

# God as Guardian and Enemy of the Human Soul/Life. The Cultural and Theological Code of the *nepeš* in 1 Sam 25:29

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**Abstract:** The cycles of traditions about Saul's rise to power and reign (1 Sam 7:2–12:25; 13:1–15:31) and David's ascension to the throne (1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5) portray human life as constantly under threat while simultaneously remaining in all circumstances in the hands of YHWH and dependent on His will. In order to understand the Deuteronomist's perspective on the life/soul of a human being, one has to explore the meaning of the Hebrew term *nepeš* in the source material he edited. This publication, using the historical-critical method, analyses the meaning of the concept of *nepeš* in 1 Sam 25:29 to show on this basis: (1) literary, editorial and historical-cultural background of this verse in the context of the whole cycle of tradition: 1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5; (2) exegetical analysis of *nepeš* and other key terms used in 1 Sam 25:29; (3) theological ideas present in the Hebrew text and their implications for the biblical concept of the human soul. This is because Abigail's blessing shows the image of God characteristic of historical books of the Old Testament, as well as sheds light on the character of David and his role in the inauguration of monarchical power in Israel. Furthermore, it allows new aspects of the semantic field of the term *nepeš* to be discovered.

**Keywords:** *nepeš*, soul/life, David, Abigail, Nabal, the story of David's rise to power (1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5)

One of the key themes in the biblical texts about the reigns of Israel's first kings, Saul and David, is the idea of a fierce struggle for survival, in which life clashes fiercely with death, and the outcome of this confrontation always depends on the will of YHWH.<sup>1</sup> In the background of the subsequent parts of the source material (1 Sam 7:2–12:25; 13:1–15:31; 1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5), there is constant talk of the threatened existence of the characters described, both collectively (the war of Israelites against the Philistines and Amalekites) and individually (the conflicts between Saul and David, Saul and Samuel, David and Nabal, Saul and Jonathan, Abner and Joab). The Hebrew term *nepeš* "soul/life," which recurs with great frequency in the narratives about Samuel, Saul, and David (1–2 Sam; 1 Kgs 1–2) in a variety of phrases and contexts, plays a vital role in the presentation of this theme. Several times the term appears without an additional qualifier or suffix, indicating

<sup>1</sup> Dariusz Dziadosz is the author of the first part of this article.

human existence in general or the soul, will, desires, and even the future of the characters presented. In this form, the word *nepeš* describes, for example, the heavily burdened mind/soul of the infertile Anna – Samuel’s mother (1 Sam 1:10), the sorrow and spiritual dilemmas of David’s companions during their escape from Saul (1 Sam 22:2), or their dejection, mourning, and anger after the destruction of Ziklag (1 Sam 30:6) and during Absalom’s bloody rebellion (2 Sam 17:8). The representatives of Abiathar’s priestly lineage (1 Sam 22:22), the life/existence of David and his enemies (1 Sam 25:29/x3/; 2 Sam 5:8; 2 Sam 19:6), Solomon’s life/existence (1 Kgs 1:12) and human life/soul/existence in general (2 Sam 14:14) are also covered by the term *nepeš* in these sources. In the traditions concerning the first kings of Israel (1–2 Sam and 1 Kgs 1–2), however, *nepeš* is usually defined much more precisely by assigning the term to a specific character with a personal suffix. Thus, with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular suffix (*napšī* “my soul/life”), it occurs eleven times in this source material, of which it once describes the soul/life of Anna, the mother of Samuel (1 Sam 1:15), twice it represents the soul/life/existence of Saul (1 Sam 26:21; 2 Sam 1:9), and once the life/existence of the necromancer of Endor (1 Sam 28:21). No fewer than seven times, it refers to David, expressing the idea of his life being endangered (1 Sam 20:1; 22:23; 24:12; 2 Sam 16:11) or saved (1 Sam 26:24; 2 Sam 4:9; 1 Kgs 1:29). In the Books of Samuel and their thematic complement in 1 Kgs 1–2, *nepeš* recurs eighteen times with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular suffix (*napšēkā/napšekā* “your soul/life”). In this vein, the term is an element of the solemn oath “on your soul/life” (1 Sam 1:26; 17:55; 20:3; 25:26; 2 Sam 11:11; 14:19; 19:6),<sup>2</sup> it expresses the human will, desires, and demands of the protagonists of the narrative (son of Eli in 1 Sam 2:16, Saul in 23:20, David in 2 Sam 3:21), defines their human lives in general (Eli in 1 Sam 2:33, David in 1 Sam 19:11; 25:29; 2 Sam 4:8, Abiathar in 1 Sam 22:23, Saul in 1 Sam 26:24, Bathsheba in 1 Kgs 1:12) or functions as a synonym for the protagonist of the story (David in 1 Sam 20:4). In the Books of Samuel, *nepeš* also occurs with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular suffix (*napšō* “his life, soul, existence”). In this sense, it refers only to David’s life/existence (1 Sam 19:5; 23:15) and Jonathan’s inner life/soul/life (1 Sam 20:17).

However, the term *nepeš* shows the most intense yet ambivalent and complex sense in the traditions concerning the monarchy in Israel in 1 Sam 25:29. This verse is part of an extensive and perfectly worded speech that Abigail gave to David (25:24–31) in the context of his conflict with Nabal (25:2–44). Abigail uses the word *nepeš* as many as four times (25:26,29/x3/) in various shades of meaning that suggest the extensive semantic field of this term. In 25:29, *nepeš* occurs three times, making this verse a unique biblical passage.<sup>3</sup> The above juxtaposition of biblical collocations

<sup>2</sup> Dafni, “Gehalt der Aussage *אם אעזבך* *אם אעזבך*,” 37–54.

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Abigail’s words in 25:29 in the Hebrew Bible are matched only by the text of Lev 24:18, but in this priestly law, the word *nepeš* describes not the life of a human being but the life of an animal.

of the term *nepeš* alone suggests that verse 25:29 was not intended by the editor of the book to be a mere news item from the story of David but an essential clue to the reading of the story described in 25:2–44 and the monothematic series of traditions of 1 Sam 24–26, the leading thread of which is the threat to the life of the protagonist (local landowner/pretender to power/king) against the background of the fierce conflict between Saul and David, and David and Nabal. For the same substantive reasons, one can assume from the first reading of 25:29 that this verse from the Books of Samuel is a biblical interpretation of the theological idea of the human soul/life.

In recent decades, there have been many papers on the literary, rhetorical, and structural profile of 25:2–44, emphasizing various aspects of Abigail's speech (25:24–31). Few, however, have addressed the idea of the human soul/life, hiding behind the metaphors at the climax of her speech in 25:29. A mysterious cultural and religious code is recorded in contrasting images: 1) the life/soul of David, which is in the care of YHWH in "the bundle of the living," and 2) the life/soul of the enemies threatening his life, which the Lord shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling, remains a significant challenge for linguists and exegetes. The exact meaning and cultural and theological subtext are complex and ambiguous, thus calling for an in-depth reexamination of verse 25:29 in the context of thematically related extra-biblical sources. Indeed, even a preliminary analysis of Abigail's words about *nepeš* suggests that they follow the editorial convention of a gloss, which is intended as an interpretive key for the extensive narrative about the rise to power of the son of Jesse (1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5). This initial research hypothesis will be verified in this publication as part of the historical and critical reading of the Scripture, which has been an unfailingly leading tool in the study of the historical books of the Hebrew Bible. To explore the meaning of the biblical metaphors containing the word *nepeš* in 25:29, the literary and editorial characteristics of the immediate context of the verse, and its religious and cultural background, which is based on the tenets of monotheistic Yahwism, i.e., Judaism of the First and Second Temple periods, and perhaps extra-biblical traditions of the Levant, will first be shown. In the next part of the study, the text of 25:29 will be critically analyzed to understand its role in the biblical source about David and Abigail and the ideological and theological context of the Books of Samuel.

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Lev 24:18 is an example of the casuistic norm that the Code of Holiness (Lev 17–26) prescribes just compensation for lost property, in this case, cattle. In an analogous legal view that advocates fair retribution on a life-for-life basis, Exod 21:23 also obligates the culprit to make reparations for the death of a pregnant woman (*nepeš* appears twice). Twice in one verse, the word *nepeš* is also found in the priestly law on animal sacrifices (Lev 11:46) and the prohibition of eating blood (Lev 17:14), and in Jeremiah's texts on God's reparation of the lives/souls of the thirsty, the hungry (31:25), and the captives (52:30).

## 1. Literary and Editorial Profile of Abigail's Blessing in 1 Sam 25:29 in Its Context

The story of Abigail (25:2–44) is one of the most beautiful narratives of the Books of Samuel in literary terms, which also includes significant ideological and theological content. As one of the few biblical stories, it shows the events simultaneously from as many as three points of view: 1) a wealthy local citizen from Maon – a harsh (*qāšeh*) and bad-mannered (*ra' ma'ālālīm*) Calebite with the telling name *nābāl* “fool” (25:25);<sup>4</sup> 2) the brave but impulsive warrior David, who, despite providing protection to Nabal with a troop of six hundred men,<sup>5</sup> was disregarded by him; and 3) the intelligent (*tōbat-šekel*) and attractive (*īpat tō'ar*)<sup>6</sup> Abigail, Nabal's wife, who managed to smooth over the conflict between the men, prevent bloodshed, and, after her husband's sudden death, became the spouse of the pretender to the throne. The literary and rhetorical mastery of the editor of 25:2–44 is also evidenced by the fact that, while successively revealing the personal profile of the characters<sup>7</sup> and the course of events they provoke, he simultaneously draws their topography<sup>8</sup> and chronology,<sup>9</sup> applying the rule of unity of characters, place and time of the story, typical of

4 Dekker, “Nabal as a Test Case,” 321–323; Ben-Meir, “Nabal, the Villain,” 249–250. The literary criticism methodology allows us to note that Nabal's presentation based on the derivation of his name (the only one in the HB), character traits, social status, and attitude toward David (25:3,25–26) was deliberately contrasted with the portrayal of his wife Abigail (25:3) to facilitate a proper evaluation of these characters. Mulzac, “The Role of Abigail,” 45–47; Garsiel, “The Story of David,” 66–78.

5 Bodner, *I Samuel*, 261, 264. Some read David's impulsiveness in the political light of his journey to the throne, which was marked by intrigue and ambition as well as violence and murder (1 Sam 25:1 – 2 Sam 4:12). Levenson – Halpern, “The Political Import of David's Marriages,” 516–518; Kessler, “Sexuality and Politics,” 409–423.

6 The Books of Samuel and Kings often emphasize the physical appearance of the characters, especially the male beauty of the kings/pretenders to the throne (Saul, Eliab, David, Absalom, Adonijah), and the grace of the women attached to them. The first is Abigail (1 Sam 25:3), followed by Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2), Tamar (2 Sam 13:1), and Abishag the Shunamite (1 Kgs 1:3–4). All are directly linked to David and his royal court. Avioz, “The Motif of Beauty,” 341–359.

7 In a manner typical of biblical narrative strategy, the plot is driven by the main protagonists: Nabal, David, and Abigail, although supporting characters also drive the story: David's ten young men (25:4,8,9,12,25), his soldiers (25:13,20,27,39–40), Nabal's servants (25:8,14–17), and Abigail's servants (25:19,42). The specific device that move the story along is the dialogue (25:5–8,10b–11,13a,14b–17,19a,21–22,24–31,32–34,35b, 39a,40b,41b) which occupies almost twice as much space as the narrative. Each time, only the two protagonists are involved in these dialogues, but successively they are held by all the leading and important supporting characters of the story. Nicol, “David, Abigail,” 130–135.

8 The unity of place is suggested by the following notes on nearby locations: Carmel and (the wilderness of) Maon, which lie south/southeast of Hebron, and the nearby steppe pastures (25:2–4) and the wilderness of the Negev (Paran) near Engedi, where David hides (cf. 15:12; 23:24–26; 24:1–3; 25:1b). Lemaire, “The Residency of Abigail,” 8. According to 25:20, Abigail met with David at the hill between the camp of Jesse's son and Maon, from which Nabal's wife had set out (cf. 23:24–26).

9 The main action of the narrative takes place within a day, a night, and the following morning (25:4–37), and its climax is marked by the brief time in which Abigail's clandestine meeting and conversation with David takes place (25:20–35).

extra-biblical and biblical sources. All the main protagonists come to the fore, but the number and importance of their interventions depend on the role assigned to them by the editor of the book.<sup>10</sup> Nabal speaks only once and briefly (25:10–11), and David talks many times and much longer (25:5–8,13,21–22,32–34,35b,39a), although it is not his words that are most important in the story. Abigail speaks on three occasions (25:19a,24–31,41b), and her statement and the actions that follow prove to be the turning point for the entire situation described. Once, for an extended period, a secondary character speaks up – Nabal’s nameless servant, who decides to inform Abigail of her husband’s disrespectful conduct (25:14–17). In the structure of the pericope, however, his interference is far more significant than Nabal’s words, as it compels the woman to take immediate action to protect the endangered *nepeš* of her family and prevent the execution of hostile actions planned by Jesse’s son.

The theological significance of the idea of *nepeš* entirely depending on God, as well as the literary artistry of pericope 25:1–44, is also indicated by the thoughtful narrative strategy, which successively and symmetrically exposes one primary thematic line based on the pattern: danger – deliverance, conflict – reconciliation, life – death. In doing so, it offers sudden and unexpected twists in the story plot and its surprising finale. And so the instigator of the described dispute and threat to human life/soul, i.e., Nabal, suffers a well-deserved punishment (first *wajjāmōt libbō* “death of the heart,”<sup>11</sup> and then *wajjāmōt* “physical death”; 25:37–38), while David and Abigail, who undertakes effective mediation, become the beneficiaries of reconciliation and are granted a long life. David avoids rash and reprehensible bloodshed, receiving God’s blessing (25:29), and Abigail and her relatives save their *nepeš*. Moreover, Nabal’s widow becomes the wife of Israel’s future king. Commentators read the internal narrative dynamics of pericope 25:1–44 in quite different ways and propose various models for its structure.<sup>12</sup> Many advocate a studied concentric structure placing Abigail’s speech at the center (25:23–31), which marks a radical turn in the action of the story while offering a precise key to its reading and a comprehensive assessment of David’s rise to power (1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5).<sup>13</sup> The outer framework of this structure is the note about Samuel’s death, which definitively closes the era of theocracy in Israel (25:1a), and the information about David’s wives, which can be seen as the announcement of a new royal dynasty (25:43–44).<sup>14</sup> Another symmetrical

<sup>10</sup> Emmerich, “Schuld und Macht,” 143–157.

<sup>11</sup> O’Rourke Boyle, “The Law of the Heart,” 421–426.

<sup>12</sup> Van Wolde, “A Leader Led by a Lady,” 355–365; Bridge, “Desperation to a Desperado,” 14–16.

<sup>13</sup> Vermeylen, “David le non-violent,” 137–144. Abigail is the leading character in the narrative, who, with courage, prudence, wisdom, and tact, can alter men’s words, decisions, and actions. Her warnings, judgments, and advice, which exude prudence, spiritual integrity, and existential experience, stand in contrast to Nabal’s endless stupidity and callousness but also to David’s impulsiveness and vindictiveness.

<sup>14</sup> Both the note about Samuel’s death in 25:1 and the information about David’s wives (25:42–44) are consistent with the theme of life and death alluded to by the term *nepeš* in 25:26,29.

framework for the structure of the story, which this time is not directed at its external context<sup>15</sup> but its internal narrative threads, are the verses defining the extent and nature of David's bond with Nabal and Abigail (25:1b–3) and the circumstances of David's marriage to Abigail (25:42). Following the concentric pattern of the story, a thematic parallel can be noted between the passages about David's messengers to Nabal (25:4–12) and David's messengers to Abigail (25:39b–41). In the first case, David's message is rejected; in the second, it finds acceptance. Proceeding further, one notices a thematic correlation between verse 25:13 reporting David's resolve for revenge and verse 25:39a, in which the son of Jesse praises God for justly punishing Nabal and preserving him from rashly meting out justice on his own. The more central stage of the concentric structure of the tale is occupied by two analogous notes informing the protagonists about the course of events that will radically change their situation (Abigail in 25:14,19a; Nabal in 25:37–38). Another thematically identical pair of pericope components are verses 25:19b, and 25:36b, in which Abigail decides not to inform her husband about the course and significance of the events taking place around him, and verses 25:20 and 25:36a about her journey from Nabal's house to David's camp and back. The innermost and key pair of parallels in form and content of this concentric structure are verses 25:21–22 and 25:32–35. The reader learns from the first passage about David's spirited monologue as he expresses his anger at Nabal and decides to take revenge, and from the second about Jesse's son's public thanks to YHWH for quieting his rage and hatred and praise for Abigail for her wise intervention. The axis and core of this symmetrical pattern is Abigail's extensive and multifaceted monologue to David, in which she asks for leniency for her misguided husband and his house, invokes God's blessing upon Jesse's son, and announces his elevation to the throne (25:23–31).

The outer structure of the pericope thus consists of two closely aligned rings that illustrate the reality of the events described from different perspectives. The first (25:1a,43–44) sets the Maon incident in the setting of a narrative series about Israel's sociopolitical transformations and David's rise to power. In contrast, the second (25:1b–3,42) marks the extreme points of the narrative itself, which are the notes about Abigail's relationship with Nabal and Jesse's son. In this structural framework, the editor has placed the account of the dispute between Jesse's son and the Maon

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15 That immediate context is the sequence of 1 Sam 24–26, referred to by commentators as *the triptych about David – the man who avoids bloodshed*. The two extreme texts (24:1–23 and 26:1–25) exemplify the narrative doublet often used in the Books of Samuel to show the son of Jesse's sovereignty over the authority of YHWH's anointed one, despite Saul's growing aggression. Armington, *Recurrent Narratives*, 81–82; Green, "Enacting Imaginatively," 1–23. The central text of the triptych (25:1–44) shows David's analogous attitude toward an ungrateful local wealthy man. Dietrich, *1 Sam 13–26*, 688–698. Exegetes believe that Nabal in 25:2–44 is Saul's alter ego and the central theme of 1 Sam 24–26 is a condemnation of unjustified or hasty bloodshed. R. Gordon, "David's Rise," 37–38; Dietrich, "Eine Frau lehrt den König Gewaltverzicht," 251–259.

wealthy man whom he protected, in which three overlapping scenes catch the eye: the genesis and escalation of the conflict (25:4–20), its climax (25:21–35), and the finale (25:36–41). The axis of this concentric pattern is Abigail's speech (25:23–31), which brings together all the most significant threads of the narrative and, in the editor's intended manner, remains at its topographical and chronological center.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the meeting and conversation that ensued as a result of Abigail and David's efforts to respond to Nabal's words and actions took place roughly in the middle of the timeline between David's messengers' visit to Nabal and his sudden decline in health the following day upon hearing the news of the would-be protector's revenge (25:9,36–38). According to the topography of the text, their meeting occurred at an unknown location in the wilderness near Paran, halfway between Nabal's house in Maon and David's camp (25:1b,4a,20,36a). Abigail's speech delivered on this occasion is one of the most extensive in the Books of Samuel and the longest female address in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>17</sup> It touches on several major themes that come together to form a compact literary whole while fitting harmoniously into the near and far context of 25:2–44, including the guilt and folly of Nabal, the guilt/innocence of Abigail (25:24–25), David's prosperity and the simultaneous defeat of his enemies (25:26–29), the announcement of the reign of the son of Jesse (25:30), or the plea for the abandonment of vengeance and mercy for Abigail's house (25:31; cf. 25:26–27).<sup>18</sup> Abigail's speech has a solid theological underpinning (she invokes YHWH as many as seven times in 25:26/x2/,28/x2/,29/x2/,30,31) and a distinct propaganda subtext, typical of the pro-monarchic and pro-Davidic biblical literature (25:26,29).<sup>19</sup> In addition, elements of sapiential retelling of events can be seen in it,<sup>20</sup> as well as Middle

<sup>16</sup> All commentaries emphasize the high rhetorical standard of Abigail's speech. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 230–231. The woman deftly illustrates her husband's foolishness and ingratitude in the context of her ignorance and willingness to immediately reward David's favor while at the same time heralding his bright future and declaring her submission. As many as six times, Abigail calls herself David's maidservant, and fourteen times she calls him her lord. Her reverence and humility are provoked by her critical existential situation while also illustrating her personal feelings and intentions toward David (25:40–43). Abigail's words also manifest the background pro-monarchic and pro-Davidic sentiments of the book. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 398; Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative," 77; Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 181.

<sup>17</sup> It is surpassed in length only by Deborah's speech, but the latter is also attributed to Barak (Judg 5:1–31). Flavius Josephus offers an even longer version of Abigail's speech in *Antiquitates* (VI, 13.7 § 303–304). In his reconstruction of the event, however, he omits Abigail's remarks about *nepeš* included in 1 Sam 25:29.

<sup>18</sup> Rabbinic texts read Abigail's intentions toward David in light of the actions of the biblical Rahab. Both women were trying to remove the threat of death from themselves and their families. Bodi, "Was Abigail a Scarlet Woman?," 78–79.

<sup>19</sup> Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, 99–100; van Wolde, "A Leader Led by a Lady," 375. According to some exegetes, the effectiveness of Abigail's mediation does not apply only to David's relationship with Nabal but also to David's relationship with Saul. In light of 25:2–44, it can be assumed that the favor shown by the son of Jesse to his persecutor Saul in the wilderness of Ziph (26:24–25) is due to Abigail, who dissuaded him from the practice of shedding the blood of his opponents.

<sup>20</sup> Fischer, "Abigajil. Weisheit und Prophetie," 143–157.

Eastern prophecy and blessing.<sup>21</sup> In literary terms, Abigail's speech is not a homogeneous composition. Its current structure consists of two originally autonomous literary components that originated in other editorial circles included in the body of narrative 25:2–44 at successive stages of its editing. In addition to a slightly different style of speech, the first part of Abigail's address focuses exclusively on the past and present (25:24–27), while the second part looks far into the future (25:28–31). The first concerns David's dispute with Nabal and its consequences for Jesse's son and Abigail's family.<sup>22</sup> The second talks about the future political and military career of the pretender to the throne, which could be harmed by hasty revenge against Nabal and helped by the generosity shown to him.

The narrative of David and Abigail is quite often likened to the tradition of Jacob and Laban (Gen 29:1–32:1),<sup>23</sup> as well as the post-exilic texts about Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12),<sup>24</sup> the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:1–20), or the wise woman of Abel Beth-Maacah (2 Sam 20:14–22). Exegetes examining the message of 25:2–44 through the optics of diachrony, i.e., looking for its original core and secondary editorial expansions, locate the original version of the Abigail narrative in verses 25:2–7a,8,<sup>25</sup> 9–10a,11–13a,14,18–20,23–24a,25b,27,32a,34b–38,39b–42<sup>26</sup> that tell the story of the rich Nabal who disregarded his protector and incurred his wrath. The angry David was dissuaded from the planned bloodshed by the mediation of the wise and beautiful Abigail. However, by God's will, the cynical Nabal died anyway, and his wife married David. The earliest version of the story is usually linked to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC and thus to the period of the consolidation of the united Davidic monarchy. At the same time, significant glosses are associated with the literary activity of circles that favored the Davidic dynasty in Judah after the collapse of the kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.<sup>27</sup> The final version of pericope 25:2–44 bears the marks of the editor of the book, who should be credited with the narrative framework about Samuel's death and David's wives (25:1,43–44) and placing the story in the context of 1 Sam 24–26 tradition.

<sup>21</sup> Frettlöh, "Der Segen Abigajils," 339–359.

<sup>22</sup> The only editorial expansion in 25:24–27 may be the motif of the defeat of all David's opponents in 25:26b, which alludes to Saul's pursuit of Jesse's son in section 21:11–26:25.

<sup>23</sup> The characterization of the conflicted protagonists, their social and material status, the assessment of their moral stance, and the presentation of the women attached to them are similar. Moreover, the name *Laban* is an anadrome of the name *Nabal*. Geoghegan, "Israelite Sheepshearing," 58–59; Frettlöh, "Der Segen Abigajils," 349.

<sup>24</sup> Noteworthy is the similar way David's courtship of Abigail and Bathsheba was described (cf. 25:39–42 and 2 Sam 11:2–5,27a) and the role of these women in his life. Shinan – Zakovitch, *From Gods to God*, 252.

<sup>25</sup> Without the phrase, "Ask your servants and they will tell you."

<sup>26</sup> Many exegetes find the original core of this story in: 25:5–8,14,19,24–25,27,34b,40–41. Dietrich, *1Sam 13–26*, 754; Kunz, *Frauen*, 297–299.

<sup>27</sup> Stoebe, *Das erste Buch Samuelis*, 454; Peetz, *Abigajil*, 207, 225–227; Willi-Plein, "Abigajil," 418. The interference of a Deuteronomist editor is also noted by exegetes in verses 25:21–22,23b,24b–26,28–34,39a (Hentschel, *1 Samuel*, 137) and 25:2–20,23a,24a,27,35–38 (Vermeylen, *La loi*, 148–154).

Finally, just a few more introductory considerations on the literary characteristics of verse 25:29 itself. This key passage of Abigail's speech should be included in the Deuteronomistic elaboration of this part of the pericope in 25:28–31. The Deuteronomist's literary contribution is evidenced by the structural distinctiveness of these verses and the unprecedented expressive ideological and theological subtext of Nabal's wife's speech, further enhanced by the editor's intentional repetitions. Abigail begins the second stage of the speech with a renewed self-deprecation and willingness to take the blame (25:28; cf. 25:24) and a repeated prediction of David avoiding the defeat his enemies wish upon him (cf. *rā'āh* in 25:26,28).<sup>28</sup> The editorial origin of 25:29 is also indicated by the dual presentation of David's persecution (*lirdopkā ūl'baqqēš 'et-napšekā*). Verse 25:29 refers as many as three times in different contexts to the idea of *nepeš*, which becomes the key to understanding the second part of Abigail's speech. In 25:29, the term *nepeš* refers twice to David's life/soul and once to the life/existence of his enemies, and in the context of the entire story of 25:2–44 could just as well refer to Abigail's threatened life, which she herself indirectly and directly mentions in 25:25,26,28,31. In 25:29, God is shown as the protector of David's life. Still, in the narrative optics of the entire pericope, He also reveals Himself as the keeper of the life of Nabal's ex-wife and her home from the wrath of Jesse's son, and then the source of her security and prosperity at the stage of her marriage to the monarch (25:42; 2 Sam 3:2–5).

An analysis of the immediate context of verse 25:29 leads to the conclusion that its current position at the climax of Abigail's second speech (25:28–31) is the intended fruit of a late editorial reworking of the pericope in 25:2–44. One of its goals was to show at this point in the 1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5 series the political aspirations of David and the House of Judah in confrontation for power with the other tribes of Israel. The content and time perspective of 25:28–31 are decidedly different from the essential body of Abigail's statements. They do not refer to David's conflict with Nabal and the woman's attempt to resolve it but concern the future reign of Jesse's son and his dynasty.<sup>29</sup> In the context of the central message of 1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5, Abigail's words in 25:28–31 serve as a prophecy that confirms Samuel's prediction (16:1–13) and precedes Nathan's promise in 2 Sam 7:5–17 relating to the royal authority of Jesse's son in Israel and its dynastic permanence. Indeed, Nathan's prophecy

<sup>28</sup> In 25:31, returns the motif of shedding blood on one's own account, which was present in the epilogue of the first part of Abigail's speech (25:26). The secondary editorial nature of 25:31 is suggested by the unevenly defined moral consequences of David's eventual revenge (*l'pūqāh ūl'mikšōl*). In addition, the theme of God's promise of blessing to David (25:28,30,31) and the kindness shown to him (*jātab* and *fōbāh* in 25:30–31) recurs as many as three times in 25:28–31.

<sup>29</sup> In the current structure of the speech, the text of 25:28–31 is a supplement to 25:24b–27. If David abandons his vengeance on the house of Nabal and accepts Abigail's request and gifts as payment for his past support and compensation for her husband's cynicism, he will gain God's favor, the fruit of which will be the permanent assumption of royal power in Israel (25:28,30), victory over his enemies (25:29) and an enviable reputation of an honorable leader and righteous man (25:31). Shields, "A Feast Fit for a King" 47.

in 2 Sam 7:11,16 about the enduring house that YHWH will build for David echoes the words of Nabal's wife in 25:28–29. Abigail's metaphorical blessing, which in 25:29 takes the form of a request to YHWH to protect David's life while becoming the enemy of the lives of his opponents, in the editor's narrative strategy becomes an illustration of the message of all the source material about the son of Jesse gathered in the Books of Samuel.

Before an exegetical and theological reading of verse 25:29, it is still necessary to pay attention to its sociocultural background, which largely determines the interpretation of its content. The words put into Abigail's mouth, on the one hand, define the concept of the human soul/life as it was understood in the era in which the book was edited and, on the other hand, help in the understanding of the historical realities of a critical moment of sociopolitical change in Israel at the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. As early as verse 25:1, with information about the death of Samuel, the last judge (7:2–17), signals a definitive departure from the system of theocracy in Israel. The subsequent verses of 25:2–44 reveal tensions in local clan and neighborhood relations (Nabal's dispute with David) but also a fierce struggle for political influence between the two strongest parties at the time, the Benjaminites and Judah. The leader of the Benjaminites is Saul, the still-in-office king of Israel (1 Sam 9–31), while Judah, at this stage of the story, is already represented by Jesse's son. The latter has been secretly anointed to succeed Kish's son and, by the will of YHWH, is to take over the rule of the state soon (16:1–14). The blessing that falls from Abigail's lips in 25:28–31, and therefore also the content of the concept of *nepes̄*, must therefore be read not only through the prism of a neighborly dispute (cf. 25:4–22,24–27) but in the broad sociopolitical perspective of the major conflicts and transformations emerging during this stage of the history of the Israelite monarchy. In the near future, they will result in the abandonment of the order of generational confederation led by the elders of the people or judges, as well as the original forms of Saul's political and military royal power (*nāgîd*; 9:16), provoking the establishment of permanent dynastic structures of the Davidic monarchy.<sup>30</sup>

The quintessential Abigail speech (25:28–31) and the sheep-shearing motif present in 25:2–44 should be read in this ideological and political context. In the ancient Levant and Israel, it was an occasion for clan festivities and an opportunity to pay debts/request repayment, pay tribute (to the king, overlord, protector), right wrongs, or reactivate violated social rights. Against the backdrop of such traditions as Gen 31:1–32:1; 38:1–30; 2 Sam 13:1–39, the motif of shearing sheep in Maon near Carmel can be considered a deliberate ideological and cultural subtext

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<sup>30</sup> Historians link this period of social and military transition in Syro-Palestine to the early stages of the Iron Age, when the Philistines and the Hebrew tribes led by Samuel, Saul, and David, who sought political autonomy, played a leading role in the region (1 Sam 4 – 2 Sam 5). Anderson, *The Living World*, 212–213.

that the editor of 1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5 chose to legitimize David's rise to power.<sup>31</sup> Abigail makes allusions to the broader political overtones of the events described in the pericope in various ways in 25:28,29,31. The cynical and unintelligent Nabal figure conflicted with David, and his anonymous persecutors<sup>32</sup> symbolize ineffective and unauthorized opposition to the political aspirations of Jesse's son. Indeed, his military endeavors are seconded by YHWH (25:28–30) and heralded a success by the beautiful and wise Abigail (25:18–31). Her pro-Davidic and pro-monarchic declarations expand the ideological background of the pericope and, already at this stage of the narrative, foreshadow the establishment of Davidic rule in Judah and Israel. In the subsequent stories of the Books of Samuel (1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5; 5:6–10:19; 2 Sam 11–20; 1 Kgs 1–2; 2 Sam 21–24), the son of Jesse is presented as YHWH's chosen one, who remains under His constant protection and can guarantee the united monarchy of Judah and Israel peace, strength, and durability.<sup>33</sup> He is the first full-fledged king of Israel to come to the throne in a climate of military and sociopolitical defeat for Saul. This subject matter fills the richest collection of sources in the book (1 Sam 15 – 2 Sam 5:5),<sup>34</sup> whose subsequent sections first report on Saul's declining reputation (15:1–35) against the backdrop of God's choice and David's military and political success (16:1–17:58), and then explain the genesis of their conflict (18:1–20:42), its course and amicable finale (21:1–26:25). The decisive part of the series is the account of Jesse's son's stay with the Philistines, during which the reigning king dies at their hands (27:1–31:13), and David assumes power (2 Sam 1:1–5:5). The text of 25:2–44, analyzed in this paper, about the dramatic circumstances of David's marriage to Abigail, is thus, in the strategy of the editor of the book, a deliberate thematic expansion that foreshadows the development of David's political career and introduces the idea of succession to the throne (1 Sam 25:43–44; 2 Sam 3:2–5; 5:13–16) described in 2 Sam 11–20; 1 Kgs 1–2. Abigail thus hints to the reader as early as 25:28–31 why the ungrateful Nabal and the jealous and hateful Saul lose their lives, while David saves them and becomes YHWH's chosen king. This happened because God diligently guarded the life of His anointed one, who waged His wars but did not spill innocent blood. For this reason, YHWH decided to make him ruler in place of Saul (25:30) and build him an enduring house (25:28), and sling out the lives of his enemies far away (25:29). This ideological and theological biblical context of Abigail's speech must be considered when analyzing the two artful metaphors in 25:29,

<sup>31</sup> Geoghegan, "Israelite Sheepshearing," 55–63; Heltzer, "Der ugaritische Text KTU 4.751," 413–415.

<sup>32</sup> From 24:1–26:25, or the immediate context of 25:29, it appears that Saul and his followers are the enemies threatening David's life. It is their lives that YHWH slings out as from the hollow of a sling.

<sup>33</sup> Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 17. In 25:2–44, Nabal is shown in contrast to David, while in 1 Sam 16–31, it is Saul. Both are depicted as husbands lacking wisdom, gripped by heartless madness, who fight David, provoking their own death. Some even suggest that Abigail's words in 25:29 hint at the death wish for Nabal and Saul. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 154.

<sup>34</sup> Bodi, "David as an 'Apiru in 1 Samuel 25," 25.

the meaning of which hides behind the enigmatic ancient imagery of human and divine activity to protect or destroy someone/something precious.

Since this metaphorical imagery has been and continues to be interpreted ambiguously by exegetes, there is a need to also look for extra-biblical religious and cultural contexts<sup>35</sup> that would facilitate the interpretation of the double figura etymologica in 25:29<sup>36</sup> illustrating YHWH's relationship to the human *nepeš*. Among the proposed cultural suggestions in this regard,<sup>37</sup> particularly noteworthy is a find encountered by archaeologists investigating burial sites in northern Iraq at Nuzi near the Tigris, dating to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. In one of the graves, a clay oval container/carved stela filled with 48 stones was found, with an inscription on it: "the stones refer to sheep and goats: 21 mother sheep, 6 lambs, 8 adult males/rams, 4 lambs, 6 mother goats, 1 billy goat, 2 young goats." Beneath this inscription was another reading, "the seal of Ziqarru, the shepherd," suggesting the meaning and origin of this Assyrian artifact.<sup>38</sup> According to archaeologists referring to other similar discoveries and texts, this type of object (a hollow tablet, container, or cloth bag/pocket) filled with pebbles and accompanied by an appropriate description was used by ancient shepherds of the Levant to count their flocks as they returned from pasture to their pens. Pebbles placed in such an object denoted animals in a safe place and no longer in danger. If this cultural code is related to *š'ôr* in 25:29 and the wish uttered

<sup>35</sup> Ancient Jewish literature suggests that the term *š'ôr* means "bag, bundle, cache," which was attributed with magical/supernatural properties. On the one hand, it could protect its contents, while on the other, it could damage or expose them to destruction. Marmorstein, "I Samuel 25,29," 122, 124.

<sup>36</sup> Two double phrases: *š'ôrûrah biš'ôr* "nepeš bound in the bundle" and *j'qall' ennâh... haqqâla'* "nepeš sling out from the hollow of a sling" composed of the same stems *š'rr* and *ql'* are specifically juxtaposed here to focus the reader's attention on the opposing ideas of divine protection and divine wrath. In the optics of Middle Eastern kingly ideology, these phrases could also point to the figure of the ruler, especially ascending to the throne, who had the right (duty) to defend the lives of his subjects and even his enemies (amnesty), but also to mete out just punishment (cf. 1 Kgs 2:1–46). Bernhardt, *Das problem der altorientalischen Königsideologie*, 68, 84.

<sup>37</sup> For that matter, the ancient civilization of the Levant also suggests other cultural codes, such as the idea of a scroll/book bound with string and sealed with a lump of clay. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum*, 76. Sometimes the Hebrew *š'ôr hašajjim* is also likened to the Egyptian Canopic jars into which selected organs of the deceased were placed during mummification, thus securing eternal life. However, this is unlikely because the human soul was linked with the heart in Egypt. According to the funerary tradition of ancient Egypt, practiced since the Old Kingdom era (2575–2130 BC), the liver, lungs, intestines, and stomach of the deceased were placed in clay, stone, wood, or alabaster urns (known as Canopic jars, named after the Greek town of *Kanôpos* in the Nile Delta) in the shape of a human, baboon, falcon, and jackal, respectively. The heart was not usually placed in the Canopic jar because, according to the interpretation of the Book of the Dead, during the judgment by Anubis, it was placed on the scales of importance along with the feather of Maat, symbolizing "truth, the goddess of justice and order" to decide the eternal fate of the soul of the deceased (ba). Spencer, *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt*, 115.

<sup>38</sup> Eissfeldt, *Der Beutel der Lebendigen*, 10–11. The cuneiform script on the oval tablet/container was deciphered by Denise Schmandt-Besserat in 1992. The number and types of animals grouped by species and age listed on the outside of the tablet/container corresponded to the number of stones inside. Postgate, *Bronze Age*, 369.

by Abigail, one gets a picture of God the shepherd keeping David's *nepes̄* safe from harm.<sup>39</sup> Just as the shepherds carefully kept pebbles in their bags/bundles/pockets to mark the animals staying safely in their pens, so YHWH in His *š<sup>e</sup>rôr haḥajjim* will "bind in the bundle" the life/soul of the son of Jesse to keep it from harm. This Assyrian cultural code could be considered the basis of the metaphor in 25:29. The lives/souls of David and God's chosen people, whom He grants special blessings, remain thoroughly protected and are not threatened by any misfortune or calamity. Diametrically different is the case with those who did not find themselves in God's *š<sup>e</sup>rôr haḥajjim*, for they were removed from it, moreover, cast far away, as one casts away stones by slinging them.<sup>40</sup> In the civilizational code of the Levant, the image of casting a stone from the leather pocket of a sling, mentioned in 25:29 and an inscription documenting the custom of the shepherd Ziqarru of Nuzi, would thus mean death or exposure to great danger outside the safe zone of influence of God YHWH.

Other options for reading these enigmatic metaphors stemming from Judaism and biblical literature will be presented below as part of an exegetical and theological reading of the tradition of 1 Sam 25:29.

## 2. Exegetical Analysis of Metaphorical Phrases Involving *nepes̄* in 1 Sam 25:29<sup>41</sup>

The analysis of 25:29 should begin by raising the question of the referent of *nepes̄* and the corresponding Greek term *psychē* in the LXX translation.<sup>42</sup> In the Polish Millennium Bible translation, a certain inconsistency can be noted in this regard, the reason for which is the broad semantic field of *nepes̄*.<sup>43</sup> The first identifies *nepes̄* as a respiratory organ,<sup>44</sup> but the same meaning does not appear in 1–2 Sam. The second is a thematic derivative of the first and understands *nepes̄* as "life" manifested by the activity of breathing.<sup>45</sup> This semantic field is most readily used by the Polish

<sup>39</sup> Eissfeldt, *Der Beutel der Lebendigen*, 13; Dietrich, *1Sam 13–26*, 784.

<sup>40</sup> Eissfeldt, *Der Beutel der Lebendigen*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> Arkadiusz Wojnicki is the author of this and the following parts of this article.

<sup>42</sup> The only exception in the Books of Samuel is 1 Sam 23:15. Auni Murtonen (*The Living Soul*, 97) does not include a single reference to 25:29 in the body of the monograph, despite *nepes̄* appearing three times, while in the appendix, he classifies all three as *the living and acting being of its possessor (man)*, emphasizing their passive overtones: in 25:29a – the individual sense; 25:29b – the individual sense, the living referent; 25:29c – the collective sense, the dying referent.

<sup>43</sup> HALOT enumerates as many as nine meanings of *nepes̄*: throat, neck, breath, living being, human, life, personality, soul, and deceased.

<sup>44</sup> "Throat" (Isa 5:14); "neck" (Ps 105:18).

<sup>45</sup> Middle Eastern anthropology understands the transmission of life as the transmission of "breath," the ability to emanate "breath" (*nišmat ḥajjim*; Gen 2:7).

translator of 1–2 Sam.<sup>46</sup> In the Millennium Bible translation, the term *nepeš* is also used in its third sense as “soul.”<sup>47</sup> This point is quite important because, in the analyzed verse 25:29, the term *nepeš* is translated twice as “life” and once as “soul.”<sup>48</sup> Many traditions in 1–2 Sam also refer to the fourth semantic field of the term, identifying *nepeš* as a “living being,” namely a person (cf. 22:23).<sup>49</sup> An interesting interpretive path in the meaning of *nepeš* is offered by Maimonides in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, in which he refers to as many as five major semantic scopes of the term (life, blood, mind, soul, will), selecting a relevant quotation from the HB for each. The fourth meaning mentioned above applies to 25:29: “And this [also] is the name of the being that remains of man after death: *w<sup>e</sup>hājtaḥ nepeš ’āḏōnī š<sup>e</sup>rūrāḥ bišrōr haḥajjim*” (I, 41).

However, this rabbinic proposal for explaining the meaning of *nepeš* raises the question of whether Abigail’s blessing should be referred to David’s temporal life or his existence after death. Indeed, a canonical reading of the Old and New Testament traditions reveals the vital role of David’s *nepeš* in the idea of the resurrection of the dead.<sup>50</sup> However, this position has not found many supporters and, in the literature, is considered somewhat anachronistic.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Sam 19:5,11; 20:1; 22:23; 23:15; 26:21, 24; 28:9,21; 2 Sam 1:9; 4:8,9; 14:7,14; 16:11; 19:6; 23:17. The Old Testament understanding of *nepeš* does not draw a clear distinction between it and the body, such that it can be: satiated and hungry (Prov 6:30; 10:3; 27:7; Isa 58:10) and can delight in “rich food” (Isa 55:2), be weary (Prov 25:25), and fast (Ps 69:10). Gesenius – Tregelles, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, s.v. נֶפֶשׁ; Pleijel, “To Be or to Have Nephesh?” 194–206 (especially 201–205).

<sup>47</sup> 1 Sam 1:10,15; 2:16,33; 22:2; 2 Sam 5:8. The expression *mar nepeš* is rendered as “greatly distressed” (1 Sam 1:10) but also “enraged” (2 Sam 17:8), while the phrase *mrr nepeš* is translated to “bitter in soul” (1 Sam 30:6). Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, s.v. נֶפֶשׁ.

<sup>48</sup> Neither the TM nor the LXX has a concept whose content overlaps with the semantic field of the modern term “soul.” Old Testament anthropology did not develop a concept of the human “soul” that could be juxtaposed with the achievements of Greek philosophical thought or the New Testament concept of *psychē* since it considers the nature of man as a psychosomatic unity. Thus, *nepeš* (LXX: *psychē*) in the HB usually means a more unidentified “vital force,” with no emphasis placed on soul-body dualism, and is generally considered a manifestation of a person’s inner identity/life. Johnson, *Vitality*, 7–8; Rösel, “Die Geburt der Seele in der Übersetzung,” 153–154; Lemański, “O właściwe rozumienie greckiego pojęcia «dusza»,” 16–17.

<sup>49</sup> The combination of *nepeš* with the personal suffix takes on the reflexive sense of “self” (1 Sam 18:3; 20:17; 2 Sam 18:13) or results in its omission in translation due to the fact that it conveys an understood subject (1 Sam 20:4). In the Millennium Bible, which is the main Polish Bible translation, there are also the phrases “according to what is in my heart and in my mind” (1 Sam 2:35) and “all that your heart desires” (2 Sam 3:21) (here translated from Polish into English – translator’s note), placing an equal sign between *nepeš* and the subject or addressee of the statement. This hypothesis is also supported by the LXX translation, which uniquely renders *nepeš* in 23:15 using the proper noun *Dauid*.

<sup>50</sup> Noteworthy here is Ps 16:10, where the words *ki lō-ta’āzōb napši liš’ōl* are attributed to David, linking *nepeš* to the reality of the š’ōl (Sheol), the abode of the dead, but also implying the action of God, who does not allow his soul to remain there. This passage is used in Acts 2:27: *hoti ouk egkataleipseis tēn psychēn mou eis hadēn*, where it acquires a fuller theological sense – it is not David’s but Christ’s *nepeš* that does not remain in Sheol but experiences resurrection.

David's *nepes̄* in Abigail's speech is undoubtedly the subject of a blessing that refers to his immediate future. The first part of verse 25:29 indicates his current circumstances: *wajjāqom 'ādām lirdopkā ūl'baqqēs 'et-napšekā* (cf. 1 Sam 24–26). Even the first form of *wajjāqom* poses interpretive difficulties. Most translations understand this part of the verse as *protasis* of the conditional clause, changing *wajjāqom* to the inverted *perfectum w<sup>e</sup>qām*<sup>51</sup> or vocalizing it as the simple *imperfectum w<sup>e</sup>jāqom*.<sup>52</sup> A possible interpretation, however, follows the MT, which considers *wajjāqom* as referring to a specific event and the following *w<sup>e</sup>hājtāh* as antithetical (disjunctive).<sup>53</sup> In both cases, *'ādām* is interpreted as a synecdoche *totum pro parte* replacing the proper noun *šā'ūl*.<sup>54</sup> David is the target of two actions rendered by *infinitivus constructus* prefixed by intentional *lamed*. While with the *rdp* root, the direct object was rendered by the 2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix, whereas *bqš* was rendered by *'et-napšekā*. If this expression were to be treated as synthetic parallelism, an equal sign would have to be put between David and the referent of the word *napšekā*. Indeed, the motif of “pursuing” and “seeking” is repeated throughout 1 Sam 21:2–27:15.<sup>55</sup> Analysis of these texts makes it possible to approximate the referents of the words *nepes̄* and *'ādām* from the *protasis* of Abigail's blessing. The subject in sentences containing the roots *rdp* and *bqš* in the aforementioned series out of 19 occurrences is *šā'ūl* – nine times, *šā'ūl wa'ānāšāw* once, *melek jisrā'el* twice, and *'ādōnī* once (in reference to Saul). On the other hand, the direct object is *nepes̄* (with a possessive suffix) – three times, *dāwid* four times, *'ādōnī* once, *'abdō* once, and four times – the direct object suffix (in reference to David). Particularly noteworthy are the metaphors recorded in 1 Sam 24:14 and 1 Sam 26:20, in which David calls himself *kēlēb mēt* (“dead dog”) and *par'ōš 'ehād* (“a single flea”). An interesting clue to understanding the phrase *'et-napšekā* is given by Targum Jonathan to 1 Sam 25:29a: *w<sup>e</sup>qām 'ēnāšā l'mirdepāk ūl'mibē l'miq<sup>e</sup>lāk*, suggesting that the author interprets it as equivalent to the whole person (rendered by the direct object suffix – *āk*) and ascribes it to signify earthly “life” (the Hebrew *bqš 'et-napšekā*, “seek your *nepes̄*”) is replaced by the Aramaic *b'h l'miq<sup>e</sup>lāk*, “seek your death”).

In the following part of 25:29, there is a double *apodosis*. Its first part is addressed to David: *w<sup>e</sup>hājtāh nepes̄ 'ādōnī š<sup>e</sup>rūrāh bišrōr haḥajjīm*. It is intriguing to note that the form *'ādōnī*, which serves as a vocative, out of 21 occurrences in 1 Sam, appears ten times in Abigail's speech in 1 Sam 25, and these are the only instances where this

<sup>51</sup> McCarter, *I Samuel*, 394; Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text*, 201.

<sup>52</sup> Lange *et al.*, *A Commentary*, 309.

<sup>53</sup> Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text*, 201.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew Henry (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, 427–428) hypothesizes that David does this because of Saul's status as a reigning and anointed king. Matthew Poole (*Annotations*, 575–576) thinks similarly, while Roger L. Omanson and John Ellington (*A Handbook*, 533–534) believe the opposite.

<sup>55</sup> *rdp*: 1 Sam 23:25,28; 24:14; 25:29; 26:18,20; *bqš*: 1 Sam 22:23; 23:10,14,15,25; 24:2,9; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4.

term refers to David.<sup>56</sup> The participle *š<sup>e</sup>rūrāh* and the adverbial following it should be analyzed in detail. The *šrr* root occurs 84 times in the HB, nine of which are in 1–2 Sam. It often takes on a figurative meaning,<sup>57</sup> only once referring to a physical “separation” (2 Sam 20:3), describing the fate of King David’s ten concubines. It seems that the use of the participle *š<sup>e</sup>rūrāh* is related by assimilation to the prepositional phrase *bišrōr* that follows it.<sup>58</sup> The noun *š<sup>e</sup>rōr* occurs ten times in the HB, including three times in 1–2 Sam. In 1 Sam 9:1, it is a proper noun – Kish’s grandfather’s name, while in 2 Sam 17:13, it is translated as “pebble” (cf. Amos 9:9). In other texts, it means an object for holding money<sup>59</sup> or perfume.<sup>60</sup> The biblical historical and cultural context offers many more interpretive options in this matter.

The interpretation of *š<sup>e</sup>rōr* as a receptacle for perfume is reminiscent of the list of feminine objects in Isa 3:16–24, among others, *bāttē hannepēš* “flasks for perfume.”<sup>61</sup> The LXX links the expression closest to this one, *ta kata tēn oikian*, with *ta epiblēmata*, which – along with rearranging the order of enumeration – indicates that the LXX’s *Vorlage* differs here from the MT. The wording of the phrase, which is *hapax legomenon* in the HB, may bring to mind the Egyptian custom of making terracotta “soul houses.”<sup>62</sup> Still, it is controversial in the view of the depiction of *nepēš* in the Books of Samuel. Admittedly, their first protagonist – Anna, Samuel’s mother – utters the words: *wā ’ešpōk ’et-napšī lipnē YHWH* (1 Sam 1:15), in which the combination of the direct object *’et-napšī* with the root *špk* could suggest that the woman’s soul is seen as a kind of liquid substance; perhaps blood (*haddām hū hannāpeš*; Deut 12:23).<sup>63</sup> However, the Bible does not mention anything about storing human blood, as the Law commands to pour it (*špk*) on the ground like water, separating it from the *bāšār* (Deut 12:24).

<sup>56</sup> In addition, it is used three times in regard to the priest Eli (1 Sam 1:15,26/x2/), five times in regard to Saul (four times it is done by David [1 Sam 24:9; 26:17,18,19], and once by Ahitub [1 Sam 22:12]), once in regard to Achish (1 Sam 29:8), and twice in regard to an unnamed servant owner (1 Sam 30:13,15).

<sup>57</sup> “to be in trouble/distress,” “to torment” (LXX: *thlibō*; 1 Sam 28:15; 30:6; 2 Sam 13:2; 22:7), “to worry” (LXX: *algō*; 2 Sam 1:26) or “to be in dilemma/danger” (LXX: *stenōs/-a [eimi] + dativus*; 1 Sam 13:6; 2 Sam 24:14).

<sup>58</sup> Note that only in 1 Sam 25:29 and 2 Sam 20:3 is it used in the form of a passive participle – as in Exod 12:34 and Hos 13:12, where it refers to “wrapping” the unleavened dough at the time of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt or “hiding” the iniquity of Ephraim. The LXX translator uses the *participium perfecti passivi* of the verb *endeō*, which corresponds to the Hebrew *qšr*, in 1 Sam 25:29 (cf. Exod 12:34).

<sup>59</sup> LXX: (*en*)*desmos* “sack” (Gen 42:35), “bag” (Prov 7:20), “purse” (Hag 1:6). Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 301; Keil – Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 530.

<sup>60</sup> LXX: *apodesmos* “pouch” (Song 1:13).

<sup>61</sup> Holladay – Koehler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic*, s.v. *שָׁפָךְ*.

<sup>62</sup> Whether these vessels were intended to hold the *ka* or the *ba* is uncertain. The origin of the hieroglyph and the term *hotep* point to a human *ka*, but in the context of food offerings they were used to indicate a divine-human *ba*. In the absence of a resolution to this dilemma, the name *soul house* or *Seelenhaus* was introduced to describe these artifacts. Petrie, *Gizeh and Rifeh*, 14–20.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs*, s.v. *שָׁפָךְ*.

The LXX proposes a different concept, explaining  $\text{ṣ}^{\text{e}}\text{r}^{\text{o}}\text{r}$  in Job 14:17 with the term *ballantion*. In the Bible, it is usually used to refer to a pouch (Tob 1:14; Prov 1:14) and a purse (Tob 8:2), and four times to a money belt/bag (Luke 10:4; 12:33; 22:35,36). The idea refers to the Middle Eastern custom of keeping valuables in a *kattu*.<sup>64</sup> The content of 25:29b in TgJon confirms this interpretation: *ūt<sup>e</sup>hê napšā deribbônî genizā bignaz hajê almā qōdām YHWH 'ēlāhāk*. The Aramaic *g<sup>e</sup>naz* indicates a certain type of vault. The author of the Babylonian *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* (12:5) assumes the same tone, quoting 1 Sam 25:29: “He took the Holy One, the Blessed LORD, the breath [of him that was] Moses, and placed it [in the vault] under the throne of glory (as it is said: *w<sup>e</sup>hājṭāh nepeš 'ādōnī ṣ<sup>e</sup>rūrāh biṣrōr haḥajjīm*).”

The Talmud *Shabbat* presents the same idea:

It was taught that Rabbi Eliezer says: The souls of the righteous are stored beneath the Throne of Glory, as it is stated: *w<sup>e</sup>hājṭāh nepeš 'ādōnī ṣ<sup>e</sup>rūrāh biṣrōr haḥajjīm*. And the souls of the wicked are continuously tied up, and one angel stands at one end of the world, and another angel stands at the other end of the world, and they sling the souls of the wicked back and forth to one another, as it is stated: *w<sup>e</sup>'et nepeš 'ōjbēkā j<sup>e</sup>qall<sup>e</sup>ennāh b<sup>e</sup>tōk kap haqqāla'* (bSh 152b:7).

The literature also includes the option of interpreting the *nepeš* in 25:29 as an *external soul*. In this case, the term  $\text{ṣ}^{\text{e}}\text{r}^{\text{o}}\text{r}$  could only secondarily be understood symbolically, its primary sense referring to beliefs from primitive religions, according to which a person's “external soul” could be separated from the body while the body is still alive.<sup>65</sup> Given the lack of traces of this concept in Old Testament theology, it must be rejected when interpreting Abigail's words.<sup>66</sup>

The Millennium Bible and other modern translations of Job 14:17 omit *biṣrōr* from the translation, contenting themselves with the phrase “sealed up,” referring to the *ḥtm* predicate. However, this raises the question of how the  $\text{ṣ}^{\text{e}}\text{r}^{\text{o}}\text{r}$  may have been

<sup>64</sup> According to the classic commentary by Lewis Hughes (*Analysis of the First Book*, 136), everything important and valuable was called *kattu* or “pouch” in Middle Eastern culture. The exegete cites ancient idioms describing the justice of a judge's sentence: “bound in the pouch of justice” or belonging to a particular social group: “bound in the pouch of a high caste.” In this vein, the expression used by Abigail in 25:29 could express both David's value and security.

<sup>65</sup> This notion was born under the influence of the idea of the *external soul* presented in the comparative analysis of religions by James G. Frazer (*The Golden Bough*, 268–323).

<sup>66</sup> In his commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, Moshe Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1–20*, 240) rejects the attempt to interpret Ezek 13:20 as “capturing” the *disembodied soul*. In contrast, Richard C. Steiner, following Frazer, who juxtaposes 1 Sam 25:29 and Ezek 13:20, based on the Mishnah, demonstrates the similarity of the semantic fields of  $\text{ṣ}^{\text{e}}\text{r}^{\text{o}}\text{r}$  and *keset* and argues in favor of the Greek translation of Ezek 13:20, suggesting that the place of “capture” of the soul is the *proskēfalaion*, i.e., *pillow-casing*. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 43–45.

sealed. This option would be more valid for a scroll or letter.<sup>67</sup> Thus arose the hypothesis of an analogy between *š<sup>e</sup>rôr haḥajjîm* in 1 Sam 25:29 and *sēper ḥajjîm* in Ps 69:29.<sup>68</sup> The latter as a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament recurs in the New Testament as a *biblion* (*biblos*) *tēs zōēs*,<sup>69</sup> while the idea of a “book of life” is found in Old Testament writings (Exod 32:32; Isa 4:3; Dan 12:1), apocryphal (*Jub.* 30:22; 36:10; *1 En.* 47:3; 108:3) and Talmudic writings. Thus, for example, according to the Talmud *Rosh Hashana*:

Three books are opened on Rosh Hashana: One of wholly wicked people, and one of wholly righteous people, and one of middling people. Wholly righteous people are immediately written and sealed for life; wholly wicked people are immediately written and sealed for death; and middling people are left with their judgment suspended from *Rosh Hashana* until Yom Kippur, their fate remaining undecided. If they merit, they are written for life; if they do not so merit, they are written for death (bRSh 16b:12).

The Talmud *Shabbat* refers to the same division, pointing out biblical references:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, also acts in this way. With regard to the bodies of the righteous, it states: *jābō’ šālôm jānūhū ‘al-mišk<sup>e</sup>bôtām* (Isa 57:2). And with regard to their souls, it states: *w<sup>e</sup>ḥājītāh nepeš ‘ādōnī š<sup>e</sup>rūrāh bišrôr haḥajjîm* (1 Sam 25:29). With regard to the bodies of the wicked, it states: *‘en šālôm ‘amar ‘ēlohaj lār<sup>e</sup>šā’im* (Isa 57:21), and with regard to their souls, it states: *w<sup>e</sup>’et nepeš ‘ōjbēkā j<sup>e</sup>qall<sup>e</sup>‘ennāh b<sup>e</sup>tōk kap haqqāla’* (1 Sam 25:29) (bSh 152b:6).

Traces of this line of interpretation can be seen in the Gospels. Upon the disciples’ return from their mission, Christ suggests that the true reason for their joy should be: *ta onomata hymōn eggegraptai en tois ouranois* (Luke 10:20). The verb *eggrafō* “to write” (*hapax legomenon* in the Gospels) in the *participium perfecti passivi* form and the interpretation of the phrase *en tois ouranois* as *totum pro parte* allows us to relate this verse to the Old Testament idea of a “book of life.” The notion of *almā* “forever/eternally” in TgJon points to a revisiting of this passage in the key of late-Judaic theology, according to which David’s *nepeš*’s stay in the *š<sup>e</sup>rôr haḥajjîm* was supernatural and timeless.

67 Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, 240–241; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 399; Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 590; Gavigan – McCarthy – McGovern, *Joshua–Kings*, 298; Omanson – Ellington, *A Handbook*, 533–534; Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 185.

68 The parallelism between *sēper* and *nōd* as “bottle” is found in Ps 56:9. However, God keeps in it not the *nepeš*, and not the *ḥajjîm* of the Psalmist, but his *dim’āh* “tears.” Both *b<sup>e</sup>nōdekā* and *b<sup>e</sup>siprātekā* in Ps 56:9 refer to YHWH (possessive suffix).

69 Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27; 22:19.

An important detail of Abigail's speech in 25:29 is the presence of the complement 'et YHWH 'ēlōhēkā, which the Millennium Bible renders, "with the Lord your God." The participle 'et here prompts us to ask whether YHWH, the God of David, will be together with him inside the š<sup>e</sup>rôr, or will the š<sup>e</sup>rôr be close to God? An analysis of similar structures in the HB<sup>70</sup> and the TgJon translation (qōdām YHWH 'ēlāhāk "before YHWH, your God") or the LXX (*para kyriō tō theō* "beside the Lord God" without the possessive suffix) suggests the latter option. Some authors hint at an analogy here to the New Testament image of life after death used by Paul: *apethanete gar kai hē zōē hymōn kekryptai syn tō Christō en tō Theō* (Col 3:3). This reference would indicate that the concealment of life (in Paul's case, there is no specification of place) occurs both "with God" (i.e., Christ) and "in God."

The second part of the *apodosis* in 25:29 is built on the principle of antithetical parallelism: *w<sup>e</sup> 'et nepes 'ōjbēkā j<sup>e</sup>qall<sup>e</sup> 'ennāh b<sup>t</sup>tōk kap haqqāla*. Of the 36 occurrences of the term 'ōjbīm in 1–2 Sam, it appears only once in the *singularis* (1 Sam 18:29 – the predicate of the sentence *wajhī šā 'ûl*), and its referents are Saul (four times), David, Ishbosheth the son of Saul, the Philistines (four times), other nations (four times) and unspecified "enemies" (the remaining occurrences), including "enemies of YHWH." The *pluralis* of the word 'ōjbēkā can have a generalizing meaning. While in the *protasis*, 'ādām may mean Saul, David's 'ōjbīm are a more numerous group, as indicated by the context of the entire 1–2 Sam (e.g., 2 Sam 7:9 – *kol- 'ōjbēkā*).<sup>71</sup> These enemies include the Philistine Goliath, to the fight against whom the terminology in 25:29c makes a clear allusion, or Absalom, whose death is connected with a similar curse (cf. 2 Sam 18:32).<sup>72</sup> The context of 1 Sam 24–26, suggesting a reading of 'ōjbēkā in 25:29 in the *totum pro parte* key, in this regard points above all to Saul (cf. 24:4,19; 26:8).

The expression *kap haqqāla* ' is a *hapax legomenon* in the HB. In this syntagma, the word *kap* is probably a later addition because the LXX translation *en mesō tēs sfendonēs* renders *Vorlage* as *b<sup>t</sup>tōk haqqāla*.<sup>73</sup> The noun *qela* ' in the sense of "sling" and the verb *ql* ' in the sense of "slinging" occur very rarely in the HB. In 1–2 Sam they appear only in the context of David's battle with Goliath (1 Sam 17:40,49,50). Slings as a military formation are mentioned in Judg 20:16 and 2 Kgs 3:25. TgJon

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Gen 4:1; Num 20:13; Isa 49:4.

<sup>71</sup> This structure suggests a singular sense of *nepes*, a unitary conception of all of David's enemies. However, it is more likely that the author used the term – as in many places in the HB – in the distributive singular characteristic of Semitic languages (applicable to body parts, for example). This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the term in the plural form *b<sup>n</sup>apšōtām* appears only in 2 Sam 23:17. Hence, in the syntagma in 25:29, *nepes* can also be translated as the plural "souls."

<sup>72</sup> Still, another meaning of David's enemies is suggested by TgJon, which renders 'ōjbēkā by *ba'ālē d<sup>e</sup>bābāk* as "men murmuring [against] you," including Saul (1 Sam 18:8), the Keilah leaders (1 Sam 23:12), Nabal (1 Sam 25:10–11), the Philistine princes (1 Sam 30:4), the Jebusites (2 Sam 5:6), and even Michal (2 Sam 6:16,20), who for this reason remains barren until her death (2 Sam 6:23).

<sup>73</sup> McCarter, *I Samuel*, 394.

does not mention the inside of the sling but instead focuses on the act of slinging, comparing the *nepeš* to slinging stones: *w<sup>e</sup>jat n<sup>e</sup>paš ba'älê d<sup>e</sup>bābāk japr<sup>e</sup>hīnāh k<sup>e</sup>mā d<sup>e</sup>mapr<sup>e</sup>hīn 'abnā b<sup>e</sup>qal'ā*.<sup>74</sup> The sling stones (*abnē qela'*) are mentioned both in historical texts (2 Chr 26:14) and in poetic passages in a symbolic sense (Job 41:28; Zech 9:15). In this sense, the HB also uses the verb *ql'* in Jer 10:18, in the oracle of judgment and condemnation, to describe the exile of the Israelites.

The most valuable context for interpreting the antithetical juxtapositions in 25:29 is the pericope about David's battle with Goliath (1 Sam 17:1–58), particularly verses 17:40 and 17:49. The former contains two *hapax legomena* in the HB, the phrase *k<sup>e</sup>lī hārō'im*, translated in the LXX: *kadion (poimenikon)*, and in the Millennium Bible as a “shepherd's bag” (17:40,49), and the noun *jalqūt*, translated as “pocket” (in the LXX *sylogē*, also a *hapax legomenon*). Can these two things be equated with the *š<sup>e</sup>rōr* of 1 Sam 25:29? The answer to this question depends on another issue – how legitimate is the analogy between *nepeš* and *'eben*? It would appear that stones are not valuable enough to serve in biblical texts as a representation of the human soul, although in 1 Sam 25:37, one can come across a fragile basis for this comparison. The description of Nabal's death is concluded with the phrase *w<sup>e</sup>hū hājāh l<sup>e</sup> 'āben*, “and he became as a stone.”<sup>75</sup> In this interpretation, some see an analogy between 1 Sam 25:29 and the expression *haššām napšēnū bahajjīm* in Ps 66:9. This reading would make it possible to interpret the word *hajjīm* not as an abstract noun (“life,” *plurale tantum*) but as a concrete one (“living,” natural *pluralis*).<sup>76</sup> In this case, the word *š<sup>e</sup>rōr* would be the congregation of the living or the place of such a gathering (cf. *'aršōt haḥajjīm*, “the land of the living” in Ps 116:9).<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the word *hajjīm* appears only twice more in 1 Sam (1 Sam 17:26,36), always in the expression *'ēlōhīm ḥajjīm*, which can be translated: “the living God” or “the God of the living.”<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> The author of TgJon abandons the repetition of the *ql'* root, doubling the *prh* root. Its primary meaning is “to blossom, to sprout buds,” only secondarily “to fly.” Once again, Ezek 13:20 returns in this context, in which souls (*hann<sup>e</sup>pāšōt* in the pluralis form) are twice likened to *pōrehōt* “flying, birds” (this translation of the root *prh* occurs in the HB only here).

<sup>75</sup> Karl Budde (*Die Bücher Samuel erklärt*, 167) is critical of this interpretation of David's *nepeš*'s stay in the *š<sup>e</sup>rōr* as a shepherd's bag, making the argument that all the stones in the slinger's bag are destined to be removed from it. Youngblood put forward another theory in this cultural context, which proposed a vision of two shepherd's bags, one containing food, which would be considered a “bag of life.” In contrast, the other, containing stones, would be viewed as a “bag of death” (Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, 760).

<sup>76</sup> Johnson, *Vitality*, 107.

<sup>77</sup> The expression *'eres (ha)hajjīm* recurs in prophetic (Isa 38:11; 53:8; Jer 11:19; Ezek 26:20; 32:23–27,32) and wisdom books (Job 28:13; Ps 27:13; 52:5; 142:6). It refers in the original sense to the earthly realm and, in particular, to the promised land. Associating it with the idea of being before the Lord (*lipnē YHWH/ 'ēlōhīm* in Ps 56:13 while correcting the vocalization to *b<sup>e</sup> 'ūr YHWH*) and seeing His goodness (*r'h b<sup>e</sup> 'tūb YHWH*) are behind the notion that *'eres (ha)hajjīm* is a temple or even a place of eternal life. Barré, “rš (h)hyyim,” 37–59.

<sup>78</sup> In the LXX, the expression *theos zōntōn* is absent, appearing only in the Gospels in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead (Matt 22:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38).

The hypothesis considering the *nepeš* in 25:29 as *'eben j<sup>e</sup>qārāh* can be cited as the latest in this line of interpretation.<sup>79</sup> The expression appears in 2 Sam 12:30 to describe the stone found in the crown of the king of Rabbah that David took. After all, if David's *nepeš* were to find its way into a shepherd's bag or purse, it would be a precious stone. Isa 28:16 returns to this idea, in which the chosen (*bōhan*) and precious stone (*jiqrat*) will be laid on Zion (*jsd b<sup>e</sup>šijôn*), that is, in the City of David, as a foundation (*pinnāh*). A New Testament retelling of this passage will relate it to Christ (1 Pet 2:6), calling Him and those believing in Him *lithoi zōntes* "living stones" (1 Pet 2:4,5).

### Conclusions: Theological Implications of the Metaphorical Use of the Word *nepeš* in 1 Sam 25:29

Verse 1 Sam 25:29 is part of a pro-Davidic (post)deuteronomistic elaboration of an older source reporting on the genesis of the marriage of Jesse's son to Abigail, and in the current version of the book legitimizes David's position in opposition to King Saul, allegorically represented by Nabal in 25:2–42.<sup>80</sup> Because of the use of the term *b<sup>e</sup>rākāh* in 25:27, although its referent is Abigail's gift to David, the verse can be interpreted as a blessing – invoking YHWH's special care for the pretender to the throne. It fits in with the Old Testament theology of retribution: *n<sup>e</sup>bālīm* acting against God's reason and will (Nabal, Saul) become His *'ōjbīm*, bringing upon themselves the curse and wrath of YHWH, and consequently death, while David – by contrast, shown as wise and good – enjoys God's blessing and peace. The double *apodosis* in this verse also juxtaposes two profiles of the monarchy. A system built on morally objectionable deeds – lust for power, envy, and aggression – is rejected by YHWH and the people. Only the order based on peace, justice, prudence, and loyalty is accepted. In accordance with Abigail's prediction and wish, this order will extend beyond David's earthly life, giving rise to a Judean royal dynasty.<sup>81</sup>

Expressing the same theological construct are the corresponding ideas of being "bound in the bundle" (25:29b) and "making a house" (25:28). The durability of the house of David erected by YHWH, expressed by the doubling of the predicate *'sh* in *infinitivus absolutus* in 25:28, is shown in the light of a similar reduplication in 25:29 (*š<sup>e</sup>rūrāh bišrōr* and *j<sup>e</sup>qall<sup>e</sup>'ennāh... haqqāla'*). The active subject – YHWH – should be interpreted similarly in these verses. In 25:28, it is expressed explicitly,

<sup>79</sup> Although the Old Testament does not explicitly voice the idea of the preciousness of *nepeš*, implicitly, this idea is expressed in Ps 116:15, which states that precious (*jāqar*) in the eyes of YHWH is "the death of His saints" (*hammāwtāh laḥšāsdāw*). Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, 427.

<sup>80</sup> Garsiel, Wit, *Words and a Woman*, 160.

<sup>81</sup> Dziadosz, *Monarcha*, 377.

in 25:29b using the *passivum theologicum* form, and in 25:29c – implicitly, hiding behind the phrase *'et JHWH 'ēlōhēkā*. The editor behind the immediate context of Abigail's blessing (25:28–31) insists, first, that YHWH Himself is the Lord of history, not the *'ādām* mentioned in the *protasis* or even David. It is God's will that is fulfilled in all the events described in 1 Sam 25, and expanding the narrative perspective, also in the entire series about David's rise to power (1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:5). Second, it is suggested that the fulfillment of God's benevolent will for David is inevitable and certain, independent of the plans, intentions, and schemes of his adversaries. Third, it is foretold that YHWH's actions will extend beyond David's earthly life and that David's *nepeš* will last in the “enduring house” (*bajit ne 'ēmān*; 1 Sam 25:28) made for him by God, that is, in the dynasty composed of his descendants.<sup>82</sup>

An important and unique theological idea in 25:29 is the image of God, who, as noted in the title of this paper, can be both keeper and enemy of human *nepeš*.<sup>83</sup> The interpretation of *š'ror* as *k'li hārō'im* would point to God as a shepherd – gentle and strong at the same time,<sup>84</sup> who cares for His sheepfold, defending it, like David, from attacks by fierce wild animals.<sup>85</sup> 1 Sam 17:20 notes that David, setting out to fight Goliath, entrusts his sheep to a keeper (*šōmēr*). The keeper's mission and tasks are an attribute of YHWH in the HB and are also referred to as one of His names (cf. Ps 116:6; 121:3,5; 146:9). Verse 25:29 demonstrates this attribute of God

<sup>82</sup> This idea should be interpreted in the key of David's pro-monarchic covenant theology (2 Sam 7:11–12), in which “making a house” is still a future act (*bajit ja'āseh l'kā YHWH*, usually expressed with the *imperfectum* form), and which will only become a reality after David's death (*ki jml'ū jāmēkā*). The ascension (*qm* in *hifil*) of David's descendant to the throne will not result from the king's actions but entirely from YHWH's initiative. Thus, the idea of blessing/protection given to David's *nepeš* will extend beyond his earthly existence.

<sup>83</sup> Although YHWH is not explicitly referred to as the “enemy” (*'ōjēb*) of the individual or collective protagonists described at any point in 1–2 Sam, the book does speak of “enemies of YHWH” (1 Sam 30:26; 2 Sam 12:14), which would imply the conclusion that YHWH is also their enemy. The idea of the transition of animosity from Israel to YHWH, on the other hand, is directly expressed in Exod 23:22, where the *apodosis* of the conditional clause, whose *protasis* includes the condition of obeying the angel of YHWH and doing the will of God, reads as follows: *w'ājabti 'et-ōjbēkā w'šarti 'et-šōr'ekā* “I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.” It is the *hapax legomenon* of the root *'jb* in the verbal form in the HB. In the immediate context of Abigail's blessing, the sorry fate of YHWH's enemies is shared by Nabal and Saul.

<sup>84</sup> A similar juxtaposition is found in Isa 40:10–11, where seemingly inconsistent attributes of God appear side by side. For He comes “with might” (*b'hāzāq*), observing the principle of retribution (*šakar, p'ullāh*), and His arm “rules” (*ūz'rōō mōš'lah*), and at the same time, He is “like a shepherd” (*k'rōeh*) who “gently leads” (*nhl*), “carries them in His bosom” (*ns' b'hēqō*), and “gathers” in His arms (*bizrōō j'qabbēš*). A parallel is replicated in 1 Pet 2:25, where Christ is called “shepherd and overseer of souls” (*poimēn kai episkopos tōn psychōn*), and His might, according to New Testament theology, is shown not as a military victory but as perseverance in the paschal suffering on the cross.

<sup>85</sup> In 1 Sam 17:34–37, the argument for David's courage and strength in the context of the battle against Goliath is the threefold praise of his victorious struggles against two kinds of wild animals: the lion (*'ūri*) and the bear (*dōb*). These animals will resurface in 2 Sam 18 as an allegorical representation of the warriors in his war against Absalom.

toward David with the idea of preserving/keeping his soul/life in a safe place under His constant care. At the same time, verse 25:29 depicts YHWH using the image of the warrior God (YHWH *'iš milhāmāh*). This image certainly does not communicate the idea of His universal salvific will for the people. In Abigail's words, the thematic parallel of this image is the comparison of David's/YHWH's enemies to stones slung out from a sling whose fate is insignificant and is immediately obliterated. These metaphors illustrate the rather exclusive vision of salvation presented by the (post)deuteronomistic editor of the book, according to which only those who are in the *š'ērōr haḥajjīm* with YHWH are the recipients of God's care and beneficiaries of His salvific activity. Taking the idea of being in the presence of YHWH as a theological interpretation of the religious and cultural metaphor of *š'ērōr haḥajjīm*, one would think that only those who are His chosen ones (David and his allies) could count on the gift of His protection. At the opposite end of the spectrum, however, are those "spilling blood" and "fools" (Nabal, Saul), whom YHWH considers enemies. Against them, "the battles of the Lord" are fought (25:28), and God slings out their souls/lives as from the hollow of a sling (25:29).

In Abigail's blessing, God is shown as the one who wields royal power. David deserves this divine choice and office because he is a warrior who fights "the battles of the Lord" (25:28)<sup>86</sup> in contrast to Saul, who fights "[his subjects'] battles" (1 Sam 8:20)<sup>87</sup> in an attempt to shed David's innocent blood (1 Sam 18–26). The immediate context of verse 25:29 suggests that David may have squandered his chance to gain kingship by recklessly shedding Nabal's blood, but God Himself, through Abigail, saved him from doing so. This motif recurs throughout the concentrically arranged section of 1 Sam 24–26, at the center of which remains David's meeting and conversation with Abigail. The moral evaluation of "lifting a hand against YHWH's anointed one," which is Saul, or attempting to kill the cynical Nabal, is clearly separate in this context from David's earlier battle with Goliath or his expeditions against the Philistines. In the first two cases (Saul, Nabal; 1 Sam 24–26), the shedding of blood would have been an aggravating circumstance for David.<sup>88</sup> This is why 1 Sam 25 emphasizes that ultimately it was not his merits but the will of YHWH that determined his ascension to the throne.<sup>89</sup>

To give an integral biblical definition of God's protection of David's *nepeš* in 1 Sam 25:29, two complementary perspectives must be considered. The first is historical and indicates a real threat to David's life due to Saul's pursuit (*rdp*). From

<sup>86</sup> Klein, *1 Samuel*, 251; Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 250.

<sup>87</sup> Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, 760.

<sup>88</sup> This motif will return in the stories on the succession to the throne (2 Sam 13–20; 1 Kgs 1–2), in which David will first have to deal with Shimei's accusation that he is a "man of blood" (*iš dāmīm*; 2 Sam 16:8), and later his successor Solomon will make sure that "innocent blood" (*d'mê ḥinnām*; 1 Kgs 2:31) does not weigh on him and his father's house.

<sup>89</sup> Biddle, "Ancestral Motifs," 635.

this point of view, it undoubtedly relates to protecting his earthly life. The fact that David escaped the threat of death that eventually befell Nabal, Saul, and many other figures associated with the war for power in Israel<sup>90</sup> and then ruled in peace in Judah and Israel, in the key of 25:29, is the fruit of God's blessing. This stage of David's life is summarized in the words of YHWH spoken by the prophet Nathan: *wā'akritāh 'et-kol-ōjbēkā mippānekā* (2 Sam 7:9). The second perspective is religious and points to David's *nepeš* relationship with God, analogous to his relationship with Jonathan.<sup>91</sup> The last information about Jonathan before his death (1 Sam 23:18) confirms these two friends' parting of ways. In light of the words of Abigail's blessing (25:29), David will not be left alone on his journey to power. The place of the close relationship with Saul's son will be taken by his relationship with YHWH, which will be expressed in a similar "bonding" (*qšr/šrr*), a personal closeness expressed in "clinging" to God (*'et YHWH 'ēlōhēkā*).<sup>92</sup> And an attitude of faithful and sincere love (*'hb*), which, with regard to Jonathan, was rendered by the comparison "loved him as his own soul/ as himself" (*kēnapšō*; 1 Sam 18:1).

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<sup>90</sup> After Abigail's words in 1 Sam 25:29, Saul (1 Sam 31:1–13), the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites (1 Sam 27:9,11; 30:17; 2 Sam 1:15), Saul's sons and potential successors to the throne: Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malkishua are killed (1 Sam 31:2), followed by Ishbaal (2 Sam 4:6–7) and his murderers Rechab and Baanah (2 Sam 4:12), as well as Asahel (2 Sam 2:23) and Abner (2 Sam 3:27).

<sup>91</sup> The beginning of the relationship between David and Jonathan in 1 Sam 18:1 is described using a literary metaphor: *nepeš j'hônātān niqšerāh b'nepeš dāwid*. The LXX, rendering the same verb *endeō*, uses the synonymous roots *qšr* and *šrr*, although it omits the very verse 1 Sam 18:1. The use of *nifal* without an agent suggests *passivum theologicum* here, and thus the idea that YHWH would be the one who causes David and Jonathan's close "bond."

<sup>92</sup> Johnson, *Vitality*, 107.

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