

against the background of the host of characters surrounding him, all simpler than he.

Few of the characters in biblical narrative are depicted extensively and in detail, most being sketched in with only a few lines. Nevertheless, they are convincingly real and human, and have unique features.

The characteristics attributed to biblical figures are not only unique, however, but are also general human traits. The characters embody various aspects of human nature and therefore have considerable representative force and general significance. Because of the way they are portrayed, combining both universal and individual features, biblical characters can fulfil their functions within the world of the narrative as carriers of the plot as well as making their way straight to the reader's heart as the bearers of a message.

Chapter 3

THE PLOT

If the characters are the soul of the narrative, the plot is the body. It consists of an organized and orderly system of events, arranged in temporal sequence. In contrast to life—where we are invariably confronted by an endless stream of incidents occurring haphazardly and disparately—the plot of a narrative is constructed as a meaningful chain of interconnected events. This is achieved by careful selection, entailing the omission of any incident which does not fit in logically with the planned development of the plot.

The plot serves to organize events in such a way as to arouse the reader's interest and emotional involvement, while at the same time imbuing the events with meaning.

An isolated incident receives its significance from its position and role in the system as a whole. The incidents are like building blocks, each one contributing its part to the entire edifice, and hence their importance. In the building which is the plot there are no excess or meaningless blocks. The removal of one may cause the entire structure to collapse or at least damage its functional and aesthetic perfection.

The units which comprise the plot are of different kinds or, more precisely, of different sizes. The smallest narrative unit is the one which contains one incident, whether an action or an event. An action occurs when the character is the subject (the logical, not necessarily the syntactical, subject) of the incident, and an event occurs when the character is the object.

The combination of several small units of this kind creates larger ones, scenes and acts. Some narratives consist of only one act, but most are composed of several.

Various kinds of connections and relations exist between the units comprising the narrative system, thereby creating the structure of the plot. The principal relations between the various units are those of cause and effect, parallelism and contrast.

The plot in its entirety has a clear beginning and end. Incidents which are appropriate to serve as starting and finishing points, such as birth and death or the imposing of a task and the reward for its fulfilment, are chosen from the unlimited reservoir of events. Consequently, we do not feel that the story we are reading is unfinished or incomplete. The beginning and end of the narrative are sometimes denoted by explicit introductions and conclusions.

Between the starting and finishing points the plot evolves along a line of development which creates a certain pattern. One can often discern a line which gradually ascends to a climax, and then descends to a state of relaxation. There are, however, other patterns of plot development, such as a sudden turn constituting an unexpected change in the line of development.

At the centre of the plot there is almost always a conflict or collision between two forces, whether these be two individuals, a person and his or her inner self, a person and an institution, custom or outlook, or an individual and a superhuman force, such as God or fate.

Several narratives, each one a complete unit in its own right, combine with one another in the Bible to create an extensive block, and thus the single narrative becomes one component of a greater narrative whole. The unity of the greater narrative whole is determined by the ways in which the individual ones are connected and by the nature of the relations between them. The individual narrative usually acquires additional significance when it serves as a constituent element of the wider whole.

The extensive blocks combine to form books, and the books to constitute comprehensive compositions, bringing before us the vast canvas of history from the creation of the world to the Babylonian exile (from Genesis to 2 Kings), and from Adam to the period of restoration (Chronicles and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). Within these large compositions, which partially overlap with one another, the individual narratives are embedded in more or less chronological order and in accordance with an overall historical and religio-ethical view. It is this view which grants these vast compositions their unity even though they are composed of many different elements.

Thus, units exist at various levels, starting with the smallest, containing one incident, and including the vast composition, which comprises several books. Each unit, at every level except for the last,

serves as a component of the one above it and each plays a part and obtains significance in accordance with its position within the great hierarchical structure.

1. The Single Narrative

A. The Units of the Plot

The smallest narrative units—the incidents—almost always have multiple purposes in biblical narrative, at the same time serving as components of the plot, as a means of characterizing the protagonists and as ways of expressing meaning. Since there are very few elements in biblical narrative whose task is solely to characterize individuals or express meaning, these functions devolve primarily onto those units which also comprise the plot.

It should be noted that speech as well as incidents almost invariably serves a number of purposes. For example, when Abigail says to David: 'My lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause or for my lord taking vengeance himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your handmaid' (1 Sam. 25.31), her 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.

The order in which the small narrative units are arranged is both temporal and causal. In other words, the incidents succeed one another in a chronological as well as a causal sequence, one incident being the outcome of the previous one and the cause of the one that follows it.

There are, nevertheless, events which are not complete links in the tight causal chain of the narrative, serving solely as the cause of another incident and not as the result of a previous one. Thus, what the snake says to the woman in the narrative of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) causes her to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, but the snake's words are not themselves the outcome of any previous incident.

Sometimes the chain of incidents bifurcates, one event having two results, either of which can set off a separate chain of occurrences. For example, the fact that the ark of God is captured by the

Philistines (1 Samuel 4) has two results, each one developing into an independent causal chain; one is the death of Eli, leading to Samuel's promotion to the rank of judge and leader, while the other is the removal of the ark to the land of the Philistines and the resultant series of disasters which strikes them, and eventually leads to the ark's return to the land of Judah. Both these chains coincide and combine again when David, anointed and supported by Samuel, brings the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim in the land of Judah to his city, Jerusalem.

On some occasions the causal connection between the events is noted explicitly by means of such words as 'because' and 'for', while on others it is not mentioned at all and the reader must grasp the causal relation for himself. The second method is used far more frequently in biblical narrative, most incidents being connected by the letter 'waw' ('and').

There are very few events in biblical narrative which have neither a causal nor a sequential role to play in the chain of the narrative. The task of those incidents, which are not essential to the structure of the plot and could be omitted, is to emphasize aspects, expand situations, illuminate characters, deepen significance, etc. Because there are so few of them, the biblical narrative is not diffuse but is cohesive, concise and very tightly constructed.

The unit created by the combination of several events—the scene—is defined through the characters participating in it. When all or some of the characters change a new scene starts.

In biblical narrative the number of characters involved at any one time is very small, usually not more than two. Even when the total number of characters in a narrative is greater, only a very limited number of active characters appear in each scene (sometimes there are additional 'silent' characters in the background, who do not take an active part in what is happening). As a result, the reader's attention is not distracted but is concentrated on a few focal points within the scene.

Since there are rarely more than two active characters in any one scene, virtually all conversations are duologues. Although in some conversations one of the participants is not an individual but a group, as in the case of Lot and the men of Sodom, for example (Gen. 19.4-9), these should also be regarded as duologues, because the group of people is in fact a collective figure.

In two instances it is possible to distinguish separate voices

emerging from within a group of people participating in a conversation.¹ In one case, it is stated explicitly: in the book of Nehemiah (5.1-5) the cry of the people is reported, and the content of the cry is divided between several voices which the narrator precedes each time with the phrase: 'For there were those who said'. In the second instance, the separate voices are not noted explicitly, but it is possible to discern them intermingling with one another. Saul, who is searching for the lost asses, asks, 'Is the seer here?' and the maidens give him a very long and complicated answer containing unnecessary repetitions. The reader gains the impression that this is not one answer but many, given by different maidens, all trying to respond and supply information: 'He is. Behold, he is just ahead of you. Make haste; he has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place. As soon as you enter the city, you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice. Afterward those eat who are invited. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately' (1 Sam. 9.12-13). In spite of the separate voices the conversations in both cases must still be regarded as bilateral.

In the narrative of the Garden of Eden, after the fruit of the forbidden tree has been eaten, there is a conversation with four participants: God, the man, the woman and the snake (Gen. 3.8-19). This must be considered as a series of bilateral conversations, since God addresses each of the other three characters separately in succession, receiving an answer from only two of them.

The conversation between Hamor, Shechem and the sons of Jacob in the narrative of the rape of Dinah can perhaps be regarded as multilateral (Gen. 34.8-18). Jacob's sons appear here as a collective character (Jacob is present but does not participate in the conversation). Hamor starts by asking that Dinah be given to his son in marriage. Shechem speaks after him, promising to accept any demand provided Dinah is given to him. Finally the sons of Jacob speak, and their reply is intended for both Hamor and Shechem. Thus, there are three participants (one of them collective) in this conversation, two of whom belong to the same side and therefore obtain a common answer from the other side. There is, nevertheless, a certain difference between the words of Hamor and of Shechem.

1. S. Talmon, *Darkei Hasippur Bamikra* (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 45ff. (Hebrew).

Although their aim is the same (to obtain Dinah), their motives are different. Hamor, being the prince of the Hivites, speaks of establishing close ties between the two ethnic groups: 'Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. You shall dwell with us; and the land shall be open to you; dwell and trade in it, and get property in it' (vv. 9-10). Shechem's motives, on the other hand, are of a personal nature: 'Ask of me ever so much as marriage present and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; only give me the maiden to be my wife' (v. 12).

A genuine multilateral conversation takes place at one point in the narrative of Absalom's revolt (2 Sam. 19.19-23). There are three characters who participate: king David, Shimei the son of Gera and Abishai the son of Zeruiah. The first to speak is Shimei, who asks the king to forgive him for insulting him when he fled from Jerusalem. Then Abishai interrupts, stating that Shimei should be put to death for cursing the Lord's anointed. David first replies to Abishai, rebuking him: 'What have I do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me?' and then answers Shimei, giving him his oath: 'You shall not die'.

In several narratives the scenes are organized in such a way as to show the parallel, contrasting or sequential relations between them quite clearly. For example, in the story of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) the scenes are organized in the following way:

the snake and the woman	the woman and the man	and the man
GOD	GOD	and the woman
GOD and the snake		and the woman
GOD		
	GOD	and the man

This is a chiasmic and concentric structure² with a forward and

2. A distinction should be made between a ring or envelope structure (A...A), a concentric structure (A,B,x,B,A) and a chiasmic structure (A,B,B,A).

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backward motion: snake, woman, man—man, woman, snake, woman, man, indicating the continuity between the scenes. God appears five times, the woman four times, the man three times and the snake twice, reflecting the relative importance of the characters in this narrative. Nevertheless, the man's special importance is indicated by the fact that he is the first and the last character to whom God speaks.

In the first part the snake appears as the initiator, the woman as the link (tempted and tempter) and the man as objective. The reversed order of the second part fits the concept of measure for measure: the sin of eating gives rise to the punishment of eating ('In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread'), the woman's tempting of the man leads to the man's supremacy over the woman ('... and he shall rule over you'). Thus, the structure accords with the content, reinforcing its impact.

A different order of scenes is found in the story of Isaac's blessing (Gen. 27.1-28.5).³

(1) Isaac—Esau	(2) Rebekah—Jacob	(3) Isaac—Jacob
(4) Isaac—Esau	(5) Rebekah—Jacob	(6) Isaac—Jacob

The symmetrical construction is very apparent. Of the four characters in the narrative no more than two encounter one another at any one time, and although all are from the same family, they belong to two opposing camps: Isaac and Esau on one side, Rebekah and Jacob on the other (see also 25.28). In scenes 1 and 4 the members of one camp meet, in scenes 2 and 5 the members of the other, and only in scenes 3 and 6 do members of the opposing camps meet (the two principal contestants, Jacob and Esau, do not meet at all). Scene 3 is the cardinal one: at this point the tension reaches its height and Jacob obtains the blessing from his father. In scene 6 the conflict is resolved: Isaac and Jacob meet again, but this time in order to part, since by sending Jacob away from home the dangerous encounter between him and his brother rival will be avoided.

There is also symmetry in the order in which the parents and the sons appear. The parents appear according to the following order:

Isaac Rebekah Isaac	Isaac Rebekah Isaac
Esau Jacob Jacob	Esau Jacob Jacob

while the sons appear in this order:

3. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen, 1975), pp. 97ff.

Isaac is the dominant parent, but Rebekah enters the picture each time in order to arrange matters. Jacob appears twice as often as Esau, indicating that he gains the upper hand.

The construction of the scenes is not only symmetrical but also chiasitic:

- (1) Isaac—Esau
- (2) Rebekah—Jacob
- (3) Isaac—Jacob
- (4) Isaac—Esau
- (5) Rebekah—Jacob
- (6) Isaac—Jacob

In both the two central scenes, 3 and 4, Isaac encounters one of his sons and blesses him, and there is clearly a contrastive parallel between these two scenes. They are surrounded by scenes 2 and 5, in which the mother plans the steps of her favourite son. They, in turn, are encompassed by scenes 1 and 6, which open and close the series and in which Isaac sends his son out. There is a difference between the two, however, regarding which of the sons is sent and to what purpose. This difference embodies the development of the plot between the initial and final situations. In both these scenes, 1 and 6, Rebekah appears in a subordinate role, first listening to what Isaac says to Esau, and later advising Isaac about Jacob. The symmetrical structure reflects the family relationships: there are two parents and two sons, and each parent prefers a different son. The chiasitic structure accords with the reversal in the situation as a result of the switch (in the central scenes) between the two sons.

In the narrative of the birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 1.1-2.11) we find the following arrangement of scenes according to the conversations conducted within the narrative:

- (1) Elkanah—Hannah
- (2) Eli—Hannah (after Hannah's prayer)
- (3) Hannah—Elkanah
- (4) Hannah—Eli (before Hannah's prayer)

Once again the symmetrical construction is obvious, the events prior to Samuel's birth paralleling those after it. Before and after the birth Elkanah speaks to Hannah, his wife, on the first occasion, in order to console her for the fact that she has no son, and on the second, to give his assent to her remaining at home so as to tend to her son until he is weaned. Before and after the birth Hannah speaks to Eli, on the first occasion, in order to tell him that she has prayed for a son, and on the second, to present her baby to him. Hannah

prays twice to God, on the first occasion, to make a request, and on the second, to thank and praise Him. The similarity in form here emphasizes the difference in content caused by the birth of Samuel.

Since she is the central figure, Hannah appears in every scene, but while in the first two she is spoken to (Elkanah and Eli initiate the conversation), in the last two she is the one to start the exchange (she addresses Elkanah and Eli). This is another way of reflecting the shift in her situation. This change also explains the fact that on the first occasion Hannah's prayer precedes her conversation with Eli, while on the second her prayer occurs after she has talked to him, at the close of the scene.

A different construction is found in the narrative of the reconciliation between David and Absalom (2 Samuel 14), in which four characters participate: David, Absalom, Joab and the wise woman of Tekoa. There is a bitter conflict between David and Absalom, and Joab and the woman of Tekoa want to heal the rift and get the two to meet and make their peace with one another.

In this narrative also two characters appear in each scene:⁴

- (1) Joab—the woman of Tekoa
- (2) the woman of Tekoa—David
- (3) David—Joab
- (4) Joab—Absalom
- (5) Absalom—Joab
- (6) Joab—David
- (7) David—Absalom

What distinguishes this arrangement is the fact that the second figure in each pair is the first in the following one. The woman of Tekoa, who is the second figure in the first scene, is the first in the second scene; David, who is the second figure in the second scene, is the first in the third scene, and so on. The pinnacle is the last scene, when David and Absalom finally meet. Joab appears at the start of the series and in several other scenes, as fits his role as initiator of matters and mediator between father and son. A period of two years separates the fourth and the fifth scenes from one another. This is also the axis of the structure, since the same characters appear in scenes 4 and 5, and in scenes 3 and 6, and there is considerable similarity between scenes 2 and 7 (the woman of Tekoa represents

4. A. Schulz, *Erzählungskunst in den Samuel-Büchern* (Münster, 1923), p. 7.

Absalom's interests). In addition to the linear order, therefore, there is also a chiasmic order here:

- (2) The woman of Tekoa—David
- (3) David—Joab
- (4) Joab—Absalom
- (5) Absalom—Joab
- (6) Joab—David
- (7) David—Absalom

The chiasmic structure exists not only in the order of the scenes but also in the order in which the characters appear within each of the corresponding ones. To understand the significance of the chiasmic structure here attention should be paid to the fact that Absalom appears on both sides of the turning-point (4—5), being the second the first time and the first the second time. This means that from being manipulated he becomes a manipulator: Absalom, who was the object of the efforts to bring him back to Jerusalem, despite the fact that he was guilty of the murder of his brother, now becomes the one to initiate matters and make demands. Accordingly Joab, who was originally sent by David to Absalom, is now sent by Absalom to David. And just as at the beginning the woman of Tekoa got David to summon Joab to him (2—3), now Joab gets David to summon Absalom to him (6—7); in both cases the summons is the expression of the king's readiness to be reconciled (whether partially or fully) with his son.

In most of the narratives it is possible to discern different parts or blocks, which are somewhat similar to the acts in a play. The acts are sometimes delimited by the location of the incidents, and sometimes by the time at which they occur, each act taking place at a different time or place. For example, the narrative about Abraham's servant and Rebekah (Genesis 24) is clearly divided into two large acts, with a prelude and a conclusion. The prelude takes place in Abraham's house before the servant sets out on his journey, the conclusion in a field in the Negeb, when the servant returns with Rebekah; the two main acts take place in Mesopotamia, one beside the well and the other in Bethuel's home. The narrative of the war between Ahab, the king of Israel, and Ben-Haddad, the king of Syria (1 Kings 20), is divided into two main acts separated by the words: 'And it happened at the return of the year' (v. 26), indicating that a period of about a year separates one act from the other.

In many instances, however, the division into acts is based on the subject matter, namely, on the central topic in the various parts of the narrative (the division by subject matter often accords with the division by place or time). For example, the narrative of the revolt against Athaliah (2 Kings 11) consists of five acts dealing with the following subjects: 1. the slaying of all the members of the royal family, except for Joash, by Athaliah; 2. the preparation of the revolt by Jehoiada; 3. the implementation of the revolt and the proclamation of Joash as king; 4. the slaying of Athaliah; 5. the making of the covenant between the Lord, the king and the people.

The narrative of Jacob's dream (Genesis 28) comprises two acts.⁵ The first deals with Jacob's preparations for sleep and his dream, while the second relates his awakening and his reactions to the dream. There is a clear parallel between the two acts, which is made manifest by the use of the same words and roots:

- (11) And he happened upon a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.
- (12) And he dreamed that there was a ladder standing on the earth, and its head reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
- (13) And behold, the Lord stood upon it...
- (14) Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to me, and will keep me in place Bethel...
- (15) Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to me, and will keep me in place Bethel...
- (16) Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it'.
- (17) And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven'.
- (18) So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone which he had put under his head and put it up for a standing pillar and poured oil on its head.
- (19) He called the name of that place Bethel...
- (20) Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in place Bethel...

5. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen, 1975), pp. 46ff.

to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you.

(21) So that I *come back* to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.

(22) And this *stone*, which I have *put* up for a *standing* pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou givest me I will give a tenth to thee'.

What is hinted at by so many repetitions of words and roots in the two acts of the narrative? The word 'place' recurs three times in the first act, and three times in the second. As if by chance, Jacob happens on a *place* on his way from Beer-Sheba to Haran and decides to spend the night there. But after the revelation he recognizes and pronounces the *place* to be not just a place but the house of God, the gate of *heaven*, which should be called Bethel (House of God). In that place Jacob *took* a *stone*, just any stone, and *put* it under his head. Jacob *takes* the same *stone* in the second act and *puts* it up for a standing pillar, commemorating and symbolizing the ladder he saw in his dream. The ladder was *standing* on the earth, and the Lord *stood* upon it, and therefore Jacob puts the stone up as a *standing* pillar, vertical like the ladder, between heaven and earth.⁶ The *head* of the ladder reached to *heaven*, and therefore Jacob pours oil on the *head* of the stone-pillar which he had put under his *head*: here is the encounter between heaven and earth, between man and God.

God promised in the first part to be *with* him, to *keep* him wherever he went and to *bring him back* to this land, to which Jacob responds in the second part by making a vow that if God is *with* him, will *keep* him on the way in which he was going and *bring him back* in peace to his father's house, then the stone which he had put up for a standing pillar shall be God's house, and as a sign of his gratitude Jacob will give God a tenth of all that God gave him. Thus, there is

6. The words translated 'standing', 'stood' and 'standing pillar' are all of the same root in Hebrew.

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here a highly significant increase in the level of importance: the simple stone becomes first a pillar, and then the house of God.

The parallelism of the structure emphasizes that Jacob's actions are the counterpart of the appearance of God, and Jacob's vow echoes God's promise. God is the initiator, and man responds accordingly.

The narrative of the ten plagues (Exodus 7-12) is divided into ten acts (corresponding with the ten plagues) organized in the following way: 3/3/3/1.⁷

A	B	C
Blood	Murrain	Hail
Frogs	Pestilence	Locusts
Lice	Boils	Darkness
		Slaying of the Firstborn

For the first two plagues in each triad God instructs Moses to inform Pharaoh in advance, while for the third of each triad there is no prior notice. The command to inform Pharaoh in advance is worded in similar form each time:

First plague, Triad A: 'Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand there to meet him' (7.15).

First plague, Triad B: 'Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water' (8.20).

First plague, Triad C: 'Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh' (9.13).

Second plague, Triad A: 'Go in to Pharaoh and say to him' (8.1), without citing time or place.

Second plague, Triad B: 'Go in to Pharaoh and say to him' (9.1), also without citing time or place.

Second plague, Triad C: 'Go in to Pharaoh' (10.1), again without citing time or place.

As stated above, the third plague of each triad is not preceded by any warnings, and God tells Moses to act straightaway to bring it about.

7. M. Greenberg, 'The Redaction of the Plague Narrative in Exodus', *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (Baltimore and London, 1971), pp. 243-52.

In the first triad (in the first two plagues) the magicians of Egypt can do the same things by their secret arts as Moses and Aaron did.

In the second triad (in the first two plagues) the *discrimination* between Egypt and the Israelites is stated explicitly: 'But on that day I will set apart' (8.22), 'But the Lord will make a distinction' (9.4).

In the third triad (the first two plagues) the particular severity of each plague is stressed by the phrases: 'such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now' (9.18); 'such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation' (9.24); 'as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day' (10.6); 'such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been seen before, nor ever shall be again' (10.14).

What does this special structure express? Whereas the plagues in general are intended to show God's greatness and strength, while punishing Egypt, each triad is unique in the way this central idea is evinced.

The first triad presents God's greatness and power by confronting them with the art of the magicians of Egypt. Although they can bring the plagues too, they cannot dispel them. This idea is expressed explicitly in the third plague, when as a result of their failure the Egyptian magicians admit: 'This is the finger of God' (8.19).

In the second triad God's greatness is indicated by His ability to discriminate between the Israelites and the Egyptians: 'But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell' (8.22). Thus, God's control over the forces of nature is so complete that he can bring disaster to one part of the land while protecting another area nearby.

In the third triad God's immense power is reflected by the unparalleled potency of the plagues, the like of which had never been seen before. The concept of the discrimination between the Israelites and the Egyptians is also expressed in this triad, although without the use of the verb 'set apart': 'Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, there was no hail' (9.26); 'They did not see one another, nor did any rise from his place for three days; but all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt' (10.23).

The third triad is far longer than the first two, since each unit devoted to one plague is almost as long as the two parallel units in the

first two triads combined. The length corresponds with the increased severity of the plagues.

The tenth plague is the most serious of all. Its impact is the greatest and consequently the unit describing it is far longer than those devoted to the other plagues. This plague is brought about by God Himself through direct action (not through Moses): 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord' (12.12).

All the concepts mentioned in the previous triads appear in the tenth plague. Moses' supremacy over the magicians of Egypt is cited in the verse: 'The man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people' (11.3). Of this plague it is also said: 'such as there has never been, nor ever shall be again' (v. 6), and also: 'that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel' (v. 7). Thus, the tenth plague is the zenith in every respect, and this is reflected in the structure of the narrative.

A different structure occurs in the narrative of Elijah and Ahaziah, king of Israel (2 Kings 1), which is divided into three acts.

In the first act (vv. 2-8) it is reported in brief that Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber and lay sick and that he sent messengers to ask Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether he would recover from that sickness. In the second act (vv. 9-15) we are told that three times the king sends 'a captain of fifty with his fifty', while in the third act (vv. 16-17) Elijah stands before the king and delivers his message: 'Thus says the Lord, "Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron,—is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word—therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die"'.

The number three is very prominent in this narrative. In the second (middle) act we find three parallel events—each time a captain of fifty is sent to Elijah—but there is, nevertheless, some development between each one. The first captain of fifty commands Elijah: 'Come down'; the second commands: 'Come down quickly', while the third begs the man of God for his life, and succeeds in bringing him to the king. This development embodies the significance underlying this narrative structure: the power of the man of God is far greater than that of the king and his cohorts. Nothing can be

achieved by means of commands based on display of military strength. The use of stronger language is of no avail either, and all the soldiers lose their lives. The only approach which achieves anything is that of request or entreaty, signifying recognition of the supremacy of the man of God.

Three times—twice in the first act and once in the third act—it is said: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel. . . Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die'. We first hear these words, which are intended for the king, when the angel of God transmits them to Elijah, then when they are conveyed to the king by his messengers, who heard them from Elijah, and the third time when Elijah himself communicates them to the king. This triple repetition focuses attention on this prophecy, stressing its role as the main point of the narrative. (Further emphasis of the prophecy is achieved in the narrative by other stylistic devices: putting the first part as a rhetorical question: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel?'; phrasing the second part as a disjunctive clause: 'From the bed to which you have gone you shall not come down';⁸ and the metonymic-concrete portrayal of falling sick as going (up) to a bed and of being healed as coming down from it.)

The structure of the acts in the narrative of Job displays conspicuous symmetry. The introduction, giving details of the protagonist (1.1-5), precedes a scene in heaven, consisting of a conversation between God and Satan (1.6-12); this is followed by a scene on earth, dealing with the disasters which befall Job and his reaction to them (1.13-22); after this there is another scene in heaven, comprising an additional conversation between God and Satan (2.1-6); this is succeeded in turn by a further scene on earth, once again concerning a disaster which afflicts Job and his reaction to it (2.7-10); and finally, we are told about the appearance of Job's three friends, bringing the prologue to an end.

Similar symmetry is found in the act depicting the four disasters. The first and third calamities are caused by man (the Sabeans and the Chaldeans), while the second and fourth are caused by nature (fire from heaven and a great wind). Several expressions recur three or four times: 'and I alone have escaped to tell you'; 'While he was

8. Literally: 'The bed to which you have gone up, you shall not come down from it'.

yet speaking, there came another. . . ' The cumulative effect of the disasters is expressed through these repetitions: each tragedy follows hard on the heels of the other, the blows fall in rapid succession, and there is no relaxation or opportunity to recover. The fourth calamity is the worst of all: in each instance, 'the young people' (*hamm'ārām*) are killed, but whereas in the first three they are Job's servants, in the fourth they are his children.

The second scene in heaven is very similar to the first as regards both content and language. This similarity, however, merely emphasizes the difference, since on the first occasion Satan obtains permission to harm anything that belongs to Job but not Job himself, while on the second Satan is given license to injure Job too, though not to take his life. This is a clear case of intensification. The fifth affliction, which affects Job's body, is considered to be worse than the previous four, which affected his property and his family.

There is also a parallel between what is said about Job's reactions at the end of the two acts concerning the catastrophes. On the first occasion the narrator says: 'In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong' (1.22); and the second time he says: 'In all this Job did not sin with his lips' (2.10). Once again, the similarity emphasizes the difference. Not only are the words 'or charge God with wrong' omitted on the second occasion, thereby weakening the statement about Job's firm stand, but the expression 'with his lips' is added. If it is said that Job did not sin with his lips, should this be regarded as a hint that he harboured sinful thoughts in his heart?⁹ This interpretation is supported by the fact that the Job narrative distinguishes between sinning in one's heart and sinning with one's lips, as is indicated by 1.5: 'For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts"'. It can, therefore, be said that despite the obvious parallels, there are evident differences which indicate significant development.

Sometimes the relation between the acts of the narrative is not a parallel or intensificatory-parallel one, as in the previous examples, but a contrastive one. The narrative of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11.1-9), for example, consists of two acts, constructed in such a way as to contrast with one another. In the first (vv. 1-4) the people act, while in the second (vv. 5-9) God acts. In the first, the people wish to build a city and a tower reaching up to heaven, while in the second God

9. *Bab. Talmud, Baba Batra*, 16a and also the Targum.

descends to earth in order to see the city and the tower. In the first, there is unity of language, and the people wish to preserve their unity by dwelling in the same place, while in the second God confuses their language and scatters them throughout the earth. This construction of the narrative is emphasized by the fact that the same words and roots are used in both acts:¹⁰

One language and few words	One people and one language
Let us . . . let us	Let us
Build	And they left off building
Make a name	Its name was called Babel
Lest we be scattered abroad upon	He scattered them abroad over
the face of the whole earth	the face of all the earth

This structure supports the content of the narrative, dealing as it does with action and counteraction while at the same time bringing into prominence the immense difference between the two sides, man and God.

There is also a contrastive structure between the two central acts in the narrative of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). In these acts the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, held on the basis of equal conditions, is presented: 'Let two bulls be given to us; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; and I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, and put no fire to it. And you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord' (vv. 23-24). The parallel is also evident in the implementation (vv. 26-37):

And they took the bull . . . and they prepared it	And he cut the bull in pieces
And they called on the name of Baal	And he said: 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel
'O Baal, answer us'	Answer me, O Lord, answer me
For he is a god	Thou, O Lord, art God'

This parallel, however, merely stresses the contrast. For whereas in the act depicting the prophets of Baal (vv. 26-29) 450 people participate, in the corresponding act Elijah is on his own. And whereas the prophets of Baal use a variety of devices in order to

10. M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin, 1936), pp. 214-17.

attain their aim, calling on the name of Baal from morning until noon, limping about the altar, even cutting themselves with swords and lances until they bleed, Elijah simply makes one short prayer. Nevertheless, the prophets of Baal are not answered, while Elijah is. This, after all, was the object of the entire 'contest': 'The God who answers by fire, he is God' (v. 24).

There are additional differences between the two contrastively parallel acts. Not only can the prophets of Baal choose the bull they prefer, but Elijah also gives instructions to pour a large amount of water on his burnt offering and on the wood until even the trench around the altar is full. Nevertheless, the fire which descends at Elijah's request is so powerful that it consumes not only the burnt offering and the wood but also the stones, the dust and the water in the trench. In this way the omnipotence and undeniable supremacy of God is offset against Baal's ineffectualness.

B. The Stages of the Plot

The situation existing at the beginning of the action is presented in what is usually called the exposition. This serves as an introduction to the action described in the narrative, supplying the background information, introducing the characters, informing us of their names, traits, physical appearance, state in life and the relations obtaining among them, and providing the other details needed for understanding the story.

In many cases it is unnecessary to communicate preliminary information of this kind, since the facts serving as background to the story are known to the audience. This is probably the reason why background information that seems indispensable to the present-day reader is often lacking in biblical narratives. The reader or listener in biblical times could draw the background material from the traditions known to him about persons and events from the past, or even from the realities of his own life and culture, whereas the contemporary reader often encounters serious difficulties in understanding the story precisely because this information is absent.

In some cases the facts cited in the exposition, or the way they are presented, hint at later developments in the plot. For example, at the beginning of the narrative of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), the two protagonists are introduced to the reader and information is given about them in chiasmic fashion:

And she conceived and bore *Cain*

And again, she bore his brother *Abel*

Now *Abel* was a keeper of sheep

And *Cain* was a tiller of the ground

This structure hints at the contrast and conflict between the two brothers, which is immediately made clear in the verses which follow, also arranged chiasmatically:

Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground

And *Abel* brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat

portions

And the Lord had regard for *Abel* and his offering

But for *Cain* and his offering he had no regard.

Eli's two sons are mentioned at the beginning of the narrative of the birth of Samuel, though they play no part in the actual narrative: 'Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord' (1 Sam. 1.3). The fact that Eli's two sons are mentioned at this point appears to indicate that Samuel, whose birth is recounted in this narrative, will eventually take their place, and that it is he, not they, who will inherit Eli's position. This is proved in the following chapter (2), when the decline of Eli's sons is recounted *alternately* with Samuel's ascent.

There are two basic methods in organizing narratives for bringing expository material to the reader's knowledge. One is to concentrate all preliminary information at the beginning, and the other is to reveal it gradually in the course of the narrative. For although the expository information refers to the situation existing at the outset of the action, or even to previous events, it is by no means necessary to locate it at the beginning of the narrative. Both methods are represented in biblical narrative. When deferred to later phases, the expository information may be disseminated either directly by the narrator or indirectly by means of the characters.

An example of background information about the setting which is placed at the beginning is found in the narrative of Jacob and Rachel: 'for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place upon the mouth of the well' (Gen. 29.2-3).

Another example occurs in the narrative of the conquest of Jericho: 'Now Jericho was shut up from within and from without because of the people of Israel; none went out and none came in' (Josh. 6.1).

Again, in the narrative of Saul and the medium at Endor: 'Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the wizards out of the land' (1 Sam. 28.3).

In many instances the characters are introduced at the beginning of the narrative:

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar (Gen. 16.1).

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. And Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when his wife's sons grew up, they thrust Jephthah out, and said to him: 'You shall not inherit in our father's house: for you are the son of another woman'. Then Jephthah fled from his brothers, and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows collected round Jephthah, and went raiding with him (Judg. 11.1-3).

There was a certain man of Ramathaim-Zophim of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children (1 Sam. 1.1-2).

There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth; and he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he, from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people (1 Sam. 9.1-2).

And there was a man in Maon, whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was of good understanding and beautiful, but the man was churlish and ill-behaved; he was a Calebite (1 Sam. 25.2-3).

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned

away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred she-asses, and very many servants; so that the man was the greatest of all the people of the east (Job 1.1-3).

It might perhaps be claimed that in the instance of Jephthah the verses recounting his being thrust out by his brothers, his fleeing to the land of Tob and his going out raiding with the worthless fellows who had collected round him belong less to the exposition than to the part of the narrative dealing with the action proper. This contention could be based on the fact that these verses do not contain elementary information about the initial situation, but refer to specific happenings and even include direct speech ('You shall not inherit in our father's house; for you are the son of another woman'). Nevertheless, the verses under consideration do in fact constitute part of the exposition, because the events of Jephthah's past mentioned in them do not appertain to the subject treated in the narrative, which is Jephthah's victory over the Ammonites. In this instance, moreover, the exposition is also clearly marked off from the main part of the narrative by the phrase *wayhî miyyāmim* ('After a time', or more literally, 'It was after many days'), just as in the case of Job the delimitation of the exposition is indicated in a formal way by the phrase *wayhî hayyôm* ('Now there was a day').

In view of the well-known economy of expression characteristic of biblical narrative, however, and the tendency to include only essential details, the question arises—why are events from Jephthah's past mentioned in the exposition? The answer seems to be that in this way the plight of the people and leaders of Gilead is emphasized. The elders of Gilead appear to be in such a precarious position that they have to beseech a man who is the son of a harlot, who has been driven out of his home and has become chief of a band of worthless fellows, to lead the war against the Ammonites. They even have to promise the outcast to make him head and leader of the people of Gilead. By stressing the almost hopeless situation at the outset, the subsequent victory, or God's act of deliverance, is made more glorious and impressive.

It should be emphasized that in general no information is included in the exposition which does not have a definite function in the development of the action (with the exception perhaps of the

genealogies, which seem unimportant to us but were of considerable significance to the people in biblical times).

For instance, in the last two examples (Nabal and Job), the material circumstances of the heroes are described in some detail. In the case of Nabal his great wealth makes his parsimony and inhospitality to David and his men stand out more conspicuously. In this connection attention should be paid to the way the facts are organized within the exposition. It is evident from the examples given above that a more or less similar pattern is often found, consisting of an opening phrase such as 'there was a man', followed by details concerning his dwelling-place or tribe, his name and finally his traits, family, possessions, etc. Not all these details are always given, but the order in which they are arranged is generally invariable. In the case of Nabal, however, the order is different. Details about his property come before his name (and the name of his wife and their traits). Nabal's wealth is probably given pride of place in order to hint at its significance for the central theme.

In the case of Job the description of his vast property has a dual function: on the one hand, his possessions should be regarded as a reward for his righteousness, according to the doctrine of retribution, while on the other, the loss of all his possessions in one day serves as a test of his virtue. The reference to Job's seven sons and three daughters also fulfils a twofold purpose: first they are regarded as Job's reward and subsequently they are the instrument of his trial. In the exposition concerning Nabal no sons or daughters are mentioned because they have no function in the action of the story.

It should also be noted that in most cases where details concerning characters or background are communicated at the beginning of the narrative, they connect *immediately* and organically with the account of the events themselves. In other words, there is a direct and smooth transition from the exposition to that part of the narrative which is concerned with the actual developments.

For instance, following the information in the exposition that Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children and that she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar, it is stated immediately: 'And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid, it may be that I shall obtain children by her"' (Gen. 16.2).

Similarly, immediately after informing us that a man of Benjamin named Kish had an excellent son whose name was Saul, the narrator

continues: 'Now the asses of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, "Take one of the servants with you and arise, go and look for the asses"' (1 Sam. 9.3).

The information included in the exposition at the beginning of the narrative thus serves as a natural point of departure for the action itself. Instances such as the one mentioned above, where we learn at the beginning of the narrative of Saul and the medium of Endor, that Samuel had died and that Saul had put the mediums and the wizards out of the land (1 Sam. 28.3), are exceptions to the rule, because here the exposition is followed by many facts concerning the action which have no direct bearing on either Samuel's death or the fact that the mediums and wizards were put out of the land. Only at a later point in the narrative are we informed that Saul himself had recourse to a medium, requesting her to conjure up Samuel, and that she replied: 'Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the wizards from the land' (1 Sam. 28.9).

We are informed twice of the fact that Saul cut off the mediums and the wizards from the land, once by the narrator in the exposition and once by the medium, resulting in redundancy (Samuel's death is also recorded twice, here and in 25.1). Repetitions of this kind occur quite often in biblical narrative. It is indeed rare for information that does not occur in the main part of the story to be included in the exposition. In most cases details concerning characters and background which appeared in the exposition at the beginning are reiterated in the body of the narrative, mentioned by either the author or one of the characters.

What is the object of these repetitions? There is no single answer to this question and each instance should be examined on its merits. In many cases, however, the repetition serves to stress some matter of importance in the story. The double reference to Saul's removal of the mediums and wizards from the land, in the example under consideration, brings into focus the sharp contrast between Saul's act in the past and his present undertaking, when he secretly makes use of the services of a medium himself. The contrast points up the desperate condition in which Saul finds himself and the steep decline in his fortunes.¹¹

Information contained in the exposition is also repeated in the

11. M. Weiss, 'The Craft of Biblical Narrative', *Molad* (1962), pp. 169-70 (Hebrew).

narrative of Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29). The narrator informs us at the outset that only when all the flocks had been gathered would the stone be rolled away from the mouth of the well to water the sheep. The same is recounted by the shepherds themselves: 'We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep' (Gen. 29.8).

Here, too, the repetition serves to draw the reader's attention to an important point. Immediately after the shepherds' words we are told: 'When Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother' (Gen. 29.10). It is stated three times that Laban is his mother's brother, implying that it was Jacob's love for his mother's relatives (the very close relationship between Jacob and his mother is made clear more than once in the previous chapters) that caused him to go up and roll the stone single-handed from the mouth of the well.

Thus, it can be concluded that rather than supplying knowledge required for understanding the story—which is also usually conveyed in subsequent sections of the narrative—the information in the exposition frequently serves to emphasize matters of importance or to hint at implied meanings.

As stated above, information about the characters and the background may be communicated in the body of the narrative only, as is the case in a great many instances.

In the narrative of the wooing of Rebekah (Genesis 24), for example, we make Rebekah's acquaintance not at the beginning but only when she appears near the well where Abraham's servant is stationed. The moment the servant sees her she is introduced by the narrator: 'behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar upon her shoulder. The maiden was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known' (Gen. 24.15-16).

This method of presenting characters is similar to the way we get to know people in real life. We sometimes obtain preliminary information about people before we actually meet them (corresponding to the exposition at the *beginning* of the narrative), but in most cases we learn about them through having direct contact with them. 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.

Thus, the narrator informs us that Eglon, the king of Moab, was a very fat man at the precise moment that Ehud, the son of Gera, who had come to present the tribute, saw him and observed his physical appearance (Judg. 3.17). We hear that there was peace between Jabin, the king of Hazor, and the house of Heber the Kenite at the point in the narrative when we are told that Sisera fled to the tent of Jael, Heber's wife. We understand from this that Sisera had no reason to fear or suspect Jael (Judg. 4.17).

Similarly, only after Saul's death do we learn that he had a concubine named Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, when Ishbosheth, Saul's son, reproaches Abner, the commander of the army, for having gone in to his father's concubine (2 Sam. 3.7). As a result of this rebuke Abner decides to go over to David and transfer Saul's entire kingdom to him.

In the narrative of David and Bathsheba the new characters are not introduced at the beginning either. We meet them in the course of the story, at the same time that David does. As a result of this technique we see Bathsheba at the same moment that David first catches sight of her and we realize that she is beautiful together with David: 'he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful' (2 Sam. 11.2). The word order here corresponds with the order of the process of perception: first David sees a woman bathing, and then discovers that she is very beautiful. This does not mean that Bathsheba is beautiful only in David's subjective view. The narrator tells us about Bathsheba's beauty as an objective fact, but we become aware of it together with David and through his eyes.

This also applies to the woman's name. Her identity is a mystery to us, as it is to David observing her from his roof. Only when her name is revealed to David does it become known to us: 'And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said: "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"' (2 Sam. 11.3). The anonymous servant who tells David of her identity and family relations gives us the information at the same time.

This technique fits in with the overall design of the narrative, in which Bathsheba has no status of her own, performs no actions and

does not take part in any conversations. In fact, she does not speak at all, except for the two words *hārâ ʾinokî* ('I am with child'), which are important to David no less than to her. She is completely passive and her feelings are not described, whether directly or indirectly. Contrary to Hannah and Abigail, who are introduced at the beginning of the narratives concerning them (1 Samuel 1 and 25), Bathsheba does not attain independence or assume importance in her own right in this narrative, any more than do Eglon or Saul's concubine in the instances just mentioned.

In many cases a combination of the two methods is used: part of the information about the characters and the background is imparted at the beginning and part at later stages of the narrative.

In the narrative of Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29) the narrator informs us at the beginning that only when all the flocks were gathered would the shepherds roll the stone from the mouth of the well (vv. 2-3). Rachel, who plays a passive role in this story, is introduced only in the course of the narrative, when she comes to the well with her father's sheep and is seen by Jacob (vv. 9-10). The narrator does not tell us that she is beautiful when she first appears, stating only that she is the daughter of Jacob's mother's brother. Consequently, it is not her beauty that inspires Jacob to roll the stone away from the well single-handed but, as noted above, the fact that she is a relative of his mother's. Rachel's beauty is mentioned only when Jacob asks for her hand and expresses his willingness to serve seven years for her. The reference to her beauty at this point explains why Jacob fell in love with Rachel and not with her sister Leah, whose eyes were weak (vv. 17-18).

In the narrative about Samuel's call (1 Samuel 3) we are informed at the beginning: 'The word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision' (v. 1). Afterwards it is stated that: 'Samuel did not yet know the Lord and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him' (v. 7). In this instance the narrator gives us general background information at the beginning of the narrative and specific background information later on. The general information serves to explain why neither Samuel nor Eli understood that the voice calling Samuel was the voice of the Lord. The specific information clarifies why Samuel did not understand even the third time that it was the Lord, not Eli, who had called him (whereas Eli understood by this time), and that is why the information is located at this point, between God's second and third call to Samuel.

The narrative of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) has two distinct blocks of exposition. The first is located at the outset and provides general background information about the battle between Israel and the Philistines, particularly as regards the geographical and topographical positions of the two hostile camps. This block passes quickly into a detailed description of Goliath and his arms.

The second block of exposition, introducing David and his family is placed after the account of Goliath's insulting challenge and the panic it aroused in the camp of Israel. It has often been observed that this introduction is largely superfluous, since we have already made David's acquaintance in the previous chapter, where his physical appearance is described at the very moment that Samuel sees him for the first time (1 Sam. 16.12) and in approximately the same terms as are used at the point when Goliath catches sight of him (1 Sam. 17.42). This redundant introduction of David (which is missing in codex B of the Septuagint) is usually explained as being due to the fact that the narrative about David and Goliath in chapter 17 was originally independent of the stories in chapter 16 concerning David's anointing and his entering Saul's service in a musical and military capacity.

The problem which concerns us here, however, is a different one. Assuming that the narrative of David and Goliath was indeed originally independent and that it was therefore necessary to include an introduction of David in it, the question arises why this was not placed at the beginning. According to the present arrangement, there is an abrupt break in the thread of the narrative at the conclusion of the passage dealing with Goliath (v. 11), and a new start is made when David and his family are introduced. This break could easily have been avoided. It would have been far more 'natural' and the transitions much smoother if the narrative had started with the necessary expositional information about the protagonist, his father and his three elder brothers who followed Saul to battle, had continued with Jesse's instruction to take a supply of food to his brothers in the army, and had told about Goliath, his physical appearance, military equipment and challenge to Israel only at the moment when he was seen by David, who had come to find his brothers in the Israelite camp.

What is gained by the way the narrative material is arranged, though at the expense of the smooth and uninterrupted flow of the story, is that the frightening and paralysing effect of Goliath's

appearance is presented in a much bolder and impressive way. This is achieved because Goliath's appearance is the first topic treated both extensively and as a primary and independent subject, and not as something subsidiary to David's performance (as in vv. 23ff.). Moreover, by placing the description of Goliath at the beginning and delaying the introduction of David to a later stage, the reader is kept aware of the tense situation for a relatively long stretch of narration time, and is made to sense the persisting atmosphere of panic and powerlessness among the Israelites, until the hero, who is to fight the terrifying enemy, finally appears on the scene.

The same purpose, namely, keeping the reader constantly aware of the threat posed by Goliath, is also served by verse 16, which is effective because of the combination of its content and its position in the text. This verse crops up rather unexpectedly in the middle of the passage devoted to David and his family, or to be more precise, between the exposition and the beginning of the action concerning David and his relatives. It informs us that: 'For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening'.

This presentation of Goliath and his impact upon Israel is clearly intended to enhance David's triumph over the Philistine champion.

Thus, in several instances expositional information is placed at the beginning of the narrative; when this is so, the information is usually repeated in one way or another during the course of the story, with the result that a certain point receives emphasis. In some cases the information is imparted only during the unfolding of the story, at the natural point in the development of the plot, in which case it may refer to a passive or minor character. In a number of instances, moreover, part of the information is conveyed at the beginning and part in the course of the narrative, in accordance with the function it has to perform in each particular case.

The plot develops from an initial situation through a chain of events to a central occurrence, which is the prime factor of change, and thence by means of varying incidents to a final situation. If we were to sketch the line connecting these two situations, with its ups and downs, we would have a graphic depiction of the plot.

We usually find the classic pattern in biblical narrative: the plot line ascends from a calm point of departure through the stage of involvement to the climax of conflict and tension, and from there rapidly to the finishing point and tranquillity. This line of development is found, amongst other places, in the narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22).

This narrative begins by posing the question which constitutes the basis of the tension. The narrator informs us that God is testing Abraham, and the reader begins to wonder whether Abraham will pass this difficult trial and whether he will sacrifice his only son, born to him after so many years of waiting. The narrative gradually brings the reader to the climactic point. First we are told about Abraham's preparations for sacrificing his son, how he sets out on his journey and all that happens until he reaches the designated spot. Here the narrator relates in detail everything Abraham does in order to fulfil the divine command: he builds the altar, arranges the wood, binds Isaac and places him on the wood. The narrative reaches its peak when Abraham puts out his hand and takes the knife in order to slay his son. The turning point comes at the very moment that the tension reaches its height: an angel of the Lord calls to Abraham from heaven, and at the very last moment the terrible deed is prevented. From here the line of the plot descends rapidly. Abraham hears the angel's reassuring words, sees a ram and sacrifices that instead of his son, and after the angel speaks to him again, Abraham returns to his young men and they all go home together. Everything appears to be the same as before, but as a matter of fact a very great change has occurred, though it is an internal one: Abraham has actually come through an extremely difficult test, having proved his readiness to sacrifice his dearest treasure to God, and this makes the final situation completely different from the initial one.

The plot of the book of Esther is far longer and more complicated than that of the sacrifice of Isaac. At the centre of the Esther narrative is the clash between the two opponents, Mordecai and Haman. Haman decides to kill all the Jews in the kingdom and obtains the king's agreement for this, while Mordecai attempts to avert the disaster with Esther's help. The conflict between the two rivals will reach its peak, it is to be expected, at the banquet which Esther has arranged. The decision is postponed, however. Haman erects the gallows on which he intends to hang Mordecai and the tension increases. The turning point occurs at the second banquet, when the king grows angry with Haman and orders him to be hanged. Esther is given Haman's house, Mordecai is appointed the king's minister instead of Haman and the Jews are given license to smite their enemies.

The book of Esther contains a sub-plot alongside the main one. After Esther has been made queen and before Haman is appointed

minister to the king, Mordecai discloses to Ahasuerus that two of his eunuchs have been plotting to assassinate the king, and this is recorded in the book of chronicles. On the night between the first and the second banquets the book is read to the king, who commands that Mordecai be honoured and that Haman be the one to implement this. The great honour done to Mordecai, and the humiliation of Haman this involves, take place shortly before the turning-point in the main plot and both presage and reinforce it. This turning-point is the central issue of the plot of the book of Esther.

In both the examples given above the pattern of the plot is characterized not only by a line which ascends to the decisive point and descends from it rapidly, but also by a turning point in the development of the plot, occurring at the place where the tension reaches its height. These changes of direction in the plot are not rare in biblical narrative.

For example, in the narrative of Jacob's return home after working for Laban for twenty years (Genesis 31-33), emphasis is placed on the fact that Jacob is very apprehensive at meeting Esau because of the deception he used in the past in order to obtain Isaac's blessing. Esau wanted to kill him then (27.41) and Jacob was forced to flee abroad. While he is returning, Jacob hears that Esau is coming towards him with four hundred men, and he is so terror-stricken that he decides to divide all his belongings into two camps, for: 'If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company which is left will escape' (Gen. 32.8). Jacob also prays to God to save him from his brother, as well as sending many flocks to him as a present, leaving a space between each flock, in the hope that Esau's anger will be assuaged before the encounter with Jacob. Despite all these actions, Jacob is extremely anxious on the last night before the meeting, as is evident from the episode of his struggle with a man till dawn. In the morning Jacob sees Esau coming with the four hundred men and, fearing the worst, also divides his wives and children into two camps. Then he approaches Esau, bowing himself to the ground seven times as he does so. At the crucial moment Esau runs towards him, but, contrary to expectations, falls on Jacob's neck and embraces and kisses him (33.4). It transpires that Esau no longer harbours resentment and the brothers are reconciled.

Another example of a turning point of this kind can be found in the narrative of David and Abigail (1 Samuel 25). David, angered by Nabal's reply, sets out with four hundred armed men in order to

attack Nabal. Abigail, Nabal's wife, goes out to meet David in an attempt to prevent him from wreaking his vengeance, bearing many gifts. Just before the decisive meeting the narrator returns to David and tells us his thoughts: 'Now David had said, "Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him"' (vv. 21-22). 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. 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.

Another structural feature of several biblical narratives which determines the pattern of the plot is that of the illusory conclusion. In contrast to the previous examples, where the story line gradually rises to a climax and then descends rapidly to the serene conclusion, here the narrative does not end after the gradual ascent and the rapid decline but rises once more to another pinnacle, only then descending to the genuine conclusion.

A structure of this kind can be found in the narrative of Isaac's blessing (Genesis 27). Jacob pretends to be Esau in order to obtain his father's blessing, and the question is, will his deception succeed or will it be discovered? The uncertainty on this point is the primary cause of suspense in this narrative. Jacob himself expresses this uncertainty already at the planning stage: 'Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing' (v. 12). The tension rises when Jacob goes to his father and says hesitantly: 'My father' (v. 18). It is further heightened when Isaac asks him: 'Who are you, my son?' and Jacob answers with a blatant lie: 'I am Esau your first-born' (v. 19). The suspense increases even more when Isaac expresses surprise that his son has returned from hunting so quickly, and reaches its peak when Isaac feels his son in order to ascertain: 'Are you really my son Esau or not?' (v. 21). After the physical examination at close quarters has not resulted in the deception being discovered (even though the voice arouses Isaac's suspicions), and particularly after Isaac has given

Jacob the desired blessing, the tension drops and tranquillity is achieved. But the narrative does not end here. No sooner has Jacob gone out than Esau enters, and the suspense increases once more. Calmness is achieved again only after Jacob has left home and physical distance has been established between the brothers. Complete serenity, however, is attained only after the final reconciliation between Jacob and Esau, twenty years later.

A similar line of development with a renewed ascent after the descent to the point of calmness can also be found in the book of Job. The tension in this narrative derives from the uncertainty as to whether Job will pass the trial. The suspense reaches its height with the reports of the four calamities which befall him, especially the last one (the death of all his children at one fell swoop). Job's response, indicating his firm stand and continuing righteousness, leads us to the point of relaxation (end of chapter 1). At this point, with the proof that Job has preserved his integrity, the narrative could come to an end. The plot flares up again, however, when an additional disaster overtakes Job. Once again he emerges successfully from his trial, but the final tranquillity is not attained until the last chapter of the book, when God restores Job's fortunes, giving him twice as much as he had beforehand (42.10).

On occasions the plot of biblical narratives is built in such a way as to create ironic situations. This is dramatic irony, which derives from the fact that the character knows less than the reader, or unknowingly does things which are not in his or her own best interests, or from the course of events leading to results which are the reverse of the character's aspirations.

Irony is sometimes embodied in an event and sometimes in an utterance of one of the characters. Even when it is spoken, however, we are not dealing with verbal irony here (for verbal irony see below, p. 210), since the ironic expression is used knowingly and with forethought and the individual concerned is not aware of the irony of what he or she says. The character speaks in all innocence, while the author, who is after all responsible for the way the character phrases the words, gives them an ironic flavour.

Dramatic irony has a variety of functions, such as expressing criticism, stressing a shocking event or emphasizing a tragic situation, to name but a few. Dramatic irony sometimes serves as a vehicle for the view that justice rules the world and that everyone receives just deserts, in contrast to the distorted view held by the character concerned.

To illustrate this, examples of dramatic irony will be given from three narratives: David and Bathsheba,¹² Absalom's revolt and the story of Esther.

When Uriah answers David's question: 'Why did you not go down to your house?' by saying: 'The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live and as your soul lives, I shall not do this thing!' (2 Sam. 11.11), he is not aware of the ironic sting in his words (assuming that Uriah does not know what happened between his wife and David while he was absent from Jerusalem). To all intents and purposes Uriah simply compares his conditions with those of his comrades in the field, declaring that he will not enjoy any privilege which they cannot share. The sting, however, lies in the fact that an implicit comparison is made between his behaviour and David's. Uriah asserts that he will not go to lie with his wife, and that is precisely what David has been doing! The emphasis of the personal pronoun in the Hebrew ('Shall I then go') implies: *I* will not go to lie with my wife, but *you* lay with my wife. What David did is, of course, far more serious than what Uriah refuses to do, because Uriah does not wish to lie with his own wife, while David lay with Uriah's.

The reader senses the additional (ironic) meaning in what Uriah says because of the many ways his words are emphasized. First of all, Uriah's refusal is stated not once but twice. Secondly, on the first occasion it is expressed not as a declarative sentence but as a rhetorical question, which is a clearly emphatic device. Thirdly, the second time the refusal is phrased as an oath, which is another way of reinforcing its content.

Uriah uses the phrase 'this thing', which is vague and ambiguous, and because of its indefinite nature both denotes the deed which Uriah will not do—the 'thing' which is mentioned explicitly—and hints at what David actually did, the 'thing' which is implied (cf. vv. 25, 27). The subtle irony reaches its zenith when Uriah swears by David's life, namely, by the life of the man who did just what he will not do. It is true that it was quite common to swear by the king's life,

12. M. Perry and M. Sternberg, 'The King through Ironic Eyes—The Narrator's Devices in the Story of David and Bathsheba and Two Excursions on the Theory of Narrative Text', *Hasifrut* 1 (1968/69) (Hebrew).

but David's life is mentioned here twice: 'As you live, and as your soul lives...' and this double expression is unique in the Bible, drawing our attention to the irony of Uriah's oath.

It is also ironic that it is by his honesty and adherence to his principles, his lord and his comrades that Uriah brings about his own undoing. The fact that Uriah is the bearer of his own death-warrant is particularly poignant in its irony. It is also ironic that the king's wrath at the great number of his servants killed in the battle at Rabbah of the Ammonites can be assuaged by the news that his servant Uriah the Hittite is also among the dead. It would be thought that information of this kind would depress someone's spirits still more.

In all these instances the irony serves to give prominence to David's culpability. David is guilty of having sentenced Uriah to die because of his loyalty, of having made him the bearer of his own death-warrant and of allowing his anger to be mollified by the news of Uriah's death. The irony seems to indicate that not only did David sin, but that he did it with unmitigated cynicism.

A distinctly ironic situation is also created when David unknowingly passes sentence on himself when he thinks that he is condemning the rich man who, according to the prophet Nathan, took the poor man's ewe-lamb away from him (2 Sam. 12.5-6).

We also find several instances of irony in the narrative of Absalom's revolt. Absalom asks for David's permission to go to Hebron to pay his vow, and David's reply: 'Go in peace' (2 Sam. 15.9) certainly has no ironic intent. There is irony in it, nevertheless, because Absalom's designs are by no means peaceful, and because the outcome of that journey is not peace but disaster, for both David and Absalom. These are, in fact, the last words David ever says to Absalom. In this case, too, the irony serves to express concealed and indirect criticism. David does not know that Absalom's intentions are not peaceful, but should he not have known? Should not the king have suspected his son, who had made himself a chariot and horses and fifty men to run before him, and who for years had risen early and stood by the way of the gate in order to steal the allegiance of anyone coming to the king for justice? David's naïvety and lack of insight into Absalom's character are simply astonishing here, just as they were on a previous occasion, when Absalom planned his revenge on Amnon for several years and David remained blithely unaware. On that occasion, too, David agreed to Absalom's request

to let Amnon go with him, and then also blessed him before he went (13.25-27).

In the last examples irony serves to stress the *extent* of the disaster as well as to criticize. The function of the irony in 2 Sam. 18.27 is also to give prominence to the depth of the tragedy: 'And the watchman said, "I think the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok"'. And the king said, "He is a good man, and comes with good tidings"'. A few minutes later it transpires that the 'good tidings' are the news of his son's death.

Ahimaaz does in fact bring good tidings. He begins by saying, 'All is well', and then goes on to report: 'The Lord. . . has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king' (v. 28), and he is not the one to tell the king that his son is dead. There is evident irony here, because the news of Absalom's death, which is brought immediately afterwards by the Cushite, completely overshadows Ahimaaz' information about the victory in battle. The good news simply momentarily postpones the bad, which is the main point as far as David is concerned. The fact that first good tidings are delivered heightens the irony, since for an instant it seems that David's expectations were justified. The crucial, bad news also casts an ironic light on Ahimaaz' first words 'All is well', which appear to confirm David's anticipation of good tidings (though Ahimaaz himself had no intention of speaking ironically). In this instance the irony is far more subtle than in the similar one in 1 Kgs 1.42: 'And Adonijah said, "Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news"', where an immediate and obvious contrast is created between the expected good tidings and the bad news which is in fact delivered.

In all these examples, the (dramatic) irony derives from the fact that there is a contrast between the situation as perceived or hoped for by the character involved and the actual state of affairs. In the last examples, the actual situation is known to the reader but not to the character, and therefore the reader is immediately aware of the irony of what is said.

The irony of fate, which is a kind of dramatic irony, is encountered in the circumstances of Absalom's death. Absalom, who took such extraordinary pride in his hair, eventually dies because of it. 'Absalom was proud of his hair, and therefore was hung by his hair', said the Rabbis (Mishnah, *Sota* 1.8), regarding this as a manifestation of the principle of just deserts.

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The same kind of irony presents itself in the fact that Absalom, who set up a memorial for himself in the Valley of the King during his lifetime, is thrown after his death into a great pit in the forest (2 Sam. 18.17-18).

The function of the irony in these cases is to highlight the connections between cause and consequence, between the individual's aspirations and what actually happens, and between character and fate.

There are several instances of dramatic irony in the book of Esther, all of them aimed at Haman and serving to make him appear ridiculous. The irony begins with Haman being joyful and glad of heart at being invited to Esther's banquet and boasting of the honour involved: 'Even queen Esther let no one come with the king to the banquet she prepared but myself. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king' (Esth. 5.12), never imagining that Esther is a member of the Jewish people he hates so much and that she is related to Mordecai, his mortal enemy.

Haman's mistaken assumption that there is no one whom the king would like to honour more than himself (6.6) also gives rise to a highly ironic situation. Haman himself causes Mordecai to be greatly honoured, and in addition he, Haman, has to implement it, leading Mordecai on the king's horse through the streets of the city, and calling out: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour' (6.11).

An ironic situation is also created through the king's mistaken supposition that Haman intends to assault the queen in his presence and in his own house when in actual fact Haman is merely pleading with Esther to spare his life (7.7-8). Once again the victim of the error is Haman.

Similarly, there is considerable irony in the fact that Haman is himself hung on the gallows he has prepared for Mordecai (7.9-10), as well as in the fact that the person who inherits Haman is none other than his rival, Mordecai. Through his plan to kill all the Jews, Haman in effect causes his own death and the promotion of Mordecai the Jew. This ironic course of events reflects the view that there is justice in the world, that the wicked are punished and the righteous rewarded.

As stated above, the narrative reaches a point of calmness at the end, the tension drops, the story-line descends and life returns to its former pace and daily routine.

The conclusion is clearly marked in many biblical narratives. For example, if we are told at the beginning or during the course of a narrative that someone leaves home and goes elsewhere, it is frequently stated at the end of the narrative that the person returns home, thus giving the reader the feeling that the incident is over.¹³ A few examples are given below.

In 1 Sam. 16.1-13 we are informed that Samuel goes to Bethlehem in order to anoint David king there. At first Samuel thinks that one of Jesse's other sons is meant to be king, but in the end he anoints the right one. The incident ends at this point, and then we find the concluding phrase: 'And Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah'.

The tale of Saul's visit to the medium at Endor is told in 1 Samuel 28. The woman summons up Samuel's spirit, Saul is greatly alarmed by what Samuel says and falls full length on the ground, and finally the woman gives Saul and his servants food in order to strengthen them. The narrative ends with the statement: 'Then they rose and went away that night'.

We are told of the revolt of Sheba the son of Bichri in 2 Sam. 20.1-22. The narrative ends with Sheba's death, and the concluding words are: 'And they retired from the city, every man to his tent, and Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king'.

This ending occurs in a slightly different form on several occasions, when, instead of noting the fact that someone went, it is said that he was sent off. Thus, at the end of the narrative about Abram and Sarai in Egypt (Gen. 12.10-20) we read: 'And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him; and they sent him on the way, with his wife and all that he had'. Similarly, at the conclusion of the narrative of the great assembly summoned by Joshua at Shechem (Josh. 24.1-28) we find: 'So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance'.

We sometimes come across a combination of both types of endings, when it is stated that someone is sent off and also goes. The narrative of Jethro's visit to Moses in the wilderness (Exodus 18) concludes with the words: 'Then Moses sent his father-in-law away, and he went his way to his own country'. The narrative of the Syrians, who were struck by blindness at Elisha's request and led by him to Samaria (2 Kgs 6.8-23) also ends with the phrase: 'he sent them away, and they went to their master'.

13. I.L. Seeligmann, 'Hebräische Erzählung und biblische Geschichtsschreibung', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 18 (1962).

In other cases the end is indicated by the statement that two people (or groups) who met during the course of the narrative separate again. Sometimes their parting is denoted by the assertion that both went their own way. For example, the narrative about Balak, who brought Balaam in order to curse Israel, ends with the words: 'Then Balaam rose, and went back to his place; and Balak also went his way' (Num. 24.25). A similar conclusion ends the narrative recounting the battle between Saul and the Philistines: 'Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines; and the Philistines went to their own place' (1 Sam. 14.46); the narrative of Saul's war against the Amalekites: 'Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul' (15.34); and the narrative of the meeting between Saul and David in the wilderness of Ziph: 'So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place' (26.25).

It should be noted that in several instances concluding phrases like those cited above occur not at the end of the narrative but at the end of a stage in it, that is, at the end of an act or scene.

For example, after God's revelation to Moses from the burning bush, when Moses is charged with going to Pharaoh and bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, we read: 'Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law' (Exod. 4.18). This does not mark the conclusion, however, because the verse continues: 'and said to him, "Let me go back, I pray, to my kinsmen in Egypt"', and then we are told how Moses discharges the mission which he had been given at the revelation.

In the narrative of the birth of Samuel we find: 'They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah' (1 Sam. 1.19). The words, 'then they went back to their house at Ramah', occur at the end of the stage in the narrative when Hannah prays for a son and before the stage when the son she has longed for is born.

At the conclusion of the narrative of Absalom's revolt we are told of David's return from Transjordan to Jerusalem. At this stage of the narrative the meetings between David and various characters are depicted. The encounter between David and Barzilai the Gileadite ends with the words: 'And the king kissed Barzilai and blessed him, and he returned to his own home' (2 Sam. 19.39), marking the end of one scene but not of the entire narrative.

Another way of indicating the conclusion of a narrative is by

noting the death of the protagonist. An ending of this kind is found in the narrative about Gideon: 'And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites' (Judg. 8.32); in the narratives concerning the kings: 'And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father; and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead' (1 Kgs 11.43); and in the narrative of Job: 'And Job died, an old man, and full of days' (Job 42.17).

In all these cases, and in others like them, there is an obvious tendency to bring the narrative to a clear and unequivocal end. The explicit statement that the principal character has gone on his or her way, returned home or died clarifies to the reader that the narrative is concluded or that a stage in the plot has terminated.

2. Collections of Narratives

The narrative books of the Bible are not mere compilations of unconnected stories but, as is well-known, are made up of sequences of narratives, which combine to constitute wider structures. What is the nature of these combinations and to what extent are the narratives integrated within the wider structures?

There appear to be a variety of connections between the individual narratives, some of them external and most of them internal.

The simplest external connection is established by means of the letter *waw* (and), being either conjunctive or consecutive. For example, 'And Adam knew Eve his wife' (Gen. 4.1) at the beginning of the narrative of Cain and Abel, or: 'And Abram went up from Egypt' (Gen. 13.1) at the start of the narrative recounting the parting of Abram and Lot. We often find the phrase, 'And it came to pass', as a means of connecting two narratives (Gen. 6.1) or such expressions as, 'After these things' (Gen. 15.1), 'At that time' (Gen. 21.22), 'After the death of Moses' (Josh. 1.1), 'After this' (Judg. 16.4), 'In those days' (Judg. 19.1). These connective formulae and others like them often occur at the beginning of biblical narratives.

The question arises, however, whether this is merely a technique for establishing an external connection or whether these connective formulae indicate internal relations between the narratives so joined. Many biblical narratives are contiguous but are not linked by any connective formula, so that when these are used they probably hint at a closer, more substantive association. The nature of this

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substantive link or what is expressed by it should be examined in each individual case.

For example, the narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac begins with the words: 'After these things' (Gen. 22.1), hinting at a substantive connection between this narrative and what has been recounted beforehand about the birth of Isaac when Abraham was already one hundred years old, the great feast that Abraham made 'on the day that Isaac was weaned', and the sending away of Abraham's other son, Ishmael. The testing of Abraham, which is recounted in the narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac, is given added poignancy against the background of these facts, which are conveyed in the preceding chapter. After years of waiting for a son, who is finally and miraculously born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age, after the joy of bringing him up and after the other son has been sent into the wilderness and Isaac is the only son left at home, 'after these things' Abraham is commanded to sacrifice this son as a burnt offering!

The expression 'And after this' (2 Sam. 13.1) connects the narrative of David and Bathsheba with that of Amnon and Tamar. The parallel between these two narratives is evident, since in both sexual sin leads to murder. The explicit link together with the thematic parallel hint at the view, which is expressed in Nathan's rebuke (2 Sam. 12.10-11), that the disasters which befall David within his own house are the punishment for his sin.

The same connective formula appears at the beginning of the narrative of Absalom's revolt (2 Sam. 15.1), and there can be no doubt of the causal connection between David's anger with Absalom for the murder of Amnon (the king's anger and the efforts to appease him form the subject of ch. 14) and Absalom's revolt against his father (chs. 15-19).

Another kind of link is created by one narrative beginning with the same subject or words with which the previous one ended. For example, the narrative concerning Abram in Egypt (Gen. 12.10-20) concludes with the words: 'And they sent him on the way, with his wife and all that he had'. The following narrative, which deals with the parting of Abram and Lot (Genesis 13) starts with the phrase: 'And Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had'.

The narrative of Saul and Amalek (1 Samuel 15) concludes with the information that Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, 'but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord repented that

he had made Saul king over Israel'. The narrative of the anointing of David comes immediately afterwards (1 Sam. 16.1-13), starting with the words: 'And the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel?"' That narrative ends with the phrase: 'And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah'. The same subject (the spirit of the Lord) begins the following narrative, which tells how David is brought to Saul's house to play to him: 'And the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul...'

The combination of isolated narratives into one extensive block can lead to duplication or even inconsistencies. In some cases of duplication or contradiction, there is explicit or implicit reference within one narrative to the parallel or opposing one.

The narrative of Isaac, Rebekah and Abimelech the king of Gerar (Genesis 26) bears a great resemblance to that of Abram, Sarai and Pharaoh the king of Egypt (Gen. 12.10ff.). Not only in both narratives is the wife presented as the husband's sister so that he will not be killed in the strange land (as in Genesis 20 in the narrative of Abraham, Sarah and Abimelech the king of Gerar), but both begin with the words 'And there was famine in the land'. In the second narrative, however, the words 'besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham' are added, making it quite clear that despite the considerable similarity between them, each narrative recounts different events.

In the verse, 'Now David was the son of this an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons' (1 Sam. 17.12) the word 'this' seems out of harmony as regards both sense and grammar. Its function, however, is to hint to the reader that David and Jesse, who are presented here in the narrative of David and Goliath as new characters, are the same individuals who were introduced in the previous chapter concerning the anointing of David and his being brought to play before Saul. The succeeding passage, 'And David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem' (v. 15) also serves to connect the narrative of David and Goliath, in which David is with his father at Bethlehem, with the preceding one, in which David is with Saul, acting as his armour-bearer. On the other hand, no attempt is made to resolve the discrepancy deriving from the fact that in the narrative of David and Goliath Saul does not know David (17.55-58), while in

the previous one David found favour in Saul's sight and Saul loved him greatly (16.21-22).

An internal connection is often established between narratives because they share the same principal character. When this is so, each narrative deals with a different exploit of the protagonist. The chief character accords unity to the separate narratives, not only because he features in all of them but also because the permanent aspects of his personality are reflected in them all. Thus, a cycle of stories is created, presenting different episodes from the hero's life in chronological order, whether a few central events or the entire span of his life from birth to death (though the Bible does not contain a complete and continuous sequence covering the life of any one character). Examples include the cycles of narratives about Abraham in Genesis, about Samson in Judges and about Elijah in Kings.

In these sequences, the narratives are arranged in linear fashion, though in others they are also organized in a circular way, as is the case with the narratives about Jacob. The first few of these narratives deal with Jacob and Esau in Canaan, the next few concern Jacob and Laban in Haran and the last ones tell about Jacob and Esau in Canaan once more. The narratives about Jacob in Canaan are separated from those about him in Haran by the incident at Beth-El, and the narratives concerning him in Haran are separated from those about him in Canaan by the episode of Penuel (and of Mahanayim, which parallels it). These episodes resemble one another.¹⁴ Jacob stayed in Beth-El, 'because the sun had set' (Gen. 28.11), and when he left Penuel, 'The sun rose upon him' (Gen. 32.31). At both places Jacob is granted a revelation of God at night, in both of them God blesses him and Jacob names both of them on the basis of the revelation he has experienced. Thus, the following structure is obtained in the series of narratives about Jacob:

Canaan	Beth-El	Haran
Canaan	Penuel	

A bridge is sometimes constructed between the separate narratives in a sequence through keywords (see below p. 212) whose reiteration

14. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen, 1975), pp. 208ff.

hints at a substantive connection between the various narratives, at a unifying line and at the significance of the overall plot.

For example, in the sequence of narratives about Abraham the following words and roots recur: go forth, bless, defend, afflict, righteousness and justice.¹⁵

The word 'fire' occurs as a key word in the series of narratives concerning Elijah. It features in the narrative depicting Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (five times), in the narrative of God's revelation to Elijah at Horeb (three times), in the narrative about the captains of fifty sent to Elijah by Ahaziah (five times) and in the narrative of Elijah's ascent to heaven (twice). In each case the fire concerned is not of the ordinary variety but is the fire of God; in most instances it comes from heaven and in the last one it takes Elijah up to heaven. This fire 'consumes' a bull, wood, an altar and even people, and symbolizes the terrible, awe-inspiring and destructive power of God, whose prophet Elijah is.

Contrasting with the word 'fire', the word 'water' occurs frequently (11 times) in the narratives concerning Elijah, as well as words akin to it, such as 'river' (seven times), 'dew' and 'rain' (eight times), and 'drink' (seven times). In addition to the verb 'drink', the verb 'eat' features frequently in the narratives about Elijah, both in the sense of eating bread (or meat) and of being consumed by fire. These words create one complex which is patently related to the famine and drought depicted in these narratives, but is not restricted to this subject and encompasses all Elijah's activities.

Each narrative in a cycle is an independent unit containing a complete story, while at the same time constituting a link in the overall pattern and contributing its share to the creation of the overall plot. This, however, is often very loosely bound and does not always comprise a close network of cause and effect, being based more on the principle of chronology than on that of causality.

There is greater unity in the block of narratives in 2 Samuel 11-20. These narratives which are concerned with David and the members of his family are so closely interconnected that they cannot be considered a cycle any more. Although each narrative contains an independent story, focusing on a different event or person, they are linked by having an overall plot with a fairly tight causal structure.

15. M. Buber, and F. Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin, 1936), pp. 226ff.

The story begins with David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba. In order to obscure this sin, David causes Uriah's death (the war against Rabbah of the Ammonites serves as the background of this narrative, accounting for both Uriah's protracted absence from home and the circumstances of his death). David's sins give rise to Nathan's rebuke as well as to a series of disasters which constitute David's punishment: first the death of the child born to David and Bathsheba, then the rape of Tamar by Amnon, and then Absalom's murder of Amnon. Because of the murder Absalom is obliged to flee to Geshur. With the help of the wise woman of Tekoa, Joab succeeds in obtaining David's consent to Absalom's return to Jerusalem, although several years pass before the king agrees to be reconciled with his son. The tense relations between father and son give rise to Absalom's revolt against David, and the narrative of Absalom's uprising, which itself displays both complex and logical development of the plot, ends with Absalom's death and David's return to his throne in Jerusalem.

The cohesive plot of this block of narratives derives not only from the fact that the events in each narrative are the logical outcome of those in the previous one, but also from the fact that the thematic structure of the narratives is analogous: as with David, so with Amnon and Absalom (and also, to some extent, with Adonijah) sexual transgression gives rise to murder.¹⁶

David	+ Bathsheba	→ The killing of Uriah
Amnon	+ Tamar	→ The killing of Amnon
Absalom	+ David's concubines	→ The killing of Absalom
(Adonijah	+ Abishag)	→ The killing of Adonijah

This analogous structure reflects the view embodied in these narratives and operating as a unifying factor: David is forced to see how the same vices of lust and violence to which he succumbed re-emerge in his sons, causing disaster and great suffering. Thus, the principle of measure for measure, or rather, sons' measure for father's measure, operates here. David's sons follow in his footsteps, but the punishment imposed on them is presented as being simultaneously their father's.

This block of narratives, which is marked by a considerable degree of unity, is itself embedded within a wider narrative framework

16. J. Blenkinsopp, 'Theme and Motif in the Succession History (2 Sam XI 2ff.) and the Jahwist Corpus', *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1966).

which includes all the narratives about David. These, in turn, combine with other complexes of narratives to form the books of Samuel, just as the narratives concerning Abraham are part of the narratives of the patriarchs, which combine with others to form the book of Genesis. Within these broad structures there is no tight, well-constructed plot development as regards the internal causal connections between all the components, yet there is considerable unity, both because of the same outlook which underlies them and because of shared literary characteristics (such as style and ways of narration). There are also threads which connect narratives belonging to different blocks and cycles.

For example, in the narrative of Absalom's revolt, there are two passages (2 Sam. 16.1-4; 19.24-30) which tell of Mephibosheth and Ziba his servant. These passages are connected with what has been related beforehand in chapter 9 about the kindness David showed Mephibosheth, Jonathan's lame son, and the task David gave Ziba of tilling the land which used to belong to Saul for Mephibosheth. Chapter 9 is itself linked to the narratives recounting the relations between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 19-20), and thence to the complex of narratives about David and Saul. Chapter 9 opens with the words: 'And David said, "Is there still any one left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"'. And further on in the same chapter we read: 'And the king said, "Is there not still some one of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?"' and also: 'And David said to him, "Do not fear; for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan"'. The emphasis on kindness in this context should be compared with 1 Sam. 20.14-15, where Jonathan says to David: 'Show me the kindness of the Lord . . . and do not cut off your kindness from my house for ever'. Chapter 9 of 2 Samuel is also connected with 2 Sam. 21.1-14, which tells of David's relations with Saul's descendants, and with 2 Sam. 4.4, where Jonathan's son is mentioned for the first time and the way in which he became a cripple is recounted.

A typical example of the various layers of narrative structures in the Bible can be found in the book of Judges. The narrative of Samson and Delilah (Judg. 16.4-31) is complete in itself and also has a tight plot structure. In the exposition we are told that Samson loved a woman in the valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. This woman asks Samson three times for the secret of his strength and the way he can be subdued and three times Samson gives her a false

answer. Three times she says: 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' and three times he shows that he has retained his strength. On the fourth occasion, however, after Delilah has used her feminine wiles, Samson succumbs and discloses the truth, as a result of which he is captured by the Philistines and blinded. Nevertheless, in the dénouement Samson's strength returns to him and in his death he succeeds in slaying thousands of Philistines, more than the number he killed during his life.

This narrative is a link in the cycle concerning Samson which consists of more or less independent narratives relating the hero's various exploits, starting with his birth and ending with his death. The unity of this series of narratives is achieved by the personality of the protagonist—who appears in all of them as an elemental, unpolished type of man with immense physical strength, ruled solely and unreservedly by his passions and emotions—as well as by the historical and geographical background which is common to all of them.

The cycle of narratives about Samson is combined with the other narratives about the judges, which together comprise the book of Judges. This is not simply a collection of narratives concerning the various judges, but has a considerable degree of unity and cohesion, primarily because of the outlook which characterizes it. This view, which is stated explicitly in chapter 2, maintains that the Israelites abandoned God and worshipped Baal; as punishment God sent them an enemy in the form of one of the neighbouring nations; the Israelites cried to the Lord, who sent them a judge in order to save them from the enemy, and then all over again. The book of Judges is built so that the narratives about the various judges are embedded within this general scheme, illustrating and detailing the stage in the cycle of events at which the judge rescues the Israelites suffering under the enemy's yoke. The chronological system which governs the book of Judges, according to which the land was at peace for forty years (once for eighty years and once for twenty) after each great judge, also contributes to the book's unity.

Yet the entire book of Judges is merely part of an extensive corpus which relates all history, from the creation of the world (Genesis) to the Babylonian exile (the book of Kings). Threads connect the various books which constitute this extensive corpus. For example, in the book of Samuel Joab says: 'Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubesheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone upon him

from the wall, so that he died at Thebez' (2 Sam. 11.21), and the details of this incident are recounted in the book of Judges (9.50-54). The extensive corpus is also characterized by a single world-outlook, which regards the course of history as the embodiment of the relationship between the one God, the creator of the world, and His chosen people, the people of Israel.

Chapter 4

TIME AND SPACE

A narrative cannot exist without time, to which it has a twofold relationship: it unfolds within time, and time passes within it. The narrative needs the time which is outside it in order to unravel itself by stages before the reader. Because of the consecutive nature of language, which is the means by which works of literature are conveyed, the narrative cannot be absorbed all at once and is communicated through a process which continues in time; in order to follow the development of the plot a certain amount of time is needed. The narrative also requires internal time, because the characters and the incidents exist within time. Everything that changes during the course of the narrative as well as everything that remains static exists within time.

This twofold link with time has significant implications for the nature, possibilities and limitations of the narrative as well as for the way it is interpreted. As far as external time is concerned, the fact that the narrative is disclosed to us successively makes it impossible for us to grasp the full significance of the first word until we have reached the last. Literature resembles music in this and differs from the plastic arts, such as painting and sculpture, which can be grasped in their entirety at one instant. Unlike music, however, which can convey several tunes together, the narrative cannot describe simultaneously different events which occurred at the same time. This constitutes one of the major limitations of the narrative form, and an attempt will be made below to indicate how the biblical narrators endeavoured to overcome it.

Since the narrative is revealed to the reader gradually, the author can exploit the reader's temporary ignorance in order to heighten interest and tension. The author similarly uses the narrative's dependence on external time to construct and organize the units comprising the narrative, such as the words, collocations, sentences