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THE ADVICE OF THE ANONYMOUS SERVANT

Remarks on the Servant-Master Relationship in Three Biblical Narratives (1Sam 9; Jdgs 19; 2Kgs 5)

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Abstract: The article investigates the narrative role of the anonymous servant in three biblical episodes (1Sam 9; Jdgs 19; 2Kgs 5). Through a synchronic approach to the text and with the help of discursive-narratological analysis of the scenes in which the servant appears, it will show how the biblical authors use this character in the context of a definite narrative pattern and with the intent of conveying a precise ideological mode.

Keywords: Biblical Narrative. Servant. Minor Characters. 1Sam 9. Jdgs 19. 2Kgs 5.

El consejo del siervo anónimo
Consideración sobre la relación siervo-amo en tres narraciones bíblicas (1 Sam 9; Jue 19; 2 Re 5)

Resumen: El artículo investiga el rol narrativo del siervo anónimo en tres episodios bíblicos (1 Sam 9; Jue 19; 2 Re 5). A través de una perspectiva sincrónica del texto, y con la ayuda del análisis discursivo-narratológico de las escenas en las que aparece el siervo, se mostrará cómo los autores bíblicos utilizan a este personaje en el contexto de un esquema narrativo definido y con la intención de transmitir un modelo ideológico preciso

Palabras clave: Narrativa bíblica. Siervo. Personajes menores. 1 Sam 9. Jue 19. 2 Re 5.

1. Introduction

Characters are the essential elements of any narrative, and the narratives we find in the Bible are no exception. Characters are products of the author, who fabricates paper creatures through precise literary techniques and describes their characteristics in such a way as to stimulate in the reader a deceptive "character-effect"[1]. The narrative's characters, including biblical characters, can be seen as entities in a story world that the author puts into the narrated world through the narrator's voice. Although a good author is adept at creating in the reader (or listener) the illusion of a character's infinite possibilities for action, in reality, the characters in a story are designed as devices to communicate through their relationships and interactions with each other, a specific meaning and their actions within the narrated world serve a specific narrative purpose[2]. In this study, I propose the analysis of three biblical episodes that share a similar narrative dynamic occurring in the relationships between characters: the anointing of Saul (1Sam 9), the crime of Gibeah (Jdgs 19), and the conversion of Naaman, general of Aram's army (2Kgs 5). What these episodes have in common, and what allows a comparison, is precisely the narrative dynamic concerning the relationships between the actors on the scene. In these episodes, the relationship between a master, the main character in the plot, and an anonymous servant, the secondary character, emerges through a precise narrative movement orchestrated by the narrator.

Despite the apparent minority of this character, in all three cases, forced into the shadows of the often-unwieldy protagonists, it will be seen how the biblical authors manage to give fundamental importance to the relationship between these two characters. The Narrative and discourse structure of the episodes[3] will reveal how the biblical text suggests a precise way

[1] The term "character" is used in narratology to refer to participants in narrative worlds, as opposed to "people", who instead participate, as individuals, in the concrete world. Following M. Bal, the *character-effects* occurs "when the resemblance between human beings and fabricated figures is so great that we forget the fundamental difference: we even go so far as to identify with the character, to cry, to laugh, and to search for or with it, or even against it, when the character is a villain". See Bal, *Narratology*, 113. Similarly, cf. also Jannidis, *Figure and Person*. Character mimesis has also been the subject of analysis by scholars of biblical narratology. See, for example, Berlin, *Poetics,* 13-14; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art,* 47-48.

[2] On the relationship between narrative character and action, see Jannidis, "Characters", 14-30.

[3] As will be seen, the type of discourse analysis arises at the level of discourse microstructure. In this sense, starting from a level of syntactic analysis, I will con-

of exercising power over subordinates based on cooperation and dialogue, rejecting a despotic model that imposes its hierarchy on the lower classes.

2. In Search of the Lost Donkeys. Saul and his Servant in 1Sam 9

The episode of Saul's anointing unfolds in a narrative arc that runs from 1Sam 9:1 and concludes in 1 Sam 10:16[4]. Placed at the beginning of Saul's story, this narrative is the starting point of the descending parable that will give to the life of this character the typical characteristics of a tragedy[5].

The plot is well known. Saul, a handsome young man, depicted in the colors of a fairy tale hero[6], is sent by his father along with a servant to find two lost she-asses. After a long search, Saul proposes to abandon the task, while the servant advises continuing to the city where a "man of God" lives. Some commentators identify Saul's submissive attitude towards his servant, foreshadowing his inadequacy to govern[7]. However, a closer look at the exchange between Saul and his servant may lead to different results.

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sider those structures that are elaborated, or described, at the local or short-range level. In other words, semantic structure of the sequences of elements that make up the sentence. In addition to the exquisitely devoted studies on Hebrew syntax (see below), fundamental in this regard are the studies on the microstructure of discourse proposed by Van Dijk, *Macrostructure,* 29-40.

[4] These boundaries are accepted by several commentators. See e.g., Keil-Delitzsch, *Commentary on the books of Samuel*, 86; Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 75; Birch, "The Development of the Tradition", 58-60; Borgman, *David, Saul, and God*, 18.

[5] See Humphreys, "The Tragedy of King Saul", 18-27; Exum, "Saul as Sacrifice", 20-25; Nicholson, *Three Faces of Saul*, 11-32.

[6] From Gressmann, *Die Schriften*, 26-27, onwards, many scholars have recognized that the narrative of Saul's anointing contains some literary motifs typical of the folktale. According to these authors, the presence of the *fanciul theme*, and the ideal picture of a gorgeous-looking boy who excels all others, are to be considered traits similar to those of the fairy tale hero. See Birch, "The Development of the Tradition", 55; Miller, "Saul's Rise to Power", 157-174; Edelman, "Saul's Journey through Mt. Ephraim", 44-58; Couffignal, "Le récit du règne de Saül", 3-20; Jacobs, "The Role of Secondary Characters", 495-496.

[7] This position is strongly supported by Hildebrant, "The Servants of Saul", 185, which states: "this first servant passage depicts the future king of Israel as someone who requires direction, advice, and even financial support from one of those he ought to lead. [...] the exchange with the servant urges me to question his royal abilities from the very moment he appears on the scene". Several scholars support this view. In a recent commentary, Balzaretti, *1-2 Samuele*, 135, writes: "In this case, it is the boy who shows all the characteristics that a king should have: the

It is worth quoting the first section of the narrative, contextualizing the dialogue between the two characters (1Sam 9:1-10)[8].

> [1] There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth.
> [2] And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward, he was taller than any of the people.
> [3] Now, the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish told Saul his son, "Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys."
> [4] And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin but did not find them.

The narrative opens with a formulaic expression introducing Kish[9], a wealthy man from the tribe of Benjamin[10], and continues with the main character, Saul, seventh in the generational line presented by the biblical author[11]. His description is majestic (v. 2); the Hebrew literally says, "from

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ability to decide, to speak [...], knowledge of the territory, from where and how to obtain divine advice, availability of means. Already in his appearance on the scene, the future king shows himself as one who should be guided, advised, and helped materially by those he should lead, and this raises doubt about his ability to be a good king" (English translation from Italian is mine). Other scholars come to similar conclusions. Following Borgman, *David, Saul, and God*, 19, "Saul's first entrance onto the narrative stage reveals uncertainty"; For Reinhartz, "*Why Ask My Name*, 35, Saul is "immature, impatient, and worried".

[8] English Standard Version (ESV) translation.

[9] The expression "there was a man", followed by the name, region, and genealogy line is a narrative device that signals to the reader the beginning of a new story within a larger narrative (cf. 1Sam 1:1-2). On this point see Alter, *The David Story*, 46.

[10] The Hebrew expression describing Kish as a "wealthy man" is *gbwr ḥyl*. In its general usage within the biblical text, the word *gbwr* denotes a particularly powerful or strong person capable of great feats, particularly in the military field. Especially when related to the word Hail, it is customary to translate it as "hero". In principle, however, the term can also be employed in a broader sense, referring to any particular endowment of power, strength, wealth, etc. In the case of Kish, the ESV translation renders the expression as "wealthy man", but other translations propose different solutions. To cite a few examples, the King James Version translates "man of power", the New American Standard Version has "a mighty man of valor", while the New Revised Standard follows the ESV and reports "man of wealth". As much as these translations may differ, they all emphasize the high social status of Saul's family. For an overview of the term, see Kosmala, "*gbr*", 449-454.

[11] In the Bible, as well as in the ancient Near East, the number seven was loaded with symbolic value. Placing Saul in the seventh place in the generational line con-

the shoulders taller than all the people". Saul's imposing stature and perfection of his appearance contribute literally to the construction of a heroic character[12].

After the protagonist's presentation, the text directly introduces the problem to be solved, the spark that will begin the plot: Kish's donkeys have gone astray[13]. It will be up to our hero, Saul, to bring them home. The request will come to Saul through his father's voice, who will invite him to complete the mission. In Kish's request to his son Saul (v. 3b), the reader makes the acquaintance of a new character who will participate in the quest: a young servant[14].

Compared with Saul's earlier presentation, the description – or rather non-description – of the servant goes almost unnoticed. The reader knows of him only that he exists, and the narrator provides no element to trace the outlines of his figure. He has no name, and the author does not provide us with his characteristics[15]. All we know about him is that he is "one of the servants". This expression, in addition to emphasizing the social status of Saul's family, which can boast several servants, suggests that the choice of the one who is to accompany Saul occurs completely randomly. Through these literary devices, the text creates a sharp contrast between the two characters in the story's scene[16]. On the one hand, Saul an almost perfect, heroic

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stitutes a literary device that can emphasize the special destiny that awaits the future king. On this topic, see Liverani, "Ma nel settimo anno", 49-53. See also Catastini, "Il quattordicesimo anno del regno di Ezechia", 258-163.

[12] The idea that Saul is literarily constructed as a hero is well argued in Mobley, "Glimpses of Heroic Saul", 80-88.

[13] From a narratological point of view, the donkeys' bewilderment constitutes what Propp called a "lack", that is, the situation that can give the necessary propulsion to get the plot started. See, Propp, *Morphology,* 95.

[14] It is interesting that already in the first verses the author has set up most of the actors necessary for the story to unfold. Following the actantial scheme proposed by Greimas, *Sémantique*, 172-189. Saul is the subject, (the one who performs the action), the donkeys are the object (which is the goal of the action) the servant is the helper (who helps the subject), Kish, Saul's father, is the recipient (who is the principal of the subject at the beginning of the narrative). In the verses immediately following, we will see how the opponent (that which hinders the achievement of the goal) is the vastness of the territory and Saul's lack of money.

[15] Anonymity in the biblical text has been addressed in a timely manner in Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name?* The scholar points out how anonymity, especially when referring to members of the servants (cf. pp. 35-38), is a narrative means of emphasizing their modest social class.

[16] As Sternberg, "Time and Space in Biblical (Hi)Story Telling", 81-145 notes, the way a character enters a story grabs the reader's attention. It is considered of great

figure from a wealthy family; on the other hand, a servant who is just "one of the servants", an anonymous, blurry figure of whom no sketch is provided. The effect of this character's insignificance is also reflected textually. In describing the events after the two leave to search for the donkeys, the servant seems to disappear from the narrator account[17]. In v. 4, in which the narrator reports the places visited to try to find the lost animals, the Hebrew verbs are all conjugated in the third person singular masculine in reference to Saul alone, as if the servant did not even exist[18].

This situation continues until, in v. 5, Saul realizes that the search is not yielding great results. The servant reappears in the narrative and engages in a dialogue with his master. In this exchange, in 1 Sam 9:5, the first to speak is Saul:

Let us come back, lest my father cease [worrying] about the she-asses and worry about us	*lkh wnšwbh pn yḥdl 'by mn h'tnwt wd'g lnw*

The construction of Saul's speech begins with a second-person masculine singular lengthened imperative *(lkh)*, followed by a first-person plural cohortative form preceded by a waw conjunction *(wnšwbh)*. From a syntactic point of view, when an imperative is followed by a cohortative that does not agree with the imperative in number, the imperative acquires an adverbial function[19]. In other words, in Biblical Hebrew prose, where the

importance to the character's overall characterization. Following the scholar, the moment of a character's introduction into the narrative sequence, as well as the way a character is introduced, can help generate in the reader an inferential mechanism that is useful to the overall effect of the story. On the contrastive effect of character descriptions in the books of Samuel, see Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 81-91.

[17] The appearance and disappearance of secondary characters during the flow of the story is a rather frequent phenomenon in the biblical narrative. According to Simon, "Minor Characters in Biblical Narrative", 13, this narrative device emphasizes the subordinate position of minor characters to the main character. Differently, Grossmann, "The Vanishing Character in Biblical Narrative", 561-571, views the disappearance and reappearance of a minor character as a refined literary device aimed at drawing the reader's attention to the actions that character will take in the continuation of the plot. He writes, "The presence of a vanishing character can be assessed based on two conditions: great emphasis is put on the character before disappearing; and the character vanishes before fulfilling a literary role" (571).

[18] The wayyiqtol form of the verb "he passed through" *(wy'br)* is always singular in this verse.

[19] For the adverbial use of the imperative see Dallaire, *The Syntax of Volitives in Biblical*, 81. Differently, GKC § 110h considers these types of imperatives to be a form of

imperative is followed immediately by another imperative or by a cohortative (with or without a connecting "waw"), the first imperative describes how the action of the second verb is to take place. Furthermore, as Mann argued, the imperative + (*w*)cohortative construction occurs when the speaker tries to get cooperation from his listener[20]. This is especially true when the cohortative differs in number or person from the imperative that precedes it[21]. In short, this conative form of speaking indicates that Saul is not imposing his authority on the servant but, on the contrary, seeks his cooperation by opening a space for confrontation[22].

Saul's speech stating his reasons expresses an idea of 'scope' – through the indicative construction x-yiqtol *(pn yḥdl)* –[23], and a prediction of 'consequence' – with the form w^{e}qatal (*wd'g*) –[24]. The proposition could be translated: Let us go back, lest my father doesn't cease (x-yiqtol = scope) [worrying] about the asses, and worry (w^{e}qatal = consequence) about us. Saul's father will probably worry about them if the two do not return home. Moreover, the consequence predicted by Saul, namely his father's concern, is confirmed in 1Sam 10:2. Here, from the reliable voice of Samuel, the reader learns that the donkey business now no longer worries the father of Saul, who is now in sorrow over his son's delay in returning.

There is no reason to believe that Saul is refusing the research of the she-asses for reasons other than those he lays out in his prediction, namely his father's concern[25].

To Saul's suggestion, the servant proposes one last way to complete the mission (v. 6):

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interjection: "imperative as קומו ,קום ,לכו ,לך, when immediately preceding a second imperative, are for the most part only equivalent to the interjections, *Come! Up".*

[20] See Mann, "On the Use of Verbs of Exhortation", 3-12 (in Hebrew).

[21] Cf. e.g. *lkh mšqh* (Gen 19:32); *lkw nplh* (2Kgs 7:4); *lkw wnb'h* (2Kgs 7:9); *lkw wnpylh* (Jonah 1:7); *ḥzq wntḥzqh* (1 Chr 19:13).

[22] It is remarkable that Kaufman, "An Emphatic Plea for Please", 198, and Lambert, *Traité de grammaire hébraïque*, 255-257, argue that the long imperative is marked out of "courtesy" and "respect" to the addressee. See also Dallaire, *The Syntax of Volitives in Biblical*, 68. See also Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, 325.

[23] In this representation, "x" can be any element of speech.

[24] On this point see the analyses in Niccacci, *Syntax*, 73-102.

[25] Hildebrant, "The Servants of Saul", 184-186, sees in this renunciation a foreshadowing of a more general attitude of Saul that would characterize him as a leader incapable of pursuing a goal. My proposed syntactic analysis, on the other hand, moves in the opposite direction.

Look, there is a man of God in this town. And the man is esteemed. Whatever he says, it surely come to pass. Now, let us go there. Perhaps he will tell us of our way on which we have gone.	*hnh n' 'yš 'lhym b'yr hzwt w'yš nkbd kl 'šr ydbr bw' ybw' 'th nlkh šm 'wly ygyd lnw 't drknw 'šr hlknw 'lynw*

To these words of the servant, Saul replies (v. 7):

Look, we will go, but what shall we bring to the man? For the bread is gone from our kits and there is no gift to bring to the man of God. What do we have with us?	*whnh nlk wmh nby' l'yš ky hlḥm 'zl mklynw wtšwrh 'yn lhbh' l'yš h'khym mh 'tnw*

The exchange between the two characters allows for some considerations. From the point of view of the discourse, both sentences begin with the particle *hnh.* This particle is an essential element of speech and, in this verse, has the function of introducing information that has particular relevance to the moment of communication[26]. To the servant's suggestion, which points the master to the important news of the presence of a man of God in a nearby town, Saul responds with another important fact through the construction *hnh* + yiqtol[27]. This verbal construction *(whnh nlk)* expresses the desire or possibility that a fact will be fulfilled in dependence on the fulfillment of certain conditions[28]. It is interesting to note that the two lines have the same grammatical structure. In essence, here, the two characters cooperate on the same level. They provide each other with important information to complete the task: in the same way that Saul had not considered asking the man of God for help, the servant had not considered that the prophet's performance required compensation.

The successful completion of the plot (the finding of the she-asses and Saul's meeting with Samuel) is not automatic but, on the contrary, requires the cooperation of the protagonist with his helper, regardless of their social statuses[29]. Mission completion results from productive teamwork in

[26] See Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 138. On the same point see also Niccacci, *Syntax,* 26; Arnold, *Syntax*, 157. See also, Ḳoguṭ, "On the Meaning and Syntactical Status of hinne", 133-154.

[27] Similarly, in the books of Samuel, see 1 Sam 20:21; 21:15.

[28] See McCarthy, "The Uses of we *hinnēh* in Biblical Hebrew", 330-342.

[29] In this sense, the secondary character of the servant is not only meant to be a "catalytic agent". On the one hand, it is certainly true that the tale proposes an alternative perspective of social hierarchies, presenting a servant who is far from

which master and servant work together proactively and contribute equally to the goal to be pursued on two different social levels.

3. Looking for a Place to Spend the Night. The Levite and his Servant in Jdgs 19

To confirm the interpretive line that emerged from the literary and discourse analysis of the previous section, it is worth analyzing another famous episode that, from the point of view of the servant-master relationship, contains a parallel to the scene in 1Sam 9 but from a reversed perspective: the episode of Gibeah's violence in Jdgs 19. This narrative is one of the darkest episodes in the Bible[30] and has puzzled scholars for centuries who have expressed discordant judgments about the behavior of the Levite and the man from Ephraim[31]. Again, the plot is well known. The narrative opens by introducing a Levite – whom the text does not name – who dwells in the hilly territories belonging to the tribe of Ephraim. The Levite takes a concubine from Bethlehem with him, but she abandons him, fled back to her father's house. The husband follows the concubine to persuade her to turn back and reaches his father-in-law's house, where he stays for three days, welcomed with the sacred chrisms of hospitality. Three times, however, the Levite tries to depart to his home with the recovered concubine, and three times the woman's father persuades him to stay an extra night. Until, on the

being a mere executor of orders and who speaks and acts on the same level as his master. On the other hand, as the analysis shows, "catalyzation" occurs not only through the servant's intervention, but through the cooperation that the characters show among themselves. From this point of view, it is the cooperation between servant and master that is the catalyzing agent of the plot. On the role of secondary characters as catalyzing agents and abundant critical bibliography see the study in Nepi, *Dal fondale alla ribalta*, 197-255.

[30] It is to the credit of feminist exegesis that scholars have brought attention to the character of the concubine in this episode. Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 64-91, meticulously analyzes the episode from the figure of the concubine, offering a reading that reveals the importance of this character to the unfolding of the dramatic action, her moral and marital agency, and her speaking voice. Recently, Paynter, *Telling Terror in Judges 19*, traced the entire history of feminist criticism of the Jdgs 19 episode.

[31] The bibliography on this episode is immense. Different authors have read the story according to different methodologies and through different hermeneutical lenses revealing the complexity of the story from both literary and theological perspectives. For an overview of the different lines of interpretation and for abundant critical bibliography see Gunn, *Judges*, 244-247.

fifth day, the man finally sets out. Come night, the group consisting of Levite, concubine, a servant, and donkeys are still on their way, and the problem of where to spend the night begins to arise:

> [11] When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it."
> [12] And his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah."
> [13] And he said to his young man, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or Ramah."
> [14] So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin,
> [15] and they turned aside to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

Among the various themes and motifs around which the episode unfolds[32]. vv. 11-13 describe the scene of an exchange between a master and, as in Saul's case, an anonymous servant. As in the case of Saul, also, through some subtle signals, the text emphasizes the high social class of the Levite – the master – which is contrasted with the almost transparency of the servant character. First of all, the Levite is described in the text as a possessor of donkeys, servants, and concubines. Although he is never called by name in the text, through these specifics offered by the narrator, the reader can infer that the Levite is a decidedly wealthy person[33]. This description, as in the previous case of 1Sam 9, is contrasted sharply with the character of the servant. As with Saul's anonymous servant, the narrator does not provide any characteristics for the Levite's anonymous servant. The character hardly seems to exist for the entire narrative. Unlike the account of Saul's anointing, in Jdgs 19, the first to speak is actually the servant:

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[32] Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20", 365-378, shows that this text is an example of complex fiction where the author makes skillful use of previous literary traditions and styles, structures, and literary models. According to the author, this narrative pattern is used to convey a "pattern of community break-down" (p. 378). Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19", 37-59, argues about how the episode overturns the assumptions of a good hospitality pattern. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility", 3-11, comes to a same conclusion after a comparative analysis of Jdgs 19 and Gen 19.

[33] The Levite's membership in a high social class is actually an anomaly with respect to biblical regulations on Levites, who are not supposed to have numerous possessions. However, the text's description of the Levite protagonist in Jdgs 19 suggests a particularly affluent character. This aporia is emphasized in Moster, "The Levite of Judges 19–21", 721-730.

The question here concerns where to spend the night, and at the gates of the city of Jebus (v. 10), the servant takes the floor and addresses his master (v. 11):

Let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.	*lch n' wnswrh 'l 'yr hybwsy hzwt wnlyn bH*

To this suggestion, the Levite responds (v. 12):

We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah	*l' nswr 'l 'yr nkry 'šr l' mbny yśr'l hnh w'brnw 'd gb'h*

An analysis of the syntactic components of the exchange between the two characters allows a comparison with the dialogue between Saul and his servant. The servant's sentence in Jdgs 19:11 begins with a second-person masculine singular lengthened imperative *(lkh)*, juxtaposed with the particle *n'* followed by a first-person plural cohortative + waw conjunction *(wnswrh)*. The construction of the discourse is the same as that Saul used in 1Sam 9:6, so the same considerations can be applied. This particular verbal construction, along with the particle *n'*, emphasizes the gentle attitude of the servant who seeks his master's cooperation[34]. Despite the similarity of the two scenes, in the case of Jdgs 19, the master (i.e., the Levite) demonstrates a markedly different attitude than that displayed by Saul. In contrast to 1Sam 9, the Levite imposes his authority on the servant using a particularly peremptory grammatical construction formed by the combination *l'* + yiqtol *(l' nswr)* that expresses unconditional rejection and a strong expectation of obedience (v. 12)[35]. While the relationship between Saul and his servant seems to suggest cooperation between the two, in the context of Jdgs 19 the same relationship displays overtly hierarchical characteristics. In addition

[34] Throughout the research, scholars have offered different interpretations of the particle נא meaning. Following GKC, 308ff, the particle can be used to (a) emphasize a request (p. 319); (b) as a particle that adds a softer nuance to an imperative (p. 324). The same nuance of politeness is emphasized by Kaufman, "An Emphatic Plea for Please", 195-198. For an overview of positions on the *n'* particle see also Dallaire, *The Syntax of Volitives in Biblical Hebrew*, 53-58.

[35] According to GKC § 107a (2), the *l'* + yiqtol costruction represents "a more emphatic form of prohibition that the jussive with -אל, and corresponds to our *thou shalt not do it!* With the strongest expectation of obedience". For this use of yiqtol see Joosten, "Do the Finite Verbal Forms in Biblical Hebrew Express Aspect?", 65-66; See also Gianto, "Mood and Modality, 191.

to the constatation of power relations between the characters, this type of relationship also leads to different plot outcomes. The Levite's account shows a situation in which the servant's proposals are not fulfilled, and this choice directly impacts the plot. Having failed to heed the servant's advice, the group continues to Gibeah, in Benjaminite territory. Here they find hospitality from an elderly man who makes his house available. Soon, however, ungodly fellow citizens knock on the door demanding that the man hand over his guest to them for abuse[36]. The old man offers them his virgin daughter, but they refuse. The Levite then takes the concubine and leaves her at the mercy of the mob, who rapes her repeatedly throughout a long night. At the break of dawn, the woman is released: more dead than alive, she drags herself to the host's dwelling and collapses on the threshold. The Levite, therefore, loads her on the back of a donkey and returns home. There, he decides to dismember the concubine's bloodless body into twelve pieces to be sent to the twelve tribes as a memento of the abysmal depravity that dwells within the Israelites[37].

From a perspective of analyzing the servant-master relationship, the episode in Jdgs 19 provides a reversed perspective of 1Sam 9[38]. Although from different perspectives, in both episodes, the level of cooperation between master and servant, reflected in the syntactic forms used in the exchanges, has direct outcomes on the plot. However, one difference is evident. While, on the one hand, Saul does not impose his decision on the servant

[36] The episode of Gibeah's violence has, from the point of view of the structure and constituent elements of the narrative, a number of elements in common with the episode of the destruction of Sodom in Gen 19. see Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah,* 54-72 and 188.

[37] Has been shown how the episode of the Levite's dismemberment of the concubine contains, on the one hand, numerous allusions to the ritual sphere and, on the other, that Jdgs19 manifests a strong anti-Saul and pro-David bias. Indeed, the text seems to be built around a series of intertextual references that trace Saul's life from a critical point of view. This is particularly interesting since, in our study, the motif of the anonymous servant's advice appears in both the Jdgs 19 episode and the Saul cycle. See, on the issue Milstein, "Saul the Levite and His Concubine", 95-116. For thematic and lexical connections of Jdgs 19 to ritual, see Unterman, "The Literary Influence",161-166. For a general overview of the use of narrative techniques, character construction, use of literary motifs, and intertextuality in Jdgs 19, see Block, "Echo narrative technique", 325-241.

[38] Several authors have pointed out that the Gibeah murder narrative is peppered with lexical and thematic intertextual references with several biblical episodes including 1Sam 9. This series of connections builds a complex web of references that makes the episode particularly rich in interpretive insights. For critical bibliography on the subject see Szpek, "The Levite's Concubine", 1-10.

but, on the contrary, cooperates with it to find a solution, the Levite in Jdgs 19 does not hesitate to emphasize his predominant position by pointing out the hierarchy of roles. The servant's choice is dismissed, and the group is forced to follow the master's directives. The outcomes of these directives are far from positive, and the group is led toward ruin.

4. Servants of the Leprous commander. Servant-Master Relationship in 2Kgs 5

The last episode I would like to analyze from a servant-master relationship perspective is the story of Naaman the Aramean reported in 2Kgs 5.

This narrative contains, similarly to 1Sam 9 and Jdgs 19, a scene of an anonymous servant who will provide decisive advice to his master. The story is well known and concerns the healing and conversion to YHWH worship of Naaman, a non-Israelite leader of Aram's army. A careful reading of this narrative reveals a structure composed of four distinct textual units, each using the master-servant relationship language and employing different functional characters[39]. Already from the first lines, one can see a now-familiar narrative dynamic reminiscent of previously analyzed narratives:

> [1] Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor because by him, the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.
> [2] Now, the Syrians, on one of their raids, had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.
> [3] She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord was with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy".
> [4] So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel".
> [5] And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel". So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.
> [6] And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy".

[39] Following KYOUNG KIM, "Reading and Retelling", 51-52, the episode can be divided in: a) Naaman sets out for the prophet Elisha following the advice of a servant girl *(n'rh)* (vv. 1-7); b) Naaman's attempt to be cured, which almost fails at first, succeeds through the help of his servants *('bdyw)* (vv. 8-14); c) once cured, Naaman returns to Elisha calling himself servant *('bdk)* (vv. 15-19); d) Gheazi, Elisha's servant *(n'r)*, is punished for his greed by his master (vv. 20-27).

The story of Naaman begins with a problem presented to the reader from the very first verse. He is a great general in the service of the king of Aram *(śr Ṣb' mlk 'rm)*, respected by the king *('yš gdwl lpny 'dnuw)* and welthy *(gbwr ḥyl)* but, the text tells us, he is leprous (v. 1). Note that the term "welthy" is the same term used to describe the social status of Kish, Saul's father[40]. This textual reference is followed – like the accounts in 1Sam 9 – by presenting the character's problem. His leprosy is perceived by the reader as a discordant note in an otherwise so perfect description. In contrast to the tendency of the biblical narrative to provide few character descriptions, the author here provides a picture that strongly characterizes Naaman as a character of high social standing, distinct from the crowd[41]. Such a high description has a precise narrative purpose, to create a gap between him and the other characters. Already in v. 2, the narrator introduces a new player to the narrative scene. From one of the raids in the land of Israel, the Arameans return with a little servant girl, who ends up serving Naaman's wife.

Again, as in previous episodes, the root *n'r* is used to identify the servant.

One can immediately see the sharp contrast between the description of the servant girl and that of Naaman. In fact, v. 2 picks up exactly the syntax of v. 1. Just as Naaman is a "big man" before his lord (v. 1), the servant is a small servant *(n'rh qṭnh)* before Naaman's wife *(lpny 'št n'mn)* (v. 2). All terms in the two descriptions are in opposition to each other[42]. Moreover, the young prisoner condenses numerous characteristics that identify her as a tiny, insignificant, and marginal character. She is, at the same time young, woman, a servant, and a foreigner. One could not imagine a more vulnerable figure. Similar to previous narratives, but in a decidedly more pronounced way, the narrator creates a strong tension between the characterizations of master and servant.

Now that the characters on the stage are characterized, and the plot problem has been stated (Naaman's leprosy), as in previous narratives comes the servant's advice. With unusual speed in the unfolding of events, v. 3

[40] See above the note 9.

[41] Cohn, "Form and Perspective", 173, notes that the syntax used in the description also contributes to characterize Namaan's high social status. He states that the author "reverses the normal word order (consecutive verb-subject) in each half of the verse in order to underscore the distinctiveness of the subject, Naaman".

[42] A strong contrast between the two characters is also exposed in Cohn, "Form and Perspective", 174.

contains the servant's proposed solution. She tells her mistress, Naaman's wife, that the prophet who is in Samaria could cure her husband's disease[43].

With even more unusual speed, the servant's words reach directly (v. 4) the ears of the king of Aram, who consents to Naaman's departure and takes care to provide him with everything he needs. Surprisingly, not only Naaman's wife and Naaman listened without hesitation to the words of such a secondary character as the young captive servant, but even the king of Syria himself did not take a second thought and considered the young Isralite's advice without any hesitation[44].

As in previous episodes, the advice of the anonymous servant leads the story's plot toward its fulfillment. Naaman heads to Samaria, and the narrative seems to turn toward a positive outcome. But an obstacle interrupts the linear unfolding of events:

> [9] So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house.
> [10] And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."
> [11] But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.
> [12] Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

When he arrives at the doorstep of Elisha (here, the reader discovers that he is the "prophet of Samaria") with gifts and offerings, he expects to be welcomed as a great personage. On the contrary, he is received by messenger, who gives him a simple instruction: he must bathe in the Jordan seven times (v. 10).

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[43] The use of the *lpny* (in front of) particle by the servant seems significant to me here. According to a consistent reading, Naaman was in a subordinate relationship to his king being *lpny 'dny* (in front of the Lord). Likewise, the maidservant was in a hierarchically inferior position to Naaman's wife being *lpny* to her. Likewise, the young servant girl proposes to Naaman to place himself *lpny* to the prophet who is in Samaria.

[44] As Von Rad, *God at Work*, 48, pointed out, the story has a kind of irony because it is not the help of an important person but humble characters, such as servants, that make Namaan's healing possible. This aspect is has also been emphasized by Brueggeman, "A Brief Moment for a One-Person Remnant", 53-59, who recognizes in the young servant girl the one who makes possible the prophetic performance lying at the heart of the narrative.

After receiving this message, the general of Aram was indignant (v. 11): why didn't the prophet Elisha go out and speak to him? And what does the Jordan have more than the other rivers? The plot again comes to a dead end.

Surprisingly, it will again be the intervention of Naaman's anonymous servants that will unblock the situation:

> 13 But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"
> 14 So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

They address their master by calling him "my father", an unusual expression when put in the context of some servants addressing their master[45]. On the one hand, this language suggests that the servants adopt persuasive language toward Naaman to urge him to listen to Elisha's words[46]. However, on the other hand, this expression suggests certain confidence and a felt closeness between the servants and the masters who allow themselves confidential language with their master that draws on the lexicon of the family[47].

If we look at the Hebrew syntax of the servants' speech, we are confronted with a skillful stylistic composition. The v. 13 states:

But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?	*wyhšw 'bdyw wydbrw 'lyw wy'mrw 'by dbr gdwl hnby' dbr 'lyk hlw' t'śh w'p ky 'mr 'lyk rḥṢ wṭhr*

[45] Normally, the most common term for a servant to refer to his master is *'dwn*, "lord" (cf., for example, Gen 18:3; 24:9.35.37.29.65; 39:19; 40:1; Ex 32:35; Jdgs 4:18; 1Sam 16:16; 20:38; 22:12; 24:9; 25:10; 29:8; 2Sam 14:18.22; 19:27). This is the only biblical episode in which servants address their master by using the word *'b,* "father". This particular designation has suggested to some commentators that the expression "my father" is a corruption of *'m* (if) despite the fact that ancient translations (LXXL, Vg, Targumim) suggest as correct the MT rendering "my father". See, Burney, *Notes,* 280.

[46] The persuasive character of the servants' words has been noted in Long, *2 Kings,* 72.

[47] See Cohn – Cotter – Walsh, *2 Kings*, 34-38.

But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?	*wyhšw 'bdyw wydbrw 'lyw wy'mrw 'by dbr gdwl hnby' dbr 'lyk hlw' t'šh w'p ky 'mr 'lyk rḥṢ wṭhr*

The servants' actions and spoken words reveal a strong persuasive intention. They approach Naaman and, after calling him "father" instead of "master", cleverly formulate their advice in a sequence of rhetorical questions in which there are no imperatives[48].

Again, as in the previous narrative section, Naaman gives no hint of hesitation. He heads to the Jordan river, bathes in the waters, and is healed of his illness (v. 14). In 2Kgs 5, the pattern found in the episode of the anointing of Saul (1Sam 9) and the murder of Gibeah (Jdgs 19) is repeated twice in a row. Twice Naaman, the great leader, general of the fearsome army of Aram, and a man respected throughout the kingdom of Syria, listen to the advice coming from his servants and implements it without even a moment's hesitation.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of these three episodes in which a servant-master relationship emerges may provide some literary and theological insights. From a literary perspective, the three narratives suggest a common dynamic. This movement starts from the author's description of the master. In all three cases, it is the protagonist and is presented to the reader as an individual belonging to a high social rank by the narrator. The animals and servants emphasize the status of Saul's family and the Levite; Naaman's glorious description emphasizes the Aramean commander's social prestige. The narrative dynamic continues by describing the problem plaguing the main character. In the case of 1Sam 9, the plot starts with the loss of some donkeys, in Jdgs 19, the wayfarers have to find a place to spend the night, and in 2Kgs 5, the problem is Naaman's leprosy. it is at this point that the texts introduce a second character into the scene of the story: an anonymous servant. In all three stories, the text uses the same lexicon to refer to a servant *(n'r)* whose description – or, rather, non-description – provided by the narrator contrasts sharply with that of his master.

[48] See Nepi, *Dal fondale alla ribalta*, 203-204.

It is at this point in the plot that the relationship that masters, that is, those in power, have with their subordinates is emphasized in the stories. In the three narratives, after a dialogue with their masters, the servants will provide advice on how they can solve the problem. Ultimately, at the narratological level, the servants propose a way to fill the gap that had started the plot by trying to lead the narrative toward its denouement[49]. Saul's servant will advise the future king of Israel to continue the quest by appealing to Samuel (the man of God); the Levite's servant will advise stopping in Gebus to spend the night, avoiding the town of Gibeah; the young servant will advise Naaman to go to the "prophet of Israel", Elisha, to cure his illness. Moreover, in the 2Kgs 5 episode, this dynamic seems to repeat itself doubly as at the moment when Naaman would like to return to Aram, his servants persuade him to follow Elisha's directions.

At this point, the plots of the three stories take different outcomes. The analysis reveals two different attitudes of the masters toward the initiative proposed by the servants. In the case of Saul and Naaman, the narratological and discourse analysis shows a relationship between servant and master that does not emphasize hierarchy but, on the contrary, emphasizes cooperation. The language of the servants and the respective responses of the masters highlight a cooperative will in which the master's will is not imposed on the servant's advice. In contrast, in the episode in Jdgs 19, the Levite uses all his authority to impose the hierarchical relationship on the servant, ignoring his advice and going his own way. Surprisingly, whether or not one chooses to heed the servant's advice, cooperating with it or not, will have direct outcomes on the unfolding of the plot.

Indeed, it will be by following the servant's advice that Saul will meet the prophet Samuel who will anoint him king over all of Israel. Likewise, it will be by listening to the advice of the young Israelite servant girl and, later, her servants, that Naaman will be able to meet Elisha and recover from his illness. In contrast, it will be because he did not listen to his servant's advice that the Levite will find himself staying overnight in the city of Gibeah, where the plot will take a decidedly tragic turn. Wanting to condense what has been said, it is possible to outline the literary pattern just exposed.

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[49] In this sense, the servant assumes the narrative role that formalist criticism and semiotic analysis has called "the helper". On the narrative level, the role of this character is to provide the main character with the tools to overcome the "test" that the plot sets before him. On this topic see the fundamental study of Propp, *Morphology*, 11-31.

	Main Character	*Secondary Character*	*Plot task*	*Is the servant's advice heeded?*	*Plot Outcome*
Judg 19	The Levite	Anonymous servant (*n'r*)	Find a place to spend the night.	No	Tragic. Townspeople rape Levite's concubine
1Sam 9	Saul	Anonymous servant *(n'r)*	Find the lost asses of Kish.	Yes	Positive. Saul is anointed king, and the asses are found.
2Kgs 5	Naaman	Anonymous young servant girl (*n'rh*)	Healing from leprosy.	Yes	Positive. Naaman recovers from the disease.
		His servants *('bdyw)*			

From the perspective of narrative action, the servants in these stories are a key element. Although they are secondary and almost transparent characters, on close analysis, they represent the turning point of the plots[50]. They are the joining point between the problem that initiates the narrative and the solution of the plot[51].

Read from this perspective, these stories can reveal a definite biblical pattern about the power dynamic and the relationship a master should exercise over subordinates. In the episodes of 1Sam 9 and 2Kgs 5, servants are not simply secondary characters who are expected to obey in silence. Their masters do not see them that way. On the contrary, they are listened to, valued, and seen as resources to whom the master can turn in case of need. In this sense, the biblical episodes seem to reward the master who knows how to put himself on the level of his servants and when to make the most of those he has around him, even if it means setting aside his pride and role[52]. The text rewards this attitude toward power. Cooperation between

[50] The importance of secondary characters in the biblical text is emphasized in See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 85-92.

[51] See Ska – Sonnet – Wenin, *L'analyse narrative*, 33.

[52] See Hobbs, *2 Kings,* Nashville: Word Books, 1985, 65; House, *1,2 Kings*, 273.

master and servant is what the plot needs to achieve its most positive outcome, which is the resolution of the protagonist's problem. This is not the case with the Levite, who instead takes advantage of his hierarchical power, imposing his will and deciding not to listen to the servant's advice.

In short, no matter how minor a character may seem, the stories give him a central role. The biblical text valorizes him and surprises the reader, who, misled by a lackluster description, might be tempted not to give the anonymous servant the proper value he will have in the story. Through the literary device highlighted by this narrative scheme, the biblical authors succeed in creating a narrative effect that can emphasize the relational dynamic underlying the relationship between servant and master. The narrative and syntactic analysis of these episodes suggest a specific way of conceiving the exercise of power. This way is based on cooperation and dialogue and, at the same time, rejects the purely hierarchical paradigm that deafeningly imposes its will on the lower classes. As in other places in the Bible, in these passages, secondary characters – such as the servants – play a central role in the network of relationships that develop in the dynamics of the narrative[53]. Because of how they are represented, combining both universal and individual characteristics, biblical characters, on the one hand, fulfill their function within the world of the narrative, and on the other, characters are vehicles capable of conveying, through their actions, precise messages, and ideologies of those who conceived them.

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[53] See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art,* 91-92.

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