

### **English Abstract**

The sheer quantity of oaths in biblical narratives, their exceptional solemn and fervent character, and the particular manner in which they are employed appear to indicate the literary significance of the biblical oath. Indeed, scholars of general literature have long maintained that literature regularly employs oaths as literary devices, generating numerous analyses of their literary role. Nevertheless, while biblical scholarship has devoted considerable effort to studying the nature of biblical oaths, their similarities to oaths in cognate Ancient Near Eastern cultures, the etymological roots of the different oath words and their precise definition, and the legal function of the oath in the Bible, the employment of the oath as a literary device in the biblical narrative has been neglected.

It has been, therefore, my intention in this study to examine the literary place of the oath within the biblical narratives. After an initial investigation regarding the nature of the oath and the source of its power, I turn my attention to the literary role of the oath in the biblical narrative.

I have divided this study into two parts. The first section is designed to examine the literary significance of the various formulae used to make oaths in the biblical narratives. I posited as a premise that the particular language of an oath formula should be strongly indicative of its underlying meaning and should, therefore, augment the reader's apprehension of the biblical narrative. It seemed evident that minor variations could contribute to the biblical portrayal of the oath's purpose within the context of the narrative in which it is found. After examining the etymological roots and origin of the

oath formulae כה יעשה, חי ה', and חלילה, I explored the anomalies of each respective oath formula, with the assumption that it is designed to enhance or mirror the primary meaning of the narrative.

By proposing possible ideas or objectives for each respective deviation from the usual formula, I have accomplished two goals. First, I have ascertained that the variances in the oath formulae do indeed function as a deliberate literary phenomenon designed to underscore some component of the narrative. Furthermore, I have revealed additional or more precise meanings in the biblical stories and thereby enhanced our apprehension of the subtext of the biblical narrative.

In order to properly examine the oath's literary role, in the second section of this study, I chose two characters who frequently engage in oath-making in biblical narratives. In this way, I was able to explore the manner in which the oaths taken by, to and about these characters mirror the narrative, and function as a prism through which the character's career is refracted. Because both Saul's and David's narrative careers span many chapters and appear to involve a significant metamorphosis in their personae, these characters have proven to be fertile testing ground for examining their development in light of the abundant oaths which concern them. An examination of the oaths in both Saul's and David's career, suggests that they may be viewed as structural markers, employed at crucial junctures in a character's career in order to underscore its different stages. In this way, the oath functions as a plot marker, helping to form or support the structural backbone of the narrative.

It appears, then that oaths do not appear arbitrarily in biblical narratives. Instead, oaths are artfully placed in order to underscore different aspects of the literary work. In

this way, oaths function as textual indicators which shed light on a character's inner life, intentions, aspirations or traits. Moreover, the oaths in a story may be seen as an index to the underlying meaning of a narrative, informing the reader as to its inner dynamics, the tensions and resolutions at its core. In the final analysis, oaths appear to be an integral part of the biblical narrative, and a literary examination of the oaths in a given narrative can indeed contribute greatly to a deeper understanding of its central ideas.