



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

**Character evaluation in biblical Hebrew narrative:
Toward a literary and theological understanding
of the 'āsher-verb formula**

by

Mark Daren Wessner

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

in the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria

2005

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
LIBRARY

Declaration

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.



Mark Daren Wessner

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	9
Key terms.....	12
Orthography.....	14
1 Introduction.....	15
1.1 Actuality and theological significance.....	15
1.1.1 Introduction by way of example – Deuteronomy 34:10-12.....	16
1.1.1.1 Literary analysis of English translations.....	17
1.1.1.2 Identification of the 'āsher-verb formula.....	19
1.1.1.3 Selection of specific 'āsher-verb occurrences.....	20
1.1.1.3.1 Formal indicator: לא־קום.....	22
1.1.1.3.2 Formal indicator: לא־חיה.....	22
1.1.1.3.3 Formal indicator: מי־ק.....	23
1.1.1.3.4 Informal indicator: Implied observation.....	23
1.1.2 Review of previous research.....	24
1.1.3 Aims and objectives.....	25
1.2 Assumptions and methodology.....	26
1.2.1 Hermeneutical point of departure.....	26
1.2.2 Synchrony and diachrony.....	28
1.2.3 Text linguistics / discourse analysis.....	29
1.2.4 Textual criticism.....	32

1.2.5	Canonical criticism	36
1.2.6	Delimitation criticism	37
1.2.7	Structural analysis	39
1.2.8	Narrative criticism	40
1.2.9	Synthesis and exegetical process	42
1.3	Theological implication	43
1.4	Hypothesis.....	44
2	Text-type: Behavioural epitaph	48
2.1	Deuteronomy 34:10-12 – Moses	48
2.1.1	Introduction.....	48
2.1.2	The text	50
2.1.2.1	Limits of the passage	50
2.1.3	Translation	51
2.1.4	Structural and literary analysis.....	53
2.1.4.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	53
2.1.4.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	54
2.1.5	Literary context.....	56
2.1.5.1	Deuteronomy 34:10-12 and the ' <i>āsher</i> -verbs within the <i>Torah</i>	56
2.1.5.2	Deuteronomy 34:10-12 and the Old Testament.....	59
2.1.6	Character evaluation - Synthesis.....	59
2.2	2 Kings 23:25 – Josiah	61
2.2.1	Introduction.....	61
2.2.2	The text	63
2.2.2.1	Limits of the passage	63
2.2.2.2	Translation	65
2.2.3	Structural and literary analysis.....	67

2.2.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	67
2.2.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	68
2.2.4	Literary context	70
2.2.4.1	2 Kings 23:25 and the ' <i>āsher</i> -verb within 1 and 2 Kings	70
2.2.4.2	2 Kings 23:25 and the Old Testament.....	71
2.2.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis.....	71
2.3	Conclusion	73
3	Text-type: Narrative future	74
3.1	Numbers 27:16-17 – Moses' successor	74
3.1.1	Introduction.....	74
3.1.2	The text	76
3.1.2.1	Limits of the passage	76
3.1.2.2	Translation	77
3.1.3	Structural and literary analysis.....	78
3.1.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	78
3.1.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	79
3.1.4	Literary context.....	80
3.1.4.1	Numbers 27:16-17 and the ' <i>āsher</i> -verbs within the <i>Torah</i>	80
3.1.4.2	Numbers 27:16-17 and the Old Testament	80
3.1.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis.....	81
3.2	2 Chronicles 1:11-12 – Solomon.....	82
3.2.1	Introduction.....	82
3.2.2	The text	84
3.2.2.1	Limits of the passage	84
3.2.2.2	Translation	84
3.2.3	Structural and literary analysis.....	86

3.2.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	86
3.2.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	87
3.2.4	Literary context	88
3.2.4.1	2 Chronicles 1:11-12 and the ' <i>āsher</i> -verbs within the Old Testament	88
3.2.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis	89
3.3	Conclusion	91
4	Text-type: Narrative historical	92
4.1	Genesis 24:7 – The Lord	92
4.1.1	Introduction	92
4.1.2	The text	94
4.1.2.1	Limits of the passage	94
4.1.2.2	Translation	95
4.1.3	Structural and literary analysis	96
4.1.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	96
4.1.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	97
4.1.4	Literary context	98
4.1.4.1	Genesis 24:7 and the ' <i>āsher</i> -verbs within the <i>Torah</i>	99
4.1.4.2	Genesis 24:7 and the Old Testament	100
4.1.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis	101
4.2	2 Samuel 7:23 / 1 Chronicles 17:21 – The people	102
4.2.1	Introduction	102
4.2.2	The text	103
4.2.2.1	Limits of the passage	103
4.2.2.2	Translation	104
4.2.3	Structural and literary analysis	105

4.2.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	105
4.2.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	106
4.2.4	Literary context	107
4.2.4.1	2 Samuel 7:23 and the Old Testament	107
4.2.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis	107
4.3	1 Kings 14:8 – David	108
4.3.1	Introduction	108
4.3.2	The text	109
4.3.2.1	Limits of the passage	109
4.3.2.2	Translation	110
4.3.3	Structural and literary analysis	111
4.3.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	111
4.3.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	113
4.3.4	Literary context	114
4.3.4.1	1 Kings 14:8 and the ' <i>āsher</i> -verbs within 1 and 2 Kings	114
4.3.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis	115
4.4	Conclusion	116
5	Text-type: Behavioural judgment	118
5.1	Exodus 32:35 – The people	118
5.1.1	Introduction	118
5.1.2	The text	121
5.1.2.1	Limits of the passage	121
5.1.2.2	Translation	121
5.1.3	Structural and literary analysis	122
5.1.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	122
5.1.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	123

5.1.4	Literary context.....	124
5.1.4.1	Exodus 32:35 and the Old Testament	124
5.1.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis.....	125
5.2	Numbers 12:11 – Aaron and Miriam	126
5.2.1	Introduction.....	126
5.2.2	The text	126
5.2.2.1	Limits of the passage	126
5.2.2.2	Translation	127
5.2.3	Structural and literary analysis.....	128
5.2.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	128
5.2.3.2	'āsher-verb structure	129
5.2.4	Literary context.....	130
5.2.4.1	Numbers 12:11 and the 'āsher-verbs within the <i>Torah</i>	130
5.2.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis.....	130
5.3	1 Kings 14:16 – Jeroboam	131
5.3.1	Introduction.....	131
5.3.2	The text	132
5.3.2.1	Limits of the passage	132
5.3.2.2	Translation	132
5.3.3	Structural and literary analysis.....	133
5.3.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	133
5.3.3.2	'āsher-verb structure	134
5.3.4	Literary context.....	135
5.3.4.1	1 Kings 14:16 and the 'āsher-verb within 1 and 2 Kings	135
5.3.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis.....	136
5.4	1 Kings 21:25 – Ahab	137
5.4.1	Introduction.....	137

5.4.2	The text	138
5.4.2.1	Limits of the passage	138
5.4.2.2	Translation	138
5.4.3	Structural and literary analysis.....	139
5.4.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	139
5.4.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	140
5.4.4	Literary context.....	141
5.4.4.1	1 Kings 21:25 and the ' <i>āsher</i> -verbs within 1 and 2 Kings.....	141
5.4.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis.....	142
5.5	Jeremiah 8:2 – Judah / Jerusalem.....	143
5.5.1	Introduction.....	143
5.5.2	The text	145
5.5.2.1	Limits of the passage	145
5.5.2.2	Translation	145
5.5.3	Structural and literary analysis.....	147
5.5.3.1	Literary style and narrative characteristics	147
5.5.3.2	' <i>āsher</i> -verb structure	148
5.5.4	Literary context.....	149
5.5.4.1	Jeremiah 8:2 and the ' <i>āsher</i> -verbs within the Old Testament.	149
5.5.5	Character evaluation - Synthesis.....	149
5.6	Conclusion	151
6	Conclusion and synthesis.....	152
6.1	Function	152
6.1.1	Introduction and Characteristics	152
6.1.2	Context.....	154
6.1.2.1	Behavioural epitaph	155

6.1.2.2	Narrative future	156
6.1.2.3	Narrative historical.....	157
6.1.2.4	Behavioural judgement	157
6.2	Concluding analysis	159
Index of Authors		161
Bibliography		163

Abstract

Title: Character evaluation in biblical Hebrew narrative: Toward a literary and theological understanding of the *'āsher*-verb formula

Student: Mark Daren Wessner

Supervisor: Professor DJ Human

Department: Old Testament Studies

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The recently uncovered *'āsher*-verb formula is so named because of its consistently repetitive structure of “*'āsher* (the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר) + verb” combinations that function as the backbone of the unique linguistic technique. The formula is a conventionalized narratological feature in biblical Hebrew that occurs in twelve Old Testament pericopes, in the context of character evaluation, and it contributes to the careful reader’s literary and theological understanding of the text, and the subject character, in multiple ways. Although a small number of scholars have loosely hinted at the presence of the repeated use of אֲשֶׁר in some of the texts, the existence of the specific literary formulaic technique has yet to be

either recognized or articulated in a comprehensive study.

The formula occurs within the following four text-types: Behavioural epitaph, Narrative historical, Behavioural judgment and Narrative future. Within each literary context, the presence of either single or multiple *'āsher*-verb combinations provides a clearer understanding of the narrator's rationale for presenting a particular character as incomparable. The *'āsher*-verb formula reflects a remarkably consistent literary structure, and as such, the careful reader of the pericope can begin to anticipate and discern its presence in the Hebrew text. After the initial identification of the subject, there is the placement of either a single or repeated subordinate אשר immediately followed by a verb (either perfective or imperfective, dependant upon the context) that qualifies or explains the narrator's observation about the subject character. In addition, the formula often employs one of the three formal textual indicators and/or further revision through the use of repeated prepositions. In essence, the entire *'āsher*-verb formula, taken as an intrinsic literary unit, often functions adjectively in relationship to the previously identified subject.

The *'āsher*-verb formula is a sophisticated linguistic tool that sheds additional light on the literary skill, artistry and narrative intention of the ancient biblical writers. Given the contexts in which it is used, it is logical to conclude that the

'*āsher*-verb formula is integral to the identification of the “final word”, from the narrator’s point of view, of the subject at hand. More often than not, it is a linguistic and theological formula of definitiveness, in terms of character evaluation.

Key terms

'āsher – the relative pronoun אשר, often translated as “whom”, “that”, “which”, or “whose”.

Behavioural epitaph – the text-type in which the participant’s life is given an overall final evaluation.

Behavioural judgment – the text-type in which the participant will experience particular events because of past actions.

Character evaluation / characterization – how the narrator portrays the motives, nature, and persona of a biblical character.

Final-text exegesis – reading a text “as it is”, assuming that it has intentional and inherent literary unity.

Formula – a conventionalized technique, used in the context of the original writers and readers, of expressing character evaluation.

Incomparability – the identification of specific characteristics that suggest the uniqueness or distinctiveness of a particular character in a narrative.

Literary analysis – the observation and identification of the “story” elements of a narrative, such as plot changes, character development, speech types, and foreshadowing.

Narrative future – the text-type which portrays the participant’s stated desire for a

future event or development.

Narrative historical – the text-type in which the participant is evaluated in light of a specific past action or actions.

Narrator – the literary story-teller behind any given text, also referred to as the “author”.

Structural analysis – the observation and identification of specific syntactical and stylistic elements of a text, such as repetition, inclusion and, chiasm.

Text-linguistics – the analysis of a language in order to discern and describe the observable patterns at a text level, also known as “discourse analysis”.

Theology – the reading of a text with the goal to better understand the nature and actions of God, achieve through the application of critical study.

Orthography

Hebrew	English	Hebrew	English
א	'	-	a
ב	b	א	ā
ג	g	ב	e
ד	d	ג	ē
ה	h	ד	o
ו	w	ה	u
ז	z	ו	ō
ח	ch	ז	ǎ
ט	t	ח	ō
י	y	ט	ě
כ	k		
ל	l		
מ	m		
נ	n		
ס	š		
ע	'		
פ	p		
צ	ts		
ק	q		
ר	r		
ש	s		
שׁ	sh		
ת	t		