

*“There are two kinds of taste in the appreciation of imaginative literature:  
the taste for emotions of surprise and the taste for emotions of recognition.”*

*--Henry James*

## Character Surprise in the Biblical Narrative

### 1. Introduction: Suspense and Surprise in Biblical Narrative

In *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, Meir Sternberg discusses two narrative devices of temporal discontinuity that create reader interest.<sup>1</sup> The first, suspense, is the generation of reader uncertainty about the details of an event yet to occur; the second, surprise, is the generation of uncertainty about a past event or a state of being. Whereas suspense leads the reader to anticipate the relief of resolving narrative tension and closing information gaps, surprise drives the reader to re-read and re-evaluate their first impression about an element in the story. Whereas the purpose of suspense is to generate reader empathy for one or more of the characters to universalize the human predicament portrayed in the narrative, surprise also makes use of reader empathy but to a more personal effect.<sup>2</sup> After building empathy for a character, the author springs the surprise on the reader, shedding new light on their past actions, revealing a deficiency in that character or highlighting a moral to be learned. The author, by artfully drawing the reader into the world of the story, subtly invites the reader to examine their own nature in light of new insights that have been foregrounded by the surprise.

From the perspective of the reader, surprise is generated when details of the plot unfold suddenly and contrary to expectations. Expectations are either directly stated or implied in the story, usually by one of the characters. To be surprising, the revelation of new information must come in light

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1 Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1985), 264–320. A third (curiosity) will not be discussed here.

2 I agree with Sternberg that promoting reader empathy with the characters serves to “drive home a point of the greatest thematic importance: the continuity between the human condition inside and outside the world of the text” Ibid., 266.

of what previously seemed settled.<sup>3</sup> The biblical author generally avoids blatant misdirection, but rather, inconspicuously draws the reader into a false or incomplete understanding of the plot or a character to spring the surprise.<sup>4</sup> In his chapter on Temporal Discontinuity, Sternberg raises several examples of narrative surprise in the Bible.<sup>5</sup> In two cases, the surprise is sprung at the end of the story, and causes the reader to re-evaluate their impressions of a major character. In Genesis 20, the reader sympathizes with Abimelech, since Abraham, out of fear and for a second time, has introduced his wife as his sister to a new community. The story emphasizes Abimelech's innocence, which is even noted by God (vss 4-6), and it stresses his apparent generosity when he lavishes Abraham and Sarah with gifts (vss 14-16). Only in the last verse, a brilliantly-withheld narrative exposition<sup>6</sup> reveals that God has shut the wombs of all the women in Gerar, encouraging the reader to take a second look at Abimelech's generosity and re-evaluate it as the self-serving proffering of plunder from a Philistine Pharaoh whose land God has struck with plagues. In Jonah, a statement from the character's own mouth toward the end of the story (Jonah 4:2) betrays his own lack of compassion, revealing that Jonah's initial flight was not due to apprehension about his task but his variance with God's all-embracing mercy.

In both of these stories, the reader only is taken in by the surprise. Surprise that is revealed by narrative exposition is effected when critical information artfully withheld is sprung upon the reader at an advanced point of the plot. Narrator and characters together conspire, as it were, to surprise the reader. However, in some forms of surprise in biblical narrative, character and reader experience the surprise together. Sometimes, it is through the eyes of a major character, as when Jacob, along with the

3 Ibid., 309.

4 Sternberg uses the example of Gideon's springing upon Zebah and Zalmunah (as well as on the reader) his hidden personal motive for waging war against the Midianite kings, causing the reader to reassess Gideon's character. Ibid., 311.

5 Genesis 20 and the book of Jonah. Ibid., 315–320.

6 A narrative exposition is a literary tool that relays pertinent details to the reader in brief from the perspective of the author to enable the reader to understand the plot. Jean-Louis Ska, *“Our Fathers Have Told Us”*: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives, Subsidia Biblica 13 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1990), 21. Typically an exposition reveals details critical to the development of the plot, often as an introduction to the story, but not necessarily. For instance, in the book of Ruth, the author introduces the reader to Boaz, not in the introduction to the story in chapter 1, where its relevance would not be obvious, but via narrative exposition immediately prior to Ruth setting out to glean in the field of Boaz. This foregrounding of relevant plot details in the exposition builds suspense, as the reader anticipates working out of the plot's details, armed with an understanding of the goal of the plot.

reader realizes that Esau holds no grudge against his brother when he embraces him after a prolonged absence (Gen 33:4). Other times, a minor character bears the surprise as happens in several of the Elisha stories. The research questions I intend to examine are as follows. What are the basic mechanics of surprise in Biblical narrative when a character reveals the surprise? What is the author's purpose in using surprise? What is the different design aim of using a major or minor character to effect reader surprise? This study will conduct a literary analysis of “the mechanics of surprise” in biblical narrative to analyze the authors' use of character as literary device that bears the surprise to the reader. In each case, the reader experiences the surprise vicariously through the eyes of a character. I have selected the anointing stories of Saul and David from 1 Samuel, to highlight the difference between suspense and surprise, and to show how surprise is used to shed new light on the characters in the story. Then, I will examine several stories from the Elisha story-cycle, which features both major and minor characters as bearers of surprise to the reader. As we shall see, minor characters used to bear a surprise, whom I shall call “surprise agents” are introduced to fulfill that sole plot function.

## 2. The Once and Future King: The King of Suspense and The King of Surprise.

In comparing the two “anointing stories” of Saul and David in 1 Samuel 9 and 16, one notices a sharp difference in the unfolding of each plot. Besides sharing the detail that at the end of each story, the prophet Samuel anoints a future king, the plots of these stories have little resemblance. The former achieves its goal by a long, steady build-up of suspense, slowly and inexorably approaching its goal. The latter achieves its goal by inviting comparison with the former, but it is punctuated with a surprise that will cause us to carefully re-read and to re-examine our assumptions about kings. The anointing of Saul, which is the longer of the two,<sup>7</sup> begins with a narrative exposition, introducing a scion of a noble family whose lineage and physical description imply his fitness to rule.<sup>8</sup> The goal of the plot is

<sup>7</sup> The story in 1 Sam 9:1-10:1, at 28 verses, is over twice as long as 1 Sam 16:1-13.

<sup>8</sup> Saul (or Saul's father, Kish), besides bearing the distinctive title גבור חיל “a wealthy nobleman” or “a mighty warrior” (cf. Boaz, Ruth 2:1; Jephthah, Judges 11:1; Jeroboam, 1 Kgs 11:28; and Naaman, 2 Kgs 5:1), is afforded the privileged 7<sup>th</sup> position in his genealogy (if בן איש ימיני can be understood as one of the ancestors). Compare with Enoch and David.

foreshadowed in the last verse of the previous chapter, where God commands Samuel to obey the peoples' desires to establish a monarchy (1 Sam 8:22). From the outset, the reader suspects that Saul is marked as the future king of Israel. Nearly every turn in the plot advances toward his anointing. Minor characters, including his anonymous servant (vs. 6) and the young women (vss. 11-13) introduce and commend Saul to the prophet. A carefully-timed exposition informs us, immediately before the two meet, that God had chosen Saul to be king (vss. 15-16), removing any doubt and contributing to the steady build-up of suspense. The reader is then reacquainted with Samuel, now through Saul's perspective,<sup>9</sup> who first encounters him as anonymous citizen (v. 18), then as the seer he seeks (vs. 19-20), then as host of a sacrificial feast (vs. 22), and finally as revealer of his divinely appointed destiny (9:27, 10:1).<sup>10</sup> The only information gaps left open by the story at this point are *When* and *Under what circumstances* will Saul be anointed? Samuel's pronouncement over Saul (vs. 20) moves the narrative closer to the moment of the anointing, by intimating to a yet unsuspecting Saul about his importance. Then, tension reaches its climax in vs. 27 when Samuel arranges to be alone with Saul and tells him he has a word from God for him. By the time Samuel anoints him, the reader is relieved and satisfied that the story has reached its objective.

The anointing of David, conversely, begins with an expositional dialogue between the God and Samuel, repeating the God's rejection of Saul as king and registering Samuel's objection to anointing a new king while Saul still reigns. The reader is reminded of Samuel's anointing of Saul and is invited to

See Jack M. Sasson, "A Genealogical 'Convention' in Biblical Chronography?," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 90 (1978): 171–85., especially pp 184-185.

- 9 Perspective is difficult to determine in this story since there are few signs of interiority. Most of the story plays out in dialogue and action that can be observed by multiple characters. Clearly up until vs. 14, the story is from the perspective of Saul and his servant. As they go up to the city, "they met" young women coming out (vs. 11), and as they enter the city "they saw" Samuel (vs. 14). An argument could be made for a perspective change from this point until the conclusion since "Samuel saw Saul" (vs. 17), Samuel's instructions to the cook appear to be made in Saul's absence (vs. 23), and Samuel is present in every verse until the end of the story. Regardless, considering Yairah Amit's four criteria of a leading character (focus of interest, quantitative, structural, and thematic), Saul emerges as the leading character. (Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress Press, 2001), 88.)
- 10 The narrative technique of allowing the reader to experience the world of the narrative through the characters generates reader empathy, and contributes to the realism for which biblical narrative is known. Thus, the reader can empathize with Goliath's disdain for David or David's lust for Bathsheba. (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 81.; Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 117, 118.)

compare the two stories and the two kings. Whereas in chapter 9, a future king who has lost his animals, sets out to find them and meets the prophet at a sacrificial feast, in chapter 16, the prophet sets out to hold a sacrificial feast at which the future king will be found properly caring for his animals. This story is told from the prophet's perspective, not from that of the future king, whom the reader will meet along with Samuel just prior to the denouement. In verse 6, we read וירא את אליאב "he saw Eliab," recalling 9:17 when Samuel ראה את שאול "he saw Saul." However, whereas in the former story when Samuel first looked at Saul, God spoke immediately, here Samuel speaks, stating his expectation from his first encounter with Jesse's first-born, who stands before him tall and strong: "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him!" From all appearances, Eliab, just as Saul, has the constitution of a new king. The reader is invited to empathize with Samuel, who in the same situation anointed Saul. When God stops him in action (vs. 7), the reader is just as surprised as Samuel to realize that we are not to compare Eliab with Saul, regarding his eligibility to rule.<sup>11</sup> The reader is invited to re-read the story from the beginning and form a new point of comparison between Saul and Eliab—their being rejected by the Lord as king despite their physical fitness.<sup>12</sup> Surprise is used to stop the flow of the plot, midstream, to give the reader pause and clear the stage for the explicit theological message, that in selecting a king, God does not consider outward appearance as humans do but rather favors inner strength and virtue. The surprise not only drives the reader to the beginning of the current story to enjoin comparison between Eliab and Saul, but also to the beginning of 1 Sam 9, to re-read Saul's anointing story in light of this theological message.

In 1 Sam 16, the mechanics of surprise consist of three elements: the build-up to the surprise, the springing of the surprise itself revealed by the character, and finally the resultant re-reading of the story from the beginning in light of the new information revealed by the surprise.<sup>13</sup> The build-up

11 Compare: ומשחתו לנגיד "and you shall anoint him as prince" 1 Sam 9:16 with ומשחת לי "and you shall anoint for me" 1 Sam 16:3 and with נגד ה' משיחו "before the LORD is his Anointed," 16:6.

12 Just as the LORD rejected Saul, though his appearance and height were impressive (1 Sam 9:2), so also does the LORD reject Eliab (מאסתירו), despite his great height and stature (1 Sam 16:7). In light of this surprise comparison, the reader is invited to re-read 16:1, where the LORD's rejection of Saul is intentionally reiterated (מאסתירו).

13 This is a modification of Sternberg's analysis of surprise revealed by exposition. First, the reader without noticing

consists of the similarities in plot and motifs found between the two stories--a prophet is charged with anointing a future king at a sacrificial meal and encounters a physically impressive candidate. The reader empathizes with Samuel who understandably balks when charged to perform a seditious act. This realistic aspect of his character endears him to the reader. The trigger of surprise itself is marked by Samuel's stated expectation that Eliab certainly will be the future king. Nothing in the story so far has led the reader to suspect Samuel's premonition about Eliab, and nothing in the story-cycle has led the reader to believe that Samuel would err in this regard. Yet, the word of the Lord comes, as it did to Abraham on Mt. Moriah, to stop the prophet in the act. The reader might ask, why does God allow Samuel to proceed, only to contradict him so sharply? Why did God not reveal who the anointed would be, in advance, as he did with Saul in chapter 9? Having empathized with Samuel, the reader is invited to consider his moral shortcoming.<sup>14</sup> Prophet and king are both servants of God, and must obey God rather than trusting in their own judgment. Independent initiatives will lead both into error. While Saul's disobedience of God is certainly in view here, the prophet also receives a subtle reprimand. Through the generation of empathy, the text invites the reader, along with Samuel, to question their own assumptions about the qualifications of a leader, and to hold judgment in abeyance until directed by the word of the Lord.

### 3. Surprising Characters in the Elisha Story-cycle

The stories in 2 Kings 5-7 contain a number of surprises that capture the attention of the astute reader in order to advance the theological message the author wishes to convey. The surprises are chiefly sprung through from the perspective of characters in the story so that the reader experiences the surprise through the eyes of the character. In the Elisha stories, both minor and major characters serve as bearers of surprise. The surprise of a major character, as with Jacob or Samuel, will reveal a

crosses an information gap, then when the reader recognizes the gap, the surprise is sprung, leading the reader to read the story anew in light of the information revealed in the surprise. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 314.

<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Esau's surprisingly gracious greeting of Jacob in Gen 33:4, casts Jacob's precautionary measures (32:6-21) in a negative light, emphasizing his unwarranted fear (vss. 7 and 11).

previously undisclosed moral deficit in that character, leading to a fresh re-reading of the story in light of this shortcoming, ultimately exposing the reader's own qualities to scrutiny.<sup>15</sup> Since minor characters are not afforded the same level of characterization, there is not sufficient time to build a rapport with the reader, thus reader empathy is somewhat diminished. Notwithstanding, the use of common people allows the reader to identify with them easily. In each case, these minor characters are introduced to the story solely to spring the surprise on the reader, encouraging the reader to learn from the character, throwing the moral of the story into bold relief.

### 3.1 The Edifying Surprise of Naaman the Syrian

Similar to the story in 1 Sam 16, the surprise that punctuates the story of Naaman the Aramean is experienced by a main character and the reader together. The mechanics of surprise are clearly represented. The lead-in to the surprise generates empathy with a character who, later in the story, reveals a surprise, while the surprise itself, causes the reader to re-evaluate the integrity of the character and re-read the story from the beginning with new eyes. First, Naaman is an admirable character with whom the reader builds empathy. The narrator attributes the highest mark possible to the commander of an enemy army of Israel: “through him, the LORD had given victory (תְּשׁוּעָה) to Aram” (5:1). He displays humility by his willingness to entertain the suggestion of a lowly servant girl. He visits the land of his enemy, seeking healing and offering gifts, even fulfilling diplomatic propriety by first visiting the king, the supposed authority over the prophet. As a great general suffering from leprosy, he is a realistic and endearing character. Naaman's “greatness” is predicated on his subordination to the King of Aram and the reason for his success in battle, though of unknown origin to him, is revealed to the reader to indicate that his true source of authority is yet to be discovered.<sup>16</sup> The reader will not

15 Interestingly, Sternberg's examples of narrative surprise, in which the surprise is sprung by narrative exposition, as in Gen 20, or by a character's speech as in Jonah 4:2 and Judg 8:18-19, also function to offer a re-evaluation of a character in light of a previously undisclosed moral deficiency. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 311–320.

16 For an in depth discussion of Naaman's character traits as described in the initial exposition, verse 1, see Yair Zackovitch, “Every High Official Has a Higher One Set Over Him”: *A Literary Analysis of 2 Kings 5* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1985), 18–24.

encounter his “intransigently arrogant and misguided attitudes toward Elisha, Yahweh, and the land of Israel”<sup>17</sup> until verses 11-12, the timing of which is a constituent of the design of the surprise, and encourages a re-evaluation of Naaman. For the time being, Naaman is an admirable, albeit foreign, character. Second, Elisha's refusal to meet him surprises both reader and character alike. Elisha's dispatch of a servant bearing his instructions is taken as a personal affront by a “great man” who has undertaken such a journey. From the outset, the little Israelite servant girl provided the initial impetus of expectation: “if only my lord were in the presence of (לפני) the prophet in Samaria” (2 Kgs 5:3).<sup>18</sup> The entrance of Elisha to the story is first delayed when Naaman first seeks an audience with the King of Israel,<sup>19</sup> increasing anticipation for his meeting with Naaman. The reader is surprised along with Naaman that the prophet does not grace the general with his presence. Naaman reveals his surprise by indicating his prior expectations (vss 12-13), which were well-defined and antithetical to what occurred. In enumerating his stipulations, he unloads a vitriolic tirade, exposing his arrogance and chauvinism. The surprise draws immediate attention to this newly revealed moral deficiency, and gives the reader pause to re-read the story from the beginning, examining Naaman's character in light of the newly revealed complexity. Instead of a noble officer who entertains the suggestions of the lowliest of servants, a materialist, driven by desperation to seek any solution to his problem, and willing to pull rank and wealth to obtain it, is disclosed.

The surprise helps achieve the moral goal of the narrative to edify the reader. By generating empathy with Naaman, the audience more easily enters into his world. The surprise then comprises an

17 Burke O. Long, *2 Kings* (Eerdmans, 1991), 69

18 Moore has noted that the use of the preposition לפני is thematic in the present story. Both its denotative meaning of being physically in the presence of someone and its connotation of being “in the service of” are significant to the theme of the story. Rick Dale Moore, *God Saves: Lessons From the Elisha Stories*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 73. Professor Zackovitch notes that this key word appears seven times in the story. Zackovitch, “Every High Official Has a Higher One Set Over Him”: A Literary Analysis of 2 Kings 5, 21.

19 In the majority of Elisha stories, Elisha appears in the first or second verse. The exceptions are the story of Mesha and the story of the siege of Samaria, where in each case, Elisha enters the story immediately he is mentioned by another character, (2 Kgs 3:11; 6:31), and the sequel to the story of the Lady of Shunem (2 Kgs 8:1-6), where he doesn't enter at all. In the present story, Elisha's entrance into the story is delayed several times: first, the story begins in Aram; second, when Naaman arrives to Elisha's location in Samaria, he first seeks an audience with the King of Israel; finally, Elisha dismisses Naaman with a word.

invitation for the reader to repent, not only their first evaluation of Naaman, but also to honestly evaluate their own character. In Naaman's story, empathy is further reinforced by his subsequent repentance and pledge of allegiance to the God of Israel. Whatever affinity with Naaman that may have suffered damage when he revealed his arrogance and indignation is repaired through his dramatic confession. Thus, the attentive reader will reap the benefit of accepting the invitation to examine the depth and complexity of their own character for similar pride or resistance to the lordship of the God of Israel and to accept the gentle invitation of Naaman's servant to submit to the prophet's instructions. While Naaman serves as the bearer of the surprise in the story that features him as a main character, in the Elisha story-cycle surprise is more frequently conveyed through the eyes of minor characters who in their cameo appearance effectuate the element of surprise, and to this topic I now turn.

### 3.2 Agents of Surprise in the Elisha Stories

The Elisha story-cycle stands out from the deuteronomistic history in its heroic representation of ordinary people. While the majority of the stories from Deuteronomy to II Kings center around kings, military officials, and prophets, many of the Elisha stories feature townspeople, outcasts, landed gentry and the prophetic circle of disciples.<sup>20</sup> While some appear as major characters in the story, the majority of them appear very briefly to fulfill a vital role in the unfolding of the plot, often correcting the incorrect perception of the ruling class and other elite.<sup>21</sup> The thematic function of minor characters portraying common folk is to expose ignorance, errors in judgment and moral deficiencies of their superiors subtly. The heroic portrayal of common folk would have encouraged an audience of the same social setting.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the literary function of many of these characters is diverse. Some

20 Scholars have noted the proportionately high number of minor characters appearing in several of the Elisha stories: Uriel Simon, "Minor Characters in Biblical Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46 (February 1990): 15.

21 Perhaps this indicates that the original provenance of many of the Elisha stories was peasantry. Or they may have been the original intended audience. Robert LaBarbera, "The Man of War and the Man of God: Social Satire in 2 Kings 6:8-7:20," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (October 1984): 651.

22 In his analysis of prophetic miracle stories in light of a selection of shaman stories taken from around the world, Long concludes that one of the objectives of such stories is to bolster the faith of the layman. Burke O. Long, "Social Setting for Prophetic Miracle Stories," *Semeia* 3 (1975): 55-58.

contribute either the development of suspense in the plot (such as the little Israelite slave girl in 2 Kgs 5:3), or to its resolution (such as the servants of Naaman who convince him to try Elisha's prescription in 2 Kgs 5:13).<sup>23</sup> Others function to spring a surprise on the reader.<sup>24</sup> I call such characters “surprise agents,” based on Adele Berlin's characterization scheme in the biblical narrative. According to Berlin, an “agent,” the lowest of three degrees of characterization, is merely “a function of the plot,” about whom no information is known outside what is necessary for the plot.<sup>25</sup> The story requires a certain role, and an agent is employed to fill that role. Such a character is often little more than a human prop.<sup>26</sup> That the biblical story does not develop the personality of such characters is a hallmark of the famed economy of biblical narrative. However, in the Elisha stories, minor characters the author introduces such as “surprise agents” receive a shade of characterization between that of Berlin's “agent,” and that of her middle category, a “type.”<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2.1. Divine Insight for a Servant

The first surprise agent we will examine is Elisha's unnamed servant in 2 Kings 6:8-23. The servant makes a brief but impactful appearance at a turning point in the plot (vss. 15-17) in which, the author affords him a relatively high degree of characterization. Unlike an agent in Berlin's scheme, the servant is not a mere human prop. By introducing the servant, the author intentionally delays the power

23 I will analyze the function and contribution of such “suspense agents” in another paper.

24 Minor characters are similarly employed in the Elijah story-cycle. For example, a narrative exposition engenders reader empathy by introducing Obadiah as a devout, though secret, follower of the LORD (1 Kgs 18:3-5). When the uncompromising Elijah confronts Obadiah, the reader can easily identify with his delicate position in service of Ahab. This sense of empathy gives the reader a sense of how terrifying the prophet is in the eyes of the people (Simon, “Minor Characters in Biblical Narrative,” 15.).

25 Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 32.

26 One of Berlin's examples of an “agent” is Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12. The plot requires that David commit adultery with a beautiful woman, and she fills the role. Nothing is known about her feelings for David, her complicity in the act, or her attitude toward her husband Uriah. In the course of the chapter, she delivers only one dispassionate line to inform David of her pregnancy. *Ibid.*, 25–27. Other examples abound: Abel (Gen 4), Noah's sons (until chapter 9), Benjamin (Gen 37-50), the Cushite whom Ahimaaz outruns (2 Sam 18), etc.

27 A “type” is a stereotypical character, whose personality and traits are unequivocal in their representation. Such characters often serve as foils to full or round characters. *Ibid.*, 30–32. In his article outlining characterization in the book of Kings, Professor Cohn describes five levels of characterization. The minor characters I will analyze come under his second level of characterization “figures that make cameo appearances” between “stereo-typed descriptions of kings” and “characters who play supporting roles,” Robert L Cohn, “Characterization in Kings,” in *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 92.

encounter between prophet and besieging force, and draws the reader into the servant's panic, setting up the surprise he is to deliver to the reader in three stages. First, the author generates rapport between the reader and the servant through his expression of a natural emotion. He exudes terror the moment he espies the siege (vs. 15).<sup>28</sup> The reader sees through his eyes, entering into the world of the servant.<sup>29</sup> His speech is brief but rife with the terror and helplessness he understandably is experiencing: “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” (vs. 15). Thus, with a few pen strokes, the author has introduced a character with whom the reader can readily identify. Second, having empathized with the servant, the author is set to spring the surprise itself. Elisha assuages the panic of his servant with news of an invisible reality that contradicts his natural sight before facilitating the insight to perceive that reality. Upon receiving Elisha's prophetic insight, he surveys the battlefield anew, revealing the presence of a heavenly army to the reader. While the reader can anticipate the Aramean siege (vs. 14), the heavenly siege is completely unexpected: it is without precedent in biblical narrative and without intimation in the story. Third, that the reader has become aware of its existence only through the servant's eyes accentuates the servant's role in the story. The horses and chariots of fire, which do not factor into the ensuing confrontation between the prophet and the Aramean army, appear to serve no purpose other than setting one man at ease.<sup>30</sup> The author seems unduly concerned about the peace of mind of Elisha's nameless servant. The author could have effectively revealed the presence of the heavenly army in a narrative exposition, omitting the superfluous character. It is critical to note that the author describes, not the moment the heavenly army arrives, but the moment the servant perceives that army, which has surrounded Elisha all along.<sup>31</sup> The heavenly chariotry, perhaps the source of the prophet's confidence,

28 Alternate readings that seek to amend *משרת* to *ממחרת*, suggesting Elisha, not the servant first observes the Aramean siege, are without basis in any manuscript. For examples, see T. R. Hobbs, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 13, 2 Kings* (Thomas Nelson, 1986), 72. The parallel use of *הנה* in vss. 15 and 17 also support that the reader is viewing the scene through the servant's eyes.

29 Long, *2 Kings*, 86.

30 That the horses and chariots of fire fulfill no specific military role has baffled commentators. Many see vss. 15-17 and secondary, but few are in agreement. See *Ibid.*, 83., for a summary of the arguments. I agree with Long, that analyzing the full text as it stands is wiser, minimizing arbitrary judgments. Others have pointed out that there is parallel phrase of *חיל וסוס ורכב* appearing in vss. 14 and 15. Since the *סוסים ורכב אש* lack a *חיל*, several have suggested that Elisha himself is the *חיל*, LaBarbera, “The Man of War and the Man of God,” 641; Long, *2 Kings*, 86.

31 Several features in the story illustrate the pre-existence of the heavenly guardians. First, the Syrian army itself arrived

where present elsewhere only when Elisha received the prophetic mantle, a scene that was not witnessed by the sons of the prophets (2 Kgs 2:16-18). Thus, the story illustrates an ordinary servant being granted rare access to prophetic resources. Whereas the surprise of a major character, as with Samuel and Naaman, draws attention to a deficiency in that character, here, the surprise simply highlights the limitations of ordinary vision, and introduces the possibility of an ordinary person receiving supernatural insight.

The surprise of Elisha's servant sets the juxtaposed motifs of physical sight and spiritual insight into sharp relief. The verb ראה "to see" and words associated with sight are prominent in the story.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, motifs of physical sight and divinely given insight are juxtaposed. The servant's fear of the Aramean army, which he saw physically is allayed by a prophetic vision of a heavenly army. Reviewing the story from the beginning, we see that the Aramean army resorted to ambush, that is to surprise the Israelite army with a concealed military force. Through divine insight, Elisha frustrates the Aramean plans by passing intelligence to the Israelite king. After one of his officers reveals an insight that the Israelite prophet comprises the Aramean intelligence leak (vss. 12-13), the Aramean king directs his staff to לכו וראו "go and see" where Elisha is located. Elisha twice prays eyesight to be granted, the first is spiritual insight for his servant, the second is physical sight for the Aramean army. When God opens their eyes again, ויראו "they see" that they are in Samaria (vs. 20). The king of Israel requests to strike them down from the prophet, כראתו "when he sees" them (vs. 21). Unlike the servant, however, the king does not receive providential insight, and his response draws admonishment from the prophet (vs. 22). The juxtaposition of the motifs of sight and insight demonstrates how the story subtly the night before, and went unnoticed until the servant rose early and went out. Second, the servant's panic stricken report does not alarm Elisha at all, but is countered with a confident, though cryptic, saying from the prophet that allied military forces are somehow greater than the enemy force. Third, Elisha prays not for God to send a heavenly army to defend them but for his servant to be able to see what Elisha himself sees, which is the horses and chariots of fire that have been surrounding Elisha all along.

32 The root ראה occurs six times in the story, הנה four times, and עין four times. "In biblical narrative, the particle הנה often serves to introduce a fact perceived by the characters in the story. The clearest cases are those where the הנה clause is prepared by the verb כראה..." as is the case in 6:17 when the servant sees the heavenly armies and in 6:20, when the Aramean army sees they are in Samaria. Jan Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew: A New Synthesis Elaborated on the Basis of Classical Prose* (Simor Publishing, 2012), 104.

and consistently portrays ordinary folk heroically with respect to their perception of the events and their meaning, when compared to monarchs. Finally, the servant as surprise agent draws attention to the reader's own perception. As opposed to the fearless wonder-working prophet, the reader readily empathizes with a fearful yet loyal servant. The reader, like the servant shares Elisha's prophetic insight for a moment. It reassures him that his worst fears will not come to pass, but also encourages him that through the prophet's intercession, God would grant a servant a glimpse into the workings of divine providence. Thus the reader like the servant is strengthened in his faith and reassured that even ordinary readers can receive divine insight into God's purposes and the truth behind visible reality.

### 3.2.2. Four Fortunate Lepers

The second surprise agent is the group of four lepers,<sup>33</sup> minor characters with a key role in the following story (2 Kings 6:24-7:20). Like Elisha's servant the lepers are ordinary folk portrayed realistically, yet heroically, in the story. The reader encounters them debating their future prospects at the gate of Samaria. The tight focus of the text upon these hapless four huddled against the city gate enables the reader to experience the scene from their perspective.<sup>34</sup> The tragic dilemma resulting from their social ostracism and the enemy siege helps the reader to empathize with these twice victims. Instead of wallowing in their misery, these resourceful four work together for their mutual benefit,<sup>35</sup> weighing every bleak course of action, before settling on the least inauspicious one. Giving themselves up for dead yet unwilling to meet their fate quietly, these commendable lepers opt to set out from their dubious refuge to cast themselves at the mercy of the besieging Aramean army.

When they reach the edge of the camp, they and the reader stumble on a windfall—a vacant enemy camp, ripe for plundering. Several features of the text indicate the role of the lepers as surprise agent. Their deliberations at the city gate ended with the grim possibility that they were going to their

33 Although there are four lepers, the story treats them as a collective personality. The four think and act as one, whether they are debating among themselves or acting in concert. No single one of them distinguishes himself from the group.

34 Moore, *God Saves*, 99.

35 *Ibid.*, 98.

deaths (2 Kgs 7:4). Their stated expectation, that they would meet their fate at the hands of the enemy, is antithetical to what actually occurred. Moreover, the reader realizes the Aramean camp is empty only when the lepers do, viewing the scene through their eyes. As in the previous story, the particle indicates that reader is being introduced to a new fact from the perspective of a character, in this story, the lepers. Furthermore, the author reveals the reason the Aramean camp is abandoned in a narrative exposition (vss. 6-7), only after the lepers make the discovery (vs. 5). By supplying the explanation after the reader has discovered the empty Syrian camp, the author allows the reader to experience the surprise. To avoid keeping the reader in the dark for long, the author interrupts the flow of events to provide pertinent plot details in an anterior-directed retrospective exposition.<sup>36</sup> For the characters, the empty Syrian camp will remain a mystery until the king investigates the lepers' claim (vs. 15). Finally, the time of day, mentioned three times in the story, magnifies the effect of the surprise. At twilight both the lepers set out from the city gate and the Arameans fled their camp (vss. 5, 7). Before the sun rises to reveal what the darkness has held secret, these no longer hapless lepers arrive for a timely discovery. There was just enough daylight for the lepers to realize the camp was abandoned the moment they arrived to its periphery, but not yet enough for anyone to notice from the city (vs. 9)

The surprise sends the reader back to the beginning of the story, scouring it for clues. Could the reader have known the lepers arrive to an empty camp? In his encounter with the king's adjutant, Elisha did prophesy a complete reversal of Samaria's economic conditions, but did not mention the means by which God would bring about that reversal (2 Kings 7:1). This point is emphasized by another minor character, the king's adjutant, who states the obvious, that even if it should suddenly rain, no such turnaround is possible (vs. 2). While his subsequent chastisement by the prophet suggests that the economic reversal would be achieved by some other means, no other means is intimated. In re-reading

<sup>36</sup> In his discussion on suspense, Prof. Sternberg discusses the use of proleptic expositions to open information gaps and create anticipation on the part of the reader. He calls the technique "future-directed retrospect," Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 280. While narrative exposition, is by nature, retrospective, quite often it also foreshadows plot events, to create suspense. Surprise, on the other hand, causes the reader to look earlier in the text to detect the opening of information gaps filled by the surprise event, thus the exposition, retrospective by nature is also anterior-directed.

from that point, a contrast of minor characters is invited. Whereas minor characters inside Samaria in their desperation consume one another and reject Elisha's prophecy, the minor characters outside the city gate cooperate together in their desperation, and unwittingly participate in the fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy. Whereas the cannibal mothers and doubting adjutant act rashly in disobedience to God's word, the four lepers choose each course of action only after considering the consequences (vss. 4 and 9) in fulfillment of it. The contrast between minor characters, highlighted by the mechanics of the surprise in the story, encourages the reader to emulate the thoughtful and cooperative lepers.

#### 4. Conclusion.

In this paper, I have demonstrated some common features surprise from the perspective of characters in the biblical narratives. Whether major or minor character, the author deliberately engenders reader empathy with the character before revealing the surprise. The surprise itself is disclosed through the eyes of the character so that the reader experiences the moment of surprise vicariously. The resultant re-reading and re-evaluation of the character and story emphasizes the theme or moral the author wishes to convey to the reader. In analyzing these few examples, one difference between major and minor characters as surprise agents became apparent. When major characters function as surprise agents, often a hidden moral deficiency or weakness is revealed by the surprise. Samuel confident in his judgment of royalty, neglected to consult the word of the Lord regarding which of Jesse's sons should be anointed. Naaman, offended by the Elisha's refusal to afford him an audience, divulges his fury and arrogance. On the other hand, minor characters in the Elisha cycle who function as surprise agents are celebrated, with their ordinary limitations, for their heroic participation in extraordinary events. The surprises emphasize the key role minor characters play in the stories, and invite the reader to empathize and identify with fearful servants and desperate lepers, who, though lacking prophetic vision or wonder-working abilities, can serve God faithfully, receive insight into God's purposes, and contribute meaningfully to the unfolding of God's salvation history.

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Henry James. "Anthony Trollope," Century Magazine (July 1883); reprinted in Partial Portraits (1888). Picture Quote 1. Picture Quote 2. Picture Quote 3. Picture Quote 4. Quote of the day. It is true that men themselves made this world of nations but this world without doubt has issued from a mind often diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men had proposed to themselves. Giambattista Vico. Henry James. The emotions he identified were happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, and anger. He later expanded his list of basic emotions to include such things as pride, shame, embarrassment, and excitement. Verywell / JR Bee. Combining Emotions. When people smell or taste foods that have gone bad, for example, disgust is a typical reaction. Poor hygiene, infection, blood, rot, and death can also trigger a disgust response. This may be the body's way of avoiding things that may carry transmittable diseases. This is why surprising and unusual events in the news tend to stand out in memory more than others. Research has also found that people tend to be more swayed by surprising arguments and learn more from surprising information. Other Types of Emotions. Reading imaginative literature can also teach us a lot about scientific writing in general; a good example is in the following New Yorker article: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-beautiful-mind-bending-of-stanislaw-lem>. Although such concepts as 'goals,' 'future' and 'character' are likely not ideas they consciously consider, the evidence and logic of a novel's character and results, will be helping the child to make associations between cause and effect, and thus will become relevant as they mature into self-determining adults. This is where a good teacher of literature can guide a child to recognize, understand and translate these important relationships into their real-world applications. Imaginative literature is one of two umbrella terms devised (in the 1960s, I think) to describe all literature that departs from the real, the other being speculative fiction. The standard varieties of imaginative literature are science fiction, fantasy, and horror (other than psychological horror). People who like to read one like to read the others, so an umbrella term was needed. And not in a way that's pointedly ambiguous between reality and one of these genres (like Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw") in a way that makes you wonder where the hell it stands among all of them. A recent film that was pure slipstream proper was Holy Motors. A classic example of some major types: Science fiction: The Time Machine, H. G. Wells. Fantasy: The Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien. Henry James Quotes. 187 WALLPAPERS 242 POINTS. Perfection Quotes. We're on a mission of turning inspiring quotes into beautiful wallpapers. Start your week with a motivational kick. Don't miss out on our next weekly batch. Join 48,000+ other people and subscribe to Quotefancy Weekly Digest. Thank you! Please check your email.