DIVINE STORY-TELLING AS SELF-PRESENTATION: AN ANALYSIS OF SŪRAT AL-KAHF

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By

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This dissertation explores the application of narrative analysis to five Qur’anic stories in Sūrat al-Kahf, the eighteenth chapter of the Qur’ān. Traditional Qur’ānic exegesis treats the narratives atomistically, giving great attention to the historical details, whilst contemporary Western scholarship approaches Qur’ānic narratives from literary-textual analysis that focuses on plot, characters, and recently literary features such as chiasmus. These approaches do not shed light on the deeper aims and psyche of the Speaker except that God recounts them to offer moral lessons. The purpose of this study is to engage the question of how narratives are functioning in the Qur’ān. This dissertation specifically asks whether they are fulfilling didactic aims using history or whether they are serving as a medium through which we can come to know God?

This study presents one way to possibly understand God’s motives in telling the stories by applying narrative analysis. As such, the narratives of Sūrat al-Kahf are approached with these key questions: Why is the narrator telling the story? What is the point of the narrative? How does the narrator organize his story to make his point? In exploring these questions multiple new insights into the notion of Qur’ānic subjectivity emerge. This thesis argues that God, the sustained Speaker, is ultimately using His narratives to construct and develop His superior ‘Self-image.’ In closely tracing the distribution of this Self-image throughout the narratives, various linguistic devices and strategies are discovered for how God constructs His narratives as
‘personal’ narratives. Through such techniques, we find that a multifaceted presentation of God as *al-walī*, ‘The Protector,’ alongside other virtues such as God as *al-qādir*, ‘The Omnipotent,’ and God as *khayr-un thawab-an wa ‘uqban*, ‘The Best giver of reward and punishment’ emerge as dominant attributes that also provide the sūra with coherency.
To my parents,
for their continuous love and unfailing support.

And to Naveed and Zayd,
I would not have finished this dissertation without you!

Rabia K. Bajwa
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Qurʾān and Narrative Analysis

I. Introduction

In the conclusion of Discovering the Qurʾan, Neil Robinson states that “As a literary text, the Qurʾān is at first reading extremely bewildering. It seems to defy analysis.”¹ The Qurʾān defies literary analysis because it is not a literary text. The Qurʾān is speech whose origins are oral. In the Muslim tradition it is considered the direct speech of God, word for word. God spoke this dramatic monologue through an intermediary angel to the Prophet Muhammad (d. 11/632) in the seventh century over a period of twenty-three years. The Meccan culture at that time was fundamentally oral, so Muhammad in turn orally communicated these spoken Qurʾānic revelations to his community. The Prophet also had a number of transcribers to whom he would dictate the oral revelations, who would then transcribe the Qurʾān into a written form that he and others primarily used as mnemonic aids.² Campanini asserts that, despite the evidence of the Qurʾān being written down at the time of the Prophet, “the main way of memorizing and transmitting the Qurʾān would still be oral.”³ Nonetheless, in this sense it is believed that the process of ‘codifying’ the Qurʾān began at the time of Muhammad himself. A final written collection of the whole Qurʾān was eventually commissioned, through various rigorous means of confirming accuracy, by the third caliph ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (d. 36/656). This copy, the ‘Uthmānic Recension,’ became the official redaction of the sacred book that Muslims today

¹ Robinson, Discovering the Qurʾan, 285.
continue to read. Schoeler importantly observes that “at no point did the ‘Book’ (al-kitāb) cease to be regarded as the orally recited word of God, not even after its definitive written canonization in the ‘Uthmānic codex.” For the purposes of my study, its muṣḥaf ‘book’ form can thus be better understood as a transcription of God’s speech.

As such, a great folly in the field of Qur’ānic studies has been the continuous analysis of Qur’ānic discourse from a literary-textual perspective that is guided by the question, “what is the Qur’ān?” This question examines the literary, or as Hoffman argues recently, the poetic techniques, which make the text or the poetic speech effective. The conclusions of such research on the Qur’ān are in the end mainly observations of textual phenomena and the identification of varying thematic sections. A number of recent works illustrate this. Sells, for example, found that early Meccan sūras contain key acoustic features that are used to heighten meaning within particular passages. With respect to the thematic division of Qur’ānic content, Robinson’s literary analysis lead him to the conclusion that the Qur’ān is divided into the following six ‘registers:’ polemic, eschatology, God’s personal communication with the Messenger, the signs of God’s power and beneficence, lessons from history, and the status and authenticity of the revelation. A division I will return to later on. In another literary study, Welch in probing the various shifts of thematic content and similarities in the so-called “punishment-stories” focuses on isolating formulaic features, such as rhetorical questions, introductory formulas and particles such as thumma ‘then,’ to guide his analysis of the stories in the Qur’ān. He advances an

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important observation that the varying and parallel formulaic features reflect a way that major themes of the Qur’ān are presented over an extended period of time to account for an evolving audience and, hence, no two accounts or ‘stories’ are identical in the Qur’ān. But his analysis stops there due to the limitations of what literary analysis or literary theory can offer in attempting to arrive at a holistic explanation of how the narratives and the presentation of their style are operating within the Qur’ān.

One way to broaden the understanding of the Qur’ān is to draw from methodological tools and concepts that redirect analysis away from the text and bring us to behind the text where the Speaker’s aims and motives rest. These aims and motives shape and control the discourse we see and, at times, are the most challenging to determine. A discipline that could guide a contemporary analysis of these aims is the field of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis analyzes speech whose origins are oral. Through its robust development over the past few decades it stands to offer multiple insights into what speakers do with language and how. I believe that exploring the application of these tools and frameworks can further the comprehension of many of the existing observations on the Qur’ān and will facilitate establishing a new nomenclature fitting to oral discourse.

To begin the investigation of the implications of merging discourse analysis and the Qur’ān, I propose a discourse analysis of some Qur’ānic narratives in this study. This is an inviting place to begin such an investigation for the reason that it seems that God loves to tell stories, evident by the fact that nearly a quarter of the Qur’ān is filled with narratives. To engage this form of discourse in the Qur’ān in light of the dominant place narrative has earned in current

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multidisciplinary research trends, makes this a novel and contemporary way to begin to see the Qurʾān in new light.⁹

My study specifically examines the five narratives that comprise the majority of sūra 18, Sūrat al-Kahf, ‘The Cave’ in an attempt to show that narrative analysis allows for a new understanding of the sacred book that namely reorients the focus back on to the Speaker and His communicative functions. To understand the significance of my contribution, it is helpful to first understand in what way the Qurʾān can be considered as spoken discourse and, then, outline the premises of the field of discourse analysis and its sub-field, narrative analysis.

1. Qurʾān as Spoken Discourse

Both traditional and modern scholars have studied the Qurʾān as a literary and historical text (their works will be reviewed in Chapter 3). In contrast, I treat the Qurʾān as a dialogic text whose characteristics are very close to those of spoken discourse. There are many features of Qurʾānic discourse that argue for its classification as a form of spoken discourse as opposed to a literary text. The strongest evidence is that Muslims believe that the Qurʾān is God’s direct speech ‘sent down’ and/or ‘conveyed’ as an oral phenomenon. Its transcription, though presented in a muṣḥaf ‘book’ form, must not be conflated with a traditional literary text.

The term ‘spoken discourse’ is used by discourse analysts to refer to language whose origins are oral, or spoken, in nature and not written. Brown and Yule explain that in spoken

⁹ Claude Gilliot, “Narrative,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3:517. See also Leyla Ozgur’s “Qurʾanic Stories: God as Narrator, Revelation as Stories” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011). This is a recent dissertation that explores the subject of God as narrator in the Qurʾān, however in her work she adapts a narratological perspective that once again is a branch of literary analysis that mainly investigates literary texts.
discourse the speaker “can observe his interlocutor and, if he wishes to, modify what he is saying to make it more accessible or acceptable to his hearer. The writer has no access to immediate feedback.”\(^\text{10}\) This integral characteristic of spoken discourse is evident in the form of an interaction between God and the first recipients of the Qur’ān. In a famous account of the reason for revelation of an āya in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, ‘The Joint Forces,’ it is narrated that a woman went to the Prophet and complained by saying “Oh Messenger of God, women are disappointed and at a loss!’ He said, 'How is that?' She replied, 'they are not mentioned [in the Qur'ān] with regard to good as are men.'\(^\text{11}\) Following this concern, it is reported that āya 35 of this sūra was revealed.\(^\text{12}\) Here, God mentions the rewards for both believing women and men in a style overtly marked by the repetitive usage of the feminine form:\(^\text{13}\)

\[
\text{For men and women who are devoted to God–believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often–God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward. [Q 33:35]}
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This is one example where God is ‘listening’ to his addressees and incorporates their immediate concerns into the Qur’ān. The incident illustrates the socially interactive and evolving nature, in its inception, of the Qur’ān, similar to spoken discourse.

The style of Qur’ānic discourse also contains many features that are recently being considered as features of spoken discourse as well. For example, Deborah Tannen identifies certain linguistic strategies such as the use of repetition, imagery/details and dialogue, which

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\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Translations in this study are taken from M.A.S Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). An āya is a Qur'ānic verse whose more accurate translation is a ‘sign,’ the is plural āyāt ‘signs.’ Also, please note that all italicizations within the Qur’ān translations are mine to highlight various details I am pointing out.
have been traditionally thought of as quintessentially “literary,” as ubiquitous conversational ‘involvement strategies.’ Speakers primarily use these involvement strategies to create interpersonal involvement.¹⁴ Such linguistic strategies exist throughout the Qur’ān and especially in Qur’ānic narratives and can therefore also be understood as conversational involvement strategies. A few examples of repetition that stand out are in the narratives of The Journey of Moses, with the occurrence of five repeated usages of the ‘We’ pronoun in a single short āya, and in The Young Men of the Cave with the occurrence of a repeated emphasis on the second person pronoun, you, in āya 18. In this same āya God also presents a detailed image, also common to Qur’ānic narratives, which functions as an involvement strategy. The listeners are brought into an intimate scene of what the inside of the cave looked like while the young men were sleeping it.¹⁵

2. Discourse Analysis and Narrative

Therefore in considering Qur’ān as spoken discourse, I analyze Qur’ānic narratives with the theoretical and methodological tools of discourse analysis, a discipline that takes spoken discourse as its area of study. Discourse analysis is a field transparent in its approach and aim: the study of language beyond the sentence.¹⁶ This study has been historically undertaken by two broad methodological approaches. The first linguist to coin the term “discourse analysis” was

¹⁵ Q 18:65: “And [they] found one of Our servants—a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own;” Q 8:18: “You would have thought they were awake, though they lay asleep. We turned them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance. If you had seen them, you would have turned and run away, filled with fear of them.” I have italicized the repeated pronouns in these āyāt to make them easier to recognize. Another example of repetition from this same narrative is that the plot of the story is described twice, once in the beginning in short summary form and then in full form.
¹⁶ Tannen, Talking Voices, 5.
Zellig Harris who defined discourse as “the next level in a hierarchy of morphemes, clauses, and sentences.” His approach was strictly structural, based on the analysis and classification of units of language. According to Schiffrin, “structurally based analyses of discourse find constituents that have particular relationships with one another and that can occur in a restricted number of (often rule-governed) arrangements.” Later definitions of discourse analysis continue to maintain this emphasis. For example, Stubbs emphasizes “larger linguistic units” over the pragmatic function. In his definition, discourse analysis:

attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language in use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers.

The other major approach to studying discourse is functional. Within this approach, the discourse analyst is “committed to an investigation of what language is used for,” and looks at how speakers construct linguistic messages for their addressees. As such, studies under this approach often draw on a number of other disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, and sociology. This dimension of discourse analysis is exemplified by Brown and Yule’s definition:

the analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs.

This approach takes into consideration the broader functional level of what speakers do with language and how they do it through various linguistic strategies and underlying structures rather than focusing on sentence level meaning or grammar. Schiffrin says that analysts adapting this

21 Ibid.
approach focus on “the way patterns of talk are put to use for certain purposes in particular contexts and/or how they result from the application of communicative strategies.” 22 From this perspective, discourse is essentially an intersection of language and context.

An excellent example of spoken discourse that clearly reflects the intersection of language and context is narrative. The study of spoken narrative has become increasingly prevalent within the field of discourse analysis so much that it has generated a new and interdisciplinary field called narrative analysis.

The analysis of spoken narratives in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis owes much to previous models of narrative analysis that came either from literary studies, represented by ‘narratologists’ such as Chatman (1969) and Prince (1973, 1982), who mainly described written and fictional narratives, or from folklore studies, exemplified by Propp (1968) who studied Russian folktales. 23 The narratologist model, for example, seeking to formulate the structure and “grammar” of a story, dismissed conversational narratives and other forms of naturally occurring narrative as insignificant to the study of the novel and other literary types of narration. 24 Fludernik believes that this dismissal resulted in the failure of the field of narratology to recognize the “common narrative essence underlying both natural and literary storytelling.” 25 In her seminal analysis of famous literary novels such as Jane Eyre and The Great Gatsby, Pratt showed instead that “literary and natural narratives are formally and functionally alike.” 26 For

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22 Schiffrin, Approaches to Discourse, 32.
25 Ibid.
example, just as speakers announce or preface their stories in some way and assume their ‘speaking position,’ titles of literary works “invite people to commit themselves to the audience role” and essentially serve as the novels’ preface or abstract.\textsuperscript{27} Such similarities, greatly significant to the study of narrative, are not surprising for Pratt since “both are attempts to render experience.”\textsuperscript{28}

The field of narrative analysis moved beyond the analysis of written texts and folktales. Its main source of linguistic data became oral or spoken narratives told in a variety of ‘natural’ settings. Labov, amongst the pioneers of narrative analysis, with his model of narrative analysis that developed in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s introduced the systematic study of oral narratives. He showed that this form of talk is in fact coherent, well structured, and full of significance. Since this study, the past four decades of narrative analysis has been dedicated to approaching and analyzing spoken narratives from a variety of perspectives, all of which trace its beginnings to Labov’s initial model. The definition for the term “narrative,” within the field of narrative analysis remains a basic issue.\textsuperscript{29} That the term “narrative” is ubiquitous and is used in many disciplines with various meanings also poses further challenges. However, a prototypical narrative, interchangeable with the term ‘story,’ is most often understood in discourse analysis and in many other disciplines as characterized by chronology. A story or narrative is therefore usually seen as a recounting of a past event.\textsuperscript{30} Labov’s definition of narrative is a “recapitulation

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{29} Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou, \textit{Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.
of past experience”. Yet, there are other definitions of narrative that deviate from this traditional characterization. Some scholars have foregrounded the element of conflict or “trouble” as defining a narrative. There is also a pragmatic way to conceive of narrative. Bruner describes narrative as an “all-purpose vehicle.” He writes that “…it not only shapes our ways of communicating with each other and our ways of experiencing the world, but it also gives form to what we imagine, to our sense of what is possible. With its aid, we pole vault beyond the presently expectable. And of course it shapes our conceptions of the past.” That narratives can afford such powers to humans has also shaped how scholars define narratives. Many scholars put forth narrative as epistemology. Under this approach, narratives are seen as an “antidote to rationality and the quantitative measures prevalent in the social sciences,” and essentially a powerful tool for the construction of knowledge.

To understand the place of narrative in social life, and the breadth of narrative, I turn to Ochs’s depiction of a world without narrative:

Imagine a world without narrative. Going through life not telling others what happened to you or someone else, and not recounting what you read in a book or saw in a film. Not being able to hear or see or read dramas crafted by others. No access to conversations, printed texts, pictures, or films that are about events framed as actual or fictional. Imagine not even composing interior narratives, to and for yourself. No. Such a universe is unimaginable, for it would mean a world without history, myths or drama; and lives without reminiscence, revelations and interpretive revision.

Ochs emphasizes the universality of narrative and its variety of genres. Narrative can either be understood in a limited way to mean a story or, in a broad sense, to include genres of literature,

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reports, sports, news broadcasts, plans, and agendas. At the most basic level, narratives are a discourse practice found in everyday ‘real’ talk or conversations. They can exist separately or appear embedded in other discursive practices such as arguments and prayers. These conversational narratives, referred to as everyday or ‘natural’ narratives, are themselves equally diverse. Fludernik touches on the variety of spoken narrative forms:

On the one hand, oral storytelling comes in a great variety of forms and shapes from spontaneous narration of personal experiences (natural narrative proper) to the telling of jokes and anecdotes, the retelling of other people's experience (narrative of vicarious experience), bare reports and summaries of events, the 'telling' of imaginary scenarios, all the way to the longer and culturally institutionalized forms which eventually developed into the epic and the folk tale.

A question that drives narrative analysis is why people tell narratives. Are narratives just about relating experiences? The first step in broaching this question is to understand that narratives do not appear out of a vacuum. De Fina writes that “narratives are seen as both produced and received from specific social and historical loci, and are therefore studied more as processes that emerge under certain socio-historical conditions than as finished products.” As such storytelling is a social practice shaped by and shaping multiple social contexts. In examining the interplay of these social and historical variables and the production of narrative, narrative analysts draw attention to the narrators’ multiple motivations. Reasons for telling stories include the desire to teach and to learn, to transcend the “here and now,” sharing emotions and attitudes, informing, arguing, entertaining, “unburdening” and positioning. De Fina and

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36 Ibid., 189.
37 Ibid., 187-188. See also De Fina and Georgakopoulou, Analyzing Narrative, 97-107. Here the authors look at how narratives are used as argumentative devices.
40 See introduction to De Fina and Georgakopoulou, Analyzing Narrative, 1.
41 See Deborah Schiffrin, Anna De Fina, and Anastasia Nylund, eds., Telling Stories: Language, Narrative and Social Life (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 1-6, and
Georgakopoulou also add that for individuals as well as groups “narrative tellings may serve as occasions for the exercise of power and domination and for the perpetuation or creation of social inequalities.” One of the most widely argued reasons for which people tell stories is self-presentation, or self-image: people mainly tell narratives to construct or to preserve certain images of themselves. Thus, narratives and identities are tightly connected. Even reputations of people and places are created with narrative. This is will be further elaborated on in Chapter 2 in my review of post-Labovian scholarship.

A major point of consideration in my analysis will be the question of self-presentation. Treating God as the Speaker, I draw parallels to what other speakers generally do with spoken narratives and argue that one way to understand God’s narratives is to also see them as a discourse strategy in which God is creating, developing and sustaining His superior identity. As such they can be considered as God’s own ‘personal’ narratives that He is recounting for certain reasons. In each of the forthcoming chapters, I examine how God constructs and maintains His ‘Self-image’ through the use of narrative. I specifically show that the narratives of Sūrat al-Kahf become a discursive practice through which God constructs an image based on three key divine attributes: God as al-walī ‘The Protector,’ al-qādir ‘The Omnipotent,’ and khayr-un thawāb-an wa khayr-un ‘uqban ‘Best giver of reward and punishment.’ These attributes pervade the narratives in various manifestations across each structural element, which inevitably dominate the recounted past events.

42 De Fina and Georgakopoulou, *Analyzing Narrative*, 125.
A pervasive yet subtle way by which God sustains His superior “Self-image” is in using constructed dialogue in the narratives. Constructed dialogue is the reproduction of voices in the Qur’ān, such as statements or dialogue of past prophets, angels, and even animals. In my study, following discourse analysis, I refer to all dialogue or statements other than God’s, as well as the statements He constructs that contain His own speech, known as the ‘Say!’ commands, as constructed dialogue. Reported speech in discourse analysis, also referred to as direct speech and speech representation, has been labeled by Deborah Tannen as constructed dialogue. She defines it as the “animation of speech framed as a voice other than the speaker’s.” For Tannen, it is “constructed” speech or dialogue and not “reported” or “direct speech” because “reported speech is not reported at all but is creatively constructed by a current speaker in a current situation.” The speaker includes dialogue within a speech or spoken narrative because of his/her communicative goals and perceptions.

Constructed dialogue in the Qur’ān is characteristically introduced by the verb qāla ‘to say,’ such as “Some said, ‘Construct a building over them: their Lord knows best about them’,” and “Say!: ‘God knows best how long they stayed’.” In the narratives of sūra 18, many important details such as emotions, thoughts and opinions of the characters are cast in the voice of others. For example, in The Young Men of the Cave, clauses dd to hh reveal perhaps the most specific details of the narrative: how the boys were eventually discovered by the townsfolk:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{dd} & \quad \text{But then others said, “Your lord knows best how long you have been here.} \\
\text{ee} & \quad \text{One of you go to the city with your silver coins,} \\
\text{ff} & \quad \text{find out where the best food is there, and bring some back.}
\end{align*}
\]

45 Tannen, Talking Voices, 1.
46 Ibid., 107-108.
47 Q 18:21, Q 18:26.
but be careful not to let anyone know about you.

If they found you out, they would stone you or force you to return to their religion, where you would never come to any good.”

Discourse analysis treats dialogue in storytelling, however, as a linguistic strategy that ultimately sheds light on the psyche and aims of the speaker. Because the speaker has the power to construct the dialogue they desire to present, factual or not, it has been found that speakers use constructed dialogue to serve many evaluative functions, such as ‘self-aggrandizement,’ to borrow form Labov’s terminology, or in other words it is a means by which speakers control and shape their self-image. As we can see above in clause dd, the idea of God ‘knowing best’ is cast in the character’s dialogue. The significant role constructed dialogue plays in narrative will be further elaborated on in Chapter 2. In each of my analysis chapters, I explore this linguistic strategy and examine how God is both constructing and managing dialogue as a means to reinforce and elucidate His Self-image.

Few scholars have approached Qur’ānic narratives from these perspectives, let alone from a discourse analysis perspective. While it is true that many revealing observations about Qur’ānic narratives have been expressed previously, which I will discuss in Chapter 3, due to the limitations of literary-analysis scholars have been unable to formulate complete or appropriate understandings of these observations or develop their ideas further. In my study, a few of these observations will be further expanded and explained using narrative analysis. The insights of narrative analysis into what speakers are doing in narratives inevitably lends Qur’ānic studies a new set of tools that when applied to God’s discourse results in a greater holistic understanding. Traditionally, Qur’ānic narratives have been considered as stories of past prophets that were told by God to offer moral lessons and to present analogous situations to the challenges the Prophet
Muhammad was going through during his prophethood. The traditional and popular focus is on the characters within the narratives so much that the narratives are recalled and told over and over again as forms of praise for particular prophets or non-prophets (such as most of the characters in the narratives of Sūrat al-Kahf with the exception of Moses) and what their actions and their personalities can teach people. The distinct genre of Qiṣas al-Anbiyā’ ‘Stories of Prophets’ and its popularity within Muslim culture is one such example of this approach to Qur’ānic narratives. Qur’ānic narratives have not been a place where one turns to for coming to know God. My analysis of the narratives reveals that they are more about God than the past events they recount or the characters in them. They should be considered as a linguistic means by which God not only presents His superior self-image, but that God also uses them as a validation for His own claims of needing to be accepted as The Superior being.

II. Methodology

The sūra that I have chosen to analyze for this study is Sūrat al-Kahf. Narrative is the dominant mode of communication in this sūra. It contains five vivid and dramatic narratives that make it read and sound more like a dynamic storybook filled with dialogue, imagery and action, than a plethora of commands, injunctions, or doctrine. The five stories are: The Young Men of the Cave (Q 18:9-26), The Master of the Garden (Q 18:32-44), Iblīs the Rebel (Q 18:50), The Journey of Moses (Q 18:60-82), and the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn, the “Possessor of the Two-Horns,” (Q 18:83-98). These narratives comprise 88 of the sūra’s 110 āyāt and, except for the telling of the Iblīs the Rebel story, are distinguished by the fact that they are not repeated elsewhere in the Qur’ān, as many other narratives are. For example, the narrative of creation and
many of the punishment stories, such as of Nūḥ and his people, and Lūṭ and his community are
told in several places. For these reasons, sūra 18 lends itself to a systematic analysis of its
narrative structures, including the analysis of each narrative, their larger discourse functions, and
the relationship between each of the narratives and to the sūra as a whole. One of the questions I
broach with respect to understanding the sūra as a whole is whether the narratives and their
structures contribute towards giving the sūra its naẓm ‘overall coherency.’

In each of the analysis chapters, I present the narratives in the format of a sociolinguistic
model of transcription, borrowed from Labov’s method of transcribing his narratives. They are
transcribed and organized around individual clauses distributed across lines. I break the lines
according to individual clauses, which contains minimally a subject and predicate. The narratives
are presented primarily in English translation while the tables showing the Labovian analysis
also contain the original Arabic. The English translation of the narratives is borrowed from
M.A.S. Abdel Haleem’s 2005 translation The Qur’an: A New Translation. I have made minor
adjustments in various places for the translation. For example, in some places I have omitted his
brackets that indicate his interpretation of the text. In āya 18:26 he inserts “[Some say]” which
reflects his opinion that this speech is of someone else’s, whereas I take the view that the
statement is God’s statement and hence do not include the bracket. Also, Haleem often
translates the Arabic conjunction fa as “and” which I translate as “so” in many places because it
correlates better with the function of the particular clause according to Labov. Haleem generally

48 For example, the narrative of creation, the story of Adam and Eve, the most repeated narrative in the Qur’ān, is
mentioned in Q 2:30-39, Q 7:11-25, Q 15:29-33, Q 17:61-66, Q 18:50-53, Q 20:116-123, and Q 38:71-85. The topic
of this form of revelation is called the doctrine of “serial” revelation related to al-ṭanji‘ and/or al-tadarruj implying
relies on the boundaries of an in formatting his paragraphs, but a Labovian approach often breaks up an āya into various narrative clauses. A given āya may contain up to six independent clauses each serving different functions. Nonetheless, as most translations do not capture the dynamic oral nature of the Qurʾān, or its polyvalent meanings, his translation is better than others in that it is a contemporary translation of the Qurʾān that tries to present the language in a modern style. It avoids literal translations of Arabic structures that sound unnatural in English. Although this translation is one of the better ones for reading the Qurʾān as a communicative text, its presentation style is still bound by literary concepts. For example, the concept of a ‘paragraph,’ constructed around a particular theme or concept remains literary. The beginning of a new paragraph is almost always marked by a new āya. With Labov, the āyāt are grouped together differently according to their group functions. Hence a line-by-line transcription, based on clauses, is the best format of presentation for a narrative analysis.

The theoretical underpinnings of this thesis draw mainly from narrative research conducted by Labov in his seminal work first appearing in 1967 in a joint article with Joshua Waletzky, under the title of “Narrative analysis: oral versions of personal experience”, (hereafter L&W) and then revised and extended in Labov (1972)’s chapter “The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax” in Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular. By studying narratives told by children and adults across races, in lower and middle class communities, Labov developed a systematic analytical framework for the analysis

49 The explanatory powers of Labov’s model are also demonstrated by the fact that many scholars have used Labov to analyze literary works. See Mary Pratt, Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse, in which she concludes that “literary and natural narratives are formally and functionally alike.” Pratt, Toward a Speech Act Theory, 66. See also Chikako Tanimoto, “Labovian Interpretation of ‘The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,’” Studies in Language and Culture31 (2009), 97-106 and J.E Bunselmany, “Faulkner’s Narrative Styles,” American Literature 53 (1981), 423-442.
of his speakers’ spoken accounts. This was the first attempt to arrive at the bare elements of narrative taken directly from ‘unsophisticated’ speakers who provided oral stories of their personal experiences. His basic thesis was that fundamental structures are to be found in spoken narratives of ordinary people and that more importantly, people transform past experiences into personally meaningful and significant narratives that serve to also express how they see themselves. Labov conceptualizes this last component as the greater evaluative function of a narrative—the most important function of a spoken narrative.

An important assumption upon which this project rests is that the oral narratives that Labov analyzed are similar to the narratives of Sūrat al-Kahf in their ‘occasion’ for telling, or in other words, their general discourse context. By this I mean that these are elicited narratives rather than spontaneous or ‘naturally occurring’ that many other narrative analysis models use for linguistic data. This is a principal reason why I believe Labov’s model is suitable for applying to the Qur’ānic narratives. Labov elicited his narratives by asking his interlocutors the question “Were you ever in a situation where you thought you were in serious danger of getting killed?” The interlocutors, in responding to this question, proceeded to tell their narratives of personal experience in which such “danger” occurred.50 I also consider God’s extended discourse in Sūrat al-Kahf, and therefore its narratives, an elicited form of discourse. It was revealed, ‘told,’ in one setting and does not overtly display any signs of interaction. This is a logical parallel to draw if one takes into consideration the traditional account of the sūra’s revelatory occasion or context. This is overviewed below and gives some insight into understanding how

50 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 363. In Chapter 2, I will go over the differences between Labov’s model and other models of narrative analysis and discuss the criticisms that have been moved to his approach related to this point of his narratives being “elicited.”
discourse in the Qur’ān operates—intersecting with the historical and social context.

III. Context

Ochs and Capps assert that many narratives of personal experience are “interwoven with what interlocutors are thinking and doing…and frequently, …are launched precisely to further a point made in the surrounding discourse.”51 This point also applies to the narratives of sūra 18, as well to the nature of Qur’ānic discourse with respect to its piece-meal revelatory manner. The Qur’ān was not revealed entirely in one communicative setting. It was communicated to the Prophet over twenty-three years of his lifetime. The result of this style of revelation is that communication was shaped by the social and historical context of the Prophet.52 Qur’ānic scholars distinguish, for example, between two larger periods of revelation—the Meccan period (610 to 622 A.D), in which the Prophet was living in Mecca, and the Medinan period (622 to 632 A.D), marked by the date of the Prophet’s migration to Medina until his death. In close analysis of the form and structure of the Qur’ān, many scholars highlight differences in the structure, style and contents of Qur’ānic discourse from these two historical periods.53 This is one indication of the idea that communication is shaped by local context. Another indication is the doctrine of abrogation ‘al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh.’ Bell succinctly describes this doctrine as the

52 It is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss the debate over the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur’ān. See Margaret Larkin, “The Inimitability of the Qur'an: Two Perspectives,” Religion and Literature 20:1, (1988), 31-47 for an overview of the debate and how it relates to the doctrine of inimitability.
idea that “certain commands to the Muslims in the Qur’ān were only of temporary application, and that when circumstances changed they were abrogated or replaced by others.”

Returning to the historical context of Sūrat al-Kahf, Nöldeke places it in the Middle Meccan period. It is comprised of 110 āyāt and was revealed approximately between 617 A.D. and 619 A.D. According to the traditional account of the Muslim community, historians and exegetes are in agreement about the historical incident that spawned the sūra’s revelation. It relates to the time when the Quraysh had almost exhausted their resources in trying to attack and discredit the Prophet. A few members of the Quraysh had gone to Medina to meet with Jewish rabbis in order to ask them what they knew of this man Muhammad claiming to be a prophet. The rabbis suggested to them to question the Prophet about a few past stories in order to validate whether or not he was a true prophet, as only a prophet would have knowledge of such events. The Jewish rabbis told the Quraysh to ask the Prophet three things: Who were the companions of the Cave? What is the rūḥ ‘spirit’? And what is the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn, ‘The Two-Horned One’? The rabbis added that if the Prophet answered these correctly then he was a true prophet and if not, he was an imposter. Upon returning to the Prophet in Mecca, the delegates asked him these three questions for which the Prophet’s reply was, “I will tell you tomorrow about what you have asked me.” As listeners become aware of in the first narrative of the sūra, the Prophet did not add to this reply, “If God wills,” ‘in shā’ Allāh. To penalize him for this mistake, God did not reveal anything to the Prophet for fifteen days. The Meccans started to doubt him during this

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56 The Quraysh were the dominant Arab tribe of Mecca at the time of the Prophet and were primarily pagans.
time, and the Prophet became greatly concerned. The awaited revelation came after fifteen days and sūra 18, which contains the answer to two of the three questions asked, was revealed to the Prophet in its entirety.\(^{59}\)

With this context of the sūra, essentially the only available information a narrative analyst can rely to construct some possible sense of how these narratives emerged, it can be argued that at least two of the narratives, *The Young Men and the Cave* and *Dhū l-Qarnayn* especially, are ‘formally’ elicited. It will be shown in the coming analysis chapters that the other three narratives told by God in between these two main narratives are also being recounted to enrich His particular message in this sūra.

**IV. Basic Elements of Qur‘ānic Discourse**

Another working assumption in this study is that God is the Speaker who is orally narrating several stories to the Prophet Muhammad. It is useful to explain two other stylistic feature of Qur‘ānic, also appearing in the narratives, so that the presentation of the narratives in the following chapters will be easier to read for those unfamiliar with Qur‘ānic style. These features relate to the issues of implied speaker and implied addressee. This section draws from a variety of sociolinguistic perspectives to broaden the frame of understanding of these discourse features.

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\(^{59}\) Very few longer sūras in the Qur‘ān were revealed as a whole. Sūra Yūsuf, Chapter 12, is the other one. As for the question about the *rūḥ*, “spirit,” exegetes differ on whether this was answered in Chapter 18 or in the previous chapter, Sūrat al-‘Isrā’, and thus it was not brought up again. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr ul-Qur‘ān*, 3:93.
1. **Implied Speaker**

What can be challenging for readers of the Qur’ān is the issue of the implied speaker and particularly the shifts in self-designation. Stylistically, God refers to Himself as either ‘We,’ using the first person plural, ‘He,’ using the third person or as ‘God,’ by his name. The predominant tool for self-designation in the five narratives of sūra 18 is the pronoun ‘We’ and its corresponding possessive pronoun ‘Our.’ In the following examples, God conveys His speech with the three different usages from each of the narratives:

**Table A:**

1. **Usage of ‘We,’ as first person plural:**

   “We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years,” (Q 18:11)

   “…For one of them We made two gardens of grape vines,” (Q 18:32)

   “…A man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own,” (Q 18:65)

2. **Usage of ‘God,’ as third person:**

   “This is one of God’s signs, those people who God guides are rightly guided,” (Q 18:17)

   “He had no forces to help him other than God – he could not even help himself,” (Q 18:43)

3. **Usage of ‘He,’ as third person:**

   “How well He sees! How well He hears!” (Q 18:26)

   “He gives the best rewards and the best outcome,” (Q 18:44)

Neal Robinson summarizes the various explanations for God’s use of the first person plural: they range from attributing ‘We’ to the royal and formal ‘We,’ to opinions of some exegetes that the ‘We’ is a self-designation of angels who are speaking in the Qur’ān as agents of God, to a minority opinion of other exegetes that ‘We’ is referring to God and the angels collectively.\(^\text{60}\)

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\(^{60}\) Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 224-255.
assume in this thesis that the ‘We’ in the narratives refers to God, one speaker exclusively, as the royal *pluralis maiestatis* ‘magisterial We.’ The reasons for His shifts, explained below, are related to various aspects of God presenting Himself in a particular light. In this study, the shifts of self-designation are fundamentally seen as discourse strategies.

Arabic rhetoricians have historically argued that the speaker’s reference to himself in the third person is part of Qur’ānic linguistic dynamism. Abdel Haleem in his work on the dynamic style of the Qur’ān stresses a few points on this:

The first and most important reason for God’s speaking about Himself in the third person relates to the fundamental message of the Qur’an—which is calling men to the religion of *tawḥīd* according to which ‘there is no god but Allah (God)’. The Islamic testimony begins with the negation of any other god, then moves on to accept only one, who is named Allah. No pronoun, even of the first person, will do here in place of the name…The Qur’ānic message is meant to be communicated to men naming Allah as the Lord they should serve…the Qur’ān, it should be remembered, is not an autobiography of Allah, which would cast it in the form of ‘I’ and ‘me’; it is revealed for men who will speak in their prayers and to each other about Allah.61

Abdel Haleem’s underlying viewpoint is that the Qur’ān is didactic discourse. With its language it teaches listeners how to praise and worship God. The argument states that a Qur’ānic expression such as “Praise be to God” (in the third person) is far more universally didactic in its essence than if it were “Praise be to me, or “All praise be mine.”

A. *Iltifāt*, ‘Shifting’

Another stylistic feature worthy of note, related to modes of speech, is the phenomenon known as *iltifāt* in the science of *balāgha* ‘rhetoric’. This accepted rhetorical practice in Arabic is a technique that is quintessential in Qur’ānic discourse. Linguistically it means ‘a turning,’ from

‘to turn one’s face to.’ The Arabic rhetorician, Badr al-Din al-Zarkashī (d.794/1391) defines it as:

…the change of speech from one mode to another, for the sake of freshness and variety for the listener, to renew his interest, and to keep his mind from boredom and frustration, through having the one mode continuously at his ear…Each of the first, second, and third persons, has its appropriate context in which it is used. The general opinion is that ʿiltīfāt is ‘transition’ from one of them to another after the first. Sakkākī said it is either this or it is using one in a place where another ought to have been used.  

This term specifically refers to a shift in mode of speech occurring between two coordinating utterances rather than, for example, in non-related utterances or sentences, as shown in the above examples in Table A. Those examples show that different self-designations are used throughout the narrative but never shift within a single utterance. A primary condition of ʿiltīfāt is that the pronoun referring to the person or thing one turns to has to refer to the same person or thing from which one turned. There are six types of ʿiltīfāt that occur in the Qurʾān; amongst the six there is only one type that occurs in The Young Men and the Cave, as an example, and it is the change in person, between first and third person.  

In this āya, God begins speaking with using ‘We’ but instead of saying ‘Our promise, which would correspond with ‘We,’ He refers to ‘God’s promise.’ The sudden shift between the two clauses, according to Abdel Haleem, creates multiple viewpoints in the discourse. The shift from first person to third person changes the perspective from that of the speaker to that of the

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62 Ibid., 187.
63 The six types are: 1. Change in person, between first, second, and third person; 2. Change in number, between singular, dual and plural; 3. Change in addressee; 4. Change in the tense of the verb; 5. Change in case marker; 6. Using a noun in place of a pronoun. See Haleem, Understanding the Qurʾan, 188.
The use of ‘We’ at first highlights the speaker’s action and agency in awakening them, and when it shifts to “they,” meaning the young boys of the story, the point of view shifts to their perspective that ‘God’s’ promise is true. The depiction of different perspectives also highlights the breadth at which communication is operating at in a given utterance. This style of discourse affects the readers and listeners in two ways: first, it is a style that captures their attention with sudden changes in self-designation, creating an awareness of who is speaking about whom and in what manner. Second, it is a mode that encourages listener involvement as the listeners’ perspective as the ‘people’ is woven into the discourse.

Another way of framing the phenomenon of iltifāt is to look at formal classifications of verbal communication. Jakobson, in blending linguistics and poetics, describes verbal communication as primarily expressive, conative or cognitive. He suggests that expressive communication centers on the speaker; conative communication centers on the addressee; and cognitive communication centers on the message. So when God designates himself as ‘We,’ this form of verbal communication is expressive, and when God uses ‘He’ or ‘God (Allah),’ the function is cognitive. Therefore when a shift from first person plural to third person singular occurs, it is a shift from expressive communication to cognitive. The speaker recalibrates his purpose in communication with each shift and successfully establishes variance in viewpoints.

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within two coordinating utterances. The result is a dynamic communication style in narrative discourse that is not restricted to a single mode.

An essential characteristic of the style of speaker self-designation in the five narratives – *The Young Men of the Cave, The Master of the Garden, Iblīs the Rebel, Dhū l-Qarnayn, and The Journey of Moses*– is that the predominant mode of verbal communication is expressive; a mode that focuses on the feelings, ideas, attitudes and experience of the speaker. For example, in *The Young Men and the Cave* narrative there are sixteen instances of first person plural usage throughout the story, outnumbering the third person singular usage that only occurs in four instances. In another narrative, *The Journey of Moses*, the repetition of the ‘We’ agency cannot go unnoticed by a reader or listener, in āya 65 where it occurs five times in a single utterance. One way to grasp this could be that God is reaffirming throughout the story His exclusive knowledge of the stories, such as the mystery as to how many years the young boys remained in the cave (a mystery that prompted Jewish rabbis to ask the Prophet if he knew anything of this story). God reassures listeners that the full story belongs to Him and that only He is capable of disseminating the truth and finality about this ancient tale. The narrative style of repetitive first person usage therefore buttresses an important theme of the sūra, namely the limitations humans have in their knowledge of events.

Expressive verbal communication is characteristic of the narratives of personal experiences that Labov studied in formulating his canonical model of narrative structure.

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67 This will be explained later in the chapter. Applying Labov’s model to the narrative shows us that one could argue this Qur’ānic narrative is akin to the narratives of personal experience that Labov studied. I argue ultimately that these are personal experiences of God since He is the primary agent and witness of these events. Therefore we can loosely borrow the term “personal experience.”

68 One or more exists in each of the āyāt of *The Young Men of the Cave* except in numbers 10, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22-26.
Narratives of personal experience, for Labov, are narratives in which “the speaker becomes deeply involved in rehearsing or even reliving events of his past.” For Neal Robinson, this is the “omniscient perspective,” a position that indicates that the speaker “allegedly witnessed events that took place long ago and that He is consequently in a position to narrate what happened in the minutest details.” This is partly why I make the claim that four of the five narratives of sūra 18 are akin to God’s ‘personal’ narratives of experience. He was there and was the primary agent in the narrative actions or events. He narrates the story and thereby is the master of the *raison d’être* for its narration, thus making it truly relevant for the Speaker for wanting to share His experiences with others. The understanding of how he delivers the story structurally, according to its various functional categories and their order of occurrence, is the work of the coming chapters, whether the story is labeled as one of ‘personal experience’ borrowing from Labov’s research, or one bearing an ‘omniscient perspective’ according to Robinson’s work. The events of the actual story itself dissolve into a greater self-evaluative function of narration.

2. **Implied Addressee**

The primary implied addressee in the narratives is the Prophet Muhammad, although his name is never mentioned. The singular second person pronouns refer to him and there is no second person plural usage, which would address believers at large or the people of Mecca in the narratives such as in other places of the Qur’ān. In *The Young Men of the Cave*, for example, there are sixteen instances in the narrative where the second person is employed, either by a

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69 Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 354. This will be further explained in Chapter 2.

70 Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 238.
pronoun suffix in Arabic such as “We narrate to you,” ‘naqṣṣu ‘alayka,’ or as the subject of the verb and/or command as in “You could have seen the sun as it rose,” where the Arabic verb tara ‘you see’ contains the second person subject. There is also an imperative form of ’aḍrib’ ‘tell’ or ‘relate’ in the second person command form directed to the Prophet before the narrative The Master of the Garden in “wa-ḍrib la-hum mathalan…” ‘Tell them the parable….’

Although the immediate implied addressee is Muhammad, who was directly listening to these narratives, he is not the only intended addressee. The universality of the Qur’ān, which Muslims hold to exist, is achieved through the fact that ordinary believers and even other listeners at the time of the Prophet feel that they can stand in the place of Muhammad as an intended audience. To borrow from Goffman’s speaking model, which is a deconstruction of the simple dichotomy between speaker and listener, these people are “bystanders” and unaddressed recipients who are also intended recipients of God’s speech. Goffman believes that the purpose of speech is not just to communicate information to one listener but also to communicate information to an “imagined audience.” This dynamic of the speaker-hearer model will become more apparent when I examine how Muslim scholars have traditionally explained the narratives. More often than not, they stress that the intended addressees of these narratives are the pagan Meccan Quraysh to whom God is delivering these various didactic lessons.

Muslim scholars maintain that this evolving audience is one of the reasons why Qur’ānic discourse is so effective. It enables a listener, a constantly new addressee, to stand in the position of second person and become an implicit listener. The message that was initially granted to

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Muhammad transforms into a message addressed personally to the believer. Scholars hold that this is the Qur’ānic wisdom behind the majority of instances of second person usage not specifically mentioning the name Muhammad.

The notion of implied addressee in the Qur’ān leads to understanding another stylistic aspect of using the second person pronoun: that of the specific narrative strategy of involvement. A vivid āya from The Young Men of the Cave narrative, āya18, stands out in this regard. This particular āya is God speaking in evaluative commentary about one of the most vivid and dramatic images of the story—the sight of the actual cave in which young boys were sleeping, guarded by a dog.

“*You* would have thought they were awake, though they lay asleep. We turned them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance. If *you* had seen them, *you* would have turned and run away, and *you* would have been filled with fear of them.” (Q 18:18)

It is apparent that in this particular āya the conative function of communication, a form of communication that places emphasis on the addressee, is more substantially developed than the expressive function. The repeated usage of the second person singular is an effective means of drawing the listener into the narrative and of arousing feelings of awe and fear at the sight of the cave. Another example of involvement comes from the narrative of Dhū l-Qarnayn: “[Prophet], they ask *you* about Dhū l-Qarnayn, Say, ‘I will tell *you* something about him,’” (18:83). The speaker with such an addressing style successfully transforms his narrative, one of personal experience, into a narrative that also enables the listener to create meaning out of the events recounted and create for himself a sense of what is happening in the narrative. As previously

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72 Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’ān*, 242.
noted, this form of repetition in addressing the addressee in the second person would be also considered an involvement strategy in spoken discourse.

**Dissertation Outline**

The next two chapters, Chapters 2 and 3, will present Labov’s narrative model and a discussion of his model’s reception and its applicability to Qur’ānic narratives. This will be followed by a discussion of the various approaches taken to narratives in Qur’ānic studies. Chapters 4 through 8 are the narrative analysis chapters. Each chapter is dedicated to one narrative from Sūrat-al-Kahf beginning with the first narrative, *The Young Men and the Cave*. In the conclusion chapter, I will summarize the results of this study and attempt to place my work within the broader discussion of approaches to the Qur’ān and hermeneutical practices.
Chapter 2: William Labov’s Narrative Model

Labov’s narrative model can provide great insight into the Qur’ānic narratives of sūra 18. Once we notice that many of these narratives resemble the spoken narratives of personal experience that engaged Labov’s interest, we can draw on his work and other developments of his work to understand them in new light by showing how they serve the narratives’ most important function—the evaluative function. I will show that each of Labov’s structural categories of narrative is at work in the Qur’ānic narratives while at the same the Labovian analysis brings forth a distinctive quality of God’s narratives, which is that each of the six narrative segments foreground and sustain God’s superior Self-image.

In order to illustrate how we might use this model, this chapter will examine it in detail, and describe each of its functional categories. It also looks at how other scholars have improved and developed his ideas further. Throughout, I ask how we can relate the concepts to our understanding of Qur’ānic narratives.

I. The Labovian Framework: Working Definitions: Narrative and Clauses

The type of narratives Labov analyzed were called ‘narratives of personal experience.’ In his original 1972 study, he states that narratives of personal experience are those “in which the speaker becomes deeply involved in rehearsing or even reliving events of his past.” Later in his 1997 work he deepens this definition in putting forth that it is “a report of a sequence of events that have entered into the biography of the speaker by a sequence of clauses that correspond to

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73 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 354.
the order of the original events.”74 Labov’s emphasis on the experience entering ‘into the biography of the speaker,’ serves to distinguish this kind of narrative from a ‘vicarious,’ or as Fludernik (1996) calls ‘observational,’ narrative that simply recounts observations, such as the events of a parade by a witness leaning out of a window.75 As Labov states, in a ‘personal’ narrative, the “events that have entered into the speaker’s biography are more emotionally and socially evaluated, and so transformed from raw experience.”76 In other words, the narrator is an important agent in the narrative itself who relates the reported events back to himself, and aims to make a larger point; a larger point about him/herself and the experience he/she went through.

Labov limits the definition of the term ‘narrative’ to “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred.”77 In a more technical definition, Labov defines a narrative as “a sequence of two or more narrative clauses, that is, a sequence of clauses separated by one or more temporal junctures.”78

A core component of his conceptualization is ‘temporal juncture,’ namely that clauses are temporally ordered to match the order in which the events took place. Labov defines temporal juncture as: “a relation of before-and-after that holds between two independent clauses, and matches the order of events in time.”79 There is a difference between saying, “I punched this boy

75 Fludernik, *Towards a Natural Narratology*, 54.
and he punched me” and “This boy punched me and I punched him.” The difference lies in temporal sequence and order of the actual event: when these clauses are not ordered in a temporal sequence matching the order of the events, the “inferred temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation is altered.” Developing this notion, he formally defines a minimal narrative as “a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered: that is a change in their order will result in a change in their temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation.” A minimal narrative can contain a temporal juncture between its clauses, and must contain at least one temporal juncture. The following example taken from Labov (1972) is a narrative sequence that contains three clauses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I know a boy named Harry</td>
<td>Another boy threw a bottle at him right in the head</td>
<td>and he had to get seven stitches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This series of clauses constitutes a minimal narrative because a temporal juncture is found between b and c. Clause c could not have happened before clause b, thus the creation of temporal juncture matches the series of events.

In Labov’s analysis, four types of clause formally constitute the narrative units: ‘free,’ ‘restricted’ and ‘coordinate’ clauses, and ‘narrative’ clauses. Free clauses are unconfined by temporal juncture. Clause a, in the above narrative example, is considered a free clause. Labov states that this first clause “has no temporal juncture, and might be placed after b or c without disturbing temporal order. It is equally true at the end and at the beginning of the story that the narrator knows a boy named Harry.” Similarly, restricted and coordinate clauses may be

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81 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 361.
placed anywhere in a narrative without altering its temporality or semantic interpretation. A restricted clause is defined as one that “does not range freely over the entire narrative, yet has a wider range [of movement] than the narrative clause.”

Coordinate clauses are clauses that can be reversed and “may be freely interchanged” without affecting a narrative’s temporal sequence or altering semantic interpretation.

This leaves us to discuss the most basic unit of narrative. Labov defines ‘narrative clauses’ as those that “cannot be displaced across a temporal juncture without a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation.” They are temporally ordered clauses. In the first example cited above, the narrative contains three clauses, but according to Labov’s definitions only two of these clauses are narrative clauses, clauses b and c. An example of a set of clauses that contains four narrative clauses would be the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a</th>
<th>This boy punched me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>and I punched him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>and the teacher came in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>and stopped the fight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These clauses, for Labov, answer the potential question “What happened then?” One of their fundamental characteristics as narrative clauses is that they must contain within themselves a ‘narrative head,’ which is a finite verb that carries a tense marker. So from the above example the narrative heads are punched, punched, came, and stopped. Typically, narrative heads in English are in the past tense. Modals such as “could”, “should”, “would” and habitual past such as “used to” are not narrative clauses since they refer to events that occurred or occur on an

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84 Labov and Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis,” 23.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 12.
indefinite number of occasions and could be placed anywhere in the narrative without changing chronological interpretation. According to Labov (1967, 1982) only clauses with verbs in the past indicative, historical present, or past progressive can be considered narrative clauses. The sequencing of these clauses, as will be outlined later, forms the ‘complicating action’ category in overall narrative structure.

Another quality of narrative clauses is that they can only consist of ‘independent clauses.’ An independent clause is a clause that can stand alone and is not structurally dependent on other clauses. A ‘subordinate clause,’ also called a ‘dependent clause,’ is a clause that cannot stand alone. Once a clause is subordinated to another, it becomes impossible to alter the original semantic interpretation by reversing it. Subordinate clauses can be placed anywhere in a narrative and often appear in the form of syntactic embedding.

The following example of three variations of the same event or “story,” taken from Labov (1967), illustrates the definition of a “true” narrative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Well, this person has a little too much to drink</td>
<td>A friend of mine came in</td>
<td>A friend of mine stopped the attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>and he attacked me</td>
<td>just in time to stop</td>
<td>She had just come in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>and the friend came in</td>
<td>this person who had a little too much to drink</td>
<td>This person was attacking me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>and she stopped it.</td>
<td>from attacking me</td>
<td>He had a little too much to drink.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In light of Labov’s definitions, only the first version, A, is a narrative. Versions B and C, despite being logical and acceptable ways of expressing a sequence of events, do not qualify. Narrative 1 contains four narrative clauses that refer to four successive events. Version B is presented by
means of syntactic embedding and only contains one narrative clause, “a friend of mine came in.” Similarly, in version C, we find four independent clauses, yet only the first clause (in line a) is a narrative clause. Line b’s verbal expression ‘had just come’ is in the past perfect, so it does not function as a narrative head. Also the past perfect is used to reverse the order of events, and that in turn alters the original semantic interpretation.

In sum, the smallest linguistic unit of expression defining a narrative is the clause. Yet, not all clauses function as narrative clauses per se.

The components and definitions that have been provided above are all connected to one aspect of narrative: its ‘referential’ function—the recapitulation of an experience. Key to this recapitulation is the notion of ‘temporal juncture’ that ultimately manifests itself as an ordered recall of sequentially ordered experience.

II. Labov’s “Full” Narrative Structure: Six Elemental Structural Categories

The above discussion showed a bare minimal narrative, the second example (2) in section II. It contained four narrative clauses and would be considered “complete” in the sense that it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The seminal result of L&W’s study focused on “more fully developed” narratives, and found them to be “characterized by the presence of higher units.” These higher units are realized by a group of clauses that have the same storytelling function. They discovered six functional categories to exist in most spoken narratives of personal experience:

89 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 362.
90 De Fina and Georgakopoulou, Analyzing Narrative, 28.
1. Abstract: “what was this about?”
2. Orientation: “who, when, what, where?”
3. Complicating action: “then what happened?”
4. Evaluation: “so what?”
5. Result or resolution: “what finally happened?”
6. Coda: precludes further questions.\(^{91}\)

The main aspect of these structural categories is that they each serve a different function within the story. These functions are indicated by the corresponding questions above that Labov believes they seek to answer. Below is a diagram summary of Labov’s complete narrative framework:

Fig. 1: Picture of a complete narrative:

“A complete narrative begins with an orientation, proceeds to the complicating action, is suspended at the focus of evaluation before the resolution, concludes with the resolution, and returns the listener to the present time with the coda.”\(^{92}\)

1. **Abstract**

   How do narrators indicate they are about to start a story? Narratives have to begin somehow and somewhere in conversation. Labov found that an abstract is typically, but not

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\(^{91}\) Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 370.
\(^{92}\) Ibid., 369.
always, found at the beginning of a narrative. It summarizes the whole story within one or two clauses. It can report the entire sequence of events of the narrative. The abstract answers the underlying question, “what was this about?” and often gives insight into the narrator’s attitude towards the narrative.93 The function for this segment is to “encapsulate the point of the story.”94

Abstracts can also often be found inserted within a conversation the narrator is having. The abstract can be a response to an interlocutor’s question that in turn links it to a previous utterance, and serves to “bridge the gap between the question and the answer.”95 Labov provides the following example to illustrate this point.96

4 (Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?)
a My brother put a knife in my head
(How’d that happen?)
b Like kids, you get into a fight
c and I twisted his arm up behind him
d This was just a few days after my father died…

The narrative begins with clause a, which is a response to the question, “Were you ever in a situation…” It is important to note that not all narratives include a formal abstract. According to Labov, narratives that do include an abstract can contain one or two abstracts as in the above example. After the interviewer’s second question “how’d that happen?” the second abstract is provided in clauses b, c and d. These clauses form an abstract because the same events are repeated later in the rest of the story and are not absolutely required. They are a more detailed summary than the first one.

Labov’s conceptualization of an abstract is mostly limited to an understanding of it

93 Ibid., 370.
94 Ibid., 363.
serving the function of providing a brief summary. Other scholars, however, have also considered the issue of how narrators indicate that they are about to tell a story. Their findings enhance the understanding of Labov’s category by drawing attention to other functions and forms of abstracts.

In Sacks’s work on analyzing conversations, he formulated the term ‘story preface,’ a key concept in his analysis of story telling [in conversation], and it performs several functions. For example, it announces to the interlocutor that a story is coming, such as with the statement “Hey I heard something wonderful today.” This announcement in Sacks’s framework relates to the phenomenon of uptake: that the listener is gaining control of the floor “over an extended series of utterances.”

Another function is to indicate to the listener “about what it will take for the story to be over.” So if someone says “I have something terrible to tell you,” the listener is aware that when the “terrible” event is reported, the story will be over. Thus, the preface provides relevant information. For Sacks, the ‘story preface’ is coupled with his notion of turn-taking—[the main conversational resource tool in the field of conversational analysis that explains how utterances are framed by whose turn it is to speak]:

The fact that stories take more than an utterance to produce involves that tellers should in the first instance see that they're intending to tell a story, and that it might take more than a sentence to produce, and, seeing that, they turn it into at least a two-utterance thing in which they first say they're going to tell a story, get permission to do that, and then tell the story. So it's a systematic occurring fact that stories, taking more than a sentence to produce, turn out to take more than an utterance to produce.

Thus the ‘story-preface’ is the first uptake of a turn followed by another turn to “tell the story.” Norrick, in following Sacks’ understanding, frames this discussion as one of ‘openings’ in stating, “conversationalists who want to gain the floor to tell a story must signal their intention to

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99 Sacks, Lectures on Conversations, 2:227.
the other participants. They must enlist the interest of these potential auditors to engage their active listenership."¹⁰⁰ Becker also uses the term ‘abstract.’ She considers the abstract, as a brief summary of the narrative, a strategy by which the narrator establishes his/or her “right” to tell a story: “this strategy insures the narrator’s right to speak, since the listeners are in this way able to assert the relevance of the topic.”¹⁰¹

Erwin Goffman’s idea of framing for a unit of analysis by which one investigates the “the organization of experience” is also relevant to the idea of an abstract.¹⁰² In Goffman’s words, “I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition of frame.”¹⁰³ At the start of a spoken narrative, according to Goffman, the audience or listeners must be alerted to the main concern of the discourse to follow, answering the question ‘What is it that’s going on here?’ with a summary rather than the detailed contents of the narrative.¹⁰⁴ As a consequence, in the context of conversational narratives, narrators always announce that they are going to tell a story or invite listeners explicitly, to ensure that the audience will yield the floor for a lengthier period of time.

These varying perspectives show that conversational narratives occur in separate conversational sequences that stand out from the surrounding discourse. This is achieved by a

¹⁰³ Ibid.,10-11.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 8.
process of signaling, what Labov and Becker call an abstract, or what Sacks calls a story preface, as mentioned above, which are situated within a larger unit of organization understood by frames of analysis. These different viewpoints on abstracts are useful for my analysis because, as well see in the coming chapters, God does not always provide a “summary” as His abstract. At times, His abstracts are functioning more like attempts to establish His “right” to tell the story or to simply dramatically “announce” to his interlocutors that He is about to tell a story without much of revealing what the point of the story is.

2. Orientation

After the abstract, an orientation section is typically found in a narrative. It is a set of free clauses that contextualizes the narrative with time, place, persons, activity or the “behavioral” situation before the first narrative clause begins. It essentially orients the listener to the general setting of the narrative by providing details: “Larry sittin’ on the corner-high.” Labov states that, “it is theoretically possible for all free orientation clauses to be placed at the beginning of the narrative, but in practice, we find much of this material is placed at strategic points later on.” The orientation section is not straightforward, in that not all narratives contain orientation sections and not all orientation sections serve the function of orienting the listener to person, place, time and situation. Nonetheless, Labov states that, “despite these limitations, the overall view of narrative shows that the orientation section is a structural feature of narrative

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105 Labov and Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis,” 32.
106 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 364.
107 Ibid., 365.
structure." A group of six free clauses that constitute an orientation, cited by Labov, is the following:

5 (Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?)
   a yeah, I was in the Boy Scouts at the time
   b And we was doing the 50-yard dash, racing
   c but we was at the pier, marked off
   d and so we was doing the 50-yard dash
   e there was about eight or nine of us, you know, going down, coming back

These clauses are found at the beginning of the narrative. It provides the listener with key details such as “Boy Scouts”, activity of “racing”, and number of persons, “eight or nine.” Another example is the clause a, “I know a boy named Harry” in Example 1, Section II. Lastly, syntactically, Labov notes that it is quite common for past progressive clauses to be found in this section. The past progressive tense outlines the “kind of thing that was going on before the first event of the narrative occurred or during the entire episode.”

Norrick challenges Labov’s basic category of orientation. He points out that “Labov & Waletzky collect all sorts of background information and framing devices into their notion of orientation, but it seems to me important to distinguish three separate types of materials under this basic heading.” Relying on Labov’s framework in conducting his ‘basic’ narrative analysis, he develops a more detailed ‘tagged’ narrative that includes more specification of orientation, which includes: a ‘general frame,’ which contains information about time, place and background—information that “goes beyond the setting to encompass all sorts of details, whether necessary for the point of a story or not,” and a narrow and or ‘local frame,’ which is

109 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 364.
information leading directly into the action of the story.¹¹¹ Orientation, as Labov identifies it, is 
too general for Norrick and the personal narratives he looks at.

Norrick’s expansion on the notion of orientation is an example of an improvement on 
Labov’s formulization because it takes into consideration the multiplicity of orientation and the 
ways speakers establish their stories. Another reassessment of Labov’s orientation comes from 
De Fina who shows that certain narrators use orientation “not as background material, but rather 
as a focus of concern both for tellers and audiences, and for figures in the story worlds,” as well 
as “to negotiate and build shared understandings of experiences.”¹¹² Thus, she brings attention to 
the challenges in structurally separating evaluation from other categories.

With respect to Qur’ānic narratives, both of these viewpoints will be useful to consider in 
my analysis. God generally does not reveal information about time, place or even specific names 
of characters, and thus Labov’s broad conception of orientation is, generally, fitting for Qur’ānic 
orientations in terms of capturing what is essential for Qur’ānic narratives—the “behavioral” 
situation of the characters. It will be shown, however, that there is variation in the orientations of 
Sūrat al-Kahf. Some of the orientations, as Norrick suggests, relate to the “general frame,” and 
as he states add nothing to the point of the story, while others can be considered as leading 
directly into the action of the narrative—a “local frame.” Likewise, De Fina’s finding that 
orientations can represent a “focus of concern” for narrators and interlocutors will also be 
supported by an analysis of an orientation clause in Chapter 6.

¹¹¹ Ibid.
¹¹² De Fina “Crossing Borders,” 372.
3. **Complicating Action & Resolution**

The complicating action section is the main body of narrative clauses that collectively make up the story or tell the event. This section answers the underlying question, “And then what happened?” Typically this is the longest section of the narrative in which several types of clauses, free and evaluative, may be interjected into the complicating action. Often the orientation and evaluation (discussed below) are embedded into this section. Example 2 from Section II is an example of four narrative clauses that make up the complicating action segment of the narrative. At the end of the main body of narrative clauses, the complicating action is concluded by a result: a final narrative clause that answers the question “what finally happened?”

An important feature of the complicating action section in the narratives of sûra 18 is that they are mostly comprised of dialogue or what it is also referred to as constructed dialogue. One definition of constructed dialogue is that it is “animation of speech framed as a voice other than the speaker’s.”\(^{114}\) Essentially, it is dialogue or speech that the speaker quotes in spoken narratives and/or conversation. The role of constructed dialogue in spoken narratives will be elaborated on further below. Here, I give an overview of how it structurally relates to Labov’s working definitions.

Labov’s first works (1967) and (1972) did not offer an extensive discussion on constructed dialogue, what he originally calls direct statements. But he reformulated his thoughts on direct statements in his (1997) work and provided the following methodological approach:

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\(^{113}\) Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 370.

\(^{114}\) Tannen, *Talking Voices*, 1.
Quotations with multiple clauses are resolved into individual sequential actions. In narrative, an important distinction between actions and quotations is that the actions frequently overlap, while quotations rarely do so. The rule that one person talks at a time is never flouted in personal narrative. As such, quotations or constructed dialogue in a narrative constitute narrative clauses because between each of the quotations or dialogues is ‘temporal juncture,’ that which connects the two clauses in a temporal order. Therefore, all quoted verbal statements or sayings (referred to as constructed dialogue in this dissertation) in Qur’anic narratives that advance the narrative forward constitute narrative actions. I therefore treat them as narrative clauses in my analysis. This is similar to Toolan’s approach, which distinguishes between doing and saying and proposes that in many instances of spoken narratives sayings can be the ‘action’ of the narrative—“revealing a fixity of sequence of those sayings, temporal juncture, and so on.”

Consider, for example, this excerpt from The Young Men of the Cave narrative:

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But then others said, “Your lord knows best how long you have been here.
find out where the best food is there, and bring some back.
but be careful not to let anyone know about you.
if they found you out, they would stone you or force you to return to their
religion, where you would never come to any good.”
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This statement is made by one of the characters in the narrative. Their action of going into the city after which they were discovered, as we learn in the next clause ii: In this way We brought them to people’s attention so that they might know that God’s promise is true and that there is no doubt about the last hour, is only understood and presented through direct speech in the narrative. God does not say, for example, “And then the boys went into the city with their silver...”

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coins…” Therefore many of what Labov refers to as direct statements or quotations are also key narrative events and constitute narrative clauses.

Finally, the resolution is technically a narrative clause of the complicating action. It is where the narrator indicates to the listeners that the story has finished. The resolution, according to Labov (1997) is “the set of complicating actions that follow the most reportable event.” The most reportable event is a semantic criterion describing the most important/elemental element in the narrative.

4. Coda

In most narratives, after the resolution, and an evaluation section (discussed last because it is the most important category) has a ‘coda.’ Labov describes the coda as a specific “functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment.” In other words, codas can bridge the gap between the end of a narrative’s time and the present moment in which both the listener and narrative stand. The narrative comes to a full circle, back to where it began and, as Becker describes it, the coda “marks the story as a structurally and semantically coherent whole and setting it off from the conversational flow as a distinct unit.” Abstracts and codas are related to each other in that the abstract announces the narrative and the coda closes it off. The following example illustrates a coda:

6a I packed up
   b and got out.
   c that was two.
   d That was one of the most important.
   e and that—that was it, you know.
   f that was it.

And that was that.

Clauses e to g in this segment of the narrative encapsulates the *coda*. With the clause “*and that— that was it, you know*” the narrator returns to his present state. A linguistic device used in this particular coda is *deixis*, a referential process that indicates or points to other entities within the text or context of an utterance.\(^{119}\) The narrator uses *deixis* standing at the present moment of time and pointing to the end of the narrative, identifying it as happening in a remote point in the past.\(^{120}\)

The Qur’ānic codas, as will be analyzed in the coming chapters, carry another layer of function: God stating a concluding moralistic message to end the narrative and complete His point. This message has been easy for many scholars to identify as appearing in a ‘coda,’ although they do not label it as a ‘coda’ as such and use other expressions instead. This speaks for the generality of Labov’s model that on some levels is intuitive for readers or listeners of narratives. These observations will be touched upon in the next chapter in which the various approaches to Qur’ānic narratives are examined.

In the Labovian sense, the coda wards off any further questions about what happened or why it mattered. In Qur’ānic narrative, the ‘why it mattered’ has to do with the greater moralistic teaching. The moralistic dimension of a narrative is one of the five fundamental dimensions of narrative for Ochs and Capps (2001). They hold that “narrators of personal experience evaluate protagonists as moral agents, whose actions, thoughts, and feelings are interpreted in light of local notions of goodness…narrators often shape the narrative to make their own comportment


\(^{120}\) Becker, “The Role of Narrative Interaction,” 106.
appear morally superior to that of another protagonist.”

Ochs and Capps speak about the moralistic component in broader terms, as something that can be embedded throughout a narrative in various ways. They also touch on its significance to narratives of personal experience that is relevant to this study of God’s narratives of personal experience as will be shown. In the Qur’ān, we find this narrative dimension not only explicitly in the codas but also imbued throughout its evaluative commentary. The following category, *evaluation*, is the category that Labov determined for those areas in the narrative that can demonstrate a narrator’s moralistic views and cultural values. For Labov, it mostly explicitly reflects the narrator’s own personal opinion on the narrative actions.

5. **Evaluation**

Narratives ultimately are insignificant without an evaluative function. I have left to discuss this category last because it is the most significant yet problematic component of Labov’s model with respect to where one finds it in the narrative. Much of post-Labovian scholarship has integrated and developed this notion from his model into multiple approaches to oral narratives, discussed later below, all of which contribute to my analysis of God’s narrative aims.

“Every narrative has an emotional point…and this point appears in the narrative through evaluation.”

The evaluation function is the second primary function of a whole narrative and serves to bring in personal significance by answering the possible “so what” question. It functions to deliver the point of the narrative, its *raison d’être*: why it was told, and what the

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121 Ochs and Capps, *Living Narrative*, 47.
narrator is getting at.”\textsuperscript{123} It is in the evaluative section that a narrator makes clear why the story is worth reporting or how it was uncommon, truly unusual, wonderful, or strange. Otherwise the narrative is not worth reporting. According to Labov, a key function of evaluation, related to the “point of the story,” is to perpetuate the notion of “self-aggrandizement,” the narrator’s desire to make himself/herself look good in the narrative, or create “the best possible image of himself.”\textsuperscript{124} In this way the narrator may, for example, highlight a part of how wise or powerful he was in a certain situation.

Labov noted that an evaluative section is often missing from narratives of “vicarious” experience, experiences of others, told from a near-objective standpoint. A narrative with only an orientation, complicating action, and resolution does not fully capture the “why” essence of the narrative and therefore lacks a fundamental function. Labov assumes that the question, “so what?” or “why is this narrative important to tell?” is a challenge that this kind of narrator is “continually warding off.” Narratives of personal experience, on the other hand - such as the ones Labov (1972) elicited in his “Danger of death” study where young adults were asked if they had ever been in a situation that put them in serious danger of being killed - contain many evaluative sections.\textsuperscript{125} This difference helps him get at a clearer definition of the narrative: “the evaluation of a narrative is defined by us as that part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others.”\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{123} Labov, \textit{Language in the Inner City}, 366.
\textsuperscript{125} Labov and Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis,” 34.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 37.
In Labov’s model, evaluation can be found in both a separate section, consisting of a number of evaluative clauses, or it can be a structural component embedded into the narrative as commentary. Labov found that typically a group of evaluative clauses are found between the complicating action and the resolution. Hence, one function of evaluation is to help listeners identify where the complicating action has reached its end point. However, as Labov states, it is a mistake to limit evaluation to one place within the narrative. He thus imagines evaluation as “the focus of waves of evaluation that penetrates the narrative,” and found in various guises throughout the narrative, forming a narrative’s secondary structure. In light of his definition of evaluation, however, it is difficult to code various clauses because although they are clearly narrative clauses, they are at the same time clearly evaluative clauses. This is especially evident in the Qur’ānic narratives. One way to work around the coding issue is to accept that each of Labov’s structural categories can also assume highly evaluative roles determined by the speaker.

According to Labov, evaluation can either be external, embedded, or internal (deeply embedded). External evaluation is a process in which the narrator breaks from the narrative and tells the listener the “point” with one or more evaluative remarks. This could be for example a direct statement from the narrator expressing his/her thoughts during the time of the event such as “It’s clear that he never really came back.” The narrator distances him/herself from the narrative event or “suspends the action” and offers his/her evaluative opinion on what was happening. In explaining external evaluation, Tannen touches on the obvious effect it has on

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127 Ibid., 35.
128 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 369.
listeners as it makes clear “from the way material is presented what the speaker thinks about it [the narrative event] (and consequently what the hearer is to think).”

Narrators can also embed their evaluation within the story through various forms of statements. Labov summarizes the different means by which narrators embed evaluation into their narratives:

1. Semantically defined evaluation:
   a. Direct statements: “I said to myself: this is it”
   b. Lexical intensifiers: “He was beat up real, real bad.”
2. Formally defined:
   c. Suspension of action: through coordinate clauses and restricted clauses
   d. Repetition: “And he didn’t come back. And he didn’t come back”
3. Culturally defined:
   e. Symbolic action: “They put an egg on his door,” “You could hear the rosaries clicking.”
   f. Judgment of a third person: when the entire narrative is reported to a person not present at the narrative.

With respect to embedded evaluation, it is important to note that Labov considers direct statements, such as when the narrator quotes himself as in “I said to myself: this is it,” and anything else said by others in the narrative as embedded evaluative commentary. Other examples from Labov are: “And I said to Mary: ‘This is it!’” or “And Mary said: ‘This is it!’” Such statements are also distinct in my analysis from other direct statements that constitute narrative clauses, as I have discussed above already.

The last type of evaluation Labov identifies is internal evaluation. This is a form of evaluation that is deeply embedded or fused into the narrative clauses or complicating action. De Fina and Georgakopoulou note that, “Labov regards this form of evaluation as “highly complex” and “regards narrators who use this kind of evaluation as communicatively skilled.”

131 De Fina and Georgakopoulou, Analyzing Narrative, 29.
describes internal evaluation as what the narrator is feeling internally during the time of the event and is therefore his or her highly subjective viewpoint. Thus the internal evaluation may pose a greater semantic challenge for analysis and is subject to listener interpretation within the narrative. Choice of word, then, instead of explicitly stating evaluation becomes a form of narrative art in this regard.

Labov put forth four types of syntactic evaluative elements that the speaker uses as internal evaluative devices. These elements are: intensifiers, comparators, correlatives and explications. Intensifiers: the narrator selects one event and intensifies or strengthens it with expressive phonology such as “we were fighting for a lo-o-o-o-ong ti-ime, buddy,” or quantifiers such as “all” in “he had cuts all over” or “he knocked him all out in the street.” Repetition also is a form of intensification that is effective in intensifying the action and suspending or pausing the action. Lastly, ritual utterances that are culturally specific to speech communities serve as intensifiers. Labov states that, “knowledge of the culture tells us that these apparently unexpressive utterances play an evaluative role.” An example he provides is the statement “And there it was,” which in the context of the narrative and speakers culture essentially reads “and then the real action started.” Qur’anic narratives are shown to display their own form of intensifiers, which will be highlighted in the relevant chapters. According to Labov, intensifiers do not complicate the basic narrative syntax, whereas the other three types of internal evaluation

132 Gonzalez, Pragmatic Markers, 29.
133 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 378.
134 Ibid., 379.
135 Ibid., 380.
136 Ibid.
are sources of “syntactic complexity.”\textsuperscript{137}

Comparators: the narrator compares “the events which did occur to those which did not occur.”\textsuperscript{138} They can contain negatives, futures and modals, questions and imperatives. Two comparators, questions and imperatives, are particularly relevant to Qur’ānic narratives, which contain many rhetorical questions and commands to the Prophet. When the narrator turns to the listeners and asks them questions such as “can you believe that,” or a negative question such as “isn’t that awful,” such questions serve a direct evaluative function. Labov states that “overt questions that are not embedded in the dramatic action but asked directly of the listener, have a direct evaluative function.”\textsuperscript{139} Speakers often turn to listeners to elicit reaction to the events of the narrative while at the same time indicating that such reactions are needed. This is pragmatically related to the usage of the rhetorical question as a speech act in daily conversation (outside of narratives) and defines evaluative role for overt questioning usage in narratives. Labov qualifies imperatives as evaluative because “the force of the command in narratives is frequently ‘you do this or else…”\textsuperscript{140}

The last two devices are correlatives and explicatives. Correlatives, as opposed to comparators, bring together two events into one single independent clause. Correlatives include progressive verbs (usually found in orientation sections as they characterize the setting of a narrative as a whole, but are evaluating a particular event at the same time), such as “I was sittin’,” appended participles (where one or more progressive verbs are aligned together) such as “I was sittin’ ...and smokin’,” double appositives such as “a knife, a long one a dagger”, and

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 381.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 385.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
double attributives such as “cold wet day” rarely used.)\textsuperscript{141} Explicatives are qualifications to a narrative main clause or to an explicit evaluative clause. They are marked by conjunctions such as \textit{while, though, that, since or because}. Explicatives are distinct for Labov because they suspend the action of the narrative to go backward or forward in time or “into a realm of abstract speculation wholly unrelated to the narrative.”\textsuperscript{142} The distribution of explicatives in Qur’ānic narratives is relatively high, as it will be shown, as God frequently explains why He did something in the narrative, as well as frequently including circumstantial clauses—known as ‘ḥāl’ clauses in Arabic.

### III. Criticisms of Labov’s Model

Some of the challenges with Labov’s model have already been pointed out above with respect to drawing clear lines between evaluation and other segments of the narrative. Clearly if evaluation is directly linked to the speaker’s ‘point’ of the story, this element will have to be detected throughout the narrative. Abstracts, orientations and complicating actions can all be fused with evaluation in a variety of ways and degrees thus raising issue to Labov’s mechanical way of segmenting a narrative. Because my study is also attempting to establish a solid groundwork for future narrative analysis on the Qur’ān, I have followed Labov’s model as closely as possible whilst noting at the same time in my analysis the underlying evaluative force of each component.

Labov’s framework has also received much rightful criticism by other narrative analysts regarding the very premise of his study related to his methodology and the issue of the narrative

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 388.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 392.
occasion. In using an interview question to elicit personal narratives, L&W essentially created a narrative occasion, or context, that was formal and ‘unnatural.’ The model therefore is rigorously criticized as one that developed out of a contrived situation, hence the use of the word ‘oral.’ Had the narratives of personal experience emerged out of a natural or on-going interactional conversation, the narratives would be considered ‘natural,’ or ‘spontaneous,’ hence the adaptation of the term ‘natural’ and ‘spontaneous’ for subsequent research on spoken narratives. Schegloff claims that, “the context of the sociolinguistic elicitation plays havoc with the motive force of the telling—the action and interactional precipitant of the telling—by making the elicitation question itself the invariant occasion for telling the story.”\(^{143}\) And he further states, “there is nothing interactional in the data [Labov’s data] at all other than the eliciting question, which takes on a role much like that of an experimental stimulus to occasion the production of the already formed story waiting to be told.”\(^{144}\) What Schegloff believes is that natural narratives are interactional and grow out of ongoing conversations that are embedded within larger social situations and contexts. This is a reality that Labov’s schema does not factor into its analysis. Labov nonetheless believed that he did transcend his version of the linguist’s observer’s paradox—“the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed...(but) we can only obtain these data by systematic observation.” Labov held that by asking the interviewees a vulnerable and personal question such as, ‘*Were you ever in a situation where you thought you were in serious danger of getting killed?*’ that it would elicit a story “so exciting and engaging to tell that tellers would lose themselves in the very drama of telling,” and result in remembrance of a narrative of personal


\(^{144}\) Ibid., 101.
experience that would “command the total attention of an audience in a remarkable way, creating a deep and attentive silence.”

Another problem raised with Labov’s model relates to his definition of narrative. Many argue that it is delimiting and an unreasonable assumption to hold that humans remember experience in the same order as it happened in the original events. Ochs and Capps remind analysts that, “remembrance is also a subjective event.” Norrick takes a strong position in stating “therefore, we must reject Labov’s definition of narrative as a method of recapitulating remembered experience, insofar as it entails that the memory of the past experience remains unchanged by the telling.” Hopper adds that, “no one has access to the true, original order of events…we have no privileged, omniscient view of events, only more and more versions of events. This is an epistemic problem, because it has to do with how we establish events and their sequencing.” Adding to the problem with his definition is the fact that stories are not always presented in a chronological and linear fashion. Some stories start with flashbacks, for example, or flash-forwards. How does Labov’s model deal with a chronological and non-linear narratives?

The challenges to Labov’s model are valid in that they are raised within the context of conversational narratives that analysts are finding difficulties analyzing with Labov’s model. For the purposes of applying a narrative analysis to the Qur’ân, I believe Labov’s model is an important preliminary model to start with, as there has not been any previous research that applies narrative analysis to the Qur’ân. As such I find it valuable to establish a solid grounding of analysis by using the most influential model from the field, whose terminology is ubiquitous.

145 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 396.
147 Norrick, Conversational Narrative, 4.
and greatly elaborated on within the field. Having said that, the limitations that Labov’s model presents for other conversational narratives does not necessarily pose the same challenges for the Qur’ān thus making it easier to apply to the Qur’ān, than let us say many other conversational narratives, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the five narratives that appear in sūra 18 do display a chronologically sequenced order of events, which is a convenient starting point. Secondly, because it is scripture, Muslims hold the view that God does have access to the “true, original order of events,” and has the “privileged omniscient view of events.” God affirms this in the narratives as well, as will be shown. These assumptions, I believe, make the Qur’ānic narratives uniquely suited to be data for Labov’s model, even if that model fails to account fully for other forms of natural narratives. Lastly, God’s extended discourse in sūra 18 as a whole, and especially many of its narratives, can be considered an elicited form of speech. God tells the narratives in response to specific questions asked by Jewish rabbis to the Prophet in a test of the Prophet’s credibility. This is the social context of the production of the narratives in sūra 18 that will be explained in the first analysis chapter. Certain questions were asked of the Prophet and in return God relates five narratives, of varying length, of “personal” experience that, similar to Labov’s narratives, proceed without pause (the sūra was revealed on one occasion in one setting), and does not display overt interactional aspects.149

In conclusion, although the L&W model is often faulted for being too mechanic, and little concerned with context, only concerned with developing formal definitions of the structure of narrative, this approach for the purposes of this thesis does provide a systematic entry into

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149 The historical context of the sūra is fully discussed in the next chapter before presenting the first narrative’s analysis.
Qur’ānic narratives. It provides a tool to identify parts, or chunks of discourse within the narrative, and then a way to understand these parts, through their referential and evaluative functions. As the overview of Labov’s model has shown, however, many other narrative models and discussions that have improved on Labov’s initial findings also contribute to strengthening my analysis, especially with respect to evaluation that I will now discuss below.

IV. Post-Labovian Evaluation

Despite the many critiques that Labov’s model has received since its inception, it remains a foundational narrative model that has been widely used within narrative analysis and other disciplines. An influential concept from Labov’s model is the idea of evaluation. Although Labov’s original conception of evaluation is more or less limited by structural constraints, his idea that evaluation brings personal significance to a narrative was seminal and paved way for much further expansion of this notion.

There are many recent approaches to spoken narratives that incorporate evaluation, specifically the idea that it represents the personal element. Some scholars bring attention to evaluation at the outset in their definition of a narrative or story. Norrick, for example, holds evaluation as the *sine qua non* of a “story. He asserts that:

*A narrative* is any representation of past events, but for a text or discourse to qualify as a *story* proper it must be a narrative with a point in context. Narratives may include travelogues, project reports, and comparable kinds of texts with no evaluation by the narrator, but a story will always possess personal and contextual relevance and contain evaluation by the teller.151

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150 See Mary Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*. She, for example, applies Labov’s model to examine literary narratives.

Norrick essentially distinguishes between what Labov calls a ‘minimal’ narrative, for Norrick a ‘narrative,’ and what Labov calls a ‘complete’ narrative that contains the evaluative element, for Norrick a ‘story.’

The narrative element of evaluation is also incorporated into Ochs and Capps’ recent anthropological analysis of personal narratives under the heading of ‘tellability.’ Tellability, one of five key dimensions of personal narratives, is associated with the varying significance the narrative carries in the narrator’s estimation, and the “way events are rhetorically shaped in narratives.”\(^{152}\) It is another way to describe the “so what” and point of a narrative. As Lampropoulou explains, “evaluation is one of the main mechanisms through which tellability is achieved. It is used, among other things, to highlight specific parts of the story and thus explain why the story is felt to be tellable.”\(^{153}\) They suggest that personal narratives can take on qualities of high or low tellability representing the degree to which a story is worth telling.\(^{154}\) Ochs and Capps state that a “highly tellable narrative of personal experience relates events of great interest or import to interlocutors. The events may be unknown to interlocutors. Or an unknown or known event may have bearing on their future lives, lending great value to the narrative account.”\(^{155}\) Highly tellable narratives are of such interest that “they can be told again and still be appreciated.”\(^{156}\) In contrast, narratives of “low tellability are reluctantly told by speakers as they relate “barley reportable incidents.”\(^{157}\) Overtly evaluative narratives, such as the ones Labov

\(^{152}\) Ochs and Capps, *Living Narrative*, 33-34.
\(^{153}\) Lampropoulou, *Direct Speech*, 36.
\(^{154}\) Ochs and Capps, *Living Narrative*, 34.
\(^{155}\) Ibid., 33-34.
\(^{156}\) Ibid., 33.
\(^{157}\) Ibid., 34.
elicited, are for example highly tellable narratives where the point of the story is made quite clearly.

Similarly, Fludernik proposes her own interpretation of evaluation as a process of ‘experientiality,’ which is essential to her construction of narrativity. She expresses this in her model, saying:  

Experientiality in narratives of personal experience consists in the dynamic interrelation between the description of personal experience on the one hand (the setting-plus-incidence core of the narrative episode) and the evaluative and rememorative transformation of this experience in the storytelling process: tellability and point of the story dialectically constitute each other. The narrative is a narrative, not because it tells a story, but because the story that it tells is reportable and has been reinterpreted by the narrating I, the personal storyteller. Oral narratives of personal experience do not obey a teleological pattern except in so far as the story has an endpoint, an ulterior point of reference from which it is told retrospectively. A complex organic unity is established which balances experience in the raw and the storyteller’s re-evaluation of it. Stories of personal experience epitomize typically human experience by representing it in the shape of an objective correlative that is organic in form and function.

1. Evaluation as Self-presentation

Labov’s specific function of evaluation “self-aggrandizement,” essentially the narrator trying to make himself look good, has also become part of a rich and varied research tradition that focuses on the broader question of how identity and self-image is constructed through narrative. Narrative analysts assume that language is used to negotiate the narrator’s/character’s concept of self. These sociolinguistic approaches view narrative as a “multifaceted phenomenon,” in which narratives are “embedding and interconnecting concepts such as experience, construction, evaluation, self and the social world.” As such, speakers find many ways, using different linguistic strategies, to fulfill the evaluative function of self-presentation, which I discuss below.

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158 Fludernik, *Towards a Natural Narratology*, 52.
159 Becker and Quastoff, *Narrative Interaction*, 1.
160 Lampropoulou, *Direct Speech*, 27.
A crucial variable in the manifestation of self-presentation is the social context of the speaker. Deborah Schiffrin (1996), reviewing the scholarship that furthered knowledge of how narratives contribute to the construction and display “of our sense of who we are,” advances her own contribution of understanding social identity in narratives as being locally situated. She states that, “who we are is, at least partially, a product of where we are and who we are with, both in interactional and story worlds….we can say that telling a story provides a self-portrait: a linguistic lens through which to discover peoples' own (somewhat idealized) views of themselves as situated in a social structure.”161 Schiffrin’s understanding of what it means to tell a story essentially touches on narrator roles and global positions within society that frame the narratives. This also must apply to an analysis of Qur’ānic narratives. As we will see in the next chapter (chapter 3) so many of the Muslim exegetes stress continuously in their interpretations of the narratives the social and historical circumstances in which God is telling the narratives. For them, this is a means through which the narratives make sense. The answers therefore to the question of “where we are and who we are with,” with respect to God will be an aspect of understanding why God is projecting particular images of Himself in the sūra, such as al-walī ‘The Protector.’

Lampropoulou explains that the term ‘self-presentation’ within these studies of narrative is used when the focus is mainly on “how tellers build positive self-presentations through a range of linguistic and narrative resources.”162 In broaching this question, Schiffrin proposes that the function of evaluation in creating a self-image is not merely found in clauses, but throughout a

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162 Lampropoulou, *Direct Speech*, 52.
text. She finds that this evaluation appears in a variety of ways, such as how narrators address characters in the story, in the uses of syntax, such as how the narrator syntactically embeds other characters’ speech into the narrative—as direct speech or indirect speech, which reveals inner speaker evaluations of the characters. All of these indicate social roles the narrator plays within a situated social context, be it mother, sister, or God, and the upholding of these social roles’ expectations.\footnote{Schiffrin, “Narrative as Self-Portrait,” 199-203.} A unique example of how speakers display self-presentation is found, for example, in O’Connor’s analysis of prison narratives. She found that inmates used certain linguistic strategies, such as irony and understatement, to underplay the crimes committed and therefore highlight themselves as changed persons.\footnote{See Patricia E. O’Connor, “You Could Feel It through the Skin: Agency and Positioning in Prisoners’ Stabbing Stories,” Text 14:1 (1994), 45-75.}

Bamberg also offers a useful model for examining how narrators display self-presentation. He examines a narrative by looking at the process of positioning, which he holds takes place at three different levels: 1. “How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events?” 2. “How does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience?” and 3. “How do narrators position themselves to themselves?”\footnote{Michael Bamberg, “Positioning between Structure and Performance,” JONALH 7 (1997), 337.}

A linguistic device used often to portray the ‘self’ in narratives is constructed dialogue, or as Schiffrin calls “direct speech.” This particular strategy is especially important in sūra 18 as many of the narratives contain constructed dialogue to varying degrees, and many of which I argue serve an evaluative function. Due to the lack of an extended analysis from Labov on constructed dialogue/direct statements, I draw on other scholarship from narrative analysis dedicated to studying the evaluative role of constructed dialogue. Their findings shed light on
our analysis of God’s usage of constructed dialogue in His narratives as well, which is an important area of contribution to His narratives’ overall evaluative function.

2. Constructed Dialogue and its Evaluative Role

Mikhail Bakhtin’s seminal works on direct speech, in which he brings attention to the context of each utterance, and to the idea that all utterances are laced with “dialogic overtones” paved way for understanding that presenting dialogue in speech is a subjective enterprise. Lampropoulou, who uses the term “speech representation” for constructed dialogue puts forth that “the process of representing one’s talk within posterior talk certainly involves the subjective contribution of the person who represents it.” Holt expresses this idea in saying that “direct reported speech, once placed in a new context, takes on a duality: it embodies both the original utterance and the citation of that utterance by another.” As such, using constructed dialogue can be seen a form of narrative power that ultimately rests with the speaker.

Analysts have explored why, when, and how a speaker cites the utterance of another in a narrative, and have found that the reported utterances perform several tasks. Constructed dialogue is found to shape listeners’ understanding of an event, their impressions of the characters within the narrative, and their social position vis-à-vis the narrator and other characters. For example, many scholars have put forward that constructed dialogue in narratives contributes to the narrative performance in providing it a level of vivid drama, and participates in

167 Lampropoulou, Direct Speech, 5.
strengthening the validity of the particular story being told. Labov himself contributes to this point in stating narration is more vivid when speech is presented as first-person dialogue in direct quotation (e.g., He said, “I’m coming,”) rather than third person report as indirect quotation (e.g., He said that he was coming). Georgakopoulou (1997) stresses constructed dialogue is a means by which the speaker engages the ‘narrative present.’ This is achieved by quoting speech that was said at the time of the event, which brings speakers to the scene of the narrative as though it was happening in front of them and thus creating vividness and involvement.

Holt highlights the fact that constructed dialogue conveys “both the attitude of the reported speaker and, more implicitly, the attitude of the current speaker.” In other words, constructed dialogue reflects the speaker’s own perceptions implicitly presented in the speech of others. Seeing this process as one of maintaining intersubjectivity, she explains what exactly the speaker is trying to do:

The device, then, is a delicate one. When people tell stories, they want the recipient to agree with their interpretation or assessment of the incident (e.g., that it was funny or complaint worthy). However, rather than making their assessment of the event explicit, reported speech (within a sequence containing implicit assessment) can be used to give the recipient access to the utterance in question, thus allowing him or her to react to it and the teller to then collaborate in that reaction.

There are also scholars who found that the evaluative role of constructed dialogue is closely linked to self-presentation. Lampropoulou’s own analysis of many oral narratives brings forth some of these findings. For example, she found that nerd girls, who generally did not use

169 Deborah Tannen, “‘We’ve Never Been So Close, We’re Very Different’: Three Narrative Types in Sister Discourse,” Narrative Inquiry, 18:2 (2008), 217.
170 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 217.
173 Ibid., 451.
direct speech in their narratives, used direct speech to contribute to the display of intelligence.\footnote{174 Lampropoulou, Direct Speech, 147} Similarly, she found that a young male narrator was using direct speech to maintain his image of a “hegemonic heterosexual male.”\footnote{175 Ibid., 138.}

The larger question of identity formation relates to the subject of self-presentation and has been also investigated with respect to the role of constructed dialogue. Alvarez-Caccamo developed the concept of code displacement in studying reported speech, referring “to the dislocation, transformation, or supplantation of identities and to the generation of local power alliances through this supplantation.”\footnote{176 Celso Alvarez-Caccamo, “The Power of Reflexive Language(s): Code Displacement in Reported Speech,” Journal of Pragmatics 25 (1996), 42.} For Alvarez-Caccamo, reported speech on many levels creates “situated power alliances with the multiple inhabitants of the space of talk: hearers, and overhearers, recipients, ‘primary’ audiences, ‘secondary’ audiences, and narrated characters.”\footnote{177 Ibid., 54.} Thus, speakers indicate their own perspective by reporting the speech of others, and thereby give insight into identity alliances.

These views on constructed dialogue ultimately show that speakers include it in narratives as another means by which they can control and shape their self-image.\footnote{178 See Holt, “Reporting and Reacting,” 425-455.} Choosing what dialogues to construct, or to present, and the degree of their contents, is a subjective decision and inevitably reflects a speaker’s inner motivations. As such, I will argue in this thesis that a large amount of constructed dialogue in the narratives is also evaluative when examined more closely. How constructed dialogue interacts with the subject of God’s overall narrative presentation, and more specifically self-presentation and identity alliances, will be explored.
The above section on post-Labovian evaluation reflects many examples of discourse and many sociolinguistic approaches to narrative subsequent to Labov. They demonstrate a continuing engagement with Labov’s original idea by reinforcing the importance of evaluation. Of important note is that the various discussions on manifestations of evaluation support Labov’s hesitation to limit evaluation to one place within the narrative. Evaluation for Labov is the narrative’s “secondary structure” and permeates the entire narrative. Labov himself affirms this intersection in one example when discussing narrative resolution. He states that “in many narratives, the evaluation is fused with the result: that is, a single narrative clause both emphasizes the importance or the result and states it.” An example of this would be a statement such as “And so I just left the fight,” where the speaker is also indexing that he made the “right” decision. These various expressions of evaluation greatly add to our understanding of Labov’s initial findings on evaluation. Together, this group of literature can bring tremendous benefit to a narrative analysis of Qur’ānic narratives that are shown to be highly evaluative.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the archetypal model for the structure of oral narratives as formulized by William Labov. Despite the major criticisms Labov’s model has received, I believe it is suitable for applying to the narratives of sūra 18. The model offers many analytical tools and resources, such as the various internal evaluative devices, by which one can analyze Qur’ānic narratives and subsequently understand them in new light. A minor adjustment to his model is my classification of constructed dialogue clauses as narrative clauses instead of being

179 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 369.
180 Labov and Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis,” 35.
classified structurally as embedded evaluation. However, what I find is that these narratives clauses as dialogue are also still highly evaluative as well thus making the Labov’s distinction of such categories problematic for coding purposes. Nonetheless I have decided to code them as narrative clauses so that the actual narrative events as they occurred in sequential order are highlighted clearly in the narrative.

Further, an overview of major post-Labovian narrative models demonstrates that Labov’s model has significantly influenced narrative studies since its introduction in 1972. His original ideas and findings continue to be incorporated into widely modified and enhanced models of approaching spoken narratives, many of which can also be drawn on to further discussions of how we can understand Qur’ānic narratives.

The most important element of Labov’s model that has been expanded is evaluation. Evaluation for Labov, as both a structural element and “secondary structure” of the narrative served three primary functions: 1) bringing significance to the narrative, 2) “self-aggrandizement,” and 3) distinguishing complicating action from resolution. This notion has developed into various understandings and approaches to narratives by later scholars who, for example, speak about notions such as tellability, experientiality, and self-presentation.

In my study, I will show that Qur’ānic narratives are imbued with evaluation across each Labovian functional category. I find that the evaluation section in Qur’ānic narratives is the most salient and pervasive feature amongst Labov’s six functional categories and ultimately fulfills each of Labov’s primary functions. Also, building on the idea that narratives are used for self-presentation, a great consideration will be given to the question of how God linguistically and narratively constructs his self-image. The constructs proposed by Bamberg (1997) and Schiffrin
(1996) will also be engaged in each of the chapters to facilitate this particular aspect of my analysis. The notion of presenting Himself in the most superior position is a global endeavor for God cutting across the entire narrative, and it is fundamentally part of the narrative’s greater evaluative function.
Chapter 3: Approaches to Qur’ānic Narratives

This chapter will first present a discussion on the various approaches taken to Qur’ānic narratives by scholars from different periods. This will be followed by Mustansir Mir’s treatment of dialogue in the Qur’ān, whose work treats a central feature of Qur’ānic narratives and an important area of focus in my forthcoming chapters. Lastly, a presentation of the concept nazm ‘coherence’ helps to situate the contribution of my findings to the debate over the unity of the Qur’ān.

I. Key Questions

The previous chapter showed that the general approach Labov takes to spoken narratives is fundamentally structural: He identifies six segments of a narrative, each of which serve a different function. One of the ways Labov explains the significance of each segment is by naming the hypothetical question that it answers. For example, the abstract answers the question: “What was this narrative about?” while the evaluation answers the question “So what?” (as shown in chapter 1).¹⁸¹ Scholars from different periods have generally concerned themselves with the following questions: “What happened?” “So what?” “What was this about?” and finally “What’s going on here?” Each question represents a different approach to Qur’ānic narratives. In this chapter, in light of pursuing a Labovian analysis of Qur’ānic narratives I will present an overview of various historical treatments of Qur’ānic narratives, particularly sūra 18 when applicable, organizing my discussion around these key questions.

¹⁸¹ Labov, Language in the Inner City, 370.
1. “What happened?”

The scholars who have been most interested in the “complicating action” component of Qur’ānic narratives are the traditional Muslim exegetes. These commentators, spanning from the 9th A.D. to the 18th A.D. centuries, have generally approached the Qur’ān in a linear and atomistic way. This approach, also known as the style of tafsīr musalsal ‘linked exegesis,’ analyzes the Qur’ān word by word, line by line, beginning with the first āya and going all the way through to the last. As such, this group of scholars did not treat Qur’ānic narratives separately but as part of a sustained linear work. Heath notes that the early traditional exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī (d.310/923), never offered conclusive interpretations but rather demonstrated a “hermeneutic pluralism”:

\[ \text{A priori, the text has only one meaning, it is the word of God. But mainstream religious scholars and traditionalists (for al-Ṭabarī typifies the mainstream approach here) refuse to determine it. Instead coexisting interpretations are left in suspension. The ultimate choice is left to the individual reader.}^{182} \]

The lack of names, places, and times in Qur’ānic narratives was a vacuum that traditional exegetes worked to fill. Their primary work was to expound all possible historical detail that is directly related to the narrated event. For example, reading the narrative of The Young Men and the Cave, classical and medieval exegetes asked ‘who were the young men? What were their names? Where did they live?’ To help explain the events in a narrative and to fill in the historical blanks, exegetes went into a lot of detail and to great lengths. This includes providing numerous citations for different versions of the events along with a list of their respective chains of transmitters. They also relied heavily on the ’isrāʾīliyyāt which were Christian and Jewish

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sources that provided extra-Qur’ānic details and contextualization of the narratives.\textsuperscript{183}

In a close analysis of al-Ṭabarī’s approach to the story of Adam’s creation, Heath remarks that traditional exegetes deemed attention to each word necessary to their fundamental aim of establishing the text’s meaning.\textsuperscript{184} Each word was analyzed from a historical perspective as well as, when relevant, grammatical and semantic perspectives. Thus, when we look at how classical and medieval exegetes analyzed the five narratives of sūra 18, we do not find them brushing the narrative with an overall theme or “point.” or trying to understand it based on a particular moral lesson. Instead, they looked at each word systematically and presented an entire corpus of historical and linguistic material relevant to it and the narrative.

This point is further illustrated by examining their interpretations of āya 65 in The Journey of Moses narrative: “And [they] found one of Our servants– a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.” Al-Zamakhsharī (d.538/1144), famed for his linguistic analysis, treats this āya by initially embarking upon philological analysis. He describes “raḥmat-an,” the primary meaning of which is ‘mercy’ as denoting “waḥy” ‘revelation,’ and “nubuwwa” ‘prophethood,’ thereby representing the two favors granted to “one of Our servants.” He then discusses why Moses, a prophet, had to seek knowledge from someone.\textsuperscript{185} Al-Qurṭubī (d.671/1273) also defines “raḥmat-an” as nubuwwa and then continues on to cite multiple reported opinions regarding al-Khiḍr’s identity (whom he

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\textsuperscript{183} An example of this is the commentary of al-Ṭabarī. See Muḥammad ibn Jaḥr al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ al-bayān’ an ta‘wil āy al-Qur’ān Ja‘far (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1978). This work marks the beginning of the classical period of tafsīr.
\textsuperscript{184} Heath, “Creative Hermeneutics,” 186.
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holds to be a prophet).\textsuperscript{186} In contrast, al-Ṭūsī (d.460/1274) defines “rahmat-an” as ni’mā ‘benefaction’ and then asserts that he does not believe that al-Khiḍr is a prophet.\textsuperscript{187} Meanwhile al-Ṭabarī cites multiple reports providing details about how and where Moses meets with al-Khiḍr. These details include what al-Khiḍr was wearing and who saluted whom first,\textsuperscript{188} the origins of al-Khiḍr (including his real name and identity), and definitions of key lexical items such as ‘ilm ladunnā ‘Our knowledge.’ Attention to individual words raises larger questions laden with historical, philosophical and theological concerns, for example whether this knowledge is hidden or universal and whether it is only granted to al-Khiḍr or also to others.

One could argue that a historical approach is natural, as listeners/readers would want to know the details of a story. Details not only contextualize a narrative, but also make it more vivid and memorable, while also offering points of comparison with other versions. This last benefit was especially important for Arab Jews and for Christian communities living in the Fertile Crescent, as they were very knowledgeable about earlier versions of the Qur’ānic narratives.\textsuperscript{189} The Prophet Muhammad is also reported to have said “And report from the Children of Israel, there is no harm in it.”\textsuperscript{190} This hadīth sanctified the use of the isrāʾīliyyāt sources for classical exegetes and they thus used them extensively to further understand and flesh out the historical details of the narratives.\textsuperscript{191} In providing these details, the traditional exegetes


\textsuperscript{188} Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān, 15:180.

\textsuperscript{189} Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ṭarīkh al-anbiyāʾ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004), 2.


\textsuperscript{191} Exegetes Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373) are famed for bringing critical attention to the use of such sources in interpreting the Qur’ān. See Robert Tottoli, “Origin and Use of the Term Isrāʾīliyyāt in Muslim Literature,” Arabica 46:2 (1999), 193-194.
created their own literary genres. In particular, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’*, “Stories of the Prophets,” is a branch of Qur’ānic exegesis that according to Brinner is dedicated to expanding “the often brief and, at times, somewhat enigmatic aspects of those stories.”  

192 Al-Tha’labī’s (d.427/1036) ‘ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’ ‘the brides of sessions about the tales of the prophets’ is this genre’s masterpiece.  

193 It is similar in content to his commentary on the Qur’ān *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*. It provides extensive historical details and contextualizes the people, including non-prophets such as the Sleepers of Ephesus. Brinner notes that this genre is generally considered, by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, as being “made up of purely anecdotal tales which may be pleasant for reading, but are otherwise of no great significance.”  

194 Nonetheless, it represents a collection of traditions from the ḥadīth literature, oral folk literature, and earlier Jewish and Christian historical accounts.

Another field of scholarship related to the “What happened?” approach is that which focuses on the origins of the narratives. In general, Western scholars have been more interested in the historical origins of Qur’ānic narratives than in the messages that they convey, in accordance with their predominantly historical-critical approach to the Qur’ān. Wensinck’s article “Al-Khaḍir” (written for the first edition of *Encyclopaedia of Islam*) typifies this approach: he argues that the story of *The Journey of Moses* of sūra 18 is taken from an older Jewish legend.  

195 Such an approach once again reflects a preoccupation with the historicity of the

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193 Al-Tha’labī, ‘ʿArāʾis al-majālis  
194 Ibid., 12.  
narratives and a neglect of the Qur’ān’s distinct style and underlying discourse structure.

2. “So what?”

The next major approach used by scholars to discuss Qur’ānic narratives is the “So What?” approach. This question focuses on what the point of telling the story is. The “point” however must be distinguished from “theme.” By “point” I mean why God tells the story in any revelation. The theological basis of the “So What” approach is in the Qur’ān itself. God says to the Prophet in āya 120 of Sūrat al-Hūd in which many narratives of past prophets are recounted:

We have told you the stories of the prophets to make your heart firm, and in these accounts truth has come to you, as well as lessons and reminders for the believers.(Q 11:120)

This āya is particularly significant for my engagement of the question how narratives are functioning in the Qur’ān. Here God clearly states that He is recounting past narratives in order to strengthen the Prophet’s heart and that they contain moral lessons relevant to the Prophet, his community, and to future communities. This is the framework in which many scholars, especially Muslim scholars, primarily approach the Qur’ānic narratives. Early elaborations on this statement can be traced to the exegetical commentaries that were emerging at around the same time that the field of ‘ulūmul-Qur’ān ‘Sciences of the Qur’ān’ was crystallizing in the 14th and 15th (AD) centuries.

Al-Kalbī (d. 741/1357), the fourteenth century Andalusian grammarian and jurist, treats the subject of Qur’ānic narratives in his commentary’s prolegomena. He first defines qiṣaṣ ‘narratives’ as “the telling of accounts ‘akhbār’ of previous prophets and others such as The

York: Prometheus Books, 2004), where Wansbrough asserts in Chapter 1 that Qur’ānic narratives especially represent the “fragmented” nature and origins of the Qur’ān.
Young Men and the Cave and Dhū l-Qarnayn."

He then begins a discussion on why Qur’ānic narratives are repeated several times throughout the Qur’ān. Repetition, for al-Kalbī, is due to the speaker’s changing and evolving goals “maqāṣid” of communication. Telling a narrative on one occasion is addressing a specific point within that sūra’s context, whereas telling it on another occasion is for another reason. Each telling in a different sūra brings to the narrative an added benefit ‘fā‘ida’ or significance that builds on the other versions. He completes his point by quoting a core principle from the Arabic science of rhetoric ‘balāgha’—“lī kulli maqām maqāl” ‘for every context there is an appropriate speech.’

Al-Kalbī then proceeds to discuss the reasons or objectives ‘maqāṣid’ behind the recounting of the narratives. The maqāṣid of a narrative is essentially the “So What” question in the Labovian narrative framework. The reason why God tells narratives in the Qur’ān has been formulized into the formal subheading of fāwā'id qiṣaṣ al-Qur‘ān or ‘merits of Qur’ānic narratives’. These appear with more or less with the same content in many later ‘ulūm ul-Qur‘ān ‘Sciences of the Qur‘ān’ texts. Al-Kalbī identifies God’s aims in telling a story as including sanctifying former prophets and affirming the Prophet Muhammad’s prophethood (for example, through noting that he has received information about these narratives that no other has received and therefore the source of this information must be God). Additional reasons include God’s desire to console the Prophet’s sadness about peoples’ rejection of his prophecy (by showing through narrative that all previous prophets were also rejected), a desire to reassure the Prophet

197 Al-Kalbī, Tashīl, 9.
that victory will come to him as it has come to past prophets, and lastly a desire to instill fear within disbelievers (by showing them what forms of punishment have been inflicted upon previous communities). For many Muslim scholars, the moral, psychological, and spiritual reasons behind these narratives overshadow the events they report.

A few notable modern scholars who foreground the *maqāsid* dimension in their treatment of Qur’ānic narratives include ‘Abdul ‘Alā Mawdūdī (d.1979) and Amīn Iṣlāḥī (d.1997). With respect to sūra 18, they argue that its contents were heavily influenced by what was going on around the Prophet at the time of its revelation. They highlight at each point of the sūra how the narratives intersect with these events and issues. In discussing *The Young Men of the Cave* narrative, Mawdūdī explains the reason for its revelation stating, “the story of the People of the Cave was narrated to these persecuted Muslims so as to raise their spirits.” God also narrated this story to apprise them of the previous sacrifices that believers had made for their faith.” In introducing the story of *Dhū l-Qarnayn*, Mawdūdī is castigating the disbelieving Meccans.

The interlocutors are informed that while people generally feel proud of their petty positions of power and eminence, Dhū al-Qarnayn was singularly different. He was a great ruler, a great conqueror who controlled vast resources. And yet, he always surrendered to his Creator…People foolishly think that they will enjoy life indefinitely; that their little palaces and mansions and orchards, and the resplendent life which they enjoy intensely, will endure; but not Dhū al-Qarnayn. Despite the impenetrable wall that he managed to build for protective purposes, he placed all his trust in God.

Similarly, Iṣlāḥī as an introduction to sūra 18 presents his overall structuring of the sūra. He groups the āyāt of the sūra into the following thematic sections, and with it identifies the historical context for each:

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201 Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, 5:86.
Prologue: Advice to the Prophet to not worry about the state of the Quraysh and their rejection of the prophet-hood.

The Young Men and the Cave: Told to console the Prophet that others have gone through a similar situation of oppression, and that God will protect him as He protected others.

Reminding the Prophet to ignore the arrogant Quraysh and to stick with his true humble companions, albeit poor. Warning of hellfire for the disbelieving Quraysh as well.

The Master of the Garden: Told to show the Quraysh an illustration of their arrogant attitude and what will happen if they do not attribute their success and wealth to God and deny his existence.

Iblīs the Rebel: Here Iblīs represents the archetype figure the Quraysh symbolize in their denial of the Prophet. The Quraysh are as arrogant as Iblīs.

The Journey of Moses: This narrative represents a greater lesson about having firm belief in God and accepting his will even in unbelievable hardship. It highlights the limits of man’s knowledge and the divine will of all actions, good or evil.

Dhū l-Qarnayn: Directed at Quraysh to give them an example of what a rich and powerful ruler did. Quraysh’s power is nothing compared to Dhū l-Qarnayn yet Dhū l-Qarnayn believed in God and was humble.

Epilogue: connects directly back to the prologue thus uniting the entire sūra. It is a further warning to the Quraysh that God has many signs he could give them as shown in the metaphor. Also, their questioning the Prophet to answer certain questions to test his prophecy is futile because the Prophet is only a man and true and ultimate knowledge is with God.

Islāḥī’s approach to the entire sūra, and the five narratives especially, is one of historical contextualization. For Islāḥī, God is directing His speech entirely to the first group of listeners—the Meccan community around the Prophet for edifying reasons.

A modern expression of focusing on the greater maqṣid ‘point’ of the narrative comes from the literary critic Muḥammad Khalafallāh. He deals with Qur’ānic narratives in his famed thesis “al fann al-qaṣṣāsī fī al-qur’ān al-karīm” ‘The Art of Narrative in the Noble Qur’ān.’ This work sparked an enormous controversial debate amongst traditional scholars because it treats the Qur’ān as a literary text—an approach that traditional scholars believed compromised the divinity and inimitability of the sacred book. A ‘literary’ or ‘adabī’ approach essentially involves putting more focus on the artistic and literary values of Qur’ānic language.

This line of thinking was born in a particular milieu in modern Egypt in which enlightenment and rationalist schools of thought cast doubt on the veracity of the narratives and

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the historical events that they present. This was especially the case for narratives that dealt with supernatural entities such as angels and jinn, and with supernatural events such as the Prophet’s ascension to heaven and the young boys who sleep in a cave for more than 300 years. As Wild puts it, Khalafallāh’s work ultimately stood as an attempt to “dehistoricize…the whole Qur’anic genre of stories (qasas) and parables (amthal), and thereby consider them in some way as divine fiction.”

Although Khalafallāh’s work focused on unorthodox theological and historical implications of the Qur’ān, his treatment of narratives more traditionally focused on their didactic origins. He divided narratives into three major groups; historical, symbolic and fables—each with a greater purpose. He stressed that, although historical events are described, (such as The Story of Lot and The Journey of Moses), it is not the aim of the Qur’ān to be a history book and to provide historical information. Qur’ānic narratives for Khalafallāh, therefore, categorically have to do with the greater messages bearing psychological and spiritual lessons and effects. They only exist in the Qur’ān to guide, to exhort and to teach. Most Muslims would agree with this statement. But Khalafallāh’s underlying premise suggested more dramatically that the events never did happen historically and it is this that raises contention amongst Muslim scholars. Nonetheless, the thesis is a seminal example and expression of favoring the exhorting ‘art’ of Qur’ānic narratives, focusing on the Speaker mainly, over other aspects such as their historical context and other related issues of historiography.

204 Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallāh, al-Fann al-qāṣaṣī fī al-qur’ān al-karīm (Beirut: Mu’assasat al Intishār al-‘Arabī, 1999), 402.
205 Ibid., 405
206 Khalafallāh, al-Fannal-qāṣaṣī, 403.
As we can see the theological precedence of āya 120 from Sūrat al-Hūd, which frames how scholars sought the “So What” question, remains influential. My study, falling within the “So What” approach, however, is treating a particularly unique sūra in the Qur’ān in which the narratives are not about past prophets, with the exception of one of its narrative’s *The Journey of Moses*. As such, I suggest that what God reveals about His inner aims in āya 120 could be limited to one’s understanding of specifically the stories of the past prophets. This is the type of narrative God is speaking about in āya 120 by stating “We have told you the stories of the prophets[anbā’ al-rusul] to make your heart firm…” Although the majority of Muslim scholars stress the historical lessons and implications of sūra 18, there also seems to be strong elements of self-presentation that merit further investigation. It will be shown that one of the narratives, about the past prophet Moses, is strikingly different in style from the other four narratives. This initial observation, expounded on in Chapter 7, supports my attempt to make a distinction amongst the types of narratives in the Qur’ān and their possible functions. God’s statement in āya 120 could be one interpretative tool in attempting to the understand *The Journey of Moses* narrative.

3. “What is this about?”

When hearing or reading a narrative, a person can sometimes find it difficult to determine exactly what the narrative is about, especially with brief narratives that appear suddenly or enigmatically such as the *Iblīs the Rebel* narrative in sūra 18. There are many scholars who have expressed what they consider to be the general theme of sūra 18, all which illustrate that there is no agreed upon theme. Sūra 18 is made up of five narratives, so when scholars write about the
overall theme of sûra 18 they are basically also commenting on how they read each narrative. I present below multiple viewpoints of different scholars on sûra 18.

Generally, it is the modern scholars, especially those who have penned thematic commentaries ‘al-tafaṣīr al-mawdū‘ī-a,’ who explicitly discuss a narrative or sûra’s ‘overall’ theme. Syed Quṭb and al-Ṭabaṭabā’ī both believe that a sûra must be seen as a whole with an overarching master theme. A topic I will return to later on in this chapter. They respectively call this master theme the miḥwar ‘axis’ and gharad ‘objective.’

This approach led both Quṭb and al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī to put forth that the theme relates to the idea of the negation of ascribing partners to God. As Quṭb puts it, “the establishment of clear and accurate thought and reasoning is made manifest in the rejection of the claims of all those who associate partners with God, because they assert what they do not know.”

Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī similarly states that it is about “the negation of any partners to [God], and the admonition to man to develop fear of God.”

Quṭb supports his reading with textual evidence from the sûra itself, by what he calls the “final comments” of the narratives. According to a Labovian analysis, he is referring to the codas of the narratives. In his introduction to the sûra, he isolates the four main closing āyāt of four of the narratives that all repeat the same message. For the first narrative The Young Men and the Cave he writes, “in its commentary [ta‘qīb] on their story [‘alay-ha], the sūrah says ‘No guardian have they apart from Him, nor does He allot to anyone a share of His rule.’” Then, for the following narrative of The Master of the Garden he writes “in the final commentary on this

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208 Quṭb, In the Shade of the Qur’ān, 11:183.
story, the sūra includes ‘He had none to support him against God, nor was he able to save himself. For thus it is: all protection comes from God, The True One. He is the best to grant reward and the best to [determine] outcome.’”

He continues to list the other two “final comments” from the other two narratives in the sūra that contains the same message of not taking other than God anyone as their waliyy [often translated as ‘master,’ ‘protector,’ or ‘guardian,’ to support his view of the main theme.

Quṭb interprets the message of these codas to mean a strong warning of committing idolatry ‘shirk.’ He relates the point of the four codas back to āya 3 at the beginning of the sūra in which God states: “It [The Book] warns those who assert, ‘God has taken to Himself son [walad-an].’” Quṭb as such is projecting his interpretation of walad as ‘son,’ and this āya’s warning of taking a ‘son,’ to the rest of the sūra. This is why he believes the Christian story of the Sleepers of Ephesus is recounted in order to warn those Christians who have ascribed a partner onto God.

Abdel Haleem, however, in his interpretation of walad uses the word ‘offspring’ to translate āya 3 and explains the word walad in a footnote. He writes that, “walad in classical Arabic applies to masculine and feminine, singular and plural. As this sura is Meccan, it most probably refers to Meccan claims that the angels are daughters of God.”

Haleem then is expanding the interpretation scope of walad and does not delimit his reading of the sūra by it.

As such we can see that Quṭb’s reading of the whole sūra becomes guided by his initial interpretation of walad as ‘son.’ I believe that such a reading denied him the opportunity to

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210 Quṭb, In The Shade of the Qur’ān, 11:183
211 Ibid., 11:186
arrive a more revealing interpretation of the individual narratives. Quṭb, for example, does not make a connection from the codas to the theme of protection, in its physical sense, which is textually evident within the narratives.

As a literary critic, Quṭb’s analysis is very traditional in the sense that the entire focus of each of the narratives is on the characters and their actions. At many points in the stories, he misses to draw connections between key elements of the narrative and the greater point that God is trying to make. For example, in attempting to explain orientation clause from the Dhū l-Qarnayn narrative, which reads “for whom We had provided no shelter from it,” Quṭb seems to be unsure of its meaning and offers two interpretations.213

Thus when the sun rose, the people were directly exposed to it. This description applies to deserts and vast plateaus. It does not specify a particular location. All that we say is that it is likely that this place was in the far east, where the sun rose over its open, flat land. It might have also been on the east coast of Africa. Another probability is that the description, ‘for whom We had provided no covering against it,’ means that those people were always in the nude and did not employ clothing. Hence, they were not screened from the sun.

His analysis on the one hand reflects that He recognizes the clause as an orientation clause, again indexing the generality of Labov’s model on a basic level, but it becomes clear that he is searching for its referential function—a place, a precise geographical location of where this people could be. Like the classical exegetes, we will examine shortly, he is trying to fill in missing details. And lastly, his other interpretation that perhaps the people were nude demonstrates again a greater focus on the characters within the narrative or “scene” than the Speaker.

Quṭb here, and in many other places in his commentary, is not looking at the narratives from the perspective of narrative analysis that consistently keeps in mind the question, ‘what is

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Ibid., 245.
the speaker doing in each part of the narrative?’ My analysis will show that such an orienting clause is highly evaluative, embedded in the syntax as well, and is emphasizing a facet of God being the *al-walī*, ‘The Protector.’ I focus on how each part of the narrative in some way sustains God’s superior image that eventually climaxes in the codas. In conclusion, I believe that Quṭb’s methodology in attempting to analyze a spoken narrative does not provide him with a holistic way to undertake a systematic analysis of the narratives’ contents although he recognizes key segments of it. This is one of the drawbacks of a thematic approach to narratives that, to borrow from Abu-Zayd, “violates the contextual dimension.”

Further examples will be provided in the forthcoming analysis chapters.

Bodman, another scholar undertaking a thematic analysis, argues that the individual stories of Sūrat al-Kahf specifically posit the theme of physical protection. He writes that:

> A complement to the theme of limited mortal knowledge is an accent on God’s protection given to believers. This protection comes directly from God to the Companions of the Cave, and through the Khidr-figure and Dhū al-Qarnayn to various populations in the latter two narratives. Two shorter stories, a parable of two men and the Iblīs story, lie between the longer stories of the Companions of the Cave and of Moses and Khidr and add dimensions to both themes.

He restates this argument in his discussion of the “summary” of the narrative/parable *The Master of the Garden*: ‘the summary verse cites the importance of God’s protection, which reflects the key theme of the surah.’ Bodman’s conceptualization of protection and his reading of the individual narratives thus are similar to the findings of my analysis. He reads many of the complicating action clauses as clearly indicating that God is giving protection to people. His analysis, however, is focused on the composite Iblīs narrative in the Qur’ān and does not provide

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216 Ibid., 130.
a systematic analysis of the individual narratives to show how God is sustaining and managing His self-image in this regard.

Muḥammad al-Ghazālī puts forth another expression of the theme of the sūra that summarizes to reflect humanity’s final accountability before God:

The surah cites episodes from the chronicles of history to illustrate the veracity of the concept of tawḥīd and its value to human society. It narrates the stories of the young men of the cave, the rich man of the orchard and the pauper, Moses and the pious man, and the well-known account of Dhū’l-Qarnayn. Each account is followed by an enlightening commentary designed to instill in the mind a recognition of the existence of God and the need to prepare for our accountability to Him.²¹⁷

In another thematic account of sūra 18, Muhammad Asad states:

[the sūra] is almost entirely devoted to a series of parables or allegories built around the theme of faith in God versus an undue attachment to the life of this world; and the key-phrase of the whole surah is the statement in verse 7, ‘We have willed that all beauty on earth be a means by which we put men to a test’ - an idea that is most clearly formulated in the parable of the rich man and the poor man (verses 32-44).²¹⁸

In surveying other treatments of this sūra that are also methodologically committed to seeing it as a whole (i.e., apart from thematic exegesis), a myriad of other themes also emerge.

For Norman Brown, an American classicist, the overarching theme of the sūra is deeply rooted in esotericism.

Folktales, like dreams, are not to be interpreted literally. And the content the folktale - the episodes of the ship, the youth and the wall-tells us in the most literal, even crude way, three times reiterated, that there is a distinction between “what actually happened,” events as seen by the eye of historical materialism, and "what is really going on," events sub specie aeternitatis, as seen by the inward, the clairvoyant eye, the second sight. The form and the content of the folktale obliges us, as it has obliged all subsequent Islamic culture, to make the distinction between literal meaning and something beyond-in Islamic terminology between zahir and batin, between outer (exoteric) and inner (esoteric); between external-visible-patent and internal-invisible-latent; between materialist and spiritual meanings.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an (Herndon: Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000), 309.
²¹⁹ Norman Brown, “The Apocalypse of Islam,” Social Text 8 (1983-1984), 162. Brown’s term “folktale” reflects his approach taken to the stories in this sūra. I argue in this thesis that these stories are spoken narratives representing God’s “personal” experience. The term “folktale” invokes an oral genre closely linked to legends and mythology particular to a subculture or group. In the Labovian tradition, narrating a folktale would be considered narrating a story of vicarious experience—which is for a speaker to narrate a “second-hand” story from an objective point of view.
The distinction between surface and substance, between ẓāhir and bāṭin, as Brown states, is operating on various levels in each of the main stories in this sūra. This is also the predominant view of Sufi interpretations of this sūra—as well as many classical interpretations that are presented and explained with different terminology.  

The notion that ‘what seems to be happening is not quite what is actually happening’ certainly pervades the sūra’s weltanschauung. Anna Gades asserts that this sūra as a whole is one “that expresses themes of the limits of knowledge in space and time.” In her reading, each story reflects this.

Each of the main stories in 18 Al-Kahf relates in some way to the theme of space, time and the boundaries of knowledge of the seen and unseen. The first main story in 18 Al-Kahf…the fact of time itself is distorted and questioned. In the second story, in which the Prophet Moses follows the mysterious “servant of God,” reasoned principles of cause and effect are apparently suspended, then restored. Finally, the third narrative… The geography of this narrative traverses space to the ends of the earth.

A more personal perspective comes from Muhammad Amin, who takes into consideration the sensitivities of everyday readers of or listeners to the Qur’ān. He contends that the general theme of this sūra is God’s compassion and the favors He grants to ordinary people—that is, to non-prophets. In other words, God is revealing that He is capable of showing His signs and favors to all and not only prophets. He is seen doing this for the young boys, who are everyday ordinary people, in the story of The Young Men of the Cave and Dhū l-Qarnayn—another ordinary person. Similarly, al-Khiḍr, whom Amin believes not to be a prophet, is granted an enormous favor. God describes him in āya 65 of sūra 18 as “one of Our servants—a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.” Again, what makes these beneficiaries (of miracles and exceptional favors) ‘ordinary’ is that they are

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220 See Abdul Karīm al-Qushayrī, Laṭā'if al'ishārāt bi tafsīr ulQur'ān (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1968).
222 Ibid., 256.
223 There is a historic exegetical debate around whether or not al-Khiḍr in the narrative The Journey of Moses is a prophet or not. These varying opinions are touched on briefly in Chapter 7.
not prophets. This reading emphasizes an important characteristic of the narratives that I take into consideration, except that I would argue that the narrative structure of The Journey of Moses indicates that this narrative should be best understood as a story of a past prophet rather than seeing it as a narrative about a non-prophet as the others.

In treating Qur’ānic narratives, it is rare for scholars to consistently relate the narrative entirely back to the Speaker. An exception comes from Mir’s treatment of the story of Joseph (Sūra 12, Sūrat Yūsuf), which argues for God’s centrality or “theocentricity” echoes this conclusion in the framework of a literary analysis. He stresses that, “the story of Joseph is presented as a dramatic vindication of the thesis that God is dominant and His purposes are inevitably fulfilled.” He believes that the four divine attributes being developed in the narrative are God as ghālib, ‘dominant,’ laṭīf, ‘subtle,’ ‘alīm, ‘omniscient’ and ḥakīm, ‘all-wise.’ Without using the same terminology, he is essentially highlighting the dominance of self-presentation in the story over the narrative events that he believes are more significant to focus on.

4. “What’s going on here?”

Works that contribute to investigating the form and structure of Qur’ānic narratives, can be understood as approaching the text with the question, “What’s going on here?” In other words, one asks, “Is this a narrative? or, “How is the story being told exactly?”

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226 Ibid., 5.

227 Ibid., 7.
Classical and medieval scholars have always argued that the primary speaker in the Qur’ān is God. They also claim that kalām Allāh ‘speech of God’ is unmatchable as it manifests the highest and most eloquent form of rhetorical and literary expression. Appreciation for the style of Qur’ānic narratives can be traced to early Arabic works from the literary genre of ‘i’jāz—the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur’ān. This genre has produced extensive commentary on the style and linguistic qualities of the Qur’ān from various literary and discourse perspectives including balāgha, the science of rhetoric, and faṣāḥa, clarity.\(^{228}\) The subject of style in Qur’ānic stories has also been addressed in the literature of qaṣaṣ ‘stories’. But one does not find a systematic approach to narratives (as individual units).

In order to prove that the style of the Qur’ān is inimitable, scholars of this genre identify its different rhetorical forms of expression (such as such as ḥadhf ‘ellipsis, ‘isti’āra, ‘metaphor,’ and tashbīh ‘simile’). They do this by gathering various examples from throughout the Qur’ān under each heading.\(^{229}\) They show no interest in analyzing the structure of an entire narrative. As Mir points out, the primary concern for scholars of ‘i’jāz and balāgha has traditionally been one of theology, proving that ultimately the Qur’ān is the miraculous word of God and thereby confirms Muhammad’s prophethood:

> Discussion of the literary aspect of the Qur'an are usually confined to the narrow framework of the Qur'an’s challenge to the unbelievers to produce a work like it...The Qur'an’s claim to inimitability was later developed into an elaborate doctrine by Muslim scholars. But, although the claim was interpreted to mean that the Qur'an is inimitable in point of style and language, the doctrine resulting from the attempts to vindicate that claim was, in its spirit and structure, not literary but theological.”\(^{230}\)


\(^{229}\) See chapter contents of al-Bāqillānī’s, I’jāz al-Qur’ān.

Some excellent modern Arabic works that discuss the general style and form of Qur’ānic narratives include Faḍl Ḥasan ‘Abbās’s al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur’ānī: īḥā’u wa nafaḥātu hu ‘Qur’ānic Stories: Inspirations and Implications,’ in which he arranges all of the narratives in chronological order.231 Maḥmūd al-Sayyid Ḥasan, in Rawā‘i’i’ al-‘i’jāz fī al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur’ānī ‘The wonders of inimitability in Qur’ānic stories,’ explores God’s usage of many literary devices - ‘uslūb al-istīfḥām ‘interrogative style,’ and ‘uslūb al-‘asnādī ‘predicative style’ - in various narratives.232 He reads the Young Men and the Cave, the only narrative he uses from sūra 18, as containing examples of both ‘uslūb al-‘asnādī, how a narrative asserts its facts, as well as ‘uslūb al-nahī, ‘the style of prohibition.’ For the former, Ḥasan explores a grammatical analysis of the story’s pervasive verbal sentences ‘jumla fi‘liyya’ and how they are used to express the narrative’s message.233 As for the prohibition commands, he identifies two: āya 22: “so do not argue, but stick to what is clear, and do not ask any of these people about them,” and āya 23: “do not say of anything, ‘I will do that tomorrow,’ without adding, ‘God willing.’ These commands engage the Prophet and instruct him on how to behave towards the Jewish people and other Meccans.234

For non-Muslim scholars, the structure and style of Qur’ānic narratives has been historically problematic. A. H Johns put forth a summary of the key literary qualities of Qur’ānic narratives that are challenging for readers:

Its stories are presented in a sequence of vivid scenes, compact and full of tension, played out by dramatic dialogue. The relationship between such scenes is often to be inferred; there may appear to be gaps or silences that the hearer has to fill from his or her imagination; events that are part of the motivation of the movement of the story are only alluded to, dialogue is often elliptic, and names are rarely used to identify the dramatis personae in any episode. In the qur'anic story of Joseph, for example, the only names

233 Ibid., 180-188.
234 Ibid., 297.
There are also many examples of western scholars who, as a result of not being able to understand the Qur’ānic style, hold negative views of Qur’ānic narratives. Wherry’s *Commentary on the Qur’an*, published in 1896, is an early example of this attitude and approach towards the overall presentation of Qur’ānic narratives. He states in his introduction to sūra 18 that “all these stories partake of the character of the marvelous, and carry with them such an air of vagueness as to leave the impression that Muhammad’s informants were themselves but ill-informed.”236 In Bell’s *Commentary on the Qur’an*, the problem rests with the canonization of the Qur’ānic text and textual arrangement. In his treatment of sūra 18 and narrative of *The Young Men and the Cave*, Bell does not believe āyāt 23 and 24 belong in the narrative and sees them as being out of place, not relating to each other, and having been mistakenly put into the narrative.237 He holds this view for many other āyāt in the sūra, thereby arguing for the incoherence of the sūra in its canonical arrangement.

Such presumptions influenced later scholarship within the western academy. In *Qur’anic Studies*, Wansbrough dismisses Qur’ānic narratives as not having any form of structure. He writes “But Quranic narrative is nothing if not elliptic, often unintelligible without exegetical complement.”238 He also states,

> The fragmentary character of Muslim scripture can nowhere be more clearly observed than in those passages traditionally described as narrative..., consist in fact not so much of narrative as of *exempla*, of the sort alluded to in the Qur’ān itself as 'signs' (āyāt), and hardly qualify even for the epithet 'legend'.

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Exhibiting a limited number of themes, the exempla achieve a kind of stylistic uniformity by resort to a scarcely varied stock of rhetorical convention.\textsuperscript{239}

As already noted, Norman Brown specifically reduces the narratives of sūra 18 to “pseudo-narratives” and “folktales.”\textsuperscript{240} Fred Donner further contributes to the misconceptions and describes Qur’ānic narratives as lacking a sympathetic ‘human’ dimension. He feels that “the characters that populate the Qur’ān’s narrations are bleached out, because its focus on morality is so intense. The only judgment about a person that really matters, in the Qur’ānic view, is whether he or she is good or evil, and most characters presented in the Qur’ānic narratives fall squarely on one side or other of that great divide.”\textsuperscript{241} In some regard, Donner’s assessment is correct in that what he perceives as a “bleached out” is an important element of God’s spoken narratives where ultimately his Self-image controls the narratives and dominates the characters. Again, his literary approach is guiding him to focus on the characters alone.

Riddell recently compared the narratives of David in the Qur’ān with that in the Bible, and his comparison shows that reading the Qur’ānic narratives requires a lot more work than simply reading the narrative alone in order to understand the narrative:

The story appears incomplete and seems to be grounded on a series of facts which are not stated overtly within this text. Thus it is not sufficient to limit oneself to the Qur’ānic text alone; the reader is obliged to seek answers from the body of exegetical material which has been assembled by succeeding generations of commentators.\textsuperscript{242}

Riddell, clearly stuck in the “what’s happening” mind-frame, does not understand that the narrative conveys a greater message. For Riddell, and the other above mentioned scholars, a

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 18.
commitment to understanding narratives as literature or as a means of recapitulating history, more than often results in them seeing Qur’ānic narratives as void, lacking and essentially without structure.

Neuwirth’s preliminary analysis on the style of Qur’ānic narratives expresses a central observation of what she sees as the influence of orality on Qur’ānic narrative. She highlights a key difference between biblical narratives and Qur’ānic narratives that, she calls, the “discursive elements.” These are the “explicit moral and theological edification of the community, their integration into the history of the divine-human communication that is achieved through the merging of narrated facts or speeches with reflections of the experience of the community.”

What has led her to this conclusion is the discovery of a stylistic device that she holds fulfills this “edifying” role. She calls this the “cadenza.” She writes:

A particularly efficient means to fulfill this purpose is the stylistic device of the cadenza which instills the narrative with a continuous appeal to the listeners, thus turning the narrative into a medially complex communication, addressing listeners present and readers still to be expected, not as passive receivers of narrative information but as active partners of the speaker in a joint covenant.

She explains that a cadenza is “easily identified since it is semantically distinguished from its context, inasmuch as it does not partake in the main strain of the discourse, but adds a moral component to it.” She then proceeds to give a number of examples, beginning with Sūrat Yusuf, of the various forms of the cadenza and her initial findings. Her entire discussion of this device is relevant to my study’s contribution so it is presented in full.

Q 12:88 expounds an episode of a narrative culminating in an address directed to the protagonist. The brothers of Joseph approached him: ‘When they entered unto him, they said ‘O mighty prince, affliction has visited us and our people. We come with merchandise of scant worth. Fill up to us the measure and be

244 Ibid.,
245 Ibid., 13.
charitable to us.’ Then, in the end of the verse, the text turns from the immediate addressee, Joseph, to a collective of addressees, including the first listeners and the later readers of the Qur’an. The verse continues: ‘Surely God recompenses the charitable’ (inna’ llāha yajzī’l-mutaṣaddiqīn). The cadenza thus transcends the main—narrative—discourse of the sūra, introducing a meta-narrative discourse: a moral argument, conveying divine approval. It may also present divine disapproval like Q 12:29: ‘Surely, you were among the sinners’ (innaki kunti min al-khāṭīn). Or it may refer to one of God’s attributes, e.g. Q 17:1: ‘Surely, God is hearing, the seeing’ (inna’ llāha samī’un baṣir), which in the later stages of Qur’anic development have become parameters of idea human behavior. Although it is true that not all multipartite verses bear such formulaic endings, cadenzas may be considered to be characteristic for the later Meccan and all of the Medinan Qur’anic texts. The resounding cadenza, thus, marks a new and irreversible development in the emergence of the text and of the new faith. On a social level, cadenzas betray a novel pact between the speaker and his audience, the consciousness that there is a basic consensus not only on human moral behavior but as well on the image of God as a powerful co-agent ever present in human interaction. But cadenzas achieve even more in terms of constructing a new identity. They provide makers of the sacred that transform the narrative events into stages of salvation history, changing the ordinary chronometric of time of the narratives into significant time.

Neuwirth has essentially observed the presence of what is called evaluation in narrative analysis. Her understanding of it is illustrated by her lengthy explanation and ability to identify three different functions of the cadenza. As such, she is inviting the need to understand these narratives of history, differently. The cadenza is inextricably linked to the added moral dimension of the narrative that God is embedding into the narratives. Neuwirth ultimately sees the cadenza as an aspect of “orality,” which is serving a new function than simply providing musical assonance such as with the feature of saj‘ ‘rhymed prose,’ a characteristic found in many of the early Meccan sūras.

It becomes apparent that a paradigmatic shift to seeing the narratives as spoken narratives, and then relying on narrative analysis to understand them, will situate Neuwirth’s initial findings into an appropriate framework and of course greatly further the understanding of these findings. Having already discussed the significance of evaluation in spoken narratives, we know that without such evaluation a narrative is truly insignificant for the speaker and by some narrative analysts not even considered a narrative. Neuwirth, for example, write above that “The cadenza thus transcends the main—narrative—discourse of the sūra, introducing a meta-

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narrative discourse: a moral argument, conveying divine approval.” In reverse, from a narrative
analysis perspective, the evaluation is considered firstly a core component of the structure,
especially in Labov’s model, of the narrative itself. Secondly, it is the main narrative discourse
that defines and drives in how the past events must be interpreted. My study sees itself as
furthering important observations that the field of Qur’anic studies has made, including many
scholars identification of the coda, but has not been able to fully appreciate or understand due to
the limitations of their methodological framework.

5. Previous Scholars who have used Labov

There are two particular works that have drawn on the analytical framework of William
Labov (1972) to analyze the structure of Qur’anic narratives. These studies also fall under the
“what’s going on here?” approach. These works are Ayaz Afsar’s “A Discourse and Linguistic
Approach to Biblical and Qur’anic Narrative,” and Mohammed Al-Ali’s “Analyzing the Generic
Structures and the Rhetorical Patterns of the Qur’anic Narrative Parables.” Both of these papers
have undoubtedly paved the way for my project.

In explaining his methodology, Afsar states that his aim is to compare Biblical and
Qur’anic narratives in order to highlight that Qur’anic narratives also display coherent structure
and unity. He wants to contest the criticism of Western scholars who claim that the Qur’ān is a
“jumble” and “incondite.” After describing Labov’s framework and definitions of functional
categories, he presents a table of his findings comparing each category from the same narratives
of the Bible and the Qur’ān. The narratives he examines are: The Intended Sacrifice of

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Isaac/Ishmael; Jonah; Adam and Eve; and Joseph. His work, however, differs in the findings of this thesis regarding some of the contents of the categories, and how they function in the Qurʾān. My findings disagree with his analysis of three different aspects of Qurʾānic narrative: abstracts, orientations, and coherence or inclusion of all its parts.

With respect to abstracts, Afsar concludes that “Qurʾānic abstracts are more general in nature and extend beyond the narrative situation.” Although this may hold true for the narratives he examines, in the case of the first narrative in sūra 18, it is evident that the abstract is comprehensive and serves to provide a full summary of the narrative that follows.

Regarding orientations, in examining the orientation sections of different stories, he concludes that “there is no proper orientation section in the Qurʾānic narrative…there are no details of time, place or the persons. The stories open abruptly in a dramatic way, as if every detail is either present to the listener or s/he has knowledge of it.” In comparing the orientation sections of the Bible and the Qurʾān, he concludes that “the Biblical narrative shows typical orientation in Labovian terms which is often missing in the Qurʾānic narrative.” I find that there are two problems with Afsar’s conclusion on the Qurʾānic orientation sections. First, he does not take into account that Qurʾānic narratives characteristically do not mention specific time, place, and persons, and he seems to miss the greater evaluative function of Qurʾānic narratives. The reason for the Qurʾān’s different approach to such details vis-à-vis Biblical narratives is expressed in Fred Donner’s explanation of the purpose of Qurʾānic narratives:

The purpose of stories in the Qurʾān, then, is profoundly different from their purpose in the Old Testament; the latter uses stories to explain particular chapters in Israel’s history, the former to illustrate — again and

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247 Ibid., 502.
248 Ibid., 505.
249 Ibid.
again — how the true Believer acts in certain situations. In line with this purpose, qurʾānic characters are portrayed as moral paradigms, emblematic of all who are good or evil.... [The Qurʾān] is simply not concerned with history in the sense of development and change, either of the prophets or peoples before Muhammad, or of Muḥammad himself, because in the qurʾānic view the identity of the community to which Muḥammad was sent is not historically determined, but morally determined.\footnote{Fred Donner, \textit{Narratives of Islamic Origins}, 84.}

The second problem with Afsar’s conclusion is he interprets of Labov’s definition for orientation too literally and limits it to only mean information about time, place and persons. Labov does however qualify that the orientation also serves to identify the “activity,” or “situation.”\footnote{Labov, \textit{Language in the Inner City}, 364.} I suggest that ‘situation’ and ‘activity’ in the Qurʾānic context refers to the moral and spiritual ‘activity,’ or ‘situation’ of the people of the narrative. This seems to be the only relevant background, or orienting information, in Qurʾānic narratives.

Finally, Afsar’s Labovian analysis also fails to analyze the whole narrative and therefore leaves doubt with respect to coherence. For example, in his analysis of the Intended Sacrifice of Isaac/Ishmael, he selected 37:83, ‘\textit{Abraham was of the same faith},’ as the abstract typically found at the beginning of narratives. This “gives some idea what the story is going to be about,” and selects the final two āyāt, 37:112-113, ‘\textit{We gave Abraham the good news of Isaac—a prophet and a righteous man—and blessed him and Isaac too: some of their offspring were good, but some clearly wronged themselves},’ as the coda typically found at the end of a narrative.\footnote{Afsar, “Discourse and Linguistic Approach,” 502-511.} Nevertheless, in between āyāt 83 and 113, āyāt 85-98 go unaccounted for as if they are not part of the narrative. If they are not part of the narrative then what function do these āyāt serve in the narrative—or, indeed, to the greater context of the narrative? This lapse suggests incoherence in the Qurʾānic narrative despite the author’s greater aim to show some degree of coherence. My application of Labov’s model to Qurʾānic narratives explains each āya within a Qurʾānic

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\item[250] Fred Donner, \textit{Narratives of Islamic Origins}, 84.
\item[251] Labov, \textit{Language in the Inner City}, 364.
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narrative -although not all of Labov’s categories are necessarily present in the narrative themselves. I will make a more nuanced discussion of the differences between Afsar’s findings and my findings in the relevant chapters.

Nonetheless, Afsar’s findings on the role of the Qur’ānic coda are in agreement with my findings of the role of sūra 18’s codas. He states that, “in the Qur’an this section [the coda] is extensive and much developed. It also embeds evaluative comments that make it the most significant part of the narrative. It seems that the whole narrative is constructed to make this point.”

Afsar’s conclusion supports the suggestion that overall coherence in sūra 18 can be determined by examining its codas as they each contain a crucial point that is self-revelatory.

The other major work that uses Labov’s model (although modified with other models related to narrative discourse) is Al-Ali’s paper that investigates the general structure of Qur’ānic narrative parables ‘ʿamthāl.’ He also draws on Hoey (1983) and Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) to specifically analyze the rhetorical patterning of “Situation-Problem-Response,” within the contents of each structural category. His analysis is two-fold: it comments on the underlying functional structure of narratives according to Labov and, then, also examines the semantic contents of the narrative in respect to the ‘problem’ it identifies and how God responds to it. He finds that Qur’ānic narrative parables are didactic in nature, but told to illustrate spiritual messages through the ‘problem’ of other characters, echoing the prevalent view about their purpose.

Overall, his analysis of the structure of the fourteen narrative parables, long and short, produces a few conclusions that I disagree with. Most notable is absence of Labov’s evaluation

253 Ibid., 513.
section in the narratives. The evaluation category, according to Labov, is the most crucial component of narratives without which the narratives do not have significance. What Al-Ali does instead is create the category “morale,” which he claims is missing from Labov’s model and yet states is crucial to Qur’anic narrative parables. “Morale” for Al-Ali deals with the principles of “right and wrong, and with conduct of men as social beings in relation to each other.” Al-Ali’s model and Labov’s category of evaluation. For example, in the narrative parable (Q36: 13-32) ‘Dwellers of the Town’ in Sūra al-Yāsīn, he classifies āyāt 26 to 29 as the morale segment of the narrative” “He was told, ‘Enter the Garden, so he said, ‘If only my people knew how my Lord has forgiven me and set me among the highly honoured.’ After him We did not send any army from heaven against his people, nor were We about to: there was just one blast, and they fell down lifeless.”

However, when following Labov’s model, these verses would constitute two narrative clauses, consisting of direct speech, and an evaluation section in which God speaks: ‘After him We did not send any army from heaven against his people, nor were We about to: there was just one blast, and they fell down lifeless.” Al-Ali does not include Labov’s lengthy discussion on evaluation in which Labov qualifies that speakers typically put their most important points, the significance of the narrative, in their evaluation section. Therefore, if Qur’anic narrative parables are didactic in nature then it would make sense that God would make His moral points in evaluative commentary. Lastly, for the short parables, he concludes that, “short parables lack codas.”

Yet, this thesis finds that there is a clearly defined coda for the short parable The

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255 Ibid., 91.
Master of the Garden in sūra 18. My work actively builds on the research examples of Afsar and al-Ali; I hope to shed more light on the narrative structures of the Qurʾān and contribute to a further sustained discussion on this subject.

It is clear that there is a critical need for systematic analysis of Qurʾānic narratives, and for further investigation into their structure, especially for narratives other than the story of Joseph. In sharp contrast, to the major approaches highlighted above, a narrative analysis holistically incorporates all of the four major questions surveyed above. It shows the fundamental cohesive structure of Qurʾānic narratives, and more importantly brings attention to the fact that these narratives can tell us more than a moral lesson but rather how God, the omniscient Speaker, is presenting Himself. The key questions that I raise from a narrative analysis perspective are, firstly, what is God doing with His language in the narrative, and what point is He trying to make? I hope to achieve this by using the Labovian model, as well as drawing from other major considerations of narrative analysis, to analyze the narratives of Sūrat al-Kahf.

II. Dialogue in the Qurʾān

A central feature of Qurʾānic narratives that has not received enough scholarly attention within Qurʾānic studies is dialogue or what I refer to as constructed dialogue in my study.

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Mustansir Mir, recognizing the lacunae, has offered a great deal of insight into the role and value of dialogue within the Qur’ān. But his work is limited to seeing dialogue as a literary feature, and in my estimation he does not provide an innovative or revealing analysis of the role dialogue plays in Qur’ānic narratives, which as we will see narrative analysis can offer.

As the first western scholar to pioneer an investigation of this topic, Mir offers a non-linguistic working definition of dialogue: “a significant verbal exchange that takes place between two or more parties in a given situation.” For Mir, this definition “excludes exchanges that are all too brief or are only of incidental importance in a given context,” and further “excludes exchanges whose continuity is broken by a lapse of time or shift of venue, with the break indicated in the text explicitly or implicitly.”

His definition therefore would not include, for example, command statements made by God such as “Say [Muhammad] ‘This is the truth from your Lord. Let him who will, believe in it, and who will, deny it’,” or short dialogues that Mir singles out from the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn:

“They said, ‘Dhu ’l-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are ruining this land. Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?’ He answered, ‘The power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute, but if you lend me your strength, I will put up a fortification between you and them: bring me lumps of iron!’ and then, when he had filled the gap between the two mountainsides [he said], ‘Work your bellows!’ and then, when he had made it glow like fire, he said, ‘Bring me molten metal to pour over it!’”

His definition, representing a literary approach to dialogue, mainly considers the characters involved in the verbal exchange. He identifies the following functions of dialogue in the Qur’ān: 1) it “mediate[s] some of the ‘major transactions’ between God and man,” 2) it “constitutes a medium the Qur’ān uses to offer a dramatic illustration of its themes,” 3) it is a “media through which the Qur’ān emphasizes their [the prophets’] humanity,” and therefore provides “interesting

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259 Q 18:29, Q 18:94-96.
insights into characters,” 4) it “can best capture the poignancy of certain utterances,” which the third person narrative “would deprive… of …rich qualitative content,” and finally 5) it reveals insight to the history of the Qur’ānic text.260

Mir’s work brings our attention to meaningful aspects of dialogues in Qur’ānic narratives and helps us to read them in new light. For example, the statement made by Moses in The Journey of Moses narrative: “May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught”, “Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you,” and “From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me from your company— you have put up with enough from me”261 can be understood as showing that a prophet, like other humans, seeks further knowledge, is fallible, and might not keep his promises.

But missing from Mir’s formulation of the function of Qur’ānic dialogue, as a result of his literary approach, is an understanding of how and why the speaker presents dialogue (or speech) within narratives as a creative act. This will be explored in further detail in the next chapter. As mentioned in Chapter 1, constructed dialogue refers to the representation of speech by a speaker. In other words, it includes all speech quoted/formulated by a speaker. According to this definition of dialogue, Qur’ānic dialogue begins to mean much more and includes more than what Mir envisions and we can begin to see how pervasive and instrumental dialogue is in the Qur’ān. The ubiquitous command statements in the Qur’ān are now also a form of constructed

260 Mir, “Dialogue in the Qur’an,” 4-8. The last function he discusses is particularly insightful to our understanding of Sūra 18 because he notices that the sūras of the Second and Third Meccan period, in which sūra 18 falls, contain most of the Qur’ānic dialogues. Mir explains that during the first Meccan period, the Quraysh mostly ignored the Prophet and his preaching. Thus, there was no “dialogue,” whereas in the Second Meccan period and continuing into the third period, the Quraysh began to engage the Prophet, criticize him, raise questions, etc. Therefore, Mir believes that the sūras of this period “are thus an accurate reflection of the dialogical situation that prevailed a certain phase of Muhammad’s prophethood.”

261 Q 18:66; Q 18:73; Q 18:76.
dialogue. God is constructing speech for the Prophet to say to others:

And do not say of anything: “I will do that tomorrow” without adding, “God willing.”

Brief interjections of dialogue such as,

He travelled on; then, when he reached a place between two mountain barriers, he found beside them a people who could barely understand him. They said, “Dhū l-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are ruining this land. Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?”

also count as dialogue. These statements could have been presented in another format not representing others’ speech. In the first example, God could have said, “And do not say that you will do that tomorrow without adding God willing.” Yet God chooses to cast these thoughts as dialogue. From the perspective of discourse analysis, He casts this utterance in a voice other than His in a conscious decision to involve listeners, serving specific communicative goals. The line “I will do that tomorrow” is dialogue constituting what Tannen describes as “what wasn’t said.” In this case, the Prophet forgot to say these words after telling the Quraysh that he will get back to them about their three questions. Casting this thought in dialogue, Tannen might suggest, “allows a dramatization based on the state of their [the listeners] understanding of events at the time, rather than the clarity of hindsight.” It also essentially enables listeners to fully imagine or experience the utterance as if they were really saying it, which one could argue subliminally, for a lack of a better term, influences them into actually saying “God willing.” Lastly, from a narrative analysis perspective, such command statements are embedded evaluation (see Chapter One): the speaker uses dialogue to make a greater point about the narrative and about himself. He mainly uses it to index a positive self-image.

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263 Ibid., 18:92-94.
264 Tannen, Talking Voices, 112.
265 Ibid., 117.
Thus, a narrative analysis taken to Qur’ānic dialogue suggests a new way to understand the role of dialogue in the Qurʾān. It focuses on the communicative agenda of the Speaker who created the dialogue rather than the literary contributions of dialogue in the Qurʾān. We will see in the coming chapters that one of my findings is that God not only constructs dialogue to present Himself in a favorable light, but He also manages “unfavorable” statements with either “favorable” statements or external evaluation.

III. ِNaẓm ‘coherence’

The question of whether or not the Qurʾān has coherence is at the center of a historic debate to which many scholars continue to engage. Because I analyze five narratives that comprise almost the entire sūra, my findings also contribute to the growing literature on general Qurʾānic composition or naẓm. A major question I pursue in my study is whether there is another way, besides what has been established thus far by previous scholarship, that a sūra can achieve coherence or naẓm. I will show in the coming chapters that the narratives of sūra 18, which follow the pattern of Labov’s model for spoken narratives, provide the whole sūra with overall structure and coherence. For this reason, it is useful to overview the development and history of the term naẓm and how it has been understood by scholars from various periods in order to establish my work as a contribution to the debate of naẓm.

Traditional Qurʾānic studies maintains the idea that the Qurʾān is coherent and highly organized. The term naẓm, literally translated as ‘organization,’ ‘order,’ or ‘system,’ developed out of the i’jāz and balāgha literature. Naẓm in its earliest formulation specifically expressed the belief that God’s speech in the Qurʾān exhibits perfect ordering and structure, and thereby
constitutes one of the reasons for its inimitability. Much of the literature reviewed in the previous section, mainly under the “What is this about?” approach, essentially work within the naẓm paradigm. Below, I will discuss naẓm more broadly and survey other works that have contributed to engaging the debate of Qur’anic coherency.

Al-Zamakhsharī (d.538/1144) illustrates his regard for naẓm in the first line of his introduction to his commentary in stating that “All praise is to God who has revealed the Qur’ān as structured and well composed speech.”266 The term is mainly attributed to the great rhetorician ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d.471/1078), although he was not the first to discuss this concept.267 His two seminal works Dalā’il al-i’jāz ‘Proofs of Inimitability,’ and ‘Asrār al-balāgha ‘Secrets of Eloquence,’ have received attention from a variety of Qur’ānic scholars working within different fields of literary criticism, linguistics and rhetoric.

In Dalā’il, al-Jurjānī developed a theory of al-naẓm, arguing that the Qur’ān was inimitable linguistically and also at the level of the structure of its overall discourse. Al-Jurjānī argues that discourse is made up of thoughts that are processed in organized and grammatical sequences, and not of isolated words. The arrangement of words in a stretch of discourse creates different shades of meanings. Accordingly, he defines naẓm as a “careful selection of grammatical meanings among speech constituents according to the aims of the speaker.”268 This definition directly links language to thinking. Said Faiq elaborates on this point:

…”Al-Jurjānī's starting point is the belief that the relations between the units of meaning are determined by the inner state (nafs) of the producer. This is implied in his postulate that a statement (sabar) and all the meanings of discourse (ma’ānī l-kalām) are meanings that the producer composes in his psyche, considers

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267 Al-Khaṭṭābī (d.388/998) and al-Bāqillānī (d.403/1013), predecessors of al-Jurjānī, also held that Qur’ānic naẓm is an essential component of the Qur’anic i’jāz. See Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī, al-Bayān fī i’jāz al-Qur’ān (‘Alīgarh: Muslim University, 1953); al-Bāqillānī, I’jāz al-Qur‘ān.
in his intellect, contemplates upon, and whispers to his heart (yunājī bihā qalbahu), and then reflects upon reactions to them (yarjī u ḥiṣā ‘ilayhi).”

This notion forms the intellectual foundation for later studies of the Qur’ān’s coherence. But Mir critiqued the lack of a serious formulization and application of the term naẓm amongst the early Muslim scholars, including al-Jurjānī, concluding that their definition was as vague as “some kind of relationship between words used and meanings intended.”

I suggest here that precisely because their definition was loose, we can extend it to include Labov’s structural approach as well. As in the theory of naẓm, Labov’s framework for narrative structure assumes coherence in its structural analysis of spoken narratives. As Labov would say, a speaker’s inner thoughts include the beginnings of speech acts or functions that they wish to perform (prior to arranging the words to produce meaning reflecting their intentions).

This form of coherence, found on a general level of speech, is easily applied to how someone arranges the contents of a story in a coherent manner according to particular narrative aims. This thesis therefore argues that the various structural elements found in the Qur’ānic narratives, such as complicating action and orienting, are resourceful functional categories that help us better understand the multiple dimensions of God’s discourse. They thereby provide the narratives within the sūra 18, and therefore the overall sūra, strong coherence.

Labov’s thoughts on narrative ‘pre-construction,’ a later concept in his research on narratives, also echoes al-Jurjānī’s understanding of naẓm. Pre-construction for Labov is a cognitive process that begins before a narrative is told. It “begins with a decision that a given

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event is reportable...the very concept of narrative demands that we recognize as an essential first step the decision to report an event, and the entailment that it is judged to be reportable.”271 This process, for Labov, results in the need for further inquiry into “how narrative events are stored in memory and accessed by the narrator, how the narrator makes selection from that storage, and how that selection is rearranged to transform the normative significance and evaluation of the events in the interests of the narrator.”272 Such a process in the mind of the speaker, by which the speaker ultimately transforms experience into a coherent and significant narrative, relates to al-Jurjānī’s conceptualization of naẓm as explained by Faiq because of the emphasis al-Jurjānī places on the inner psyche process before formulating coherent speech.

For later scholars such as al-Rāzī (d.606/1210) and al-Biqā’ī (d.885/1480), naẓm became synonymous with munāsaba “connectedness,” understood as the relationship between specific āyāt or texts.273 Mir and El-Awa both conclude that these textual relations did not extend to the explanation of the relation of an āya to the whole sūra.274 A number of modern Qur’ānic scholars however hold that the sūra as a whole possesses a substantially high degree of structural and thematic unity, which brings us to how naẓm has been recently discussed with respect to the Qur’ān.

Mustansir Mir in Coherence in the Qur’an provides a modern formulation of naẓm. He presents the views of Işlāḥi, whose specific analysis of the narratives of sūra 18 was introduced earlier, on Qur’ānic naẓm as proposed in his nine-volume Urdu tafsīr Tadabbur-i- Qur’ān,

272 Ibid., 3.
‘Reflections on the Qur’ān.’ For Iṣlāḥī, naẓm is a fundamental hermeneutical principle by which one has to approach the Qur’an. There is an obvious naẓm, ‘coherent organization’ in every sūra that can be determined by examining the thematic sub-sections of a sūra, and finding its ‘amūd ‘pillar,’ a “distinct controlling theme.” In a systematic reading of the Qur’ān, he shows this for each sūra in the Qur’ān by establishing “a clear and unbroken linear connection” between the verses and sections of a sūra. Naẓm according to Iṣlāḥī operates on three levels: within the single sūra, across a pair of sūras and between groups of sūras.

The understanding of naẓm as ‘amūd, or as an overarching theme influences my approach to the narrative structures of sūra 18. It shows that, through analysis in light of Labov’s framework, a convincing theme gives the sūra one level of coherency. Again, for Iṣlāḥī, that theme is the shared historical relevance of the narratives, found in the asbāb al-nuzūl ‘reasons for revelation’ and knowledge of the sīra, ‘biography’ of the Prophet. The thematic divisions he offers for sūra 18, shown in section 1, are nonetheless self-evident -as are the five narratives which function as internal thematic dividers. That is, many treatments of this sūra note the same divisions. Arkoun, for example, does not treat āyāt 27 to 59, (which contain the narratives of The Master of the Garden and Iblīs the Rebel), as having any thematic connection to the

275 Mir, Coherence in the Qur’an, 38.
276 Ibid., 74.
277 An excellent recent presentation of Iṣlāḥī’s findings in English is also Massimo Campanini’s The Qur’an: Modern Muslim Interpretations, trans. Caroline Higgitt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 85-88.
preceding āyāt in the sūra or ensuing, except through the “marques de l’énunciation” ‘elocution cues.’

A number of recent works do demonstrate unique and highly systemized ways of showing a sūra’s overall coherence. Salwa El-Awa’s Textual Relations in the Qur’ān: Relevance, Coherence and Structure applies the pragmatic analytical tool of relevance theory to argue for the overall structural coherence in sūra 33, al-Ḥāzāb, and sūra 75, al-Qiyāma. Relevance theory posits that communication takes into account implicit inferences and contextual effects. In other words, as El-Awa explains, “instead of a notion of coherence being the main relation holding parts of text together, what is needed for comprehension is relevance relations.” So when a speaker communicates, “a new item of information is relevant if it improves the cognitive environment of its recipients, and the more contextual effects an utterance has the more relevant it is.”

El-Awa undertakes her analysis by dividing the sūra into sections of paragraphs, ten for sūra 33 and seven for sūra 76. Instead of looking at relationships between individual āyāt, as most coherence discussions do, she makes connections across all of these paragraphs. She shows that these contain a relevant message or topic pointing to the greater message of the sūra. In other words, her approach is “based on the effect of each item of information on the context of other items within a sura.” Through this semantic deduction, including analyzing discourse markers (overt linguistic markers used as paragraph markers in the Qur’ān), she makes a case for the overall coherence of a few sūras. Sūra 33, as an example, according to El-Awa contains ten

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280 El-Awa, Textual Relations, 29.
281 Ibid., 100.
sections of relevant messages that systematically develop into the main larger themes of: “believers as followers of the Prophet, believers and the Prophet as opposed to the unbelievers and the deniers of the truth, the clarification of the truth about the lawfulness of the Prophet’s social and personal behavior and finally information regarding the prophets sent to people by God and that the fate of all peoples is according to their stands with regard to the truth.” Her analysis inevitably shows a clear meaningful segmentation of the whole of a sura but is based mainly on semantic criteria.

Another major work that argues for Qur’anic coherence is Neal Robinson’s *Discovering the Qur’an: A Contemporary Approach To A Veiled Text*. Robinson maintains that nazm in the Qur’an is achieved primarily through rhythmic symmetry. He unveils the coherence of Sūrat al-Baqara, the longest sura in the Qur’an, by deducing thematic connections, and uses the idea that different “registers” are used in thematic subsections. By ‘register,’ Robinson means “context-dependent linguistic characteristics—either spoken or written, and encompassing any set of choices which are made according to a conscious or unconscious notion of appropriateness to context (vocabulary, syntax, grammar, sound, pitch and so on).” These include the different rhythmic endings, or rhyme clauses, of the āyāt. He divides the sura into five main sections with their respective āyāt: Prologue (1-39), Criticism of the Children of Israel (40-121), The Abrahamic Legacy (122-152), Legislation for the new nation (153-242), Struggle to liberate the Ka’bah (243-283), and the epilogue (284-286), systematically showing repeated rhyme at the end of āyāt, repeated words, and reoccurring themes link the sura together:

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282 Ibid., 99.
The reference to the Children of Israel gives rise to the condemnation of those who change God’s favor (v.211b), and of the unbelievers who ridicule the believers (v.212), as well as to an explanation of how humankind came to be divided despite God’s sending prophets to guide them (v.213). This last ayah has the rhyme clause ‘He guides whom He wills to the straight path’ which occurs elsewhere only in v.143, where the context is the change in the direction of prayer.\(^{284}\)

Although he shows that a tightly knit thematic linear development from the beginning to the end connects the five sections of Sūrat al-Baqara into a whole, Robinson does not specify an overarching theme. Nonetheless, like El-Awa, he has shown Qur’ānic coherence by applying a unique model that closely analyzes the text alone.

Also currently working within the \textit{naẓm} paradigm are Michel Cuypers and Mathias Zahniser. Cuypers relies on Semitic rhetoric, based on symmetry (parallelism, chiasmus, circle composition), to show the coherence of many Qur’ānic sūras, including al-Fātiḥa.\(^{285}\) Zahniser, while building upon Angelika Neuwirth’s inductive analyses of the Qur’ān, brings attention to the structural and thematic importance of narratives within larger sūras. In “The Word of God and the Apostleship of ‘Isa: A Narrative Analysis of Al-‘Imrān” (3): 33-62, he argues that the middle narrative section of al-‘Imrān contributes significantly to that sūra’s dominant theme—the singularity and sovereignty of God.\(^{286}\) This section includes the two narratives of “announcements”: Zakarīyā’s Yaḥyā, and Maryam’s ‘Īsā. His study is particularly revealing for my thesis because among the three thematic āyāt that he believes contribute to the overall theme of the entire sūra is āya 59. Āya 59 is from the narrative of Maryam and ‘Īsā and according to a Labovian analysis would be the narrative’s coda. Zahniser, as one listener, has identified that the narrative’s most important message rests in āya 59. This finding, to me, validates the usefulness

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\(^{284}\) Ibid., 214.


of Labov’s narrative model as it enables one to segment a narrative around its many components and thereby easily determine the narrative’s most important message. Further, Zahniser’s finding underscores the importance narratives can carry in bringing meaning to the sūra as a whole. My findings also shed light on the profound role that coherent and highly structured narratives play in a sūra.

Having overviewed the various approaches taken to nazm, we can see that a Labovian approach greatly adds to the scholarship on the Qur’ān. A Labovian approach, rooted in narrative analysis, also shows Qur’ānic coherence by revealing that it can be achieved by narrative organizational principles rather than semantic considerations. I call this a ‘narrative intertextuality.’ My work will be a new contribution to the historic debate about whether or not sūras contain organic unity, showing specifically that sūra 18 achieves coherence through the similar codas of the narratives, as well as by the overall parallel narrative structures.
Chapter 4: The Young Men and the Cave

I. Introduction

The Young Men of the Cave is the main story of Sūrat-ul-Kahf ‘The Cave,’ and it gives its name to the sūra. The story, also known as the Sleepers of Ephesus, is an ancient pre-Christian legend according to some scholars. Classical Muslim exegetes maintain that the narrative is a retelling of a Christian legend, The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, which occurred under the reign of Emperor Decius. Many of these exegetes rely on Christian and Jewish sources in their interpretation of the story. The social circumstances in which this sūra was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, presented in Chapter 1, are however more relevant to understanding the Qur’ānic context of the narrative.

Taking the sūra’s revelatory context into consideration, I regard the narrative as an elicited one similar to the narratives analyzed by Labov. Labov elicited his narratives by asking his interviewees the question, “Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?” It will be shown in the thesis that two of the elicited narratives in sūra 18, those directly answering the rabbis’ questions, follow a structural pattern different to that of other “unannounced” narratives.

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288 Al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr of this story heavily relies on these sources. See al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ al-bayān, 15:126-188, 16:8-32. Asad holds in his recent exegesis that the Christian formulation of this story seems to have been a later development of an older Jewish oral tradition. This then explains why the Jewish rabbis of Medina preserved such knowledge and used it to test the Prophet’s veracity. See Asad, The Message of the Qur’an, 559. Mawdūdī notes in his commentary that, because of the striking similarities of details found in both al-Ṭabarī’s account in his commentary and Gibbon’s summary of the story, it seems that al-Ṭabarī had used the same Syriac accounts of this narrative that had also reached Europe. The names of the kings, the city in which the cave was located, and the young boys are all the same. See Mawdūdī, Towards Understanding the Qur’ān, 5:90-91.
The Young Men and the Cave story is presented below in translation:

Do you find the Companions of the Cave and al-Raqim wonderful, among all Our other signs? When the young men sought refuge in the cave and said, ‘Our Lord, Grant us Your mercy, and make easy for us a good way out of our ordeal,’ We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years. Then We woke them so that We make clear which of the two parties was better able to work out how long they had been there. [18:9-12]

We shall tell you their story as it really was. They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We gave them more and more guidance. We gave strength to their hearts when they stood up and said, ‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth. We shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do. These people of ours have taken gods other than Him. Why do they not produce clear evidence about them? Who could be more unjust than someone who makes up lies about God? Now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God, take refuge in the cave. God will shower His mercy on you and make for you an easy way out of your ordeal.’ [18:13-16]

You could have seen the [light of the] sun as it rose, moving away to the right of their cave, and when it set, moving away to the left of them, while they lay in the wide space inside the cave. This is one of God’s signs: those people God guides are rightly guided, but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray. You would have thought they were awake, though they lay asleep. We turned them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance. If you had seen them, you would have turned and run away, filled with fear of them. [18:17-18]

In time We woke them, and they began to question one another. One of them asked, ‘How long have you been here?’ and [some] answered, ‘A day or part of a day,’ but then [others] said, ‘Your Lord knows best how long you have been here. One of you go to the city with your silver coins, find out where the best food is there, and bring some back. But be careful not to let anyone know about you: if they found you out, they would stone you or force you to return to their religion, where you would never come to any good.’ In this way We brought them to the people’s attention so that they might know that God’s promise [of resurrection] is true and that there is no doubt about the Last Hour. [though] people argue they among themselves. [18:19-21]

[Some] said, ‘Construct a building over them: their Lord knows best about them.’ Those who prevailed said, ‘We shall build a place of worship over them.’ [Some] say, ‘The sleepers were three, and their dog made four,’ others say, ‘They were five, and their dog made six’—guessing in the dark—and some say, ‘They were seven, and their dog made eight.’ Say [Prophet], ‘My Lord knows best how many they were.’ Only a few have real knowledge about them, so do not argue, but stick to what is clear, and do not ask any of these people about them; [do not say of anything, ‘I will do that tomorrow,’ without adding, ‘God willing,’ and, whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say, ‘May my Lord guide me to be closer to what is right.’ [Some say] ‘The sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years,’ some added nine more. Say [Prophet], ‘God knows best how long they stayed.’ His is the knowledge of all that is hidden in the heavens and earth – How well He sees! How well He hears! – and they have no one to protect them other than Him; He does not allow anyone to share His rule.’ [18:21-26]

Although the story seems to focus on what happened to the boys and about how long they slept in the cave, a closer analysis of the structure and contents suggests that the narrative is
mainly conveying a sense of God’s Self-image—His “self-aggrandizement.” He is the main character that ultimately controlled and executed each of the events.

An essential feature of the narrative that will be analyzed in this chapter is the pervasiveness of evaluation. The presence of this structural category enriches the narrative by adding to it the crucial layer of personal significance that cannot be served by the narrative’s referential function (See Chapter 2). It will be shown in the analysis below that the evaluative function is fulfilled by each of the six structural categories, thus supporting Labov’s proposition that evaluation serves as a narrative’s secondary structure. The Narrator instills key divine attributes - being the al-walī ‘The Protector,’ al-qādir ‘The All-Capable/Omnipotent,’ and al-‘ālīm ‘The All-Knowing’ - in this narrative through evaluatory commentary, as well as through the basic plot (protecting the young men in a cave for 309 years). Lastly, the analysis of The Young Men and the Cave using Labov’s model brings forth a novel contribution to contested exegesis of the narrative’s resolution.

II. Narrative Analysis: The Young Men and the Cave

1. Transcription:
   a. Do you find the Companions in the Cave and al-Raqīm so wondrous, among all Our other signs?
   b. When the young men sought refuge in the cave and said:
   c. “Our Lord, grant us Your mercy and find us a good way out of our ordeal.”
   d. We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years.
   e. Then we woke them,
   f. so that We could make clear which of the two parties was better able to work out how long they had been there.
   g. We shall tell you their story as it really was.
   h. They were young men who believed in their lord,
   i. and we gave them more and more guidance.
   j. We gave strength to their hearts when they stood up
and said: “Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth. We shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do. These people of ours have taken gods other than Him. Why do they not produce clear evidence about them? Who could be more unjust than someone who makes up lies about God...? now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God, take refuge in the cave. God will shower His mercy on you and make you an easy way out of your ordeal.”

You could have seen the light of the sun as it rose, moving away to the right of their cave, and when it set moving away to the left of them, while they lay in the wide space inside the cave.

This is one of God’s signs: those people who God guides are rightly guided, but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray. You would have thought they were awake though they lay asleep. We turned them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance.

If you had seen them you would have turned and run away with fear of them. In time we woke them, and they began to question one another. One of them asked: “How long have you been here?” And some answered: “A day or part of a day” But then others said, “Your lord knows best how long you have been here. one of you go to the city with your silver coins, find out where the best food is there, and bring some back. But be careful not to let anyone know about you. If they found you out, they would stone you or force you to return to their religion, where you would never come to any good.”

In this way We brought them to people’s attention so that they might know that God’s promise is true and that there is no doubt about the last hour… although people argue among themselves. Some [townsfolk people] said: “construct a building over them: their lord knows best about them.” Those who prevailed said, “we shall build a place of worship over them.” Some say: “The sleepers were three and their dog made four” Others say: “They were five and the dog made six [guessing in the dark]” And some say: “They were seven, and their dog made them eight” Say! [Prophet] “My lord knows best how many they were.” Only a few have real knowledge about them, so do not argue, but stick to what is clear and do not ask any of these people about them. Do not say of anything: “I will do that tomorrow,” without adding: “God willing,” And, whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say: “May my Lord guide me closer to what is right” The sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years. And they added nine more. Say![Prophet]: “God knows best how long they stayed.” His is the knowledge of all that is hidden in the heavens and earth. How well He sees!
### Abstract

Do you find the Companions of the Cave and al-Raqīm so wondrous, among all Our other signs? When the young men sought refuge in the cave and said, ‘Our Lord, Grant us Your mercy, and make easy for us a good way out of our ordeal,’ We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years. Then We woke them so that We make clear which of the two parties was better able to work out how long they had been there. We shall tell you their story as it really was (Q 18:9-13)

### Orientation

They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We gave them more and more guidance. (Q 18:13)

### Complicating Action

We gave strength [strengthened] to their hearts when they stood up and said: “Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth. We shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do. These people of ours have taken gods other than him. Why do they not produce clear evidence about them? Who could be more unjust than someone who

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| v | How well He hears! and they have no one to protect them other than Him; He does not allow anyone to share His rule. |
| vv | uu |}

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**Table B**
Complicating Action

makes up lies about God? Now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God, take refuge in the cave. God will shower His mercy on you and make you and easy way out of your ordeal" (Q 18:14-16)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>وَتَّرَىَ الْمُسَيِّبُونَ إِذَا طَلَّعَتْ أَرْوَاحُهُمْ عَنْ كُفَّارِهِمْ نَائِبَالْأَمْضَىَ وَإِذَا غَرَتْ نَيْصُوحُ نَائِبَالْأَمْضَىَ والَّذِينَ فِي حَيَافَةِ مَخْرَجٍ</em></td>
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<td>You could have seen the light of the sun as it rose, moving away to the right of their cave, and when it set, moving away to the left of them, while they lay in the wide space inside the cave;</td>
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<tr>
<td>This is one of God’s signs: those people who God guides are rightly guided, but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>وَخَلَّتْ مِنْ نَائِبِهِمْ مَنْ بَعْدُ اللَّهِ هُوَ الْمُهْيَدُ وَمَنْ يَضُلُّ فَقَلَتْ لَهُمْ مَا رَآَئُوْا</em></td>
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<td>You would have thought they were awake, though they lay asleep; (Q 18:17-18)</td>
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<td><em>وَلَكِنَّ كُفَّارِهِمْ نَائِبَالْأَمْضَىَ وَلَكِنَّهُمْ نَائِبَالْأَمْضَىَ</em></td>
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<tr>
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<td>If you had seen them, you would have turned and run away with fear of them. (Q 18:18)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>وَكَذَلِكَ بُعِثْنَا لِيَسِئُوا بَيْنَهُمْ مَنْ فَالَّذِينَ مَنْ فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرَهُمْ كَفَّارَهُمْ فَاقَلَتْ لَهُمْ مَا رَآَئُوْا مَنْ بَعْدُ اللَّهِ هُوَ الْمُهْيَدُ وَمَنْ يَضُلُّ فَاقَلَتْ لَهُمْ مَا رَآَئُوْا لَا يُظْهِرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ بِجَمْعٍٍ أَوْ أُحْدَىَ بِمِنْهُمْ وَلَا يَطْلُعُوا إِذَا أَتَىَ فَزْجَمُوكُمْ أَوْ يَبْعَدُوكُمْ فِي مِلَّاتِهِمْ وَلَا يَطْلُعُوا إِذَا أَتَىَ فَزْجَمُوكُمْ أَوْ يَبْعَدُوكُمْ فِي مِلَّاتِهِمْ</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>And turn over to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance;</td>
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116
In time We woke them, and they began to question one another. One of them asked: How long have you been here? And some answered: A day or part of a day But then others said: “Your lord knows best how long you have been here. One of you go to the city with your silver coins, find out where the best food is there, and bring some back. But be careful not to let anyone know about you. If they found you out, they would stone you or force you to return to their religion, where you would never come to any good.” (Q 18:19-20)

Complicating Action

And they were arguing among themselves. (Q 18:20)

In this way We brought them to people’s attention,

Internal Evaluation

so that they might know that God’s promise is true and that there is no doubt about the Last Hour although people were arguing among themselves. (Q 18:20)

Complicating Action

Some [townsfolk people] said: “Construct a building over them: their lord knows best about them,” Those who prevailed said: “We shall build a place of worship over them.” (Q 18:21)

Internal Evaluation

Some say: The sleepers were three and their dog made four. Others say: They were five and the dog made six [guessing in the dark] And some say: They were seven, and their dog made them eight;

Complicating Action

And some say: The sleepers were three and their dog made six; Their lord knows best about them,” Those who prevailed said: “We shall build a place of worship over them.” (Q 18:21)

Internal Evaluation

Only a few have real knowledge about them, so
do not argue, but stick to what is clear, and do not ask any of these people about them. (Q 18:22)

Do not say of anything, “I will do that tomorrow” without adding “God Willing,” and, whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say “May my Lord guide me closer to what is right.” (Q 18:23-24)

Resolution

The sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years, some added nine more. (Q 18:25)

Internal Evaluation

Say [Prophet], “God knows best how long they stayed;”

Coda

His is the knowledge of all that is hidden in the heavens and earth. How well He sees! How well He hears! And they have no one to protect them other than Him; He does not allow anyone to share His rule. (Q 18:26)

2. Abstract

At first, a narrator has to signal to the listener that a story is about to begin. This narrative’s abstract is comprised of āyāt 9 to 12:

- **a** Do you find the Companions in the Cave and al-Raqīm so wondrous, among all Our other signs?
- **b** When the young men sought refuge in the cave
- **c** and said: “Our Lord, grant us Your mercy and find us a good way out of our ordeal.”
- **d** We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years.
- **e** Then we woke them,
- **f** so that We could make clear which of the two parties was better able to work out how long they had been there.
- **g** We shall tell you their story as it really was.
“Highly ritualized narratives” or elicited narratives typically tend to have abstracts in their narratives as opposed to spontaneous ones. The *Young Men and the Cave*, exhibits this same pattern at its start. The abstract mainly serves the function of providing a summary. It answers a listener’s hypothetical question “what was this story about?” The entire sequence of events is told in the first three āyāt across eight clauses. The sequence of the clauses also matches the sequence of events told in the rest of the narrative. The abstract is also serving the function of indicating to listeners that a story is about to begin. In Sacks’ terms, this abstract can be understood as a *story-preface*. Within his conversation analysis framework, the preface functions to ensure the audience’s attention and uptake as listeners.

Labov found that speakers sometimes provide two abstracts in a given story, especially when responding to another question. Looking at the āyāt that I have coded as the narrative’s abstract, we can consider it as containing three parts. The first part is clause a: “Do you find the Companions in the Cave and al-Raqīm so wondrous, among all Our other signs?” This part of the abstract contains what Labov calls the “point of the story,” the narrator’s attitude towards the story. The attitude is captured here as an overt rhetorical question asked of the listeners. According to Labov, “overt questions that are not embedded in the dramatic action, but asked directly of the listener, have a direct evaluative function.”

Exegetes also emphasize that this rhetorical question captures God’s attitude to the entire story. To God, this story is not so wondrous, nor is it greater than any of His other signs or

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miracles. Al-Zamakhshari connects the previous two *āyāt* that read, “We have adorned the earth with attractive things so that We may test people to find out which of them do best, but We shall reduce all this to barren dust” directly to this abstract. In his interpretation, adorning the earth with attractive things and then eventually reducing it to barren dust are actions more wonderful than the story of the Young Men and the Cave that is being asked about. Yet those around the Prophet during the time of this sūra’s revelation were intrigued and perplexed by the mystery of this story, trying especially to decipher how many sleepers there were and if the Prophet had such knowledge. Muhammad Asad, in explaining this *āya*, states that “the implication [is] that the allegory or parable based on this story is entirely in tune with the ethical doctrine propounded in the Qur’an as a whole, and therefore not ‘more wondrous’ than any other of its statements.” Asad’s explanation also asserts that God’s attitude to the story, one of no astonishment, is captured in the opening question. Putting a few young men to sleep and awakening them again does not merit shock or awe; for such a task is not a challenge for God—*al-qādir* ‘The Omnipotent.’ The attribute of God being *al-qādir* ‘The Omnipotent’ is therefore this narrative’s first self-disclosure appearing in the (first) abstract.

If the first part of the abstract constitutes clause a, “Do you find the Companions in the Cave and al-Raqīm so wondrous, among all Our other signs?” the second part comprises the subsequent three *āyāt*, clauses b through f:

b When the young men sought refuge in the cave
c and said: “Our Lord, grant us Your mercy and find us a good way out of our ordeal.”
d We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years.
e Then we woke them,
f so that We could make clear which of the two parties was better able to work out how long they had been there.

In this section, God provides an overview of the main events of the story. And finally, the formulaic opening in clause h constitutes the third part: “We shall tell you their story as it really was.” Here God is specifically utilizing the abstract as a preface in Sacks terms: He ensures listeners that the full narrative is about to be told, and essentially “takes the floor.”

The three distinct parts of the abstract fulfills the full range of potential functions according to Labov. This finding challenges the conclusion of Afsar’s analysis of Qur’ānic abstracts, that, “Qur’ānic abstracts are more general in nature and extend beyond the narrative situation.”\textsuperscript{295} His conclusion is a generalization based on only a few abstracts from Qur’ānic narratives, none of which are from sūra 18. In the Young Men and the Cave abstract, it is evident that the Speaker’s attitude to the story, apparent in the first part, is crucial to the narrative situation as it is contributing to answering the listener’s key question “so what?” Secondly, a summary of the main events directly relates to the narrative situation.

3. Orientation

Labov defines an orientation section as a group of free clauses that can be placed anywhere in the narrative without affecting the narrative sequence of events. They describe a situation or condition that holds true during the entire narrative, and provide background information. The orientation of the Young Men and the Cave narrative comprises the free clauses h and i from āya 13:

\begin{verbatim}
  h They were young men who believed in their lord,
  i and We gave them more and more guidance.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{295} Afsar, “Discourse and Linguistic Approach,” 504.
Because Qur'ānic stories ultimately serve to promote God’s self-image as well as convey greater moral lessons, facts such as personal names, place and time that do not pertain to these objectives are rarely included. In this occasion, God provides a brief description of the general situation of the boys prior to first narrative clause that reveals to listeners an important detail of their background—their spiritual state. It gives the listeners a general picture of who they were (young men) and what kind of young men (those believing in God and who received God’s guidance). This is what is God deems as important background information for understanding the narrative, which thereby fulfills the criteria of an orientation section according to Labov.

From a syntactic point of view, Labov found that one of the common syntactic features of an orientation section is the use of past progressive clauses, which describes what was going on before the first event of the narrative. This feature is indeed present in this orientation. The two past progressive clauses are: “who believed in their lord”, and “We gave them more and more guidance.” Haleem’s translation “more and more” conveys that guidance was not given at one particular time in the past but rather it was a progressive action of giving.296

Although the āya seems to be fulfilling the basic referential function of an orientation section—that of describing the characters’ general behavioral situation – its syntax also embeds an evaluation. In the first clause, the boys are positioned vis-à-vis “their Lord”, which establishes God as superior and the boys subordinated. Then, in the second clause, there is the foregrounding of the subject ‘We’ in “We gave them more and more guidance.” Here God’s agency as being the source of the Young Men’s guidance is affirmed. This kind of syntactic subordination represents one of the ways in which God positions Himself with respect to other

characters within the narrative. The orientation section as such is fulfilling the greater evaluative function that reinforces God’s centrality and absolute agency, subordinating the characters to Himself syntactically, and foregrounding His agency.

4. **Complicating Action and Narrative Clauses**

The complicating action section contains the rest of the story: embedded within it are the evaluation sections, resolution, and coda. A bare minimum narrative, that which only contains the complicating action and/or narrative clauses, can be seen in the presentation of Table B, below, that highlights each of the narrative heads in their respective temporal order.

**Table C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>j</th>
<th>We <strong>strengthened</strong> (<em>rabājnā</em>) their hearts when they <strong>stood</strong> (<em>qāmū</em>) up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>and <strong>said</strong> (<em>qālū</em>): “Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth...we shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>these people of ours have taken gods other than him...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>why do they not produce clear evidence about them? Who could be more unjust than someone who makes up lies about God...?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God, take refuge in the cave...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God will shower His mercy on you and make you and easy way out of your ordeal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>We <strong>turned</strong> (<em>nuqallibu</em>) them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>In time, We <strong>woke</strong> (<em>ba'athnā</em>) them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

297 Labov mentions in “Narrative Analysis” that the simple past and simple present verbs are the principal forms for narrative heads. Therefore the Arabic verb *nuqallibu*, which is a present tense form, counts as a narrative head. In Arabic, however, the present tense verb can also indicate a past meaning for the verb as indicated by the translation. Labov, “Narrative Analysis,” 28.
and they **began** to question one another  

One of them **asked** (**qāla**): “How long have you been here?”

And some **answered** (**qālū**): “A day or part of a day”

But then others **said** (**qālū**), “Your lord knows best how long you have been here.

one of you go to the city with your silver coins,

find out where the best food is there, and bring some back

but be careful not to let anyone know about you

if they found you out, they would stone you or force you to return to their religion, where you would never come to any good.”

In this way We **brought** (**'a'tharnā**) them to people’s attention  

Some [townsfolk people] **said** (**qālū**): “Construct a building over them: their lord knows best about them.”

Those who prevailed **said** (**qālū**): “We shall build a place of worship over them.”

The sleepers **stayed** (**labithū**) in their cave for three hundred years.

And they **added** (**'izdādū**) nine more.

---

Table B presents the story’s “minimal” narrative, defined by Labov as a narrative that only contains complicating actions. As we can see there are only a few narrative clauses that move the events forward. In the end, reading much shorter in length than the full version, it has no point except to serve the referential function of the narrative. That is to say that it successfully conveys to listeners what events took place, but it does not contain the extended explicit dimension of the Speaker’s evaluation.

The story’s last few narrative clauses move the story to a point where the boys sent someone amongst themselves to the town to get food. Between clauses **z** to **aa**, listeners infer
that local townsfolk discovered the boys’ identity because they went to search for food. Without giving any details as to what form of discussions took place, God performs a form of narrative ellipsis and immediately jumps to a future time. This future time is after the boys have passed away.\footnote{Although all the details about what happened to the boys when they went into town and what the situation was like are in the exegesis of this story in most commentaries, I am trying to keep the story as simple as possible so as to construct an understanding of the story based solely on the narrative \textit{as it is told} and what one would ordinarily have to assume from listening to it.} The community is discussing what should happen with the bodies of the deceased boys and the cave. This interpretation is validated by the previous evaluative clause, clause cc that states, “although people argue among themselves.” We have to return to the abstract of the narrative that summarizes the main events of the narrative. There God makes it clear that He put the boys to sleep “so that We could make clear which of the two parties was better able to work out how long they had been there.” Thus, this event in the abstract is about the debate presented in clauses cc and dd. Clauses dd and ee provide listeners with the two opinions, and we are left to believe that the opinion of those in ee prevailed and the community built a shrine or \textit{masjid} (the Arabic word used in this clause) over them. If it were not for the evaluation section that comes after this clause, discussed below, listeners perhaps would be satisfied that clause ee is the last narrative clause. The first plausible resolution would be then: “Those who prevailed said, “We shall build a place of worship over them.” This is historically what happens to the boys in the end: a shrine was eventually built over their deceased bodies and the cave in their honor and memory. However, as it will be further supported below under the section that discusses evaluation, God tells the story’s resolution after an evaluation section—the usual place for a resolution in Labov’s model. He states in the last two narrative clauses of the complicating action section, clauses pp and qq: “The sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years. And they
added nine more. ” This resolution is that point in the narrative when listeners get satisfied with understanding what finally happened with the young men.

This section’s evaluative role is first apparent by examining its overt syntactical markers. In the narratives of personal experience that Labov analyzed, the speaker typically relates the actions of others in the third person voice. The following few examples provided by Labov (1972) shows how speakers present typical narrative clauses:

Boot’s Narrative

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
j & \text{Calvin th’ew a rock.} \\
r & \text{Calvin stuck his head out.} \\
t & \text{An’ the rock went up}^{299}
\end{array}
\]

In Qur’ānic narratives, however, God as Speaker assumes a superior position where He is the agent for the actions of others, and often reinforces this position syntactically within narrative clauses. This is evident in several of the narrative heads in The Young Men and the Cave, such as strengthening, turning, awakening, and bringing forward the boys, which are in fact the Narrator’s actions. God consistently uses the first person subject, indicated in table B, instead of narrating the events of the story in the third person. He does not say, for example, “then the boys slept for a long period,” or “then the boys woke up,” in these particular instances. It is God who put them to sleep and awoke them. The narrative therefore gains a layer of ‘personal’ experience through the agency of the narrative heads as well.

Another way the complicating action gains a layer of ‘personal’ element for God is through constructed dialogue. Many of the dialogues in this section portray the characters in a positive light that sustains God’s lordship—in that they are righteous believers. For example, in

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299 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 356.
the constructed dialogue clause k, God portrays the young men as righteous servants who are firm in their belief in God and determined that God will protect them if they escape their disbelieving surroundings:

k We gave strength to their hearts when they stood up and said: “Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth. we shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do. These people of ours have taken gods other than him…why do they not produce clear evidence about them? Who could be more unjust than someone who makes up lies about God...? Now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God, take refuge in the cave… God will shower His mercy on you and make you an easy way out of your ordeal.”

This speech in the end extols God and places Him in a superior position through its contents revolving around a favorable declaration of man’s faith in Him. Here the characters are positioning themselves vis-à-vis God in a submissive manner, which ultimately expresses His lordship and is a position that God would like others to take. He therefore constructs a desired action in the form of another’s speech, instead of explicitly commanding people to do or say such things. This is an example of how narrative and constructed dialogue can be used to achieve God’s personal means, such as didactic aims, as Holt and others have touched on.300 There are also other examples from this section that underscore God’s superior position of lordship:

z But then others said, “Your lord knows best how long you have been here…”

and,

dd Some [townsfolk people] said: “construct a building over them: their lord knows best about them.”

These examples support the notion that constructed dialogue, as narrative clauses, plays an evaluative role and help support the overall argument of the centrality of God, or as Mir calls the

300 See Chapter 2, 30.
“theocentricity,” of Qur’ānic narratives. Another evaluative dimension of constructed dialogue will be discussed after first presenting the evaluation sections of this narrative.

5. Evaluation

I have shown thus far that the narrative segments abstract, orientation, and complicating action not only serve the referential function but also contribute to the narrative’s evaluative function. I now draw attention to the embedded evaluative clauses and sections that explicitly fulfill this function. Labov defines an evaluative clause as one that “provides evaluation of a narrative event,” and it helps listeners determine which clauses and sections of the narrative answer the question “so what?” and thus encapsulate the point of the story.

The majority of evaluation clauses in this narrative are internal evaluation, in that they are deeply embedded within the narrative. The explicative type, an appended subordinate clause that qualifies or gives reason for a main event reported, is the first kind of internal evaluation appearing in the narrative. This clause is found in the abstract of the narrative in clause g following the narrative event provided in the summary of the abstract:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>Evaluative Clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then we woke them</td>
<td>so that We could make clear which of the two parties was better able to work out how long they had been there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clause f enhances the reportability of the narrative event ‘waking’ by explaining the motivation for this specific action. This is an important explanation for God, as He is the One waking them up, a seemingly strange event, and must explain why as He does not do anything

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without a purpose. The last example of an explicative evaluative clause is found in clauses aa and bb, subordinated to clause a:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>aa</th>
<th>In this way We <strong>brought</strong> them to people’s attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative Clause</td>
<td>bb</td>
<td>so that they might know that God’s promise is true and that there is no doubt about the last hour…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative Clause</td>
<td>cc</td>
<td>although people were arguing among themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, here clause bb states the reason and motivation for why the event in clause z took place and establishes the relative importance of the event for the listener. Clause cc as an appended evaluative clause further establishes the context in which they were brought to people’s attention and describes for listeners the ensuing situation. As with all types of evaluative commentary, the Narrator is momentarily suspending the narrative action, while yet bringing the listener into the narrative experience.

There are also two independent evaluation sections in the narrative that deliver the greater point of the narrative. The first evaluation section, contains half a section of the comparator type in that it contains the verb *tara* ‘to see’ but used as a model, which comprises clauses l through o.

| l     | You could have seen the light of the sun as it rose, moving away to the right of their cave, |
| m     | and when it set moving away to the left of them, |
| n     | while they lay in the wide space inside the cave. |

Then clauses o to q are external, as they are less deeply embedded into the narrative. In this section, God is speaking directly to listeners after having set the scene of the boys refusing to worship other than God and leave to take refuge in a cave:

| o     | This is one of God’s signs. |
| p     | Those people who God guides are rightly guided, |
| q     | but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray. |
This section, I argue, contains the strongest indication of what God ultimately is trying to achieve with this narrative and in the other narratives to follow. With the previous clauses l through q, God describes an image of the precise movements of the sun rising and setting away from the sleeping boys in the cave, essentially an image of divine protection. God moves on, clauses u through w, to explicitly affirm that this is amongst the signs of God—‘āyāt-u-Allāh. Just as God protected the young men from the sun’s heat, He, too, guides and protects whomsoever He wills. This is the narrative’s first disclosure of God being al-walī ‘The Protector,’ and it is embedded into the narrative through evaluation. He affirms to believers that there will be no protector “waliyy-an” for those who do not accept God. Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) touches on the universality of this message in his interpretation of these āyāt:

\[
wa \ 'inna kull-a man salak-a ṭarīqat-al-muhtadin-i ar-rāshidīn-a fa huwa'alladhī 'aṣāb-al-falah-a, wa-hidā 'ilā as-sa'ādat-i, wa man ta'arrāda lil-khidhlān-i fa lan yajid-a man yali-hi wa yurshidu-hu ba'da khidhlān-i llāh
\]

“And every one who follows the path of the righteously guided, it is he who has gained success and has guided himself to felicity. And whoever has embraced God’s abandonment, then he will not find anyone to protect him or guide him after God’s abandonment.”

The external evaluation of this section delivers a universal message; hence it is more external than internal, and includes ‘every one’ in its interlocutors. The specific theme of God being the al-walī is reinforced again later in this narrative by the coda, making it the predominant theme.

Lastly, in the second half of this evaluation, in which God states “Those people who God guides are rightly guided, but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray” there is an instance of iltifāt, shifting of pronoun. In the previous segments of the

\[303\]Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, 3:54. The Arabic text is:

وَأَنَّ كُلَّ مِن سَلِكَ بُرْقِيَةِ الْمُهْتَدِينَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ فَهُوَ الَّذِي أَصَابَ الْفَلاحُ، وَاهْتَدَى إِلَى السَّعَادَةَ، وَمَن تَعْرَضَ لِلْخَذَالَةِ، فَلَنْ يَجِدَ مَن يَلْهَبُهُ وَيَرْشِدْهُ بَعْدَ الْخَذَالَةِ اللَّهَ
narrative, especially in the complicating action section, God has been using the first person voice. Here God addresses Himself in the third person, a distant pronoun, suitable to the context of an external evaluation—an evaluation on a distant event. This syntactic marker can be seen as this narrative’s very own Qur’ānic evaluative element, in addition to some of other markers present from Labov’s four sub-types of evaluative elements.\(^{304}\)

The second evaluation section, comprised of clauses ff to nn, is internal and provided at the end of the story:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ff</th>
<th>Some say: “The sleepers were three and their dog made four”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gg</td>
<td>Others say: “They were five and the dog made six [guessing in the dark]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hh</td>
<td>And some say: “They were seven, and their dog made them eight”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii</td>
<td>Say [Prophet], “My Lord knows best how many they were.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jj</td>
<td>Only a few have real knowledge about them,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kk</td>
<td>so do not argue, but stick to what is clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ll</td>
<td>and do not ask any of these people about them,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm</td>
<td>do not say of anything, “I will do that tomorrow,” without adding: “God willing,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nn</td>
<td>and, whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say: “May my Lord guide me closer to what is right.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These constructed dialogues are internal evaluations, as again they are embedded within the narrative and describe other peoples’ evaluation of the narrative in the first half.

Previously, God used the past tense form of qāla ‘to say’ to convey narrative events regarding the debate in the community about what to do with the boys after they were discovered and after they had passed away.\(^{305}\) Therefore, I considered the clauses with the past tense usage of qāla part of the complicating action rather than evaluation. Beginning with clause ff, there is a shift to the present tense usage of qāla, indicated by yaqūlūna, ‘they say,’ or it can be translated as ‘some are saying’ as a progressive. Progressives are one kind of correlatives that

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\(^{304}\) See Chapter 1, 13-14.

\(^{305}\) The inference of the boys having passed away is found in the exegetical literature. The narrative itself does not make it clear as to whether or not the boys are still alive or dead when the community is arguing amongst themselves about what should happen with the cave.
Labov found are used as evaluative devices evaluating a particular event. The tense shift indicates that the Narrator is reporting on the ‘present,’ i.e. at the time of the Prophet, debate over what has happened in the distant past.\textsuperscript{306}

After presenting the diverging viewpoints, God commands the Prophet directly to say or give the definitive answer, which is that only God knows how many they were. This can only be understood as God commanding the Prophet in the present time to report or say to those around him, such as the Jewish rabbis who are still intrigued by the facts of the story. These imperatives: “Say,” “Do not argue,” “Do not say,” “Do not ask,” and “Remember your Lord” according to Labov, are comparators—a common syntactic element found in evaluations. The contents of this set of commands, directed to the Prophet, are reinforcing God’s complete knowledge of all affairs. No one knows precisely how many boys slept in the cave except God.

At this point, in clauses mm and nn, God states: “Do not say of anything: ‘I will do that tomorrow without adding: ‘God willing.’” This set of commands to the Prophet appear suddenly, and the subject changes from surveying the idle guesses to reprimanding the Prophet, leading Bell to argue that they do not belong in the narrative and are out of place.\textsuperscript{307} Here a narrative analyst must rely on the social context of the narrative—the question of “where we are and who we are with”—in order to make sense of the jump. Exegetes have traditionally understood these commands as God’s reprimand of the Prophet [for saying to the rabbis that he will get back to them about the story without adding the most essential statement for a believer—“God willing”

“in shā’ Allah.” The ḥadīth literature and asbāb al-nuzūl literature, from where exegetes construct their interpretations, document various Prophetic statements that provide support for this interpretation. Having understood their context, these commands also represent key points God is making with the narrative, and represent another syntactic device by which God is superiorly positioning Himself over the interlocutors of the narrative: His immediate audience. These āyāt, according to Labov’s model, appear at a point when the narrator has not yet signaled the end of the story with a resolution; and are part of the evaluation section in which God is delivering the greater “point” of the narrative.

Another way to interpret these two particular āyāt contextually is to also relate them to the theme of protection. God is interjecting an explanation for why the sūra’s revelation was delayed—because the Prophet forgot to add “God willing” in giving his response to the Jewish rabbis. Still, God reveals the sūra at a delayed time, and the reason for the delay is explained in these evaluative clauses. Had the sūra never been revealed after the rabbis asked the Prophet the questions, the Prophet himself would have been left in a sense unprotected. We can make the argument that the revelation of the sūra, containing answers to the rabbis’ questions, historically protected the veracity of the Prophet at a particular time when he was being greatly challenged. God as al-walī is also protecting His Prophet. This heightens the theme of protection fostered within each of the narratives themselves as well.


5.1 Dialogue Management

Another key evaluative device God employs with respect to His presentation of constructed dialogue is that He evaluates “unfavorable” statements almost immediately, those statements that go against His Self-image or simply statements He does not want listeners to be “influenced by.” As such, it is found that He does not evaluate statements that do sustain His superior image. This is what I call a form of ‘evaluative dialogue management’ or ‘control’ that we will see in many of the narratives. The first such example of this management or comes in this narrative’s first complicating action in clause k that was presented above. Clause k reads:

k We gave strength to their hearts when they stood up and said: “Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth. we shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do. These people of ours have taken gods other than him…why do they not produce clear evidence about them? Who could be more unjust than someone who makes up lies about God…? Now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God, take refuge in the cave… God will shower His mercy on you and make you an easy way out of your ordeal.”

Because as already discussed above this statement supports God’s positive image, God does not evaluate it with further commentary. After this statement, the narrative immediately continues on to an internal evaluation where God is describing the inside of the cave. (To be discussed in the next section). The next example is found in the next complicating action. Clauses v through x:

v In time we woke them,
w and they began to question one another.
x One of them asked: “How long have you been here?”
y And some answered: “A day or part of a day”
z But then others said, “Your lord knows best how long you have been here…”

Here we can see that the constructed statement of one of the young men who made a guess about how long they had been in the cave for is immediately evaluated by God by constructing another statement He wants listeners to hear: “but then others said, ‘your Lord knows best how long you have here.’” This is how God chooses to complete the presentation of this section’s dialogue.
Finally, towards the end of the narrative we see this level of control again. Upon presenting the idle guesses of people, clearly statements God does not favor, indicated by his interjection of “guessing in the dark,” God immediately constructs dialogue for the Prophet to say in the final clause ii:

ff Some say: “The sleepers were three and their dog made four”
gg Others say: “They were five and the dog made six [guessing in the dark]”
hh And some say: “They were seven, and their dog made them eight”
ii Say! [Prophet] “My lord knows best how many they were.”

This brings us to another evaluative aspect of constructed dialogue in the narrative. The instances in the narrative that the dialogue does not bolster God’s superior image, there is immediate evaluation. Sometimes this immediate evaluation is given in the form of further constructed dialogue, as seen in the above examples, or sometimes it is simply given by God Himself with His own speech. This method of evaluation management will continue to be explored in the remaining chapters.

6. A Contribution to the Exegetical Debate of āya 25

An integral function of the second evaluation section relates to its strategic placement within the narrative. Labov notes that the evaluation section often serves to establish a break between the complicating action and the resolution. He states that: 310

A simple sequence of complication and result does not indicate to the listener the relative importance of these events or help him distinguish complication from resolution. We also find that in narratives without a point it is difficult to distinguish the complication action from the result. Therefore it is necessary for the narrator to delineate the structure of the narrative by emphasizing the point where the complication has reached a maximum: the break between the complication action and the result. Most narratives contain an evaluation section which carries out this function.

310 Labov and Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis,” 35.
Labov also formally defines the evaluation section as a group of “multicoordinate clauses or groups of free or restricted clauses frequently located at the break between the complicating action and the resolution of these complications.” 311 This structural positioning is an additional function of evaluation sections, besides its semantic function of instilling the narrator’s greater point or raison d’être of the narrative. In this light, the second evaluation section in *The Young Men of the Cave* story brings attention to the narrative’s resolution, clauses pp and qq, immediately after the second evaluation section.

God states: “*wa labithū fī kahfī-him thalātha mi’at-in sinīn-a wa z-dādū tis’-an*” [The Young Men] stayed in their cave for three hundred years. And they added nine more.’ These two clauses constitute āya 25, and their meaning has been historically debated. In al-Ṭabarī’s (d.310/923) commentary, the various reports of the meaning of the āya are documented. He states that there are those who say that āya 25 is reported speech of the People of the Book as their idle guessing about the length of their stay, similar to their previous guessing about the number of boys in clauses ff to hh in the beginning of the evaluation section.

Those who advocate this interpretation justify this position by considering the following āya after 25, āya 26: “Say [Prophet]: ‘God knows best how long they stayed,’” as a refutation to their idle guessing. They hold that if āya 25 stood as God’s own speech then āya 26 would have no meaning or propose.312 This interpretation is based on an early written copy of the Qur’ān, copy of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd, which is believed to have contained the words, “And they said, ‘They remained…’” In Arabic as “*wa qālū wa labithū*” 313 Based on Ibn Mas‘ūd’s copy, later

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311 Ibid.
313 Ibid.
interpretations and translations have read this āya as containing a grammatical implication or ellipsis, known in Arabic rhetoric as taqdiir. A few major modern translations of the Qur’ān reveal that this interpretation is still adopted. Muhammad Asad translates this verse as: “AND [some people assert], ‘They remained in their cave three hundred years’; and some have added nine [to that number].” Similarly, Abdel Haleem translates the āya as: “[Some say], ‘The sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years,’ some added nine more.” And finally, Mawdūdi explicitly explains the matter in his footnote: “these figures—three hundred and some others add nine years—have been mentioned by way of narrating the different opinions held by people on the question. The statement, therefore, about the period of stay in the cave is not understood by exegetes to be that of God, but rather the varying opinions of human beings.”

Other classical exegetes such as al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr, and modern scholars such as Syed Quṭb and Yusuf Ali, take a literal or ‘face-value’ approach to this āya. For example, Quṭb asserts: “This is the truth of the length of their stay, given to us by the One who knows all secrets in the heavens and the earth…His statement puts an end to the matter, leaving no room for dispute.” Such scholars understand the āya to mean that God is informing the listeners of the exact length of their stay, 300 years according to the solar calendar or 309 years according to the lunar calendar. Those who follow this approach believe that the subsequent āya, number 26, is God reaffirming that only He has the knowledge of how long they stayed and no one else

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314 Ibid.
315 Asad, The Message of the Qur’ān, 652.
316 Abdel Haleem, The Qur’ān a New Translation, 185.
318 Quṭb, In the Shade of the Qur’ān, 252.
319 See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-ghayb (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 21:113. Asad explains that the “And they added nine more” is interpreted as what the Arabs added to the 300 solar years, giving them 309 lunar years. Hence, God gives the length of their stay according to both Christian and Arab calculations at that time.
so therefore what He has just been stated is the final truth.\footnote{Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān, 15:153.} This second approach coincides with the Labovian analysis of the narrative.

Understanding the intended meaning of clauses pp and qq is fundamental to analyzing the narrative from a Labovian perspective. The external evaluation section examined above, clauses ff to nn, falls in the precise location that Labov shows typically to appear between the end of the complication actions and the narrative’s resolution. Following this pattern, it seems then that the clause following the last major evaluation section should be the narrative’s resolution—God disclosing the length of their stay. Otherwise these clauses would read as part of the evaluation section, as another statement guessing how long the boys stayed in the cave. However, if so, the placement of this guessing seems out of place as the other guesses about how many boys there were come at the beginning of the second evaluation section followed by God directing the Prophet on how to respond. Why would this statement of conjecture, about their length of stay, not appear alongside the other guesses at the beginning of the evaluation section? It seems to me that the positioning of āya 25 strongly indicates that it is serving as the narrative’s resolution. As such, this argument is based on a canonical structure of spoken narratives, which thereby supports āya 25 as God’s own statement and constituting the narrative’s resolution.

7. Coda

The final segment of the narrative is the coda, which is the second common characteristic of elicited narratives (the abstract is the first). For Labov, the coda precludes the question of ‘what happened next?’ and more importantly it “marks the story as a structurally and
semantically coherent whole and setting it off from the conversational flow as a distinct unit."

The coda in *The Young Men and the Cave* also clearly completes the story and is initiated with a single internal evaluative clause yy. The coda comprises the last two āyāt of the story, clauses rr to ww:

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rr Say [Prophet]: “God knows best how long they stayed.”
ss His is the knowledge of all that is hidden in the heavens and earth.
tt How well he sees!
uu How well he hears!
vv And they have no one to protect them other than Him;
ww He does not allow anyone to share His rule.
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Labov found two common devices that speakers often employ in codas. One is an explicit statement that the narrative is over, such as with a statement ‘And that was that,’ or ‘And that is the end of the story.’ The second most common device frequently found in codas is that the coda deictically points back to the narrative itself. God employs this second device in His coda by a type of person deixis. In clauses rr and vv, “God knows best how long they stayed”, “And they have no one to protect them other than Him,” the pronoun ‘they’ is referring back to the characters of the narrative, the young boys. The Speaker signals to listeners with this deixis the closing of the narrative and bridges the time gap by returning the narrative to the present time, all while ensuring that a greater point is being made about the story.

The syntactic feature of shifting in self-designation *iltifāt* also marks this coda, which falls outside of Labov’s analysis. In the first clause rr of the coda: “Say [Prophet]: “God knows best how long they stayed,” God is using the third person to address Himself in the command to

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322 Toolan, *Narrative*, 162.
323 In the exegesis of this āya, it is also suggested that the ‘they’ refers to all of humankind and that no one has a protector other than God. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 15:154 and al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:61. As a point of comparison, the story of Joseph in the Qur’ān ends with a more traditional Labovian coda, deixis referring back to the narrative itself: “Such is one of the stories of what happened unseen….” Qur’ān 12:102.
the Prophet whereas just previously before the coda in clause ii He states: “Say [Prophet], “My lord knows best how many they were.” The usage of ‘My lord’ evokes a closer connection between the Prophet and his immediate listeners and the narrative at hand, whereas in the ‘God knows’ clause the message is reaching out towards a wider audience and falls outside the narrative boundaries that seems to be a better fitting self-designation for a coda that is evaluating the entire narrative as well by instilling a global message.

The Qur’ānic codas in sūra 18 we will see are distinct from many of Labov’s codas that end with phrases such as “And that was that.” The Young Men and the Cave’s coda is fused with evaluative commentary that largely serves the evaluative function of the narrative, as well as closing off the narrative by bringing it back to the present time. In this coda, God is emphasizing positive attributes of His identity: His powers of seeing and hearing, and indicates to listeners how to understand the narrative by stressing the theme of being al-walī ‘The Protector, the Protector, mentioned in an earlier evaluative section as well. The word waliyy-in ‘protector’ appears here again in clause cc: “And they have no one to protect them (waliyy-in) other than Him.”

Exegetes debate who the ‘they’ refers to in this āya. Their different conclusions essentially represent different understandings about whether or not this statement is part of the narrative context or not. Both Al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī stress the generality of this āya’s meaning in stating that the ‘they’ indexes no one ‘in the world’ has, other than God, to offer them protection.324 Similarly, al-Bayḍāwī and al-Tha‘labī interpret the pronoun ‘they’ as referring to the whole of mankind “‘lī ahl-i-samawātī wa’l-‘ard” 325 Then there are those exegetes such as al-Biqā‘ī and Ibn ‘Āshūr who interpret the ‘they’ to refer to the disbelieving

325 Al-Bayḍāwī, Anwār al-tanzil, 2:10; Al-Tha‘labī, al-Kashf wa’l-Bayān, 165.
Meccans around the Prophet, who have taken their gods as protectors.\textsuperscript{326} Al-Qurṭubī, on the other hand, while believing that the ‘they’ refers to the young men states the other possibility of it refers to the disbelieving Meccans.\textsuperscript{327} In a narrative analysis, the coda is the last segment of the narrative - directly related to or part of the narrative itself. Therefore I understand ‘they’ as referring back to the young boys to whom the initial clause of the coda, ʿr also indexes.

From a Labovian perspective, a narrator instills his most important message in the coda. God, therefore, is stating His conclusive interpretation, a greater evaluation of the entire story in the coda segment: that the young men had no one else to protect them. Following this presumption, the narrative is about the fact that only God can grant people true protection, especially to those who are rightly guided, similar to the kind of protection that the young men received in the story. For 309 years, these young men were protected from the sun’s heat, as one example, as well as from people finding them inside the cave as another example. Only the \textit{al-qādir} ‘The Omnipotent’ can offer such absolute protection.

My analysis of this narrative and the others in the sūra shows that God repetitively invokes the title of \textit{wali} ‘protector’ in each of His codas. Therefore it will be argued that the coda is an essential resource for God by which He thematically unites the contents of the entire sūra. Al-Rāzī, for example, explicitly determined to find \textit{nazm} ‘coherency’ in the Qur’ān, expresses his thoughts on the story at the end of his treatment of the narrative. In this instance approaching the narrative as a narrative analyst, he does emphasize the importance of the Narrator in the story. He confirms two main attributes of God: God being \textit{al-qādir} ‘The Omnipotent,’ as in


\textsuperscript{327} Al-Qurṭubī, \textit{al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām}, 10:388.
being able to do absolutely anything related to His omnipotence, such as putting the young men to sleep for a few hundred years and then waking them; and the virtue of God being al-ʿālim ‘The All-Knowing,’ in that He has knowledge of everything including how long the young men slept in the cave.  

But he misses the story’s emphasis on God being al-walī ‘The Protector’ as evidenced by the lack of any such discussion. Al-Rāzī then moves to his concern with a form of greater nazm that extends beyond the sūra. For him, this sūra and the one revealed before it, Sūrat Baṇī ‘Isrāʾīl and after it, Sūrat Al-Maryam, are connected to each other because each sūra tells a story about a “miraculous situation” ḥālat-unʿajība.’ In sūra 17, God transports the Prophet to meet God Himself, while in sūra 18 young men are put to sleep for a lengthy period and then awoken. And finally in sūra 19, the story of the miraculous birth of Jesus is told. These major events underscore God’s virtue of being al-qādir, ‘The All-Capable,’ and thus connect the sūras together. Al-Rāzī therefore seems to be more interested in finding nazm across larger sūras, looking at the contents from a very general perspective, and does not pay attention to the possibility that a single narrative may contain a significant theme that could relate to the entire sūra.

III. Chapter Conclusion

In an attempt to investigate what kind The Young Men and the Cave story is, the findings of this chapter reveal that there is a strong resemblance between its structure and the structure of elicited narratives of personal experience. We can see that The Young Men and the Cave narrative is not a ‘pseudo-narrative’ or a ‘folktale,’ that lacks cohesion or structure as Richard

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328 Al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ, 21:14.
Bell has suggested. It is rather a narrative that is following the structure of a spoken personal narrative, beginning with an abstract and ending with a coda, and interspersed with complicating action and evaluative commentary.

The most significant narrative aspect for Labov, the evaluation, has been shown to be an underlying force in each of the categories otherwise normally fulfilling the narrative’s referential function. The role of evaluation in this narrative fulfills its two primary functions: self-aggrandizement and the distinguishing of complicating action from resolution. Narrating personal experience, God mainly constructs His image around being the _al-walī_, ‘The Protector,’ and _al-qādir_ ‘The Omnipotent.’ The presence of these attributes in the evaluative commentary, and other agency positioning devices that were looked at, affirms that Qur’ānic narratives as well can be argued to be a discourse strategy for “creating, negotiating, and displaying the moral standing of the self.”

A preliminary finding of this dissertation is that the coda contains the Speaker’s analysis of His narrative. God lexically reintroduces the concept of _walī_ ‘protector’ in the narrative’s coda after having introduced it in an earlier evaluation section. That it appears in two evaluation sections strongly indicates the importance of this point in this first narrative of sūra 18. Using Labov’s narrative model helps to uncover this theme by examining the narrative in terms of identifying segments that serve greater functions. Exegetes concerned mainly with lexical explanations and the historical significance of the narratives, and/or other issues, seem to miss this reading.

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Chapter 5: The Master of the Garden

1. Introduction

Narrative 2: The Master of the Garden

Tell them the parable of two men: for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between; both gardens yielded fruit and did not fail in any way; We made a stream flow through them, and so he had abundant fruit. [One day], while talking to his friend, he said, ‘I have more wealth and a larger following than you.’ He went into his garden and wronged himself by saying, ‘I do not think this will ever perish, or that the Last Hour will ever come– even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there.’ His companion retorted, ‘Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust, from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man? But, for me, He is God, my Lord, and I will never set up any partner with Him. If only, when you entered your garden, you had said, “This is God’s will. There is no power not [given] by God.” Although you see I have less wealth and offspring than you, my Lord may well give me something better than your garden, and send thunderbolts on your garden from the sky, so that it becomes a heap of barren dust; or its water may sink so deep into the ground that you will never be able to reach it again.’ And so it was: his fruit was completely destroyed, and there he was, wringing his hands over what he had invested in it, as it drooped on its trellises, and saying, ‘I wish I had not set up any partner to my Lord.’ He had no forces to help him other than God– he could not even help himself. In that situation, the only protection is that of God, the True God: He gives the best rewards and the best outcome. [Q 18:32-44]

This illustrative narrative conveys a story about two neighbors. One of them is a boastful disbelieving man who has been granted two fertile gardens, and the other a poorer believing neighbor, fearful of God, who tries to warn his neighbor of his arrogance. Its greater theme is the ephemeral reality of worldly goods, God’s omniscient power over human affairs, and most importantly that God is the al-walī ‘The Protector.’

A distinct feature of this narrative is that God classifies it as a mathal ‘parable’ or ‘example’ in His preface by stating “wa-drib la-hum mathal-an rajul-ayni,” ‘Tell them the parable of two men.’\(^{330}\) Parables comprise nearly one fourth of Qur’ānic discourse, and are defined as “an illustrative story teaching a lesson.”\(^{331}\) Al-Suyūṭī (d.911/1505) states that they have been generally understood as existing in the Qur’ān to give warnings, provide advice, praise

\(^{330}\) Q 18:32.

\(^{331}\) This fact is attributed to a statement made by ‘Aṭī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.44/ 661). See Mathias Zahniser, “Parable,” in Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
good deeds and admonish incorrect behavior, bringing the reality of such values closer to the listener through an illustration that is meaningful to humans.\textsuperscript{332}

Parables within Qur’ānic studies are treated differently from the genre of qīṣṣa ‘story.’ Whereas it is a general moral lesson that predominantly characterizes the parable, the category of qīṣṣa is historically bound. This is evident in many of the definitions put forth for qīṣṣa. For example, al-Kalbī (d.741/1357) the last great Andalusian scholars famed for his exegesis and comparative jurisprudence, defines qīṣṣa as “the telling of accounts ‘ākhbār’ of previous prophets and others such as the young men of the cave and Dhū l-Qarnayn.”\textsuperscript{333} Similarly, the Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān under the heading ‘narrative,’ defines qīṣṣa as “stories of individuals and communities of the past, of varying length many of which appear in numerous renditions throughout the Qur’ānic text, but are found predominately in the Meccan sūras…”\textsuperscript{334}

Tottoli’s definition most effectively highlights the distinction:

A univocal definition of Qur’ān narrative is problematic owing to the nature and style of the Qur’ānic text. Other genres, such as the juridical parts, are more easily distinguishable. It would almost be easier to proceed by elimination. An approved method is that of identifying Qur’ān narratives with verses that are historical in character. Indeed, the Qur’ān relates events or issues that are true, that are factual history, and that are to be believed precisely because they took place or will occur in the history of the world. Moreover, there is no room for professedly fantastical narratives or explicative parables.\textsuperscript{335}

As such, a parable such as The Master of the Garden would not fall within the category of Qur’ānic narratives because it is does not convey factual history. The characters portrayed in the story are not presumed to be real historical characters but rather fictitious characters designed for a moral lesson. Therefore when listeners think of a Qur’ānic story they think of the Story of

\textsuperscript{332} Al-Suyūṭī, \textit{Itqān}, 2:1041-1042.
\textsuperscript{333} Al-Kalbī, \textit{Tashīl lī 'ulūm}, 9.
\textsuperscript{334} Gilliot, “Narrative,” 3:516.
Joseph or the story of Jonah and the Whale; they do not immediately think of the smaller ‘examples’ as real stories since they are not recounting an “established” historical past event.

This chapter offers a new understanding of Qur’ānic parables, and that is that mathal and qīṣṣa at times operate on the same discourse level. The Master of the Garden is a narrative that contains temporal juncture, thus fulfilling Labov’s minimal definition of narrative. It also exhibits a narrative structure parallel to the other major narratives in sūra 18 in displaying each of the six narrative segments. Most importantly, we continue to explore how the narrative is being told to maintain and sustain God’s superior Self-image.

1. **Historical Contextualization**

Within the context of the sūra, The Master of the Garden narrative is told immediately after āyāt 27 to 31 in which God is continuing to speak to the Prophet after The Young Men and the Cave story. The contents of āyāt 27 to 31 are important to present because they constitute a discourse context for The Master of the Garden, which helps us to understand the narrative better, as well as link to the other theme of punishment and reward that God is also developing. Here we see that this theme is developing outside of the narratives however. These five āyāt are the third main discourse segment of the sūra, and I propose that they are the narrative’s pre-abstract, namely those āyāt that come immediately before a narrative and are semantically connected to it.

336 It is important to note that not all parables in the Qur’ān contain temporal juncture and narrate past events like The Master of the Garden. For example, in sūra 18 there is another parable that will be discussed, but it does not qualify as a narrative according to Labov and therefore I would not call it a spoken narrative.
and evening, seeking His approval, and do not let your eyes turn away from them out of desire for the attractions of this worldly life: do not yield to those whose hearts We have made heedless of Our Qur'ān, those who follow their own low desires, those whose ways are unbridled. Say, ‘Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so.’ We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides. If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink! What a painful resting place! As for those who believe and do good deeds—We do not let the reward of anyone who does a good deed go to waste—they will have Gardens of lasting bliss graced with flowing streams. There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold. There they will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade. There they will be comfortably seated on soft chairs. What a blessed reward! What a pleasant resting place! (Q18: 27-31)

Al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr explain that āya 28 in particular that states:

Content yourself with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval, and do not let your eyes turn away from them out of desire for the attractions of this worldly life: do not yield to those whose hearts We have made heedless of Our Qur'ān, those who follow their own low desires, those whose ways are unbridled(Q 18:28)

is related to an incident in which the leaders of the Quraysh tribes, who did not accept the prophethood, had asked the Prophet to abandon his financially poor Muslim companions before they would sit and speak with him.337 Al-Rāzī’s version of this incident is that that the leaders had said that they would not believe in the Prophet’s truth until he had abandoned his poor companions.338 In these āyāt, God reminds the Prophet to remain steadfast in his beliefs, stay with those who are believers, even if poor, and not to get distracted by those who are wealthy and heedless of God. God at this point is also presenting Himself as the khayr-un thawab-an wa uqab’an ‘Best giver of reward and punishment.’ He evokes daunting details of the hellfire for those who reject Him, as well a comforting scene of decadence for the believers.

The exegetes therefore attribute the historical event motivating the revelation of The Master of the Garden to the boastful and arrogant attitude of the Quraysh tribesmen around the

338 Al-Rāzī, Ma‘ārif, 21:119.
Prophet regarding their wealth and their frowning upon the poorer believers. The narrative was meant to make an ‘example,’ a ‘mathal’ out of two such groups, depicted generically as believers and nonbelievers, through an illustrative story that ultimately aims to warn the disbelieving Meccans of the consequences of such attitudes. Al-Rāzī in fact regards āyāt 27 to 59 as part of “kalām-un wāhid-un fī qiṣṣat-in wāhidat-in,” ‘connected speech about a single story’ because of this shared historical relevance. Therefore, al-Rāzi considers āyāt 27 to 31 to be relevant to The Master of the Garden narrative, as well to the remaining āyāt until the Journey of the Moses narrative. As stated earlier, I propose that these āyāt form a pre-abstract.

II. Narrative Analysis: The Master of the Garden

1. Transcription:

   a. Tell them the parable of two men.
   b. For one of them, We made two gardens of grape vines,
   c. surrounded them with date palms,
   d. and put corn fields in between.
   e. Both gardens yielded fruit,
   f. and did not fail in any way.
   g. We made a stream flow through them,
   h. and so he had abundant fruit.
   i. While talking to his friend, he said, “I have more wealth…
   j. and a larger following than you.”
   k. He went into his garden,
   l. said, “I do not think this will ever perish…
   m. or that the last hour will ever come—
   n. even if I were to be taken back to my Lord,
   o. I would certainly find something even better there.”
   p. His companion retorted,
   q. “Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust,
   r. from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man...?
   s. But, for me, He is God, my Lord, and I will never set up any partner with Him.

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340 Iṣlāḥī, Taddabur, 552.
341 Although the literal translation reads ‘one speech,’ al-Rāzī means that these āyāt are a connected unit of speech because of their shared context and thematic relations. See al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ, 21:115.
If only, when you entered your garden, you had said:
‘This is God’s will. There is no power not [given] by God.’
Although you see I have less wealth and offspring than you,
and send thunderbolts on your garden from the sky,
so that it becomes a heap of barren dust,
or its water may sink so deep into the ground that you will never be able to reach it again.”

And so it was.

His fruit was completely destroyed.

And there he was,
wringing his hands over what he had invested in it, as it drooped on its trellises,
and saying: “I wish I had not set up a partner to my Lord”

He had no forces to help him other than God,
He could not even help himself

In that situation,
the only protection is that of God, The True God.

He gives the best rewards and the best outcome.

Table D

| Abstract | Tell them the parable of two men, |
| Orientation | For one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between; Both gardens yielded fruit and did not fail in any way; We made a stream flow through them, and so he had abundant fruit. (Q 18:32-34) |
| Complicating Action | ف قال لصحبة وهو يحاول أن أكفره أن أكرر مالاً وأعرّ نفعاً |
| **Orientation** | One day, While talking to his friend, He said, ‘I have more wealth and a larger following than you.’ (Q 18:34) |
| Complicating Action | He went into his garden, |
**External Evaluation**

And **wronging** himself,

**Complicating Action**

Q 18:35-36

**Complicating Action**

said, “I do not think this will ever perish, or that the Last Hour will ever come—even if I were to be taken back to my lord, I would certainly find something even better there.”  

<table>
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<tr>
<th>His companion retorted: “Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust, from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man? But, for me, He is God, my Lord, and I will never set up any partner with Him...</th>
<th>(Q 18:37-38)</th>
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<td>If only, when you entered your garden, you had said ‘This is God’s will. There is no power not [given] by God.’ Although you see I have less wealth and offspring than you. My Lord may well give me something better than your garden, and send thunderbolts on your garden from the sky, so that it becomes a heap of barren dust, or its water may sink so deep into the ground that you will never be able to reach it again.” (Q 18:39-41)</td>
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| Resolution | 

وَإِحِيَا بَشَرًّا
And so it was: his fruit was completely destroyed.

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<tr>
<th>Internal Evaluation</th>
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<tr>
<td>فَأَصِيبَ يَقِبَلَ كُلْهُ عَلَى ما أَطْلَقَ فِيهَا وَهُوَ خَائِبٌ عَلَى عِروُشَهَا وَيَدْؤُ</td>
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<th>External Evaluation</th>
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<td>ﻟَمْ ﻉَلَكُ ﺃَلْبُقُ ﻣِن ذُو ﺍٓﻟّدَ ﻭَمَا ﻛَانَ ﹿﮏِرِرًا</td>
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<th>Coda</th>
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<td>ﻃَنَالْ ﻉُوْلِيَةَ ﲑَلَ ﻣُهَلَقَ، ﻪِوَ ﺑَخْرَ ﻡُوَاُداً ﻭَخَبْرُ ﻩِعْلَ</td>
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2. **Abstract/Orientation and Complicating Action**

The narrative comprises each of the six functional categories as shown in the above table, and therefore fulfills the requirements of a well-structured complete narrative despite having the classification of *mathal* rather than *qiṣṣa*. It also qualifies as a narrative of ‘personal’ experience in the Labovian sense due to the presence of both internal and external evaluation, and the syntactic embedding of speaker agency, which ultimately brings significance to the narrative.

The narrative begins with a short abstract, consisting of a single clause:

a,  ‘Tell them the parable of two men,’

that is in the form of a command to the Prophet to convey to others the narrative. The abstract functions mainly to indicate the start of a new narrative, while briefly sketching a synopsis of what it is going to be about: two men. Although in this particular parable there is no evaluative
commentary in the abstract that indicates the point of the story, we can make the argument that by using the word ‘mathal’ as a strategy of self-referentiality in the narrative, it invokes its didactic aims.

Next, the “situational” information about the two men that is pertinent to the point of the narrative is told. The orientation section, in clauses b through h:

b  For one of them, We made two gardens of grape vines,
c  surrounded them with date palms,
d  and put corn fields in between.
e  Both gardens yielded fruit,
f  and did not fail in any way.
g  We made a stream flow through them,
h  and so he had abundant fruit.

This orientation section indicates that the names of the characters are not relevant, nor are their place nor time. Yet, traditional exegetes provide this historical information, even detailing their exact names and lineages.\footnote{See al-Zamakhshari, \textit{al-Kashshaf}, 3:64 and al-Tha‘labi, \textit{Kashf wa‘l-bayān}, 6:169.} God, nonetheless, only narrates what is necessary background information for understanding the narrative as He tells it: that a great wealth that has been bestowed upon one of the men in agricultural form (grape vines, date palms, fruit and a stream). These resources invoke within the Quraysh tribesmen and other listeners a picture of abundance and wealth, which then sets the stage for their later evaluation of this man’s actions.

Many scholars, who approach spoken narratives from an ethnopoetic perspective, including Hymes (1981) and Scollon and Scollon (1981), have found that narrative structure and its internal organization cannot be isolated from the broader cultural environment in which the narratives occurs.\footnote{See De Fina and Georgakoupou, \textit{Analyzing Narrative}, 36-41.} God’s invoking of familiar topographical imagery from the cultural surroundings of the immediate listeners—gardens of grape vines surrounded by date palms with
cornfields between them—is then a strong example of His discourse strategy also reflecting a shared knowledge and a specific way of understanding reality. For others, such as Tannen, this speaking device is one of the conversational involvement strategies that “make it possible for both speakers and hearers to refer to their memories and construct images of scenes: people in relation to each other engaged in recognizable activities. And the construction of a scene in comprehension by hearers and readers constitutes mutual participation in sense-making.”

The remaining portion of the narrative is constructed entirely of a scene of a dialogue, a recognizable activity for listener that participates in enhancing the sense-making function for the listeners.

God’s narrative centrality is established through the multiple usage of the first person plural ‘We’ verbal inflection in this orientation. The verbs containing this inflection are in bold above. ‘We’ appears four times in the above āyāt. This repetition suggests that God is stressing to listeners that it is He who has given the man his two gardens and a stream, and that He ultimately has the power to do so. With this syntactic positioning, God is beginning to establish the narrative as one of ‘personal’ experience. Similarly, it was shown in the previous chapter that God also positions Himself into the orientation section of The Young Men and the Cave in the statement “We gave them more and more guidance.” These occurrences strengthen the function of Qur’ānic orientations as also a place where the Speaker constructs His positive “Self” image and thereby establishes His centrality in the narrative. This is different from Labov’s narratives of personal experience, where glimpses of “self-aggrandizement” were typically only found in commentary in evaluation sections.

The remaining parts of the narrative follow a traditional Labovian narrative structure, as

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344 Tannen, Talking Voices, 134.
shown in Table C. The complicating action is a constructed dialogue that entails a single interaction between the two men, and one statement by the narrator moving the story with the statement, “he went into his garden.” The set of complicating actions of the narrative is presented in clauses i through l:

i. While talking to his friend, he said, “I have more wealth and a larger following than you.”
j. He went into his garden,
k. and while wronging himself
l. said, “I do not think this will ever perish or that the last hour will ever come even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there.”

The first complicating action set contains three narrative heads, said, went and said. With the first “said,” the ‘problem’ of the narrative is revealed—a boastful man. At the outset, the complicating action is also interspersed with a single orienting clause “while talking to his friend” which reads in Arabic ‘wa huwa yuḥāwiru-hu.” This is an orienting clause because syntactically in Arabic it is a circumstantial ‘ḥāl’ clause, functioning in English as a past progressive clause, typical of syntax found in Labov’s orientation sections. It is semantically “sketching the kind of thing that was going on before the first event of the narrative occurred or during the entire episode.”

‘Ḥiwar’ ‘dialogue’ or ‘conversation’ is the activity that takes place during the entire episode of the narrative and it is mentioned twice in the form of an orienting clause within the complicating action.

This part of the complicating action is also interjected with a single evaluative clause. The Narrator’s evaluation is apparent in clause m: “wronging himself,” which is a form of an external evaluation in the first complicating action. Yusuf Ali’s translation of the Arabic “wa huwa zālim-un li-nafsi-hi,” as the man entering his garden “in a state (of mind) unjust to his

345 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 364.
soul.”346 – another circumstantial clause that describes the state of the man at the time of the action – captures the literal meaning of this evaluation. Al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of this clause is that it signifies that the man has become arrogant by what he has been granted, and is in denial, “kāfir-un,” of his lord’s bounty.347 In terms of function, we can see an obvious management of constructed dialogue. God is essentially pre-judging the statement the man is about to make and evaluates it. He does not make listeners work to derive meaning for themselves of the man’s following statement. Therefore the evaluative clause, in its order of appearance and content, demonstrates a form of narrator control that privileges the narrator’s interpretation of the events, as it is God’s ‘personal’ narrative. As Tannen describes it in her understanding of external evaluation, “the meaning is stated, and handed to the hearer ready-made.”348

The second half of the complicating action is the dialogue presented in clause m: which completes the narrative’s dialogue between the two neighbors:

m [While talking to his him] His companion retorted, “Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust, from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man...? But, for me, He is God, my Lord, and I will never set up any partner with Him. If only, when you entered your garden, you had said: ‘This is God’s will. There is no power not [given] by God.’ Although you see I have less wealth and offspring than you, my Lord may well give me something better than your garden, and send thunderbolts on your garden from the sky, so that it becomes a heap of barren dust, or its water may sink so deep into the ground that you will never be able to reach it again.”

The poorer man at this point in the story replies to his boastful neighbor with a fierce and cautionary response. This constructed dialogue, like others previously analyzed, is also reflecting

348 Tannen, Talking Voices, 136.
the Speaker’s underlying evaluation. It ultimately “aggrandizes” God. The poor believing
neighbor is invoking an image of an “All-Capable” God who can create something out of dust,
and can send thunderbolts. As such, God constructs His message for the Meccans to hear, both
poor and rich, in this lengthy statement in the words of someone else’s reaction. This is another
example of the Speaker’s effective strategy of using constructed dialogue in fulfilling the greater
evaluative role of the narrative, which also relates to the function of self-aggrandizement. This
“favorable” statement does not need further evaluation by God as it represents what He would
like listeners to know. Therefore, I would argue that the lack of an evaluation in this occasion, in
contrast with the need for God to state, “while wronging himself,” reinforces the idea that
constructed dialogue is serving as an evaluative function for God in the narratives. More support
for this finding will be shown in the remaining chapters.

The complicating action section ends with the narrative’s resolution in clauses ee and ff:
“And so it was, His fruit was completely destroyed.” In this narrative, the resolution comes
immediately after the main complicating actions without a break. This is different from The
Young Men of the Cave, in which one of the functions of the evaluation sections was to establish
a break between the complication action and the resolution. Here, the result of the ‘problem’ of
the narrative is simply that God destroyed the man’s garden as anticipated by his poorer neighbor
who warned him of this outcome. In sum, the narrative begins with an expectation, builds it up
through the poor neighbor’s statement, and ends by fulfilling this expectation with the resolution.
This resolution sufficiently answers the presupposed question of the listener—‘what finally
happened?’

The exegetes are not confused by this resolution. They were satisfied with the resolution
and were not searching for more answers or explanations. Al-Ṭūsī, for example, does not make any comments about this clause and skips to later ones, while al-Zamakhsharī only offers a brief clarification of what the verb ‘uḥīṭa means, which he explains as signifying total destruction from the verbal phrase ‘aḥāṭa  bī l-‘adwaw-i ‘to consume the enemy,’ which represents complete domination of the enemy.349 Al-Tha‘labī also only clarifies the meaning of ‘uḥīṭa with the same explanation as al-Zamakhsharī.350

3. Evaluation

The formal evaluation of the narrative events is here presented after the resolution. This differs from the structure of The Young Men and the Cave where a formal evaluation section comes immediately before the resolution, where Labov typically found one as well. There are two plausible explanations for this change of order. The first is that the resolution of The Young Men of the Cave—that the boys slept for 309 years—was crucial information that needed to be stated clearly so listeners would not be confused about the facts of the sleepers, one of the premises for the story. In The Master of the Garden, there is no surrounding confusion around the facts of the story as there are no counterparts in older or other traditions. The resolution therefore can come immediately after the complicating action without a break and fulfills its function to answer the question ‘what finally happened’ in the narrative.

The other plausible explanation is that the resolution of The Young Men and the Cave is more informative in nature whereas in The Master of the Garden the contents of the resolution are directly linked to its didactic theme. That the man’s garden was destroyed means ultimately

350 Al-Tha‘labī, Kashf wa‘l-bayān, 6:129.
that he had no control. Therefore God is al-qādir ‘The All Capable’ and can destroy anything. The resolution in and of itself then is projecting evaluation and hence the lack of a formal evaluation section before it.

Explicit evaluative commentary takes place both at the beginning of the narrative and at the end. I have already discussed the first internal evaluation in clause k, “wronging himself” in considering the complication action that was of the correlative type. The next evaluation to appear in the narrative is also an internal evaluation. God describes to the listeners exactly what He saw at the time of the event when the garden was destroyed. This internal evaluation, confirms to the listeners that God was there at the time of the event and acts as another way the narrator enters into the story, alongside establishing his agency through self-positioning as discussed earlier. More importantly, because of this presence and witnessing He is therefore credible as narrator and later as a commentator on the event in the evaluation section. The internal evaluation clauses are p through q:

\[
\begin{align*}
p & \text{ And there he was,} \\
q & \text{wringing his hands over what he had invested in it, as it drooped on its trellises,} \\
r & \text{and saying: “I wish I had not set up any partner to my Lord”}
\end{align*}
\]

These clauses are syntactically marked by two progressives in the English translation, *wringing* and *saying*, both translated from the present tense Arabic verbs that are circumstantial clauses: “yuqallibu” ‘wringing’ and “yaqūlu,” ‘saying.’ In English, they also form an appended participle: two adjacent verbs in non-finite V-ing form as in ‘and there he was, *wringing* his hands…and *saying*...” which Labov calls a “double progressive,” used sometimes to suspend action in evaluation sections. Both of these markers emphasize simultaneity of occurrence of actions and also come under Labov’s classification of *correlatives* that are typical for narrative-
clause-internal evaluation in Labov’s findings.\textsuperscript{351}

This internal evaluation section includes a constructed dialogue, clause r, which represents the character’s personal evaluation of what happened to him in the story. In the previous narrative, there was also one instance of an internal evaluation that was a constructed dialogue, but that dialogue was an evaluation of ‘present’ time people around the Prophet guessing about the past, i.e. guessing how many boys there were.\textsuperscript{352} In this narrative’s internal evaluation, God presents the character’s internal thoughts: “I wish I had not set up any partner to my Lord.” As previously discussed, embedding direct speech or constructed dialogue is exclusively a subjective narrative act. It carries an evaluative role because it “renders the story effective and heightens to the point of the story.”\textsuperscript{353} That God provides the characters’ own internal evaluations could also be related to the fact that \textit{amthāl} are meant to be more didactic in nature than regular narratives. Thus God is delivering the ‘lesson’ in many ways as possible.

More specifically, the internal evaluation clause, “I wish I had not set up any partner to my Lord,” indicates one of the functions that Lampropoulou discusses for constructed dialogue, or what she calls direct speech, and that is direct speech serving a means of argumentation.\textsuperscript{354} In this way, in order for God to support His “argument,” such as that people should only worship God alone and not set up any partners to Him, God constructs a story or scene within a story in which God represents the words of a character which express His own opinion in different words. Lampropoulou explains that,

\textsuperscript{351} Labov, \textit{Language in the Inner City}, 387-388.
\textsuperscript{352} Q 18:22 “Some say: The sleepers were three and their dog made four. Others say: They were five and the dog made six [guessing in the dark]. And some say: They were seven, and their dog made them eight.”
\textsuperscript{353} Lampropoulou, \textit{Direct Speech}, 19.
\textsuperscript{354} See Chapter 2 for her discussion on this.
by showing that it is not only he [the speaker] who holds this particular opinion, the represented words count as evidence and the opinion expressed becomes more valid, acceptable, and therefore, potentially convincing to his interlocutor who happened to disagree with him previously.355

Taking this view into consideration, we can say then that the man’s statement is a belief or position that God would like the Meccans, those similar to the disbelieving arrogant man, to also take. He therefore presents this essential “argument” or engagement with His interlocutors in the most persuasive manner—constructed dialogue.356

An interesting result of constructed dialogue being used as internal evaluation, such as in the particular case of clause jj, is that it enables listeners to draw their own conclusions based on the represented voice.357 The various reactions of exegetes illustrate this function. Al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of the man’s statement is that he is realizing his mistake and is remembering the warning of his brother [the exegete held the two men to be brothers]; he also adds that this statement could signify that the man is entering into a state of belief and that it indicates his seeking of forgiveness, ‘tawba’.358 Al-Rāzī’s evaluation of this man’s statement, on the other hand, although acknowledging that the man is regretful, is strongly negative. He holds that the only reason this man is regretting his past actions or beliefs is because he has lost his material wealth, and his seeking of forgiveness is out of his greed for worldly wealth. Therefore in al-Rāzī’s consideration, God will not accept the man’s new-founded belief “tawḥīd-u-hu.” 359

Still others, such as Ibn Kathīr, offer no reaction and only comment about the following

355 Lampropoulou, Direct Speech, 20.
356 See Tannen, Talking Voices, 136. She believes that internal evaluation in the form of constructed dialogue is a more persuasive form of evaluation than external evaluation.
357 Tannen, Talking Voices, 136.
359 Al-Rāzī, Majārīḥ, 21:129.
With this instance of a constructed dialogue functioning as an internal evaluation, we can see that listeners also participate in determining the possibilities or scope of the evaluation. The diverging reactions to the man’s statement could have not have been possible if God, for example, had presented this evaluation as an explicit external evaluation whereby God stops the narrative in order to make an explicit comment. Had God done this, He would have said something to the effect ‘He should never have set up any partner to His Lord.’ In such a case, it would have precluded varying listener responses, such as the ones found for the subsequent external evaluative clause kk, “He had no forces to help him other than God—he could not even help himself.” Thus one finds al-Rāzī and al-Zamaksharī who expressed different interpretations above, providing similar interpretations of this evaluation. They emphasize that this means that only God is capable of helping someone in such a situation, as He is the al-qādir “The All-Capable.”

Returning to the narrative, clauses s and t are the second and last external evaluation of the narrative:

s He had no forces to help him other than God

\[\text{t} \quad \text{He could not even help himself}\]

As with other external evaluations, this clause steps away from the narrative scene and speaks directly to the present listener about the past situation while making a general point. It is God’s subjective commentary that the man with the destroyed gardens “…had no forces to help him other than God,” and that “he could not even help himself.” Similar to the external evaluation in

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The Young Men of the Cave narrative, it functions here to facilitate the delivery of a universal message that is beyond the narrative scope, which finally reaches its crescendo in the coda. That message is for all listeners of the narrative and spoken directly to the immediate listener, the Prophet Muhammad. Needless to say, the content of this clause is fulfilling the key function of self-aggrandizement: God is establishing His worth by presenting the “best possible image” of Himself. As cited above, the exegetes affirm that this clause signifies that God is the al-qādir, “The All-capable,” another major attribute being developed in the sūra. We can also add that here the image is also constructed around God being al-nāṣir, ‘The Helper,’ or ‘The Protector,’ taken from the Arabic phrasing of the clause.

The occurrence of a shifting in self-designation ‘iltifāt’ in this external evaluation also buttresses the function of the evaluation. It takes place across two separate clauses within the same narrative, however, rather than within a single clause. The narrative begins with God using the first person plural as self-designation in ‘For one of them We made two gardens of grape vines’ in the orientation section, and then shifts at this point to the third person in ‘He had no forces to help him other than God’ in the final external evaluation. This Qur’ānic evaluative element, as already proposed, is a syntactic move that displaces the narrator further away from the story as a direct agent, and strengthens the function of stepping outside the narrative to make a point about it to the listener in the present time. This particular narrative strategy took place earlier in the sūra, in the external evaluation of The Young Men and Cave, and it will continue to be examined in the other narratives.

4. **Coda**

God closes off the narrative by stating a coda—a “functional device for returning the
verbal perspective to the present moment.362 Clauses u to v read:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{u} & \quad \text{In that situation}, \\
\text{v} & \quad \text{the only protection is that of God, The True God.} \\
\text{v} & \quad \text{He gives the best rewards and the best outcome.}
\end{align*}
\]

Like Labov’s codas, this coda exhibits deixis, one of the many devices used in a coda to indicate the completion of the narrative. Deixis has the effect of “standing at the present moment of time, and pointing to the end of the narrative, identifying it as a remote point in the past.”363 In this situation, God’s usage of the word *hunālika* ‘in that,’ or ‘there,’ is what refers back to the narrative events as a whole.

The meaning of *hunālika* is not agreed upon within the *tafsīr* tradition. Al-Rāzī puts forth four different possible interpretations of what ‘situation’ the demonstrative *hunālika* could point to, whereas many other exegetes limit their interpretation to one meaning. Al-Rāzī states that the first possibility is that *hunālika* points back to the situation of the man in the narrative, which means that the owner of the garden did not have anyone to protect himself or his garden except God.364 This interpretation stays within the boundaries of the narrative context alone. The second possibility for al-Rāzī is that this āya concludes that in such similar arduous conditions, the destitute and constrained turn to God and seek His protection.365 Here, al-Rāzī is generalizing from the narrative and beginning to apply the coda to a wider context. His third position on *hunālika* is that it refers more generally to God’s friends, such as the believer in the narrative. He states that *al-walāya* (protection, power, authority and kingdom) is solely with God. God helps his believing friends against the evil of disbelief by taking revenge on their behalf and

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363 Ibid., 40.
365 Ibid.
alleviating their hearts from their enemies. Specifically, God aided and protected the believer from the evil of the disbeliever in this situation by making his words manifest when he responded to the owner of the garden with, “It may be that my Lord will give me [something] better than your garden and will send upon it a calamity from the sky…” (Q 18:40), and supported him with His promise, “…He is best in reward and best in outcome.” (Q 18:44), i.e. for the friends of God.\footnote{Ibid.}

Lastly, the fourth possibility for al-Rāzī is that it refers to the time of the hereafter, the ‘dār al-‘ākhira.’ At that time only God can protect people and will be the best of rewards givers and punishers. Exegetes such as al-Tha‘labī only subscribe to this interpretation of hunālika. He states that hunālika means “fī al-qiyāma” ‘in the hereafter.’\footnote{Al-Tha’labī, al-Kashf wa‘l-bayān, 6:172.}

According to a Labovian analysis of the narrative, hunālika points back to the narrative itself, as speakers mainly refer back to the narratives that they just told. Thus hunālika refers to the situation of the man and the destruction of his garden. It connects only to the narrative as part of its overall structure—the coda. This rules out the possibility that hunālika indicates the hereafter, as suggested by al-Rāzī and others as one interpretation because the hereafter is outside of the narrative frame. Thus Labov’s model helps us determine the boundaries of the narrative and gives strong support for certain interpretations, just as I demonstrated in the interpretation of 18:25 and the resolution of The Young Men and the Cave story.\footnote{See Chapter 4.}
Finally, the coda as with the previous Qur’ānic coda, functions to make the most important point of the narrative. It makes it seem as though the entire narrative is constructed to make this point: ultimate protection is in the hands of God.

In comparing the codas of the two narratives analyzed thus far, it is evident that they are delivering the same point. In *The Young Men of the Cave*, clause cc reads: *hunālika-l walāyat-u lillāh* ‘And they have no one to protect them other than Him,’ which is basically another way of saying ‘*mā la-hum min dūnihi min waliyy-in* ‘The only protection is that of God, the True God.’ The coda therefore as a structural element and functional device serves as cohesive device for the narratives of sūra 18. I will sustain this argument in my analysis of the remaining three narratives. This appears to be a convincing discourse feature that pushes forward the sūra’s overall theme or *miḥwar* ‘axis,’ to use Quṭb’s terminology.

The connection across the sūra’s codas is a form of repetition. Repetition, in one analysis of conversational discourse, is a salient feature of conversational style. Tannen sees repetition, such as the lexical repetition thus far of the Arabic root *wālī* in both codas, as part of a system of ‘pervasive parallelism,’ and a system that supports the idea that no utterance occurs in isolation. Rather, utterances echo each other “in a tenacious array of cohesive grammatical forms and semantic values…and intertwine in a network of multifarious compelling affinities.” In other words, she states that “one cannot understand the full meaning of any conversation

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369 Textual relations, or ‘intertextuality,’ is defined as that message recovered by explaining the relation between two apparently unrelated passages. See Salwa el-Awa, *Textual Relations*, 3.

370 See Chapter 2 for discussion of Tannen’s tiered thematic approach to storytelling. Quṭb sees each sūra has having a specific ‘axis’ or thematic point on which the sūra revolves. Similarly, Amīn Islāḥī also espouses this viewpoint for each sūra whilst using the term ‘*amād* or ‘*amūd*,’ ‘pillar.’ Islāḥī and Quṭb are both modern pioneers of this pragmatic approach to relations between utterances or segments of the Qur’ānic text. Much of their thematic exegesis is dedicated to this form of analysis.

utterance without considering its relation to other utterances—both synchronically, in its discourse environment [within a single narrative], and diachronically, in prior text [in relation to another narrative previously told].” As such, because they are told by the same speaker within one setting, both of the otherwise unrelated narratives are compelling the listener to broaden her conception and understanding of ‘protection.’ The narrative structure, thus, enables the listener to understand protection in a variety of contexts.

In short, the coda as the last element of the narrative’s structure is a particularly rich functional category for God, serving multiple functions throughout the several narratives told in His extended monologue. It functions to close off the sequencing of complicating actions by indicating the close of a narrative, instills the moral lesson to be drawn from the narrative, and finally creates connections to previously told narratives. After examining the remaining narratives of the sūra, the organic unity of the sūra will become clearer.

With the completion of the coda, God returns to the present time. The next discourse segment of the sūra can be seen as an additional evaluation section, although not technically part of a narrative. This segment consists of the next set of āyāt 45 to 49 that are told to the Prophet before telling the next story. These āyāt are also a mathal ‘example’ or ‘lesson’ but not a narrative because they do not contain temporal juncture, or simply, they are not narrating about a past event. As suggested by al-Rāzī earlier, this segment is thematically connected to The Master of the Garden. Here, God is illustrating for the Quraysh leaders the reality of their arrogance and disbelief and it touches on many of the themes address in the narrative: 373

Tell them, too, what the life of this world is like: We send water down from the skies and the earth’s

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372 Ibid.
373 Al-Rāzī, Mafāṭīḥ, 21:115.
vegetation absorbs it, but soon the plants turn to dry stubble scattered about by the wind: God has power over everything. Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life, but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord and give better grounds for hope. One day We shall make the mountains move, and you will see the earth as an open plain. We shall gather all people together, leaving no one. They will be lined up before your Lord: ‘Now you have come to Us as We first created you, although you claimed We had not made any such appointment for you.’ The record of their deeds will be laid open and you will see the guilty, dismayed at what they contain, saying, ‘Woe to us! What a record this is! It does not leave any deed, small or large, unaccounted for!’ They will find everything they ever did laid in front of them: your Lord will not be unjust to anyone.\textsuperscript{374}

III. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter began by discussing the narrative’s discourse context within the greater sūra. It was argued that the preceding āyāt 27 to 31 serve as a pre-abstract to the narrative: they are thematically connected and therefore this narrative does not appear precipitously in the sūra. Next, the chapter moved to the analysis of the narrative’s structure in light of Labov’s framework. The short mathāl ‘parable’ was shown to be a fully functioning narrative containing each of Labov’s six canonical, ‘proto-narrative,’ functional categories. I have thus argued that mathāl and qiṣṣa ‘story’ in this occasion operate on the same discourse level despite God has labeled these stories differently.

The dynamics of the evaluative commentary throughout the narrative, coupled with the syntactic embedding of God’s agency in the orientation section, argue for God’s centrality and the narrative’s strong ‘personal’ significance. An example of narrator control of the listeners’ sense-making capabilities was demonstrated in two separate cases: one where the speaker denied listeners the ability to deduce their own meaning in using external evaluation, and the other where they were given that privilege in using constructed dialogue as a form of internal evaluation. The role of constructed dialogue in Qur’ānic narratives is multifold and, as shown in

\textsuperscript{374} Q 18:45-49.
this chapter, its analysis is linked to the greater evaluation of the narrative and at times reflects a point where God enables listeners to negotiate meaning in His narratives.

The underlying structure of the narrative and its greater evaluative function transforms it from a brief dialogue between two figures of the past into a meaningful and significant narrative for the Speaker, whose ‘personal’ self-disclosure is most evident in the coda. The coda, which echoes the coda of *The Young Men of the Cave* story, continues to develop the sūra’s overarching theme of God’s omnipotence and protection.

In this coda, it was shown that a Labovian analysis puts forth a conclusive interpretation for the use of the deictic word *hunālika*. I argue that this is the distinctive coda element that triggers to listeners that the narrative has ended, by referring back to it in a closing statement. Also, the Qur’ānic codas analyzed thus far, unlike Labov’s codas that consist of statements such as “And that was that,” contain more self-aggrandizing statements that reinforce the didactic aims of their narratives.
Chapter 6: *Iblīs the Rebel*

This chapter shows that the short story of *Iblīs*, told in sūra 18 across several clauses within a single āya, is a complete narrative. Many scholars, surprisingly, have not considered it as such. An examination of its structure in light of Labov’s framework reveals that it is a rich spoken narrative that can stand alone as a meaningful ‘personal’ narrative. More importantly, it can be argued to be the most “tellable,” narrative in the sūra because it is at this point, at the core of sūra, God is localizing for his Meccan interlocutors the issue of protection that has otherwise been developing temporally and spatially distant from them. The crux of the narrative is why do people take Iblīs and his progeny as protectors instead of God? The narrative’s coda, again, signifies this unifying message.

I.  *Iblīs and the Jinn*

*Iblīs* in the Qur’ān is Satan and/or the devil who, as Mahmoud puts it, “represents the dramatic counterpart to God.”\(^{375}\) In short, *Iblīs* used to be a jinnī who turned into Satan after his rebellion against God’s order. In explaining the theme of the devil in the Qur’ān, Wild shows that a closer reading of the narratives of *Iblīs* in the Qur’ān leads one to infer that when God uses the designation “*Iblīs*,” God is referring to the jinnī who revolted against Him in his refusal to bow down to Adam. The title “*al-shayṭān*,” i.e. Satan, is a later designation given to *Iblīs* that is associated with the entity involved in the temptation of Adam and Eve, and by extension the rest

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of mankind, to his satanic ways.\textsuperscript{376} This distinction in God’s Qur’ānic designation of this character has also been expressed in early Islamic thought, which traditionally associated \textit{al-shayṭān} with “malevolence” and considered Iblīs as the “symbolic figure of human failings.”\textsuperscript{377} Thus, Iblīs can be regarded as a transformative character in the Qur’ān and it can be said that the narrative of Iblīs in sūra 18 is about a jinnī named Iblīs and not the malevolent \textit{al-shayṭān} ‘Satan.’ The jinn are a key character in the Iblīs narrative and it is important to understand who they are in the Islamic tradition, and how they were perceived in the 7\textsuperscript{th} century Mecca at the time this narrative was told.

The jinn, often described as unseen entities, in the Islamic tradition are spiritual entities created of a mixture of fire and air, and, like humans, are accountable before God for heeding revelation and obeying His law. They are also considered as being able to live in both the manifest and invisible worlds.\textsuperscript{378} There are many references to the jinn in the Qur’ān that reveal aspects of their nature, such as the statement “I created jinn and mankind only to worship me.”\textsuperscript{379} Thus Rahman explains that, “jinn are generally conceived of in the Qur’ān as a genre of creation parallel to man. God’s messages are addressed to them also, though, perhaps secondarily.”\textsuperscript{380} Earlier āyāt in the Qur’ān such as from Sūrat al-Jinn, sūra 72, which according to Nöldeke’s chronological ordering of the Qur’ān was revealed shortly before sūra 18, are especially relevant for the discussion of jinn in the Iblīs narrative as an “orientation.” In Sūrat al-Jinn, God establishes the fact that there are “good” jinn and “bad” jinn. In āya 11 God constructs

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Quran} Q 51:56
\end{thebibliography}
the speech of jinn: “Some of us are righteous and others less so: we follow different paths.” Then, in āyāt 14 and 15 the jinn speak again “some of us submit to Him and others go the wrong way: those who submit to God have found wise guidance, but those who go wrong will be fuel for Hellfire.” Because God constructs these statements, we assume that the group of jinn are not categorically “believers” or “unbelievers,” and that accordingly will be held responsible for their actions as the āya about some of them going to hell suggests.

The reality of the jinn in Mecca, however, was quite different. In pre-Islamic Mecca the jinn were a type of terrestrial beings from whom Arabs sought protection, rather than mainly celestial beings as early Islamic thought treated them.381 Islāhi explains that the jinn were an important ideological concept within pre-Islamic Arabia, and that the jinn were believed to be a source of evil. In fear of their wrath, pagan Arabs would sacrifice their own children as offerings to the jinn. By giving them such offerings the Arabs believed they were protected from the jinn.382 Quṭb agreeing with Islāhi that the jinn are sources of evil, looks for further information to āyā 6:100, where God makes a similar statement: “Yet they made the jinn partners with God, though He created them.” Quṭb notes that the pre-Islamic Arabs used to worship the jinn even without fully comprehending their existence.

Different forms of pagan communities were aware that there were evil beings i.e. something similar to devils, and they feared those beings whether they considered them evil spirits or evil creatures. Therefore, they used to provide offerings to them in order to circumvent their fury.383 He adds that it was a short step from fearing the jinn to worshipping them:

Thereafter, they began to worship them. This form of paganism that prevailed in Arabia before Islam is just one of the many forms in which such misconceptions flourished and led to the worship of the jinn describing them as God’s partners.384

381 Bodman, Poetics of Iblis, 142.
382 Islāhi, Tadabbur, 596.
383 Quṭb, In the Shade of the Qur’ān, 5:260.
According to Arabic literary historians, and exegetes the jinn species was also considered to be muses of poets ‘al-kāhin,’ which led the Arabs to accuse the Prophet of being majnūn literally ‘possessed’ by a jinn. For how could the Prophet have attained such information and eloquence without being under the influence of jinn? Graham and Kermani quote the famous Arab poet Walīd b. al-Mughīra, who is reported to have said about the Prophet’s Qur’ānic recitation, “I know many qasīdas and rajaz verses, and am even familiar with the poems of the jinn. But, by God, his recitation is like none of them.” Graham and Kermani also state that the jinn were regarded to have knowledge of the secrets of heaven and to be able to report back to people about future events. This background information, as we will see later in the chapter, is crucial for understanding the role of evaluation in the Iblīs narrative.

Returning now to the story of Iblīs, it is repeated seven times in the Qur’ān, often embedded within the larger story of the creation of Adam and Eve. In three versions there is no dialogue between God and Iblīs, and the crux of the narrative is told within a single āya: 2:34, 18:50, and 20:116. The crux is that God commands the angels and jinn to bow down before His new creation, Adam. Everyone bows down except Iblīs. In the other four extended versions, God tells the story with constructed dialogue and additional details. Mir, in discussing the significance of dialogue in the Qur’ān and its role in Qur’ānic narratives, puts forth that in each telling of the same narrative “the amount of information it provides in a given place about something is, as a rule, determined by the needs of the context.” Following this hermeneutical

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384 Ibid.
385 Graham, Kermani, “Recitation,” 128.
386 Ibid., 143.
principle - which resonates with the general principles of discourse analysis in holding that each utterance should be understood in its local context or “situation” – I analyze this version of the Iblīs story only as it appears in sūra 18. I focus only the information that is provided by God on this occasion, and I do not examine the composite narrative of Iblīs. A composite narrative analysis would entail taking into consideration each of the variant narratives in the Qur’ān. As listeners within the particular setting of sūra 18, it is necessary to examine how much meaning can be obtained through the isolated narrative contained therein and its ultimate significance within the sūra. Below is the translation of the narrative as it appears in āya 50:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{When We said to the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ they all bowed down, but not Iblis: he was one of the jinn, and he disobeyed his Lord’s command. Are you [people] going to take him and his offspring as your protectors instead of Me, even though they are your enemies? What a bad bargain for the evildoers!} \quad &\text{[Abdel Haleem]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

II. Exegesis of the Narrative

Exegetes once again provide contextualization for the reason that God most likely tells this story, which helps to understand a layer of the narrative’s significance within the sūra by. The exegetes are in agreement that although this narrative does not link to a specific historical incident, it is told as a direct warning to arrogant and prideful disbelievers. Al-Rāzī offers the

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389 Abdel Haleem translates this without the “when” in this particular instance whereas he uses “when” in the other six Iblīs narratives to represent the conjunctive particle ‘idh. My insertion of “when” is explained in this chapter. Also, Abdul Haleem translate the second particle “fa” as “and” whereas I have translated it here as “so.” This choice of translation will be explained later in the chapter when discussing this clause. Finally, I have replaced Haleem’s translation of awliyyā’ as ‘masters’ with ‘protectors’ to keep the consistency with the other codas of the narratives.

lengthiest explanation for the context of āya 50 within the sūra. He explains that God is here naming the attitude of superiority taken by the Quraysh in refusing to sit with the Prophet because of his companionship of poor people, those who were not of noble blood, as similar to Iblīs’s attitude in refusing to bow to Adam. Iblīs held that Adam was made out of clay while he himself was made of a smokeless fire, superior in creation; and therefore he should not have to bow to Adam.\(^{391}\) Thus this narrative is also contributing towards a greater lesson God is conveying to the unbelievers surrounding the Prophet at the time of the revelation of sūra 18. We can also see this dynamic at work in *The Master of the Garden* narrative, where exegetes liken the garden owner’s arrogance, which led him to a great loss, to the arrogance of the disbelieving Quraysh.

The exegetes nonetheless generally approach the Iblīs narrative in the sūra as a composite narrative, and further mainly focus on the complicating action component of the story.\(^{392}\) They are committed to establishing the historical truth of the entire story, and thus they do not focus on the distinct variations in the narratives of each sūra except when adding information to the composite narrative. The commentaries for āya 50 therefore connect to the exhaustive commentaries of the narrative told in 2:34, which is the first appearance of the Iblīs narrative in the *muṣḥaf*. Al-Rāzī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Tha‘labī go into a great deal of historical, semantic and theological discussion of āya 2:34 to the composite narrative that includes cross-references to later tellings. They discuss for example, the *karāma* ‘respect’ or *ni’ma* ‘benefaction’ that God has bestowed upon the human creation in asking the angels to bow


\(^{392}\) See Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs* for a complete discussion on this point as he examines the Iblīs narrative as theology in the Qur’ān.
to Adam. According to the exegetes, the significance of **sujūd** ‘prostration,’ or ‘bowing,’ is not to be understood as an act of worship, but rather, one of respect and honor.\textsuperscript{393}

The pressing issue for the exegetes is the genealogical and theological status of Iblīs. Was he a jinnī or an angel? The Qur’ān is ambiguous about this question, resulting in multiple opposing narratives in early Islamic thought. Al-Ṭabarī for example quotes Ibn ‘Abbās (d.68/687), the Prophet’s cousin and renowned exegete, who believed that jinn was the name of a tribe of angels who ruled over the heavens and earth.\textsuperscript{394} Ibn ‘Abbās pointed to Q 7:11, which reads: “…We said to the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ and they did. But not Iblīs: he was not one of those who bowed down.” If Iblīs was not an angel then how would the command to ‘bow down’ apply to him as it was asked of the angels?\textsuperscript{395} Al-Ṭabarī himself does not offer his own opinion, but seems to lean towards thinking he was an angel.\textsuperscript{396} Others, like al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr make it clear that Iblīs was not an angel but of the creation called jinn, as Adam is of mankind.\textsuperscript{397} Discussions such as these constitute a commentarial backdrop for the exegetes, which they subsequently refer to in their treatments of later Iblīs narratives. Their specific reactions to the narrative in sūra 18 and how it adds to their understanding of the composite narrative will be discussed below after the narrative analysis.


\textsuperscript{396} Al-Ṭabarī’s full discussion on this issue can be found in his commentary on Q 2:34. See *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 1:177-180.

III. Narrative Analysis: *Iblīs the Rebel*

1. Transcription:
   
   a. [Remember] when We said to the Angels, “Bow down before Adam,”
   
   b. they all bowed down
   
   c. but not Iblīs,
   
   d. he was one of the jinn,
   
   e. and he disobeyed his Lord’s command.
   
   f. Are you [people] going to take him and his offspring, as your protectors instead of Me, even though they are your enemies?
   
   g. What a bad bargain for the evildoers!

2. Defining a Narrative

   The first issue at hand is showing how, in Labovian terms, these clauses constitute a narrative. This is a problem resting in the style of the Iblīs narrative in that it lacks a Qur’ānic designation such as *mathal* ‘parable’ or *qiṣṣa* ‘story’, or even, in Labovian terms, a formal abstract. As a result, or perhaps due to the narrative’s succinct delivery within a single āya, major modern commentators who generally treat narratives as a whole dismiss the possibility that this āya might be a narrative. Even the layman reader does not consider it a narrative.

   Qūṭb, someone one would expect to offer a more nuanced literary approach to this piece of discourse in the sūra, sees it as an “*ishāra*” or a ‘signifier,’ loosely translated as ‘mention,’ of the earlier narrative.” Similarly, Mawdūdī, recognizes it as “an illusion to the story of Adam and Satan.” 398 Arkoun and Netton also do not recognize it as a narrative or use the term “story” to refer to it. 399 In fact, Netton in his interpretation of sūra 18 does not discuss the significance of āya 50 or even mention it in his entire “modern Tafsīr,” despite the fact that he attempts to

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398 Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, 5:112
399 See Arkoun, “Lecture”; and Netton, “Towards a Modern Tafsīr.”

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identify the major archetypical characters of the sūra. Asad calls it a “short reference.” Al-Ṭabatiba’ī labels each of the other narratives in the sūra a qīṣṣa, but not āya 50. He refers to it as an event or happening ‘wāqi’a’ that is being recalled by God, thus seeing the narrative as a complicating action and nothing more. And finally, even though al-Rāzī refers to the āya as a story in his brief interpretation of the āya, later, in his introduction to The Journey of Moses narrative, it becomes clear that he does not really consider āya 50 a narrative. He states that The Journey of Moses narrative is the third narrative of the sūra, thus counting only The Young Men and the Cave and The Master of the Garden passages as narratives.

These treatments, which often shape readers’ perceptions of the discourse, miss the full narrative force and depth of the āya and consequently, its contribution to the sūra in communicating a central message of the sūra. As with the classical exegetes, this could be because they are treating the Iblīs story as a composite narrative. Even if so, it nonetheless results in an underestimation of the narrative’s structural unity within the sūra. Another reason could be that because the narrative is told within a single āya, it leaves the impression that it does not require commentary.

But the āya, short as it is, fulfills Labov’s definition of a narrative: “one way of recounting past events, in which the order of narrative clauses matches the order of events as they occurred,” which stipulates the condition of at least one temporal juncture between two independent clauses. Temporal juncture is when two clauses are “temporally ordered with
respect to each other.” In other words, if these two clauses were to be interchanged in their order it would disturb the “temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation,” i.e. their original order of events.\textsuperscript{405} The following example from Labov illustrates a minimal narrative: “I shot and killed him.” Across these two clauses is a temporal juncture and the change of the order of these clauses would change the original event as it happened. So the following clause, “I laughed and laughed at the park yesterday,” although describing an event of the past is not technically a narrative according to Labov because it does not contain a temporal juncture.\textsuperscript{406} Returning to the Iblīs narrative, its basic narrative is achieved by the following first three clauses:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[a] [Remember] When We said to the Angels, “Bow down before Adam,
  \item[b] they all bowed down,
  \item[c] but not Iblīs.
\end{itemize}

The temporal juncture rests between clauses a, and b. If the narrative were to terminate at this point, we could argue that it contains an orientation (the setting is that God is speaking with the angels somewhere, in some past time), a complicating action section (clauses a through c), and a result which is subordinated to the last narrative clause.

For Labov, however, even “a narrative which contains an orientation, complicating action and result is not a complete narrative.”\textsuperscript{407} These elements carry out the referential function “perfectly,” but in the end “it has no point” because of the absence of the evaluative function that serves to ultimately bring personal significance to the narrative. But I argue that the Iblīs narrative, as shown below, stands as an exception to Labov’s notion of a minimal and complete narrative. It is distinguished by its highly evaluative nature across the entire narrative. Each

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item{\textsuperscript{405}} Ibid.
\item{\textsuperscript{406}} Ibid., 28.
\item{\textsuperscript{407}} Ibid., 33.
\end{thebibliography}
structural unit, including the complicating action, is fulfilling the greater evaluation function of the narrative.

3. Labovian Analysis

Table E presents the narrative with its corresponding Labovian structural units. The narrative begins with the only two complicating action clauses of the narrative initiated by ‘idh ‘when.’ A detailed discussion of the Arabic adverb ‘idh and its narrative role comes after the preliminary outline of the overall narrative structure.

Table E

| Abstract          | فِئَتْ النَّارِيْةَ أَسْجُدُوا لِأَدَمَ  
|                   | [Remember] When                                     |
| Complicating Action | فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ  
|                   | We said to the Angels “Bow down before Adam,”        |
| Complicating Action | كَانَ مِنْ الْجَنِّ  
|                   | so they all bowed down but not Iblis:                 |
| Orientation       | عَفَضَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ  
|                   | He was one of the jinn                                |
| External Evaluation/Resolution | فِئَتْ النَّارِيْةَ وَدُرِّيَّةَ أُولَٰئِيْاً مِنْ ذُنُوبٍ وَمَغْفِرَةً عِنْدَ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ بَلَأَرْ  
|                   | so he disobeyed his Lord’s command                    |
| Coda              | أَتَأْتُونَنَّهُ وَأَبَداَنٌ أَوْلِيَآٰءٌ مِّنْ ذُنُوبٍ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ بَلَأَرْ  
|                   | Are you [people] going to take him and his offspring as protectors instead of me, even though they are your |

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enemies? What a bad bargain for the evildoers! (Q 18:50)

A. Complicating Action

The first section comprises two complicating action clauses with the narrative heads “said,” and “bowed.” The first narrative clause “We said to the angels” arguably contains orienting information. God is establishing the scene of the primordial dialogue between God and the angels before man was created. The words port listeners, then, to that particular time. Upon hearing these clauses, the listeners could infer that Iblīs was one of the angels mentioned in the first complicating action. The various reactions of the exegetes already mentioned confirm this possible reaction; if the angels were asked to bow down and Iblīs refused, than he must have been an angel. These clauses therefore are ambiguous and possibly confusing for listeners.

B. Orientation/Resolution/Coda

God seems to resolve the possible confusion of the complicating action section regarding Iblīs’s identity immediately. He suspends the narrative action after the two first complicating action clauses, and interjects a single orienting clause of the narrative that explicitly tells the listeners that Iblīs was a jinnī. This orientation clause is highly significant because it is only in this occasion, in sūra 18, and nowhere else in the Qur’ān, that God identifies Iblīs as a jinnī. Hence, we must understand why God is orientating Iblīs in this way in this particular context.

A strong indication of the orientation’s significance first comes from its positioning within the narrative. It is placed between the complicating action and resolution whereas
typically the orientation is provided before the complicating actions following the abstract. Because an orientation clause is technically a free clause and could be placed anywhere in the narrative without disturbing the order of events, the displacement is not a structural or semantic issue. What Labov found, however, was that when orientations are displaced, they perform an evaluative function. Norrick’s further research of orientations found that orientations either relate to the narrative’s ‘general frame’ or the ‘local frame.’ Local or narrow orientation sections or clauses, for Norrick, are not functioning so much as just providing the listeners with general background information but rather information that leads into the action of the story. This is precisely how the orienting clause d, “He was one of the jinn” is functioning in the Iblīs narrative. I believe it leads listeners into the proceeding clause, the narrative’s resolution, clause e: “So he disobeyed his Lord’s command” to emphasize the fact that it was a jinn who committed the greatest act of disobedience. Neuwirth captures the force of God’s evaluation in this resolution in her brief analysis of the āya:

The codation as a fāsiq [transgressor] confirms the novel, exclusively negative, perspective taken towards Iblīs already in Q 17:61-65, where however the pattern of the negotiation between God and Iblīs was still upheld. Iblīs has certainly by now stepped down from the rank of a forensic agent in a divine scheme to the prototype of the adversary…he is now recalled as an enemy of man (18:50).

With this explanation, one of the evaluations of jinn becomes apparent: some jinn are prone to greatest of crimes and as such their spiritual status need to be reassessed. De Fina’s research on orientations in narratives is very insightful to draw on in furthering our understanding of how God uses this orientation. She found that speakers use orientations to bring to focus areas of concern both for tellers and audiences, and for figures in the story worlds,” as

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408 Labov and Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis,” 32.
well as “to negotiate and build shared understandings of experiences.” It is evident that the statement “He was a jinn” is not just supplying general or situational background information. In evoking the entity of jinn in the context of Iblīs’s rebellion, God is clearly beginning to negotiate an understanding with the Meccans of their practices related to the jinn—specifically that they are sought protection from. The coda of the narrative, following the resolution, manifests clearly the negotiation of a new understanding. Clauses f and g state: “Are you [people] going to take him and his offspring as protectors instead of me, even though they are your enemies? What a bad bargain for the evildoers!” With this coda, which returns listeners to the present time, the relationship between the Meccans and the jinn is problematized and greatly evaluated. God poses a threatening rhetorical question and follows it with an affirmation that the evildoers taking other than Him as their protector [‘awliyyā’] will ultimately suffer severe consequences.

Once again the coda contains the Arabic root of w-l-y, which clearly evokes the theme of protection again and expounds on why the Iblīs narrative is relevant to this theme. That the message is even a part of an extremely brief narrative, told within a single āya, reinforces the significance of this theme in the sūra. The coda, as a narrative element is continuing to play a substantial functional role. God is establishing Himself as the ultimate protector and in this occasion localizing the theme for his immediate interlocutors that therefore I argue gives the narrative a high level of tellability.

Al-Rāzī and Iṣlāḥī, both read the āya from within the naẓm paradigm, which also looks for a sūra’s unifying theme or coherence. For them, it is historical contextualization—the idea that the Iblīs narrative was told as another warning to the arrogant Quraysh—that explains how
the narrative achieves its *naẓm* with the preceding āyāt and with the sūra.\textsuperscript{412} They do not recognize the lexical cohesion of Arabic root *w-l-y* across the narratives as a possible source of interconnectedness, perhaps taking it as a given assumption and thus not stating it. Although it can be argued that this historical contextualization remains consistent for all of the narratives, I believe that God’s explicit assertion of the message of taking others as protectors instead of Him, lexically evident in each of the codas, is the strongest evidence for the sūra’s overall coherency. Acting as a narrative analyst, I find basis for relating the narratives together from a close analysis of the narrative itself rather than relying on extra-textual reasons. I do maintain that the social context of the narratives is full of insight and important for understanding the narratives to some degree. I believe, however, that the parallel codas play the greatest role in understanding the narratives and reinforce the specific theme of protection.

IV. *'idh*: Discourse Marker to Evaluative Abstract

In the previous section, I mainly analyzed the narrative structure according to Labov’s six categories. This section turns the attention to a specific lexical item in the narrative and proposes an explanation for its evaluative role. I examine the first word of the narrative, *'idh*, ‘when’, and how it reflects on the greater value of this narrative’s place in the sūra.

The basic complicating action section of the Iblīs narrative, as seen above, comprises the first set of clauses a through c. The narrative begins with a complicating action clause “[Remember] When We said to the Angels, ‘Bow down’,” which contains the first narrative head *said*. Immediately, a listener is brought into the narrative’s first action without a formal detached

abstract or a preceding orientation clause, as was the case with the previous two narratives of the sūra. This narrative begins with the Arabic adverb of time ‘idh ‘when,’ literally ‘time,’ which requires a closer analysis to understand the style of narrative structure in this narrative and in the following story *The Journey of Moses* that begins with the same Arabic adverb.

Ibn Hishām (d.761/1360) in *Mughnī allabīb*, a seminal classical Arabic grammar text that gives a great deal of attention to Arabic conjunctions, explains the Qur’ānic usage of ‘idh as functioning in multiple grammatical ways. In narrative clauses specifically, it acts as an adverb prefixed to a past action, “‘ism-un li-zaman-in mād-in,” ‘noun of the past tense.’ This adverbial conjunction can serve grammatically as a direct object “maf‘ūl bihi” that is controlled by an elided verb, most commonly ‘udhkur ‘remember,’ which is called an act of taqdar ‘explicit assumption,’ or ‘hypothesis.’²⁴¹ Because it is an indeclinable particle, however, it does not manifest its accusative marker. Ibn Hishām explains that this usage is most common in Qur’ānic narratives where ‘idh has the function of introducing Qur’ānic stories. Of the 239 occurrences of ‘idh in the Qur’ān, the majority are used in introducing narrative clauses.²⁴² Therefore, the original meaning of clause a in the Iblīs narrative can be represented thus: “[Remember] When We said to the Angels bow down.” This particular function is affirmed by many English translations where “Remember” is prefixed to the *when*-clause in narratives as I have shown in this chapter within the brackets. A few examples from Abdel Haleem’s modern translation are: “Remember when (wa ‘idh) We gave Moses the Scripture, and the means to distinguish [right and wrong], so that you might be guided,” (Q 2:54), and “Remember when (wa ‘idh) We said,

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‘Enter this town and eat freely there as you will, but enter its gate humbly and say, “Relieve us!”’ Then We shall forgive you your sins and increase the rewards of those who do good.” (Q 2:58). But interestingly, Abdel Haleem does not translate of ‘idh as “when” in the Iblīs narrative in sūra 18, instead translating the clause as “We said to the Angels…” This is different from his own translations for the same narrative clause in Sūrat al-Baqara and Sūrat al-Ṭāhā that include “when,” but not “remember.” 415 His interpretive choice is not explained for sūra 18.

Ibn Hishām also discusses the pragmatic function of ‘idh separate from his discussion of its grammatical functions. He states that ‘idh also functions to emphasize other words around it as a form of tawkīd ‘corroboration,’ or ‘strengthening.’ 416 That is to say that using ‘idh in introducing a clause brings a greater emphasis to the clause, as if it is being uttered in an emphatic voice. Ibn Hishām quotes the clause wa-‘idh qulnā lilmalā‘ikati usjudū li-ādama “[Verily] when we said to the Angels, ‘Bow down before Adam’” as his only example of this pragmatic function. We can summarize then that the i‘rāb ‘declensional case’ of ‘idh is in the accusative as a result of the elided verb “Remember,” but that it is also serving the emphatic function in the narrative of Iblīs the Rebel.

The conjunctive Arabic particle ‘idh, in its pragmatic usage, essentially works as a discourse marker in modern linguistic terms, anticipated by Ibn Hishām and other classical Arabic grammarians. Discourse markers are lexical devices that can technically be understood as “sequentially dependent elements, which bracket units of talk,” i.e., they are “nonobligatory

415 Q2:34, Q 20:116.
416 Ibn Hishām, Mughnī, 98.
utterance initial items that function in relation to ongoing talk and text."\textsuperscript{417} The diverse members of word classes that usually comprise discourse makers in English include conjunctions (\textit{and}, \textit{but}), interjections (\textit{oh}), adverbs (\textit{now, then}) and lexicalized phrases such as ‘\textit{y’know’}’ or ‘\textit{I mean}.’\textsuperscript{418} González defines them in a broader semantic perspective in her approach to discourse markers from the field of pragmatics:

Pragmatic markers are polyfunctional cues that predicate change in the speaker’s cognition, attitudes, and beliefs and facilitate the transmission of illocutionary force and intentions…the speaker makes use of them to organize, recover, reformulate and segment the information provided to the hearer.\textsuperscript{419}

To my knowledge, there has been no major investigation into the pragmatic and structural roles discourse markers play in the Qur’ān. An exception however is El-‘Awa’s analysis of the discourse markers \textit{bal} ‘but’, \textit{kallā} ‘no indeed/indeed not’, ‘and \textit{yā ’ayyuhā}, an emphatic vocative term of address, in her textual relations’ study of sūra 33 and 75.\textsuperscript{420} She argues that these connective particles serve as paragraph markers that indicate a subject-switch, which ultimately provide internal coherence to a discourse. She proposes that “many grammatical particles behave as paragraph markers at the beginnings of sections and subsections. These are clearly noticeable at the turns of subjects within the \textit{sura}, and have a highly effective role in communicating the message of the sections they introduce in terms of their relations to the previous sections.”\textsuperscript{421}

Similarly, Fludernik, looking at personal narratives, discovered a similar structural function that discourse markers serve in “flagging” narrative episodes. She writes that “Discourse markers fulfill important roles as signals of structural points in narrative. They can mark the story's return


\textsuperscript{418} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{419} González, \textit{Pragmatic Markers}, 1.

\textsuperscript{420} See El-Awa, \textit{Textual Relations}.

\textsuperscript{421} El-Awa, \textit{Textual Relations}, 161.
to the plotline after a digression (such as embedded orientation, commentary), signal the result section of the narrative, and they also serve to flag new episode beginnings.**422

Returning to the Iblīs narrative, it becomes evident that the marker ‘idh is more than a grammatical particle. It is crucial to the utterance it is attached to and to the overall framing of the narrative. In terms of framing the narrative, I suggest that this one word abstract be considered a discourse marker that signals to the listeners that a narrative is about to begin and therefore acts as a “subject-switcher,” similar to El-‘Awa’s findings. As an organizational tool, it segments off the previous section of discourse, āyāt 45 to 49 in the sūra, and introduces a new segment of discourse. The elided imperative verb “‘udhkur” ‘remember’ signals to listeners that the narrator is about to remind them of a past event. Similar to the function of Labov’s abstracts, the marker draws the listeners’ attention and indicates that a story is about to begin.

Furthermore, ‘idh in the clause “When We said to the Angels. ‘Bow down before Adam,’ serves an evaluatory role. As an adverbial conjunction of tawkīd or “strengthening,” its usage implies that the appended set of utterances is significant to the speaker. With respect to Labov’s narrative framework, the discourse marker can be related to the intensifiers that Labov identifies as a category of syntactic evaluative elements narrators use to make evaluative comments. For Labov, each of the evaluative elements, such as comparators, correlatives and explicatives, serve a particular function that is represented by a syntactic device. An intensifier “selects one of the events and strengthens or intensifies it.”**423 Among the syntactic and other lexical devices that Labov classifies as intensifiers are gestures, expressive phonology, quantifiers and repetition, which have been detailed in Chapter 1. The Qur’ānic discourse marker ‘idh in its pragmatic

**422 Fludernik, Towards a Natural Narratology, 46.
**423 Labov, Language in the Inner City, 378.
The function of *tawkīd* is essentially a narrative event *intensifier* that correlates with Labov’s definition of intensifiers.

The discourse role *‘idh* plays in the narrative is multi-fold as argued above. Similar to the function of *when-clauses* in English, the Qur’ānic *‘idh* ‘when’ introduces narrative clauses.\(^{424}\) Further, while it signals to the listeners that a narrative is about to be told it is also serving as an *evaluative abstract* in that it is increasing or strengthening the narrative’s tellability.

A shared characteristic of the *Iblīs the Rebel* and *The Journey of Moses* narratives (examined later in the thesis) is that they are both unannounced narratives. By that I mean that the other two main narratives, *The Young Men and the Cave*, and *Dhū l-Qarnayn* relate directly to the three questions asked by the Meccan Jewish rabbis and therefore should be considered elicited. The Meccans were expecting, or curious, to find out about these events in the Prophet’s next set of revelations. With respect to *The Master of the Garden* narrative, the exegetes link this story’s revelation to the historical incident of certain Quraysh tribesmen asking the Prophet to abandon his poor companions before they would consider engaging with him.\(^{425}\) That narrative as such was considered to be elicited. This leaves the two narratives of *Iblīs the Rebel* and *The Journey of the Moses* to appear “unannounced.” Although the Iblīs narrative is “known,” in the sense that it has been told previously to the Meccans in earlier Qur’ānic revelations, and historically known amongst Jewish and Christian Arabs, its appearance in the sūra comes unexpectedly. Therefore, the parallel evaluatory abstracts *‘idh* and shared dehistoricized context of these two narratives must merit a greater consideration. I suggest that their similar abstracts

\(^{424}\) Fludernik, *Towards a Natural Narratology*, 46. She notes that *when-clauses* are frequently used to initiate plotline action as found in conversation analysis studies.

enable these two narratives to be classified in the context of the sûra as the most “highly tellable” narratives. With these two narratives specifically, the paraenetic force is heightened to greater levels. God is narrating two stories for the Quraysh audience whose narrative events and their understanding do bear on their “future lives.” Taking Iblīs and his progeny rather than God as protectors will result in their ultimate downfall in God’s world.

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, a number of observations have been put forth. Firstly, Iblīs the Rebel is a full narrative according to Labov’s model and should also be considered as narrative of personal experience. As the shortest narrative in sûra 18, not even visible as a narrative to many scholars, it also contains the central point of sûra 18. A major finding of this chapter is that this theme is reinforced by the structure of the narrative through the displacement of the orientation clause. The orientation clause has shown to be particularly evaluative in this narrative, whose displacement draws the listeners’ attention to the most contentious issue for the Speaker—namely the jinn. The coda, which states clearly what this problem is, poses a rhetorical rebuke of the disbelieving Meccans who take jinn as their protectors instead of God. In relying on exegetical commentary that explains that worshipping jinn was a prominent pagan Arabic practice, this issue becomes much clearer. However, as the narrative stands it is still possible to understand from the coda that the jinn are taken as protectors even if we did not look into exegetical commentary. Because God instills this particular message in the shortest of narratives, and here it is locally contextualized for his interlocutors, it strongly ensconces the argument that the narratives of sûra 18 are ultimately about not seeking protection from other than God, al-walī ‘The Protector.’
It was also argued that two discourse markers, the adverbial noun ‘idh ‘when,’ and particle fa ‘so’ fulfill important roles of signaling structural points in the narrative: ‘idh flags a new theme from previous discourse and constitutes the narrative’s evaluative abstract, while fa signals the result section of the narrative, thereby matching its Arabic pragmatic function as fā’ lil-twābīb ‘the fā’ of result.’ For these reasons, I argue that the Iblīs the Rebel āya is a rich narrative in which the Narrator maximizes various structural elements and lexical devices to convey His point.
Chapter 7: The Journey of Moses

In this chapter, an examination of the narrative structure of The Journey of Moses shows that not all of the narratives of sūra 18 can fit Labov’s canonical model perfectly. A formal coda and explicit evaluation by God are absent in this story, while the other categories are present. Therefore, the presentation and style of the narrative makes it difficult to classify this story as a narrative of personal experience. The question I engage, then, is whether or not this narrative functions as a vicarious narrative. If so, how does God’s vicarious narrative bring significance to the narrative, and contribute to the overall theme of the sūra?

I. Introduction

In this fourth narrative of sūra 18, God tells the story of Moses seeking knowledge from a mysterious unknown person, identified as al-Khiḍr or al-Khāḍir “the green one,” or “the green man,” in the exegetical literature. Moses accompanies him on a journey in which he witnesses a number of bewildering events; the damaging of a ship, the killing of a boy, and the restoration of a broken wall, which perplex Moses and causes him to break his oath of patience and obedience. Why would a man of God, such as al-Khiḍr, unjustly kill a boy?

The narrative appears in the sūra at āya 60 and goes until āya 82. The āyāt that precede this narrative, āyāt 54-59, shed light on the social context surrounding the Prophet and on the general discourse tone of the sūra in which God consistently, in between the narratives, rebukes the disbelievers for their denial of God, the Prophet, and the resurrection to come:

In this Qur’an We have presented every kind of description for people but man is more contentious than any other creature. Now that guidance has come to them, what stops these people believing and asking forgiveness from their Lord before the fate of earlier peoples annihilates them or their torment confronts
them? We only send messengers to bring good news and to deliver warning, yet the disbelievers seek to refute the truth with false arguments and make fun of My messages and warnings. Who could be more wrong than the person who is reminded of his Lord’s messages and turns his back on them, ignoring what his hands are storing up for him [in the Hereafter]? We have put covers over their hearts, so they cannot understand the Qur’an, and We put heaviness in their ears: although you [Prophet] call them to guidance they will never accept it. Your Lord is the Most Forgiving, and full of mercy: if He took them to task for the wrongs they have done, He would hasten their punishment on. They have an appointed time from which they will have no escape, [just like] the former communities We destroyed for doing wrong: We set an appointed time for their destruction.\footnote{Q 18:54-59.}

Al-Rāzī explains that God in these above āyāt reminds listeners again why the previous two parables, including The Master of the Garden, referenced in āya 54 ‘We have presented every kind of description [mathal] for people but man is more contentious than any other creature’ were told.\footnote{Al-Rāzī, \textit{Mafātīḥ}, 21:141.} The Journey of Moses narrative comes directly after these āyāt and reads:

\begin{quote}
[Remember when] Moses said to his servant, ‘I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years!’ but when they reached the place where the two seas meet, they had forgotten all about their fish, which made its way into the sea and swam away. They journeyed on, and then Moses said to his servant, ‘Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring,’ and [the servant] said, ‘Remember when we were resting by the rock? I forgot the fish– Satan made me forget to pay attention to it– and it [must have] made its way into the sea.’ ‘How strange!’ Moses said, ‘Then that was the place we were looking for.’ So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps, \footnote{Q 18:65} and found one of Our servants– a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own. Moses said to him, ‘May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?’ The man said, ‘You will not be able to bear with me patiently. How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?’ Moses said, ‘God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way.’ The man said, ‘If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself.’ They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, Moses said, ‘How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!’ He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ Moses said, ‘Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you.’ And so they travelled on. Then, when they met a young boy and the man killed him, Moses said, ‘How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!’ He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ Moses said, ‘From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me from your company– you have put up with enough from me.’ And so they travelled on. Then, when they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down and the man repaired it. Moses said, ‘But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that.’ He said, ‘This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently: the boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force. The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief, \footnote{Q 18:81} we wished that their Lord should give them another child– purer and more compassionate– in his place. The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord
intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.’

In this narrative God speaks in the register of a neutral omniscient narrator. This style distinguishes it from the other narratives in the sûra that are largely characterized by God’s pervasive and direct evaluative voice, and most importantly by His agency (which marks many of the narrative heads). This narrative is a very detailed statement of a sequence of events and their results, presented in the third person and in dialogue between Moses and al-Khiḍr. God does not “emotionally” or “socially” evaluate these actions as He has done in His previous narratives. Such an evaluation is crucial to Labov’s definition of a personal narrative, as it brings it so much significance and “tellability.” But such lack of elaborate evaluation, for Labov, often characterizes narratives of “vicarious” experience—experiences of others that are told from a near objective standpoint. A vicarious narrative is essentially the “retelling of other people’s experience.” Fludernik, who works closely on various forms of oral storytelling, provides insight into how a vicarious narrative achieves tellability.

Its tellability depends on the interest afforded by the described experience, which needs to have been especially funny, weird, exotic or outrageous. The emphasis is therefore on the effect of this experience, which has been undergone by another person, on narrator and listener alike. The rendering can be empathetic towards the story protagonist (for example in tales that relate how somebody managed ‘to get away with murder’, for instance when cheating the (tax) authorities, and thereby eliciting the narrator’s and listeners’ admiration). Alternatively, the protagonist of the vicarious story may be passive, in the sense that things happen to him/her, and these events may be tellable because they are particularly sad, lucky, awesome or weird. In fact in vicarious narrative the two basic schemata available for tales of personal experience operate in a comparable manner: there is either an agent who achieves certain things or an experiencer to whom things happen.

Based on this description of a vicarious narrative, I propose that The Journey of Moses is a vicarious narrative whose tellability depends on the effect of the experience on the protagonist of

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428 Labov and Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis,” 34.
the narrative. Moses is passive, to whom particularly ‘strange’ events happen. An important question that must be kept in mind in the analysis however is how God nonetheless manages to tell a highly evaluative narrative.

Exegetes have treated The Journey of Moses narrative much as scholars have approached the general sūra. At the outset, the exegetes are constrained by their commitment to historicity, and as listeners, are immediately concerned with basic orienting questions: who, why, when and where—details the Qur’ānic narrative does not fully supply. Which Moses is this? When did this journey take place? And why was Moses on a journey? Thus, the exegesis provides a report of a historical contextualization for the narrative that, amongst other things, transports listeners back to the time of Moses and a conversation he had with God. This conversation explains the reason why Moses went on this journey and is reported in a ḥadīth narrated by Ubayy b. Ka'b (d.19/640). The ḥadīth tradition in many exegeses functions to situate the Qur’ānic narrative into what is held to be its wider context and therefore explains what was going on prior to the journey and aids listeners in understanding the place where God begins the narrative:

Moses asked his Lord, “Which of your servants is most beloved to you? He said, “The one who remembers Me and does not forget Me.” Moses said, “And which of your servants is most judicious [‘aḍā]?” He said, “The one who judges with truth and does not follow his own disposition [al-hawa].” Moses said, “Which of your servants is the most knowledgeable?” He said, “The one to whose knowledge the knowledge of the people aspire, so perhaps they might receive a word leading them to guidance or saving them from ruin.” So then Moses said, “If there is among your servants someone more knowledgeable than me, guide me to him.” He said, “Al-Khidr is more knowledgeable than you.” Moses said, “Where shall I find him?” He said “Upon the shore by the rock.” Moses said “How will I find him?” He said, “Take a fish with you in a basket, and wherever you lose it is where he will be.”

This ḥadīth introduces the name of the al-Khiḍr that is not mentioned in the Qur’ānic text and establishes that he is someone more knowledgeable than Moses.

The ḥadīth as such also establishes the framework in which exegetes interpret the

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430 Al-Zamakhshari, al-Kashshāf, 3:75. Ibn Kathīr cites a different version of this hadith in his Tafsīr, 3:120.
narrative that relates to its pedagogical aims. Al-Rāzī, for example, stresses that although the story can stand as an independent narrative “qiṣṣa mustaqilla,” it also connects to the warning of the arrogant Quraysh of their proud ways. God wants to show them that Moses, despite having abundant knowledge and an honorable prophetic position, still humbled himself and went to al-Khīḍr to learn. Humility, al-Rāzī states, is a greater virtue than arrogance. Students can also learn from Moses as he sets an example for being humble, eager to learn, and offering complete submission to the teacher. Adding to this, Ibn ‘Āshūr notes that the story as well as the next one Dhū l-Qarnayn, are told to underscore the benefit of travelling for spiritual attainment—for gaining knowledge (Moses), or doing righteous work (Dhū l-Qarnayn).

Some exegetes predominantly hold that the reason for God telling The Journey of Moses was to teach specifically the Jewish rabbis who challenged the Prophet a lesson. That it is not compulsory for a prophet, like Moses—their principal prophet, to have complete knowledge of all stories and events and as such neither does the Prophet Muhammad have to. Gade elaborates on this view and states that “the story concerns cause and effect limitations and boundaries, and the potential of a knowledge even greater than that which a prophet may be said to possess.” Similarly, Wheeler understands the story as “a vindication of God's justice and an indictment of the human claim to divine knowledge.”

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431 Al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ, 21:144.
432 See al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ, 21:152.
433 Ibn ‘Āshūr, al-Taḥrīr, 15:98
434 See al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ, 21:144; al-Biqā’î, Naẓm al-durar, 12:96-97;
435 Gade, The Qu’ran, 264.
enigmatic, but seems to reinforce the idea that God determines our fate and that, regardless of human pretensions, what God determines happens.\footnote{Wheeler, “The Jewish Origins,” 160.}

There is a wealth of edifying material in this narrative for classical and modern Sufi commentaries. Mainly, the story presents the archetypical master-disciple relationship embodied by Moses and al-Khidr. In an excellent investigation of this subject, Talman summarizes what this narrative represents for the Sufis:

Sufi commentators find in this story categories of knowledge, mystical experience and spiritual training. They adapt the narrative’s lexicon to unearth a mystical substrate. The process of mentoring companionship (suhba) directs the disciple’s journey into the realm of knowledge, experience, and training realized through unveiling (kashf) and witnessing/contemplation (mushahada). In the companionship of suhba, mentoring is a bridge to inner knowledge (‘ilm ladunni) beyond words or concepts.\footnote{Hugh Talman, “Where the Two Seas Meet”: The Quranic Story of Khidr and Moses in Sufi Commentaries as a Model for Spiritual Guidance (PhD diss., Duke University, 2000), 38.}

Omar’s work on the narrative addresses the story’s symbolism and signification, as Muslim scholars have historically done:

Besides the symbolism which revolves around the figure of Khidr himself, the story of Moses and Khidr is full of other imageries and divine allusions. First of all there is a mention of the fish which is a symbol of knowledge; then there is mention of water, a symbol of life, as well as the sea, symbolizing the limitless immensity and vastness of knowledge, especially esoteric knowledge.\footnote{Irfan Omar, “Khiḍr in the Islamic Tradition,” Muslim World, 83:3-4 (1993), 289.}

He then concludes that:

Overall, the episode of Khidr in the Qur’ān is a reflection and representation of the paradoxes of life. Above all, it symbolizes the delicate balance between “patience and faith as they were enjoined” on Moses after he understood the meaning of those paradoxes explained to him by Khidr himself.\footnote{Ibid., 290.}

As such, we can see that narrative’s mysterious and enigmatic elements invite great discussion.

A rare interpretation of The Journey of Moses narrative comes again from Bodman, whose analysis puts forth that the theme is about protection, and as such relates to the other narratives in sūra 18. Bodman writes, “here again, in a way that Moses, a Messenger of God,
could not possibly comprehend, God was protecting the righteous and punishing the unrighteous.” Yet Bodman admits to the “mystery” of the narrative in stating that, “there is not enough information in the story itself to gain the sense of it.” My forthcoming narrative analysis attempts to show that there is enough information in the story to gain a sense of it. The story’s compelling theme, that God protects people in all situations, even situations that look tragic, is a furthering of God’s projection of Himself as the al-walī ‘The Protector’ in the sūra.

II. Labovian Analysis

A distinguishing characteristic of this narrative is that the complicating actions take place across different scenes, at times involving different characters. This is different from the other narratives analyzed, where the narrative’s plot generally takes place within one scene setting. For this reason, I approach the analysis by identifying its various episodes, which serve as an overarching interpretative frame, and then analyzing their respective and collective narrative contents according to Labov’s model.

Episodes, discussed recently by Ochs and Capps, have been traditionally treated as “textual units consisting of an articulated chain of events that cohere around a focal character, topic, or goal.” Ochs and Capps add three new useful dimensions by which one can identify episodes in narratives: 1) “a sequence, i.e. the prior episode seems to have faded out…the actors start to talk on a different prosodic level, 2) “new referents in new constellations and situations are being introduced, which may mean that episode-internal devices such as pronouns (anaphoric expressions) are not carried on,” and 3) “a new participation structure is developing i.e.…the

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441 Bodman, The Poetics of Iblis, 147.
442 Ochs and Capps, Living Narrative, 170.
actors involved change roles (e.g. initiator, main speaker, main addressee, story protagonist etc.) from the prior chunk of talk to the new one." Following these criteria, I divide the narrative sequence of *The Journey of Moses* into five episodes. Below is a presentation of the episodes with their respective clauses, and Labovian categories followed by a brief discussion of the narrative elements.

**Episode 1: Moses and his unnamed servant**

a Remember when Moses said to his servant:
   “I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years.”

b But when they reached the place where the two seas meet,

c they had forgotten all about their fish,

d which made its way into the sea

e and swam away.

f They journeyed on.

g And then Moses said to his servant:
   “Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring.

h And [the servant] said:
   “Remember when we were resting by the rock…?
   I forgot the fish—
   Satan made me forget to pay attention to it—
   and it [must have] made its way into the sea.”

l Moses said,
   “Then that was the place we were looking for.”

j So the two turned back,

k retraced their footsteps

l and found one of Our servants—

m a man to whom We had granted our mercy

n and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.

**Table F: Part 1**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
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<td>Remember when</td>
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443 Ibid.
And when Moses said to his servant, 'I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years!' (Q 18:60)

But when they reached the place where the two seas meet, they had forgotten all about their fish, which made its way into the sea and swam away. (Q 18:61)

They journeyed on, and then Moses said to his servant, 'Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring,' (Q 18:62)

[the servant] said: “Remember when we were resting by the rock? I forgot the fish– Satan made me forget to pay attention to it– and it [must have] made its way into the sea.” ‘How strange!’

Moses said, “Then that was the place we were looking for,” (Q 18:64)

So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps,

and found one of Our servants (Q 18:64)

a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own. (Q 18:65)
One of my proposals in analyzing the narratives of sūra 18 is that the two “unannounced” narratives are prefixed with the discourse marker ‘idh ‘remember when.’ The Journey of Moses is unannounced in the sūra because it does not overtly respond to any of the three questions that the Jewish rabbis asked the Prophet in order to confirm whether he was a true Prophet or not. Moreover, the narrative is not told in response to a particular historical incident such as The Master of the Garden that is linked to reports of a statement made by the Quraysh of not wanting to sit with the Prophet until he abandoned his poor companions. The Journey of Moses narrative for this reason, similar to the Iblīs narrative, holds a status of “high tellability” within the sūra as indicated by its abstract ‘idh. A ‘highly tellable’ narrative is one that the Narrator deems especially worthy to share because it has a great amount of relevance for the listeners. The abstract “wa ‘idh” in this case then plays a pragmatic role in introducing the narrative for the listeners within the sūra while simultaneously bringing emphatic attention to the narrative from surrounding discourse within the sūra. With this, the discourse marker ‘idh can be argued to be the shortest abstract in the Qurʾān.

There is no formal orientation section in this narrative that would comprise a set of free clauses such as, for example, the one found in The Young Men and the Cave narrative. The only background information God supplies, pertains to who the general characters are and a vague sketch of the situation Moses and his servant are in. The orientation is fused into the first complicating action, clauses a through c: “Moses said to his servant ‘I will not rest until I reach

444 See Chapter 6, 17-19.
445 See Chapter 4, 2.
446 “[Prophet], We shall tell you their story as it really was. They were young men who believed in their Lord, and we gave them more and more guidance.” Q 18:13.
the place where the two seas meet.” From this, a listener derives that Moses seems to have set for himself a goal of a journey, which becomes clearer as the narrative moves forward. The exegetes, however, are interested in developing a greater orientation to the story. Their extensive commentary pertaining to the basic question of why Moses is on a journey, which was mentioned earlier supported by Ubayy b. Ka’b’s ḥadīth, indicates this desire for wanting to know more background information. Narratively, a brief and allusive orientation is intended and clearly the Narrator does not deem it necessary information to understand His point in telling the narrative.

In this episode, the following narrative heads move the story forward in a temporally sequenced linear order: reached, forgotten, made, journeyed, said, said, said, turned, and found. With respect to these narrative clauses, it is valuable to explain again how the dialogue on a basic level constitutes the complicating action. In Labov’s model, direct quotes and constructed dialogue sometime are coded as temporal narrative clauses because temporal juncture connects the two or more clauses of dialogue.447 One person speaks at a time within the narrative, and their statements are temporally ordered, thus contributing to advance the action in chronological terms. The dialogue of this episode between Moses and his servant therefore constitutes the plot or main complicating actions and fulfills no other functions. Much of the story’s initial events are presented through dialogue, such as Moses’ servant forgetting the fish, which is the main event causing them to meet al-Khīḍr:


[447]
I forgot the fish—
Satan made me forget to pay attention to it—
and it [must have] made its way into the sea.”

i Moses said, “Then that was the place we were looking for.”

The only external evaluation found in the narrative is found in the first episode when God describes the man that Moses met on his journey. This is found in clauses m and n:

m a man to whom We had granted our mercy
n and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.

In this external evaluation, also functioning as an orientation to al-Khiḍr, God is performing two communicative functions: He is indicating His favorable attitude towards the character in describing his interdependency with God, and He positions Himself into the narrative, using the first person ‘We’ and ‘Our’ and their corresponding inflections five times within these two clauses. The syntactic embedding of ‘We,’ and the contents of the clauses begin to lead listeners to a kind of narrative transposition of God and al-Khiḍr, which reaches its climax in the resolution of the narrative. The context and importance of these clauses in the narrative’s overall significance will be explained after the remaining episodes’ analyses.

For a narrative analyst, the above positioning and establishment of agency in āya 65 is of particular interest for exploration in terms of understanding the Narrator. It is surprising that this repeated embedded agency does not receive attention by many of the classical exegetes. It is as if the repetition of ‘We’ goes unnoticed for them or is not of interest. Or perhaps taken for granted as such knowledge is part of their theological presuppositions. Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 684/1286) as an example of an exegete committed to the linguistic analysis of the Qur’ān, does not discuss the rhetorical style of the āya in his entire analysis, but rather explains that the majority opinion is that the person God is referring to is al-Khiḍr, that the ‘mercy’ bestowed upon him is revelation
‘waḥy’ and prophecy ‘nubuwwa,’ and that the knowledge he has been given is the knowledge of the unseen.\footnote{Al-Baydawi, \textit{Anwār al-tanzil}, 2:19; See also al-Zamakhshari, \textit{al-Kashshaf}, 3:77; Ibn Kathir, \textit{Tafsir}, 3:119} God’s agency in this evaluation is an inviting area of exploration for a narrative analyst. It is the only section of the narrative that provides a glimpse of how the narrative relates to the Speaker, and how then the Speaker relates to one of the main characters. This will be dealt with after the analysis of the remaining narrative.

Lastly, there seems to be indication in this episode of the role that internal evaluation, in the form of constructed dialogue, plays in terms of producing diverging interpretations of the narrative. Moses’ servant says in clause h: “Remember when we were resting by the rock…? I forgot the fish—Satan made me forget to pay attention to it—and it [must have] made its way into the sea.” Another way to understand the servant’s speech, besides representing a complicating action, is that it also internally evaluates what happened in the story. He explains why he forgot the fish [the main complicating action presented early by God in clause c: “they had forgotten all about their fish] by stating that it was Satan’s influence. There are many converging interpretations that attempt to explain this statement. First, there are many issues that peak the exegetes interest. How did the fish make its way into the sea? Al-Razi, for example, suggests that one possibility is that God made some form of a tunnel in the water for the fish to escape in safely.\footnote{Al-Razi, \textit{Mafatih}, 21:148.} Another issue is how was Satan capable of making them forget the fish? Is the act of forgetting a created or uncreated act? Al-Zamakhshari places the blame on Satan, but Al-Biqai asserts that Satan is not to blame, that the forgetting of the fish is due to God’s mediation.\footnote{Al-Zamakhshari, \textit{al-Kashshaf}, 3:76, Al-Biqai, \textit{Nazm al-Durar}, 12:105} As we have been showing in each chapter, internal evaluation in the form of
constructed dialogue results in varying interpretations of the narrative action. This is not the case when God evaluates the actions explicitly Himself.\(^451\)

### Episode 2: Moses Convinces al-Khiḍr

- **o** Moses said to him, “May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?”
- **p** The man said, “you will not be able to bear with me patiently… How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?”
- **q** Moses said “God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way”.
- **r** The man said, “If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself.”\(^452\)

#### Table F: Part 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
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| o  
Moses said to him, ‘May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?’ (Q 18:66) | قال له موسى هل أطيعك على أن تعلمني منها علماً رشداً | Moses said to him, ‘May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?’ (Q 18:66) |
| p  
The man said, ‘you will not be able to bear with me patiently… How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?’ (Q 18:67-68) | قال إنك لن تستطيع معي مصراوكي قد تصير على ما لم تحتم عليه نفر | The man said, ‘You will not be able to bear with me patiently. How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?’ (Q 18:67-68) |
| q  
Moses said, ‘God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way.’ (Q 18:69) | قال فإني آليمك فلا تستطع عن شيء حتى أحدثك كلمة ذكرت | Moses said, ‘God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way.’ (Q 18:69) |


\(^{452}\) Abdel Haleem’s translation of clauses q and r does not include the translation of “said” in these statements that I have included along with the speaker in the translation. They are in the Arabic text so as a transcript it is essential to represent each word.
The man said, ‘If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself.’ (Q 18:70)

This episode introduces the initial dialogue between Moses and al-Khiḍr. The only Labovian element in this episode is the complicating action that contains the narrative heads said. Moses here convinces al-Khiḍr that he will be able to remain patient and obey al-Khiḍr. The initial dialogue between the two establishes their hierarchical relationship: Moses is positioned in the less powerful role and al-Khiḍr is depicted in an omniscient-like role. In al-Khiḍr’s first statement “you will not be able to bear with me patiently,” he wisely predicts the future. Many exegetes challenge this statement and enter into a philosophical debate about the proposition of this statement. Can al-Khiḍr predicate the capability 'istiṭā’a’ before Moses’ action? Al-Rāzī believes that there is no capability before the action.⁴⁵³ Others like Ibn Kathīr simply see the statement as being true since al-Khiḍr has knowledge God gave him and therefore can simply predict the future.⁴⁵⁴ Al-Rāzī also spends a lengthy time elaborating on Moses’ humble disposition in this episode and his demonstration of a high level of ‘adab ‘etiquette’ to his teacher that is syntactically emphasized. Moses’s choice of words, “May I follow you,” for example reflects him first seeking permission, and second humbling himself in front of al-Khiḍr in a position of following.⁴⁵⁵

From a narrative analysis perspective, it is God who is constructing Moses’ dialogue and depicting him in this humble manner. That Moses also states the phrase “God willing” gains another layer of significance in remembering that God previously, in The Young Men of the

⁴⁵⁴ Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr, 3:123.
⁴⁵⁵ Al-Rāzī, Mafāṭīḥ, 21:152.
Cave, reproaches the Prophet for not saying these words. God now is presenting an “appropriate” way another prophet speaks. Thus, the constructed dialogue in this episode could also be argued to be serving a didactic aim in teaching the Prophet Muhammad again about his mistake.

**Episode 3: Damaging the Boat**

- **They travelled** on.
- **Later when they got** into a boat,
- **and the man made** a hole in it,
- **Moses said:**
  “How could you make a hole in it…? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing you do!”
- **The man replied,** “Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?”
- **Moses said:** “Forgive me for forgetting, do not make it too hard for me to follow you.”

**Table F: Part 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They travelled on until they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, (Q 18:71)</td>
<td>قام أخرجنا الغرق أهله إلى جبل شيماء إمبرًا</td>
<td>They travelled on until they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, (Q 18:71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses said, ‘How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!’ (Q 18:71)</td>
<td>قال أخرجنا الغرق أهله إلى جبل شيماء إمبرًا</td>
<td>Moses said, ‘How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!’ (Q 18:71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ (Q 18:72)</td>
<td>قال ألم أقل إنك لن تستطيع شنيعتي إمبرًا</td>
<td>He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ (Q 18:72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses said, ‘Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you.’ (Q 18:73)</td>
<td>قال لا تؤخذي بما نسيت ولا تزلفي من أمرى عمرًا</td>
<td>Moses said, ‘Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you.’ (Q 18:73)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This episode is overtly marked by a change of dual verbal inflection for the narrative head *travelled*. The subjects are now Moses and al-Khiḍr, and not Moses’ servant. The narrative frame has also now changed to the arrival at the scene of a boat. Here, the first unexpected event takes places: al-Khiḍr damages a boat with passengers in it by placing a hole in it. Moses, shocked by this apparently unjust action, breaks his oath and questions the action.⁴⁵⁶ Al-Khiḍr, speaking from a position of higher power, reprimands him and Moses humbly seeks his forgiveness.

God is beginning to infuse the narrative with a level of tellability. As Fludernik notes, “a tale of a mere sequence of events holds little narrative interest unless its effect on the observer is of note or the events themselves drastically depart from normal expectations.”⁴⁵⁷ From the perspective of an average listener, the events that Moses witnesses, clearly affecting him too, are a departure from “normal expectations.” It becomes understandable why God presents this narrative as a vicarious narrative rather than a personal narrative. That God removes His voice and agency from the episode also leaves listeners in a position to be effected by the strangeness of the event, and begin to try to make sense of it.

**Episode 4: The Killing of the Boy**

| y | And so they travelled on, |
| z | and they met a young boy |
| aa | and the man killed him, |
| bb | Moses said: |
| | “How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! |
| | What a terrible thing to do!” |
| cc | He replied, “Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently? |

⁴⁵⁶ Al-Rāzī explains that the injustice of the event caused Moses to forget about his promise. See *Mafātīḥ*, 21:155.
⁴⁵⁷ Fludernik, *Towards a Natural Narratology*, 56.
Moses said, “From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me from your company—you have put up with enough from me.”

Table F: Part 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>فَكَشَفْنَاهَا عَلَىٰ إِنَّ لَكُمْ عِلْمًا فَكِيلٌ</td>
<td>And so they <strong>travelled</strong> on. Then, when they <strong>met</strong> a young boy and the man <strong>killed</strong> him. (Q 18:74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>مَوْلَىٰ نَفْسِكَ رَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسِهِ فَلَمْ تَجْعَلْ ضَيْبًا لَّكُمْ!</td>
<td>Moses said, ‘How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!’ (Q 18:74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>لَا أَنفُقُ أَنِّي أَلْكَ إِنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مُعَيْ صَنُّورًا</td>
<td>He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ (Q 18:75)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>فَلَا إِنَّ سَلَالَةٌ مِّن شَهِيدٍ فَلَا تَضَجِبُيْ فَأَلْقِيْتِ مِن أَذْنِيْ عُثْرًا</td>
<td>Moses said, ‘From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me from your company— you have put up with enough from me.’ (Q 18:76)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, Moses and al-Khîdr meet a young boy. The location is not made clear in this episode nor how they meet the boy. The focus rests on another strange and shocking event for Moses and listeners. Al-Khîdr kills the boy, which once again results in Moses speaking out against the action. Al-Khîdr then reminds Moses of his initial prediction, and Moses pleads for another chance and their journey continues. The three main narrative heads: **met**, **killed**, **travelled** are stated by God at the beginning of the episode followed by the dialogue between Moses and Al-Khîdr.
Lastly, this second ‘strange’ event is continuing to heighten the tellability of the narrative, which again supports the understanding of why God tells a vicarious narrative.

**Episode 5: Repairing a Wall and Explanations**

- ee And so they travelled on.
- ff And then they came to a town,
- gg and asked the inhabitants for food,
- hh but they were refused hospitality,
- ii Then they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down
- jj and so the man repaired it.
- kk Moses said: “But if you had wished, you could have taken payment for doing that.”
- ll He said, “This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently: the boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every (serviceable) boat by force. [The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief, we wished that their lord should give them another child—purer and more compassionate—in his place. The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried a treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your lord. I did not do (these things) on my own accord. These are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.

**Table F: Part 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>فاجئًا</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And so they travelled on. (Q 18:77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, (Q 18:77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then they found a wall there that was on the point of falling down and the man repaired it. (Q 18:77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Moses said, 'But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that.' (Q 18:77)

قَالَ هَذَا فَرَاغٌ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنِكَ، تُسْتَرِيقُ بِهِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِيعُ عَلَيْهِ صَغرًا

He said, ‘This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patience.’ (Q 18:78)

أَفَإِنَّهُمَا لَسِيْلَةٌ كُلَّتِينَ يَمْلُكونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَارْدِنَّ أَنْ أَعْيُنَاهُمَا وَكَانَ

The boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force. (Q 18:79)

وَأَنَا الْأَلْفَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُمَا مُؤْمِنِينَ فَضَيْحَانِانَّ أَنْ يُرَاهُمَا مُغْفِيًا وَكَفُّرًا

The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief. We wished that their Lord should give them another child– purer and more compassionate– in his place. (Q 18:80-81)

وَأَنَا الْبَنُّ الصَّالِحُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ نَخْلَةَ كَبِيرُهَا لَهُمَا وَكَانَ

The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.’ (Q 18:82)

In this episode, the narrative enters its last scene, an unnamed town. It begins with God interjecting an apparently separate incident of Moses and al-Khiḍr being refused food, but it
becomes clear that this incident clarifies why Moses was surprised that al-Khiḍr did not ask for a reward for fixing the broken wall. In clauses ee through jj, God presents the major complicating actions in the third person and then presents the dialogue between Moses and al-Khiḍr. Al-Khiḍr’s final statement reveals the reasons behind each of the seemingly unjust actions, and provides the narrative with its most significant evaluation. Al-Khiḍr’s message is two-fold: on one level, it is saying that what looked like unjust actions were in fact multiple forms of protection for the respective people. Then, in consideration of al-Khiḍr’s parallel statements of “Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?” the lesson that man’s knowledge is fundamentally limited and that he should nonetheless always have faith in God is also present.

Al-Khiḍr’s statement substitutes a formal coda section and also assumes the categorical value of a resolution, and evaluation. The crucial function of constructed dialogue in serving an evaluative function for the Speaker has already been elaborated on in each of the chapters thus far, as each of the narratives’ constructed dialogue display this underlying function. In this narrative, however, al-Khiḍr’s statement comes in lieu of God’s speech in a place in the narrative where God typically provides His explicit evaluation. This on one hand further strengthens my analysis of the evaluative role constructed dialogue is serving. But this occurrence begets further exploration into how God narratively transfers His evaluation to al-Khiḍr, so that his final statement’s credibility is heightened, which helps to understand how God shapes the overall narrative.
III. Code Displacement and Constructed Dialogue

The entire narrative of *The Journey of Moses* is structured predominantly in dialogue, which raises the important question of finding God’s presence in the narrative. At first, a consideration of the narrative’s principal complicating actions, which God advances, is valuable. Below is an illustration of God’s speech from the narrative, without constructed dialogue:

**Episode 1:**

b. They finally reached the place where the two seas meet,
c. and they had forgotten all about their fish,
d. which made its way into the sea
e. and swam away.
f. They journeyed on.

j. So the two turned back,
k. retraced their footsteps
l. and found one of Our servants—
m. a man to whom We had granted our mercy
n. and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.

**Episode 3:**

s. They *travelled* on.
t. Later when they *got* into a boat,
u. and the man *made* a hole in it,

**Episode 4:**

y. And so they *travelled* on.
z. Then, when they *met* a young boy
aa. and the man *killed* him,

**Episode 5:**

e. And so they *travelled* on
ff. Then, when they *came* to a town
gg. and asked the inhabitants for food
hh. but were *refused* hospitality,
ii. They *saw* a wall there that was on the point of falling down
jj. and the man *repaired* it.
As shown, God is not speaking in the narrative as a ‘personal’ narrator, marked by personal inflections or agency, except in the initial episode of when He positions Himself into the narrative to describe al-Khiḍr in clauses m and n as an orienting evaluation. His greater narrative role could therefore be described as an “observer’s” role even in telling a vicarious narrative. Fludernik distinguishes the category of “observational narrative,” from personal narrative in that within the former the narrator as an “observer,” though not the main protagonist of the story, “was nevertheless physically present at the scene of events and watched the goings-on.”\textsuperscript{458} But she states that, “the narrator-observer can only relate events from an outside perspective and lacks the knowledge about other people's motives and aims.”\textsuperscript{459} Unlike other narrators, however, it is held that God does have complete knowledge about other people’s motives and aims and therefore relates these events as an \textit{omniscient-observer}. But even as an omniscient narrator He does not tell listeners about the characters’ motives and aims from a vantage point of having that knowledge. The narrative He states therefore functions as a minimal narrative according to Labov. They convey each of the main actions, but do not offer any form of an evaluation. Evaluation is exclusively served by constructed dialogue in this narrative, which in of itself is God’s subjective presentation of what dialogue He chooses to construct for listeners.

The evaluative role of constructed dialogue in spoken narratives has already been primarily discussed in Chapter 2, and was also argued for in the each of the previous narratives. Constructed dialogue in this narrative assumes a significantly highly- evaluative role for the main reason that it is the \textit{only} form of evaluation in the narrative, which is not the case for the other narratives. Here, technically the dialogue of Moses and al-Khiḍr is complicating action

\textsuperscript{458} Ibid., 54.  
\textsuperscript{459} Ibid., 56.
(God is telling us what happened at each of the scenes) but they can also be considered as internal evaluations. In each of the episodes, God first narrates the basic event in the third person, then, the dialogue between Moses and al-Khiḍr functions as their own internal evaluation of what happened: For Moses, the actions are condemnable and for al-Khiḍr the actions have other interpretations that He is knowledgeable of, signifying God’s will. That God enables al-Khiḍr to speak on His behalf is of particular interest for this narrative analysis.

Alvarez-Caccamo’s concept of ‘code displacement’ sheds great light on understanding the constructed dialogue of al-Khiḍr in the narrative. The ‘code displacement’ theory is that speakers indicate their own perspective through the reporting of the speech of others. For Alvarez-Caccamo, this reported speech on many levels creates “situated power alliances with the multiple inhabitants of the space of talk: hearers, and overhearers, recipients, ‘primary’ audiences, ‘secondary’ audiences, and narrated characters.” I believe that this theory deepens our understanding of the alliance between God and al-Khiḍr in the narrative. We can see that the alliance manifests itself in the narrative syntactically, and is also expanded on theologically by many Sufi commentaries. Their interpretation of the narrative buttresses this particular function of reporting speech/constructed dialogue.

There are a number of indications within the narrative that ‘align’ al-Khiḍr to God, which thereby reinforces al-Khiḍr’s evaluative constructed dialogue. The first indication in the narrative of God creating a “situated power alliance” with al-Khiḍr is found in āya 65, which was discussed in the analysis of the first episode. The five reoccurring instances of the first person pronoun and its corresponding inflections instill God’s supremacy and agency in al-Khiḍr’s

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460 See Chapter 2, p.31.  
knowledge. As a result, this repetitive agency establishes al-Khīḍr’s credibility or authority to speak on God’s behalf at the outset of narrative.

The second major indication of a “situated power alliance” between God and al-Khīḍr in the story occurs most obviously in al-Khīḍr’s concluding taʿwīl ‘explanation’ section:

“This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently: the boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every (serviceable) boat by force. The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief, we wished that their lord should give them another child—purer and more compassionate—in his place. The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried a treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your lord. I did not do (these things) on my own accord. These are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.

A notable feature of al-Khīḍr’s explanation is the intratextual usage of ‘iltifāt ‘shifting’ of the self-designation pronoun to explain the situations. In explaining the first incident of damaging of the boat, he states “I knew,” and in explaining the second incident he states “We feared” and “We wished.” And finally, in the last explanation al-Khīḍr uses the expression “your lord” twice. Many exegetes interpret the Arabic “khashīnā ‘We feared’ to mean ‘We were disgusted,’ because as al-Ṭabarī notes God never fears, which highlights the fact that al-Khīḍr in using “We” includes God. From a strictly narrative analysis perspective, if the Narrator is presenting a character’s dialogue that is speaking about the Narrator, then inevitably it must serve an evaluative function. It is evident here specifically that al-Khīḍr’s statement makes God look “good” by the fact that we learn that in each of the situations God, al-ḥakīm, ‘The All-Wise,’” and the al-ʿalīm ‘The All-Knowing” is ultimately manifesting His multifaceted role of al-walī ‘The Protector.’

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462 Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān, 16:4.
From a Sufi perspective, commentators have understood al-Khiḍr’s speaking shift in terms of spiritual stations. Sands, in *Sūfī Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam*, presents a translation of al-Ḥallāj’s (d.309/922) explanation:

The first station (*maqām*) is the total mastery (*istīlā’*) of God (*alhaqq*). The second station is conversation with the servant. The third station is a return to the inner understanding (*bāṭin*) of [God’s] supremacy in the outer world (*alẓāhir*)... because to get closer to something by means of egos (*nufūs*) is to get farther away while to approach [the supremacy] by means of [the supremacy] itself is to draw near.

Sands elaboration of al-Ḥallāj’s explanation sheds more light:

What al-Ḥallaj seems to be describing here is a change in awareness as the mystic draws nearer to God. Initially, al-Khadir said, “I wanted,” because he perceived the distance between himself and the all-powerful Creator and therefore judged himself as a separate entity acting on his own volition. When he said, “We wanted,” he judged the intimate conversation between himself and his Lord as indicating a kind of partnership in action, but this was also an illusion which kept him from true nearness. Finally, when he said, “Your Lord wanted,” he returned to the awareness of God’s Omnipotence, achieving true intimacy by recognizing the secret of His pervasive agency and allowing his own ego to be eclipsed.

The interpretation of “We wanted,” is understood as al-Khiḍr’s perception of “a kind of partnership in action.” Though Sufis regard the “partnership” as a state of spiritual illusion, many classical “non-Sufī” exegetes recognize this “partnership” in meaning by interpreting the “We feared” and the “We wanted” to include God. Thus, both Sufis and other classical exegetes acknowledge a form of “alliance” although they are not so much concerned with its narrative effect but rather more complicating actions details such as who is going to replace the killed boy or how many people were aboard the ship.

Another form of semantic evidence that highlights the “situated power alliance” between God and al-Khiḍr rests in understanding the two main attributes al-Khiḍr embodies in the narrative: The attributes, *raḥma* ‘mercy,’ and being a possessor of *ʿilm laddunā* ‘Our knowledge’

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466 For example, some suggest a girl will replace the killed boy as women are emotionally closer to their parents. See al-Zamakhshārī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:83 and al-Qurṭūbī, *al-Jāmi’ l-ḥākīm*, 11:32.
are attributes that God bestowed al-Khiḍr with in āya 65. Āya 65, therefore, also foreshadows al-Khiḍr’s later actions. Āya 65 states “a man to whom We had granted our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.” As such, al-Khiḍr received a share of God’s mercy, as well as a share of divine knowledge. First, al-Khiḍr shows Moses mercy by the virtue that he allows Moses to continue on the journey after Moses seeks forgiveness for his disobedience. Then at the end of the narrative al-Khiḍr foregrounds the divine ‘ilm ‘knowledge’ that God granted him by speaking on God’s behalf culminating in the statements:

so your lord intended them to reach maturity
and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your lord.

Omar’s explains al-Khiḍr’s embodiment of these attributes symbolically that further supports the point of alliance. He states that, “symbolically it may imply that Moses' encounter with Khiḍr is actually his encounter with the aspects of the Divine in an attempt to equip him (i.e. Moses) with the infiniteness of knowledge.” ⁴⁶⁷

IV. Conclusion

Within sūra 18 listeners have been oriented thus far to hearing God speak explicitly. This has been the pattern in His previous three narratives of ‘personal’ experience, which included God’s pervasive self-positioning, agency and direct evaluation. In the analysis of The Journey of Moses narrative, we find that God’s evaluative voice is absent and He plays the role of an omniscient narrator whose speech is cast in the third person narration of a few of the complicating actions. As such, it has been argued that this narrative is better understood as a narrative of vicarious experience, which gains its fundamental tellability from its recounting of

extraordinary events. Further, as a highly didactic vicarious narrative, God provides His evaluation in the voice of other characters. Therefore, in this narrative we see the most emphatic expression of the evaluative role of constructed dialogue in the sūra thus far.

The narrative decision to use constructed dialogue exclusively to carry out the greater evaluative function of the narrative speaks for the significant scope of constructed dialogue and its multifaceted versatility for speakers in spoken narratives. In particular, by placing al-Khadr’s evaluation in the form of constructed dialogue, where typically a coda is found, God narratively leads listeners into registering it as the coda. This coda, similar to other codas, displays the function of self-aggrandizement but also serves here as a resolution to the narrative.

What, then, is the point of the narrative? First, the narrative must be understood within context of the sūra and not as an isolated narrative: God narrates this story alongside the telling of many other narratives. The previous codas and lengthy evaluation sections of sūra 18 provided for a framework in which we could deduce God’s intended message. They collectively instilled the message of God’s protection through the lexical parallelism of the Arabic root *w-l-y*. This will also be the case in the last narrative (see next chapter). In this narrative, God enables listeners to understand His greater point by relying on al-Khadr’s evaluation whom he has narratively “aligned” with Himself. I propose that the actions that are explained by al-Khadr, although not containing the root *w-l-y*, still connect to the theme of protection. This is evident by taking the other narratives into consideration, as well as by its actual contents: when things or people look as though they are being harmed, the greater virtue of protection in reality is at play in God’s world. Thus, an ancillary message in this narrative is also that *experiencers* such as Moses and listeners should remain steadfast in their faith in God despite how a situation may
appear because He is the *al-ʿalīm* “The Knowing” and *al-ḥakīm* “The All-Wise.” The damaging of a boat, the killing of a boy, and the reconstruction of a wall—were actually serving a greater purpose to protect people. Therefore, the divine application of protection does not always function in what is perceived to be ‘rational’ forms of protection. I maintain that the narrative’s message serves to shed yet further light on God’s virtue of being *al-walī* ‘The Protector.’
Chapter 8: Dhū l-Qarnayn

I. Introduction

As a spoken narrative, Dhū l-Qarnayn represents God’s own ‘personal’ experience and relates thematically to the other narratives in sūra 18. This chapter continues to examine how the narrative is organized around the presentation of God’s desirable “self.” It explores how the narrative also posits the overriding virtue of protection, related to the Arabic root w-l-y, in its coda—again, the structural category in which the speaker typically instills the broader message of the narrative - to see how it is represented structurally and semantically. Another important virtue of God, being khayr-un thawāb-an wa khayr-un ‘uqb-an ‘Best of reward givers and punisher,’ is also equally important to the message of the narrative.

Dhū l-Qarnayn, told across āyāt 83-102, is an elaborate story comprising three main episodes about a famous conqueror who, assisted by God, achieves many feats. The most important being the construction of a wall to protect an endangered community from its oppressors:

[Prophet], they ask you about Dhu ’l-Qarnayn. Say, ‘I will tell you something about him.’ 84 We established his power in the land, and gave him the means to achieve everything. 85 He travelled on a certain road; 86 then, when he came to the setting of the sun, he found it [seemed to be] setting into a muddy spring. Nearby he found some people and We said, ‘Dhu ’l-Qarnayn, you may choose [which of them] to punish or show kindness to.’ He answered, ‘We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their Lord He will punish them [even more] severely, while those who believed and did good deeds will have the best of rewards: we shall command them to do what is easy for them.’ He travelled on; 89 then, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had provided no shelter from it. 90 And so it was: We knew all about him. 91 He travelled on; 92 then, when he reached a place between two mountain barriers, he found beside them a people who could barely understand him. They said, ‘Dhu ’l-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are ruining this land. Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?’ He answered, ‘The power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute, but if you lend me your strength, I will put up a fortification between you and them: 93 bring me lumps of iron!’ and then, when he had filled the gap between the two mountain sides [he said], ‘Work your bellows!’ and then, when he had made it glow like fire, he said, ‘Bring me molten metal to pour over it!’ Their enemies could not scale the barrier, nor could they pierce it, and he said, ‘This is a mercy from my Lord. But when my Lord’s promise is fulfilled, He will raze this barrier to the ground: my Lord’s promise always comes true.’ On that Day, We shall let them surge against each other like waves and then the Trumpet will be
blown and We shall gather them all together. We shall show Hell to the disbelievers, those whose eyes were blind to My signs, those who were unable to hear. Did they think that they could take My servants as masters instead of Me? We have prepared Hell as the disbelievers’ resting place.

The last of the three questions the Jewish rabbis posed to the Quraysh who were looking to test the Prophet, was about Dhū l-Qarnayn. This narrative therefore is one of the sūra’s main elicited narratives. Al-Rāzī and al-Ghazālī treat this narrative as the fourth of the sūra, while I propose that it is the fifth due to the consideration of the Iblīs the Rebel narrative. The story of Dhū l-Qarnayn is similar to that of The Journey of Moses in that the narrative is about various journeys. Dhū l-Qarnayn embarks on three: one to the east, one to the west and the last one to an unknown location between “two mountain barriers.” This leads exegetes such as Ibn ʿĀshūr and al-Biqāʿī (d.885/1480) to connect the two narratives in their commentaries. For Ibn ʿĀshūr, the narratives convey the greater lesson of purposeful travel. Moses went on his journey to seek greater knowledge, and Dhū l-Qarnayn embarked on his travels to spread righteous work and rule. Travelling for such two aims carries great spiritual benefit. Similarly, al-Biqāʿī explains that as God finishes narrating a story about someone who travelled the earth for the attainment of knowledge, He follows it with a story about someone who travelled around the world for the attainment of jihād ‘personal achievement.’ Moreover, the spiritual status of Dhū l-Qarnayn is depicted in the narrative to have been bestowed with great favors from God just as al-Khīḍr. Whereas al-Khīḍr was granted a form of special divine knowledge ‘ilm laddunā,’ Dhū l-Qarnayn is granted enormous means ‘sabab-an’ including powers of physical ability, wealth and rule.

469 Ibn ʿĀshūr, Tahrīr, 15:98.
470 Al-Biqāʿī, Naẓm al-durar, 12:128
1. **Who is Dhū l-Qarnayn?**

A great deal of attention has centered on the historical identification of Dhū l-Qarnayn and the origins of his appellation that often gets literally translated into “The Two-Horned One.”

Al-Tha‘labī (d.427/1036) provides the most curious of readers with exhaustive details about the historical identification of Dhū l-Qarnayn in his ‘Arā‘īs, whom he, and the majority of classical exegetes, believes is the Macedonian Alexander the Great.\(^{471}\) The compelling reason put forth by commentators is that he was the only man recorded in history to have ruled such vastness, from east to west.\(^{472}\) There are however many other scholars, such as Mawdūdi and Asad, who do not believe that Dhū l-Qarnayn was Alexander the Great because of the notion that the Qur‘ānic story emphasizes the strong faith of Dhū l-Qarnayn, which does not match the historical narrations about Alexander. They hold Dhū l-Qarnayn to have been a pious ruler whose exact historical identity is as important as the lessons to be learned from this just and pious ruler.\(^{473}\)

Al-Tha‘labī also explains in detail various opinions regarding the epithet “Dhū l-Qarnayn,” ‘The Two-Horned One:’

Opinions differed about the reason for his being called by this [nickname]. Some said that he was given it because he ruled over both his home and Persia, while [others] said that at the front of his head was something similar to two horns of flesh. Another [version] was that it was because he saw in a dream that he had grasped at two rays [Qarnayn] of the sun, and the interpretation of his vision was that he would encompass both the East and the West. Another said that it was because he called his people to monotheism and they beat him on his right horn and he again called them to monotheism and they beat him on his left horn. Another said that he had two beautiful locks of hair—and a lock of hair is called a horn. It is said it was because he came of nobility from both sides, of high-born family from both his father and his mother. It is also said that it was because during his time two generations [qarnān] of people had died out while he still lived. Another said that it was because when he did battle he fought with both his hands and with his mount together. Others said that it was because he was granted both esoteric and exoteric knowledge, while

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\(^{473}\) See Asad, The Message of the Qur’ān, 664; Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qur’ān, 5:127.
another said that it was because he entered both the light and the darkness. But God is All-knowing.\textsuperscript{474}

Asad provides a Qur’ānic linguistic analysis in support of the opinion that the name signifies ‘Lord of Two Epoch,’ which could suggest that he lived the span of two generations. He puts forth the following argument:

In fact, the term \textit{qarn} (and its plural \textit{qurun}) occurs in the Qur'an -apart from the combination Dhu'l Qarnayn appearing in verses 83, 86 and 94 of this surah – twenty times: and each time it has the meaning of “generation” in the sense of people belonging to one particular epoch or civilization.\textsuperscript{475}

And finally, al-Zamakhsharī cites that the Prophet said that the epithet refers to the fact that Dhū l-Qarnayn ruled over the two territories or spans of earth and thus the meaning of his name connotes ‘Lord of the East and West.’\textsuperscript{476} The Prophet’s interpretation emphasizes how Dhū l-Qarnayn is represented in the narrative.

II. Narrative Analysis

Just as \textit{The Journey of Moses}, this narrative is organized around a few distinct episodes that also contain their own internal narrative structures. It is complete in the Labovian sense as it contains each of the six structural categories, many of which are repeated in each of the episodes. The episodes are marked below, following the abstract and orientation sections and followed by a complete table of the coordinating structural categories:

\textbf{Abstract/Orientation}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[a] They ask you about Dhū 'l-Qamayn.
  \item[b] Say, ‘I will tell you something about him.’
  \item[c] We established his power in the land,
  \item[d] and gave him the means to achieve everything.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{474} Al-Tha’labī’, \textit{‘Arā’is}, 606.
\textsuperscript{475} Asad, \textit{The Message of the Qur’ān}, 664.
\textsuperscript{476} Al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashšāf}, 3:85.
Episode 1:

He travelled on a certain road;  
then, when he came to the setting of the sun,  
his heart found it setting into a muddy spring.  
Nearby he found some people,  
and We said, ‘Dhū ’l-Qarnayn  
you may choose [which of them] to punish or show kindness to.’
He answered, ‘We shall punish those who have done evil,  
and when they are returned to their lord,  
He will punish them [even more] severely,  
while those who believed and did good deeds will have the best of rewards:  
we shall command them to do what is easy for them.’

Episode 2:

He travelled on.  
Then, when he came to the rising of the sun,  
he found it rising on a people  
for whom We had provided no shelter from it.  
And so it was:  
We had full knowledge of him.

Episode 3:

He travelled on;  
Then when he reached a place between two mountain barriers,  
he found beside them a people  
who could barely understand him.  
They said, ‘Dhū ’l-Qarnayn,  
Gog and Magog are ruining his land.  
Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?’
He answered, “The power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute,  
but if you lend me your strength, I will put up a fortification between you and them:  
Bring me lumps of iron!”
And then, when he had filled the gap between the two mountainsides  
[he said], ‘Work your bellows!’
Their enemies could not scale the barrier, nor could they pierce it,  
and he said, ‘This is a mercy from my Lord.  
But when my Lord’s promise is fulfilled,  
He will raze this barrier to the ground— my Lord’s promise always comes true.”

Coda/Evaluation

On that day, We shall let them surge against each other like waves.  
And then the Trumpet will be blown  
and We shall gather them all together.  
We shall show Hell to the disbelievers,
those whose eyes were blind to My signs,
those who were unable to hear—
did they think that they could take My servants as protectors ('awliyā') instead of Me?
We have prepared Hell as the disbelievers' resting place.

| Table G: |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Abstract**    | (Q 18:83) [Prophet], they ask you about Dhu 'l-Qarnayn. Say, 'I will tell you something about him.' |
| **Orientation** | (Q 18:84) We established his power in the land, and gave him the means to achieve everything. |
| **Complicating Action** | (Q 18:85) He travelled on a certain road; then, when he came to the setting of the sun, he found it [seemed to be] setting into a muddy spring. Nearby he found some people. |
| **Complicating Action** | (Q 18:86) We said, ‘Dhu 'l-Qarnayn, you may choose [which of them] to punish or show kindness to.’ |
| **Complicating Action** | (Q 18:87) He answered, ‘We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their Lord He will punish them [even more] severely, while those who believed and did good deeds will have the best of rewards: we shall command them to do what is easy for them. (Q 18:87-88) |

| Orientation | (Q 18:84) We established his power in the land, and gave him the means to achieve everything. |
He travelled on; then, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found it rising on a people, who could barely understand him (Q 18:92-93)

And so it was: We knew all about him (Q 18:89-91)

He travelled on; then, when he reached a place between two mountain barriers, he found beside them a people, who could barely understand him (Q 18:92-93)

They said, ‘Dhu ’l-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are ruining this land. Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?’ (Q 18:94)

He answered, ‘The power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute, but if you lend me your strength, I will put up a fortification between you and them: bring me lumps of iron!’ (Q 18:95-96)

And then, when he had filled the gap between the two mountain sides,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>حتمًا إذا جعله نارًا</td>
<td>وقال تعالى: أفرِ عَلَيْهَ فَطَرًا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And then, when he had made it glow like fire,</td>
<td>he said, ‘Bring me molten metal to pour over it!’ (Q 18:96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Evaluation</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>رأى هذا رحمته من ربي إذا جاء وغد ربي جعله نكاح وكان وغد ربي حقيقًا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their enemies could not scale the barrier, nor could they pierce it. (Q 18:97)</td>
<td>And he said, ‘This is a mercy from my Lord. But when my Lord’s promise is fulfilled, He will raze this barrier to the ground: my Lord’s promise always comes true.’ (Q 18:98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>وَلَكِنَّا بِضُرْعَمِهِمْ بِهِ نَجِيْنَ في بَعْضٍ وَلَّنْ نَجِيْنَ في الصُّورِ فَجَمَعَهُمْ جَمِعًا وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَمَ بِهِمْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ غَرَّهُمْ َأَلْدِينَ كَانُوا أَعْطَانِيُّهُمْ فِي غَتنَّ عَن ذِكْرِي وَكَانُوا لا يَعْتَشُفُونَ نَصِبًا أَفْحَسَتْ لِلْكَابِرِينَ كَآ إِذَا كُفَّرُوكُمْ أَنْ يَلَحْنُوا عَبْدَيْنِ مِن ذِي نَوْنِ أَوْلَٰٰياً إِنَّا أَعْتَنَّا جَهَمَ بِلِكَافِرِينَ نُزُلًا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On that Day, We shall let them surge against each other like waves and then the Trumpet will be blown and We shall gather them all together. We shall show Hell to the disbelievers, those whose eyes were blind to My signs, those who were unable to hear. Did they think that they could take My servants as masters instead of Me? We have prepared Hell as the disbelievers’ resting place. (Q 18:99-102)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The narrative begins with an archetypical Labovian structure, a formal abstract or preface followed by an orientation. These categories are independent from the core narrative actions, and technically can be placed anywhere in the narrative without disturbing the temporal sequence of events to follow. The abstract gives a general statement about what the story will be about but more than offering a summary is basically introducing the narrative. Seeing it as a preface, in relying on Sack’s findings, therefore is more suitable. It is told in the form of what can be understood as a “mini dialogue” between God and the Meccans (specifically the Jewish rabbis). Clauses a and b comprise the question posed by the Meccans, followed by the initial response to the question marked by “qul” ‘say!’:

\[
\begin{align*}
a & \quad \text{They ask you about Dhū 'l-Qarnayn.} \\
b & \quad \text{Say, ‘I will tell you something about him.’}
\end{align*}
\]

The style of this ‘mini-dialogue’ abstract, structurally presented as “They ask you….Say:” is a ubiquitous characteristic style of God’s speech when He is answering a direct question of the first recipients of the Qurān.\(^{477}\) In conversation analysis terms, it can be considered a minimal dialogic unit, which contains a ‘first pair part’ and a ‘second pair part’ forming an ‘adjacency pair,’ the basic format of turn-taking in speaking.\(^{478}\) This Qurānic version of a question-answer adjacency pair, constituting the narrative’s abstract or preface, functions on various discourse levels. It distinguishes the narrative from the end of The Journey of Moses narrative by

\(^{477}\) Other examples are found in āyāt such as Q 2:215, “They ask you [Prophet] what they should give. Say, ‘Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy, and travellers. God is well aware of whatever good you do,’” and Q 2:219, “They ask you [Prophet] about intoxicants and gambling: Say, ‘There is great sin in both, and some benefit for people: the sin is greater than the benefit.’” This form of involvement communication, which I bold above, deserves more discourse analysis and is beyond the scope of this thesis.

announcing a new narrative, and it directly engages listeners and increases the communicative effectiveness of the proceeding narrative.

Following the abstract is a brief but self-explanatory orientation in clauses c and d:

*We established his power in the land,*

and gave him the means to achieve everything.

The orientation, appearing to mainly introduce Dhū l-Qarnayn, is essentially determining the source of agency and action in the forthcoming complicating actions. In positioning Himself into the narrative at the outset semantically and syntactically, with two inclusions of the first person plural pronoun, God is ensuring that the actions of Dhū l-Qarnayn in this narrative be understood in light of God. This is God’s first display of “Self” in the narrative, in which God is emphasizing that He ultimately is the source of all action as the supreme agent *al-qādir* ‘The Omnipotent.’ This orientation is also a necessary background to appreciate the narrative’s resolution, which I examine below, in which Dhū l-Qarnayn states that, “This is a mercy from my Lord,” which again reaffirms God’s agency. This orientation, as such, is also highly evaluative, like many other orientations examined in sūra 18 where God underscores His attribute of being *al-qādir.*

The narrative moves to its predominant structural category. The complicating action begins in the first episode and continues throughout the rest of the narrative. The style of presenting the complicating action is the same as in *The Journey of Moses*. God speaks in the

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479 For example, the orientation of *The Young Men and the Cave* reads, “They were young men who believed in their Lord, and we gave them more and more guidance,” (Q 18:13); and the orientation of *The Master of the Garden* reads, “For one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between; Both gardens yielded fruit and did not fail in any way; We made a stream flow through them, and so he had abundant fruit.” (Q 18:32-34).
third person form that moves the narrative forward, marked by the repetitive phrase fa 'atba’a sababan ‘and so he travelled on a certain road,’ and the constructed dialogues are used to elaborate the scenes and actions of Dhū l-Qarnayn on its basic level. The first episode’s internal structure is illustrated below:

**Episode 1**

**Complicating Action**

- e He travelled on a certain road;
- f then, when he came to the setting of the sun,
- g he found it setting into a muddy spring.

**Complicating Action**

- h Nearby he found some people,
- i and We said, Dhū 'l-Qarnayn you may choose [which of them] to punish or show kindness to.’

**Complicating Action**

- k He answered, ‘We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their lord, He will punish them [even more] severely, while those who believed and did good deeds will have the best of rewards: we shall command them to do what is easy for them.’

The set of complicating action clauses are marked by the narrative heads travelled, came, found, said and answered. The first set of complicating action clauses, clauses e to g, can also be read as serving an orientating function within the episode. It sets the scene for the main event to come. The main event of this episode is a dialogue between God and Dhū l-Qarnayn across clauses i through p. Listeners are able to deduce, as commentators have done, that it is westward and perhaps the furthest point he could have travelled west. Here he encounters a community living at this location. God provides no information about the state of the community or why Dhū l-Qarnayn would have to punish them or show them kindness. What is relevant in the episode is the dialogue between God and Dhū l-Qarnayn. In this brief dialogue, God affords Dhū l-Qarnayn a choice of how to conduct his affairs with the community he has come across. Al-
Tha’labī interprets this situation as Dhū l-Qarnayn being given the choice of how to deal with the community if they do not accept Islam, implying that Dhū l-Qarnayn would naturally have called the community to Islam in this instance. Al-Rāzī, who believes that this direct conversion between God and Dhū l-Qarnayn is strong evidence for the argument that Dhū l-Qarnayn was in fact a Prophet, seems to agree with the opinion that this particular community was a group of disbelievers and God sent Dhū l-Qarnayn to them to either punish them if they persisted in their disbelief or to grant them forgiveness.

The decision that Dhū l-Qarnayn formulates in clauses 1 through p: “We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their lord, He will punish them [even more] severely, while those who believed and did good deeds will have the best of rewards: we shall command them to do what is easy for them,” represents a virtuous “political policy.” It echoes a prevailing subtheme of the sūra: those who have done evil ‘man zalama’ will be punished and those who have done good deeds will be rewarded. Dhū l-Qarnayn’s initial constructed dialogue therefore is echoing the second core concept being emphasized in the narrative—that of God being “khayr-un thawāb-an wa khayr-un ‘uqab-an” ‘Best giver of reward and punishment.’ The statement relates semantically to multiple statements made by God within and outside of the sūra’s narratives.

At first, Dhū l-Qarnayn’s statement echoes the message of the āyāt found at the beginning of the sūra, which contains the sūra’s first mention of the theme of ‘Best giver of reward and punishment’:

Praise be to God, who sent down the Scripture to His servant and made it unerringly straight, warning of

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480 Al-Tha’labī, al-Kashf, 6:191.
481 Al-Rāzī, Majāriḥ, 21:168.
severe punishment from Him, and [giving] glad news to the believers who do good deeds—an excellent reward that they will always enjoy (Q 18:1-3)

Then, in between two of the narratives God states in āyāt 29-31:

We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers [al-zālimīn] that will envelop them from all sides. If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink! What a painful resting place! As for those who believe and do good deeds—We do not let the reward of anyone who does a good deed go to waste—they will have Gardens of lasting bliss graced with flowing streams.

Further in āya 53, God says:

The evildoers [al-mujrimūn] will see the Fire and they will realize that they are about to fall into it: they will find no escape from it.

And lastly we find the same message at the end of the sūra in āyāt 106-108:

Their recompense for having disbelieved and made fun of My messages and My messengers will be Hell. But those who believe and do good deeds will be given the Gardens of Paradise. There they will remain, never wishing to leave.

The semantic parallelism between Dhū l-Qarnayn’s speech and God’s speech outside of the narratives is on one level a manifestation of constructed dialogue playing an evaluative role in the narrative. Dhū l-Qarnayn’s words represent the message God has been conveying throughout the sūra in His own voice. Next, the semantic parallelism is serving the function to tie together the discourse of the entire sūra together. Dhū l-Qarnayn’s statements, in the last of the narratives, is proving be playing this important cohesive role.

Finally, the absence of any evaluative clauses or devices surrounding his statement is another indication of the fact that these statements are “favorable,” and thus there is no need for God to have to provide further evaluation. This heightens the tellability of the dialogue for the Speaker.

In the next episode, Dhū l-Qarnayn moves to another location in his journey. It is not obvious from the language what precisely happens between Dhū l-Qarnayn and this new
community, as the resolution in clauses u and v are both elliptical and cryptic. There is also no dialogue, as with the other two episodes, which involves listeners’ and assists them in making sense of the scene. It seems therefore that the greater point of this scene, otherwise puzzling, is to be fulfilled by the external evaluation clause, clause t, within the episode:

**Episode 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>He <strong>travelled</strong> on.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Then, when he <strong>came</strong> to the rising of the sun,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>he <strong>found</strong> it rising on a people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Evaluation</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>for whom We had provided no shelter from it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Evaluation</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>And so it was,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>q</td>
<td>We <strong>had</strong> full knowledge of him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point, Dhū l-Qarnayn arrives at the other end of the earth where the sun is rising on another community whom God ‘had **provided** no shelter from’ the sun. Modern commentators have demonstrated a tendency to define **sitr** ‘shelter’ as physical clothing. Al-Ghazālī remarks, “Dhū l-Qarnayn then went eastward where he encountered primitive communities living on the open land and wearing no clothes.”

Asad takes this view as well. Al-Tha’labī and al-Rāzī, on the other hand, relate the opinion that this means that there were no physical barriers such as mountains, trees or constructions to protect them from the sun’s rays and that the community would hide themselves during the day and emerge at night to work.

Clauses p and q “**kadḥālika wa qad ’aḥṭnā bi mā ladayhi khubr-an**” ‘and so it was, We had full knowledge of him’ is an utterance whose literal lexical meaning does not directly convey its intended meaning. Many exegetes have therefore focused on its possible **situated**
meanings, pertaining to the use of a linguistic expression in a given situation.\textsuperscript{485} Ali explains that this means that Dhū l-Qarnayn did not “fuss over their primitiveness” but left them as they were “in the enjoyment of peace and tranquility in their own way.”\textsuperscript{486} This is amongst the widely accepted interpretations of this āya, the other being that Dhū l-Qarnayn essentially conducted his affairs with this community as he did with the first community—with a fair policy.\textsuperscript{487} From a discourse analysis perspective, God’s vagueness in these specific clauses can be understood as an interactional resource.\textsuperscript{488} When a speaker is vague, it naturally leaves the listener to have to do more work in understanding what was possibly meant. I suggest however that in this situation God’s vagueness redirects listeners’ attention to the surrounding discourse, to the most reportable or significant event of the episode that was told just previously in clause o: “for whom We had provided no shelter from it.” Clause o can also be considered as an orientation clause, one that is describing the background situation of the people Dhū l-Qarnayn has come across, but at the same it’s highly evaluative because God is making the point that He did not provide for them ‘shelter’ from the sun. This is another example of some of the difficulties in coding with Labov’s model. The lines between evaluation and the other categories are difficult to distinguish as evaluation is interspersed throughout stories.

As a personal narrative, the Labovian model proposes two greater functions of a spoken narrative: referential and the evaluative function. As it has been argued in this thesis thus far, God’s narratives in sūra 18 are highly evaluative and the narrative clauses largely contain

\textsuperscript{485} Al-Rāzī offers four different possible interpretations for these elliptical clauses. See Mafātīḥ, 21:169-170.
\textsuperscript{487} Quṭb, \textit{In the Shade of the Qur’ān}, 245. Also see al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{al-Kashshāf}, 87.

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constructed dialogues that ultimately promote God’s favorable viewpoint, which render them evaluative as well. In this particular episode, the first form of orientation sets the basic scene, fulfilling the referential function, but no explicit details are provided for any main actions rather than the vague clauses that most likely mean that Dhū l-Qarnayn carried on with this normal righteous political policy. The evaluation clause, “for whom We had provided no shelter from it,” which I have noted is also functioning as an orientation, is what I would argue the most reportable clause or event in this episode. This then could also be seen as a displaced orientation clause that brings more attention to it as already discussed. This clause mainly serves two greater agendas that relate to the self-images of God being developed within the narrative. The first is its standard function of self-aggrandizement: reminding listeners that only God has the power to provide shelter or protection if He so wills as al-wālī ‘The Protector.’ The evaluative clause thus also serves to continue a sustained presentation of God’s image within sūra 18 as al-wālī. In constructing in listeners’ minds this particular image of people having no protection or shelter from the sun, whereas the young men of the cave were protected from the sun to conceal their presence, we are provided with another illustration of protection being narrated about throughout the sūra.

The role of language vagueness, which I suggest redirects listeners at times to surrounding discourse in this particular place, is extremely relevant for the whole narrative rather than an explanation of what Dhū l-Qarnayn specifically achieved with the community. Yet, the majority of thematic commentaries and traditional approaches to Qur’ānic narratives do not discuss clause 0 as conveying a sense of protection that relates to other parts of the narrative or

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the whole sūra. Therefore, my narrative analysis approach achieves a new understanding that has been overlooked by other commentators.

Finally, the third episode contains the major part of the story, which narrates the most memorable event and is presented entirely in constructed dialogue. It also transitions into God’s final evaluative commentary, beginning with clause oo and ending with the coda:

**Episode 3:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>He travelled on;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s</td>
<td>Then when he reached a place between two mountain barriers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicating Action</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>he found beside them a people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>who could barely understand him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicating Action</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>They said, ‘Dhūʾ-l-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are ruining this land. Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
<td>He answered, ‘The power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute, but if you lend me your strength, I will put up a fortification between you and them: Bring me lumps of iron!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>And then, when he had filled the gap between the two mountain sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>y</td>
<td>[he said], ‘Work your bellows!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>z</td>
<td>And then, when he had made it glow like fire,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aa</td>
<td>he said, ‘Bring me molten metal to pour over it!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Evaluation</td>
<td>bb</td>
<td>Their enemies could not scale the barrier, nor could pierce it,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>cc</td>
<td>and he said, ‘This is a mercy from my Lord. But when my Lord’s promise is fulfilled, He will raze this barrier to the ground—my Lord’s promise always comes true.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mention of Gog and Magog in this episode invites an historical analysis and discussion of who Gog and Magog are and who the Jewish Rabbis understood them to be, as
well as their general universal historical origins.\textsuperscript{489} For the purposes of examining the narrative from a discourse analysis perspective, however, listeners do not need to do know the historical significance of Gog and Magog except for what can be obtained from the information provided in the narrative.\textsuperscript{490} It tells us that a community is suffering from certain raids or attacks by two figures Gog and Magog. This community speaks in clause \zet and states: “Gog and Magog are ruining this land.” We can only infer that the damage being done is substantial to the point that the community is asking Dhū l-Qarnayn for a barrier to be constructed to protect them. Later, God speaks of them: “On that day, We shall let them surge against each other like waves.” This indicates to listeners that on “that day” ‘\textit{yawma idhin},’ understood to be the Day of Judgment, God will release these figures again before the final trumpet is blown.

At this point, God takes listeners to Dhū l-Qarnayn’s final destination in the narrative that is at a point between two mountains and where he meets a community “who could barely understand him.” The exegetes understand this orientation to the community to different degrees. The opinion of al-Rāzī, which does not venture too far from what the text implies, is that it does not mean that they could not comprehend anything, but that they understood Dhū l-Qarnayn with difficulty.\textsuperscript{491} Al-Tha’labī registers a single opinion that this means the community could not understand good from evil, or guidance from misguidance, therefore alluding to their misguided

\textsuperscript{489} From the exegetes surveyed in this thesis, al-Tha’labī provides the most exhaustive review of the various opinions. See \textit{al-Kashf}, 6:193-199. Gog and Magog are generally treated as savage tribes within Islamic thought. For extensive discussion of these tribes in pre-Islamic sources, see Emeri Van Donzel, Andrea Schmidt, and Claudia Ott, \textit{Gog and Magog in early Syriac and Islamic sources: Sallam’s quest for Alexander’s wall} (Leiden: Brill, 2009) and Seyed-Gohrab, Douïkar-Aerts, and Sen McGlinn, \textit{Gog and Magog: The clans of chaos in world literature} (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2007).

\textsuperscript{490} They are also referenced in Q 21:96-97 within the context of discussing the Day of Judgment: “and when the peoples of Gog and Magog are let loose and swarm swiftly from every highland.”

\textsuperscript{491} Al-Rāzī, \textit{Mafātīḥ}, 21:171.
state of affairs rather than language capabilities. Ibn Kathīr understands it as their speaking a remote language.

The constructed dialogue presented in this episode continues to project God in a favorable light by bolstering God’s image. To set up the favorable response by Dhū l-Qarnayn, God first constructs the community’s dialogue in which they ask for protection from Gog and Magog in clause v:

\[\text{v} \quad \text{They said, ‘Dhū l-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are ruining this land. Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?’}\]

Immediately, Dhū l-Qarnayn responds with a favorable response:

\[\text{w} \quad \text{He answered, ‘The power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute, but if you lend me your strength, I will put up a fortification between you and them.}\]

This statement depicts Dhū l-Qarnayn as an exemplary pious ruler who is satisfied with what God has granted him and therefore refuses to take recompense for righteous work. At the same time, his refusal to take a form of recompense or reward from the people (because power from God is enough) is another example of God being \textit{khayr-un thawab-an} ‘Best of reward givers.’ Dhū l-Qarnayn will get the best reward from God for his actions. The exegetes support this idea of reward in explaining “\textit{kharaj-an}” ‘tribute’ to mean a form of financial payment, and can also signify \textit{jizyat-un} ‘reward.’


The remaining dialogue provides many details on how the impenetrable wall was built, indicating that it was so strong that, as God states in an evaluation clause: “Their enemies could not scale the barrier, nor could they pierce it.” Quṭb’s reading of this āya is that for the first time
this particular community was finally protected from their oppressors.\textsuperscript{495} The majority of other exegetes focus on the technical aspects of this description such as how Gog and Magog were unable to climb over the barrier because of its height, and how they were unable to break through it because of the ingenious material used.\textsuperscript{496} From a Labovian perspective, an evaluative clause has to convey a greater point, communicating to listeners the meaning of the narrative by establishing points of personal involvement. What, then, is really the point of God saying that the enemies could not destroy the barrier? It seems obvious that God’s evaluation of the wall’s strength is another way of bringing attention to the capabilities of God’s divine assistance. The \textit{al-qādir} ultimately made this possible for Dhū l-Qarnayn to construct (in granting him the strength and the means). And as such, no one could ‘pierce it’ because it was essentially a ‘divine’ construction.

Does the narrative have a resolution, as Labov proposes it should? The sequence of structural categories helps us find it, as it has done in previous narratives. The only evaluative clause in the episode, clause bb: “Their enemies could not scale the barrier, nor could they pierce it” comes in the place of the narrative where narrators typically suspend the complicating action with an evaluation immediately prior to telling the resolution.\textsuperscript{497} Thus, the resolution following clause cc is where God indicates that the story has finished and it presents Dhū l-Qarnayn’s final words at the completion of the construction of the wall:

\begin{quote}
cc and he \textbf{said}, ‘This is a mercy from my Lord. But when my Lord’s promise is fulfilled, He will raze this barrier to the ground— my Lord’s promise always comes true.’
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{495} Quṭb, \textit{In the Shade}, 247.
\textsuperscript{497} Labov Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis,” 35.
The story finishes but also leaves listeners with a glimpse of the beginning of a new narrative: the story about when this wall will be razed to the ground. The constructed dialogue, now defining the resolution, is the last illustration presenting God’s self-image in the voice of Dhū l-Qarnayn: *al-walī* is merciful in providing protection and *al-qādir* will raze the barrier to the ground nonetheless in due time. The resolution confirms yet again that Dhū l-Qarnayn’s speech has been an instrumental tool in sustaining God’s agency throughout the narrative.

Clause cc triggers the onset of the coda with the deictic element *yawmaʿidhin* ‘on that day’ that stands in the place of the common deictic lexical signal found in Labov’s codas, which indicates to listeners that the narrative has finished, and God is speaking in present time. God refers back to the resolution in which Dhū l-Qarnayn alludes to the Day of Judgment, and posits His greater concluding point. The coda, resembling other codas within sûra 18, is a universal message that instills a strong warning to the disbelievers and in this coda also emphasizes His attribute of being *khayr-un thawāb-an wa khayr-un ‘uqab-an* ‘Best giver of reward and punishment’:

- dd On that day, We shall let them surge against each other like waves.
- ee And then the Trumpet will be blown
- ff and We shall gather them all together.
- gg We shall show Hell to the disbelievers,
- hh those whose eyes were blind to My signs,
- ii those who were unable to hear—
- jj did they think that they could take My servants
- kk as protectors (ʾawliyyāʾ) instead of Me? 498
- ll We have prepared Hell as the disbelievers’ resting place.

It has already been discussed that the codas in sûra 18 tend to be universal and speak to the general interpretative framework of the sûra. The evocation of hell, specifically in clause gg.

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498 Abdul Haleem translated ʾawliyyāʾ as “masters” however I have changed it to protectors to highlight this theme.

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and the strong warning given to disbelievers connect to previous statements describing hell in the
sūra. For example, God describes the form of torment one could face in the fire in āya 29:

Say, ‘Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who
wish to reject it do so.’ We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides. If
they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible
drink! What a painful resting place!

Another scene of hell is depicted in āya 53:

The evildoers will see the Fire and they will realize that they are about to fall into it: they will find no
escape from it.

The specific message of clauses jj and kk: “did they think that they could take My
servants as masters (’awliyyā’) instead of Me?” has also already appeared in the sūra several
times in various forms in other codas. God stresses that “they” are His servants and therefore
cannot be taken as ’awliyyā’. Al-Zamakhsharī believes ‘ibādī ‘my servants’ to refer to the angels
whom were believed to offer protection. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī add that “servants” refer to both
the angels and Jesus.499 Given the fact that this coda appears at the end of the Dhū l-Qarnayn
narrative and many others, an alternative interpretation could be that God is referring to those
who have taken Dhū l-Qarnayn himself as an idol to be worshipped, just as some people wanted
to build a shrine over the tombs of the young men of the cave, and hence worship them as saints.
The same can be said of the mystical figure al-Khiḍr. Each of these narratives presents heroic
figures, but listeners are continuously reminded in the end that none of God’s servants, despite
their significant earthly and spiritual achievements, should be taken as true protectors or partners
to God.

IV. Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, it was demonstrated that the narrative of Dhū l-Qarnayn continues to develop core attributes related to God’s Self-image in sūra 18. As a ‘personal’ narrative, the virtues of God as al-qādīr, ‘the All-Able,’ al-walī, ‘the Protector,’ and khayr-un thawāb-anwakhayr-un ’uqban, ‘Best of reward givers and punishers’ are embedded within the story structurally and semantically and shape its theme. This narrative particularly connects the three attributes together into a single narrative. Thus, it reinforces a holistic superior image of God in the sūra. The evaluative use of constructed dialogue, especially, plays a significant narrative role in reinforcing a favorable image of God. As seen in this chapter, Dhū l-Qarnayn’s statements, which essentially represent God’s evaluation, are left alone without further evaluative commentary. The function of the narrative is highly evaluative as with the previous narratives analyzed, and its evaluative style and contents are being used to build up a significant level of credibility or validation for the Speaker before making His final point.

Its coda is again posing the same rhetorical question asked throughout the sūra. Do people think that they can take His servants as their ’awliyyā’ ‘protectors,’ instead of God? In this story, God tells listeners about a particular community He did not protect from the sun, and about Dhū l-Qarnayn’s engineering feat, which God is ultimately responsible for, that provided an oppressed community total protection from their oppressors Gog and Magog. These past events are truly significant for God because He is narrating them in order for His listeners to understand that He should be taken as the sole protector—the Speaker’s driving motive for sharing each of His past experiences to the audience.

The surrounding clauses of the coda, clauses dd to ii:
dd On that day, We shall let them surge against each other like waves.

ee And then the Trumpet will be blown

ff and We shall gather them all together.

gg We shall show Hell to the disbelievers,

hh those whose eyes were blind to My signs,

ii those who were unable to hear—

and clause ll “We have prepared Hell as the disbelievers resting place” reflects the grave significance of His claim to be sought as The Protector, thus heightening the tellability of the narrative, and the previous ones. For the Speaker, these stories are extremely worth telling as He tells listeners their point relates to their own possible future. It is fitting that the Speaker’s theme of punishment is presented at a heightened level in His final narrative, reflected also greatly in Dhū l-Qarnayn’s statements, as now listeners have heard the five narratives. God in the final coda bridges His current and previous points of protection to His culminating point that ultimately protection will be needed from the hellfire and only al-walī can provide that at the end of time.
Conclusion

In this study, I have shown how rewarding and productive a narrative analysis applied to the Qur’ān can be. Drawing parallels from what human speakers do to what God could be doing, is one way to continue to understand the layers of discourse in the Qur’ān. This study has furthered our understanding of God and the Qur’ān on multiple levels. At the very basic level, I have shown that the narratives of Sūrat al-Kahf strongly resemble spoken narratives and as such are better understood when analyzed with narrative analysis. Whereas other scholars have pointed out observations on narratives, such as the existence of a “final comment” or of a “cadenza,” my study has relocated these phenomena into an appropriate framework where these features can be considered as codas and evaluation—the very building blocks of spoken narratives.

In treating Sūrat al-Kahf some scholars have touched on the theme of protection but mainly within the larger framework of the oneness of God ‘tawḥīd.’ This study argues that God uses the narratives as a dynamic tool to present and sustain His superior Self-image of specifically being al-walī ‘The Protector.’ In each of the narratives, the basic plot revolves around characters receiving or not receiving a form of protection. The young men were protected in a cave for 300 years, a man’s luscious garden was not protected from thunderbolts and thus destroyed, and a community finally received physical protection from an oppressing neighbor. As such each narrative functions to contextualize various elements and detailed images of how protection takes place. Sometimes protection is guised in an unjustifiable manner, such as through the killing of another human being. God’s evaluation of such an act informs listeners that this is also a form of divine protection although we may not understand it. Thus man’s
conceptions of protection are challenged and expanded across the narratives.

Ultimately, God recounts these past experiences of His ‘personal’ experience in order to validate His greater point: that only He should be sought protection from—the crucial reason for telling the narratives found in the codas. Such a bold claim for any speaker to make would certainly necessitate credibility. In the very end of the last narrative Dhū l-Qarnayn, the other dimension of God as khayr-un thawab-an wa ‘uqb-an ‘Best giver of reward and punishment,’ which has been developing in meta-narrative discourse throughout the sūra, leads listeners to the meeting of these attributes: only He can offer physical protection from the hellfire. With this, I propose two answers for how narratives in Sūrat al-Kahf function in the Qur’ān: self-presentation and a form of validation for the Speaker to claim to be worthy alone of seeking protection from.

The instrumental device in carrying out God’s message was His complete dominance of the language in the narratives. The evaluative function greatly subverted the referential function in each of the narratives. As Labov said of his personal narratives, “Every line and almost every element of the syntax contributes to the point and that point is self-aggrandizement.” God infused evaluation into each of the other five structural categories of the narratives in multiple ways that are summarized below.

The first kind of evaluation found in the narratives was direct evaluation—manifested as either external or internal evaluation. A few examples of external evaluation, evaluation distant from the past event, include:

*The Young Men of the Cave:* “This is one of God’s signs: those people God guides are rightly guided, but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray.” (Q 18:17)

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500 Labov, *Language in the City*, 368.
The Master of the Garden: “He had no forces to him other than God—he could not even help himself” (Q 18:43)

Iblīs the Rebel: “So he disobeyed his Lord’s command” (Q 18:50)

Dhū l-Qarnayn: “And so it was, We had full knowledge of him” (Q 18:91)

The codas of four of the narratives also comprised direct external evaluation. The coda was functioning to indicate to the listeners that the narrative has finished, marked by a deictic element, as well as functioning to instill the Narrator’s most important point:

The Young Men of the Cave:

Say [Prophet], ‘God knows best how long they stayed.’ His is the knowledge of all that is hidden in the heavens and earth– How well He sees! How well He hears!– and they have no one to protect them other than Him; He does not allow anyone to share His rule. (Q 18:26)

The Master of the Garden:

In that situation, the only protection is that of God, the True God: He gives the best rewards and the best outcome. (Q 18:44)

Iblīs the Rebel:

Are you [people] going to take him and his offspring as your protectors instead of Me, even though they are your enemies? (Q 18:50)

Dhū l-Qarnayn:

On that Day, We shall let them surge against each other like waves and then the Trumpet will be blown and We shall gather them all together. We shall show Hell to the disbelievers, those whose eyes were blind to My signs, those who were unable to hear. Did they think that they could take My servants as protectors instead of Me? We have prepared Hell as the disbelievers’ resting place. (Q 18: 99–102)

Evident in these codas is the lexical repetition of the Arabic root *w-l-y*. Using this to guide my reading of the narratives, I systematically showed how each narrative was constructed to show various manifestations of how God protects people, sometimes conceivably, and sometimes inconceivably. The findings of these codas, along with parallel narrative structures, are especially relevant because they contribute to the debate of intertextuality, or *naẓm*, and the Qur’ān. Just as recent scholars assert “aural” intertextuality” or “relevance” intertextuality as
means by which sūras are coherent, I propose a narrative intertextuality as another medium through which a sūra can achieve coherency.\(^{501}\)

Examples of internal evaluation (deeply embedded) include:

*The Young Men of the Cave* “You would have thought they were awake though they lay asleep.” (Q 18:18)

*The Master of the Garden* “And while wrongdoing himself…” (Q 18:35), “And there he was, wringing his hands over what he had invested in it, as it drooped on its trellises…” (Q 18:42)

Evaluation also appeared, less explicitly, in several ways. For example, in the telling of the Iblīs story, which I showed to be a complete narrative in the sūra despite its single-āya brevity, God imbued a heightened level of evaluation to the orientating clause by displacing it from its usual order of appearance in a narrative. The clause “He was a jinn” comes after the complicating actions and before the resolution, whereas typically the orientation is found before the complicating action clauses. The entity of jinn was a major focus of concern for God at the time of recounting the narrative as the immediate interlocutors, pagan Meccans, were historically taking jinn as protectors instead of God. This interpretation was facilitated by recognizing that the orientation clause was displaced and also by the awareness that speakers sometimes use orientations to negotiate areas of concern. Thus, evaluation was indexed at times through the structural organization of the narrative.

Another way God imbued His evaluation into the narratives was by embedding His supreme agency onto other peoples’ situations. This was done by way of syntactic embedding of His first person voice in many of the narrative and orienting clauses. Examples are in many of the orientation clauses from the narratives:

The Young Men of the Cave: “They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We gave them more and more guidance.”

Dhū l-Qarnayn: “We established his power in the land, and [We] gave him the means to achieve everything.”

The Master of the Garden: “For one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between; Both gardens yielded fruit and did not fail in any way; We made a stream flow through them, and so he had abundant fruit.”

The Journey of Moses: “And [they] found one of Our servants—a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.” (Q 18:65)

In such orientation to the main characters, God is foregrounding His agency more than providing listeners with background information. It is evident that God establishes His impressive universal agency over others and other creations in how He introduces them to listeners. To borrow from Bamberg’s model of narrative, this is one of the ways God positions Himself in relation to the characters in the narrative.

Evaluation was also embedded into a single discourse marker. Both the narratives Iblīs the Rebel and The Journey of Moses, the two “unannounced” narratives in the sūra are introduced by the single discourse marker ‘idh ‘[remember] when’ that functioned as their abstract. This abstract served both the function of announcing that a narrative is about to be told, distinguishing it from prior discourse, as well as functioning to bring an added layer of ‘personal’ significance to the narrative. In using ‘idh, an Arabic particle of emphasis, God indicated to listeners that the two narratives He is about tell are highly-tellable—they have a high degree to which the story is worth telling. None of the other three narratives share this abstract. I drew the conclusion that this high level of importance was given to these narratives because their understanding was especially significant for His immediate interlocutors. I argued that the

Notes:
502 Q 18:13
503 Q 18:84
504 Q 18:32-34
problem of the jinn was of immediate concern for God and His interlocutors, as well was teaching the Jewish rabbis who were testing the knowledge of the Prophet a lesson on the limitations of human knowledge through their prophet Moses. Thus the tellability of a narrative heightened when the significance of the narratives were ‘localized’ for the immediate audience.

Finally, the least direct way, God projected His evaluation into the narrative was through constructed dialogue. There are many examples of constructed dialogue that ultimately are functioning to create and sustain a superior image of God.

The Young Men and the Cave: “When they stood up and said: ‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth. We shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do…”(Q 18:14)

The Master of the Garden: “His companion said: ‘Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust, from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man? But for me, He is God, my Lord, and I will never set up any partner with Him.’” (Q 18:37-38)

The Journey of Moses: “He said…’so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience (Q 18:82)

Dhū l-Qarnayn: “He said, ‘The power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute (Q 18:95).

From a narrative analysis perspective, constructed dialogue is a truly narrator’s act. It is the speaker who constructs the specific dialogue and as such it is inextricably linked to the immediate goals and aims of the speaker in any given context. What I also found was that God immediately evaluated ‘negative’ statements of others with either His own direct evaluation or another ‘positive’ statement. Such examples include:

The Young Men and the Cave (Q 18:22)

| Negative statement | “Some say: ‘the sleepers were three and their dog made four. Others say ‘They were five and their dog made them six…”’ |
| Direct Evaluation: | “Guessing in the dark” |
| Negative statement: | “And some say: They were seven, and their dog made them eight.” |
| Positive statement: | “Say [Prophet]: “My Lord knows best how many there were.”” |

The Master of the Garden (Q 18:35-36)
Direct Evaluation: “And wronging himself,”
Negative Statement: “said, ‘I do not think this well ever perish, or that the Last Hour will ever come—even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there.’

In this case, the evaluation is provided immediately before the character makes his statement. Thus God pre-judges the statement for the listener. In the next narrative, Moses’ continuous questions of al-Khiḍr’s actions are met with al-Khiḍr admonishing him as well as reminding him to be patient:

_The Journey of Moses (Q 18: 60-82)_

Negative Statement: Moses said, ‘How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!’ (Q 18:71)
Positive Statement: He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ (Q 18:72)

Lastly, in contrast to this form of self-image management, as we would expect positive statements made by characters that sustained God’s super self-image remained unevaluated by God. These examples can especially be found in the narrative Dhū l-Qarnayn where all of his statements are left unevaluated.

Mustansir Mir rightfully argued for the need of further research into dialogue. My study greatly furthers Mir’s interest in Qur’ānic dialogue and shows that it ultimately functions in the narratives of sūra 18 to create and maintain God’s superior Self-image. As a persuasive evaluative device, listeners are presented with the same point from different perspectives.

The status of Qur’ānic narratives within Qur’ānic studies today remains deeply entrenched in issues of historical origins, particularly for non-Muslims, and in the conventional mode of understanding narratives as stories of past prophets or a genre of punishment stories,
whose greater role are to convey spiritual and moral lessons.\textsuperscript{505} Nasr exemplifies this in his division of the Qur'ān into two overarching messages. The first is its doctrine or message concerning the nature of “Ultimate Reality,” which includes the doctrine of the transcendence of God and the doctrine of His immanence. The second message of the Qur'ān he identifies is its ethical doctrine—moral principles according to which man should live. He places Qur'ānic narratives, what he calls “sacred history” within this second category.\textsuperscript{506} As such, he distinguishes Muslim moral lessons from understanding the “Ultimate Reality.” Another questionable classification of Qur'ānic discourse comes from Robinson who divides it into six major sections: polemic, eschatology, God’s personal communication with the Muhammad, the signs of God’s power and beneficence, lessons from history, and the status and authenticity of the revelation.\textsuperscript{507} In light of my study, such divisions need to be reexamined. In looking at five full narratives of Sūrat al-Kahf one could argue that each of these ‘registers’ exists in the narratives. Such divisions rooted in literary analysis reflect the major hermeneutical problem of applying literary analysis to the Qur'ān that limits our understanding of its discourse.

Lastly, whilst narrative analysis can be applied to all narratives of the Qur'ān, the findings of my analysis should be limited to understanding the narratives from sūra 18. One must be cautious to generalize from these findings and apply them wholly to the term ‘Qur’ānic narratives.’ Narrative analysis assumes that narratives are shaped by their ‘local’ surroundings

\textsuperscript{505} See Gilliot, “Narrative.” Also, al-Qaṭṭān’s categorization of narratives into five major types reflects this trend. He identifies the following groups of narratives: stories about prophets before the prophet Muhammad, stories about righteous people, stories of communities who rejected their own prophets, stories about past persecuted righteous communities, and lastly stories related to events that took place during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad. See al-Qaṭṭān, \textit{Mahāḥīth fi 'ulūm al-Qur'ān},


\textsuperscript{507} Ibid.
and social context—the principle of “‘where we are and who we are with.” Therefore, without having analyzed other narratives in the Qur’ān, we should assume that narratives from different periods of Qur’ānic revelation, told under different circumstances, will exhibit variations in style and structure, not superficially, but in their manifestations of the referential and evaluative functions.

This presupposes the idea that the social and discourse context of the Qur’ān was not fixed. There is more to the Qur’ān than the general, and often lazy, context of seventh century Arab paganism, which frequently defines the whole of the “context” with respect to the Qur’ān. For example, in sūra 18, it was a particular audience of Jewish rabbis who had inquired about the stories that form the base of narratives. This contextual rooting may help to explain why the unelicited narrative of The Journey of Moses, featuring their prominent Prophet, was told alongside the other narratives to convey the same point. Other examples can be taken from the rest of the Qur’ān. According to Mourad, for example, the narrative of Mary in the Qur’ān reflects the influence of Arabian Christians. Leaving aside his greater argument, the fact remains that there were different audiences at various stages of the Qur’ān that undoubtedly shaped the narratives. Thus, the narratives must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis in order to better understand their structures. 508 The key role of social context brings us to the implications of my study on the genre of tafsīr, Qur’ānic exegetical commentary. As I have demonstrated in this study, classical tafsīr works are mainly invested in the referential function of the narrative. In Labov’s terms, they are filling in historical blanks with respect to orientation and complicating action segments, and as such are dealing with the minimal narrative. What Labov would call the

“complicating action” segment of the narrative was especially significant to the classical and medieval exegetes because therein rested the notion of *i'jāz*—the doctrine of inimitability. That God revealed new stories, in that they were previously unknown, as well as previous stories in new light, to the Prophet confirmed the veracity of the Prophet. As such, the historical details of the narratives were a major point of consideration. Having said that, the exegetes’ understanding of the narratives as didactic lessons targeting the arrogant Meccans, did indicate that they understood the importance of the relationship between narratives and the social circumstances of the Prophet in Mecca at the time of sūra’s revelation. Because a certain level of contextualization is required in a narrative analysis, the exegetical commentary as well as the genre of *Ṣīra*, historical writings on the Prophet’s life, and the genre of *asbāb ul-nuzūl* ‘reasons for revelation’ will remain important resources alongside the texts of the narratives in the Qur’ān.

**Areas of Further Research**

There are many prospects for furthering the results of my study. I believe one of the more compelling areas is to expand on the idea of narrative intertextuality. There are many other sūras that contain multiple narratives, which could be examined to see if those narratives play a similar role of contributing towards the sūra’s message. The longer Medinan sūras would be an ideal starting point for this line of research.

Also, the delicate relationship between the historical and social context and the structure of Qur’ānic narratives needs further research from the perspective of narrative analysis. Do the different contexts in which God tells the narratives affect their structure? How much and how
so? Returning to Mourad’s work, for example, much of his thesis, that the Mary narrative reflects Arabian Christian influence, rests upon the interpretation of a few orientation clauses, which he claims are allegorical.\(^509\) But before arriving at such an interpretation, a number of questions would have to be raised: At what point are these clauses told in the narrative? Are they displaced or in their usual place? Are they evaluated? How much detail and what kind of information is provided in the orientation? What does the coda state? The answers to such questions would certainly open up new paths of interpretation leading from the perspective of narrative analysis. I believe this is one of the fascinating results of using narrative analysis on the Qur’ān. It encourages the analyst to take into consideration the structure of the narrative as well as the historical context of the narrative, in order to explore all possible ways in which we can better understand the narratives. This approach opposes other modern approaches, most notably literary approaches that explicitly denounce the historicity of Qur’ānic narratives in order to focus on the narratives’ universal morals.\(^510\) This leads to an extreme simplification of Qur’ānic narratives that in the process simplifies the Speaker as well.

In the end, my study aimed to introduce the field of narrative analysis to Qur’ānic studies and to lay a preliminary foundation of narrative analysis. Other projects can extend this work to other Qur’ānic narratives, and they can also move beyond Labov. There are many post-Labovian narrative models, greatly influenced by Labov, that provide new insights into the role of narrative and deal with many more structural and social complexities of narratives that could be relevant to Qur’ānic narratives -such as the idea that narratives are used as argumentative

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\(^{509}\) Mourad, “Mary in the Qur’ān,” 166.

\(^{510}\) Muḥammad Khalafallāh’s work, *al-Fann al-qaṣaṣī fi al-qur’ān al-karīm*, is the best example of this approach.
devices.\textsuperscript{511}

\textsuperscript{511} See De Fina, Georgakopoulos, \textit{Analyzing Narrative}, 97-105.
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