are both moments of narrative of the past and reflections on what they mean for David at that point, though in fact each of the major poems in Samuel (1 Sam 2:1 – 10, 2 Sam 1:17 – 27, 22:1 – 23:7) fulfils this function.

Genette is also concerned with the order in which events are recounted relative of the chronological sequence to which they refer. To understand this analysis, it is important to note the distinction between the narrative and the story (Genette, 1980: 25 – 29). The story is what happened (whether this is fictional, historical or some sort of fusion does not affect the analysis), and the narrative is the recounting of this story. How the narrative unfolds indicates to some extent how the story is to be interpreted. Genette notes that narrators can vary the order of events, the speed at which they are recounted and their frequency (Genette, 1980: 113 – 160). Although his models for analysing both speed and frequency add depth to his analysis, we need to leave them aside for the constraints of this paper except for where they bear on the relationship between narrative voice and chronology. Genette notes in respect of order that narrators may present their material in either a chronological or non-chronological sequence (Genette, 1980: 33 – 35). In a chronological sequence, the narrative's order is the same as the story's order, and although the narrator might play with both the speed

and frequency of an event, the sequence stays the same. A non-chronological narrative therefore is one which recounts events such that their presentation in the narrative is not the same as their order within the story. In my analysis of Samuel, I would want to refine this to one additional level, which is to note that a non-chronological narrative can be either dis-chronologised, in which the story's order can be recreated from the narrative, or a-chronologous, in which case the order cannot be reconstructed (Firth 2009: 32 – 34). These are perhaps points on a continuum rather than something absolutely discrete, but serve well as an analytical tool.

However, Genette's own contribution to non-chronological narrative is to describe what he calls anachronies, which are the mode by which a non-chronological narrative is recounted (Genette 1980: 35 – 47). As will become apparent, these tools work both with dis-chronologised and a-chronologous narratives. In particular, he describes two types of anachrony, analepsis and prolepsis (Genette 1980: 40). An analepsis occurs where the narrator records an event after its chronological sequence within the story, whereas in a prolepsis it is recounted before its sequence within the story. It is important to note that anachronies can be both internal and external to any given narrative. The exact definition of a given narrative can be fluid, but broadly we can think of a completed unit of plot, whether or not that plot is a sub-plot for a larger plot unit as a single narrative unit. An anachrony occurring within that plot unit is thus internal to it, whilst one occurring in another plot unit is external. In considering any particular anachrony, Genette requires consideration of its extent and its reach, the reach being how far back or forward within a given narrative the anachrony goes (i.e. its temporal distance), with the extent then being how much of that narrative's duration is affected by it (Genette 1980: 47 – 48). This is thus a sophisticated set of analytical tools with which to consider the ways the books of Samuel employs narrative chronology and which enables us to examine its rhetorical force. What we will see is that when narrative chronology is examined from this set of perspectives that different rhetorical goals emerge through the deployment of the different options. Chronology becomes more than just a mechanism for noting how time passes; it is a vital tool for conveying meaning through narrative. In the particular case of narrative voice, it is a mechanism for demonstrating the reliability of a particular narrative voice, a feature the standard works on Old Testament narrative do not note in their treatment of chronology.

## C    CHRONOLOGY AND NARRATIVE VOICE

### 1    Subsequent Narration

It is fairly obvious that most narratives within Samuel, and the Bible as a whole, are subsequent from the perspective of the narrator. Although scholars differ on the value of the biblical text in terms of its value as a witness to Israel's history, it is clear that the Old Testament's narrative texts generally aim to report events that from the perspective of the narrator occurred in the past. Subsequent narration is thus employed to

show, within the world established by the text, that what is reported has happened. Where the text has a reference in the real world, the implication is that this actually took place. A witness to this in the Hebrew narrative tradition is that many narratives begin with ויהי and then continue with a series of converted *yiqtol* verbs (e.g. Josh 1:1). In the case of the books of Samuel, the narrative does commence with ויהי (1 Sam 1:1) but rather than following this with converted *yiqtol* verbs, introduces the main characters through Elkanah's genealogy, and then subverts the more common pattern by employing a *qatal* verb (ועלה) in verse 3 to indicate that the pattern of worship that is about to be described was characteristic of the family and that the main movement of the narrative has not yet begun. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the narrator, although the worship pattern described in verses 3 – 8 was typical rather than unique, the events described are all in the past.

One intriguing variation on this occurs in the account of the Amalekite who reported Saul's death to David in 2 Samuel 1:1 – 16. Here, we encounter an unreliable narrator, someone whose own interests require the employment of subsequent narration though the contrast with 1 Samuel 31 indicates that what he describes did not take place,[3] though there may be hints that he does know the truth. Because David accepted this mode of narration as indicating a reliable report of events, he had the man executed. But David has already shown that he too can be an unreliable narrator in his dealings with Ahimelech (1 Sam 21:2 – 10 [ET 1 Sam 21:1 – 9]) and Achish (1 Sam 27:10), though no one is able to execute him. Narrators within the story (intradiegetic in Genette's model) may be unreliable, but the narrator who stands outside the story and provides the controlling narrative voice (the extradiegetic narrator) controls our reading of them through subsequent narration which enables us to see the flaws in their claims. A particular subset of this mode of narration occurs when Nathan tells David the story about the rich and poor man (2 Sam 12:1 – 4) and the wise woman from Tekoa tells the story of her sons (2 Sam 14:4 – 17) where subsequent narration is employed with fictions that are intended to be understood as factual because of the mode employed, though both fictions must ultimately be dissolved to reveal the actual issue which lies behind the narrative presented (cf. Birch 1998: 1292).

Subsequent narration can thus occur through the various narrative voices that are presented in the text. Thus, it is not only the controlling voice that guides most of the book, but also most of the narrators who are reported within it who employ subsequent narration. Thus, when the messenger came to Eli to report on the battle in 1 Samuel 4:10 – 11, he recounts events that have already taken place (4:17). Eli's death is simultaneous from the point of view of the messenger, but still past for the extradi-

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[3] For the main views on the relationship between 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1:1 – 16, cf. Anderson 1989: 5 – 6; Arnold 1989: 289 – 298, 2001: 409 – 411; Bergen 1996: 288; Green 2003: 436 – 437; McCarter 1984: 62 – 64; Robinson 1993: 155 – 156; Smith 1899: 251. Fokkelman (1989) explores the importance of the interplay between different narrators but does not develop this within a theory of narrative.

egetic voice which again takes control at this point. However, because subsequent narration is such a common feature, there is no need to emphasise this point further.

## 2    Prior Narration

Because of the ubiquity of subsequent narration, it thus becomes important that we note how other forms of narration are employed because their very deviance from the standard pattern means that they are emphasised. As we noted above, all events within Samuel are past from the perspective of the controlling narrative voice. However, that voice is still capable of employing prior narration though it does so in an embedded form through characters within the narrative.

It is, perhaps, no surprise that where prior narration occurs through the voice of a character within Samuel, that voice is given a prophetic dimension, though not all instances of this involve figures for whom one of the prophetic labels is applied.[4] It is, however, the case that wherever prior narration is employed with an explicitly prophetic figure, later subsequent narration is offered that demonstrates the truth of the prophetic voice. The reliability of the authentic prophetic word is a vital component for the books of Samuel, and this interplay of prior and subsequent narration enables this to be demonstrated at the macro-plot level.[5] For example, one might note that both the unnamed Man of God in 1 Samuel 2:27 – 36 and Samuel himself in 1 Samuel 3:10 – 14 announce the downfall of Eli's house, with the details of their prophecies largely overlapping but with certain details unique to each (Firth, 2005: 6 – 9). 1 Samuel 3:19 – 4:1a insists upon the importance of Yahweh's word to Samuel, but Samuel's first word is itself in partly repeating that of the Man of God. Although Samuel himself is physically absent from the story of the Ark in 1 Samuel 4:1b – 7:1, the narrative in 1 Samuel 4:1b – 22 works out the details of his prophecy along with that of the Man of God as first Eli's sons and then Eli himself all die on the one day. What they have announced, the narrator thus demonstrates to be true, so that the authentic prophetic word becomes an announcement of plot within the relevant segment of the book. Something similar can be said with Samuel's two stage announcement of Saul's removal and replacement with his neighbour (1 Sam 13:14, 15:28 – 29) which obliquely announce David's coming and then recount it with Samuel largely absent save for 1 Samuel 19:18 – 24.[6]

This pattern recurs with Nathan's word of judgement on David in 2 Samuel 12:10 – 12. Like the Man of God and Samuel, Nathan's status as a prophet is made explicit in his introduction in 2 Samuel 7:2. Following David's sin against Uriah through Bathsheba, Nathan announced that the sword would not depart from David's

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[4] That is, prophet (נביא), man of God (איש אלהים), seer (חזה) or seer (ראה), the latter two being distinguished in Hebrew, but not English. On these titles, see Petersen (1981: 35 – 50).
[5] On the importance of the authentic prophetic word, see Firth (2005: 6 – 10).
[6] On the relationship between these stages, see Long (1989: 165 – 168): for the specifics of the link to 1 Samuel 10:7, see Van Zyl (1988: 169).

house which is defined as Yahweh raising evil against David from his own household and that someone would publicly lie with his wives as an act of judicial punishment.[7] The narrative of 2 Samuel 13 – 20 then demonstrates how the sword does not depart from David's house through the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba, whilst the specific details in verse 11 of evil coming from within David's house and the public act of lying with his wives find their fulfilment in Absalom (2 Sam 15:7 – 12, 16:23). As with the Man of God and Samuel, Nathan is shown to be an authentic prophet because what he offers as prior narration can later be shown to be true through subsequent narration. The same is true of Gad in 2 Samuel 24:12 – 13 when he announces David's punishment for the sin of his census, a punishment worked out in 2 Samuel 24:15 – 17.

Prophetic voices are thus important for prior narration because of the opportunity they provide to give an announcement of plot which is also a vindication of their status. But Samuel also employs prior narration through Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1 – 10, and Hannah is never explicitly called a prophetess or equivalent. Nevertheless, the foregrounding of Hannah's voice in 2:1 – 10 provides a mechanism for the book's central themes to be announced in advance (similarly, Brueggemann 1990:16 – 17, Tsumura 2007:135 – 136), so that as we recognise their outworking we are forced to re-evaluate Hannah and understand that she too is a prophetic figure. It is difficult to know why Hannah is not given a prophetic label, but it is possible that because her speech does not use a classical form of prophetic speech that the narrative declined to give her that label, though it is perhaps preferable to think in terms of the narrator's subtlety. We should however note that although we continue to use the label "Hannah's Song" to refer to the passage, the narrative actually refers to it as a prayer, even though apart from 1 Samuel 2:1d and 2b Yahweh is described and not addressed. Some figures are obviously prophetic, since they fulfilled the roles typically associated with the label. But others are prophetic only with hindsight, and Hannah could well fit here.[8]

We cannot explore all the ways in which Hannah's Song announces themes that are unpacked in the rest of the book. But two are worth noting briefly. First, Hannah's Song announces that Yahweh brings down the powerful and exalts the weak (1 Sam 2:4 – 8). The theme has a ready resonance in Hannah's own experience following the birth of Samuel and his subsequent dedication in the temple (1 Sam 1:19 – 28), so in one sense this is already subsequent narration. But the Song far exceeds Hannah's own circumstances, including numerous military references. Crucially, the Song declares that such a reversal of fortunes is typical of Yahweh's actions. In doing so, it

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[7] This seems to be the force of the phrase "before this sun" in 2 Samuel 12:12. See Van Wolde (2003: 259 – 278). Gunn (1978: 99) points to the importance of familial language in this context, preparing for the fact that David's problems will come from his family.

[8] Klement (2000: 112 – 114) notes important links with 2 Samuel 23:1 – 7, a demonstratively prophetic text, which forces a reading of Hannah's Song as similarly prophetic.

draws in Hannah's own experience whilst indicating that this is something Yahweh does on a regular basis. In a subtle way, Hannah's Song announces the plot that is to come, so that rather than being a late intrusion (so Stoebe 1973: 106, cf. Miscall 1986: 15) into the larger narrative (cf. Klein 1983: 14), it is the Song which gives shape to it (cf. Fokkelman 1993: 105 – 111).

There is an immediate application of this reversal of fortunes motif in the account of Eli's house and their downfall, so that the messages announced by both the man of God (1 Sam 2:27 – 36) and Samuel (1 Sam 3:11 – 14) fit into the pattern announced by Hannah's Song which thus becomes a prior control for their announcements, effectively advising readers of their reliability from the outset because they conform to the pattern of the Song. Eli's family, and especially his sons who are characterised as בני בליעל (1 Sam 2:12), have become in varying degrees used to the use and abuse of power, with the sons engaging in some doubtful practices in claiming an excessive share from sacrifices (1 Sam 2:13 – 17) and sleeping with the women who served at the sanctuary (1 Sam 2:21). Eli's sins are less gross, but he is portrayed as dealing with his sons in only an ineffectual manner, whilst his own great weight[9] at his death (1 Sam 4:18) might suggest that he too enjoyed the illicit fruits of his sons stand over tactics. The dual announcement of their impending downfall is then a demonstration of the assertion in 1 Samuel 2:3 that Yahweh weighs actions and then 2:4 – 8's claim that Yahweh brings about a reversal of circumstances, bringing down the powerful. Conversely, Samuel's rise shows Yahweh elevating the weak. Although it is not as specific as those speeches which are direct prophecy, the assertions of Hannah's Song are vindicated in the downfall of Eli and his household. Saul's experience, which shows close patterning to that of Eli at a number of points (Firth 2007: 78 – 79), also follows this structure, demonstrating that those who cling to power are those least likely to retain it because power is only ever something delegated by Yahweh.

But if this is so, then it might raise the question of how anyone can continue to hold power if the very act of holding it renders the holder liable to lose it through the reversal of fortunes. But Hannah's Song sets up a contrast in 2:9 – 10 with 2:4 – 8. On the one hand, Yahweh does bring down the powerful and elevate the weak, but the story of David shows that it is possible to retain power, though only by recognising that power really belongs to Yahweh. David, of course, sins in ways that are far grosser than Eli or Saul, yet unlike them he retains power. A pious reading of Samuel might point to 1 Samuel 13:14 which points to David as being after Yahweh's heart and suggest that there was something intrinsic to him that qualified him to remain as king. Yet it is doubtful that this was ever the intent of that verse,[10] and even if it was, David's time as king surely deconstructs any such image. But if we are to understand why David was able to remain as king then we need look no further than 1 Samuel 2:9

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[9] כבד refers to Eli's weight, but is also part of an important word play in 1 Samuel 4:1b – 7:1 where the word's varying senses are deployed.

[10] McCarter (1980: 229) plausibly argues it is a statement of Yahweh's choice.

– 10. Here, Hannah asserts that Yahweh guards the faithful, and in particular that he gives strength to his king.[11] At this stage, of course, there is no king, so by introducing the king here Hannah's Song prepares for a dominant theme in the rest of the book. Yet it also serves to indicate the mechanism by which a king can remain in power, and that is by recognising that a king only has power so long as he is Yahweh's king, because a king's power comes only by depending on Yahweh, not by claiming power himself (similarly, Evans 2000: 21).

It is the framework established by Hannah's Song that is worked out in David's story. For all David's faults, he accepts Yahweh's discipline whenever he is challenged to do so. Thus, when confronted by Nathan following Uriah's murder he confesses his sin (2 Sam 12:13), and he similarly accepts responsibility following his sin in the census (2 Sam 24:10, 17). As the one chosen by Yahweh he can be the one after Yahweh's heart, and he demonstrates that he is better than Saul (1 Sam 15:28) in that he accepts Yahweh's authority. Thus, rather than clinging to power David must finally acknowledge that he has authority only because he has been exalted by Yahweh (2 Sam 23:1,[12] with רום picking up on 1 Sam 2:1, 10). In this particular case, interpolated narration is employed to demonstrate the reliability of the prior narration through Hannah, though its function as interpolated narration also needs consideration. The whole of Hannah's Song, which is itself a form of interpolated narration, is shown to be a prophetic text through the rest of the narrative because its prior narration is shown to be trustworthy through the subsequent models of narration.

Related to this is direct prayer. Although it is not of itself prophetic, it can establish the pattern for events and thus also serves as an announcement of plot which is worked out in succeeding narratives, so that the validity of prayer is shown in the interaction of prior and subsequent narration. An example of this is David's brief utterance in 2 Samuel 15:31 when he asks that Ahithopel's counsel be turned to foolishness. The prayer was offered as David fled up the Mount of Olives, but it only found its fulfilment in 2 Samuel 17:1 – 14 when Hushai's rather curious advice trumped that of Ahithopel, though here the narrator felt the need to intervene and point out that the outcome was because Yahweh had determined to defeat Ahithopel's good advice (2 Sam 17:14). The language of authentic prayer can thus become a mechanism for announcing the direction of the plot where the prayer is validated by later subsequent narration (cf. Fokkelman 1981: 220, Hertzberg 1964: 352).

Prior narration is distributed across the books of Samuel and usually occurs with another narrative form (most commonly subsequent narration) which subse-

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[11] An inclusion is formed by 1 Samuel 2:1, 10, both of which make use of the image of the exalted "horn" (קרן), a traditional symbol for strength. But the inclusion is important for interpretation, for in 2:1 the reference is to Hannah, whereas in 2:10 it is the king. Hannah's experience becomes the pattern for the king.

[12] Balwin (1988: 58) also points to the link to 2 Samuel 22:51.

quently demonstrates the reliability of the prior narration. It is thus employed to demonstrate the reliability of those who are named as prophets, and at the same time to require readers to reconsider elements of the narrative such as Hannah's Song which were not directly presented as prophetic but which are shown to function that way, as well as the reliability of prayer. Prior narration is thus an important vehicle for establishing points at a macro-plot level, especially for pointing to the ways in which God is at work.

## 3    Simultaneous Narration

Since most of the narration in Samuel is subsequent, we should recognise that alternative forms of narration occur through characters within the narrative rather than as something given by the controlling narrative voice. It also becomes clear that where simultaneous narration does occur, it is (like prior narration) embedded within a block of subsequent narration but with a slightly different rhetorical focus within the book. Hence, where prior narration operates at the macro-plot level in its interplay across large segments of text, simultaneous narration is employed at the micro-plot level, interacting with matters of relevance to the immediate narrative segment and demonstrating the limitations in the knowledge of the characters.

A simple example of simultaneous narration occurs in 1 Samuel 29:6, where Achish reports to David the perspective of the Philistine lords as to why David should leave the Philistine camp prior to battle with Israel which will be recounted in 1 Samuel 31.[13] Here, Achish explains to David why he believes him to be a reliable servant whilst also reporting that, due to pressure from the other leaders, David cannot stay. In response to David's ambiguous claim that he ought to be able to fight the enemies of his king,[14] Achish repeats the core of this narrative, but adds that he regarded David as being "as blameless as an angel of God". Where prior narration was able to interact with subsequent narration to show the reliability of the prophetic word, subsequent narration interacts with Achish's comments to show their folly. 1 Samuel 27:5 – 11 has already shown that Achish should never have trusted David (similarly, Alter 1999: 170) and that the perspective of the rest of the Philistine leaders is far more likely to be correct than that of Achish who has been thoroughly duped by David who, while serving his own ends, claimed to serve those of Achish. Although the narrator could have chosen subsequent narrative, recording Achish's words in the mode of simultaneous narration creates a mechanism for reinforcing the limitations of his perspective.

The technique is used in a similar manner with the account of Shimei cursing David in 2 Samuel 16:7 – 8. Shimei, a loyal supporter of Saul, interprets David's

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[13] For a sensitive exploration of how this interacts with other elements in 1 Samuel 29, see Brueggemann (1989).

[14] The king remains unnamed, and so could refer to Saul (or even Yahweh), though the intent is that Achish understand that he is the king mentioned.

flight from Jerusalem as evidence that Yahweh has rejected David and is avenging the blood David has shed, presumably implying that David was still in some way responsible for Saul's death.[15] The intriguing issue here is that David is drawn into this simultaneous narration and thus unable to determine the truth or otherwise of Shimei's claims (cf. Campbell 2005: 149, though Gordon 1986: 276 considers Ziba an "opportunist"), so it is only through the following subsequent narration of Absalom's death and David's return that Shimei's perspective is shown to be flawed. Likewise, while hiding in the cave at Engedi, David's men had urged him to kill Saul, claiming that Yahweh had provided this opportunity to do so (1 Sam 24:7 [ET 1 Sam 24:6]). David again is drawn into their interpretation and cut off the corner of Saul's robe, but is struck by his heart[16] and in his guilt reflects upon the fact that Saul is still Yahweh's anointed. Nevertheless, because understanding providence is a difficult thing, the ensuing dialogue between David and Saul allows them both to offer a simultaneous narration so we see how both men came to an agreed interpretation. Any model other than simultaneous narration would prohibit this because it would draw on greater knowledge than the characters had. David's encounters with Ziba and Mephibosheth (2 Sam 16:1 – 5, 19:18 – 31 [ET 19:17 – 30]) are an intriguing example of this where no subsequent narration is ever provided to clarify these men's claims, so in the end we simply do not know if either of them told the truth to David when he fled from Absalom.

A related model of simultaneous narration occurs through the use of a wish expressed through a jussive.[17] An example of this occurs in Eli's comment to Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:17 (similarly Campbell 2003: 41). In this instance, Eli expresses the wish that Hannah be granted the son for whom she has asked, and the narrative then recounts immediately how this happens. A similar example of this occurs in 19:4 when Jonathan intervened on David's behalf when Saul wished to kill him, with the effect that Saul then did not kill David (1 Sam 19:6). Thus, the wish typically announces something which is about to happen within a particular plot unit. The expression of a wish is not of itself necessarily effective, but where the wish legitimately invokes Yahweh then the wish is resolved within the particular narrative segment. However, consistent with Samuel's employment of simultaneous narration, it indicates the limitations of the character's knowledge.

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[15] A view with some modern defenders – e.g. McKenzie (2000: 109 – 110).
[16] Fokkelman (1986: 457) claims David had palpitations, but the phrase is not that prosaic, and ignores the motif of the heart in chapters 24 – 25. Cf. Boyle (2001). Gunn (1980: 92 – 95) interprets this sexually, but it is more likely that we are simply to see an allusion to 1 Samuel 15:27 – 28.
[17] It is, of course, not always possible to distinguish the jussive in form from the imperfect (*yiqtol*), but the sense is normally clear.

## 4    Interpolated Narration

Interpolated narration is generally agreed to be the most complex level of Genette's model, requiring an interface between the other levels of narration and is therefore comparatively rare in the Bible. Nevertheless, the books of Samuel offer some rich examples of this in each of the major poems which provide a reflection on the surrounding narrative. None of these poems directly advances the main narrative, but each in some way speaks into the narrative world.

We have already noted Hannah's Song as an example of prior narration in that it sets out themes for events that are to follow. However, since interpolated narration involves an intersection of modes of narration it is entirely in order to note that its narrative function in Samuel is not divorced from Hannah's own story. 1 Samuel 1 outlines something of the life of Elkanah and his family, including his two wives Hannah and Peninah and the conflicts caused within the family because of Hannah's childlessness (1 Sam 1:2). Later, this point is emphasised by noting that Yahweh had closed Hannah's womb (1 Sam 1:5). Out of this, there arose considerable friction between the two wives such that Peninah would seek to provoke Hannah to "thunder" (הרעמה, 1:6)[18] However, following a visit to the sanctuary, Hannah conceived and bore Samuel, whom she dedicated in the temple in accordance with her vow (1 Sam 1:11, 24 – 28).

Hannah's Song is then both an act of prior narration and a reflection on events so far recounted in which Hannah exults in Yahweh because she has experienced his power in her life (1 Sam 2:1), something which then triggers the balance of the Song. Commentators routinely note that the details of the Song do not fit Hannah's own circumstances particularly well, especially the note that "the barren has borne seven" (1 Sam 2:5) since at this stage Hannah has had only one child and the note at 1 Samuel 2:21 only allows her a total of six children. But the function of the Song is not to provide such a close analysis of Hannah's immediate situation so much as to draw on general themes, and in the Song Hannah aligns herself with those who have discovered Yahweh's power rather than requiring a specific match to her circumstances. The reflection is thus, for the most part, a statement of general themes rather than specifically matching Hannah's circumstances.

Nevertheless, there is one point where the Song picks up on the language of earlier events in an intriguing way. And that is in the claim of 2:10 that Yahweh would thunder (רעם) against his enemies. Peninah's provocation of Hannah was said to have the goal of making her thunder, presumably an idiom indicating extreme anger. But in reality, Yahweh would thunder against his adversaries. Hannah's Song thus re-

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[18] The phrase is variously rendered in EVV, usually something like "provoke her grievously to irritate her" (ESV), but this underplays this unusual phrase which is establishing a key term for later reference.

flects on Hannah's experience as well as pointing forward in the book, showing the need for Yahweh's involvement to resolve fundamental issues.

The theme of Yahweh's thunder is picked up on later in the book, notably in the defeat of the Philistines in 1 Samuel 7:10 and in David's reflective song in 2 Samuel 22:14.[19] There are, in fact, numerous verbal links between 2 Samuel 22 and 1 Samuel 2:1 – 10, which taken with their relative placement within Samuel suggests they are intended to be read in light of one another. But these links also occur with 2 Samuel 1:17 – 27 and 23:1 – 7, each of which in some way functions as a piece of interpolated narrative.[20]

David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17 – 27) provides an important climax to 1 Samuel 27 – 2 Samuel 1. In that narrative block, David had been staying with the Philistines to avoid Saul but was busily duping the Philistine king of Gath, Achish, so he could further his own agenda while appearing to support Achish. Yet all of David's careful deception appeared to have come to an end when he was summoned to join Achish's bodyguard as he set off for battle against Israel (1 Sam 28:1 – 2). David was thus in a seemingly impossible position, where he had to fight against Israel and run the risk of killing Saul, the very thing he had twice declined to do (1 Sam 24, 26). The narrative then shows how the other Philistine leaders insisted on David's dismissal, requiring him to be sent back to Philistine territory (1 Sam 29). David thus returned to his base in Ziklag only to discover that the Amalekites had raided the town and carried off both family and possessions for David and his men. Directed by Yahweh (1 Sam 30:7 – 8), David had pursued the Amalekites and defeated them in the wilderness. Meanwhile, the narrative has set up a careful series of synchronisms[21] to show that while David was more than three days journey to the south, the Philistines had killed Saul and his sons on Mt Gilboa and taken their remains away with them (1 Sam 31). In spite of the fact that David was with the Philistines, he could not have killed Saul.

David, however, only learns of Saul and Jonathan's deaths through an Amalekite who approached him looking for reward, but on hearing the man confess to having killed Saul, David ordered his execution (2 Sam 1:14 – 15). That the man probably confessed to a crime he did not commit does not matter for the presentation of the narrative, because David acts on the basis of his claims. At one level, therefore, the Amalekite's news presented David with an opportunity to celebrate. He was now the only anointed of Yahweh, and the throne could legitimately be his. But rather than moving on to the point where David became king, the narrative pauses for David to

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[19] Thunder is also mentioned in 1 Samuel 12:17 – 18, but different terms are used, distinguishing that event from the themes in Hannah's Song.
[20] On some of the links, see Childs (1979: 273 – 275), Firth (2007: 79 – 80, 2009:29 – 30), Polzin (1993: 207 – 21). One should also note the presence of the key term משיח in each poem.
[21] See the chart in Fokkelmann (1986: 594).

reflect on events in 2 Samuel 1:17 – 27.[22] The lament is careful to ensure that Saul and Jonathan are both praised and, unusually for the major songs in Samuel, makes no direct reference to God. But it enables David to reflect on what Saul and Jonathan have meant for the nation and also Jonathan's significance for him. The lack of reference to God in the lament is significant in that it avoids any claim by David that Yahweh had removed Saul, allowing him to affirm Saul's qualities without the implication of highlighting his failings by attributing his removal to God. But Hannah's Song has already provided the necessary framework for interpreting Saul's fall, as have Samuel's announcements at 1 Samuel 13:14, 15:28 – 29 and 28:17. David's reflection need not mention Yahweh because the wider narrative has already made his involvement clear. Moreover, where each of the other main songs can speak of the exaltation (using רום[23]) of the anointed (1 Sam 2:10, 2 Sam 22:49, 23:1) and God (2 Sam 22:47), this one speaks only of how Saul and Jonathan have fallen. David's reflection is thus offered from the perspective that Yahweh has removed Saul but without having to say so directly. The interpolation in this case operates directly with the narrative of Saul's downfall that began in 1 Samuel 13, but does so through the framework established by Hannah's Song. The reflection offered is thus intensely theological because of the way the interpolation engages with the preceding narratives.

This pattern continues with David's two songs in the Samuel Conclusion (2 Sam 21 – 24). Rather than being an appendix which interrupts the narrative of David's court, it is becoming increasingly clear that this segment of Samuel is intentionally arranged to reflect on the whole of David's story (Koorevaar, 1997: 71). That reflection is made up of various forms of narration within the larger chiasm of these chapters.[24] The central placement of the two Songs again shows their importance, though these poems also interact with the earlier reflective poems.[25] As with the lament over Saul and Jonathan and Hannah's Song, these poems also come with a narrative context, though this time the exact sense of them is difficult to discern.

As is well known, 2 Samuel 22 is more or less equivalent to Psalm 18, but it is important that the poem itself is interpreted within the narrative context, and not ascribed some sort of absolute sense. In both places it is said to be a song David spoke when Yahweh had delivered him from all his enemies and Saul, a point which links it to 2 Samuel 7:1, which indicates that David planned to build the temple in a similar context of rest given by Yahweh. Creating an exact chronology of events in 2 Samuel 5 – 24 is by no means simple, but that represents a concern with the order of the re-

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[22] Van Zyl (1998) shows some awareness of these issues, though the concerns that generated his reflection on this poem lead him in a rather different direction.

[23] Although this root is common in the major songs, it only otherwise occurs in 1 Sam 9:24, indicating its importance within the reflections offered by the songs.

[24] Noted at least as early as Budde (1902: 304), though Simon (2000: 7 – 10) points to earlier sources which began to explore this possibility.

[25] Similarly, Fokkelman (1990: 354), Simon (2000: 247 – 248), Watts (1992: 24).

porting of events relative to their absolute order relative to one another whereas our concern here is with the relationship between narrative voice and chronology. Nevertheless, when read alongside the introduction to 2 Samuel 23:1 – 7 it becomes clear that 2 Samuel 22 is to be understood as the reflections of the earlier David, whilst 2 Samuel 23:1 – 7 is the words of an old man near to death. But by placing them together we see that we are to read each in light of the other for the light they shed on the larger narrative.

Where the lament over Saul and Jonathan could only implicitly look to Yahweh's actions, this poem is highly theocentric, praising Yahweh for his provision and protection. Given that mention of Yahweh has been relatively scarce since 2 Samuel 12, this is highly significant, providing David with the opportunity to comment on Yahweh's involvement in his own experience and to reflect on the fact that the king can only overcome his enemies because Yahweh allows him to do so (2 Sam 22:36 – 49). David's story as king has been less than glorious, covering the sin against Uriah through Bathsheba (2 Sam 11), the rebellions of Absalom (2 Sam 13 – 19) and Sheba (2 Sam 20), whilst within the Samuel Conclusion his resolution of Saul's famine was only complete following the involvement of Rizpah (2 Sam 21:1 – 14) and the various Philistine giants[26] were only overcome through the involvement of his men who even had to require him to stay out of battle (2 Sam 21:15 – 22). But David sings of what Yahweh does, thus insisting that the victories won (especially in 2 Samuel 5:17 – 25, 8:1 – 14) were achieved through Yahweh. David's claims of innocence within the poem (2 Sam 22:21 – 25) are thus not to be seen as general claims, but as specific to his earlier refusals to kill Saul. David's record was significant but tarnished. His failings are not denied by the poem, but his successes are reshaped by pointing back to Yahweh.

The last poem (2 Sam 23:1 – 7) forms a balancing pair with 2 Samuel 22, representing a sort of final public statement by David. Significantly, and drawing on the exaltation language from Hannah's Song (1 Sam 2:10, 2 Sam 23:1), David claims to have been exalted by Yahweh. This poem is also characterised as an oracle, making it a form of prophetic speech. The poem itself is notoriously difficult to interpret, but it seems likely that after the introduction of verse 1, verses 2 – 3a outline the means by which Yahweh has spoken to David, with the oracle proper coming in verses 3b – 4. The claim of this oracle is that the ruler who governs with justice and the fear of God is the one who brings blessing to the people. David cannot, in light of all that has gone before, claim that he is innocent in those terms, unlike the earlier confidence in 2 Samuel 22:21 – 25, because he knows of his failings and the punishment announced by Nathan. But in verses 5 – 7 he can claim that his house (drawing on the language of 2 Sam 7:3 – 16) stands in this relationship with God, and that God has established an enduring covenant with him. David's failures are thus recognised, but through this re-

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[26] Assuming that to be the sense of רפאים. See McCarter 1984: 449 – 450 for the view that these were champions devoted to the deity Rapha.

flection the narrative can insist that the promises to David from Yahweh in 2 Samuel 7 continue. David, whatever his failings, will not be removed as was Saul. The interpolated narration thus provides a mechanism for interpreting the earlier accounts to insist that Yahweh will not abandon David.

Interpolated narration thus emerges as a model of considerable importance for Samuel, especially as a mechanism for interpreting the units employing the other forms of narration. In particular, where simultaneous narration is employed to show the limitations of the character's knowledge of what God is doing, interpolated narration is employed to provide a key to an expressly theological interpretation of those other narratives. Rather than admit to uncertainty as to what Yahweh is doing, these reflections provide an abundance of theological consideration, even in the case of David's lament in 2 Samuel 1:17 – 27 where this is done without directly mentioning Yahweh. Interpolated narration is thus employed to provide an authoritative commentary on the other narratives.

## D    CONCLUSION

This survey of narrative voice and chronology in the books of Samuel demonstrates a sophisticated use of variations in this technique throughout the book, with the various modes of narration each employed to achieve a different effect. Although it was not examined in depth, it was noted that subsequent narration is the dominant form of the text and is used to indicate that an event happened, at least within the world of the story. As a mode, it is principally employed by the dominant narrative voice (the extradiegetic narrator), but it could be employed by characters within the story. It is the only mode employed by the dominant narrative voice, with the other modes employed only through characters within the story. It represents the text's claim to witness to events that have taken place, though by recording unreliable narrators within the story who also employ subsequent narration, it invites us to attend to the textures of that narration.

Prior narration was employed less commonly, but always sought to demonstrate the reliability of the one who gave it because Yahweh was the source of the information that enabled the prior narration. In the case of those given prophetic labels this is explicit, but in the case of Hannah's Song this status is revealed only gradually. The same may be true of prayer. Nevertheless, the authority of Hannah's Song as an authentic prophetic word is shown, and readers are thus encouraged through this mode of narration to trust the authentic prophetic voice whose message is shown to be vindicated by Yahweh in subsequent events. Prior narration is thus always complemented by subsequent narration which becomes the mechanism for demonstrating the reliability of the prophetic or praying figure.

Simultaneous narration is also used by characters within the story, but always to reveal the limitations of their knowledge. By entering the story world with them readers are able to appreciate what they see, but are for that point shielded from wider

knowledge that would render a judgement on their actions. As with prior narration, simultaneous narration is generally employed in conjunction with subsequent narration to enable an assessment of events, but this is not necessarily the case and there are points where the ambiguities generated through this mode are not resolved.

Finally, interpolated narration is employed through the major poems in Samuel to provide a reflection on events, and in particular to consider where Yahweh is to be seen in events, even when he is not mentioned. Samuel is somewhat unusual in that this mode of narration is not widely employed in the Old Testament, and the other examples of major poems which interpret a narrative place these poems in the immediate proximity of the relevant prose narrative (Exod 14:21 – 31 and 15:1 – 17, Judg 4 and 5, Jonah 1 and 2). These examples of interpolated narration are also placed at significant structural points within the book, so that Hannah's Song (1 Sam 2:1 – 10) and David's closing reflections (2 Sam 22:1 – 23:7) provide the bookends to Samuel which pivots on David's lament over Jonathan and Saul (2 Sam 1:17 – 27). Each of these passages interfaces with the other narratives of the book to provide a theological reflection on the whole, even for those narratives where Yahweh is not otherwise mentioned.

Thus, Samuel not only employs the principal modes of narration with regard to narrative voice and chronology, it does so with a different rhetorical purpose for each of these modes. It therefore emerges as an important exegetical consideration in interpreting the book.

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