Knowledge & Power in 1 Samuel 3: A Narrative-Critical Reading

by

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Thesis
Submitted to Flinders University
for the degree of

Master of Theological Studies

Trinity College Queensland

October 31, 2019

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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October 31, 2019

Acknowledgements

Tapu ki he ʻOtua Mafimafi ʻoku ʻafio ʻi hotau lotolotonga. *He ʻoku lahi ʻa ʻene ʻaloʻofa kiate kitautolu: pea ʻoku tolonga ʻo taʻengata ʻae moʻoni ʻa ʻAtonai. Mou fakamālō kia ʻAtonai* (Ps. 117:2). I wish to acknowledge my family for illuminating discussions and their constant support throughout this process, ʻofa lahi atu. My thanks and acknowledgement to Paul Hedley Jones, Principal of Trinity College Queensland, whose guidance and supervision in this endeavour have been insightful, entertaining and much appreciated.

Thesis Summary

This dissertation is an exegetical analysis of 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a. This narrative tells of Samuel's first encounter with the Divine on an ordinary evening in the Shiloh sanctuary and his rise to becoming a nationally recognised prophet. Yet, the crux of the story is the word of the LORD, its reception and transmission. The core thesis of this paper is that the word of the LORD communicates knowledge and power. Power dynamics shift between the youthful Samuel and the elderly priest, Eli, which accompanies the transmission and reception of the divine word. The word of God also carries with it knowledge, not only of the divine will but also of the relationship between the LORD and the Elide priesthood. As an example of speech, the word of the LORD is also inherently tied to communication, speaking and listening, which is seen in the resistance God encounters when calling to Samuel. This same thematic framework is also evident in the wider context of 1 Samuel 1-4. More often than not communication is hindered by misunderstanding which stems from a lack of knowledge and perception: Eli misinterprets Hannah's vow (1 Sam. 1:13-14), Eli's sons do not listen to him (2:25), Samuel and Eli do not immediately realise the LORD is calling (3:4-8), the Israelites speak and act in ignorance and are defeated in battle (4:2-11). Yet, there are also examples of clear and precise communication, most closely related to the LORD, which exhibit and describe power and knowledge, e.g., Hannah's song of praise (2:1-10) and the LORD's two words concerning Eli and his house (2:27-36; 3:11-14). In all these instances the word of the LORD is central, even in its absence, in conveying power and knowledge to the people of Israel.

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Introduction

The call of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a) is a well-known chronicle for most believers within the Church and beyond. Not only does it carry authority by virtue of its status as scripture, but the narrative form itself "has an ongoing power to affect those who hear and read it"[1] even today. A characteristic Sunday School reading presents the story with the moral of listening out for the call of God in one's life or emphasising the "idyllic childlike exchange"[2] between Samuel and God, epitomised with the phrase, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10). Within the Tongan Methodist branch of the Church there is a popular hymn of this episode, its opening verse is as follows, with translation:

'Amusia 'a Samiuela	Blessed is Samuel
Hono ui 'e he 'Eiki;	for he was called by the LORD;
'O ne tali hake leva	And he answered
Tāu mo ha tamasi'i:	as was befitting a young lad:
"'Oku ou tokanga atu,	"I am listening to you,
'Eiki, fai mai ho' fekau."[3]	LORD, express your instruction."

This focus on listening and the word of God pre-empt the following analysis of 1 Samuel 3. Not only is the word of the LORD the chief concern of the text, listening and communication are also pertinent. The story of 1 Samuel 3 is inherently one of communication and miscommunication; the

[1] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 11.

[2] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation Series (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 25.

[3] *Ko e Tohi Himi 'a e Siasi Uesiliana Tau'ataina. 'O Tonga.*, 4th ed. (1826), 194.

LORD calls but neither Samuel nor Eli are initially aware of the word of the LORD. Eventually the LORD is recognised, but there is first some stumbling in the dark.

1 Samuel 3, structurally and thematically revolves around the word of the LORD (דְּבַר־יהוה).[4] The text can be divided roughly into three main segments: the *status quo* preceding the word of the LORD (3:1-10), the reception of the word (3:11-14), and the *status quo* following the word of the LORD (3:15-4:1a). As the central crux on which the narrative pivots, the word of the LORD also marks a turning point in the relationships of Samuel and Eli, as well as God and Samuel. Once the word of the LORD is spoken and shared, the situation in Shiloh, and eventually all Israel, is irrevocably transformed. Just as in the beginning of creation, once the LORD speaks, the chaos of the world is restructured and reordered to usher in a new age. The new age in the Book of Samuel being the establishment of monarchy and a new form leadership.[5] However, before the narrative can reach that new epoch, the established priestly dynasty will be removed and an interim leader and youthful prophet will be appointed as the mouthpiece of the LORD, communicating the divine word to the people.

The central theme of 1 Samuel 3 is the word of the LORD, which is expressed in and reinforced by the further subthemes of communication, power and knowledge. This is the thesis of the present

[4] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (1 Sam. 1-12) (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 4:189, 241.
[5] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 108; Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 5.

dissertation. The divine word is spoken directly (1 Sam. 3:11-14) yet its ramifications are far-reaching and decisive. Expressions of God's word incorporate knowledge and power but also, in general, it discloses these two qualities to those who receive the divine word, to those upon whom the LORD bestows it. This is certainly true of Samuel, whose existence begins as the fulfilment of his mother's vow (1 Sam. 1:10, 19-20), but once he receives the word of God, he begins his ascent towards prophethood and leadership. The inverse is true of Eli and his house, who receive a twofold condemnation through the divine word (1 Sam. 2:27-36; 3:11-14) which leads to their collective demise (1 Sam. 4).

The word of the LORD itself, as item of speech, is also a unit of knowledge indicating the divine will but also, more directly, what is God's position concerning his relationship with Eli and his house. The private dialogue between the LORD and Samuel keeps Eli, figuratively and literally, in the dark (3:16); Samuel knows something Eli does not. As an example of language, the divine word is also inherently tied to communication, in order to know a word, it must be conveyed and received. For Samuel to know God's word, the LORD must speak it and the boy must acknowledge it. The word of the LORD affords knowledge and power.

Before delving into the text itself, the first chapter will outline the method utilised in the rest of the dissertation. In short, a narrative form requires a narrative critical approach in order to understand *what* is conveyed as well as *how* it is communicated. The instrument of choice is biblical

poetics, an exegetical method which focuses on the building blocks of narrative, e.g., character, theme, perspective, setting, narration, etc.[6] The notion is that understanding how 1 Samuel 3 tells its story will lead to the deeper meanings and insights inherent within the text.

Chapter 2 will explore the wider context, namely 1 Samuel 1-2 and 4, establishing what has immediately preceded and what will directly follow the main text. Even in these chapters, the word of the LORD is central, particularly given that the same divine message is given twice to Eli, first in 2:27-36, and again in 3:11-14. Both words from the LORD condemn the Elide priesthood for their corruptive practices, promising a swift and definitive judgment which is fulfilled in 1 Samuel 4. Yet this dire mood is contrasted with the hope and renewal depicted in Hannah's shift from despair to joy, from barrenness to child-bearing. As the LORD exalts Hannah, the Elides are simultaneously humbled.

Chapter 3, then, will focus on 1 Samuel 3 itself, whilst drawing on the insights of the wider context. Structurally and thematically, the word of the LORD lies at the centre of this passage. The LORD's sole motivation is to pass onto Samuel the divine word, reinforcing the imminent fulfilment of all that was promised regarding the Elides (2:27-36). Although this divine motivation is frustrated by the human counterparts, Eli and Samuel, nonetheless the word is given and its message delivered.

[6] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 13-82; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 84-229; Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 13-238; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 55-162.

1 Samuel 3 begins in figurative and literal darkness, an absence of the word of the LORD (3:1-3) and a lack of knowledge of the LORD, yet by its end the light has breached the darkness (3:15), paralleling the abundance of the divine word and proliferation of knowledge, not only to Samuel but also to all Israel.

Finally, conclusions will be summarised from both chapters 2 and 3 whilst also suggesting directions for further work on these topics. 1 Samuel 3, as well as its neighbouring chapters, illustrates that the word of the LORD is imbued with both power and knowledge. It has the power to challenge institutions and affect the destinies of individuals and nations. Its knowledge is inherently tied to communication and hence interpersonal relationships. The knowledge communicated and the power demonstrated all point to the divine capacity to reverse outcomes and intervene in hopeless situations, ushering in a new age for those who heed the word of the LORD.

Chapter 1 - Methodology

The essential question of this chapter on methodology is 'How?' How will the analysis of 1 Samuel 3 be undertaken and what method/s will be utilised to achieve the goal of this dissertation? Quite simply, a literary method focusing on the poetics of biblical narrative. Since the book of Samuel is narrative in form, it follows that any exegesis of the text should keep in mind the conventions and structure of narrative, "in other words, how it represents that which it wishes to represent."[7] In short, a consideration of the 'how' of biblical narrative will enable an interpretation of the narrative proper. Using a literary method aims to get to the essence of 1 Samuel 3, to understand this essence and extract meaning from it. Sternberg and Alter both made the point that simply identifying literary features of a text is in itself insufficient, a further step of interpreting these features and their underlying meaning is required.[8] Both identifying and interpreting these narrative features will constitute the bulk of the following chapters. However, to prepare the way for such analysis, an articulation of the method used to reach any conclusions is required. What follows is a justification for a literary approach centred on biblical poetics over and against historical methods, as well as identifying specific elements of the method which will feature prominently in the ensuing chapters.

[7] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 13; cf. David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, Apollos Old Testament Commentary Series (Nottingham: IVP, 2009), 21.

[8] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), xii, 2; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, xiv.

Poetics & Other Methods

Berlin offered the following analogy of interpretation, literature and poetics: "If literature is likened to a cake, then poetics gives us the recipe and interpretation tells us how it tastes."[9] Following this analogy, the present paper attempts to employ part of the recipe and offer a tasting of 1 Samuel 3. Given that our purpose is to utilise poetics (the recipe) as a means to an end, only a selection of poetical elements (ingredients) will be emphasised here and in the following chapters, namely theme and characters (including their dialogue and deeds, narration to a lesser extent). Nevertheless, poetics and interpretation go hand-in-hand, the former aiding in the latter, for if "we know *how* texts mean, we are in a better position to discover *what* a particular text means."[10] By employing aspects of poetic and narrative criticism, the ultimate goal is to uncover meaning within the text, to offer an interpretation; using the recipe to submit a tasting of the cake. While the tasting itself may not be wholly novel, the hope is that it will be well-reasoned and argued, supported by poetics and narrative elements to arrive at the literary essence of 1 Samuel 3. Before delving deeper into biblical poetics, an alternate method will be discussed, including its limitations for the current project.

As Alter explained, the heavy emphasis on historical critical methods in biblical scholarship was a direct response to the view of scripture as the uniform and only fount of divine truth. As such, the

[9] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 15.
[10] Ibid., 17.

"first several waves of modern biblical criticism, beginning in the nineteenth century...[were] an attempt to break it [the Bible] up into its constituent sources, then to link those pieces to their original life contexts."[11] Unsatisfied with a unitary model, biblical scholars sought to identify the sources and traditions that came together as the final form of scripture. For historical methods, the meaning of texts is rooted in the past and in the societies that birthed traditions and sources that were brought together into what we know today as 'scripture'. Therefore, a historical method is less concerned with 1 Samuel 3 as a biblical narrative and more concerned with its historical context, its sources (oral and written), its redaction, etc., and thus interpreting it with these perspectives in mind.

The choice here to employ literary and poetical analyses as opposed to historical methods mirrors this same shift in the preceding decades of biblical scholarship. Many of the scholars referenced here with respect to biblical poetics and literary analysis of the bible are some of the vanguards of this emergent field: Adele Berlin, Shimon Bar-Efrat, Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, Robert Polzin, etc. In 1989, Polzin questioned what had brought biblical scholarship to the point where 'establishing the text' meant "reconstructing a supposed prior text and to determining its theological intention and probable date of composition, without employing as much sympathetic care and effort in determining the global meaning of the very text that has helped shape Western

[11] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 17.

civilisation and the Judeo-Christian culture at its core?"[12] In this sense, a focus on poetics and the literary character of scripture acts as a counterbalance to, according to Polzin, an over-emphasis on historical criticism. Polzin's comment also points out another important truth: it is the textual quality of the bible, its narratives and poetry, that has and continues to fascinate and fashion the Judeo-Christian culture and influence 'western' civilisation. It is this textual quality that will be the focus of this dissertation. Put another way, the method utilised here is a 'discourse-oriented' approach rather than a 'source-oriented' one,[13] that is, an approach concerned with the meaning of the text, with the text's poetic composition (*poesis*) not its genetic composition (*genesis*).[14]

Poetics of Biblical Narrative

Biblical poetics refers to "the formal and structural aspects of biblical narratives,"[15] that is, how biblical narratives are organised and presented. Poetics can be understood as the 'How' of biblical narratives, how these stories (i.e., characters, setting, plot, perspective, etc.) are presented, organised, structured and formed. Poetics, then, aims to understand the How of biblical narrative, analysing the methods and forms which act as a foundation for interpretation and deriving meanings from within the text. In short, the "examination of form and design will also reveal additional, subtler and more precise meanings."[16]

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[12] Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomist History, Part Two - 1 Samuel* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 3.
[13] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 14.
[14] Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 6.
[15] Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 10.
[16] Ibid., 11.

What a poetics-literary approach affords that a historical method does not is precisely this access to the meanings of the text. Historical methods such as source criticism or redaction criticism are more concerned with 'the world behind the text', therefore any interpretation of the text is anchored in that world. What poetics and a literary approach allows is interpretation of the text from 'the world within/of the text'. Rather than using the text as a bridge to its own genesis and the context that spawned it, poetics allows the text to speak *qua* text, to perceive its textual qualities and draw out insights by emphasising its status as a piece of literature.

Poetic Ingredients: Gap-Filling & Terse Narration

Although the biblical narrator does not overtly explain every detail to the reader, they are still able to communicate a message through the text. This subtlety, nuance and reticence allows the narrator to retreat somewhat into the background whilst inviting the reader to engage more directly with the story and connect the dots of meaning. This is part of the gap-filling style of biblical narrative.[17] The narrative and its storyteller will express to the reader only so much at certain points, but it is how the reader fills in those resultant gaps that reveals the narrative's tensions and depths. These gaps may be either temporary or permanent, temporary in that the narrator may disclose information or details at a later time or leave the issue unresolved. The Bible's minimalist narration style is expressed in characterisation that is often marked by efficiency

[17] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 200.

and economy, details of setting which are kept to a minimum and dialogue that is often left left to carry the bulk of meaning.[18] Gap-filling in biblical narratives is partly due to the nature of biblical Hebrew itself. Biblical Hebrew is terse and minimal. Therefore, each word carries with it an array of translational possibilities, but more importantly, meaning and interpretative possibilities. This quote from Burke describing the Taoist text, the *Tao Te Ching*, could also be applied to biblical narrative: its style is "terse, vigorous, and profound, with striking images and memorable paradoxes. From the viewpoint of grammar much of its phrasing can be read in different senses. It compresses a great amount of thought into a very small space, its very vagueness serving to enhance its message."[19]

Poetic Ingredients: Theme & Theological Thrust

Another way to express theme is considering it as the "theological thrust"[20] of the narrative. In Tolmie's estimation, biblical narratives have an overall theological or ideological thrust, a perspective the text aims to convey to the reader. The theological thrust of 1 Samuel 3, indeed of 1 Samuel 1-4, is that the word of the LORD confers knowledge and power, whilst also emphasising communication. A few instances of this theological thrust include, Samuel's name, the miscommunication between God, Samuel and Eli in 1 Samuel 3 and the reversal of knowledge and power between Eli and Samuel once the lad hears the word from the LORD. Alter understands theme as "part of the value-system of the narrative – it may be moral, moral-psychological, legal,

[18] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 42.
[19] T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction With Texts* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 159.
[20] Francois Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 7, 22.

political, historiosophical, theological – [it] is made evident in some recurring pattern."[21] Some of his examples include the election and rejection of the monarch in the books of Samuel and Kings and the reversal of primogeniture in Genesis.

Poetic Ingredients: Characters

The analysis of the following chapters will focus primarily on theme and character. Although other poetic elements, such as the plot and setting will be explored in part, the emphasis will rest on character and theme. The main emphasis is to follow a selection of poetic elements of biblical narrative (e.g. character, setting, plot, perspective, etc.), in order to argue for an overall theme to unify all elements as they pertain to 1 Samuel 3 (i.e., the thesis) and thus to provide a cohesive and comprehensive reading of the text. Naturally, this is itself is a daunting task and given the limits of the current paper perhaps also unrealistic. As such, to concentrate our efforts, character will be the main locus for articulating theme, including instances of dialogue and action.

One reason for the emphasis on characters is that they act as focal points of the narrative, delivering the significance and values of the text to the readers. As Bar-Efrat described, characters elicit emotional responses from the readers, at times "the characters arouse our sympathy, sometimes our revulsion, but we are never indifferent to them."[22] Not only do characters evoke our emotions, they are also one of the more prominent aspects of biblical narrative, making them a

[21] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 120.
[22] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 47.

natural jumping off point for analysis and interpretation. Also, for the current examination, both the speech and deeds of characters will pertinent for advancing recurring patterns and thus the theme. Some of these recurring patterns include communication, power, knowledge, not least of all the word of the LORD. The divine word is communicated to characters and recommunicated between them, thereby impacting and influencing character action and dialogue. Furthermore, the word of God also imparts knowledge and power to characters, particularly elevating Samuel but humbling Eli and his house. Therefore, the word from the LORD both comments on and influences characters and their characterisation; the sins of the Elide house are the catalyst for both divine words, yet divine communication also shapes Samuel into a "trustworthy prophet of the LORD" (3:20).

Character: A Pinch of Speech

Character traits are revealed primarily through words. Speech is significant since whatever is said by characters reveals something of the speaker even as it communicates something to their interlocutor.[23] Thus, when the LORD speaks to Samuel, offering a message regarding the Elides (3:11-14), it also demonstrates God's aversion to the abuses of Eli and his sons, further emphasising the previous word through the man of God (2:27-36). Likewise, when Eli interrogates Samuel for the divine word (3:16-17) it reveals not only his desire for its content but also suggests that the aging priest expected a different, more hopeful missive. The primacy of character dialogue accords

[23] Ibid., 64-65.

well with the recurrence of the word of the LORD. All examples of verbal communication offer a twofold characterisation, of the speaker as well as the listener. This applies to God as well as the Elides, Samuel, Hannah, Elkanah and Peninnah.

In tandem with dialogue, narration also influences the presentation and interpretation of biblical narratives. For Alter, narration is mostly a bridge between instances of dialogue, a restatement and re-emphasis of what has been said and how it was expressed; as such, narration is mostly concerned with dialogue more so than with character action.[24] This focus on dialogue is another recurring pattern, not only the words of the human persons but also of the divine person, which brings these two types of speech into relief and comparison. This is reiterated in the fact that the divine word is first conveyed by God to specific people (the man of God, Samuel) and then recommunicated by these messengers to others. This pattern is expressed, not just in the presence of divine communication and human re-communication, but also in the emphasis biblical narrative places on dialogue itself, this is simply given further significance in the particular episode of 1 Samuel 3.

Character: Two Cups of Action

If dialogue deals more with knowledge, then the actions of characters aligns more with power. However, this is not a clear and persistent distinction. Like dialogue, actions and deeds reveal character, externalising their inner qualities.[25] Although, the extent to which either action or

[24] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 82.
[25] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 77.

speech can be considered reliable for characterisation is subject to conjecture. Although Bar-Efrat placed more confidence in a direct correlation between action and characterisation, Alter envisaged a scale of reliability.[26] On the lower end of this scale of characterisation were character actions and appearance; in the middle lies speech by the character in question or others about them; the upper echelon consisting of inner speech and thoughts, with the zenith, affording absolute certainty, being the narrator's direct and unequivocal report. Although Alter put less weight on character action and dialogue, context will also be central, although this may invite more uncertainty, it is also fertile ground for interpretation. Characters and plot propel each other forward, each one shaping and influencing the other. Since actions, in and of themselves, do not necessarily reveal the motivations and reasonings behind them, these must be reconstructed by the reader,[27] they are, essentially, more gaps to be filled in order to make sense of the plot and expose meaning.

Indirect characterisation, according to Bar-Efrat, is far more prevalent and thus more important, in biblical narratives[28]. This indirect shaping of character occurs through dialogue and action. The narrator presents the pearls and the reader is left to string them together into a coherent whole – to interpret how these speeches and deeds reveal character, their inner thoughts and emotional

[26] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 146-147.
[27] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 77-78.
[28] Ibid., 64.

states, their aspirations and intentions. Though, of course, the narrator may also clearly articulate character.

Chapter 2 – The Word of the LORD in 1 Samuel 1-4

1 Samuel 1-4 establishes much of the narrative context of 1 Samuel 3. Specifically, we learn of the Elides and their sins which afford greater background for the damning words from the LORD. Samuel's origins are also clarified, explaining why the LORD would speak to him in the first instance. Whilst zooming in on 1 Samuel 3 can yield its own insights, zooming out and taking in the wider landscape will produce a broader perspective. In this context, the current chapter will examine 1 Samuel 1, 2 and 4, leaving 1 Samuel 3 for the subsequent chapter. The following analysis is partitioned in two sections. Firstly, character will be explored, including dialogue, action, characterisation. Secondly, prominent motifs within these chapters will be put forward, which also inform 1 Samuel 3.

Characters: Hannah

The narrative of 1 Samuel 1-4 opens with the story of Hannah, highlighting the role of motherhood.[29] This emphasis on Hannah and motherhood attunes well with Gerald Janzen's argument that motherhood analogises not only Hannah's desire for a son but also the lack of the divine word in Israel.[30] Although speaking from another time, the words from the prophet Amos seem fitting, "The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11,

[29] Francesca Aran Murphy, *1 Samuel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible Series (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 3.

[30] J. Gerald Janzen, '"Samuel Opened the Doors of the House of Yahweh" (I Samuel 3.15)', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 8, no. 26 (1983): 89–96.

NRSV). Just as Samuel's birth signals the end of Hannah's childlessness, it also ushers in a new era for Israel, one in which the word of the LORD is once more free-flowing and abundant. This is further supported by the LORD Himself closing Hannah's womb (וַיהוָה סָגַר רַחְמָהּ, "and the LORD shut her womb," 1:5); hinting at a providential rather than miraculous pregnancy.[31] Not only does the LORD have the power to grant or deny children, God also determines how and when the word will return to Israel. Seemingly, the LORD has been waiting for the desire, vow and prayer of Hannah in order to speak to the people of the covenant. Nevertheless, the LORD utilises Hannah's initiative in order to seed Israel with the divine word. The LORD "remembered her" (1:19), allowing Hannah to conceive. Hannah, in this stage, parallels Israel at large, particularly in their respective barrenness, of child (1:2) and of the divine word (cf. 3:1-3). This synecdochic comparison can also be said of the Elide priesthood, the leadership standing in for the entire body politic. If such connections are valid, it suggests that God had never forgotten the people of the covenant, rather the people (the Elide house and the Israelite elders, cf. 4:3) had forgotten or turned away from God, a condition that is altered by Hannah's desire to be a mother. In this way, there is a direct correlation between motherhood (specifically Samuel's origins), new beginnings and the re-emergence of the word of God.

At least within the context of 1 Samuel 1-4, the first and only prayer offered, i.e., Hannah's (1:11), is given a direct and affirmative response by the LORD. The prayer itself is an intimate and private

[31] Murphy, *1 Samuel*, 3.

speech by Hannah and also her first utterance. It is filled with emotion and desperation, in short, powerlessness. This is contrasted by the divine appellation Hannah employs to speak to God (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת *Adonai ṣᵉbaʾôt*, "The LORD of Hosts"). The Hebrew root for 'hosts' (צבא) implies an army or multitude arrayed for war.[32] Hannah addresses the LORD, appealing to divine control and power, in order to find deliverance from her current crestfallen circumstance, namely childlessness. As events unfold, Hannah proves true to her vow and the LORD's power is made manifest in Samuel's birth and life.

It is only after Samuel is dedicated that Hannah celebrates and sings her psalm of praise (2:1-10).[33] The fulfillment of her vow brings her great joy and results in a word of praise to the LORD, signalling the transformation of her initial plight and demonstrating the capacity for divine power to bring about this alteration of conditions. Narrative report is withheld of Hannah's celebration and elation until Samuel is given over to the LORD and Eli's care. Consummation of her pledge leads to another word celebrating and remembering the LORD who remembered her. This mutual remembrance – of God to Hannah and Hannah to God – is established and then contrasted with the Elides' failure to remember or honour the LORD in their role as priests, though God will soon bring them a prophetic reminder (2:27-36). Hannah's words and deeds are largely directed to the God of Israel,

[32] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With An Appendix Containing The Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 838-839. The 'LORD of Hosts' title first appears in the Hebrew Bible in 1 Samuel, which contains five instances (1:3, 11; 4:4; 15:2; 17:45), Hannah's vow (1:11) being the second.

[33] David Jobling, *1 Samuel*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry Series (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 133.

either in vow, praise or dedication. In keeping her promise, Hannah shows herself as faithful to the LORD, which cannot be said of the priesthood.

Hannah's song, according to Gordon, "focuses on the illimitable power of God as it is deployed in the reversal of human fortunes."[34] Ultimately, the LORD is the source of power and knowledge, which means that the Divine can allot these qualities accordingly, particularly in Samuel's case. This sentiment is reflected in Hannah's song. Hannah describes God as wholly unique, "There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. (2:2) Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" (2:3, NRSV). Verse two might point to the encounter between the LORD and Dagon in 1 Samuel 5 but also references God's divine authority more generally, a power that is not equalled by mortal or deity. Ironically, verse three could be read as a comment on the events of 1 Samuel 1-4, where verbal communication entails speaking with arrogance and ignorance, e.g., the wild shouting of the Israelites (4:5).[35] Still, the equivocation of the LORD and knowledge is reinforced in poetic meter, as well as narrative/prose form.

[34] Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), 78.

[35] Cf. Roy L. Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy: The Character of Samuel and the Deuteronomistic Evaluation of Prophecy* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006). Heller's points out that Hannah's song establishes the tone of the rest of 1 Samuel. Also, the dichotomies within 2:1-10 also suggests a world of extremes where "a character must be one extreme or the other: *either* full *or* hungry, *either* rich *or* poor, *either* barren *or* productive, *either* lowly *or* exalted." To this I would add, either with power or without, with knowledge or without.

1 Samuel 2:4-8 continues this focus on power – by describing the LORD's might in terms of a series of reversals between extremes: the mighty and the feeble, the hungry and the full, the barren and she who has children, life and death, poor and rich, raising and bringing low. This motif of reversals and extremes will be expressed in the narrative that follows this poem, specifically between Hannah and Eli's respective families: the mighty becoming feeble (Elides) and the feeble become mighty (Hannah/Samuel); the hungry and barren becoming full and bearing children (Hannah/Samuel); life leading to death (Elides) and vice versa (Hannah/Samuel); those brought low by the LORD (Elides) and those elevated (Hannah/Samuel). Divine power is demonstrated and confirmed through reversals, i.e., through words and deeds of the LORD as well as other characters. This motif is expressed in Hannah's poetry but also in the narrative with the opposing fates of Hannah's family and Eli's family, as well as in Hannah's barrenness and with the Israelites in battle. With all this in mind, Hannah's song of praise seems a deliberate insertion, functioning to elucidate and reinforce in poetic meter what will soon be enacted in prose, namely the power of the LORD expressed through the divine word.

Characters: The Elides

In Murphy's approximation, "First Samuel 2 shows the failure of the hereditary priesthood: the adopted son, Samuel, is a worthier successor to Eli than his own sons."[36] From a thematic viewpoint, part of this inadequacy of the Elide sons is due to their failure to listen and accept chastisement. It

[36]Murphy, *1 Samuel*, 4.

seems plausible to consider that, had Hophni and Phinehas heeded the word of their father (2:22-25) and had such regard resulted in a course corrected towards repentance, righteousness and duty, the words of the LORD to Samuel (3:11-14) and the man of God (2:27-36) may have been different. Yet the failure of the Elides is not only the failure to listen but also a dearth of knowledge and power in Eli's word to his sons. The arrangement of the narrative in 1 Samuel 2 portrays Eli as recently discovering the extent of his sons' infidelities[37] and speaking without any weight or persuasion.[38] His speech questions but neither remonstrates nor chastises, it is mostly Eli making known to his sons something they (and the reader) have known long before their father; his word lacks cogency and authority. It ends with a curious rhetorical question that proves impotent both to his sons in the face of God's will: "'If one person sins against another, someone can intercede for the sinner with the LORD; but if someone sins against the LORD, who can make intercession?' But they would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the LORD to kill them" (2:25). Just as the Elide sons fail to listen to their father, Eli himself fails to listen to the man of God by taking no action to remedy the situation. Of note is the confluence of divine and human initiatives: the LORD is determined to destroy the Elides and the Elide sons' obstinacy, unwittingly for them, only aids in this goal which will reach fruition in the course of two chapters.

[37] Bodner suggests that 3:13 contains an analepsis, "for the iniquity he knew," meaning that Eli in fact knew of his sons' exploits and profited from them, Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 40.

[38] Cf. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 83. Payne notes Eli's "moral weakness" in dealing with his sons, David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 24.

The word of Eli to his sons and the word of the unnamed prophet also reveal new depths of Elide corruption. Not only are the Elide sons laying with women and blaspheming sacrifices, but they, including Eli, honour themselves above God by pilfering from the first fruits (מֵרֵאשִׁית) of God's sacrifices (2:29). Before verse 2:29 one might assume Eli was oblivious to this profaning of the sacrifices, yet the divine word suggests otherwise. One question is just how much Eli had discovered by 'hearing *all* that his sons were doing to Israel' (2:22). Did he learn of both their sacrificial sins *and* sexual liaisons, or just the latter? The laying with the women is implied since it is communicated within the same sentence (v.22), but was that 'all' he learnt? This may seem a minor gap in the text, yet it can be read as a further indication of Eli's ignorance. Had the aging priest been feeding from God's sacrifices for untold years before learning the truth and confronting his sons, or had Eli only discovered their adultery and no more? Both options are available from the text and both paint Eli in an increasingly oblivious pigment. However, if Eli discovered both the adultery *and* the sacrificial misconduct, then his rebuke is further drained of any residual authority. His concern is with the reputation of his house among Israel (2:24)[39] rather than with the reputation of the name of the LORD. Furthermore, he addresses neither issue or offers any reprimand of his own.

The final segment of Eli's word to his sons can easily be read as an impotent attempt at discipline.[40] Yet, in the context of the narrative, the clear answer to his rhetorical question is that no-one can

[39] לוֹא־טוֹבָה הַשְּׁמֻעָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי שֹׁמֵעַ מַעֲבְרִים עַם־יְהוָה, "It is not good the report which I heard the people of the LORD spreading," Eli's words to his sons.

[40] Roy L. Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy: The Character of Samuel and the Deuteronomistic Evaluation of Prophecy* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 55.

intercede for him and his house who have sinned against the LORD (2:25). This suggests a sense of fatalism, at least in Eli's eyes, with no possible change in fortunes for the Elides. The inevitability of divine purpose is written into the narrative in the same verse, "for it was the will of the LORD to kill them"; the sins of the Elides will be their end. This certainty is supported by factors working against intervention. Firstly, there is Eli's weakness to affect change, secondly, there is Hophni and Phinehas' obstinacy and finally, Samuel's naivete. All these elements are essentially a lack of strength, or audacity, to challenge the LORD on this ruling.[41] Unlike the Golden Calf (Ex. 33:12-17) or Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:22-33), there will be no intercession and no avoiding the coming judgment (cf. 2 Kgs 23). Given this inevitability, the narrative sets up succession and substitution, renewal and the establishment of a new order. Looking ahead in the narrative, this 'out with the old and in the new' motif is a precursor for the later creation of the monarchy. Yet, looking back, this old/new pattern was also presaged in Hannah's reversal of fortunes and her giving birth to a son.[42] There is an inescapability in that things are surely changing for Israel. Both on the macro and micro levels, new realities are emerging and older ones are disappearing.

[41] David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, Apollos Old Testament Commentary Series (Nottingham: IVP, 2009), 79-80; Assis argues that Eli's acceptance is derived "from discretion and deeply meditated comprehension," Elie Assis, "Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative: Rhetoric of Characterization," *Prooftexts* 22, no. 3 (2003): 273–304.

[42] Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 10, 27;

It is often noticed that as the Elides fall Samuel rises,[43] a theme which is woven throughout the structure 1 Samuel 2; each mention of Elide depravity is accompanied by a glowing portrait of Samuel. This trend continues in chapter 3 (3:19-4:1a), where Samuel is initially portrayed and described as ignorant of the LORD (3:7). Although Samuel begins at the same stage of ignorance as Hophni and Phinehas (2:12, "they did not know the LORD," לֹא יָדְעוּ[44] אֶת־יְהוָה; 3:7, "and Samuel did not yet know the LORD," וּשְׁמוּאֵל טֶרֶם יָדַע אֶת־יְהוָה) by the end of chapter 3 he has received a direct revelation and word from the LORD; Eli at least receives the same divine message twice but his sons remain in their ignorance. As the Elides decline in knowledge and power, Samuel grows in both respects, a direct enactment of the reversals in Hannah's song (cf. 2:6-10).

Characters: The Israelites

In chapter 4 of First Samuel, after a defeat at the hands of the Philistines, it is once more the leaders of Israel (though not the Shiloh priesthood) who speak with a lack of understanding. They first question why the LORD has allowed this defeat, then immediately and mistakenly intend to coerce the LORD's presence, and thus military victory, with the ark (4:3). Their lack of insight also results in a further display of their powerlessness (4:10). That Hophni and Phinehas are numbered amongst the throng of Israelites parading the ark of the covenant, simply confirms their recalcitrance to

[43] Tony W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2001); Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 40; Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 61. Stephen B. Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.E.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 86.

[44] The NRSV translates this term as 'regard' ("they had no regard for the LORD"). The root (ידע) implies a personal knowledge or intimate acquaintance, Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 393-395. A closer translation would be "they did not *know* the LORD."

repent and failure to listen. In the very language of 1 Sam. 4:3, the Israelite mob seek to coerce the LORD's hand/power in order to save themselves from 'the hand of their enemy' (מִכַּף אֹיְבֵינוּ).[45] In an ironic twist, the Israelites and the Elide sons needn't concern themselves with the hand of the Philistines but rather with the hand of the LORD, suggesting an antagonistic relationship between the LORD and Israel.[46] The sins of Israel, as in the Book of Judges, has reached the point where they have become enemies of the LORD. Yet, even though the power of Israel wanes, the LORD's control remains unchallenged. During the Philistine victory over Israel, the loss of the ark, the defeat of the Philistine deity, Dagon, and the return of the ark – regardless of the situation throughout 1 Samuel 1-7 – the LORD is depicted as possessing "utter mastery of the situation, whatever it may be."[47] Where the LORD is characterised with power and mastery, the Israelites are represented as ineffective and immobilised.

Once the ark reached the camp, the Israelites let off a mighty roar, "so that the earth resounded" (4:5). The Philistines heard this, questioned its meaning and were filled with dread. Drama is established with the trepidatious verbal exchanges within the Philistine camp but is resolved in a brief narration (4:10-11): a greater defeat than the first, the capture of the ark and the death of Phinehas and Hophni. The mighty roar of the Israelites (4:5, וַיָּרִעוּ כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּרוּעָה גְּדוֹלָה) was merely bluster. The Israelites were convinced of their superiority, even instilling fear in their

[45] Jay P. Green, *The Interlinear Bible Hebrew/English* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 2:718.
[46] Cf. 1 Samuel 4:3, לָמָּה נְגָפָנוּ יְהוָה הַיּוֹם, "why has the LORD defeated us this day?"
[47] Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 4.

enemies, yet their powerful shout is as impotent as Eli's word to his sons. Regardless of their convinced victory, the result was a compounded rout. The military victory parallels the spiritual defeat and decline of the Israelites; there is still a lack of knowing in their relationship with the LORD and thus their words also lack power and effectiveness. Again, quite the contrary is true of the LORD. The word, now twice delivered to Eli, is partially fulfilled with the deaths of his sons (4:11). This fulfilment is derived from the LORD's knowledge of their prolonged waywardness and reinforced with the power to realise the prophecy of judgment (cf. 3:11-14).

With the word of the Benjamite messenger coming to Eli, it also brings with it the final fulfilment of the LORD's word. Eli is awaiting news, "watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God" (4:13). Once more, Eli was neither able to prevent his sons and the Israelites from posturing the symbol of divine presence on the battlefield nor its eventual capture. In fearing for the ark, the very same verse again demonstrates that Eli is the last to discover the dire news. Eli lacks not just propositional knowledge (i.e., the fate of the ark and his sons), but also any relational connection with the LORD. His own connection being a threadbare concern for the ark. Eli, even after receiving the word of the LORD twice, failed to prevent or mitigate the now imminent judgment, he neither prayed, interceded nor offered sacrifices.

Another irony comes through the narration. The narrator introduces the aging priest as watching by the side of the road (4:13) yet delays the final detail which confirms Eli's complete impotence: he was ninety-eight years old "and his eyes were set, so that he could not see" (וְעֵינָיו קָמָה וְלֹא יָכוֹל לִרְאוֹת, 4:15).[48] Concerning his vision, 4:15 is almost a verbatim repetition of 3:2 (וְעֵינָו הֵחֵלּוּ כֵהוֹת לֹא יוּכַל לִרְאוֹת, "and his eyes began to grow dim, so that he could not see"), indicating Eli's progressive loss of sight and the progressive unfolding of the divine word. In 3:2, Eli's eyes were beginning to fail just as the LORD was beginning (3:12, הָחֵל) to fulfil what was forewarned (2:27-36). By 4:15, Eli's eyes are set or fixed (קָמָה) just as the LORD's judgment nears culmination. By 1 Samuel 4, Eli is close to death both through the imminent fulfilment of the word of the LORD and due to physical deterioration; Eli's eyesight indicates his complete powerlessness in the face of the word of the LORD.

Eli is looking for knowledge using the very power of perception that is no longer available to him. He will not receive the news with his eyes but with his ears (4:14, "When Eli heard the sound") and it will be by his auditory faculties that he will receive the news he dreads which will lead to his death (4:18). The extent of Eli's complicity in exploiting the ark is not mentioned, as well as any objection he might have been expected to voice; all he can do is await the fatal message atop his seat or throne (הַכִּסֵּא, 4:18). Finally, once Eli's daughter-in-law received the news of the ark, her husband and father-in-law, she gave birth and died (4:19-22). Both Phinehas' wife and Eli were

[48] Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 76.

preoccupied with the ark, more so than Hophni and Phinehas themselves. This was certainly the case with Eli (4:18) but is more ambiguous with his unnamed daughter-in-law, though the name of her son suggests her focus was also on the ark: "And she named the child Ichabod, saying, 'The glory has departed Israel!' because the ark of God had been captured (4:21, ESV).[49] In a sense, that their attention is pinpointed on the ark is apt, yet also betrays the lack of inter-relationality within the Elide family. If the internal familial dynamics of the Elides are insignificant, how much less their covenantal faithfulness to the LORD. Also, that both Phinehas' wife and Eli heard the news that lead to their respective deaths brings to mind the words of the LORD to Samuel in chapter 3: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle" (3:11).[50]

Ichabod's birth and name not only provide a smooth segue into the events of the ark in Philistine territories (1 Samuel 5:1-7:2), but also functions as a comment on the state of the covenantal relationship. The name Ichabod (אִי־כָבוֹד) can be translated as 'where [is] glory?' pointing directly to the glory of the LORD and the ark of the covenant. This question is answered in the context of 4:21, specifically with the verb *gālâ* (גָּלָה): the glory of God (i.e., the ark) has been removed from Israel or has gone into exile from Israel. The sin of the Israelites has led to the glory of the LORD departing the nation, figuratively and physically. Within 1 Samuel 1-4 the priests have profaned

[49] וַתִּקְרָא לַנַּעַר אִי־כָבוֹד לֵאמֹר גָּלָה כָבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הִלָּקַח אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים, "and she named the lad Ichabod, saying, 'the glory has departed (*gālâ*) from Israel because the ark of God has been captured," 4:21.

[50] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:175.

the holiness of sacrifices, abused worshippers and, together with the broader Israelite population, flaunted the ark of the LORD of Hosts as if it were a lucky charm. Once again, the entire nation, not just the Elides, are guilty of a lack of knowledge of the LORD and also any power; their spiritual shortcomings are the source of all their woes.

Characters: The LORD

The divine word in 1 Sam. 2:27-36 opens with a look back into the past, of God's revelation to Eli's ancestor and choosing their family as priests. The purpose of Eli, Phinehas and Hophni was to continue the legacy of unique responsibility granted to their family out of all the Israelites. God's two opening clauses are conjunctive queries to Eli: "Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? And did I choose him out of all the tribes in Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me?" (2:27-28, ESV). The rhetoric is clear, the answer is affirmative in both cases. The LORD is reminding Eli of his heritage and his responsibilities, since he and his house have forgotten them both. Hiding nothing from the accused, the LORD begins his word by reminding the aging priest of his identity and purpose. This setup imbues the following denunciation with greater sting; not only have the Elides forsaken their duties and despised the LORD, they have forgotten themselves in the process.

God accuses Eli of fattening himself and his family from the sacrifices, scorning that which belongs to the LORD (לָמָּה תִבְעֲטוּ בְּזִבְחִי, "why do you trample/despise my sacrifices?" 2:29). It is at this point

where the dialogue turns from rhetoric to indictment. Having established the duties of the priesthood (offering sacrifices, etc.), the Elides are found more than wanting, they actively honour themselves above the LORD and pervert their very purpose. From here the LORD declares that honour will come to those who honour the LORD (2:30), effectively cutting off the Elides from the office of priest and further declaring that the strength of his family will be cut off (2:31). Initially, it may have seemed the LORD was being generous in the opening recount of Elide family history, yet it proves to be more kindling for the fire. By establishing where the priesthood began and where it currently stands under Eli's tenure, their judgment is brought to a comprehensive, severe and poetic climax[51] – "Therefore the LORD the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your family and the family of your ancestor should go in and out before me forever'; but now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt'" (2:30, NRSV).

Considering the current division of 1 Samuel 2, it opens with Hannah's song (2:1-10) and closes with the LORD's word of judgment (2:27-36). This bookending of poetry allows some comparisons to be drawn, as well as indicating that literary structure has theological significance. One parallel is the LORD bringing low the mighty and exalting those who honour the LORD. In Hannah's poem she witnesses that "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts" (2:7, NRSV) which is mirrored in the prophetic word, "for those who honour me I will honour, and those who

[51] Cf. Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 60-61.

despise me shall be treated with contempt" (2:30, NRSV). Clearly it is Hannah and Samuel who are exalted and who honour the LORD in their faithfulness to promises (1:24-2) and in maintaining priestly duties (2:18, 26). Conversely, it is Eli, Hophni and Phinehas who despise the LORD by perverting their office and the sacrificial system, and are subsequently brought low. This juxtaposition between Hannah's family and Eli's house is also seen in the perspectives of these two bookending poems, the first is a song of praise and jubilation *to* the LORD from the exalted, whilst the second is a message of doom *from* the LORD to those about to be brought low. These two poetic words also illustrate God's power to bring about these twin realities to fruition, to simultaneously exalt and humble, to honour and scorn; the LORD, who has listened and witnessed, now speaks before acting with authority and purpose.

The condemnatory word of the LORD in chapter 2 acts as a bridge connecting not only what has previously transpired but what will unfold in chapters 3 and 4. In 1 Samuel 3 this same tenor is given to Samuel (3:11-14) and received a second time by Eli (3:18), whilst chapter 4 describes the arrival of the foretold judgment on the Elide house. The word of the LORD given to both the man of God and to Samuel concerning Eli's house plays out despite the absence of both prophetic personages in the narrative; the power of their word is demonstrated in its enactment.[52] Although this points to the power of the prophetic word, ultimately, it is the LORD's word and power that is conveyed and fulfilled; again literary structure indicates theological significance. Although only Eli

[52] Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 46.

receives the verbal word of judgment, nevertheless, the LORD's purpose is transmitted through these prophets to Eli, his sons, the Israelites and even to the Philistines and their deity, Dagon (1 Sam. 5).

Themes: Communication

Throughout 1 Samuel 1-4, the text offers several examples of dialogue. In chapter 1, the dialogue of Elkanah, Hannah, Eli predominate (e.g., 1:8, 11, 14-18, 20, 22-23, 26-28); the opening verses of chapter two (2:1-10) are taken up by Hannah's song, there is the narrated exchange between the priest's servant and a worshipper (2:15-16), Eli's blessing (2:20) and rebuke (2:23-25) and the oracle from the man of God (2:27-36); chapter four features the queries of both the Israelites (4:3), the Philistines (4:6-9) and Eli (4:14), the exchange between Eli and the Benjamite runner (4:16-17), the reassurance of the women attending Phinehas' wife (4:20) and her reasoning behind the name, Ichabod (4:21-22). Given this large volume of character speech, the centrality of communication in these adjacent chapters to 1 Samuel 3 is also highlighted.[53] Some common patterns in these exchanges between characters is a general lack of understanding and reciprocation, as well as simply not heeding the words of another. Elkanah fails to comfort his wife, Eli mistakes Hannah as drunk, Eli's sons do not listen to their father's rebuke, Phinehas' wife does not respond to the women attending to her, both the Israelites and Philistines mistake the outcome of the battle, etc. In general, then, communication is woven throughout the narrative, yet more more often than not

[53] Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 19.

such exchanges exhibit limited understanding stemming from failures to listen and inaccurate speaking.

Elkanah is afforded two lines of dialogue (1:8, 23) and takes a backseat position to Hannah, who features more prominently. His first words are to her, offering blithe comfort and misunderstanding in the face of her deep emotional distress. As Jobling notes, his word focuses more on himself than his wife,[54] where the reverse might have elicited at least a verbal response from Hannah. Given the way events play out, Elkanah's query answers itself: he is *not* worth more than ten sons to Hannah, she simply desires one son, a child to dedicate to the LORD. Moreover, Elkanah's words here reflect more his own view of Hannah, that in his own eyes Hannah is worth more to him than ten sons, yet this still fails to address Hannah's own emotive state. Still, Elkanah's second line of dialogue is more deferential to Hannah's wishes for Samuel and he offers a wish for his son, that Samuel's word may be established by the LORD (1:23), a wish that will be granted by the beginning of chapter 4 (4:1a).[55] This is an example of another motif of 1 Samuel 1-4, that human misunderstanding and ignorance is still used to accomplish the purposes of the LORD, this is a central point in 1 Samuel 3 in particular.

[54] Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 131-132.

[55] Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 53; although my argument leans towards Elkanah's lack of understanding, his yearly words of comfort also express his "touching effort to console his wife… fully dramatizing Elkanah's tender devotion to Hannah," Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 105.

Themes: An Annual Occurrence of Abuse

Although not directly quoted, the narrator makes mention of Peninnah's constant provocations toward Hannah (1:6), which Polzin reads as a yearly occurrence.[56] If this is the case, then it suggests a routine use of words that demeans and disparages. Even further, there are the constant abuses of power by the Elides concerning sacrifices and worshippers; not only an abuse of language but also a perversion of responsibility. Year by year Peninnah incites Hannah, year by year Elkanah fails to console his wife, year by year the Elides profane the sacrifices and exploit worshippers. The very environment at Shiloh during the time for offering sacrifices, though perhaps all year round, is one of grief and exploitation. At this stage Shiloh acts as a substitute for Israel, a synecdoche for the entire country, a land devoid of the LORD's presence and word. We are yet to venture beyond the confines of the Shiloh sanctuary, so how the rest of Israel fares at this stage is unknown, though the focus on the priesthood, the ark and sacrifices is at least suggestive. Indeed, when the wider Israelite population enter the stage in 4:3 ("the elders of Israel") they seek to exploit the LORD's presence – and power – as embodied by the ark of the covenant. Once it is taken from Shiloh, Hophni and Phinehas are with the ark, (4:4) and by extension amongst the people as they return with it to the battle encampment. The abuses exhibited by the Elides are similarly enacted by the Israelites at large.

[56] Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 20; cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 104.

In a sense, without the word of the LORD speech is perverted and power is distorted, since there is no knowledge of the LORD. In this climate of proliferating abuses, "Hannah finds her situation intolerable. She makes no reply to her rival's taunts or to her husband's reassurance. But to YHWH, at the shrine of Shiloh, she pours out her heart."[57] Hannah is an exception to this trend towards abuse and debasement, more specifically, she is the victim of all these verbal abuses,[58] yet she does not add to this noxious environment. Her first words are a vow and prayer for deliverance from the misery directed towards her, but also a promise to dedicate her male child before the LORD "until the day of his death" (1:11). In contrast to the Elides who pilfer from God's first fruits, Hannah is ready to give her firstborn to the LORD. Even in the face of Eli's misreading of her, she simply defends herself without disparaging the aging priest, even gaining a blessing (1:17). In this climate of repeated verbal abuse, Hannah does not respond in kind but pivots in another direction, seeking solace and help from the LORD. Using Hannah's own words, she is the only person who remembers the LORD and the only character to offer a prayer to the God of Israel in 1 Samuel 1-4.[59] Hannah is the first character to directly recognise the LORD's power and beseech God to direct that authority to bring about a change of circumstances. Although her initial concern is for herself, her song demonstrates that her purview expands to include the condition of all Israel.

[57] Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 132.

[58] Clearly, she is victimised by Peninnah and not comforted by her husband, but by inference, also a victim of Hophni and Phinehas since they harassed anyone who offered sacrifice (2:13), which includes Elkanah and Hannah (1:3); Robert Alter reads her prayer, which are her first spoken words, as "a formal mark of her dignity and her destiny," *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 105.

[59] At least in chapter 1. By chapter 2, Eli remonstrates his sons and invokes 'the LORD' (2:25).

Themes: Everyone Doing What is Right in Their Own Eyes

Jobling notes that considering 1 Samuel 4 within the immediate background of its preceding three chapters alone will yield one reading, whilst widening the scope to include Judges 2 and the cycle of sin established there will add further context, and thus alter its meaning.[60] Judges 2:11-23 details the cycle of sin and deliverance seen throughout that book. Israel does what is evil in the eyes of the LORD (Judges 2:11); the Israelites are given over into the hands of their enemies (2:14-15) but a deliverer is raised by the LORD who ends the foreign oppression (2:16); during the judge's lifetime the Israelites are free from the yoke of their enemies since the LORD is with the judge (2:18); nevertheless, once the judge dies the cycle is repeated (2:19-20). From Judges 2, it is told that the Israelites refuse to "take care to walk in the way of the LORD" (2:22) and continually follow foreign gods (2:13, 17, 19). Alongside this the Israelites refuse to listen (2:17); if they refuse to heed their deliverers it is clear they also do not listen to the word of the LORD. The Book of Judges, then, provides important thematic precedents for 1 Samuel 1-4. The breakdown of communication between the LORD and Israel and the audacious sins of the Israelites in the book of Samuel are reiterations of the pattern established earlier in the canon.

On the topic of power and knowledge, Jobling provides a unique perspective. According to him, Hannah "understands very well what happens when 'all the people, even the priests of Israel, 'do

[60] Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 606-607.

what is right in their own eyes.' She can respond only by doing what is right in her own eyes."[61] Taking into account the wider canonical context, the evil perpetrated by the Elides in 1 Samuel 1-4 is simply an extension of the Israelites doing what is 'good in their own eyes' in Judges. The implication is, what is good in the eyes of the Israelites is evil in the eyes of the LORD. For the Elides, this is made explicit in 2:17, "Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD; for they treated the offerings of the LORD with contempt." Given this, the failure of the Elides can be seen as the maintenance of the cycle of sin stretching back to the time of the Judges. This is unsurprising since Eli is included in their number (4:18).

Another important aspect of the book Judges is the refrain that Israel perpetually does what is good in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). In both verses the suggestion is that the cause of everyone doing what is right in their eyes is due to Israel having no king.[62] It seems a small leap to say that Israel doing what is good in their own eyes equates to doing what is evil in the eyes of the LORD, a reoccurring reminder to the reader (Judges 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Of course, these ideas persist into 1 Samuel 1-4: Elkanah supporting Hannah's decision to wean Samuel, "do what is good in your eyes" (עֲשִׂי הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינַיִךְ, 1:23); Eli's response to God's word is "it is the LORD, let him do what is good in His eyes" (יְהוָה הוּא הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינָו יַעֲשֶׂה, 3:18); Phinehas and Hophni's sacrificial sins "was very great in the sight of the LORD" (2:17).[63] Thus, in the language of Judges, the LORD, Hannah and

[61] Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 134.

[62] Cf. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 3.

[63] הַחַטָּאת הַנְּעָרִים גְּדוֹלָה מְאֹד אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה. Cf. 2 Sam. 11:27 - וַיֵּרַע הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה דָוִד בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה, "but the thing which David did was evil in the eyes of the LORD."

the Elide sons each do what is right in their eyes. However, what is right for Hophni and Phinehas is abominable to the LORD but what is good in Hannah's eyes also seems to be right in the sight of the LORD. The clearest evidence for this position is in how the LORD responds to each of their actions that are good in their own eyes: Hannah is blessed with children but the Elide family is almost completely destroyed.

Earlier it was considered that Hannah faced the continual assaults of Peninnah due to her inability to have children, yet perhaps this was not the only source of Hannah's vexations. Jobling suggests that just as the Elide sons continually harassed the worshippers offering sacrifices at Shiloh and slept with the women serving at the tent of meeting, Hannah may have also been a victim of their abuses of power year after year.[64] In this way, Hannah's desire for a son, specifically to dedicate to the LORD, is a way for her to achieve some measure of justice for her sufferings and also sheds a more defiant light on her first exchange with Eli.[65] Hannah's desire for a son dedicated to the LORD can be read as an intervention, disrupting this sustained cycle of sin by Israel and her leaders. Where the priests take from the LORD, Hannah gives back to the LORD, signalling a change from this downward spiral of sin established in the book of Judges. Like the Elide priesthood, Hannah does what it good in her own eyes, but where their actions were labelled as evil (2:17), Hannah's vow is answered by the LORD (1:19). Furthermore, she remains true to her word by handing over

[64] Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 134.

[65] On the other hand, she makes no mention of such abuse. This could be taken as Hannah's fear to speak out or that such reading goes beyond the bounds of the text.

her son to be dedicated to God. All this sets Hannah in direct contrast to the Elide priesthood. Although both the actions of Hannah and the Elides elicit divine attention, Hannah's family prospers but Eli's family are led into ruin, both outcomes being consequences of the intermingling between human action and divine input. Hannah's initiative, vow and its fulfillment prepares the way for the LORD to speak to Samuel, Eli and Israel, thus breaking the cycle of sin perpetuated by the priesthood.

Chapter 3 – The Word of the LORD in 1 Samuel 3

The word of the LORD, from a narrative-centric perspective, is the central theme of 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a. Unlike most commentators and scholars who have only noted the presence of the divine word in their analyses, it was primarily J. P. Fokkelman who singled out the word of the LORD (*dᵉbar Adonai*, דְּבַר יְהוָה) as the text's overriding focus.[66] This is reflected in the opening (3:1-3) and closing verses (3:19-4:1a) as well as the central position taken up by God's speech to Samuel (3:11-14). Essentially, this entire passage in its received form is centred on and revolves around the word of the LORD. The following will explore how the word of the LORD functions in the narrative, particularly how it is expressed in terms of two subthemes: communication and status.

The communicative aspects of the divine word, as the term might suggest, deals with speaking and listening, and their intermingling in the plot. Speakers speak but are not always heard and understood, in fact, there is a good measure of confusion evident in the breaking through of the word of the LORD into the Shiloh sanctuary. The status subtheme centres on the ideas of knowledge and power. In 1 Samuel 3, power is present with the priesthood, the sanctuary and the ark of the covenant. Yet, power for the characters in the narrative is derived from the dispensation of the divine word. The divine word also affords its receivers knowledge of the LORD as well as future

[66] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:172.

events. In order to examine these elements in 1 Samuel 3, the following sections are divided, firstly into characters and secondly into themes.

Eli

Eli is the only member of his house present in 1 Samuel 3; however, it is the sins of he and his family which evoke the word of the LORD. Even in this climate of precious words from God and infrequent visions (3:1), due to the sins of the priesthood, the divine presence will manifest in Shiloh. The first detail of characterisation afforded to Eli is his failing eyesight (3:2), this coupled with his advanced age (2:22) informs the reader that the Shiloh priest is in decline and to an extent unresponsive.

This aloofness is also evidenced in Samuel's lack of knowledge of the LORD. Not only does 3:7 exonerate Samuel's ignorance, it further indicts the Elides, particularly Eli. Although Samuel's deficiency in knowledge can be attributed to his youth and inexperience, it also points to the dearth of insight and dereliction of duty of the Elide priesthood. Who is to teach the youth about the LORD if not the elders? Deuteronomy 6:20-25 instructs the Israelites to pass on their legacy and national story to their children, to recount and remember not only their time as slaves but also their deliverance by the LORD. Ironically, this is the same chapter in which the Israelites are called to listen: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone... Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise." (Deut. 6:5-7, NRSV). Once more, the Elides have forgotten their purpose and forsaken their obligations in favour of

pursing personal gain, enhancing their own name rather than making known to Samuel the name of the LORD.

In Eli's defence, he is not completely devoid of wisdom, offering Samuel the necessary guidance to communicate with the LORD. Yet, that he did not offer such guidance earlier to Samuel speaks to a lack of direction. It is perhaps unsurprising that poor leadership should come from an elderly man with failing eyesight and wayward sons, still it only further distances the reader from Eli. On the whole, where the Elides are diligent in their sin, Samuel is assiduous in his service to the LORD, and although Eli spoke to his sons, his words fell on deaf ears, changing neither their actions nor the verdict of the divine word.[67]

One feature that 1 Samuel 2 and 3 have in common is the presence of a word from the LORD. Both words (2:27-36 and 3:11-14) are clearly critical of Eli and his house. Where the first message from the LORD explained and defined the judgment that would visit the Elides, the second word is a confirmation of the first. This shared featured results in a gap in the text, namely Eli's response to the first word of God, or rather, lack thereof. After this word is spoken to Eli in 2:27-36, given by the 'man of God' (2:27), no response is afforded to Eli before the narrative swiftly moves to chapter 3 and the evening visit of the LORD to Samuel. Eli does not respond to God's word until he receives

[67] Murphy, *1 Samuel*, 4, 32.

it a second time in 3:18, once it is delivered through Samuel. The gap is resolved with Eli's response, "He is the LORD, let him do what is good in his eyes" (3:18).

But does the author withhold his response or was Eli simply stunned into silence by the intricate and devastating word from the LORD (2:27-6)? A response of silence there is fitting since Eli has received a definitive word from the Almighty, a word outlining the collective sins and failures of his family, any response would only be out of place. Given the comprehensive nature of God's word to Eli, it is difficult to fathom how any defence could be established. Eli and his family had been given an elevated position which they – Hophni, Phinehas *and* Eli – instead utilised as a tool to further their own greed. Consequently, they have been judged guilty and will be replaced by a faithful priest. In this light, at the end of 1 Samuel 2, Eli has been humbled into silence, not only by a sudden and terrible word from the LORD, but also by being confronted by his own sins and failures.

After this silence, the LORD arrives surreptitiously, under cover of darkness, to speak to a young lad in 1 Samuel 3. From Eli's perspective, God has spoken and he waits for the promised judgment upon his house to be fulfilled. Yet, after being awoken by Samuel on three occasions, Eli realises the word of the LORD has once again come within proximity. In Eli's eyes there is an element of suspense at play since a potential new development is on the cusp of revelation. Although chronologically Eli chastised his sons (2:22-26) before receiving the first word (2:27-36), his eagerness to hear the word given to the Samuel in 3:16 suggests a hope that the word of judgment

in chapter 2 might be overturned, at the very least a curiosity as to the tenor of this latest divine communication.

After the evening meeting between the LORD and Samuel, a new day arrives together with Eli's desire to learn of this new word from God. Eli's words to Samuel are as follows:

A What was it **that he told you**?

B Do not **hide it from me**.

C May God do so to you and more also,

B' if you **hide** anything **from me**

A of all **that he told you** (3:17, NRSV)[68]

Eli's words take on a chiastic structure with a repeated emphasis on Samuel to not only reveal the word of the LORD to Eli but also to hide nothing, to disclose all that was revealed to him. This desire of Eli's is satisfied in the very next verse: "So Samuel **told him everything** and **hid nothing from him**" (3:18). This formulated urging from Eli reveals intent, deliberation and premeditation;[69] Eli is eager to learn of this newest development, perhaps being also kept awake in anticipation. For Eli, the word is simply an abridged version of the more detailed message he has already received in chapter 2.[70] The LORD's words in 3:11-14 reinforce the intent to bring about the judgment detailed in 2:27-36.

[68] Assis, "Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative: Rhetoric of Characterization," 282.
[69] Ibid., 283; cf. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:183.
[70] Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 89; Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 63; Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 78;

This particular gap of Eli's response, then, is suggestive of his mind-state at realising a divine word has come to Samuel, waiting with anticipation until morning to learn of its dire content. What, I contend, distinguishes this as a *gap* rather than a *blank* (or unimportant omission),[71] is that it reveals Eli's psychology[72] and adds to his overall characterisation. If this understanding of Eli anticipating more favourable news is correct, it would suggest the old priest is, to a large extent, self-deluded. If a silent response was apropos in the face of divine condemnation, any anticipation of a divine turning from judgment is mistaken and countered by the word of the LORD, particularly since no remedial action has been taken by Eli.

Samuel

The etymology of Samuel's name, as described by Hannah, is given in 1:20.

> And she called his name Samuel, "Because from the LORD I asked for him."[73]
> וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שְׁמוּאֵל כִּי מֵיְהוָה שְׁאִלְתִּיו

In my estimation, Samuel's name means 'listen to God' (שְׁמַע, 'listen!' in the imperative mood + אֵל, 'God') or simply 'listen' (√שמע). Not only does this relate to the theme of communication running through 1 Samuel 1-4, but also illustrates the lad's central role as prophet and bearer of God's word to Israel, emphasising his twin duties of hearing and recommunicating, receiving and channelling the divine word. Samuel's defining action in this story is to listen(!), to God and also to Eli (עֵלִי, 'my

[71] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 236.
[72] Assis, "Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative," 283.
[73] John R. Kohlenberger III, *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 158.

God'). Both figures call the young lad by his name,[74] reiterating this imperative decree. Also, within the context of 1:20 is the root meaning 'to ask or request' (√שׁאל), Samuel is what Hannah asked or requested of the LORD in her emotion-filled vow (1:11). Although Samuel does ask God to speak, initially it is the LORD requesting the youth to recognise the divine voice and listen to the divine word. Samuel's request is to ask the LORD to speak since the servant is ready and listening. This central concern of listening is emphasised and reinforced not only with the repeated misfires of comprehension on Samuel's part, but is also expressed in the LORD calling the boy by his name, particularly in 3:10 with the double, 'Samuel! Samuel!' The first spoken words of God in the book of Samuel *is* 'Samuel,' repeated five times (3:4, 6, 8, and twice in 3:10), a divine call to a young and inexperienced youth, yet nestled within that summons is an urge to listen, to acknowledge his God and to receive the word of the LORD. In 1 Samuel 2:11 the LORD had remembered and listened to the prayer of the boy's mother, Hannah, now the LORD comes to call the child of promise to hearken to Him; God has listened and now it is Samuel and Israel's time to listen to the word of the LORD. For Sternberg, names of biblical characters not only mark their significance but also act as unique, mnemonic aids even if they are irreducible to a character's personality and are usually opaque and arbitrary, nevertheless a name confers status.[75] As interpreted here, Samuel's name is a signifier of his prophetic office as well as a reminder of the themes of 'the word of the LORD' and 'communication' in the narrative.

[74] Cf. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:171.

[75] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 330.

Commentators have noted the direct comparisons that are drawn between the son of Hannah and the sons of Eli in 1 Samuel 2.[76] Coupled within each of the sins of the Elides is a reminder of Samuel's faithful ministering to the LORD (cf. 2:18, 26). This pattern of behaviour is extended into 1 Samuel 3 as Samuel sleeps, perhaps habitually,[77] by the ark (3:3), he is positioned physically in closer proximity to God than Eli[78] (3:2), which is also reflected in his constant ministering (√שרת, cf. 2:11, 18; 3:1). Not only is Samuel directly contrasted to the Elides in narration but also in action and habit, whilst the Elide sons persist in their sin, Samuel remains committed to his duties. Although the narrator describes Samuel as lacking knowledge of God's word (3:7), his dutifulness demonstrates, or at least suggests, a nascent intimation of the LORD. He might not yet know the LORD but his actions set him apart from any of his peers and seniors at Shiloh, and if a word were to come to the religious leaders of Israel, Samuel seems perfectly positioned, morally and physically, to receive it. This is indeed what transpires, the aging and sinful priest is passed over by the word of the LORD in favour for a young lad who is seemingly the last faithful servant in Shiloh.[79] Despite this, there is a degree of hesitancy in Samuel's second response to the divine word (3:6), "perhaps hinting at his own confusion or self-doubt about the experience."[80] Nevertheless, when the sons of Eli receive a word from their father it yields no fruit, but when Samuel receives a word from the LORD his God,

[76] Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 50, 64; Chapman, *1 Samuel*, 88; Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 39-40.
[77] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:160, 162; Polzin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 50; Chapman, *1 Samuel*, 87.
[78] George Savran, 'Theophany as Type Scene', *Bloomington* 23, no. 2 (2003): 126.
[79] Cf. Assis, 283; R. K. Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel: Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Its Theological Significance* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 149, 151-153.
[80] Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 66.

it leads to a drastic change; Samuel increases in knowledge of the LORD where the Elides do not, including their patriarch.

Not only has the word of the LORD afforded Samuel a measure of power and superiority, even succession, over Eli, it also leads to him being acknowledged as a prophet by the people. He is raised to a higher social status and public responsibility (3:20), so much so that it "is now the presence of Samuel that demonstrates the presence of YHWH."[81] Furthermore, by the end both the word of the LORD and the word of Samuel go out to all Israel (4:1a) and "the LORD was with Samuel, letting none of his words fall to the ground" (3:19). 1 Samuel 3 illustrates that Samuel's task will be not only to listen to the divine word but also to convey it to the nation at large. This transition into greater power is mirrored by the prolepsis' (3:19-4:1a) lack of reference to Samuel as either 'boy' or dependent on Eli; Samuel transitions from *náʿar* (נַּעַר, youth, lad, servant) to *nāḇîʾ* (נָבִיא, prophet), "the accompanying alliteration underlining the great change."[82] In contrast to Eli, as the story progresses Samuel grows to prominence both physically, in the knowledge of God and the *dᵉḇar Adonai*, which also results in increased influence. As such, he "changes from being a temple servant to being a spiritual leader with national authority."[83]

[81] Ibid., 70.

[82] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:157.

[83] Ibid., 158.

Essentially, Samuel now draws power and knowledge directly from the word of the LORD. The inverse fortunes of Eli and Samuel, foreshadowed in Hannah's song ("he brings low, he also exalts" 2:7) and reinforced by the man of God ("for those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt" 2:30), is achieved through the reception of the divine word. Each instance Eli is addressed by the word of God it is by proxy, a nameless man of God and Samuel, emphasising his increasing distance, both spiritually and morally, from the LORD. Furthermore, after each reception of the divine word Eli's power is subsequently diminished; in the first instance harsh censure, in the second instance re-confirmation of judgment and supplantation through Samuel. By 1 Samuel 2-3 God's word no longer comes to Eli, but after receiving it once Samuel will continue to embody the word of the LORD to all Israel.

The only similarity between Samuel, Hophni and Phinehas is their mutual lack of knowledge of the LORD.[84] This is highly ironic considering the Elides' positions as leaders, "in spite of all the cultic and ritual competence and knowledge which [they have] acquired [they have] no knowledge of God!"[85] To a large extent, the Elide priesthood's guidance at a national level is a case of the ignorant leading the ignorant (cf. 4:2-11). This culminates in the compound disasters of 1 Samuel 4, two devastating military defeats, thousands slain (including Phinehas and Hophni) and the ark of the covenant plundered. It is little wonder then that the Elides, Hophni and Phinehas in particular,

[84] Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 67; Chapman, *1 Samuel*, 89-90.
[85] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:167.

have forgotten their priestly purpose and fallen into sin. The words of the prophet Hosea seem apt, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hos. 4:6, NRSV). The LORD's priests are destroyed for their lack of knowledge of both God and the divine word, yet one of their number is raised as a prophet-priest to help usher in a new epoch in Israel's history. The ending of one thing brings with it the beginning of something new. Yet this transition is achieved through adherence to the word of the LORD and growing in the knowledge of God. In both these respects Hophni and Phinehas fail, though Samuel increases in both regards. Consequently, the Elide leadership of Israel is brought to an end where Samuel's time as the mouthpiece of the LORD only builds in momentum.

Throughout the earlier stages of the narrative, the word of God produces confusion and misunderstanding. Only by the middle (3:8-18) and end (3:19-4:1a) does it – for Samuel – yield knowledge, understanding and empowerment. Before the word of the LORD authorises the boy, it first confuses him, highlighting his distinct lack of power and knowledge. In 1 Samuel 3:6 Eli calls Samuel, "my son" (בְּנִי), a typical form of address from a superior to an inferior.[86] At this point, Eli is still the superior, having knowledge of the word of the LORD, directly in the previous chapter and perhaps accrued from his years of experience. Yet with his dim vision and insight he is not able

[86] Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 66; within 1 Samul 1-4 it occurs four times (2:24; 3:6, 16; 4:16), other examples in DH include Josh. 7:19; 1 Sam. 24:17; 26:17, 21, 25; 2 Sam. 13:25; 18:22; 19:1, 5; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 120.

to perceive immediately the presence of God but only after repeated prodding. The three "miscarries of communication"[87] all play out in the same fashion: God calls Samuel, Samuel hears but perceives it as Eli to whom he responds, and Eli tells him to return to his resting place. Eventually, the message is received only by Samuel nevertheless it is a word wholly concerned with Eli and his house. Therefore, these miscarries can be seen as foreshadowing the eventual reception, once more, of the divine word to its ultimate recipient, Eli. Twice, now, the LORD speaks through intermediary to the aging priest, delivering a decisive and final word which matches the severity of the sins it punishes. By the end, Samuel has been enlarged by knowledge where Eli has not, furthermore, the power dynamic has shifted; where Samuel was initially dependent on Eli in order to receive the divine word, Eli is subsequently reliant on Samuel to finally learn his fate.[88] As a whole, 1 Samuel 3 submits that the "knowledge of God... is something you have only if God himself divulges it to you."[89]

The LORD

The opening salvo of the divine word is a declaration that the LORD is about to do something ear-tingling and, for the Elide house, horrifying (3:11, cf. 4:18-19).[90] 3:12 clarifies that this declaration is to fulfil against the Elides what was promised in 1 Samuel 2, with the LORD revealing to Samuel the sins of the Elides – Hophni and Phinehas blaspheming God and Eli not restraining or rebuking them

[87] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:162.
[88] Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 25.
[89] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:168.
[90] Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 78.

(3:13). Given the order of events, it's strange that the LORD would claim that Eli failed to rebuke his sons when he did confront them in 2:22-25. Though, the point seems to be that Eli's words fell on deaf ears and his sons persisted in their blasphemy, the end result being as if Eli did not confront his sons at all. Eli ultimately fails in this regard.[91] Finally, the LORD claims, with more than a hint of poetic justice, that the sins of the Elides will not be expiated by sacrifice or offering (3:14). The blasphemy of the Elide sons prevents them from further 'exploiting' the sacrificial system by expiating their own sins, even though this would constitute its proper and intended use. Once more, there is little hope for Eli's house; the word of the LORD is inching inevitably closer towards fulfilment with nothing able to impede its advance or annul its purpose.

For Sternberg, one constant aspect of God's character is spreading knowledge, as such, conflicts arise when this desire is frustrated. "The mainspring of God's actions throughout history is the spread of 'knowledge'... Only when his creatures threaten of frustrate that desire do other motives, like retribution, come into play; and along fairly determinate lines."[92] Sternberg understands God's primary motivation in the Bible as spreading knowledge, though this is not the sole drive. Still, this reliability in God's characterisation lends itself to a predictable pattern, compared to the more mercurial motivations and thus greater variability of human characters. Human characterisation and motivation are prone to change whereas, God's "mode of action shifts from one moment to

[91] Cf. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 40; Chapman, *1 Samuel*, 86; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:177;
[92] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 324.

another, yet his nature remains static…God's ways may remain mysterious but man is himself a mystery."[93]

Within 1 Samuel 1-4, this divine motivation to increase knowledge is also at play. By 3:19-4:1a knowledge of the divine word has been proliferated by God through Samuel. The burgeoning prophet increases knowledge by increasing the word of the LORD in all Israel, thus fulfilling the LORD's primary motivation. This abundance of God's word contrasts its dearth in 3:1, a shortage (and thus ignorance) which arguably extended back to 1 Samuel 1:1 to include the entirety of Eli's time as priest and judge over Israel. If Eli's leadership was characterised by an absence of the divine word, the LORD remembering Hannah (1:19) and Samuel's providential conception (1:20) can be understood as part of God's plan to eventually diffuse understanding to his people once more (3:19-4:1a); illuminating the darkness of ignorance (3:1-3) with the light of knowledge (3:15).

This emphasis on knowledge, then, is emphasised in the repeated words of the LORD (2:27-36 and 3:11-14). The same word is conveyed twice to Eli with the LORD clearly sending a message to his priest. The LORD makes known to Eli, in no uncertain terms, that the sins of his house are not hidden from his eyes, that judgment is imminent and will not be averted. The word of the LORD will not be denied, even by the priesthood. Given the overall outcome of 1 Samuel 1-4, the fall of

[93] Ibid. 324, 325.

the Elides and the rise of Samuel, God's purpose of increasing knowledge is only temporarily stalled but not derailed. The word of the LORD persists until its purpose is realised.

The word of the LORD also acts as a way of illuminating character. According to Heller, the "revelation of the word from YHWH to Samuel will, furthermore, be the primary focus of the evaluation of the prophetic role of Samuel at the end of the chapter (3:19-4:1a)."[94] That is, Samuel's diligence in ministering to the LORD extends to his faithful reception and transmission of the divine word where the boy 'told him [Eli] everything and hid nothing from him' (3:18a). Similarly, Eli's reception of the divine word paints him in a positive light,[95] even as the word itself tells a different story of him. Again, the biblical narrative conveys complexity of character in Eli's case. Although his acknowledgement of God's word and judgment is favourable, it does not cast aside his failings as priest and father, nor does it negate the coming judgment. Still, the old priest's insight (3:9) is both a parting gift to his young charge and the means by which he can accept God's final word on his house. Add to this the content of the divine word itself which illuminates a condemnatory light on the Elides, both father and sons (cf. 3:13-14). Not only does the LORD condemn the Elides, but the narrator also goes to lengths establishing them as wholly deserving of their censure; in addition to direct characterisation (cf. 2:12, 22, 25) there is also a detailed recounting of their blaspheming of the sacrifices and worshippers (2:12-17). There are no redeeming qualities evident in Hophni or

[94] Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 67.

[95] Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 27; Chapman, *1 Samuel*, 88-89; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:185.

Phinehas' respective portrayals, only Eli can be said to be the best of a bad bunch. On this issue of Elide characterisation, the LORD and narrator are of one, unequivocal position.

Communication

"Speak, for your servant is listening" (3:10). This utterance exemplifies the communicative aspects of the text. Perhaps more than anything else, 1 Samuel 3 is a story of communication: calls heard but mistaken, responses to the wrong person and a lack of common understanding. Although it is the boy who is called, nevertheless it is the old man, still retaining a measure of insight despite the ravages of time, that provides the crucial key that leads to a reversal of fortunes. Eli finally realises, Samuel eventually comprehends and the word of the LORD is delivered. God has been speaking but the servants of the LORD have not been listening until Samuel is able to say these words, not until this moment is an exchange of communication truly completed – a call transmitted, received and acknowledged. *Once the word is recognised, knowledge pours forth*. In fact, after Eli's realisation (3:8), his advice to Samuel (3:9) is the first complete exchange of communication in the story, where at least one person understands what it occurring as opposed to both conversational partners being lost in confusion and misperception. This successful communicative exchange leads to another when the LORD finally reveals the divine word to the lad.

Each of the three players speak and listen, with varying degrees of success. The LORD speaks three times to Samuel before being acknowledged and understood on the fourth attempt, which leads to the message proper. Taking into account 1 Samuel 1-4, the LORD has generally listened in the first

two chapters (cf. 1:19, 2:21, 26), and speaks in chapters 2 and 3 (2:27-36; 3:4-14). Samuel listens to both God and Eli, though understanding is most clearly demonstrated once he receives the word of the LORD.[96] Eli hears the repeated acknowledgements of Samuel before realising who is truly calling the boy and offers his own word, which pivots the narrative from one of dimming vision and continual lack of knowledge towards understanding and repeated revelation. Indeed, apart from God's word residing structurally within the centre of the chapter, Eli's word is "necessary for the success of the plot. His meditation is indispensable to God who is attempting to reach Samuel with his revelation."[97]

Samuel's signature phrase in the story is 'here I am' (*hinnî*, הִנֵּנִי or *hinnēnî*, הִנְּנִי). On one level it signals Samuel's deference and availability to God, however it is always (mis)directed towards Eli.[98] For Berlin, *hinnēh* (הִנֵּה, √הנה, often translated as 'look!', 'behold', 'lo', 'see') is "often a statement of perception... which is known to mark the perception of a character as distinct from that of the narrator."[99] Not only does *hinnēh* signal a character's awareness, it also externalises their viewpoint, providing the reader a glimpse from the character's perspective.

[96] Though, Samuel does hear Eli in 3:9 and uses his response in 3:10.

[97] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:163; cf. Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture*, 87.

[98] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:166-167.

[99] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 62. Berlin uses Genesis 24:63, and her own translation, as an example, "And he [Isaac] lifted up his eyes and saw, and *hinnēh* there were camels coming." The text could have easily read 'he saw *that* there were camels coming.' But this would position the reader externally to Isaac, according to Berlin, so by inserting *hinnēh*, the perspective shifts to Isaac's own.

Taking this into account, both the LORD (3:11) and Samuel (3:4-6, 8, 16) employ this term. Each time the LORD calls Samuel, the perspective of the narrative is seen, briefly, through Samuel's eyes and pauses with his response, *hinnēnî* or 'here I am' (first person singular), before the focus shifts more externally to see him running to Eli. With this interplay of third person and first-person perspectives, the narrative adds tension which is finally resolved,[100] in no small part due to Eli's guidance, with Samuel acknowledging the LORD and receiving the divine word. The interplay and exchanges of *hinnēh* and its cognates clearly illustrate the gulf in perception and knowledge between the divine speaker and his human interlocutors. Each time Samuel says *hinnēnî*, it is marked by an incomplete perception as to what is happening and who is truly calling him; he perceives the call but not the caller.[101] The youth's inexperience keeps him in the dark until the LORD imparts his message to him. In contrast, the single use of *hinnēh* by the LORD is characterised by purpose and acute awareness,[102] as well as acting as a warning that prefaces the condemnatory core of the missive. In this respect, when Samuel constantly says *hinnēnî*, they are incomplete and misguided exchanges of communication since it is the LORD calling him, yet he responds to Eli. Ironically, only when Samuel addresses the LORD in 3:10 is the awareness and perception of his earlier use of *hinnēnî* fully realised, yet he does not use the phrase. In fact, it is the LORD that begins his divine message to Samuel with *hinnēh* ('Behold' in ESV, 'See' in NRSV). Nonetheless, the lad

[100] Cf. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 4:166.

[101] Cf. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 675-676. Waltke and O'Connor also point out this perceptive aspect of *hinnēh*, calling it a 'presentative exclamation' which indicates "immediacy and fuller exclamations of perception, cause, circumstance, etc."

[102] Ibid., 627, Waltke and O'Connor note the certainty and "immanency" implicit in the LORD's words; cf. Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 202.

comes into a greater understanding and firsthand experience of the LORD. In tandem with Samuel's 'behold' moment is the LORD's persistence, not only in continually calling Samuel, but in 'taking a stand' in 3:10 (וַיָּבֹא יְהוָה וַיִּתְיַצַּב).[103] The LORD is taking a firm stand, stationing himself until this divine word is delivered to Samuel, having been met with resistance for the third time God is determined to succeed on the fourth attempt. Regardless of how misguided the lad may be, the LORD perseveres, standing firm until the word has achieved its purpose. Once more the LORD's power and knowledge is only temporarily stymied, but ultimately will not be denied.

One important aspect of the word, or verbal communication more generally, is that there is a consistent pattern of divine revelation throughout scripture. In short, it appears to be the LORD's preferred method of revelation.[104] Although there are burning bushes, clouds, earthquakes, lightning and fire, the most important aspect of revelation tends to be the spoken word from the LORD; the commissioning, the revelation, the prophecy. In 1 Samuel 3, despite the fact that God's presence is described as coming and standing in front of Samuel (3:10), it is the call, the verbal aspect that predominates; it is the LORD's word and Samuel's word that goes out to Israel, it is the constant calling and the back and forth communication between Eli and Samuel and God that permeates the narrative.[105] Yet, much of this communication is met with initial resistance on the

[103] The root יצב means to "set or station oneself, take one's stand" but also has connotations of taking a stand to fight, implying both determination and resolve, Brown, et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 426.
[104] Cf. John L. McKenzie, 'The Word of God in the Old Testament', *Theological Studies* 21, no. 2 (1960): 183–206. & Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 87.
[105] Cf. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*,4:160-162.

part of the human recipients. The LORD must persist in the face of this impedance before the divine word can be transmitted and received, another recurring motif within the Hebrew Bible.

Dual Causality

From one perspective, the narrative of 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a is chaotic. God's purpose in this piece is simply to relay a message to the young Samuel. If the story were a straight line – in an idyllic story world – God would call the boy once, Samuel would respond knowing that the LORD was the one calling, the message would be given, and Eli would be none the wiser or Samuel would still reveal the message to his elder. Yet, the unfolding of events meanders from this direct approach to demonstrate the lack of understanding on the parts of both Samuel and Eli. As God beckons several times, Eli eventually realises it is the Almighty calling the boy and Samuel stumbles his way towards the divine word. Eli's insight and God's initiating calls both constitute what Yairah Amit labelled the dual causality principle.[106] Essentially, the principle highlights both the divine and the human cause/s in biblical narratives: "the reader of these stories may explain occurrences by two systems of interpretation – the divine system and the human system – without one system contradicting or invalidating the other."[107] Admittedly, Amit's concern encompasses the intention of the biblical writers in emphasising the human system of causation more so than the divine system, though both are in operation in 1 Samuel 3.

[106] Yairah Amit, "The Dual Causality Principle and Its Effects on Biblical Literature," *Vestus Testamentum* 37, no. 4 (1987): 385–400.
[107] Ibid., 391.

Nevertheless, within the text, both divine and human systems of causation are evident and intermingled. God initiates the turn of events in calling Samuel, yet this divine call is insufficient to allow the message to be delivered, it is only after the initially dormant and obtuse human causal system comes into play (i.e., Eli's 'dim' insight) that Samuel is able to finally listen to the LORD. This complicating human cause also leads to Eli later questioning Samuel as to the contents of the divine word, Eli's awareness of a divine word is due to his perception outpacing Samuel's. This confluence of events, of engagement between ignorance and knowledge, leads to Eli receiving, essentially, the same reproving divine word which was previously delivered to him by the nameless man of God. Now, the same message is again transmitted from God and delivered to the priest and judge, this time by a named young man or youth (*náʿar*, cf. 3:1). For Eli, ultimately, no new knowledge is gained. The divine system of causation initiates the chain of events which encompasses and employs human causation that, although winding, ultimately achieves its purpose (cf. Isa. 55:11). Although God calls to Samuel not Eli, the word given centres on the Elides and their sinful exploits, and despite the LORD not giving explicit instructions to Samuel to pass on the word, Eli, the intended recipient, nonetheless obtains the damning word once more. Despite the fact that the LORD does not speak to Eli, the word of God cuts through the ignorance and lack of insight to reach its intended target. Also, both systems of causation operate in tandem and although the human system dampens the divine system to an extent, neither fully negates or invalidates the other.

What dual causality points to, essentially, is freedom. God is free to act and cause, though, perhaps within the limits of covenant. Nevertheless, within 1 Samuel 3, it is the divine system that initiates the dialogue and makes the first move. Yet, the divine system does not override the less than sensitive and imperceptive human system; divine freedom does not impinge on human freedom. The LORD calls until the word is understood by at least one party within the human system of causation, rather than speaking in an autocratic or domineering fashion. This is the still, small voice not the great wind or earthquake or raging fire, even though the voice perhaps increases the volume in the fourth and final call.[108] God acts freely but persistently, allowing Eli the space to finally realise the LORD's presence, which leads to Samuel willingly employ Eli's formulation to respond to the divine summons. This freedom of the human players in the drama was noted by Alter, that each "human agent must be allowed the freedom to struggle with his or her destiny through his or her own words and acts...God creates in each human personality a fierce tangle of intentions, emotion, and calculations caught in a translucent net of language, which is left for the individual himself to sort out in the evanescence of a single lifetime."[109] This fierce entanglement of the human system is not magically resolved by the divine system, instead the former is afforded a similar measure of freedom as the latter to disentangle the net and discover their destiny. From this perspective, in 1 Samuel 3, the LORD engages Eli and Samuel to permit them both the autonomy

[108] Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 67.

[109] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109-110.

required to recognise the divine presence, to respond to the divine message, and to discover their respective destinies.

Another prominent aspect of the text is the movement from the initial scarcity to the eventual abundance of the word of the LORD.[110] This turn of events comes to pass as a result of the twin coiling systems of causality, the human system and the divine system. This transition, in Janzen's estimation, is alluded to in verse 15, when Samuel opens the doors to the Shiloh sanctuary. Drawing on intertextual links back to 1 Sam. 1, Janzen argues that there is a parallel between Hannah's closed womb which gives birth to a child of promise, and the opened sanctuary at Shiloh which will continue to experience an abundance of the word of the LORD (3:21). It is God's power that gives birth to something new, whether it be a child to a barren woman or the divine word to an infertile and resistant people. Yet, within a dual cause framework, God creates with the assistance of humankind, specifically His covenantal partners. That which has withered or lacks vitality gives way to that which is brimming with life via the word of the LORD. Once Samuel is born, Hannah offers a stirring word to and concerning God which emphasises the themes of the rest of the book (2:1-10).[111] In a similar fashion, once Samuel has received God's word for the first time, the shrine doors are opened and God's word is able to permeate to the rest of Israel (3:19-4:1a). The removal of Hannah's barrenness mirrors not only the elimination of the deficiency of the divine word

[110] Janzen, '"Samuel Opened the Doors of the House of Yahweh," 89–90.

[111] Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 26; Jobling questions this line of thinking, David Jobling, 'What, If Anything, Is 1 Samuel?', in Reconsidering Israel & Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study Series (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 8:610.

redressed with abundance, but also the elimination of the Elide house from the narrative world; their waning contrasted with Samuel's ascent.[112] Just as Hannah becomes fertile, so too is the word of the LORD once again revealed to Israel.[113] Janzen even suggests that Samuel is "inseminated" with the divine word which he delivers first to Eli and then to all Israel.[114] Fertility, then, is both a literal occurrence and a metaphorical illustration of God's increasing presence amongst the Israelites. Not only is there an insemination in both instances, but both times it is Samuel who emerges from the darkness into light, from ignorance and vulnerability to knowledge and power.[115] In terms of communication, there is a breakdown on both the divine and human sides – God remains silent to Israel but when the divine word presents itself the human counterparts (Samuel and Eli) cannot decipher it immediately. Nevertheless, the word of the LORD is received and acknowledged spreading from Dan to Beersheba through the now opened doors of Shiloh.

Divine omnipotence, through the power of the divine word, makes possible the transition from lack to abundance. Not only does the word of the LORD move with power, but it also leads to an increase in the knowledge of God and a proliferation of that knowledge to the people of the LORD. What was barren now abounds with life and prosperity, that which was weak is now made strong and likewise that which was mighty is brought low, that which was powerful is now humbled; what was closed is now opened and what was opened is now closed. This all demonstrates the resilience of hope in

[112] Chapman, *1 Samuel*, 86; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 37.
[113] Janzen, "'Samuel Opened the Doors of the House of Yahweh," 91.
[114] Ibid., 92.
[115] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 164.

the life of Israel. Despite the great sins of her leaders and the famine of the divine word, this *status quo* did not remain unchanged. Despite the fading lights and sights and insights, even in this twilight hour the LORD speaks hope back into the people of the covenant; the lamp of God has not yet gone out. Although the Elides have perverted and distorted the covenant, the LORD remains faithful and loyal, working together with those faithful few that remain in the land. Even after this word of judgment, there is anticipation for a new reality to emerge in and for Israel, a painful transition into a new period, not unlike the birth pangs of an infant about to enter the world. The reversal-of-fortunes motif also demonstrates the rule of the LORD as king over Israel; apart from the LORD Israel, even her kings, have no power.[116] Later, even when Saul and David become rulers, they are always regents to the LORD, their status confirmed and validated through the LORD's authority. Despite the darkest of nights, there ever remains hope that the LORD will reverse the order of things and, working together with human partners, bring Israel into a new epoch.

[116] Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 42, 43.

Conclusions

The thesis of this dissertation has been that the word of the LORD is the central focus of 1 Samuel 3, as well as its adjacent chapters. God's word naturally lends itself to a discussion on communication, a process that begins with the divine system of causation but encompasses and embraces the parallel human system, with all its foibles and resistance. The divine word is also the vehicle through which knowledge is dispensed and individuals are empowered or humbled. To conclude this paper, the following provides a summary of the salient points argued for in the previous chapters, whilst suggesting potential avenues for further research.

Chapter 2 Summary

The opening of 1 Samuel 1 with a story of motherhood establishes both the macro and micro stories, of God's people collectively and Hannah particularly. God is doing a new thing in Israel which is mirrored in Hannah's initial childlessness and subsequent abundance of children. Yet it is her firstborn that will carry the word of the LORD to Israel. This new era coincides with the re-emergence of the divine word in the land. This reversal of fortunes, from barrenness and scarcity to profusion and abundance is achieved through God's power which is expressed in God's word; the LORD exalts Hannah and humbles the Elides. For further research, one topic might be the interplay of the barrenness type-scene and the word of the LORD.[117] Further investigations may explore the

[117] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 55-78; Cf. Benjamin J. M. Johnson, "What Type of Son is Samson? Reading Judges 13 as a Biblical Type-Scene," *JETS* 53/2, 2010, 269-286, who has already begun by comparing Samson's birth with other biblical examples, including Samuel and Jesus, though he did not include an analysis on the word of the LORD.

variations of this interaction compared to 1 Samuel 2. In Hannah's case, she initiates the process by vowing to the LORD concerning her firstborn son, a child specially dedicated to the LORD as a nazirite, all his life (1:11). The LORD remains silent, speaking in 1 Samuel 2 and 3 to ultimately convey a message of judgment to Eli, through Hannah's child. Childlessness serves as a precursor and preparation for the word of the LORD.

Hophni and Phinehas' failures include not only their sins over sacrifices and women but also their resistance in heeding the only word of warning offered to them by their father. The Elide sons do not receive a divine word, but are defiant to the end. In a not unsimilar fashion, Eli accepts the first word of the LORD but fails to act on it in any remedial manner. In one way or another the Elides demonstrate a failure to listen and effectively communicate with one another and with the LORD. This breakdown in communication is coupled by a lack of knowledge, particularly Eli's. Part of this new epoch for Israel includes the removal of the Elide priesthood, an inevitable, forewarned conclusion defined by the word of God; as the Elides are humbled Samuel is exalted. This decline in Eli's house is matched by the lack of power and knowledge in Israel at large: two defeats at the hands of the Philistines, the capture of the ark, and God's glory leaving Israel. The word of the LORD in 1 Samuel 2-3 is one of imminent judgment and its confirmation. Even though many of the later prophetic words are also reproving in tenor, an interesting question is how differently does a less judgment-oriented divine message play out in the biblical canon? In a similar vein, another topic

might be an exploration of the types of prophetic words in biblical narrative, more generally, whether they predominantly deal with judgment or whether other variations exist.

The focus on the word of the LORD is paralleled by the profusion of communicative exchanges present in 1 Samuel 1-4. However, a clear pattern throughout is misunderstanding, failed listening and ineffectual speech, specifically on the human side of the equation. Between human characters there is some level of communication collapse, but when words are directed to the LORD or given by the LORD there is clarity. Given the close association in 1 Samuel 3 between communication and the word of God, is this dynamic further developed or explored in other instances of prophecy or is Samuel's first dialogue with the LORD unique? An interesting comparison would be with Moses, who, like Samuel, receives the divine word on several occasions throughout his life, also in another defining epoch in Israel's history.

Chapter 3 Summary

Samuel's ignorance of the word of the LORD is partly the responsibility of the Elides, who have failed to teach the young ministrant. Nevertheless, this inexperience does not keep Samuel from maintaining his duties of ministering compared to the egregious depravities of the priesthood. Eli's desire to receive the word of God from Samuel suggests a deliberate and premeditated intimation that the message of judgment has changed. The consistency of the unrevised divine word, given to Samuel, is matched with Eli's own lack of action to affect any change.

Samuel's own name is a signifier and constant reminder of the communicative underbelly running through 1 Samuel 1-4 and beyond, as it also points to an essential element of the prophetic office: to listen to God, receive the divine word and convey it to the people. Samuel's reception of the word of God results in increased power and knowledge, not only for him but, eventually, for all Israel, save for the Elides. At the end of 1 Samuel 3 the boy becomes a prophet and guides Israel into the new beginning initiated and shepherded by the LORD. This transition is mediated through adherence to divine decree. Considering the future calamities that will visit the Israelites, namely exile, in later narratives is there also a connection with disaster and a lack of the divine word? As cited above, with the prophets this connection is certainly made (i.e., Amos 8:11), but are there any further instances and how is this relationship developed or challenged?

This new epoch that opens the book of Samuel simultaneously results in the anticipated removal of the Elide house from the priesthood; judgement and renewal are equally inevitable. The LORD's grand arrangement for Israel, i.e., monarchy, is firstly seeded with Hannah's pregnancy and Samuel's birth to realise the divine drive to multiply knowledge amongst his people.

1 Samuel is inherently a narrative of communication. It recalls the struggle of the LORD to communicate the divine word to Samuel, Eli and by extension all Israel. The text features examples of poor and partial information conveyance as well as complete and mutual communication.

Through the misunderstanding, misperception and confusion, nevertheless, the word of the LORD is spoken, received and imparted.

The haphazard path the word of the LORD takes in 1 Samuel 3 from the LORD to Eli is emblematic of the dual causality principle, which explains that two systems of causation exist in biblical narratives, the human and the divine. The divine system of causation is straightforward, both in execution and motivation: the LORD speaks repeatedly seeking to proliferate knowledge by sharing the divine word. In contrast, the human system of causation meanders and stumbles in ignorance until a moment of insight allows them to receive the word of God. Rather than bypass it, the divine system utilises and includes the human system in achieving its own ends. Whether it be Hannah's initiative, the Elides' sins, or Samuel and Eli's mutual misunderstanding, the LORD uses all these human actions and causes to eventually inseminate Israel once more with the divine word. Considering the covenantal relationship of Israel and the LORD, dual causality has potential as a more wide-reaching paradigm that may aid in explaining other biblical narratives generally, as well as those pertaining to prophecy and the word of God. Furthermore, those aspects of the dual causality formula not engaged with here may also extend its potential as a poetics approach to biblical narrative. For example, one issue is the distinction between the word of the prophet and the word of the LORD. Heller paints a negative picture of this relationship, casting suspicion on the

reliability of the prophetic word, whether it truly originates from God and how it can be distinguished from the word of a prophet.[118]

The LORD is a God of knowledge, power and the Word. Power that is demonstrated in the ability to upturn norms and reverse fortunes, knowledge that is established on relational and communicative foundations, and a Word that is both the vehicle of and mechanism through which knowledge and power are made manifest. Where divine power is frustrated, ultimately it prevails whilst also coinciding with human initiative – whether it be good or ill – to bring into fruition the divine will upon Israel. Even when the glory of the LORD departs Israel, its authority is still felt in foreign lands and among foreign deities. The God of Israel may be unseen, yet the word of the LORD cuts through the dimness of ignorance to bring about a new day for the people of the covenant, a new beginning filled with the knowledge of God. In the darkness, whilst the lamp of God has not yet gone out, in a situation of profound despair and sin, the LORD petitions his people to listen(!), to recognise and receive the word of the LORD.

[118] Heller, *Power, Politics, and Prophecy*, 44.

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