

Prologue of Job: *A Narrative Study*

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The objective of this study is to analyze the prologue of Job from a literary perspective and to see how this new science has had an adverse reaction to the principles postulated in source criticism,¹ form criticism,² redaction criticism,³ or traditio-historical criticism.⁴ This essay will explain how the prologue and epilogue cannot be separated from the dialogue from a literary outlook. This study will consider **narrator, scene, narrative plot, character types, dialogue, point of view, and repetition** to illustrate the composite nature of the Book of Job. Since Hebrew narrative is a distinct genre (type or kind) of literature, it requires a distinct hermeneutical approach, that is to say, a distinct method of exegeting the text.

¹See F. B. Huey, Jr. & Bruce Conley, *A Student's Dictionary for Biblical & Theological Studies: A Handbook of Special and Technical Terms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 179, where they write: “**SOURCE CRITICISM.** A special aspect of → literary criticism, an analytical→methodology used in the study of biblical books to discover individual documents (or sources) that were used in the construction of a particular literary unit as we now have it.”

²Ibid., 81, where they say: “**FORM CRITICISM.** The analysis of a text according to typical, identifiable forms by which the people of a given cultural context expresses itself linguistically.”

³Ibid., 164, where they explain: “**REDACTION CRITICISM.** A study of how the Scriptures reached their final form from the earliest oral form, through a process of editing and composition, to their written form.”

⁴Ibid., 191, where they give explanation:

TRADITIO-HISTORICAL CRITICISM. Another name for →tradition criticism. **TRADITION CRITICISM, TRADITION HISTORY.** A study of the history of a tradition from its oral to its written stage. It is based on the belief that the material in the OT (and the NT to a lesser extent) passed through many generations by word of mouth before taking a fixed written form.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARSHIP ON THE BOOK OF JOB

The methods of critical study formulated by H. B. Witter (German pastor and one of the earliest to advance the Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch in the early 1700s) were later developed still further by Jean Astruc (1684-1766, French physician—posited an *Elohim* source and a *Yahweh* source) in 1753.⁵ The critical studies by Witter and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918, German biblical scholar)⁶ were essentially source splitting. Wellhausen popularized source splitting in his study of the Pentateuch (The first five books of the Old Testament—known for his analysis of the structure and the dating of the Pentateuch). Eventually, this methodology of biblical study was applied to other books of the Bible. Wellhausen sought to identify the sources behind the Pentateuch. He denied Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Old Testament.

Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791, German church historian and biblical commentator) is generally designated as the father of the technique that specializes

⁵See Elgin Moyer, revised and enlarged by Earle E. Cairns (Chicago: Mood Press, 1982), 21, where they write:

French doctor and formulator of early Pentateuchal criticism. Born in Languedoc into a Huguenot pastor's family which became Roman Catholic in 1685. Studied at Montpellier and taught medicine there and at Toulouse and Paris. Court physician to Louis XV. Argued in his *Conjectures on the Memoires originaux don't il livre de la Genese* that Moses used earlier sources, a Yahweh and Elohim source based on the names of God, in writing the book of Genesis.

⁶Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox, 1981), 210, where he says,

Wellhausen, Julian (1844-1918). Born the son of a Lutheran pastor in Hameln, Germany, W. studied under the famed OT scholar Heinrich Ewald in Gottingen, and became Prof. of OT on the theological faculty in Greifswald in 1872, a position from which he resigned because of ecclesiastical opposition to his radically historical approach to OT studies, most notably to his theories concerning the formation of the Pentateuch. Subsequently, he became prof. of Semitic languages in Halle (1882), Marburg (1885), and Gottingen (1892). Accomplished in NT and Islamic studies as well as the OT, W's great influence on Biblical criticism nevertheless derived largely from his classic work, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (1878, 1883; reprint: Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1973).

in treating Scripture as an object of criticism and historical scrutiny. Many scholars have accepted the dictum of Semler: “The root of the evil (in theology) is the interchangeable use of the terms ‘Scripture’ and ‘Word of God.’”⁷ As a result of this distinction, the Scriptures came to be viewed as any other book, not the Word of God. The principles of biblical criticism were applied, and, as a result, scholars began to deny the continuity of the Book of Job. John Barton (b. 1948, Oriel and Laing Professor of the interpretation of Holy Scripture), in a most candid exploration of the various critical methodologies—structuralism, literary analysis, form criticism, redaction criticism, and new criticism—concludes that they

Can take us some way towards a better understanding of what lies behind the biblical text, but they all seem to fail us if we look to them for help in reading the text as it actually meets us when we open a Bible. Indeed, the method that looks most promising from this point of view—redaction criticism—also seems the most fragile. The claim that any of these methods, or even all of them together, constitutes the one ‘valid’ way of handling the Old Testament seems to have an obvious flaw in it. The flaw is that there are questions we want to ask that none of these methods can answer for us. The methods we have got will simply not tell us what we want to know.⁸

The various methods of higher criticism⁹ have questioned the unity and integrity of the text of Job. In spite of the weightiness of M. H. Pope’s scholarship, he writes:

Unity and integrity. A mere summary of the book’s contents inevitably raises the question of its unity and integrity, for its parts are seemingly inconsistent and incongruous, and the plan and structure of the whole seems illogical and haphazard.¹⁰

⁷As cited by Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 15.

⁸John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 77-78.

⁹See Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 74, where he defines higher criticism:

“Higher criticism. A method of biblical interpretation which seeks to determine the authorship and date of books, the literary documents underlying them, and their historical dependability. Higher criticism contrasts with lower criticism, which concerns itself with questions of the correct reading of the text.

¹⁰George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), vol., 2: 920, s.v. “Job, Book of,” by M. H. Pope.

As we apply the principles of literary analysis to Job, we will observe that there is unity and integrity in the entire Book. Even though many scholars deny this unity, nevertheless, there is coherence to the whole. Some scholars want to separate the middle from the beginning and end. For example, John Hayes (1934-2013, a distinguished, internationally recognized scholar of the Old Testament) summarizes this particular philosophy: “The prologue and the epilogue may have once circulated in Israel as a folk narrative.”¹¹ It is in this same vein that Rolf Rendtorff (1925-2014, Emeritus Professor of Old Testament at the University of Heidelberg) also enumerates a number of scholars who deny the unity and integrity of the book. For instance, he explains:

There is much to be said for assuming that the narrative framework first had an independent existence (some scholars, e.g. Hoffmann, doubt this). The Narrative framework often used to be called a ‘folk book.’ In the meantime, however, its ‘cultured and developed narrative art’ (Fohrer) has been recognized and it has been termed a didactic wisdom narrative (Muller 1977). There is argument as to whether the narrative had its present form and present extent from the very beginning. Some exegetes assume that the two scenes in heaven were added later (cf. Horst) or that the figure of Satan was inserted at a secondary stage (Fohrer) so that originally YHWH himself caused Job’s suffering. The role of the friends also raises questions: in the last part of the narrative framework there is mention of a visit by Job’s kinsfolk and acquaintances (42:11) which the preceding scene (42:7-9) does not seem to presuppose. It has been argued from this that there was originally no mention of the friends in the narrative (Alt) or that the visitors in 2.11-13 were primarily Job’s tempters, a role which is now taken by his wife (2.9). However, the narrative can no longer be detached from its unction as a framework, so that all such attempts at reconstruction remain hypothetical.¹²

According to Rendtorff, some scholars deny the “framework” (**prologue and epilogue**) as part of the original story. As the scholars attempt to restructure Job, Rendtorff asserts, “However, the narrative can no longer be detached from its function as a framework, so that all such attempts at reconstruction remain hypothetical.”¹³ Also, H. H. Rowley (1890-1969), in his excellent commentary, captures the essence of the denial of the original prologue and epilogue by saying: “Of this there is no evidence but the fertile brain of the modern author.”¹⁴ He forcefully argues that such postulated presuppositions are without any evidence to substantiate their conclusions. Rowley poignantly captures the essence of the utter

¹¹John Hayes, *An Introduction to Old Testament Study* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 354.

¹²Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Fortress Press, 1986), 250-51.

¹³*Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁴H. H. Rowley, *The New Century bible Commentary, The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 9.

futility of the denial of unity and integrity advanced by many modern scholars when he writes:

But without some Prologue the book is unintelligible, and if it be supposed that a different Prologue once stood here, its disappearance needs to be accounted for. If it was more relevant than the present Prologue, its replacement is hard to understand; if less relevant, the inability of the brilliant author of the Dialogue to compose a suitable introduction would be remarkable. On the other hand, without some Epilogue the book would be incomplete. If originally there were neither Prologue nor Epilogue, Job's sufferings would be unaccounted for and without beginning or ending.¹⁵

As one studies the prologue, one soon discovers that many key words/themes in the dialogue were foreshadowed in the prologue. This foreshadowing will be developed in the analysis of the literary techniques applied to the book of Job. Rowley speaks of various views advanced by many scholars to account for what they consider to be incongruities and inconsistencies in the prologue and epilogue. As stated above, he states emphatically, "Of this there is no evidence but the fertile brain of the modern author." Also, Norman Habel (b.1932) advocates the integrity of the Book of Job. He points out, with justice:

The preceding analysis of the narrative plot of the book of Job reveals an underlying structure which gives coherence to the work as a literary whole. Prologue, dialogue speeches, and epilogue are integrated into a total artistic work through this plot structure. This unity, however, intends beyond the narrative plot to include terminological, thematic, and literary features. The integrity of the work is evident in its overall construction, the setting of its characters, and the interrelationship of its several parts.¹⁶

Habel correctly states the coherence in the Book of Job. As we work through the prologue, we soon discover the artistic work of the narrator, and we also observe that there is a plot structure through the Book of Job. The entire book may be seen as a series of speeches—the narrator speaking in prologue and epilogue and the characters in dialogue. The Book of Job consists of two basic parts—a prologue and an epilogue in prose form (Chapters 1 and 2; 42:1-17) and an extended dialogue in poetic form (3:1—42:6). We should take seriously the narrator, the scene, the techniques of plot analysis, dialogue, repetition, and point of view in order to appreciate the narrative techniques of the author. In developing the integrity of the Book of Job, we must begin with the narrator as he unfolds the story in the prologue.

¹⁵Ibid., 8.

¹⁶Norman Habel, *The Book of Job* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 35.

LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF JOB

The Narrator

The **narrator** is an integral part of the narrative. Bar-Efrat calls attention to the importance of the voice of the narrator in seeking to understand the unfolding of the plot. He writes: “His voice is heard continually, along with the voices of the acting characters, through his eyes we see and through his ears we hear whatever is happening in the narrative world. He also interprets for us the vents of this world.”¹⁷ Although the narrator usually remains inconspicuous, we become aware of his presence when we look for telltale signs exposing the distance between the narrator and the narrated events.

For example, the narrator closes the inaccessibility by revealing what is going on behind the scenes: “One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD” (Job 1:6); “While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said” (1:18); and, “In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (1:22). The reader also becomes aware of the narrator when he or she notices how the narrator introduces the characters, when he informs the reader who is talking, and when he reveals the nature of the talk. For instance, the narrator says, “In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (1:1). Again, the narrator writes: “The LORD said to Satan” (1:7) and “Have you considered my servant Job?” (1:8). It is through these telltale signs, we hear the narrator’s voice.

As we read biblical narrative, we immediately become conscious of the narrator’s omniscience and omnipresence. In other words, the reader, too, knows everything and is present everywhere. In the Book of Job, we witness the narrator’s omnipresence and omniscience. We observe how the narrator switches back and forth between heaven and earth, and how he reveals the innermost thoughts of the characters. In order to illustrate this point of omniscience and omnipresent in Job, we should consider how the narrator begins his narrative with an earthly scene (1:1-5), then moves to an heavenly scene (1:6-12), and again moves back to an earthly scene (1:13-22), then once more he returns to heaven again (2:1-6), and finally he returns to earth again (2:7-10).

The most notable evidence of the narrator’s omniscience is when he tells his readers about God’s judgment about Job: “He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8). Once more, listen as God reveals His thoughts and judgment about Job’s character: “There is no one on earth like him” (1:8). The

¹⁷Bar-Efrat, *Immanuel* 8 (1978): 20, quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 206.

narrator developed the **prologue** (introduction) as the framework for the entire book. Without the framework, the dialogue between Job and his friends would not make sense. In other words, the prologue establishes the stage for the beginning of the dialogue.

The Scene

Adele Berlin (B. 1943) biblical scholar and one of the most prominent practitioners of a literary approach to the Bible) likens the Hebrew narrative to “the frames from which films are made. Each one exists separately, and they are combined in a certain order to make the greater narrative, but an individual frame has no life of its own outside of the film as a whole.”¹⁸ At points in the prologue, the narrator disappears completely from the scene. But at other times, the lens zoom “in and out” to catch details. For instance, one discerns details in the following remarks: “In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (1:22); or, “On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him” (2:1). The scene in 2:11-13 prepares the stage for the dialogue between Job and his friends (Chapters 3—37).

The Narrative Plot

The narrative plot (a scheme or design) also sets forth the unity of the book. A narrative “‘must have a plot,’ claims Jay Wilcoxon. In other words, a plot must have a beginning, middle, and end which contribute to the buildup and release of dramatic tension.”¹⁹ In narrative of Job, we find a **beginning** (prologue), a **middle** (dialogue), and an **ending** (epilogue). Tremper Longman III (Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California) captures the essence of plot when he writes: “As a general rule, plot is thrust forward by conflict. The conflict generates interest in its resolution. The beginning of a story, with its introduction of conflict, thus pushes us through the middle toward the end, when conflict is resolved.”²⁰ A narrative plot underlies Job and gives coherence to the text as a whole. It is in this vein that Robert Alter (b. 1932) writes:

¹⁸Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1987), 29. (Before retirement, she was Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Maryland.)

¹⁹Cited in Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 203.

²⁰Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 93.

A quick review of the main functions served by narration in the Bible will give us a better sense of the special rhythm which the Hebrew writers tell their tales: beginning with narration, they move into dialogue, drawing back momentarily or at length to narrate again, but always centering on the sharply salient verbal intercourse of the characters, who act upon one another, discover themselves, affirm or expose their relation to God, through the force of language.²¹

Not only does narrative plot give coherence to Job, but also the structure and parallelism of this book emphasizes its unity. Habel explains it this way:

A frequent structuring device of the author is the *inclusio* or envelope construction, in which a key term, form or speech, image, or motif given at the beginning of a unit is repeated or complemented as a signal of closure at the end of that unit. Within the framework of the book of Job, the correspondence between the opening verses (1:1-3) and the closing verses (42:12-17) has long been recognized. What has not been fully appreciated is that 28:28 clearly echoes 1:1 and seems to constitute and *inclusio* which signals a closure at the midpoint of the scenes in the book as a whole. The use of the term *bina*, “discernment,” which introduces the closing vignette (39:26-30) of Yahweh’s speech from the whirlwind, recalls the same key term in opening vignette (38:4-7) and thereby emphasizes its significance for interpreting the speech as a whole Each major literary reflects a structure designed to integrate the governing themes and functions of the materials incorporated in that unit.²²

Character Type

The prologue enumerates four main characters (Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—Job 2:11) that are fully developed in the dialogue (Three other characters are also mentioned in the prologue—God, Satan, and Job’s wife). In the dialogue, the narrator zeros in on five of the characters in the prologue, namely, Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and God. In analyzing narrative, it is customary to distinguish between flat characters and round characters. For example, **flat characters** do not stand out as individuals, that is to say, flat characters manifest only one trait and seem one-dimensional, but, on the other hand, **round characters** are much more complex, that is, round characters manifest a multitude of traits and appear as real people.

One other character appears in the biblical text as agent. An **agent** has no personality to speak of and simply moves the story along. Berlin defines characters

²¹Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 75. (b. 1935, American professor of Hebrew and comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley)

²²Habel, *Job*, 46-47.

in the following manner: “The round character is the full-fledged character; the flat character is the type; and the functionary is the agent.”²³ From the narrative of Job, we could say that God, Satan, Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu are full-fledged characters. But in the prologue, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (2:11) appear as flat characters as well as Job’s wife. On the other hand, in the dialogue Job and his three friends as well as Elihu appear as round characters. As we read the Book of Job, we can feel the emotions, the tensions, and the frustrations between these five men.

Dialogue

The words of Brevard Childs (1923-2007, an American Old Testament scholar and professor of Old Testament at Yale University) capture the sentiments of many scholars when he expresses his thoughts concerning the dialogue. He says, “One of the most difficult aspects of the entire book of Job is in determining the place of the dialogue (3—31).”²⁴ Alberto Soggin (1926-2010, a leading Italian biblical scholar) also wrestles with this problem of the dialogue in relationship to the **prologue** and **epilogue**. He concludes his findings by stating that the three parts of the book were interdependent. In spite of the weightiness of his scholarship, he appears to overlook the continuity among the three parts. He writes:

Despite the obvious fact that the three parts of the book are for the most part interdependent, in other ways than being connected with the same protagonist, we can discover at least two different traditions, without counting independent parts like chapter 28, even if they have now been skillfully joined so as to show a consistent pattern of thought. For this reason, it is customary to call the prologue and the epilogue the ‘framework’ of the book. This framework relates the legend of a just man called Job, a wise man and a patriarch who, although afflicted by God in many ways, still bears the suffering imposed on him with courage, in the certain belief that God himself will sooner or later secure justice for him—and this is in fact what happens. This legend could be placed towards the end of the pre-exilic period.²⁵

Habel, on the other hand, addresses his exegetical studies by applying the principles of narratology to an understanding of the integrity of Job. He correctly points out: “Contrary to the opinion of some scholars, the book of Job is not a

²³Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 23.

²⁴Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 534.

²⁵Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 451.

disparate collection of narration and speech materials with relatively little internal cohesion or connection.”²⁶ Throughout the **dialogue**, key themes and words are developed from the **prologue**.²⁷

These principles of narrative construction are splendidly confirmed in the two opening episodes of Job (1:6-22 and 2:1-10). Direct speech dominates both episodes and governs the interplay. The poetic dialogue is framed by narration. Dialogue retards and complicates the plot; instead of running, the dialogue slows the pace of the narrative. Dialogue is used in the plot in order to slow the tempo. In the plot “we are moving through the action in slow motion,” writes Berlin.²⁸ An examination of the Book of Job reveals three passages that introduce Job and the characters in the plot (1:1-5; 2:11-13; 32:1-5). These sections introduce the performer being announced by the narrator and provide the background information for the next stage of the plot growth.

A significant feature of the **prologue** is the primacy of **dialogue** in moving the narrative plot and in revealing the relationship between characters. The conflict between Yahweh and Satan is expressed in dialogue form. These dialogues provide important precedents for the extended dialogue conflicts, that is, first between Job and his friends and then between Job and his God. The various dialogues constitute further evidence of continuity between the so-called prologue and the chapters that follow.

Point of View

Before the three friends of Job are announced, the narrator sets forth a verdict on Job’s reaction to his misfortune: “In all this, Job did not sin in what he said” (1:22). This interpretive comment by the narrator lies outside the actions of the episode itself. Here we encounter the narrator’s **point of view** about Job. Concerning the focus on point of view, Berlin speaks of three senses in which point of view can be applied: (1) **perceptual point of view**—the perspective through which the events of the narrative are perceived; (2) **conceptual point of view**—the perspective of attitudes, conceptions, and world view; and (3) **interest point of view**—the perspective of someone’s benefit or disadvantage.²⁹

We can also say that **point of view** refers to the relation between narrator, story, and audience. There is a “showing” and a “telling” point of view. In a **showing point of view**, the narrator stands to one side and shows the action. In this

²⁶Habel, *Job*, 50, 51.

²⁷This concept of themes and words is more fully developed under the caption “repetition” in this brief study on the narrative of Job.

²⁸Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 29.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 47.

showing point of view, the reader is conscious of the narrator's presence. On the other hand, in a **telling point of view**, the narrator stands between the reader and the story. In this particular point of view, we are more conscious of our dependence upon the narrator for what is told.

For example, in Job 1:22 and 2:10, we encounter a telling point of view. In other words the narrator stands between the reader and the story, that is, the narrator stands outside the story itself. This point of view is often referred to as the conceptual point of view. The telling point of view makes the reader conscious that there is a story and a narrator. The narrator stands to one side and shows the reader the action. In the **prologue** (1:1-5), we become conscious of the narrator's omniscience and omnipresence.

Repetitions

Repetition is not an indication of various authors but rather a literary technique that is typical of both biblical and narrative poetry.³⁰ Sydney Greidanus (b. 1935, an American pastor and biblical scholar) makes the following succinct observation: "Repetition is a favored device in Hebrew narrative. It ranges from the repetition of words to the repetition of whole speeches."³¹ In the **prologue**, we encounter a very significant number of repetitions. For example, "In all this, Job did not sin" (1:22; 2:10); "This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (1:1, 8; 2:3); "I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (1:15, 16, 17); "While he was still speaking" (1:16, 17, 18); and "Satan went out from the presence of the LORD" (1:12; 2:7). Berlin correctly points out: Repetition in the Bible serves many purposes; among them intensification."³²

Through **repetition** one may create a literary vehicle whereby connections can be made between units that are separated by extended speeches. Repetition is a way of bringing back into focus a previous thought or statement. Alter calls attention to what he calls "sequence of actions," as well as other means of repetition that commonly appear in literature.³³ Alter writes that intensification as a pattern is captured through repetition:

Three consecutive repetitions, or three plus one, with some intensification or increment from one occurrence to the next, usually concluding either in a climax or a reversal. For example, the three captains and their companies threatened with fiery destruction in 2 Kings 1; the three catastrophes that destroy Job's possessions,

³⁰Habel, *Job*, 49.

³¹Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 208.

³²Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 105.

³³Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 95.

followed by a fourth in which his children are killed; Balaam's failure to direct the ass three times.³⁴

Repetition takes many forms in narrative, not just repetition of key words or themes. In narrative studies, we encounter episode repetition, repetition of key formulae and idioms, and repetition of words in dialogue. In the Book of Job, we witness repetition of words between Job and his three friends that were foreshadowed in the prologue. For example, in the Book of Job, we quickly observe "episode repetition" in the fourfold reference to the "servants/youths" being killed (1:15, 16, 17, 19). In quick succession, the narrator heightens the sense of the tragedy by calling attention to the tragic events in sequence.

He says, the "Sabeans attacked and carried them off" (1:15), then he declares, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants" (1:16), next he speaks, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword" (1:17), and finally he utters, "a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them (sons and daughters) and they are dead" (1:19). This last reference concerned the death of his children. There is heightened activity and tragedy as the news reaches Job in the loss of his children.

Again, we are introduced to the "**repetition of key formulae and idioms**" in Job. For instance, one swiftly perceives the following formulae and idioms: (1) "blameless and upright" (1:1, 8; 2:3); (2) "feared God and shunned evil" (1:1, 8; 2:3); (3) "In all this, Job did not sin" (1:22; 2:10); (4) "I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (1:15, 16, 17, 19); and (5) "While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said" (1:16, 17, 18); Habel points out that the phrase "I alone escaped to tell you" is like a haunting refrain which echoes in the brain long after the details of the ugly event have faded."³⁵

Once more, we bump into the "repetition of key words or themes" throughout the Book of Job. The following are cases in point of key words that are introduced into the prologue and developed throughout the subsequent dialogue speeches: "blameless" and "upright." In the **prologue**, God affirms Job's integrity, and then in the **dialogue**, we observe Job's fight to exonerate his own reliability. Listen to Job as he battles for his uprightness:

As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul,³ as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils,⁴ my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit.⁵ I

³⁴Ibid., 96.

³⁵Habel, *Job*, 82.

will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. ⁶ I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live. (Job 27:2-6)

The oral sin of cursing is introduced at the very beginning of the prologue. Job prays for his children in the event they have “cursed God in their hearts” (1:5). Satan too predicts that Job will curse God to His face (1:11). And Job’s wife also encourages him to “Curse God and die!” (2:9). The various themes are foreshadowed in the **prologue** and developed in the various **dialogues** between Job and his friends. One of the key motifs is that of the “face” of God. For example, Satan declares that Job will curse God to His “face” (1:11; 2:5— “curse you to your face”). Again, the word “face” pops up in Job’s response to Zophar’s accusations (Chapter 11) concerning his good behavior: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face” (13:15).

Job having said all of this, he, nevertheless, was acutely aware of the terrifying reality of facing God. Job exclaims: “Only grant me these two things, O God, and then I will not hide from you: Withdraw your hand far from me, and stop frightening me with your terrors” (13:20-21). In spite of this apprehension, Job concludes his story by saying: “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (42:5-6).

Key words used in the prologue are foreshadowed and developed in the numerous conversations between Job and his friends. The author of Job records the word “blameless” in the **prologue** (1:1, 8; 2:3). Yet this word is found frequently in the **dialogues** (8:20; 9:20, 21, 22). Another significant word is “fear.” This expression occurs regularly in the Book of Job (1:1, 8, 9; 6:14; 28:20). “Hedge” is another term (1:10; 3:23). The word “hand” crops up repeatedly (1:11; 2:5; 6:9; 10:7, 8; 12:9; 19:21; **23:2**). The word “fire” is employed throughout the book (1:16; 15:34; 20:26; 22:20; 31:12). And finally the term “dust” is scattered all the way through Job (2:12; 4:19; 5:6; 7:5, 21; 17:16; 19:25).

CONCLUSION

The language of the Book of Job reflects a literary unity that embraces an inner tension reflecting divergent perspectives on the same reality. The basic design of the **prologue** is to introduce bold positions that are challenged and explored in the various **dialogues** between Job and his friends. As we mull over the amazing book, we observe that the narrator stands outside the story. There is a sense in which the narrator is omnipresent as well as omniscient. He is able to listen in on the conversations between God and Satan and is always present everywhere. Again, as we monitor the scene, we quickly detect that the action is

broken up into sequences of scenes and presents the happenings as occurring in a particular place and time. This cycle of events focuses the attention of the reader on the deeds and words spoken.

The narrator sets the stage for the plot with its **introduction** of conflict and character types. He also employs the use of **dialogue** as a means of slowing the pace of the narrative. The narrator sets the stage for the various points of view as he guides the readers in their interpretation of the many characters and events. He is able to draw the readers into the story through the various points of view concerning the integrity of himself (Job). As we reflect upon the author of this book (Job), we cannot help but recall that repetition is a means whereby attention is brought to the reader. **Repetition** is the means of intensifying the many aspects of the story of Job and his plentiful tragedies and ultimate blessings from God.