

## A Narratological Analysis of Time in 2 Samuel 11:2-27a<sup>1</sup>

RONALD H. VAN DER BERGH  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

### **ABSTRACT**

*This article enquires into the role of time in 2 Samuel 11 – the story of David, Bathsheba and Uriah. This is done by first demarcating 2 Samuel 11:2-27a as a narrative unit and determining the scenes of the narrative. An analysis of time, on the basis of the narrative theory of Gérard Genette, then follows. It can be clearly seen in this analysis, amongst other things, that the main theme of this narrative is rather the murder of Uriah than the adultery of David and Bathsheba.*

### **A INTRODUCTION**

The Old Testament contains numerous entertaining, yet in some cases strange, stories. In fact, more than thirty percent of Old Testament material can be described as narrative (Tolmie 1999:1). Logically, it follows that the analysis of narrative texts should be a matter of prime concern for students of the Old Testament. It is imperative that these texts should be read and understood as such, as this will elucidate the meaning of the texts to both the Hebrew scholar and the Old Testament exegete. To do this, it is necessary to ‘understand the basics of biblical narrative – its structure, its conventions, its compositional techniques – in other words, how it represents that which it wishes to represent’ (Berlin 1983:13). In this article, one of these ‘basics’ – the aspect of time – will be addressed. However, creating a model out of the available resources to do a complete narratological analysis is a daunting task (Culler 2004:117), even if just a model for the analysis of narratological time. Such an exercise falls beyond the scope of this article; in any case, this has been attempted with some degree of success many times before.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the focus of this paper will be on

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of chapters 1, 4, 5 and 6 of the author’s dissertation submitted to the Department of Ancient Languages of the University of Pretoria in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree MA in Ancient Languages and Cultures. The study was supervised by Prof. G. T. M. Prinsloo.

<sup>2</sup> The comprehensive study by Gérard Genette (the English translation, entitled ‘*Narrative Discourse*’, appeared in 1980) has become all but canonical. For an overview, this work could be a bit bulky. Good summaries (and further additions to the theory of time) can be found in Brink (1987), Chatman (1978), Copley (2001), Rimmon-Kenan (2002) and Toolan (2001), to name but a few. Approaches more focused on biblical narrative can be found in Bar-Efrat (1989), Resseguie (2005) and Tolmie (1999). Of these, Resseguie is focused on narratives in the New Testament. For a dis-

the narratological aspect of time as encountered in 2 Samuel 11 – the well-known tale of David, Bathsheba and Uriah. The choice of this narrative as research object serves a twofold purpose: firstly, it will demonstrate the huge gain to be had with a narratological approach, and particularly the study of time, and secondly, it will perhaps shed light on the very equivocal narrative contained in 2 Samuel 11.

In order to carry out such an analysis, the narrative unit with which one busies oneself should first be established. Furthermore, it should be clear that the object of study is a narrative text, so as not to pose irrelevant questions to the text. This will be the first objective of this article. The structure of 2 Samuel 11 will also be determined, as this will be used as the basis of an analysis of time. The second objective will be to take an in-depth look at time in this narrative. This will be discussed according to the scenes determined in the analysis of structure. Finally, I will reflect on this analysis of time.

It is my contention, together with Tolmie (1999:87), that an analysis of time in a narrative ‘can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a narratological analysis’. Hopefully, this narratological analysis of time will add to the understanding of the narrative of David, Bathsheba and Uriah, which Campbell (2005:113) described as ‘one of the Bible’s great narrative texts’.

## **B ASPECTS OF 2 SAMUEL 11 AS A NARRATIVE TEXT**

### **1 Introductory remarks**

Before an analysis of time in 2 Samuel 11 can commence, it is necessary to first define some of the narrative aspects of the text. A clear boundary should be set in order to determine the exact text to be used. Furthermore, no text should be read as narrative if it is indeed not narrative – one should ask questions pertaining to the specific genre of a text. It is essential to determine whether 2 Samuel 11 is a narrative text or not. It is also necessary to determine the structure of the text, as an analysis of time will unfold according to this structure.

### **2 The delimitation of the pericope**

In order to analyse a text as a narrative, the text needs to be taken as a unit. In some biblical stories this may prove to be a difficult but necessary enterprise, since this will ‘drastically affect what the story can mean’ (Gunn & Fewell 1993:111). Therefore, it is also essential that the boundaries of the text at hand should be clearly defined.

---

cussion of theory as well as application to a specific ancient narrative, see Brink (2005) and De Villiers (2004). This present study draws on all of these summaries and insights, but takes as its basis Genette’s theory.

Generally, the text of 2 Samuel 11-12 is divided by commentaries in 2 ways: either as forming a complete unit as such<sup>3</sup> (e.g. Campbell 2005:101), or with chapter 11 as a standalone unit up until verse 27a (e.g. Stoebe 1986:388). Some commentaries take verse 1 to be included in the narrative of chapter 11 (Anderson 1989:152), while others group this verse together with 2 Samuel 12:26-31 (Ackroyd 1977:100). To be fair, both points of view should be assessed.

In general, there seems to be no objection to taking 2 Samuel 11:1 as the beginning of a new unit.<sup>4</sup> Ackroyd (1977:100) even contends that '[t]here appears to be no link made between this campaign against Ammon and the one described in 10:1-14'. It is also clear that verse 1 links up with 2 Samuel 12:26ff, so as to form an *inclusio* (Gunn & Fewell 1993:161). The story of David and Bathsheba is thus 'encapsulated within the account of the campaign against Rabbah'<sup>5</sup> (Campbell 2005:119), forming a framework within which 2 Samuel 11 transpires (Bailey 1990:72-73; Hentschel 1994:43; McCarter 1984:285; Stoebe 1986:388).

With the marriage and the birth of a child, it seems as though the narrative in 2 Samuel 11 has come to an appropriate end. Verse 27b becomes the link between this narrative and the next (Campbell 2005:116; Stolz 1981:236). Therefore, Naumann (2000:165) comes to the conclusion that the two narratives belong together and form an independent unit, consisting of deed and judgement. This, however, does not need to be the case. From a strictly narratological point of view, the narrative of David, Bathsheba and Uriah 'are fairly self-contained and form a single narrative unit', since the following narrative merely gives a theological judgement of the story (Anderson 1989:152). Verse 27b functions as a hinge between the two narratives but this does not make them inseparable. In fact, verse 27b is an introduction to chapter 12, and should thus be read with that narrative<sup>6</sup> (McCarter 1984:304; Stolz 1981:236). The narrative in 2 Samuel 12:1-25 functions as a theological commentary on the narrative contained in 2 Samuel 11. This would imply that there is a definite distinction between the two. Since 2 Samuel 11:27b fits with the theme of

---

<sup>3</sup> McKenzie (2000:134) is more concerned with redaction criticism but his studies nevertheless conclude that 2 Samuel 11-12 can be taken as a complete unit.

<sup>4</sup> Stolz (1981:236) argues otherwise: to him, it is quite clear that the narrative of 2 Samuel 10 is continued by 11:1. However, Stolz is more concerned with the diachronical assessment of the text.

<sup>5</sup> McKenzie (2000:134) confirms this with insights gained from redaction criticism.

<sup>6</sup> Hentschel (1994:44-45) works diachronically. He is of the opinion that the original narrative (before the deuteronomistic redaction of the text) ended at verse 27a. According to him, verse 27b has been inserted by a deuteronomistic redactor who offered his opinion. However, it is just as likely that this verse was inserted as an introduction to the next narrative – which is as a whole a complete theological commentary on 2 Samuel 11.

chapter 12 (i.e., theological judgement), it should be taken on that side of the dividing line. It is therefore correct, as Stoebe (1986:388) argues, that 2 Samuel 11 up to verse 27a should be taken as a self-contained unit and that the text itself wants to be read in that way.

However, if 2 Samuel 11 up to verse 27a is a unit on its own, 2 Samuel 11:1 becomes problematic. It has already been shown that 2 Samuel 11:1 forms an *inclusio* with 2 Samuel 12:26ff, and although 11:1b certainly sets the scene for the narrative contained in 2 Samuel 11 (Alter 1981:75-76; Bailey 1990:77; McCarter 1984:285), it is not necessary for the story to transpire. Both verse 1 and verse 2 start with *וַיְהִי*, which may serve as a marker for a new scene or a whole narrative. Verse 2's *וַיְהִי* is a clear marker as it is followed by a direct indication of time: *לַעֲתָה הָעֶרֶב*. Since this is the case, it is clear that there is a break between verse 1 and verse 2. If verse 1a is to be taken with 2 Samuel 12:26ff, verse 1b ('and/but David stayed in Jerusalem') is left hanging. The sentence would be out of place; it has to be taken with verse 1a. The whole of verse 1 should be taken with 2 Samuel 12:26ff, becoming an introduction to that narrative.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, 2 Samuel 11:2-27a, if it is to be studied as a narrative, can be taken as an independent unit.

### 3 The narrative character of 2 Samuel 11:2-27a

The choice of method of textual interpretation relies heavily on the genre of a text (Van Aarde 2006a:661), as questions (and consequently answers) that may be posed to a text might differ. A narratological analysis of a text will only be viable if that text is indeed a narrative.

Therefore, before a narratological analysis of time in 2 Samuel 11 can begin, this hurdle, concerning the genre of the text, still needs to be cleared. Is it credible to read 2 Samuel 11 as narrative? This certainly seems to be the case (Boshoff, Scheffler & Spangenberg 2000:92; Campbell 2005:106,173). Fischer (1989:51) even speaks of the 'literarischen Charakter der Erzählung' and Naumann (2000:137) points out that it is undeniably more a narration than a report. Similarly, Stoebe (1986:393) is of the opinion that one must speak 'aber besser von literarischen Fiktionen'. 2 Samuel 11 can be shown to contain almost all aspects pertaining to a narrative. For instance, the narrator presents facts about things done in secrecy as well as conversations held behind closed doors, of which he could not have been an eyewitness (Boshoff, Scheffler & Spangenberg 2000:92). Furthermore, the language used is definitely of a narrative nature. This is evidenced by the repeated occurrence of the *waw consecutive*, the use of verbs denoting successive actions (e.g. *וַיִּשְׁלַח - וַיִּקְרָא - וַיִּבְרָא* -

<sup>7</sup> Anderson (1989:152) is correct in calling verse 1 an introduction; however, it is more an introduction to the narrative continued in 2 Samuel 12:26ff.

בַּיּוֹם - וַיִּשְׁכַּב in verse 4)<sup>8</sup> (Fokkelman 1999:171-172) and the frequent introductions to direct speech. None of these elements are as striking in poetic texts or legal texts. The prominent role and the defined state of the characters also form part of the text's narrative qualities, and indisputably its structure betrays its narrative nature. 2 Samuel 11:2-27a can thus certainly be taken as a narrative unit.<sup>9</sup>

The text can also be said to have a certain aesthetic value (Boshoff, Scheffler & Spangenberg 2000:93). For example, the verb שָׁלַח occurs 11 times<sup>10</sup> in this rather short text. This makes the text very dense, an almost poetic feature. Nevertheless, שָׁלַח is here clearly used in narrative form. It is a characteristic feature of biblical narrative that it is interwoven with poetry, as Fokkelman (1999:171-172) points out.

#### 4 The structure of 2 Samuel 11:2-27a

The structure of 2 Samuel 11:2-27a needs to be taken into account, as it will have consequences for an analysis of narrative. In 2 Samuel 11:2-27a, there is a clear division into four scenes. This division has been noted by many a commentator as being verses 2-5, 6-13, 14-25 and 26-27a (e.g. Ackroyd 1977:100; Anderson 1989:152; McCarter 1984:277-279).<sup>11</sup> This division can be done on the grounds explained below.

The beginning of verse 2 presents no problem, as the beginning of a narrative naturally constitutes the beginning of a new episode. The first division in the text occurs at verse 5. This is in accord with the theory set out by Bar-Efrat (1989:96), namely that the characters participating in a narrative can be used to determine the structure. Whenever the characters change dramatically, a new scene is introduced. In verse 6, David remains one of the characters, but Bathsheba has left the scene. In her stead, Uriah becomes the other main character. According to Bar-Efrat (1989:130), the theme can also be a marker of this division. This is the case in verse 6. Whereas verses 2-5 concern David and Bathsheba's liaison, the scene beginning with verse 6 is concerned with David's attempt to hide his guilt. This theme runs through to verse 13. In verse 14, however, attention is

<sup>8</sup> And he came – and he took – and she came – and he lay – and she returned.

<sup>9</sup> Rosenberg (1989:103-104) points to different ways of understanding the text. Some commentators (e.g. Wellhausen, Alt, Bright, etc.), according to Rosenberg, use this text only as a historical source. Others (e.g. Fokkelman, Perry, Sternberg, and Gunn) place too much emphasis on the narrative aspect of the text. To a certain extent, this text is indeed a historical one; however, this falls beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>10</sup> It occurs in verses 1, 3, 4, 6 (3 times), 12, 14, 18 and 27.

<sup>11</sup> Stoebe (1986:388) divides it into three sections – 2-5, 6-25 and 26-27a. However, later on he discusses 6-13 as a unit, and 14-15 as another unit.

shifted away from this theme, since David's intent is now to murder Uriah. This also entails a different set of characters: once again, David is a main character, but Joab now steps forward as the other main character. Verse 14 also has a clear marker in the Hebrew text indicating the beginning of a new scene. The word **וַיְהִי** followed by a direct indication of time (**בַּבֶּקֶר**) constitutes a new section.<sup>12</sup> Bar-Efrat (1989:102) lists such changes in time as a marker for scene division. According to the *setumah* in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), 11:15, rather than 11:13, was taken by the Masoretes as the end of the second scene. This may be due to the change of location at verse 16. Nevertheless, the evidence of the shift in characters, taken in conjunction with the very prominent change in time points to a division between verse 13 and verse 14. This is also attested by the shift in theme. At the end of verse 25, the *setumah* in the Hebrew text agrees with the division of scenes. Here, there is not only a change of characters (once again, David and Bathsheba) and a change in location, but also a definite change of theme. This scene concerns the aftermath of David's affair with Bathsheba and Uriah's murder. The division of 2 Samuel 11:2-27a can clearly be made along traditional lines, namely, verses 2-5, 6-13, 14-25 and 26-27a. The four scenes can be titled according to their themes:

11:2-5	-	David (and Bathsheba's) adultery
11:6-13	-	Attempts to hide David's guilt
11:14-25	-	Uriah's murder
11:26-27a	-	David and Bathsheba's marriage.

This division of scenes will be used in the analysis of the narrative.

## C AN ANALYSIS OF TIME IN 2 SAMUEL 11:2-27a

### 1 Introductory remarks

It has been established that 2 Samuel 11:2-27a is a narrative text and can be analysed as such. Therefore, an analysis of time in 2 Samuel 11:2-27a can now be embarked upon. This analysis will be done on the Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 11:2-27a as found in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Each scene (according to the division of the text established above) will be considered on its own. The number of the verse in which a certain action in the storyline occurs will be marked in bold to facilitate ease of reference in the discussion.

<sup>12</sup> **וַיְהִי** also occurs in verse 2, 16 and 20. In verse 2, it is also followed by a direct indication of time (**לְעֵת הַקָּרֶב**) and starts a new scene. In verse 16, **וַיְהִי** refers more to circumstance than direct time, while in verse 20, it can certainly not be the beginning of a new scene as it is in the middle of Joab's direct speech.

## 2 David (and Bathsheba's) adultery (Episode A)

The narrative contained in 2 Samuel 11:2-27a begins with an almost timeless designation, as if to say: 'once upon a time, in the evening'.<sup>13</sup> This pause in **11:2a** serves to give background information to the reader. David just got up from an afternoon nap, but apparently there was still enough light for him to see a woman bathing.<sup>14</sup> At this point, narrated time<sup>15</sup> freezes for just a while in **11:2d** where a description of Bathsheba is given. This underscores the point: Bathsheba was a very beautiful woman. Almost as if one holds one's breath for a second, or in narratological terms, a narrated span of time measured in four words. Considering the pace of the surrounding narrated events, these four words mark a considerable pause. This pause once again serves to convey background information, and may make the reader aware of David's intentions.

However, the action quickly resumes again. David inquires about the woman, and sends for her. Precisely how long this takes, remains a mystery as the text does not explicitly say. However, the rapid pace of the text would seem to suggest that all of this happened in one evening, which is surely possible (Kim & Nyengele 2003:100). Only in one instance, the direct speech of **11:3b**, is the pace slowed down. This scene, a whole nine words, serves to inform the reader of the identity of the woman. The reader is also invited to dwell on these facts, along with David, who now also cannot claim to be uninformed.

The whole account of the adulterous deed and Bathsheba's return home is portrayed in a mere five words in **11:4c** and **11:4e**.<sup>16</sup> This briefness is remarkable (Esler 2005:201). The rapid pace hints at David's attitude towards the event. It could even suggest the secrecy with which the deed is undertaken. A description is added in **11:4d** to say that Bathsheba had recently purified her-

---

<sup>13</sup> Fokkelman (1981:51) renders the beginning of the episode as 'and it happened one evening'. Here the general reference to time ('one evening') becomes apparent.

<sup>14</sup> Presumably bathing was done in the afternoon, just after the hottest time of day. This way, sunburn and visibility would be kept to a minimum (Kim & Nyengele 2003:103-104).

<sup>15</sup> *Narrated time* concerns the time taken by the events in the narrative to transpire, while *narration time* is the time taken to recount the narrative (cf. Bar-Efrat 1989:143; Chatman 1978:62; Tomashevsky 2002:170; Van Aarde 2006b:9). The terminology used to describe the two categories of time related to narrative differs widely. In part, this is due to the wide array of languages in which narrative theories are published. English translations have not reached a standard agreement on the terms to be used. For instance, Tomashevsky's (2002:170) terms are translated *story time* and *reading time*. Chatman (1978:62) prefers to change 'reading time' to *discourse time*. Brink (1987:26), writing in Afrikaans, creates the impression that an English translation of his preferred terms would include terminology like *sjuzet time*. One has to note, however, that the concept essentially stays the same. In this article, the terms *narration time* and *narrated time* will be used, since it is the least confusing.

<sup>16</sup> These five words being Ht(y)B=| a, bv;T# HMF[i bKV]#r.

self. This is an allusion to time, and a case of true analepsis. It is a completing analepsis as it discloses information hitherto not known. This interjection is especially important as it shows that Bathsheba was at a time favourable to conceive (ritual impurity lasting seven days from the onset of menstruation, Stolz 1981:237) and that Uriah couldn't possibly have been the child's father, as he was at the battlefield (McCarter 1984:286; Anderson 1989:153; Hentschel 1994:46).

The narrative continues in **11:5a** at a chronological point in narrated time of at least three weeks later, as Bathsheba could only then discover that she was pregnant (Fokkelman 1981:53). This leap is a 'characteristic biblical time-jump' (Alter 1981:76). Nothing noteworthy happens and thus the action picks up again after this period. The episode then concludes with a hasty message sent to David, saying: 'I am pregnant'. In all probability, this message would be longer and the narration time is condensed, as often happens when direct speech is used in the Bible (Bar-Efrat 1989:148). Nevertheless, the brevity of this short scene is noteworthy. Even though time slows down to a scene,<sup>17</sup> it consists of only two words. This focuses the reader's attention on the important statement contained in the direct speech.

The whole of episode A depicts a narrated span of time of at least one month. This is, however, related in a mere 57 words. Almost no disturbances in the flow of chronological time are perceived. The rapid pace of this scene gives the impression that the events related happened in quick succession. This scene is indeed rather short in comparison with the next two scenes.

### 3 Attempts to hide David's guilt (Episode B)

Verse **11:6-7a** concerns the message David sent to Joab, and Joab's sending of Uriah to David. This verse gives the impression that there is almost no lapse of time. However, the distance between Rabbah and Jerusalem, measured on a map, is approximately 65 km. This would mean that a messenger would take at least two days to reach Rabbah, and Uriah would probably take just as long. Thus, at least four days' time is recounted in a space of fifteen words, a mere summary (Hentschel 1994:44). Nevertheless, the pace slows down considerably (and gradually) from the hasty narration in scene A to the start of this scene. This serves to build up the tension and expectations of the reader. The pace slows down even more in **11:7b**, after Uriah came to David, presumably immediately after his arrival in Jerusalem, when David takes the time to ask about the progress of the war, etcetera. This is still recounted quite rapidly. Once again, this retardation of the pace serves to build up expectations.

<sup>17</sup> 'Scene', used in this sense, refers to a category of narrative time where narration time equals narrated time. It should not be confused with the structural sense of 'scene' as a subdivision of a narrative episode.



The pace drops completely to the point of a scene in the direct speech in **11:8a**. The slower pace of the narrative points to the importance of this clause. Although this scene does not last very long – it is but four words - much is revealed about David’s plan. Embedded in David’s speech is a repeating prolepsis, occurring four times<sup>18</sup> (**11:8a**, **11:9b**, **11:10a** and **11:10b**) in the discourse. However, this event does not turn out as David indicated in his speech. Through repetition, the point is driven home: David’s plan fails. Uriah does not go home, but stays at the palace. This fact is pointed out each time, either in a scene or in a pause, inviting the reader to dwell on it. Thus, the function of the embedded analepses in **11:10a** and **11:10b** is to shift the focus to this fact. Furthermore, Uriah’s arrival is skipped over completely in **11:10** in order not to retard the successive flow of these statements.

In **11:10b-11:12a**, almost the whole encounter between David and Uriah is reported in direct speech. Uriah’s speech becomes stressed by this slowing of narration time, taking up an amount of 30 words, although not even a minute is narrated. This speech is framed by the direct speech of David in **11:10b** and **11:12a**, the remark before Uriah’s speech counting nine words and the concluding remark by David counting six words. A great deal of narration time is spent on Uriah’s speech. What is even more interesting is that narration time gradually slows down from the first conversation between David and Uriah (which passed quickly), to the second conversation with Uriah. Here, a short length of narration time is given to David before Uriah’s speech, as well as a short length of narration time after the speech. After the second conversation, time speeds up again toward and in the third encounter between David and Uriah. Graphically, this can be presented as follows:

Encounter 1  
    David’s direct speech (9 words)  
        Uriah’s speech (29 words)  
    David’s direct speech (6 words)  
Encounter 3

This signifies that Uriah’s speech is a central theme to the second scene.

David’s concluding remark is problematic (McCarter 1984:281), since he promises to send Uriah home the next day, but entertains him the following evening. McCarter (1984:287) attempts to solve this problem by pointing out that days are to be reckoned from sunset to sunset. Thus, if this conversation takes place already in the evening, the next day would include the following night. However, whether or not David kept his word, it would seem that Uriah spent a total of three days in Jerusalem (Garsiel 1993:256; Fokkelman 1981:57).

---

<sup>18</sup> I.e., four times there is referred to Uriah going home, or not.

The events alluded to by Uriah in **11:11**, namely that he will not go down to his house, nor eat, nor drink, nor sleep with his wife, also occurs four times in the discourse (twice in **11:11**, **11:13a** and **11:13c**), but only once in the story. This time it is Uriah's embedded repeating prolepsis which turns out to be problematic. He does indeed eat and drink; however, he still does not go home. Although this would have taken quite some time, the whole evening is basically depicted in four consecutive words in **11:13a**. The pace has once again picked up. However, the pause in **11:13c** again brings Uriah's reluctance to go home to the fore.

The pace of this second scene, compared to the first one, has drastically slowed. The second scene is narrated in a space of 143 words, although it covers only seven days. This is especially because of the weight in time accorded to Uriah's speech. Moreover, through repetition by way of both analepses and prolepses, a single fact has become clear: David's plan has failed.

#### 4 Uriah's murder (Episode C)

The third scene again starts with a time reference in **11:14a**: it was morning. This pause serves to give background information to the reader. The night has passed; Uriah has once again not gone home. A letter is written and sent in **11:14b**, an account given in summary. In the letter, one can find a trace of embedded prolepsis (**11:15b**) where David orders Joab to organize Uriah's death, and although this could simply be mentioned, it is narrated just as it appears in the letter. Just as in direct speech, narration time and narrated time coincides. Again, not much is made of the time needed by Uriah to travel to Rabbah. Furthermore, a rather generous amount of narration time is spent on the description of the foreseen death of Uriah – twelve words, to be precise. Of even greater importance is the fact that the events described in the repeating prolepsis in **11:15b** occurs three times (**11:15b**, **11:16b-17** and **11:23-24**) in the discourse, and only once in the story. Although it is not the narrator who relays the second and third account of the battle,<sup>19</sup> the frequency of the event seems to be three times told to one time happened. This causes the pace<sup>20</sup> of the narration to slow down,<sup>21</sup> allowing the reader to dwell at length on the battle and the death of Uriah. Each time the event is recounted, it differs. Joab does not carry out David's command to the letter, and the messenger appears to conflate the two accounts.

<sup>19</sup> A true deviation in frequency of one to one would be if the narrator told the event more than once.

<sup>20</sup> The narrated time, of course, still continues, since it is not the narrator recalling the incident. The narrated time at the time of direct speech is the present.

<sup>21</sup> One must bear in mind, as Bar-Efrat (1989:162) points out, that the purpose of repetition is far greater than slowing down the pace.

There is almost no narration time between the prolepsis contained in David's letter and the description of Uriah's death in **11:16b-17**. Not much time is spent on the action depicted here. Presumably, Joab would send out an expedition to effect Uriah's demise at the first opportunity. This need not be more than a day after Uriah's arrival, although one can not say for certain. The sending out of Uriah and the fighting would take some time, although the whole account is related in only 26 words. This is more than the repeating prolepsis of **11:15b**, with the result that the pace slackens. This prepares the reader for the series of scenes that are to follow – the greatest remaining part of this scene, in fact, occurs in the narrative category of time known as scene.

Once again, Joab sends a message to David in **11:18**. Thus, the time taken to travel to Jerusalem needs to be considered. Here, the narration time slows once again, as the speech is recounted in direct speech in **11:19-21**. Some clear cases of embedded anachronies are to be seen in this speech. One of the analepses refers to the battle waged and the death of Uriah, the other to the death of Abimelech. A great amount of narration time is spent on the proleptical event of David's anger. Since this is never again related, it functions as a completing analepsis. The embedded analepsis in the first part of **11:21** is the only external analepsis in the narrative. It is recalled to put Uriah's death in perspective.

A short space of narration time passes in **11:22**, quickening the pace. However, the pace slows down to a scene because of direct speech in **11:23-24** and **11:25a**. In the conversation between David and the messenger, a great length of narration time (25 words) is devoted to the depiction of the battle, and Uriah's death. This is, as before, embedded analepsis. Once again, the reader is made aware of Uriah's death. David's reply is also given in a scene. It contains embedded completing prolepsis that is heterodiegetic, as it does not refer to the same storyline. Rather, the reader's attention is focused on David's attitude towards the event repeated over and over in this scene: Uriah's death. The reference to Joab's taking of the city in **11:25b** is either external or embedded completing internal heterodiegetic prolepsis, since an exact date is not mentioned.

The third scene ends with narration time virtually equal to narrated time. This episode contains a total of 186 words, and covers approximately five days. A great amount of narration time is set aside for the battle and ultimately, the death of Uriah, even though this is mostly done in retrospect. Twice embedded analepsis is used to describe the battle. Thus, it must be concluded that this is an important theme of this episode.<sup>22</sup> The great amount of scene and the slowing of the pace towards the end of the scene serves to make the reader aware

---

<sup>22</sup> This conclusion correlates to the findings of Ackroyd (1977:105) when he calls repetition an 'effective stylistic device'. Anderson (1988:155) agrees.

and dwell on these facts. Also, the pace slows to characterize David – his response is set against the proleptical expectations of Joab. David is not angry – and that much could be expected.

## 5 David and Bathsheba's marriage (Episode D)

Probably, in **11:26a**, Bathsheba heard about the death of her husband not long after David. Once again, this cannot be said with certainty. However, one can assume that she would have been informed, and a gap of merely a few hours in the narrated time is to be expected. The pace has picked up again, the narration moving into summary.

Bathsheba then mourns over her husband (**11:26b-11:27a**). Hentschel (1994:47) and McCarter (1984:288) give the time of mourning as seven days.<sup>23</sup> After this, David marries her (**11:27**). If there was a wedding preparation, the time for this is not given in the text, neither is it mentioned whether David married her immediately after her period of mourning, although it would appear so. In any event, only a small amount of narration time is spent on the whole incident (ten words) and even less narration time is accorded in **11:27** to the fact that she bore him a son (three words), which must have happened at least seven months into the future.<sup>24</sup> The pace accelerates exponentially towards the end of the narrative. Thus, this last scene, covering a space of 23 words, contains the longest period of narrated time. One can deduce that this scene merely serves as the ending of the episode of narrative contained in 2 Samuel 11. The whole scene occurs in summary and functions as a means of giving closure.

## D CONCLUSION

In this paper, it was shown that 2 Samuel 11:2-27a can, and should, be read as a narrative unit. Reading the narrative texts of the Bible as *narratives* is an important yet sometimes neglected exercise. In the case of 2 Samuel 11:2-27a, the analysis contained in this article has indeed shed some light on this difficult text.

It is clear that the ratio of narration time to narrated time slows continually throughout the narrative towards the second episode. Here, although not as prominently presented in scene as in the third scene, the author uses time to focus on Uriah's speech. This speech, mainly concerned about loyalty, stresses the irony contained in the narrative. Uriah remains loyal to a king who is not. David's character is in this sense contrasted with Uriah. His character is further elucidated by the use of time.

---

<sup>23</sup> Although Stolz (1981:238) takes this time to be three months.

<sup>24</sup> This would mean that it would be quite obvious that the child was either not David's, or that David committed adultery (Anderson 1989:156).

In the third scene, the pace slows down almost completely to scene. In this scene, Uriah is murdered. Immediately after the third scene, the ratio of narration time to narrated time speeds up again. Thus, the emphasis of the narrative is placed rather on the murder of Uriah than the adultery committed with Bathsheba (Bar-Efrat 1989:151). The reader is also invited to dwell on this event by the repetition thereof, and the subtle changes in this repetition. Twice the account is relayed in a scene. The importance of Uriah's murder above the deed of adultery is also confirmed by structural analysis (Yee 1988:247). In the light of the above, it might be more appropriate to refer to the narrative as 'David and Uriah', rather than the more conventional 'David and Bathsheba'. The two most prominent points of the narrative is, in a sense, Uriah's speech and Uriah's death.

The conclusions drawn in this paper about 2 Samuel 11:2-27a are by no means exhaustive. Much more study should be done on this narrative to achieve a better understanding of this elusive piece of text – and on the Old Testament in general. This analysis is but a springboard for future studies. It would be best to keep in mind that insights gained from an analysis of time should always be supplemented with information gained by way of other methodologies. Nevertheless, an interpretation of narrative without considering the role of time would be so much the poorer.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ackroyd, P. R. 1977. *The Second Book of Samuel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alter, R. 1981. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books.
- Anderson, A. A. 1989. *2 Samuel*. Dallas: Word Books.
- Bailey, R. C. 1990. *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Bal, M. 1997. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Bar-Efrat, S. 1989. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. Sheffield: Almond Press.
- Berlin, A. 1983. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: The Almond Press.
- Boshoff, W., Scheffler, E., & Spangenberg, I. 2000. *Ancient Israelite Literature in Context*. Pretoria: Protea Book House.
- Brink, A. P. 1987. *Vertelkunde: 'n Inleiding tot die Lees van Verhalende Tekste*. Pretoria: Human & Rousseau.
- Brink, I. A. 2005. *Die Jobdrama: 'n Narratologiese Ondersoek van die Boek Job*. University of Pretoria: Unpublished doctoral thesis.
- Brooks, P. 1984. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Brooks, P. 2002. Narrative Desire, in Richardson, B. (ed.), *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure and Frames*, 130-137. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Campbell, F. A. 2005. *2 Samuel*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Chatman, S. 1978. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Cobley, P. (2001). *Narrative*. London: Routledge.
- Culler, J. 2004. Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative, in Bal, M (ed.), *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, 117-131. London: Routledge.
- De Villiers, G. G. 2004. *Understanding Gilgamesh: His World and his Story*. University of Pretoria: Unpublished doctoral thesis.
- Esler, P. F. 2005. 2 Samuel – David and the Ammonite War: A Narrative and Social-Scientific Interpretation of 2 Samuel 10-12, in Esler, P. F. (ed.), *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context*, 191-207. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Fischer, A. 1989. David und Batseba: Ein literarkritischer und motivgeschichtlicher Beitrag zu II Sam 11. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 101(1), 50-59.
- Fokkelman, J. P. 1981. *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses. Volume I: King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kings 1-2)*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Fokkelman, J. P. 1999. *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Garsiel, M. 1993. The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55(2), 244-262.
- Genette, G. 1980. *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Gunn, D. M. & Fewell, D. N. 1993. *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hentschel, G. 1994. *2 Samuel*. Würzburg: Echter Verlag.
- Kim, H. C. P. & Nyengele, M. F. 2003. Murder S/He Wrote? A Cultural and Psychological Reading of 2 Samuel 11-12, in Kirk-Duggan, C A (ed), *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, 95-116. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.
- McCarter, P. K. 1984. *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.
- McKenzie, S. L. 2000. The So-called Succession Narrative, in De Pury, A & Römer, T (eds), *Die sogenannte Thronfolgeschichte Davids: Neue Einsichten und Anfragen*, 123-135. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Naumann, T. 2000. David als Exemplarischer König: Der Fall Urijas (2 Sam 11) vor dem Hintergrund altorientalischer Erzähltraditionen, in De Pury, A. & Römer, T. (eds), *Die sogenannte Thronfolgeschichte Davids: Neue Einsichten und Anfragen*, 136-167. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Resseguie, J. L. 2005. *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Rimmon-Kenan, S. 2002. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. (2nd ed.) London: Routledge.
- Rosenberg, J. 1989. The Institutional Matrix of Treachery in 2 Samuel 11. *Semeia* 46, 103-116.

- Stoebe, H. J. 1986. David und Uria. Überlegungen zur Überlieferung von 2 Sam 11. *Biblica* 67(3), 388-396.
- Stolz, F. 1981. *Das erste und zweite Buch Samuel*. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag.
- Tolmie, D. F. 1999. *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide*. San Francisco: International Scholars Publications.
- Tomashevsky, B. 2002. Story, Plot, and Motivation, in Richardson, B. (ed.), *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure and Frames*, 164-178. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Toolan, M. 2001. *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Van Aarde, A. G. 2006a. Genre en Plot-Georiënteerde Narratief-Kritiese Eksegese van Evangeliemateriaal: Inleiding tot Narratiewe Kritiek. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 62(2), 657-677.
- Van Aarde, A. G. 2006b. Vertellersperspektiefanalise van Nuwe-Testamentiese Teks-te. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 62(2), 1-36.
- Yee, G. A. 1988. Fraught with Background: Literary Ambiguity in II Samuel 11. *Interpretation* 42, 240-255.

R. H. van der Bergh, Post-graduate student, Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria, 0002, Pretoria. E-mail: [ronald@tuks.co.za](mailto:ronald@tuks.co.za)