

5 Text-type: Behavioural judgment

The last of the four text-types in which the unique *'āsher*-verb formula is present is the Behavioural judgment literary context. In the five passages of Exodus 32:35, Numbers 12:11, 1 Kings 14:16, 1 Kings 21:25 and Jeremiah 8:2, the subject character(s) are evaluated in light of their specific past actions, by means of the inherent linguistic formula. Also described in each of the pericopes, although not part of the *'āsher*-verb formula *per se*, are the logical consequences of the subject's previous actions.

5.1 Exodus 32:35 – The people

5.1.1 Introduction

The second scroll of the Five Books of Moses starts with a story of oppression and ends with a picture of divine glory. In between, the Exodus narrative tells an amazing and detailed story of how God interacted with his people, and in turn, how they responded to his leading. Exodus is a book so full of foundational teaching to the ancient Israelite community (both religiously and politically), that

it has been called the first book of the Bible.¹⁸⁹

The literary structure of this profound story can be seen a number of ways,¹⁹⁰ but the general outline below will suffice for a study of the *'āsher*-verb formula, with the Exodus 32:35 pericope occurring in the eighth section of the structure.

Israel in Egypt	Exodus 1:1-2:25
	Exodus 3:1-7:7
	Exodus 7:8-11:10
	Exodus 12:1-15:21
Israel in the Wilderness	Exodus 15:22- 18:27
Israel at Sinai	Exodus 19:1-24:18
	Exodus 25:1-31:18
	Exodus 32:1-34:35
	Exodus 35:1-40:38

Within the eighth section describing the fall and restoration of the people of Israel

189. See Durham (1987:xiv) for his rationale for making this claim.

190. For example, it has been suggested that Exodus has a three-fold structure (see Alexander and Baker (2003:250-251) and Durham (1987:xxx) for two different opinions), and alternatively, Fretheim (1991:Contents) suggests that it is made up of nine parts.

at Sinai (Exodus 32:1-34:35), there is a chiasmic structure shown below¹⁹¹ in 32:1-33:6 that highlights both the Lord's judgement of the people and their opportunity for repentance. The assessment in verse 35 - the *'āsher*-verb formula, contains the narrator's perspective of *why* the Lord judged the people as he did.

- A People act, Aaron reacts (32:1-6)
- B the Lord's two utterances (32:7-10)
- C Moses intercedes (32:11-14)
- D Moses goes down the mountain (32:15-20)
- E Judgement: investigative phase (32:21-25)
- F Opportunity for repentance (32:26a)
- E' Judgement: executive phase (32:26b-29)
- D' Moses goes up the mountain (32:30)
- C' Moses intercedes (32:31-32)
- B' the Lord's two utterances (32:33-33:3)
- A' The Lord acts, the people react (33:4-6)

191. See Hendrix (1990:212).

5.1.2 The text

5.1.2.1 Limits of the passage

At first glance, that the pericope ends in verse 35 would seem to be fairly self-evident,¹⁹² but determining the precise delimitation of the beginning and end of the passage is somewhat more challenging, given the complex interaction between direct speech and historical prose. If Hendrix's proposed literary structure is taken into account, not only is the entire narrative structure of 32:1-33:6 clearly identified, but the smaller textual limits of 32:33-33:3 also become apparent, as the focus of the pericope is on the direct speech of the Lord. In this context, the *'āsher*-verb formula of verse 35 functions as type of isolated parenthetical observation, which is explored in more detail below.

5.1.2.2 Translation

Taking into account both the basic grammar of the text and the repetitive *אשר*'s as a structural framework, a translation of the text can look like what is shown below. Exodus 32:35 reads:

192. The majority of commentators conclude that verses 30-35 are the textual limits of the pericope [for example, Childs (1974:571-572), Janzen (2000:391) and Janzen (1997:241-242)].

The Lord sent a plague on the people
וַיִּגַף יְהוָה אֶת־הָעָם
ms noun + article / particle / proper noun / Qal-i3ms + conjunction
because
עַל
preposition
they made the calf, and
אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֶת־הָעֵגֶל
ms noun + article / particle / Qal-p3cp / relative pronoun
Aaron did it.
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַהֲרֹן
proper noun / Qal-p3ms / relative pronoun

The visual presentation (ie, the appropriately indented phrases) and the colour-themed text help the reader to quickly recognize the presence of a double 'asher-verb combination.

5.1.3 Structural and literary analysis

5.1.3.1 Literary style and narrative characteristics

Exodus 32:33-33:3 contains the words of the Lord spoken to Moses in his judgment against the people for their sin in making and worshipping the golden calf. In his judgment, the Lord concluded that even though he would continue to provide his angel¹⁹³ to guide the people, he himself would no longer go with them as he may destroy them due to their “stiff necks”. Also, the people would be held accountable for their sin, and this time Moses was not able to negotiate with the

193. The only other references in Exodus to מַלְאָךְ are in the earlier context of the Lord's angel

Lord on behalf of the people.¹⁹⁴

The speech of the Lord is bisected in the middle by the narrator's observation that the Lord struck¹⁹⁵ the people due to Aaron's and the people's actions. This sentence appears to function parenthetically, and the narrative would have a logical and literary flow even with its absence from the story. The observational statement is terse and to the point – no detailed description of the plague¹⁹⁶ is given to the reader, either in its nature (skin disease, infestation of insects, etc?) or extent (all of the people, or just some?).

5.1.3.2 'āšher-verb structure

The statement that the Lord struck the people with a plague is immediately followed by the preposition על and two אשר and perfective verb clauses which serve to describe *why* the people were struck. The rationale is not singular as some have suggested,¹⁹⁷ but is, in fact, twofold: the people made the calf (עשׂוּר)

guiding the people to the promised land (Ex 14:19, 23:20,23).

194. See Childs (1974:571-572), Fretheim (1991:290-291) and Newing (1993:25-26).

195. The term נָגַף can refer to an individual simply hitting someone/something else, or can be used to describe God's judgment on a national scale (as in the Exodus, the Israelites, etc).

196. Cassuto (1967:424) notes that even the timing of the plague cannot be assumed by the reader.

197. See Durham (1987:426).

אשר) and Aaron did it (אשר עשה). The message from the narrator's perspective is that the Lord would hold both parties accountable for the golden calf – neither one could hide behind the other and hope to not get caught.

5.1.4 Literary context

5.1.4.1 Exodus 32:35 and the Old Testament

Outside of Exodus 32, there are only three references to Aaron and the people's golden calf (עגל) episode.¹⁹⁸ In Deuteronomy 9, Moses reminded the Israelites of the event, as part of his message to the people that their long-awaited entrance into the promised land was not due to their own righteousness, but rather because of the Lord's previous covenant with their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses also noted that the Lord's anger was directed to *both* the people and Aaron separately, and that he had to pray to the Lord on behalf of them both. In Nehemiah 9, the Levites recounted and confessed the history of the Israelites, including the creation and worship of the image of the calf, as did the Psalmist in Psalm 106:19.

198. Jeroboam acted similarly in 1 Ki 12:25-33.

5.1.5 Character evaluation - Synthesis

The parenthetical statement in the midst of the direct speech of Exodus 32:33-33:3 achieves added significance by means of the narrator's employment of the specific 'āsher-verb formula in 32:35. Not only is the Lord said to have struck the people of Israel because of their "stiff necks", but as is uniquely presented by means of the specific 'āsher-verb formula, also because of their making of the golden calf (אשר עשו) and Aaron's participation (אשר עשה) in its creation (despite his unsuccessful claim of innocence).¹⁹⁹ By the presence of verse 35 within the Behavioural judgment pericope, it seems that the message the narrator may have wanted his readers to understand is that the Lord's jealousy and judgment is comprehensive and final.

An awareness of the presence and function of the 'āsher-verb formula within Exodus 32:35 suggests that an effective English translation of the text could be:

"The Lord sent a plague on the people because:

they made the calf, and

Aaron did it."

199. See Ex 32:24.

5.2 Numbers 12:11 – Aaron and Miriam

5.2.1 Introduction

As previously described in 3.1.1 of this study, the book of Numbers reflects a literary structure based upon a distinction (by means of two separate censuses)²⁰⁰ between the Old Generation of the people of Israel who were characterized by rebellion (1:1-25:18) and the New Generation who were characterized by hope (26:1-36:13). It is within the first of the two sections that the Numbers 12:11 pericope falls.

5.2.2 The text

5.2.2.1 Limits of the passage

Numbers 12 is the story of Aaron and Miriam's questioning of Moses' divinely ordained leadership, and as such, the chapter contains a mixture of direct speech and narrative description of the particular events. Verses 4-13 form the broader limits²⁰¹ of the text within which the *'āsher*-verb formula of verse 11 falls, and the

200. The first census in the Desert of Sinai is described in Nm 1:1-46, and the second census on the Plains of Moab is recorded in Nm 26:1-62. The number of men, excluding Levites, remained essentially unchanged (603,550 to 601,730).

201. As represented in the Leningrad Codex [Ben-Asher and Dotan (2001:215)], the reconstructed Aleppo Codex [Breuer and Ofer (2000:138)] and Samaritan Pentateuch [Von Gall (1918:296)].

immediate context of Aaron's speech in verses 11 and 12 forms the textual limits for the purposes of this study.

5.2.2.2 Translation

Taking into account both the basic grammar of the text and the repetitive אשר's as a structural framework, a translation of the text can look like what is shown below. Numbers 12:11 reads:

Aaron said to Moses,
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶהְרֹן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
proper noun / preposition / proper noun / Qal-i3ms + conjunction
My lord, do not place this sin on us,
בֵּי אֲדֹנָי אֶל־נָא תִשֶׂת עָלֵינוּ חַטָּאת
fs noun / preposition + 1cp / Qal-i2ms / interjection / preposition / ms noun + 1cs / preposition + 1cs
in which we have been foolish
אֲשֶׁר נִוְאלְנוּ
Niphal-p1cp / relative pronoun
and by which we have sinned.
וְאֲשֶׁר חָטְאנוּ
Qal-p1cp / relative pronoun + conjunction

The visual presentation (ie, the appropriately indented phrases) and the colour-themed text help the reader to quickly recognize the presence of a double 'āsher-verb combination.

5.2.3 Structural and literary analysis

5.2.3.1 Literary style and narrative characteristics

The overwhelming majority of scholarly analysis of this pericope has focussed on a variety of elements other than the nature of Aaron's confession.²⁰² However, this study is instead concerned with how the 'āsher-verb formula helps the reader understand how Aaron saw the nature of his and Miriam's sin, as he described it to his brother Moses, and as it is skilfully presented to the reader of Numbers 12:11-12. Of course, there is great irony in that Aaron, one who claimed to be a prophet of the Lord, could not intercede directly with the Lord, but instead had to appeal to his brother for help – the brother whose prophetic uniqueness he had just been questioning.²⁰³ Also note the use of the particle אֲנִי, stressing the urgency and formality in Aaron's request.

The phrase “we have sinned” (חַטָּאנוּ) occurs 24 times²⁰⁴ in the Old Testament, but it is only mentioned in connection with two other incidents in the *Torah*. Moses

202. For example, the identification of Moses' Cushite wife [eg Ashley (1992:223-224) and Budd (1984:137)], the legitimacy of Aaron's and Miriam's claim to a prophetic calling [eg Alexander and Baker (2003:2), Olson (1996:69-70) and Phillips (1998:78-88)], the nature of Miriam's leprosy [eg Cole (2000:207), Harrison (1990:197); Sherwood (2002:156) and Wenham (1981:113)], and why Aaron was not afflicted with the skin disease [eg Olson (1996:74); Sakenfeld (1995:82-84) and White (1990:157)] are discussed extensively, but there is remarkably little exploration as to the nature of Aaron and Miriam's sin.

203. See Anderson (1994:16) and Ashley (1992:227).

204. Nm 12:11; 14:40; 21:7; Dt 1:41; Jdg. 10:10, 15; 1 Sm 7:6; 12:10; 1 Ki 8:47; 2 Chr 6:37; Neh 1:6; Ps. 106:6; Is 42:24; Jr 3:25; 8:14; 14:7, 20; 16:10; Lm 5:16; Dn 9:5, 8, 11, 15.

was involved with both events – the people’s recognition that they had sinned by not fighting for possession of the promised land as God had previously commanded,²⁰⁵ and the people’s complaint against God and Moses that required the creation of a bronze snake for them to be healed.²⁰⁶

5.2.3.2 *'āsher-verb structure*

As is often true with the *'āsher-verb* formula in instances where a specific character is not being set apart as inherently unequalled, the Numbers 12:11 pericope does not employ any of the three formal indicators to give the reader a reason to anticipate the upcoming use of the formula. In fact, this occurrence of the *'āsher-verb* formula appears at the end of Aaron’s first statement and at first glance, it appears almost redundant and unnecessary in the text. Upon closer inspection, however, the identification of the two אשר and perfective verb clauses is seen to be crucial to a deeper understanding of Aaron and Miriam’s mistake. First, they were foolish (אִל),²⁰⁷ and second, their foolishness caused them to sin (חַטָּא).²⁰⁸

205. The event is described in Nm 14:40, and Moses later reminded the people in Dt 1:41.

206. Nm 21:7. In this story, as in Nm 12:11, Moses had to intercede with the Lord as a result of someone else’s sin. In this case it was the entire people who rebelled, but again, note that the recognition of sin did not come until after the experience of judgement.

207. Compare Jr 50:36 where false prophets and fools are linked.

208. Ashley (1992:221) suggests that the two verbs combine to express one idea, and while that

5.2.4 Literary context

5.2.4.1 Numbers 12:11 and the 'āsher-verbs within the *Torah*

The story of Numbers 12:11 is the only recorded instance in the *Torah* where either Aaron or Miriam act foolishly (לֵא) or sin (חַטָּא). However, later on in the Numbers narrative,²⁰⁹ Aaron (along with his brother Moses) interceded on the behalf of the entire people of Israel (because of the sins of a few men) before the Lord. Perhaps the events of Numbers 12 had a positive impact on Aaron, and he learned the value of respecting divinely ordained leadership.

5.2.5 Character evaluation - Synthesis

The 'āsher-verb formula in the Numbers 12:11 Behavioural judgement pericope serves to draw the reader's attention to the comprehensive nature of Aaron and Miriam's sin. The narrator uses verses 1 and 2 to describe the words and attitudes of both Aaron and Miriam - their questioning of Moses' choice of wife, and the unique nature of Moses' prophetic role. However, it is not until the reader comes to the specific 'āsher-verb formula at the end of verse 11 that he can recognize

idea may have merit, to blur the two verbs together loses the nuances between the two concepts, and also hides the breadth of Aaron and Miriam's rebellion (ie, that they were foolish *and* sinful).

209. The story of Korah's rebellion is presented in Nm 16. In the narrative, Aaron is the one who is shown to be set apart by the Lord, rather than the one who challenged someone else's uniqueness (as he did in Nm 12).

Aaron's own²¹⁰ acknowledgement of *why* their particular actions and attitudes were perceived as being so sinful – they were foolish (אֲשֶׁר נִאֲלְנוּ) and they sinned (אֲשֶׁר חָטְאנוּ).

An awareness of the presence and function of the particular *'āsher*-verb formula within Numbers 12:11 suggests that an effective English translation of the text could be:

“Aaron said to Moses,

My lord, do not place this sin on us

in which we have been foolish, and

by which we have sinned.”

5.3 1 Kings 14:16 – Jeroboam

5.3.1 Introduction

As part of the same Jeroboam and Ahijah narrative that is explored in 4.3 (therefore much of the introductory information does not need to be repeated here), 1 Kings 14:6 shares much of the same background and context as does 1

210. Note that it is Aaron himself, not the Lord or Moses, who is the one who explicitly identifies their words and attitude as sin.

Kings 14:8, and the reader of this study would be well served to refer to that section.²¹¹ Further to the introductory comments made in 4.3, verse 16 is the final sentence of Ahijah's prophetic pronouncement as he explains the full extent of the Lord's impending judgment on Jeroboam's family and kingdom, as described to the king's wife.

5.3.2 The text

5.3.2.1 Limits of the passage

The prophet Ahijah's utterance starts in 1 Kings 14:6 and continues through to verse 16, and forms a natural textual unit of direct speech. As noted earlier, within the message from Ahijah there is a distinct unit that contains a divine quotation, spoken on behalf of the Lord (verses 7b-11), but as the quotation is contained entirely within Ahijah's speech, we can conclude that verse 16 functions as the end of the direct speech unit.

5.3.2.2 Translation

Taking into account both the basic grammar of the text and the repetitive אֲשֶׁר's as a structural framework, a translation of the text can look like what is shown

211. Also refer to 2.2.1 for a brief introduction to the books of Kings.

below. 1 Kings 14:16 reads:

and he will abandon Israel
וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
proper noun / particle / Qal-i3ms + conjunction
because of the sins of Jeroboam
בְּגִלַּל חַטָּאוֹת יִרְבְּעָם
proper noun / fp noun / preposition
by which he sinned,
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא
Qal-p3ms / relative pronoun
and by which he caused Israel to sin.
212 וְאֲשֶׁר הִחְטִיא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
proper noun / particle / Hiphil-p3ms / relative pronoun + conjunction

The visual presentation (ie, the appropriately indented phrases) and the colour-themed text help the reader to quickly recognize the presence of a double 'āsher-verb combination.

5.3.3 Structural and literary analysis

5.3.3.1 Literary style and narrative characteristics

Ahijah's speech is a self contained unit, and other than a small part of the divine quotation in verse 7-11,²¹³ Jeroboam is spoken about only in the third person. The immediate reason for this, of course, is that the prophet is speaking to Jeroboam's

212. וְאֲשֶׁר הִחְטִיא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל also occurs in 1Ki 15:30 and 1Ki 16:13.

213. Refer to 4.3.3.1.

wife and not the king himself, but the usage of the third person²¹⁴ may also send an implied message to the reader about the relational “distance” between king Jeroboam and the Lord.

Further, the non-participation of Jeroboam is also seen in the irony of the king sending his wife on a mission to understand the future of the king-to-be, his son (1 Kings 14:2-3). Instead, however, she ended up being a messenger of judgment against both the royal family and the kingdom (assuming, of course, that she relayed the prophet’s words to the king).

5.3.3.2 *’āsher*-verb structure

The *’āsher*-verb formula appears at the end of Ahijah’s prophetic speech, and is not predicated by any of the three formal indicators,²¹⁵ but instead is simply introduced by the statement that the Lord will destroy the house of Jeroboam (and by implication, all of Israel) because of the sins of king Jeroboam. Even though the narrative is looking ahead to the coming judgment and destruction of the kingdom, the *’āsher*-verb formula is employed as an historical assessment by means of double אֲשֶׁר and perfective verb clauses. The first *’āsher*-verb clause

214. See Fretheim (1999:84) and Brueggemann (2000:179-180) for observations not only about the third person perspective, but also the crude language of judgment.

refers to Jeroboam's sins (חטא) and the second refers to the sins (חטא) that he caused the people to commit.

5.3.4 Literary context

5.3.4.1 1 Kings 14:16 and the 'šher-verb within 1 and 2 Kings

An analysis of all instances of ירבעם and חטא within a three verse range²¹⁶ throughout the books of Kings shows that both Jeroboam's own sin and the sins that he caused the people to commit, are frequently referred to by the narrator²¹⁷ when other kings were being evaluated. Jeroboam's many sins are also given as the reason for the divine judgment experienced by others, especially as the fulfilment of Ahijah's prophecy.²¹⁸

215. מִי כִּי and לֹא־הָיָה, לֹא־יָקוּם.

216. 1 Ki 14:13f, 16f, 19f; 15:25, 29f, 34; 16:2f, 19, 26; 21:22; 22:53; 2 Ki 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11, 13; 14:23f, 27; 15:8f, 18, 24, 28; 17:21f; 23:15.

217. The following kings are associated with the sinful impact of Jeroboam: Nadab (1 Ki 15:25), Baasha (1 Ki 15:34), Zimri (1 Ki 16:18-19), Omri (1 Ki 16:26), Ahab (1 Ki 21:22), Ahaziah (1 Ki 22:52-53), Joram (2 Ki 3:3), Jehu (2 Ki 10:29-31), Jehoahaz (2 Ki 13:2,6), Jehoash (2 Ki 13:11), Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:24), Zch (2 Ki 15:9), Menahem (2 Ki 15:18), Pekahiah (2 Ki 15:24), Pekah (2 Ki 15:28), and Josiah (2 Ki 23:15 – the only king who reversed the actions of Jeroboam). The same phrase – אֲשֶׁר חָטָא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל – is used in almost every instance.

218. For example, Baasha's destruction of the remaining family of Jeroboam (1 Ki 15:29-30), and the exile of the people (2 Ki 17:21-23).

5.3.5 Character evaluation - Synthesis

Within the prophetic announcement by Ahijah, which in turn is part of both the Jeroboam narrative and the books of Kings as a whole, the question of *why* God abandoned his people is critical from both literary and theological points of view. The answer found within the 1 Kings 14:16 Behavioural judgment text, is that from the narrator's point of view and by means of his use of the specific 'āsher-verb formula, Jeroboam's sins were so profound that they could not be compensated for or ignored. By recognizing the inherent 'āsher-verb formula in the text, the careful reader can now move toward identifying the precise two-fold nature of Jeroboam's incomparable sin: 1) he was personally involved in the sin (אשר חטא), and 2) he was personally responsible for causing the nation to sin (אשר החטיא).

An awareness of the presence and function of the 'āsher-verb formula within 1 Kings 14:16 suggests that an effective English translation of the text could be:

“And he will abandon Israel, because of the sins of Jeroboam:

which he has committed, and

which he has caused Israel to commit.”

5.4 1 Kings 21:25 – Ahab

5.4.1 Introduction

The presentation of the Ahab narrative²¹⁹ starts with an amazingly sharp and negative observation²²⁰ – there was no king of Israel who did more evil than king Ahab. Not even king Jeroboam, who often functioned as the religious and political plumb line by which the future “evil kingships” of Israel were measured,²²¹ seems to have surpassed the all-encompassing wicked nature of king Ahab’s reign.

As is the case with each of the narratives in the books of Kings that contains the *’āsher*-verb formula, the language and events of the *Torah* (especially Deuteronomy) rise to the surface and the Mosaic law’s theological principles are the unwavering standard through which all royal actions are viewed and evaluated. Consequently, as part of the Old Testament’s Deuteronomistic History, the books of Kings often serve as an interpretive analysis²²² of the people of God and how they measured up against the standards established during the lifetime of Moses.

219. 1 Ki 16:29 – 22:40 is the largest narrative devoted to a single king, other than the Solomon narrative.

220. 1 Ki 16:30-33 is also an especially damning assessment of the kingship of Ahab.

221. Refer to 5.3.4.1.

5.4.2 The text

5.4.2.1 Limits of the passage

The Ahab narrative of 1 Kings 21 can be divided into two distinct literary sections: the royal narrative of verses 1-16, and the prophetic narrative of verses 17-29.²²³ The latter section of prophetic activity, within which the *'āsher*-verb formula occurs, consists of direct speech interaction between king Ahab and the prophet Elijah, and it is within this section that the editorial assessment²²⁴ of verses 25-26 is inserted. Due to the break in direct speech and the markings in the text itself,²²⁵ for the purposes of this study, the textual limits of this pericope should be seen as 1 Kings 21:25-26.

5.4.2.2 Translation

Taking into account the formal indicator *לְאִי־הָיָה* and the repetitive *אֲשֶׁר* clauses as a structural framework, a translation of the text can look like what is shown on the next page. 1 Kings 21:25 reads:

222. Refer to 2.2.1 for more information on the relationship between Kings and Deuteronomy.

223. This division is followed by most, but not all, commentators: see Brueggemann (2000:257-263), House (1995:231-233) and Nelson (1987:140-143), for example.

224. That is, the main story line of the narrative continues from verse 24 to verse 27, and verses 25-26 stand apart as discussed in 5.4.3.1.

There was no one else like Ahab,
 רק לֹא־הָיָה כְּאַחָאָב
 proper noun + preposition / Qal-p3ms / negative particle / adverb
 who sold himself
 אֲשֶׁר הִתְמַכֵּר
 Hithpael-p3ms / relative pronoun
 to do evil in the eyes of the Lord,
 לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה
 proper noun / md noun + preposition / ms adjective + article / Qal-inf + preposition
 and who was enticed by his wife Jezebel.
 אֲשֶׁר־הִסְתָּהּ²²⁶ אָחֻז אִיזְבֵּל אִשְׁתּוֹ
 fs noun + 3ms / proper noun / particle + 3ms / Hiphil-p3ms / relative pronoun

The visual presentation (ie, the appropriately indented phrases) and the colour-themed text help the reader to quickly recognize the presence of both a double 'āsher-verb combination and one of the three formal indicators (לא־הָיָה).

5.4.3 Structural and literary analysis

5.4.3.1 Literary style and narrative characteristics

Within the larger narrative section²²⁷ of the passionate interaction between the king and the prophet, verses 25-26 function as parenthetical background information which effectively supplement the main story line. That is, the verses explain *why* Ahab received such a devastating judgment from the Lord (of course,

225. By the use of open spaces and/or a *samekh*.

226. Compare Dt 13:6 (13:7 in the Hebrew text). Also, possibly a derivative of הִסְתָּהּ.

227. Walsh (1992:195) concludes that verses 17-29 consists of six subunits, and he also suggests various literary structures of the pericope.

the insertion of historical and/or editorial details into the main story line is a common feature in biblical narrative).

There are at least two unusual literary characteristics of this passage, one of which is that the narrator's assessment of king Ahab is directly connected to (and possibly even dependant upon) a secondary character – his wife Jezebel.²²⁸ To some degree, she is the source of his wickedness. The other distinguishing element of this particular use of the *'āsher*-verb formula within the books of Kings is that Ahab's uniqueness is not limited to his role as king (or any other authoritarian position),²²⁹ but rather it seems to extend to his negative incomparability as a person.

5.4.3.2 *'āsher*-verb structure

The presence of the *'āsher*-verb formula in the “Ahab Evaluation” is evident in the narrator's standard use of the formal **לְאִדְהִיָּה** statement at the beginning of verse 25, thereby setting king Ahab apart from everyone else. The king's

228. The only other *'āsher*-verb assessments of a king that are linked to a secondary character are found in 1 Ki 14:8 and 14:16, but in both instances the king's wife is simply the messenger and she has no discernable affect on king Jeroboam's negative evaluation.

229. For example, there is no other (**לְאִדְהִיָּה**) *king* like Josiah in 2 Ki 23:25 (although the **לְאִדְהִיָּה** at the end of the verse suggests that there may have been no other person like him), *prophet* like Moses in Dt 34:10-12, or *servant* like David in 1 Ki 14:8.

negative assessment is then further clarified by the use of the two subsequent אשר and perfective verb clauses (אשר סוּחַ and אשר מִכַּר), both of which together articulate exactly why it is that the narrator can conclude that there was no one like Ahab – he sold himself to do evil, and he was enticed by his wife.

The use of specific verb forms within the *'āsher*-verb formula can also be understood as an additional rhetorical tool used by the narrator. That is, both perfective verbs may be reflective/passive²³⁰ in nature, thereby adding further emphasis to the passivity of king Ahab (ie, it is his wife Jezebel who seems to be the driving force behind many of his actions, especially within the Naboth narrative).²³¹

5.4.4 Literary context

5.4.4.1 1 Kings 21:25 and the *'āsher*-verbs within 1 and 2 Kings

A review and analysis of all instances of אֲחָאב and מִכַּר, and אֲחָאב and סוּחַ within a three verse range²³² reveals there are no other references to Ahab's divine assessment in the books of Kings or elsewhere in the Old Testament (other than 1

230. For the significance of specific verb forms, refer to Joüon and Muraoka (1991:124) and Waltke and O'Connor (1990:358).

231. See 1 Ki 19:2; 21:7-8, 11, 15, and also Schniedewind (1993:654).

Kings 21:20, which is part of the same pericope). Although they do not refer to either of the specific *'āsher*-verbs, there are two other references to the generally wicked nature of Ahab's reign in 1 Kings 16:30, 33.

5.4.5 Character evaluation - Synthesis

Once again, the narrator's use of the specific *'āsher*-verb formula, this time in the 1 Kings 21:25 Behavioural judgment pericope, proves to be an effective literary technique to highlight to the careful reader the exact nature of king Ahab's incomparability, as seen from the narrator's perspective. Not only does the formal indicator **לְאִדְהִיָּה** notify the reader of Ahab's general uniqueness, but the specific inclusion of the two *'āsher*-verb combination clauses (**סוֹחַ אֲשֶׁר מִכֵּר** and **אֲשֶׁר**) articulates the precise nature of king Ahab's unfortunate and unenviable notoriety.

An awareness of the presence and function of the specific *'āsher*-verb formula within 1 Kings 21:25 suggests that an effective English translation of the text could be:

“There was no one else like Ahab:

232. **אֲשֶׁר** and **מִכֵּר** are in 1 Ki 21:20, 25. **אֲשֶׁר** and **סוֹחַ** are in 1 Ki 21:25; 2 Chr 18:2.

*who sold himself (to do evil in the eyes of the Lord), and
who was enticed by his wife Jezebel.”*

5.5 Jeremiah 8:2 – Judah / Jerusalem

5.5.1 Introduction

The first question that must be asked as part of any attempt to responsibly study the biblical book of Jeremiah, is “*which book of Jeremiah is the correct one?*”, as the Masoretic Text and Septuagint versions of Jeremiah are markedly different.²³³ However, as has been discussed in the introductory sections of this study, our focus here is on a specific Hebrew narratological technique, and naturally therefore it is concerned with the Masoretic Text.

The largest of the Old Testament prophetic writings, the book of Jeremiah is rich in literary complexity and theological distinctiveness, both of which elements are strongly influenced by the chaotic political and religious context of the book, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem.²³⁴ Jeremiah is a mixture of poetry

233. See Petersen (2002:97-103) for a good summary of the current debate. Also refer to Craigie et al. (1991:xli-xlv).

234. “The dominant and shaping event of the entire [Old Testament]”, according to Brueggemann (1998:1).

and prose, and contains many themes, such as Mosaic law,²³⁵ judgement,²³⁶ and the new covenant.²³⁷ Not surprisingly, the structure of the book is also somewhat ambiguous, although two possibilities are most probable.

Thematically, Jeremiah can be divided into three parts:

Prophetic oracles and prose speeches (chapters 1 – 25)

Prose narratives about Jeremiah (chapters 26 – 45)

Oracles against the nations (chapters 46-52)

Alternatively, Jeremiah could be bisected into two separate books:

A book of judgement (chapters 1-25)

A book of new beginnings (chapters 26-52)

Regardless of the structural approach selected, the Jeremiah 8:2 pericope falls within the first section of the book, and it forms an integral part of Jeremiah's initial prophetic oracles, spoken in, and to, Jerusalem.

235. Jr 2:8; 6:19; 8:8; 9:12; 16:11; 18:18; 26:4; 31:33; 32:23; 44:10, 23.

236. For example, judgment against Judah (Jr 25-29) and against the nations (Jr 46-51).

5.5.2 The text

5.5.2.1 Limits of the passage

Jeremiah's prophetic monologue is initiated at the start of chapter 7 and continues until chapter 10, and it consists of a number of smaller oracles often introduced by the phrase "say to them" (ואמרת) or a similar introduction. The manuscript evidence indicates that the smaller pericope of which the *'āsher*-verb formula is an integral part, begins with 7:32 and ends with 8:3,²³⁸ but this literary unit can be refined even more. The description of the Lord's final judgment is both initiated and concluded by the phrase "declares the Lord" (נאם יהוה), and for the purposes of this study, textual limits of Jeremiah 8:1-3 are sufficient.

5.5.2.2 Translation

Taking into account the basic grammar of the text, the five repetitive אשר clauses and the repeated ל prepositions as a structural framework, a translation of the text can look like what is shown below. Jeremiah 8:2 reads:

237. For example, Jr 11:1-17; 31:31-40; 33:19-26.

238. Ben-Asher and Dotan (2001:661-662) and Breuer and Ofer (2000:432).

They will be spread out before the sun, the moon and all the stars of heaven,

וְשִׁטְחוּם לְשֶׁמֶשׁ וְלִיָּרֵחַ וְלְכָל צֶבֶא הַשָּׁמַיִם

mp noun + article / ms noun / ms noun + article + preposition + conj / ms noun + article + preposition / Qal-3cp + 3mp + conj

which they have loved,

וְאֲשֶׁר אֶהְבוּם

Qal-p3mp + 3mp / relative pronoun

which they have served,

וְאֲשֶׁר עִבְדוּם

Qal-p3cp + 3mp / relative pronoun + conjunction

which they have followed,

וְאֲשֶׁר הִלְכוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם

adverb + 3mp / Qal-p3cp / relative pronoun + conjunction

which they have consulted,

וְאֲשֶׁר דָּרְשׂוּם

Qal-p3cp + 3mp / relative pronoun + conjunction

and which they have worshipped.

וְאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָהֶם

preposition + 3mp / Hishtaphel-p3cp / relative pronoun + conjunction

They will not be gathered

לֹא יֵאָסְפוּ

Niphal-i3mp / negative article

and they will not be buried;

וְלֹא יִקָּבְרוּ

Niphal-i3mp / negative article + conjunction

they will be like dung lying on the ground.

לְדָמֵן עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה יִהְיוּ

Qal-i3mp / fs noun + article / fp noun / preposition / ms noun + preposition

The visual presentation (ie, the appropriately indented phrases) and the colour-themed text help the reader to quickly recognize the presence of a quintuple 'āsher-verb combination.

5.5.3 Structural and literary analysis

5.5.3.1 Literary style and narrative characteristics

Within the Jeremiah 8:1-3 pericope, the noun “bones” (עצם) is used five times (all in verse one, referring to literal human bones), whereas it is used only two times throughout the rest of book of Jeremiah. In both instances outside of the Jeremiah 8:1-3 passage,²³⁹ Jeremiah uses the term metaphorically, in reference to the strong emotion that he is feeling at the time.

Another peculiar term used in Jeremiah’s speech against astral worship²⁴⁰ is “dung” (רִמָּה), which occurs only five times in the Hebrew Bible, always in the context of divine judgement.²⁴¹ The curse of being like dung is usually expanded by the inclusion of “lying on the ground” for all to see (including the sun, the moon and the hosts of heaven)²⁴², perhaps as a way of describing complete judgement and abandonment.²⁴³ Given the language and tone of the passage, perhaps it is not surprising that Ryken (2001:139) referred to this pericope as one of the low points in Jeremiah’s book.

239. Jr 20:9; 23:9.

240. See Holladay and Hanson (1986:272), Nicholson (1973:83) and Thompson (1980:295).

241. Jezebel (2 Ki 9:37), Midian, Sisera and Jabin (Ps 83:10), people of Jerusalem (Jr 9:22; 16:4) and those who will experience God’s wrath (Jr 25:33).

242. Brueggemann (1998:84) rightly concludes that “the punishment fits the sin”.

243. See Bracke (2000:85), Carroll (1986:224-225) and Huey (1993:111).

5.5.3.2 'āsher-verb structure

The particular 'āsher-verb formula found in Jeremiah 8:2 is quite distinctive, in that there is a unique five-fold repetition²⁴⁴ of the 'āsher-verb clause. In the pericope, the bones of the people (and by extension, the people themselves) of Judah are posthumously cursed²⁴⁵ by being exhumed, for five interrelated reasons, each of which is identified by a separate אשר and perfective verb clause. The people are judged because of “the sun, the moon and all the hosts of heaven” which they have loved (אשר אהבום), which they have served (אשר עבדום), which they have followed (אשר הלכו אחריהם), which they have consulted (אשר דרשום) and which they have worshipped (אשר השתחוו להם). Immediately following the five-fold unit of 'āsher-verb clauses, an additional curse is indicated by the repeated use of the preposition ל²⁴⁶ - their bones would not be gathered or buried, but in fact, they would be like dung lying on the ground.

244. The fivefold repetition of אשר is noted by Holladay and Hanson (1986:271), but is not explored.

245. See Craigie et al. (1991:126-127) and McKane et al. (1986:181).

246. Refer to 2.1 (Dt 34:10-12) and 4.2 (2 Sm 7:23) for other examples of the repetitive use of ל within the 'āsher-verb formula.

5.5.4 Literary context

5.5.4.1 Jeremiah 8:2 and the 'āsher-verbs within the Old Testament

The five verbs used in the Jeremiah 8:2 'āsher-verb formula do not occur together anywhere else in the Old Testament. However, Jeremiah (and presumably his original hearers and readers) must have been aware that the Mosaic law clearly forbade the people of Israel to engage in (עבד and חוה) any form of astral worship,²⁴⁷ with the consequence for disobedience being the death penalty.²⁴⁸ Despite the strong warning, the biblical narrative presents other examples of both the leaders and the people worshipping and serving celestial objects,²⁴⁹ although there is also a glimpse of hope during the reign of king Josiah.²⁵⁰

5.5.5 Character evaluation - Synthesis

The language, imagery and function of the 'āsher-verb formula within the Jeremiah 8:1-3 Behavioural judgment text paints a vivid picture of the disobedient

247. Dt 4:19. Note also Gn 37:9, where Joseph informs his brothers of a dream in which the sun, moon and stars all bow down *to him*.

248. Dt 17:2-7.

249. King Manasseh initiated astral worship (2 Ki 21:3,5; 2 Chr 33:3,5) and the people openly participated as well (2 Ki 17:16).

250. King Josiah removed the objects of astral worship (2 Ki 23:4-5), perhaps as part of his response to the renewal of the covenant (2 Ki 23:1-3) or in response to Zephaniah's prophecy (Zph 1:4-5). Ultimately, however, Lundbom (1999:500) notes that "Bar 2:24-25 records the sacrilege as having taken place".

actions of both the leaders and the people of Israel, and the resultant divine judgment. Jeremiah's prophetic words contain an assessment that is damning and all-encompassing, highlighted by the unique five-fold use of the 'āsher-verb formula, as it relates to the sun, moon and hosts of heaven which the people loved (אשר אהבו), served (אשר עבדום), followed (אשר הלכו אחריהם), consulted (דרשום אשר) and worshipped (אשר השתחוו להם). As can be recognized by the careful reader who has now become familiar with the typical function of the 'āsher-verb formula, repetitive characteristics of the text not only add a distinct literary element to the pericope, but also add a powerful theological reminder and impact as well.

An awareness of the presence and function of the specific 'āsher-verb formula within Jeremiah 8:2 suggests that an effective English translation of the text could be:

“They will be spread out before the sun, the moon and all the stars of heaven,

which they have loved,

which they have served,

which they have followed,

which they have consulted, and

which they have worshipped.

They will not be gathered, and they will not be buried;

They will be like dung lying on the ground.”

5.6 Conclusion

Within the Behavioural judgment text-type, each of the five subject characters is evaluated by the narrator, in light of their specific past actions. According to the narrator, the people experienced a plague because both they and Aaron made the calf. Later, Aaron and Miriam experienced the judgement of the Lord because they were foolish and they sinned. Within Ahijah’s prophetic speech, king Jeroboam is condemned because of his own sin and also the sin that he caused Israel to commit. Another king, Ahab, was also negatively evaluated by the narrator because he sold himself to do evil and he allowed himself to be enticed by his wife Jezebel. Finally, the people of Jerusalem were devastatingly judged through Jeremiah’s prophetic assessment of the people’s love, service, following, consultation and worship of the sun, moon and stars of heaven. In each pericope, it is the distinct *’āsher*-verb formula that clearly identifies the subject character and/or their action(s) as unique, and also lists the specific characteristics that support the narrator’s conclusion.

6 Conclusion and synthesis

6.1 Function

6.1.1 Introduction and Characteristics

Returning to the introductory comments, the goals of this study are first, to accurately identify the presence of the *'āsher*-verb formula throughout the text of the Old Testament, second, to suggest the literary function of the formula, and third, to propose a few initial theological observations of how the formula enhances the reader's understanding of the subject characters. To that end, the results of the methodology²⁵¹ employed through this study indicate that 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. The evidence suggests that *the 'āsher-verb formula is a specific and unique linguistic feature in biblical Hebrew that contributes to the reader's literary and theological understanding of both the text and the subject character in multiple ways*. 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

251. As a summary of 1.2, the five general methods are: Step 1 - Delimitation criticism, Step 2 - Text-linguistic analysis, Step 3 - Textual criticism, Step 4 - Structuralism, and Step 5 -

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.

The twelve pericopes that contain the *'āsher*-verb formula have been linguistically and theologically analyzed within their unique text-type and narratological setting in order to discern and describe the structure, narrative function, theological significance and specific literary contexts in which the narrator employs the formula. In addition to the careful analysis of each pericope, a new and clearer English translation of each text has also been suggested to the reader, taking into account the structure, use and narratological function of the specific *'āsher*-verb formula.

As has been readily seen throughout this study, the *'āsher*-verb formula reflects a remarkably consistent literary structure, and as such, the careful reader of the Bible can begin to anticipate and discern the presence of the formula 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. In six of the *'āsher*-verb formula occurrences, there is the inclusion of one of the three formal indicators,²⁵² and in five of the pericopes, the *'āsher*-verb clause is further refined by the presence of a specifically repeated preposition.²⁵³ Although there are certainly other instances of character evaluation within the Old Testament,²⁵⁴ the *'āsher*-verb formula stands unique due to the multi-layer technique that is often used: layer 1 – formal indicator, layer 2 – *'āsher*-verb combination(s), layer 3 – repetitive preposition(s). Finally, in essence, the entire *'āsher*-verb formula, taken as an intrinsic literary unit, often functions adjectively in relationship to the previously identified subject.

6.1.2 Context

The particular literary contexts, or text-types, in which the specific evaluative *'āsher*-verb formula is used by the narrator can be categorized into four general areas. As summarized below in the following chart, the formula is employed 1) at the end of a biblical character's life, 2) in contexts of looking forward to the future, 3) as a general historical assessment, and 4) in times of judgement for

252. מי כּ לֹא־הָיָה, לֹא־קָוָם.

253. ל (Dt 34:10-12; 2 Sm 7:23, Jr 8:2) or מִן (Gn 24:7).

254. For example, Noah (Gn 6:9) and Saul (1 Sa 15:10-11).

wrong doing.

Text-Type	Passage	Character	Evaluator	Indicator	1X	2X	3X	4X	5X
Epitaph	Dt 34:10-12	Moses	Narrator	לא־קום			אשר ירע אשר שלח אשר עשה		
Epitaph	2 Ki 23:25	Josiah	Narrator	לא־היה לא־קום	אשר טוב				
Future	Nm 27:16-17	Moses' Successor	Moses	Implied				אשר יצא אשר בוא אשר יצא אשר בוא	
Future	2 Chr 1:11- 12	Solomon	God	לא־היה (2x)		אשר שפח אשר מלך אשר היה אשר פנה			
Historical	Gn 24:7	The Lord	Abraham	Implied			אשר לקח אשר דבר אשר שבע		
Historical	2 Sa 7:23 1 Chr 17:21	The People	David	מי כִּ		אשר הלך אשר פרה			
Historical	1 Ki 14:8	David	The Lord	לא־היה		אשר שמר אשר הלך			
Judgment	Ex 32:35	The People	Narrator	Implied		אשר עשה אשר עשה			
Judgment	Nm 12:11	Aaron and Miriam	Aaron	Implied		אשר יאל אשר חטא			
Judgment	1 Ki 14:16	Jeroboam	The Lord	Implied		אשר חטא אשר חטא			
Judgment	1 Ki 21:25	Ahab	Narrator	לא־היה		אשר מכר אשר סת			
Judgment	Jr 8:2	All Jerusalem	The Lord	Implied					אשר אהב אשר עבר אשר הלך אשר ררש אשר שחה

6.1.2.1 Behavioural epitaph

Twice in the Old Testament, the *'āsher*-verb formula is used by the narrator as part of his overall and concluding analysis of a character's life. In Deuteronomy

34:10-12, the specific three-fold use of the *'āsher-verb* formula increases the clarity of an otherwise unrecognizable picture of Moses' uniqueness as a *prophet* – he was known by God, he was sent, and he responded. Canonically later in the biblical text, in 2 Kings 23:25, the narrator states his case for the incomparable *kingly* role of Josiah, using the language of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:5) to provide the rationale for his conclusion. In both cases, the *'āsher-verb* formula assessment is markedly positive, it is used in a cultic context, and the character is set apart as being incomparable for all time.

6.1.2.2 Narrative future

Of the twelve occurrences of the *'āsher-verb* formula, two are focussed on the future, and both times the words containing the formula are spoken by someone other than the subject character. As part of the divine conversation between Moses and the Lord presented to the reader in Numbers 27:11-12, Moses identified the four specific characteristics of his ideal replacement as the leader of Israel by using the *'āsher-verb* formula's repeated "going" and "coming" terminology. Also, during another human-divine conversation, the Lord responded to king Solomon's request by promising that he would be enabled to judge the people of God, and that his wealth and honour would be unequalled (2 Chronicles 1:11-12).

6.1.2.3 Narrative historical

Three of the *'āsher*-verb formula pericopes reflect a literary context of general historical assessment, either of an individual or of a national group. The patriarch Abraham's last recorded words contain his evaluation of the Lord, based upon his previous experiences. By recognizing of the *'āsher*-verb formula, the reader becomes aware that Abraham concluded that the Lord was unique for three inter-related reasons: the Lord took him, spoke to him and swore to him (Genesis 24:7). The Lord also plays a crucial role in king David's evaluation of the people of Israel (2 Samuel 7:23), when he stated that the people's incomparability was based on the Lord's taking and redeeming of them, presented via the two-fold use of the *'āsher*-verb formula. Finally, through the words of the prophet Ahijah, the Lord again is central as he stated that David's unequalled servant nature was evidenced by the fact that David kept his commands and walked after him (1 Kings 14:8).

6.1.2.4 Behavioural judgement

In five of the twelve *'āsher*-verb formula pericopes, the literary context is the Lord's divine judgement of the subject based upon the subject's previous actions. Two kings – Jeroboam and Ahab – are given strongly worded negative assessments that describe their reigns as being either “sinful” or “wicked” (1

Kings 14:16 and 1 Kings 21:25, respectively). Also, during the events of the Exodus from Egypt, the entire Israelite people are judged for making the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:35) and Aaron and Miriam are judged for questioning Moses' divinely appointed authority (Numbers 12:11). Finally, during the chaotic years near the end of the Israelite kingdom, all of Jerusalem is judged for their participation in forbidden astral worship (Jeremiah 8:2). In each pericope, the specific *'āsher*-verb formula is employed by the narrator, and once the reader has become adept and identifying and understanding the formula, the precise reasons *why* divine judgment was being executed on the particular subject (ie, the nature of their "evaluation") becomes significantly clearer.

Clearly, the *'āsher*-verb formula is intentionally employed by the narrator in a specific range of literary contexts, and each usage seems to fall into one of the four linguistic text-types identified above. Given the contexts in which it is used, it is logical to conclude that the *'āsher*-verb formula is integral to the formation, and subsequent 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.

6.2 Concluding analysis

As has been discovered throughout this study's literary and theological exploration and analysis of the twelve identified Old Testament texts, the *'āsher*-verb formula is indeed a specific linguistic technique used by the various biblical narrators. Employed in one of the four literary contexts²⁵⁵ of character²⁵⁶ evaluation (primarily either retrospective or anticipatory), the intentional and structured use of either single or multiple *'āsher*-verb combination clauses provides the careful reader with a clearer understanding of the narrator's specific rationale for presenting a particular character as incomparable. Often used in conjunction with either a formal or informal textual indicator and/or further revision through the use of repeated prepositions, the *'āsher*-verb formula is a sophisticated literary tool that sheds additional light on the narrative skill, artistry and rhetorical intention of the ancient biblical writers. As such, like the formation of a base camp on a long journey to a mountain's summit, this study represents only the first step of hopefully many more in the further exploration and refinement of the *'āsher*-verb formula, as it becomes an additional tool used by

255. As initially described in 1.2.3, the four text-types are Behavioural epitaph, Narrative future, Narrative historical and Behavioural judgement.

256. As stated in the introduction, the term "character" refers primarily to a literary character (that is, a narrative story consists of multiple characters, plot development, etc), although the term often has the secondary meaning of personality trait, moral character, etc. Throughout this study, however, the dual meanings sometime overlap, as the character (nature) of a character (specific individual or group) is evaluated by means of the *'āsher*-verb formula.

students of Old Testament literature and theology.