

Penn Presentation:  
**“Metaphor in the Prose Narratives of I & II Samuel”**  
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**A. ALTER’S INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS**

- Robert Alter criticizes modern English translations for what he describes as the “avoidance of the metaphorical” (xiii).
  
- He explains:
  - “One of the most salient characteristics of biblical Hebrew is its extraordinary concreteness, manifested especially in a fondness for images rooted in the human body. The general predisposition of modern translators is to convert most of this concrete language into more abstract terms that have the purported advantage of clarity but turn the pungency of the original into stale paraphrase.”
  - Noting that “a good deal of this concrete biblical language based on the body is what a linguistic would call lexicalized metaphor,”
  - he then asserts: “Dead metaphors, however, are the one persuasive instance of the resurrection of the dead—for at least the ghosts of the old concrete meanings float over the supposedly abstract acceptations of the terms, and this is something the philologically driven translators do not appear to understand” (xii-xiii).
  
- He cites a few examples that demonstrate how biblical writers utilized concrete terms for specific literary purposes.
  - For instance, most modern translators usually render the term זרע as “offspring,” ignoring the fact that this Hebrew noun has the general meaning of “seed.” Alter argues that “there is convincing evidence that the biblical writers never entirely forgot that their term for offspring also meant semen and had a precise equivalent in the vegetable world” (xiii).
  - He shows how, in the story of Tamar and Judah’s sons, the author strategically uses this term throughout the narrative to highlight the themes of the episode.

- In another example, God’s promise to Abraham that his seed will be multiplied “as the stars in the heavens and as the sand on the shore of the sea” (Gen. 22:17), Alter stresses that the term זרע “imposes itself visually on the retina of the imagination” (xiv).
- Because of the power of figurative language, he claims: “To substitute offspring for seed here may not fundamentally alter the meaning but it diminishes the vividness of the statement, making it just a little harder for readers to sense why these ancient texts have been so compelling down through the ages” (xiv).
- Alter criticizes modern translators for repeatedly substituting abstract terms for concrete expressions, “introducing supposed clarity where things were perfectly clear to begin with.” His main point is that the substitution of the abstract for the concrete, the “avoidance of the metaphorical,” ends up “subverting the literary integrity of the story” (xv).

## **B. RESEARCH REVIEW**

- I read Alter’s introduction to his Genesis translation after I had spent over a year researching the general topic of metaphor in the Bible. The margins of my book are filled with check marks and exclamation points, visual signs of the excitement I felt having at last found someone who understands and articulates the observations I had made about the unrecognized, or underappreciated, metaphoric language in biblical prose.

## 1st. Research On Metaphor In The Bible

- The vast majority of research on metaphor in the Bible has focused on poetic texts, primarily on the prophets.
- Several individuals have written monographs on one particular metaphor in one particular prophetic book, including
  - Kirsten Nielsen's 1985 study of the tree as metaphor in Isaiah,
  - Julie Galambush's 1992 book on the metaphor of Jerusalem as God's Wife in Ezekiel,
  - Katheryn Pfisterer Darr's 1994 work entitled, *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God*, which looks at groups of images that run throughout Isaiah, such as children, women, etc.
  - and, most recently, Bernhard Oestreich's 1998 book, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh in Hoseah 14:2-9*.
- Others have written full-length studies tracing a particular metaphor throughout the Bible,
  - such as Marc Brettler's 1989 study, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*,
  - and Elaine Adler's 1990 dissertation from U. C. Berkeley on *Background of the Metaphor of the Covenant as Marriage in the Hebrew Bible*.
- Articles on this topic follow a similar pattern:
  - the bulk of the work has been on specific metaphors in the prophets,
  - with some attention give to other areas of the Bible, like Proverbs, Job, and Psalms.
- Only one monograph-length study of biblical metaphor has been published to date, Peter Macky's 1990 book, *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought, A Method for Interpreting the Bible*.
  - For Macky, "biblical thought" includes both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and he approaches this topic from a decidedly theological perspective.
  - As the subtitle indicates, Macky focuses heavily on theory and methodology.

- Not only is the book heavily weighted toward the New Testament, with nearly twice as many citations coming from Christian scriptures, but he tends to merely cite examples, without adequate analysis of actual biblical metaphors.
- While Macky's work has a number of commendable features, it does not satisfy the needs of those looking for an in-depth understanding of metaphor in the Hebrew Bible.

## 2nd. General Metaphor Research

- In contrast to the fairly limited bibliography of research on metaphor in the Bible, the amount of research on metaphor in general is a bit overwhelming.
  - In a 1978 lecture on "Metaphor as Rhetoric," Wayne Booth made the following comments about the explosion of interest in metaphor: "I'll wager a good deal that the year 1977 produced more titles than the entire history of thought before 1940...I have in fact extrapolated with my pocket calculator to the year 2039; at that point there will be more students of metaphor than people."
  - As outrageous as Booth's claims may be, he may not be not that far off.
  - To give you a sense of the quantity of research in this field, I counted the number of entries in the book, *Metaphor II, A Classified Bibliography of Publications 1985-1990* (Jean-Pierre van Noppen and Edith Hols). During that five year period, 3,483 books and articles on the topic of metaphor were published.
  - An index in the back of the book categorizes the publications according to disciplines. Scholars in every field seem to be writing on metaphor:
    - from aesthetics, anthropology, architecture, art, artificial intelligence, and axiology
    - to technology, theolinguistics, theology, translation, women's studies, and writing.
  - Interestingly, in this lengthy index, there is no entry for biblical studies.
- **Why are so many people all of a sudden so interested in the topic of metaphor?**
  - To answer this question, let me give a very brief history of the status of metaphor.

- From the time of Aristotle (4<sup>th</sup> cen B.C.E.) until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> cen, one dominant view of metaphor held sway:
  - Metaphor has been looked upon as “an elliptical simile useful for stylistic, rhetorical, and didactic purposes, but which can be translated into a literal paraphrase without any loss of cognitive content.”
  - In other words, metaphor involves a simple comparison btwn two objects or experiences; it is used for aesthetic or rhetorical reasons, but not for clearly expressing meaning or making truth claims.
- Aristotle’s definition of metaphor provides the cornerstone for all subsequent studies of metaphor.
  - In the *Poetics*, he writes that “metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else.”
  - He cites the following example:
    - Old age is to life as evening is to day; therefore, one can simply transfer the appropriate words and speak of evening as “the old age of the day” and of old age as “the evening of life.”
  - In the *Art of Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses the rhetorical benefits of metaphor, which include the ability to ornament a subject, to provide clarity, or to produce vividness.
  - As part of this discussion, Aristotle comments on the similarities between metaphors and similes.
    - He writes that “a simile is also a metaphor, only slightly different,” explaining that “the simile is a metaphor differing in one addition only [the word “like”]; hence it is less pleasant, as it is more drawn out.”

- The classical Latin rhetoricians who followed Aristotle
  - reversed the dominance of metaphor over simile,
  - and, as a result, assigned metaphor a less important place in persuasive speech than did Aristotle.
  - They argued that if metaphor is only a brief form of comparison (an elliptical simile), then metaphor has no unique function in crafting a proof.
- In the medieval period, the importance of metaphor continued to diminish.
  - In the 7<sup>th</sup> cen, rhetoricians made a distinction btwn rhetoric and logic and reduced rhetoric to an issue of style.
  - The devaluation of rhetoric resulted in the further devaluation of metaphor, for metaphor was viewed simply as a stylistic device, not a tool for serious philosophical argumentation.
  - Medieval theologians attacked the embellishment of language in general, warning against “those who clothe falsehoods in pleasing language and style.”
- Post-medieval philosophers continued to perpetuate a negative attitude toward metaphor.
  - For example, the 17<sup>th</sup> cen. empiricist philosopher Thomas Hobbes argued that our ability to communicate is impeded whenever we ‘use words metaphorically...and thereby deceive others.’
  - Hobbes considered literal language the only adequate vehicle for expressing meaning precisely and making truth claims. In contrast, a metaphor constitutes a deviant use of words and results in a tendency to confuse and deceive.

- In the early twentieth century, the pervasive philosophy known as logical positivism continued to devalue metaphor as unimportant, deviant, and vague, an appropriate tool for politicians or poets, but not for scientists attempting to accurately describe physical reality.
  - “A basic notion of positivism was that reality could be precisely described through the medium of language—literal language-- in a manner that was clear, unambiguous, and, in principle, testable.”
  - Believing that reality could, and should, be literally describable, other uses of language were considered meaningless.
- Only with the spread of a new philosophical perspective, relativism, did the view of metaphor that had remained fairly consistent for over 2,000 years begin to change.
  - “The central idea of this approach is that cognition is the result of mental construction...The objective world is not directly accessible but is constructed on the basis of the constraining influences of human knowledge and language.”
  - This perspective does not rigidly differentiate scientific language and other kinds of language, thus it does it elevate literal language as the “correct,” desired form of discourse.
  - Whereas the traditional approach devalues metaphor “as deviant and parasitic upon normal use,” this new approach celebrates metaphor “as an essential characteristic of the creativity of language.”
- During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, philosophers, linguists, psychologists, literary critics, and scholars in a wide range of disciplines have reassessed the standard view of figurative language started to appreciate metaphor as an essential component of language and thought.

### III. MY RESEARCH

#### A. The Avoidance of Metaphor in Biblical Studies

- With this brief overview providing some insight into the explosion of interest in the topic of metaphor and tropes, let us now return to the field of biblical studies.
- Earlier, I contrasted the fairly limited amount of research on metaphor in the Bible to the total quantity of recent work in this area. This disparity raises the question:
  - Why have biblical scholars often ignored metaphor, both in translations and commentaries and in the secondary literature?
  - Why, as Alter puts it, has “avoidance of the metaphorical” been so widespread?
- I have a few theories:
  - (1) Many biblical scholars have inherited the long-standing, negative view of metaphor that belittles figurative language as ornamentation, a mere rhetorical flourish. As a result, tropes have not been appreciated as an important component of biblical texts.
  - (2) In many instances, words or phrases that might qualify as metaphors are dismissed as “dead” metaphors or idioms. The unstated assumption is much of the figurative language in the Bible is made up of fixed, conventional phrases like *אף חרה או בתן ביד*, or words that *זרע* that many biblicalists seem to think should properly be understood as abstract concepts.
    - The whole notion of “dead” metaphors is extremely problematic, as is the attempt to classify metaphors as living mets, stock mets, lexicalized mets, etc.—ultimately a futile enterprise.
    - Our present time constraints do not allow me to further elaborate on this issue, but it is a very important and interesting aspect of my topic.
    - I plan to introduce recent research on idioms, studies that show that idioms are not semantically empty. On the contrary, convincing arguments have been made that the meanings of the constituent words of an idiom and its underlying structure are both available and play a role in communication – which is basically the point that Alter makes.
  - (3) Another reason is that many of the clearly identifiable metaphors, metaphors that equate *A* with *B* (like when Goliath says to David: “Am I a dog, that you come against

me with sticks?") are perceived to be banal and uninteresting – we'll look at an example like this shortly.

- (4) Another factor parallels the neglect of semantics in modern linguistics. The linguist, John Lyons, notes that the field of semantics has been neglected because it is not as objective or rigorous as grammar or phonology. Adele Berlin has proposed a similar explanation for the neglect of metaphor in biblical studies: Since metaphors involve semantics, they have not received the type of attention paid to formal features of the biblical text.

## **B. My Project**

- In a 1997 article on the role of metaphor in biblical poetry, Adele Berlin addresses the fact that, among modern biblical scholars, "scant attention has been paid to [metaphor] in a systematic way."
  - She writes: "There are many competing theories of metaphor—linguistic, cognitive, pragmatic, philosophic. To understand them all and apply them to an analysis of biblical metaphor is a worthy task that I would encourage biblical scholars to undertake."
- I have accepted Berlin's challenge, and--after a considerable amount of time spent grappling with these many competing theories--I have now (finally) gained some degree of clarity on this topic.
  - The next, most crucial step, is to apply this understanding of metaphor to the Bible, with the goal that in the end, I will better understand the biblical text itself.
- While Berlin's interest in metaphor relates to her interest in poetry, the focus of my work is on biblical prose.
  - As I mentioned previously, almost all of the present work on metaphor in the Bible has been concentrated on the prophets and other poetic texts.
  - However, as recent research demonstrates, metaphors and other tropes suffuse language, not just poetry or rhetorical speech, but all forms of discourse.
  - Since metaphors and other forms of figurative language do occur in biblical prose, in dialogue and narration, this overlooked area of research seemed an ideal dissertation topic.

- As I examine metaphor in biblical prose, specifically in the texts of I & II Samuel, I will approach the topic from a linguistic perspective.
  - Whereas many scholars today examine the conceptual aspects of metaphor, the mental processes that take place when we create or confront metaphors,
  - my interest is in the actual language of metaphor, the way words are combined to create a tropic effect.
  - My understanding of metaphor has been largely shaped by Dr. Asif Agha, a professor in Penn's anthropology department, who (much to my good fortune) taught an excellent course last semester on metaphor and tropes.
- The working definition of metaphor which guides my research is that **metaphor is an anomaly that creates an analogy and produces an interactional effect**.
  - To explain this definition and demonstrate my approach, let us examine a few examples.

## C. EXAMPLES

### 1st. Overview of 1 Samuel 25

- When David finds out that Nabal is shearing his sheep in Carmel, he sends a polite message to Nabal, requesting that Nabal share some of his goods with David's men in recognition of the fact that they had previously protected Nabal's shepherds. Nabal rudely refuses David's request, which prompts David and his men to gird their swords and prepare for a violent confrontation with Nabal. In the meantime, one of Nabal's lads runs to Abigail to let her know what has transpired.

## 2nd. 1 Sam. 25:14 -- וַיִּעַט בָּקָהּ

### 1. Background

- What features of a bird of prey are these verbal forms foregrounding?
  - (a) the sound the bird makes, normally or in connection with a specific activity, such as capturing prey; or
  - (b) the action of the bird swooping down on its prey?
  - BDB opts for the first answer (as do Fox and NRS), guided by the Arabic and the presumed contextual fit.
  - The assumption is made that the verb refers to the quality/pitch of Nabal's voice (he shouted at them). However, there are no clues in the original conversation (vv. 10-11) that Nabal shouted or spoke in a loud voice: וַיִּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר (v 10).
  - An alternative interpretation links 25:14 with 14:32 and 15:19; in this case, the verb is used to explain the general way that Nabal spoke to David's men, not just his voice, but his general demeanor.
  - (To adequately solve this issue, I need to follow the Tigay methodology of calling a zookeeper.)
- Other citations:
  - 1 S 14:32: After defeating the Philistines from Michmas to Aiyalon, the famished troops pounce on the spoil; they take the sheep, cows, and calves, slaughtering them on the ground and eat the blood.
  - 1 S 15:19: Samuel asks Saul why the troops disobeyed God by taking spoil from the Amalekites, and not putting them under the ban.

### 2. Translations:

- **JPS**: "he had spurned them"
  - A good example of "avoidance of the metaphorical," where translation is pushed "to the verge of paraphrase—recasting and interpreting the original instead of representing it" (Alter, xx).

- **NRS**: “he shouted insults at them”
  - Like the JPS, it is a translation on the verge of paraphrase, with a translation that attempts to capture the “shrieking” but explicate it in greater detail.
- **Alter**: “he pounced on them”
  - He interprets the verb as referring to the activity of pouncing on prey, not shrieking; however, the translation does not allow the reader to clearly reconstruct the met, for “pouncing on” is not distinctively identifiable with a bird of prey (contra the Hebrew, when the verb and noun are clearly linked).
- **Fox**: “he shrieked at them”
  - He accepts BDB’s interpretation; but, as with Alter, the translation does not help the reader to reconstruct the underlying met, for many things are capable of shrieking.
- **McCarter** (Anchor Bible): “he flew at them”
  - Best preserves the met, with a verb that clearly links Nabal’s actions with that of a bird.

### 3. **Anomaly**

- **Background**:
  - There is nothing metaphoric about individual words in and of themselves; a metaphor is an effect of words in context.
  - The hallmark of metaphors (and tropes in general) is a lack of fit btwn certain items and their surrounding context, creating a sense of deviance or anomaly.
  - The ability to identify and interpret a trope requires a knowledge of the grammar and semantics of a language, an ability to distinguish what is grammatically or semantically unmarked or unremarkable (the normal way of speaking) from what is remarkable. Because, tropes presuppose convention, the task is to determine the base-line relative to which something counts as a deviation—but this is not easy to do for the Bible, since we have such a limited corpus and very little corroborating data.

- **This passage illustrates the problem of establishing the norm:**
  - When we use distributional patterns of usage to help establish the norm, we find that this verb (in the qal, leaving undecided for now the two Psalms references cited in K-B) only occurs three times, all in narrative passages in 1 Sam, and with human subjects. Does this mean it was “normative,” and not anomalous, to use this verb in this manner? Or is it just that our evidence is skewed: neither the Bible nor the extrabiblical epigraphic material preserve examples of the normative use of this verb to in connection with birds (or other animals?); the only available citations exemplify metaphoric uses of the verb.
  - Note that compared with the other instances of this verb in 1 Sam, 25:14 is unique in that it is the only passage in which the verb is used to describe and interaction btwn two human beings, how one person spoke to or treated another.
  - This verb also stands out because of the fact that biblical prose contains a fairly limited vocabulary. Alter describes the Hebrew of the Bible as “a conventionally delimited language” (xxiii). A verb like  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$  proves unusual and remarkable, because we would expect a more common, straight-forward verb.
  - [Etymology is also a potential tool to address these issues (e.g., denominative verb), but this too is not definitive or fool-proof.]
- **Methodology:**
  - To highlight the anomalous nature of this sentence, I have adapted a linguistic technique which identifies the grammatical characteristics and semantic properties of a given word. This helps us to identify which words can or cannot be combined with one another. This is important because anomalies are created through the combinability of incompatible items.
  - [E.g., the noun “book” is a + common noun (it permits a article: a, the) (contra “I” or “this”); it is a + count noun (it is pluralizable) (contra “air”); it is – animate (it cannot occur as the subject of verbs like eat or sleep)]

#### 4. **Analogy**

- What distinguishes met from other tropes: a met creates an analogy.
- The **construal** presented here is modeled on Roger White's heuristic device of differentiating what he terms the intertwined primary and secondary vocabulary in order to then reconstruct the actual and hypothetical situations being compared in the met.
  - Primary vocabulary: those words that belong in a straight-forward, non-metaphorical description of the actual situation under discussion
  - Secondary vocabulary: words that introduce the metaphorical comparison into the sentence, the hypothetical situation to which the actual situation is being compared
  - There is not one "correct" way to fill in the gaps that arise when you separate the vocabulary into two distinct sentences. Construal depends on contextual clues, which help narrow down the logically possible candidate sentences to the most appropriate, relevant substitutions.
- The addition of an adjective in my gloss ("swiftly verbally attacked") in an attempt to capture nuances of the verb demonstrates the power of met, for simple paraphrase is not equivalent to the met.

#### 5. **Effect**

- What interactional effects can we discover at various layers of contextualization?

3rd. **1 Sam. 25:16** -- חֹמֶה הָיָה עָלָיו

- This seems like a very simple, straight-forward metaphor--so simple, in fact, that very few commentators have anything to say about it.
  - The LXX softens the met by phrasing it as a simile.
  - Most of the medieval commentators skip over the statement altogether.
  - A few of the modern commentaries offer some remarks.
    - Why does McCarter propose an emendation? What's his temptation to emend? Is it that the met is too straight-forward? (Because it is so easy to interpret, he needs to make work for himself?) And what would it mean for David's men to be a sun above Nabal's shepherds?
- Taken out of context, mets like this seem simple, obvious, banal. In some sense, this is the type of met that has led biblical scholars to ignore mets altogether. Equivalence mets like this (in the form "An A is a B") are that are most obvious, most clearly identifiable, the easiest to interpret—and they also seem to be the least interesting. What more needs to be said?
- However, if we look closer at the metaphor in context, as a vital part of various layers of text-in-contexts relationships, we can begin to appreciate the fact that even this simple metaphor produces important interactional effects.

**D. Conclusion:**

- I hope these examples demonstrate that metaphors can play a vital function in biblical narrative and thus constitute a worthwhile field of study.

# Metaphors in the Prose Narratives of I & II Samuel

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**Working definition of metaphor:** Metaphor is an anomaly that creates an analogy and produces an interactional effect.

## 1 Samuel 25

וַיִּעַט בָּהֶם הַגָּה שְׁלַח דָּוִד מִלְאָכִים מִהַמְדַבֵּר לְבָרֵךְ אֶת אֲדֹנָיו  
וְהָאֲנָשִׁים טָבִים לָנוּ מְאֹד וְלֹא הִקְלַמְנוּ<sup>15</sup>  
וְלֹא פָקְדְנוּ מְאוּמָה כֹּל יְמֵי הַתְּהַלְכָנוּ אִתָּם בְּהִיטְנוּ בְּשָׂדֵה:  
לְלֵה גַם יוֹמָם כֹּל יְמֵי הִיטְנוּ עִמָּם רְעִים הִצְאָן: גַּם חוֹמָה הָיָה עָלֵינוּ<sup>16</sup>  
וְעַתָּה דַעִי וּרְאִי מַה תַּעֲשִׂי כִּי כָלְתָה הַרְעָה אֶל אֲדֹנָיו וְעַל כָּל בֵּיתוֹ<sup>17</sup>  
וְהוּא בֶן בְּלִיעֵל מְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו:  
... וְתַמְהָר אֲבוּגִיל וְתַקַּח מֵאִתָּם לָחֶם<sup>18</sup>

## 1 Samuel 25:14 -- וַיִּעַט בָּהֶם

### 1st. Background:

- **BDB:**
  - [עִיט]: *scream, shriek*; only Q, 1 Sam 25:14 *and he screamed at them*
  - עִיט: bird of prey (from *scream*) Gen 15:11, Jb 28:7; Je 12:9 (fig of foes of Judah); Is 18:6; 46:11 (fig of invader); Ez 39:4 [Note: Most of these citations deal with eating (often with wild beasts); only Jer 12:9a<sup>1</sup> might possibly relate to the voice.]
  - [עִיט]: denom. *dart greedily* (like a bird of prey), Q 1 Sam 14:32; 2 ms 15:19
- **Koehler-Baumgartner:**
  - עִיט: ar. *jī* schreien; *gīz* erzurnen; sy. *‘ajīa* und md *aiīa* Zorn; Q: (1) c. ב anschreien 1 S 25:14; (2) c. אל schreiend herfallen uber 1 S 15:19, cj. 14:32; cj. Hif: עִיטוּ pr. *schreien* (Unheil uber) Ps 55:4, al. prop. *ישו* vel *יִמְטִירוּ*; so auch Ps 140:11, pr *יִמְטִירוּ*
- **1 Sam 14:32 & 15:19**
  - 1 S 14:32 (N): ( ) ק (הָעַם אֶל שָׁלֹחַ/הַשְׁלָל) וַיִּעַט
  - 1 S 15:19 (Samuel to Saul): הָרַע בְּעֵינָי ה' וַתַּעֲשׂ אֶל הַשְׁלָל וַתַּעֲשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינָי ה'

### B. Translations:

- JPS: “he had spurned\* them” \**(meaning of Hebrew uncertain)*
- NRS: “he shouted insults at them”
- Alter (*The David Story*, 1999): “he pounced on them”
- Fox (*Give Us a King*, 1999): “he shrieked at them”
- McCarter (*Anchor Bible*, 1980): “he flew at them”

### C. Anomaly:

- {Nabal} swooped down on {David’s men}: {+human}<sub>NP</sub> [(-human) verb + [(+human)]<sub>PP</sub>] <sub>VP</sub>
- A verb primarily associated with a non-human creature (a bird of prey swooping down upon its prey) is used in connection with a human being (Nabal speaking to David’s men).

### D. Analogy:

- Nabal's treatment of David's men (his response to them when they ask for a share of the sheep shearing) is compared to a bird of prey swooping down on its prey (or possibly the sound of the bird).
- Construal:
  - Actual situation: (Nabal) *swiftly verbally attacked* (David's men).
  - Hypothetical situation: *The bird of prey swooped down on the carcass.*

**F. Effect:**

- What interactional effects can we discover at various layers of contextualization? (a) Dialogue between the servant and Abigail (report on Nabal's treatment of David's men) (vv. 14-17); (b) Original interaction between Nabal and David's men (vv. 9-11); (c) Larger scene in which a crisis is created by Nabal (by rejecting David's messengers) and then averted by Nabal's servant and Abigail (vv. 4-18ff); (d) Entire episode (1 Sam 25); (e) Broader context created by the placement of this chapter in between the two encounters between David and Saul (1 Sam 24-26); (f) 1 & 2 Samuel; (g) Bible as a whole; (h) Interaction between reader and text. A few examples:
  - Dialogue between the servant and Abigail: The speaker vividly and succinctly describes to Abigail how Nabal treated David's men, thus helping to impress upon her the egregiousness of Nabal's behavior. The speaker sets up a contrast between Nabal and David's men: David's men came to greet Nabal (לברך, v. 14), but he attacked them; David's men were very good to Nabal's men (v. 15), but Nabal is a scoundrel no one can talk to (v. 17). The servant's speech succeeds in spurring Abigail into action (v. 18).
  - Connections between this episode and Samuel as a whole: This root is used in 1 Sam 14:32 and 15:19 to describe the troops taking spoil with greed and aggression. In this case, the verb applies to Nabal, who perceives of David's men as greedy and aggressive in their request for his goods (he thinks David's men are attempting to swoop down on his property).

**1 Samuel 25:16 -- חומה היו עלינו**

**A. Translations & Commentaries**

- All translations: "They were a wall about/around/beside us"
- Fokkelman, 491: The phrase praises the completeness of the protection.
- McCarter, 397: A perfectly intelligible bit of met. Still it is quite tempting to read *hamma* for *homa*, reckoning the *mater w* as late in any case, and translate: "They were *a sun above us* at night as well as in the day..."
- Alter, 155: The servant amplifies the language of David's message to Nabal by adding the image, "They were a wall around us both night and day." He thus makes emphatically clear that David's men really provided protection faithfully.

**B. Anomaly**

- Equivalence statement: animate object = inanimate object (David's men = a wall)
- [inanimate dir obj (חומה)]<sub>NP</sub> [verb of equivalence (היו)]<sub>VP</sub> [animate (עלינו)]<sub>PP</sub> [animate subj {האנשים}]<sub>NP</sub> [(גם לילה גם יומם)]<sub>ADV P</sub>

**C. Analogy**

- Nabal's servant compares David's men who protected them to a wall.
- Construal:
  - Actual situation: (David's men) *provided protection for us* both by night and by day.
  - Hypothetical situation: *The stones were a wall about us* both by night and by day.

#### D. Effect

- Differences between David's original message (vv. 6-8) and the servant's account of what happened (vv. 14-16): This statement is one of the three instances in which Nabal's servant expands upon David's description of what happened (variations underlined; additional statements marked with a double underline; asterisks indicate different order). The first addition ("the men were good to us") generalizes the following two statements about the way the men treated the shepherds ("we were not humiliated and we missed nothing"). The second addition ("we went about with them") suggests that the shepherds chose to join up with David's men; David's men did not initiate the relationship. The third addition ("they were a wall around us both night and day") paints a clear picture for Abigail of what David's men did for them: they provided steady, sturdy protection and security.

בכרמל היותם \* ימי כל / מאומה להם נפקד ולא / הכלמנום לא / עמנו \*\* היו לך אשר הרעים (25:7) \*\* / \*בהיותנו בשדה \* / התהלכנו אתם / ולא הכלמנו / ולא פקדנו מאומה / כל ימי והאנשים טבים לנו מאד (25:15-16) / כל ימי היותנו עמם רעים הצאן \*\* / ומסחומה היו עלינו גם לילה גם י

- The cumulative effect of the language in the servant's speech: This is the second metaphor the servant uses in his four verse speech to Abigail (vv. 14-17), as he attempts to persuade her to take action. Cf. the cluster of metaphors used by Abigail in vv. 29-31, as she attempts to persuade David *not* to take action. Whereas the verbal met in v. 14 was used to cast Nabal in a negative light, this met of equivalence is used to support the positive portrayal of David's men. As noted above, the servant's rhetorical devices prove effective, for Abigail rushes into action as soon as he finishes speaking.
- The relation between this metaphor and other metaphors in the chapter as a whole: Assuming that the wall envisioned was a stone wall, then this metaphor can be linked to two others in this chapter: (1) in v. 29, Abigail expresses the hope that David's enemies will be flung (presumably like stones) from a slingshot (וְאֵת נֶפֶשׁ אִיבִיךָ יִקְלַעְנָה בְּתוֹךְ כַּף הַקֶּלֶעַ); (2) in v. 37, Nabal, who was introduced in v. 3 as a "hard man" (וְהָאִישׁ קָשֶׁה) turns into a stone as his heart dies within him (וְהָיָה לְאֶבֶן).
- Similarity between this metaphor and an Egyptian metaphor (Instructions to Merikare, *Context of Scripture*, 64): When the Bowmen were a sealed wall, I breached [their strongholds], I made Lower Egypt attack them, I captured their inhabitants, I seized their cattle, until the Asiatics abhorred Egypt.