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# THEOLOGY AND ART IN THE NARRATIVE OF THE AMMONITE WAR (2 SAMUEL 10-12)

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*The well known David/Bathsheba incident is examined in its broader narrative framework of 2 Sam 10:1-12:31. Much of the meaning and appreciation of the biblical account of that event is missed apart from its context. The larger Ammonite War narrative is a classic example of the masterful use of literary techniques by a biblical writer. It is not, however, "literary art for art's sake." The artistic presentation of the material greatly enhances the writer's perspective on the profound and vital theological issues at stake.*

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## INTRODUCTION

THE familiar narrative of David's adulterous involvement with Bathsheba and his subsequent confrontation by Nathan (2 Sam 11:1-12:25) is often cited as an example of James' model of "lust-sin-death" (James 1:14-15). To be sure, these elements are apparent in the David-Bathsheba narrative; but a careful scrutiny of the text indicates that there is much more. Initially, it is to be observed that the David-Bathsheba pericope is but part of a larger narrative unit. The Ammonite war is actually the narrative framework within which the David-Bathsheba incident is depicted. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the phrase *וַיְהִי אַחֲרָיֶיךָ* ("Now it happened afterwards . . ." NASB) of 2 Sam 10:1 is precisely the same phrase that is found in 13:1 ("Now it was after this . . ." NASB);<sup>1</sup> thus 2 Sam 10:1-12:31 is to be treated as a narrative unit.<sup>2</sup> This fact might help shape the reader's perception of the events recorded in 11:1-12:25.

<sup>1</sup>For other occurrences of this phrase in 2 Sam see 1:1, 2:1, 8:1, 15:1.

<sup>2</sup>This narrative unit, in turn, is part of a still larger literary unit which is commonly known as the "Succession Narrative," 2 Sam 9-20. "In the Bible narratives which are more or less complete in themselves link up with one another so as to create larger

The intent of this study is not to present a verse-by-verse analysis; rather, the purpose is threefold: (1) to suggest a literary structure for these three chapters, (2) to investigate the narrative technique that has been employed, (3) to raise—and seek to probe—the question of “how the text has meaning.”

#### THE TEXT

The drama of the Ammonite War would appear to develop through a sequence of episodic units which progressively create tensions, ambiguities, and complications both for the characters in the drama as well as for the readers. A pivotal point seems to turn the flow of events around, resulting in the gradual resolution of the difficulties of the first half of the narrative.

#### 10:1–19

This first unit introduces the context of Israel's conflict with Ammon. Not only does this reappear toward the end of the narrative but it also provides the “subsurface” context in which David's sin (11:1) and Uriah's death (11:14–17) take place. The events leading up to the Ammonite conflict are sketched in 10:1–5. Nahash, the Ammonite king dies and his son, Hanun, takes the throne. By means of direct speech, the reader is informed of David's apparent intention to “deal kindly”<sup>3</sup> with Hanun; Davidic emissaries are then sent to offer condolences. Hanun's advisers question David's motives; perhaps the emissaries were actually sent to spy out the territory. At this point the reader is left to weigh the opposing claims of David (10:2) and the Ammonite princes (10:3). Hertzberg argues that some of David's earlier dealings might have provided adequate reason for the questioning of his motives.<sup>4</sup> At any rate, Hanun draws his own conclusions and publicly shames David's messengers.

The stage is now set for the first military encounter between Israel and the Ammonites, who have hired 33,000 Syrians to help them in this effort. Chapter 10:6–14 is characterized primarily by rapid action: David sends Joab and mighty men to the battle (10:7); the Ammonites and Syrians set their strategy (10:8); Joab perceives

literary units. In other words, narratives which on the one hand can be considered as self-contained units may be regarded on the other hand as parts of larger wholes.” Bar-Efrat, “Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative,” *V/T* 30 (1980) 156.

<sup>3</sup>The term *ḥesed* appears here, suggesting the possibility of a treaty arrangement between David and Nahash, which David now intends to honor with Hanun.

<sup>4</sup>H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, trans. J. S. Bowden (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 303.

the strategy of the enemy and lays his own (10:9–10). At this point the narrative slows down by recording the direct speech of Joab (10:11–12). The speech is important for two reasons: first, the reader has the opportunity to focus momentarily on the character of Joab through what he says, and second, his concluding remark, “. . . may YHWH do what seems good to him,” provides the only reference to YHWH in the narrative up to the pivotal point alluded to above. This latter point seems rather significant and will be raised again. The narrator then reports that Joab and his army were momentarily successful against the Syrians and Ammonites, for they fled before Israel (10:13–14). The text does not indicate that the Syrians and Ammonites were sorely defeated; they fled. Actual military defeat is not seen until the final unit of the entire narrative. The text is explicit in reporting the fact that Joab returned to Jerusalem following this encounter.

Chapter 10:15–19 records David's defeat of the Syrian attempt to “regroup.” Smith observes that the paragraph “. . . breaks the sequence of the narrative. . . .”<sup>5</sup> If, however, as Childs would argue, the present shape of the narrative has its own integrity,<sup>6</sup> then the reader is obligated to inquire concerning the function of this short scene. Two points may be mentioned: first, David's defeat of the Syrians explains why the Ammonites have no help when Israel inflicts the final blow at the conclusion of the narrative. The second, and perhaps the more important point, is that it sets up a marked contrast in David, who is here seen to be leading his own army, while in the next episodic unit he is seen to remain in Jerusalem.

### 11:1–5

This second major episodic unit is characterized by rapidity of action. In three short verses (3–5) Bathsheba's status moves from “wife of Uriah” to “pregnant by David.” Perhaps more intriguing, however, are the ambiguities of character which are created primarily by the narrator.

Quite noticeable is the repetitious use of the term *šālaḥ* (“to send”) in four of these five verses (1, 3–5). This constitutes a continuation of a pattern established in the previous unit where the term appears eight times.<sup>7</sup> Altogether, the term is used 23 times in the narrative of the Ammonite war alone, while in the Succession Narrative of chaps.

<sup>5</sup>H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1904) 315.

<sup>6</sup>B. S. Childs, “On Reading the Elijah Narratives,” *Int* 34 (1980) 134.

<sup>7</sup>10:2; 10:3 (2x); 10:4; 10:5; 10:6; 10:7; 10:16.

9–20 it is used a total of 44 times.<sup>8</sup> The use of this term in these chapters, with a concentrated use in chaps. 10–12, provide an excellent example of Alter's category of *Leitwort*.<sup>9</sup> Further significance might be seen in the fact that eleven times David is the one who "sends," and twice he issues orders "to send."<sup>10</sup>

What is the significance of such a concentrated use of this term? One is tempted to see in this a conscious development of a power motif. David the king asserts his authority, "sending" people to do his bidding; he "sends" word here and there; he "sends" for Bathsheba. Joab, David's commander, "sends" messengers and messages. Ultimately, YHWH Himself "sends" his word to David by the prophet Nathan. This would seem to correlate with the broader context in which this narrative is set, that is, the Succession Narrative. Referring to the repetitious use of this term, Simon remarks, "In this way the narrator conveys the strength of David's position. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

What is the reader to make of the two narrative notations found in 11:1: "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go forth to battle . . ." and "But David remained at Jerusalem."? Some observers are wont to gloss over these statements.<sup>12</sup> Once again, however, the reader must weigh the narrative intention behind such remarks. As noted above, the preceding scene describes David's leading the army of Israel against the Syrians. Immediately, then, the narrator turns to a time when kings normally go out to battle. It would have been sufficient for the narrator to record the fact that David "sent" Joab against the Ammonites in the spring of the year. Instead, he consciously informs the reader that David remained in Jerusalem at a time when normally he would be involved in military activity. Alter refers to the opening line of chapter 11 as ". . . a brilliant transitional device."<sup>13</sup> He explains his evaluation when he observes that "It firmly ties in the story of David as adulterer and murderer with the large national-historical perspective of the preceding chronicle."<sup>14</sup> This writer would add that its brilliance is also demonstrated by the subtle, rather ambiguous manner in which it raises the question of David's character, a question which then becomes the very focus of the narrative.

<sup>8</sup>G. Lisowsky, *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibleanstalt, 1958) 1438–43. Perhaps it should also be pointed out here that the term is used only 9 times in 2 Samuel 1–8 and only 4 times in 2 Samuel 21–24. This clearly focuses attention upon the concentrated use of the term in 2 Samuel 9–20.

<sup>9</sup>R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 95.

<sup>10</sup>Joab is the subject of the verb 4 times; YHWH is the subject of the verb twice.

<sup>11</sup>U. Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb," *Bib* 48 (1967) 209.

<sup>12</sup>Smith, *Books of Samuel*, 317.

<sup>13</sup>Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 76.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

One further issue that deserves comment is the narrator's treatment of Bathsheba. Hertzberg raises the possibility of "... feminine flirtation..."<sup>15</sup> on Bathsheba's part and suggests that she perhaps anticipated the potential of being seen.<sup>16</sup> What is fascinating about his treatment of the question is the fact that after raising all these "possibilities" he concludes that "... all this is unimportant for the biblical narrator."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps his last observation is the most perceptive, for the narrative avoids focusing on her thoughts, feelings, actions and words for the most part. Her only words in the entire narrative are found in v 5: "I am with child." The relative silence of the text concerning Bathsheba may very well be the narrator's way of keeping the reader's attention on the primary character in this scene.

### 11:6-13

The narrative context is set in 10:1-19 while 11:1-5 quickly relates the circumstances which lead to the artistic account of David's attempt to deceive Uriah in the present scene. The only recorded speech of Bathsheba, brief though it is, sets in motion a course of action which ultimately results in her husband's death.

From a literary point of view, this scene is, according to Alter's definition, a "proper narrative event:"

A proper narrative event occurs when the narrative tempo slows down enough for us to discriminate a particular scene; to have the illusion of the scene's "presence" as it unfolds; to be able to imagine the interaction of personages... together with the freight of motivations, ulterior aims, character traits, political, social, or religious constraints, moral and theological meanings, borne by their speech, gestures, and acts.<sup>18</sup>

The narrative blending of action and dialogue is noteworthy as it builds tension, moves toward crisis, characterizes David and Uriah, as well as in its effecting reader participation in the flow of events. All this is initiated by the narrator's particularly concentrated use of his *Leitwort* *שָׁלַח*. Three times in 11:6 the term appears. Thus Uriah becomes the unsuspecting victim of the king's pressure and power, as David attempts to conceal his wrongdoing.

While the Davidic pretext of concern over the progress of the war and the welfare of the troops seems obvious to most readers, it should be noted that the narrator places the reader in the position of having to "weigh claims" at this point. That is to say, direct speech by

<sup>15</sup>Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 309.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>18</sup>Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 65.

the two main characters in the scene is the most explicit device employed at this point, a device which does not result in certainty for the reader.<sup>19</sup>

David the king of Israel and Uriah the Hittite provide an interesting and rewarding study in contrast here. David the king of Israel is selfish. While his army is engaged in warfare in Ammon, he is home satisfying himself with another man's wife. Uriah the Hittite, on the other hand, is selfless. When summoned by the king and given the opportunity to enjoy rest and relaxation at home with his wife he refuses. David, the king of Israel, is cunning and deceptive. If he can entice Uriah into cooperating, he might extricate himself from a situation which, if exposed, could lead to his death (Lev 20:10). Uriah the Hittite, on the other hand is unsuspecting.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is this very virtue which eventuates in his death! David the king of Israel is characterized by infidelity and disloyalty. He has wilfully become involved in an adulterous relationship with the wife of one of his warriors; he has indulged in the pleasures of home which his warriors have denied themselves for the cause of Israel. Uriah the Hittite, on the other hand, is marked by fidelity to the king, his commander-in-chief, and loyalty to the cause of Israel.

Uriah's character is especially evident in his direct speech of 11:11. When asked by David why he had not gone to his home the night before, at the king's urging, he replies:

The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.

A straightforward consciousness of duty and priorities is expressed in this response. Furthermore, if David had been truly attentive to Uriah's words, he might have been pricked in his conscience. It is to be noted also that this speech of Uriah becomes important later in the narrative when Nathan confronts the king with a parable.

The reader, aware of David's plight, senses the growing frustration of the king as he unsuccessfully attempts to cajole Uriah into providing him, unknowingly, with a means of escape from a most difficult

<sup>19</sup>See Alter's discussion of a "scale of means" by which characterization takes place; *Ibid.*, 116ff.

<sup>20</sup>Hertzberg (p. 310) argues that because of court gossip, etc., it is likely that Uriah knew that something was awry and that in this scene he consciously thwarts the king's plan. If this is so, it cannot be established on the basis of the narrative itself - only speculation. If one wants to speculate, it would seem reasonable to assume that if he did suspect something he would not have delivered the letter containing his execution notice. The narrative taken at face value makes better sense.

situation. At the same time, the reader quickly develops a healthy respect for this Hittite warrior.

### 11:14-27a

As David's ruthless scheme to rid himself of this "all too loyal soldier" develops in this next episodic unit, the plot becomes more complicated. The adultery and deception of the previous units lead to further, but this time lethal, deception here, as several Israelites are slain in the effort to accomplish the death of Uriah. As this part of the narrative progresses to crisis proportions, David's absolute callousness becomes apparent.

Even in his resolve to dispatch Uriah,<sup>21</sup> David attempts to make the setting appear as natural as possible, for he arranges for Uriah's death to occur in the context of battle. Perhaps a touch of irony is evident here in that the very loyalty which first frustrates the king's purpose becomes the tool that is used to bring about the loyal soldier's death. As a matter of fact, David misuses the loyalty in two ways: first, the letter containing the details of David's plan is carried by Uriah—an indication that the king was using this quality of Uriah to his own advantage; second, the scheme, briefly outlined though it is, suggests that David believed that Uriah's character would lead him to remain on the front line even though his fellow soldiers retreated. This grotesque "use"/misuse of loyalty is also evident with respect to Joab, although it takes a different form. Aware of his commander's loyalty to the king, David is certain Joab will carry out his orders, regardless of the morality/immorality of them.

The narrator has effectively drawn the reader's attention to this issue. The one whose apparent attempt to show loyalty to the new king of Ammon was rebuffed (10:1-3)—an event which leads to the development of the present circumstances—is deeply enmeshed in a desperate scheme, the success of which depends upon the unsuspecting loyalty of one and the misdirected loyalty of another. The "uninformed loyalty" of Uriah is a more genuine loyalty, even though it is used by David and leads to his death. The "informed loyalty" of Joab is political and is used by David in an effort to avoid his own death. David's total insensitivity reaches a climax when he learns of the death of several warriors, including Uriah: "Thus you shall say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another' . . ." (11:25).

<sup>21</sup>Miscall draws attention to the fact that "The narrative slows down through the use of detail and repetition allowing us, as readers, to consider alternatives, to create counter-texts, and to thereby better realize David's singlemindedness, his lack of consideration of alternatives." Miscall, "Literary Unity in Old Testament Narrative," *Semeia* 15 (1979) 40.

The narrator's technique in this scene is once again dominated by the reporting of action and dialogue; however, two additional techniques are employed effectively: internal speech (11:20–21) and repetition (11:15–17, 22–24). The example of interior speech in this case is Joab's anticipation of what David will *say* when he learns that the plan was not carried out in the manner David had described, and it is combined with Joab's anticipation of the king's *reaction*. His anticipation of the wrath of the king and words of the king combine to indicate a rather intimate knowledge of David on his part.<sup>22</sup> This, in turn, adds to the characterization of David which is developed by the narrator.

The scene closes with David taking Bathsheba as his wife after her days of mourning for her slain husband. The text again indicates that David "sent" (πλψ) for Bathsheba (cf. 11:4); but it is non-committal with respect to his motives, as well as her thoughts and feelings. It would appear on the surface as though David believes the issue has been resolved. The woman whom he desired and cohabited with illicitly has now become his wife, and the narrator reports that the child conceived in this adulterous relationship is born.

#### 11:27b

While the final statement of chapter 11 does not constitute an episodic unit, it receives particular attention here because of its pivotal location and function. The narrative up to this point has steadily moved toward crisis and it is interesting and perhaps significant that YHWH is noticeably absent from the narrative except for Joab's reference to him in the context of Israel's encounter with Ammon and Syria (11:12). The reader is left to wonder what else David's involvement with Bathsheba and the attempt to cover it up might lead to, should secrecy be further threatened. Thus this very important statement turns the entire narrative around: "But the thing that David did was evil in the eyes of YHWH." Immediately the reader is "put on notice" that David is not going to "get away with" this. The initial deed and the subsequent events have not escaped the eye of YHWH. This creates anticipation within the reader, as he waits for the resolution of the situation. Divine activity now becomes very evident. The next statement of the narrative, in fact, indicates that YHWH "sends" (πλψ) Nathan to David! Furthermore, YHWH's presence now becomes very apparent, for the Tetragrammaton appears thirteen times in chap. 12.

<sup>22</sup>Smith says that this ". . . reflects the opinion of the narrator rather than that of Joab or of David," *Books of Samuel*, 319.

12:1-6

This episodic unit presenting Nathan's parable and David's response confirms the direction which 11:27b apparently gives to the narrative. YHWH's "sending" the prophet to David signals the divine intention to pursue the situation to a resolution. The parable itself is artfully contrived and gives evidence of having been deliberately designed to communicate a message and to effect a particular response from the recipient. Simon argues that the parable is to be seen as an example of the genre of "judicial parable."<sup>23</sup>

One of the more important features about the parable is the fact that it parallels the situation which gave rise to its telling, yet that parallel is not so obvious to the recipient that it reveals its point.<sup>24</sup> Simon refers to it as a "veil of concealment."<sup>25</sup> An illustration of this point is seen in the terminology which Nathan uses in 12:3 where he indicates that the ewe lamb "... used to eat (תֹּאכַל) of his morsel, and drink (תִּשְׁתֶּה) from his cup, and lie (תִּשְׁכַּב) in his bosom. . . ." The significance of this is to be seen in the similarity of this statement to Uriah's statement, recorded in 11:11, when in response to David's query as to why he would not go to his home, he responds: ". . . shall I then go to my house, to eat (לֶאֱכַל) and to drink, (לְשִׁתּוֹת) and to lie (לְשַׁכַּב) with my wife. . . ."

The parable also has been constructed and is told in such a manner as to elicit a specific response from its recipient. Gunn points out that, "If the addressee were to give the wrong answer to the parable . . . the parable would be ludicrously pointless."<sup>26</sup> David's initial response ("... As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die . . ."), however, is the expected response and leaves David vulnerable.

Rather lengthy discussions have been carried on concerning what/who the various elements of the parable "stand for." It would seem more appropriate to talk in terms of "the point of the parable." The key appears in 12:4 where we read that the rich man was "... unwilling (רַיָּהוּמָל) to take one of his own flock or herd . . ." and 12:6 where David says that the rich man should make four-fold restoration "... because he did this thing and because he had no pity

<sup>23</sup>See discussions in U. Simon, "Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb," pp. 220ff. Gunn responds: "Now if Simon really is suggesting . . . that this is a 'literary genre' with a primary connection with a 'legal' setting of kings and 'judges at the gates,' then one must observe that as such it can hardly have enjoyed much of a vogue." Gunn, "Traditional Composition in the 'Succession Narrative,'" *V7* 26 (1976) 218.

<sup>24</sup>Gunn, "Traditional Composition," 219.

<sup>25</sup>Simon, "Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb," 229.

<sup>26</sup>Gunn, "Traditional Composition," 219.

(לִטְּחֵה).” David’s anger appears to have been aroused by the callousness of the rich man. The callousness was clearly demonstrated by the rich man’s slaying the poor man’s ewe lamb. Herein, then, lies the point of the parable and when David demonstrates anger over the callousness of the rich man, he is, in effect, demonstrating anger over his own callousness.

From the narrative point of view, this episodic unit balances out the episodic unit immediately preceding 11:27b, 11:14–27a. David’s own callousness is clearly manifested both through the scheme to rid himself of Uriah and his response when learning of the death of several Israelite warriors, including Uriah (11:25). As Simon remarks:

The king who was usually so sparing over the lives of his men, and whose anger at reports of unnecessary loss of life struck fear into his generals, assumed a mantle of indifference when he learnt that amongst the fallen was also the husband of Bathsheba.<sup>27</sup>

### 12:7–15a

An outstanding characteristic of this episodic unit is its domination by dialogue. The entire block of material is devoted to dialogue with the exception of the narrator’s report that “Nathan went to his house” (12:15a). Of further interest is the fact that of all the words spoken in this scene only two are spoken by David: *וַיִּשָׁחַת לַיהוָה* (“I have sinned against YHWH.”). Twice in Nathan’s speech the addressee and the reader are reminded that these words are actually the words of YHWH (12:7, 11). This literary unit provides the reader with a good example of the narrative techniques of “contrastive dialogue.”<sup>28</sup>

The message of YHWH is divided into two parts. The first, 12:7–10, begins by reminding David of what YHWH has done for him (12:8–9a) and then moves to reminding David of what he had done against Uriah and ultimately YHWH himself (12:9b–10). That an emphasis is placed upon David’s unacceptable conduct toward Uriah is evident in two ways. First, Nathan reminds David twice of the fact that he is guilty of slaying Uriah “with the sword.” Second, Nathan twice rehearses David’s action of “. . . taking his/Uriah’s wife to be your wife.” Nevertheless, the promise that “the sword” would be an ever-present factor in his house is directly linked to David’s “despising” (*וַיִּבְזֶה*) the word of YHWH (12:9) and YHWH himself (12:10).

The second part of YHWH’s message (12:11–12) focuses upon the clandestine nature of David’s involvement with Bathsheba. Because

<sup>27</sup>Simon, “Poor Man’s Ewe-Lamb,” 231–32.

<sup>28</sup>Alter defines this as, “. . . to juxtapose some form of very brief statement with some form of verbosity.” *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 72–73.

of David's elaborate attempts to maintain the secrecy of the matter, his own wives would publicly be shamed by relative and neighbor.<sup>29</sup> In this way, therefore, the divine message of this episodic unit reverses the Davidic action which characterized 11:6–13. *YHWH*'s words, "I will take your wives . . ." (תִּקַּח) are reminiscent of David's action of "taking" (תִּקַּח) Bathsheba (cf. 12:11 with 11:4; 12:9, 10).

David's two-word response is simple but powerful. Gunn observes that, "the stunning simplicity of David's response to Nathan . . . functions powerfully to reinstate him in the reader's estimation. . . ."<sup>30</sup> Nathan, at this point, announces to the king that *YHWH* has put away his sin and that he shall not die. Thus the king's self-pronounced judgment (12:5) is reversed by *YHWH*. The child, however, would die.

### 12:15b–25

The focus of attention in this seventh episodic unit is upon David and the child with an emphasis upon the former. The scene takes the reader from David's seven-day vigil for the ill child to his seeming lack of grief following the death of the child. The portion of the narrative devoted to David's vigil moves at a much slower pace than that which tells of David's activities following the death of the child. In "rapid-fire" style, v 20 reports that David "arose" (וַיָּקָם), "washed" (וַיִּחַוֶּה), "anointed" (וַיִּסַּח), "put on" (וַיַּחְלֵךְ), "went" (וַיֵּבֶא), "worshipped" (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה), "went" (וַיֵּבֶא), "asked" (וַיִּשְׁאַל), and "ate" (וַיֵּאָכֵל)." This sudden change of behavior was noticeable even to his servants (12:21).

This unit ends with the conception and birth of a second, legitimate child named "Solomon" of whom it is said that "*YHWH* loves him" (12:24). This is the second occurrence in the narrative of the narrator reporting "inside information" with respect to divine feelings/responses (cf. 11:27b). Brueggemann suggests that this is evidence of "the Yahwistic underpinning of this political history. . . ."<sup>31</sup>

Two other comments from the narrator in this section deserve attention. In 12:15b Bathsheba is referred to as "Uriah's wife"—this in spite of the fact that she has become the wife of David by this point. At the conclusion of this portion of the narrative she is spoken of as "his/David's wife." This seems to serve as a connection to 11:1–5 where she begins as the wife of Uriah yet ends up pregnant by David. In 11:1–5 Bathsheba conceives David's child while she is

<sup>29</sup>Cf. 2 Sam 16:20–23.

<sup>30</sup>D. M. Gunn, "David and the Gift of the Kingdom (2 Sam. 2–4, 9–20, 1 Kings 1–2)," *Semeia* 3 (1975) 20.

<sup>31</sup>W. Brueggemann, "On Trust and Freedom: A Study of Faith in the Succession Narrative," *Int* 26 (1972) 9.

Uriah's wife; in 12:15b-25 while the child is yet alive she is referred to as "Uriah's wife." After the death of the child, Bathsheba, now spoken of as "David's wife," conceives another child by David. Roth notes that the narrative involving David and Bathsheba "... begins with David desiring Bathsheba and ends in David having Bathsheba as wife who bears the son."<sup>32</sup> This portion of the narrative thus provides a resolution to the complication of 11:1-5.

### 12:26-31

With the solutions to the problems created by the David/Bathsheba incident finally worked through, the narrator now returns to the broader framework of the Ammonite war. Joab has fought against the Ammonite royal city and has subdued it; now he sends (נִלְשָׁ) word to David inviting him to come and deal the death blow to the Ammonite insurrection.<sup>33</sup>

This second part of the narrative dealing with the Ammonite war also brings to a final resolution the problem which initiated the entire narrative. In 10:1-19 Ammon revolts against Israel. While Joab gains some sort of victory, the fact that in 11:1 David must send Joab against her sufficiently demonstrates the temporary nature of that victory. However, in 12:26-31 partial victory becomes total victory.

### CONCLUSION

The narrative of the Ammonite war is a fascinating study in divine resolution of a complex set of circumstances created by human greed, lust, deception and indifference. Furthermore, it is a fine example of narrative artistry. It is characterized by concentricity<sup>34</sup> and symmetry. This writer suggests the following chiasmic symmetry for the narrative:

<sup>32</sup>W. Roth, "You are the Man! Structural Interaction in 2 Samuel 10-12," *Semeia* 8 (1977) 5.

<sup>33</sup>This raises a question as to whether Joab's involvement with the Ammonites lasted all the time covered by the events of 2 Samuel 11-12, a period of at least 2 years; or might this be an example of deliberate narrative framing without concern for linear chronology/sequence?

<sup>34</sup>Roth, "You are the Man!" 4-5.

- 10:1–19 A Ammonite War: Revolt by Ammon, only partial victory by Israel
- 11:1–5 B David and Bathsheba: She begins as “Uriah’s wife,” becomes pregnant by David
- 11:6–13 C David and Uriah: David attempts to conceal his sin by deception of Uriah
- 11:14–27a D David arranges for Uriah’s death, demonstrating his callousness
- 11:27b *“But the thing which David had done was evil in the eyes of YHWH.”*
- 12:1–6 D Nathan’s parable: exposing David’s callousness
- 12:7–15a C Nathan’s dialogue of “Thus saith YHWH”: David’s attempt to conceal his wrongdoing will result in the public shame of his own wives
- 12:15b–25 B David’s vigil: Bathsheba called “Uriah’s wife” while child is alive; spoken of as “David’s wife” after death of child; conceives legitimate son by David; one whom “YHWH loves”
- 12:26–31 A Ammonite War: Israel’s complete victory over Ammon