VERBUM VITAE • 43/4 (2025) 849–878
Received: May 13, 2025 | Accepted: Jul 24, 2025 | Published: Dec 19, 2025

Various Methods of Introducing a New Character in Hebrew Bible Stories

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To Professor Jean-Louis Ska, SJ
with gratitude

Abstract: The introduction of a character in a biblical narrative is intimately linked to that character's narrative function, a connection that is reflected in the stylistic strategies employed by the biblical authors. This study aims to identify the primary stylistic techniques used by biblical writers to bring new characters onto the "stage" of their narratives. The first part of the study, employing narrative analysis, explores the various modes of introducing the protagonist in relation to the plot structure, the stylistic constructions adopted by the authors, and the presentation, characterization, and narrative function of the protagonist's name at the moment of their entrance into the narrative. The second part of the research focuses on the entrance of secondary characters in relation to the plot, and on how they are presented and characterized at the moment of their appearance into the narrative. The analysis reveals that protagonists are typically introduced at the very beginning of the narrative, generally through one of three principal methods: narration, plot exposition, or *in medias res*. In contrast, secondary characters, as the analysis demonstrates, appear at various points in the narrative, depending on their narrative function. Unlike protagonists, they are not usually given an extensive narrative introduction; rather, they are allotted limited space within the exposition or are inserted directly into the dramatic action through their activity. Their introduction is typically accompanied by minimal descriptive elements and is often connected to an already-present character within the narrative plot.

Keywords: main character, protagonist, secondary character, type scene, exposition, narrative program, stylistic constructions, characterization

A character in a literary work is not given to us in an immediate synchronic totality, as in a painting or a portrait (Vignolo 2003, 21). In fact, each character appears at a precise moment in the storyline; he appears and then disappears, according to his role in the plot. A narrative without characters would be like an empty picture: indeed, "events without existents" (Chatman 2010, 117)—that is, without characters, cannot exist. In the universe of the story, even a biblical story characterized by the "predominance of action and a lack of interest in the psychological evolution of the characters" (Ska 2012, 131), the events are determined by the presence of the characters who act, or are acted upon by others, and thus determine the evolution of

This text is a revised version of an article originally published in Italian under the title "Le diverse modalità di introduzione di un nuovo personaggio nei racconti dell'Antico Testamento" (Rzepka 2025).

ISSN 1644-8561 | e-ISSN 2451-280X | DOI: https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.18591

the plot. In the life of a character, his appearance in the story, that is, his first encounter with the reader, is particularly relevant. It therefore seems legitimate, almost to the point of being "intriguing," to wonder how a new character is introduced in the plots of biblical stories.

This question is the subject of the present study: it will focus first on some protagonists in the Hebrew Bible stories, primarily on some of the main characters, and secondarily on some of the major characters, whom we will identify as secondary characters, because of their lesser importance with respect to the protagonists (Ska 2012, 136). In analysing the text, we shall attempt to discover the relationship between the entrance of the main character and the plot of the story, by indicating and examining the typology of the introduction of the main character. We shall also examine the different modalities with which the characters are introduced into the story. We shall pay attention to the stylistic constructions used by the biblical authors to introduce the character and characterise him at the moment when he comes on the scene. The goal of the present study is not to examine the introduction of all the Hebrew Bible characters, because the list would be too long, but rather above all to seek to present the principal strategies used by the biblical authors to bring a new character onto the stage of their stories.

1. Introduction of a Main Character in the Plot of a Story

The main character is indispensable to the plot. The entire story revolves around him, and it is he who guides the course of events, often taking on the role of a "hero" (Ska 2012, 136). Our objective, however, is not to examine the whole evolution of the story, but to analyse only the first moment, that is, the protagonist's entrance on the scene. How does the story of a hero begin in the Bible? What characteristics of the hero emerge at this point?

In biblical stories, the main character is usually introduced at the beginning of the story concerning him,[1] but not always in the same way. From the analyses we can see that sometimes the biblical authors dedicate an entire narrative to the main character, while others give him only a few sentences in the exposition of the plot, and still others introduce him *in medias res*, with a direct discourse that is often a divine order. A synthesis of the analyses is shown in Table 1.

1 One exception is Esther (Esth 2:5–7), who, as the main character, is introduced when the action is already underway, that is, when Queen Vashti refuses to appear in the presence of Ahasuerus (Esth 1:12).

Table 1. Method of introducing the main character and the plot of the story

Entire narrative	Brief exposition	*In medias res* (direct discourse)
Isaac (Gen 21:1–3)	Abraham (Gen 11:26–32)	Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2)
Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28)	Noah (Gen 6:8–10)	Joshua (Josh 1:1–9)
Moses (Exod 2:1–10)	Joseph (Gen 37:1–2)	Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1–4)
Samson (Judg 13:3–24)	Jephthah (Judg 11:1–3)	–
Samuel (1 Sam 1:1–20)	Saul (1 Sam 9:1–2)	–
David (1 Sam 16:1–13)	Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1–2)	–
Gideon (Judg 6:1–21)	Ruth (Ruth 1:1–4)	–
Elisha (1 Kgs 19:19–21)	Esther (Esth 2:5–7)	–
–	Job (Job 1:1–5)	–

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

The main characters are usually announced, and their entrance into the story is prepared by the narrator. Table 1 shows, however, that the biblical authors do not always follow this pattern. For example, when the main character is introduced *in medias res*, his first appearance is sudden, that is, without any information about the situation or any preparation for the reader. The question therefore arises as to why an entire narrative is dedicated to certain main characters, to others only a brief exposition in the text, while still others are thrown into the story without any specific reference.

1.1. Introduction of the Protagonist by Means of a Narration

Among the main stories in which the protagonist is introduced with a narrative, we can cite the following: in Gen 21:1–3, Isaac is presented with the narrative of his birth; analogous are the cases of Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28), Samuel (1 Sam 1:1–20), Samson (Judg 13:3–24) and Moses (Exod 2:1–10). On the other hand, there are protagonists such as Gideon, David and Elisha, who are introduced with a narrative that is not that of their birth: David is introduced with the story of his anointing as king (1 Sam 16:1–13); Gideon is introduced with the narrative of his vocation as judge in Israel (Judg 6:1–21); Elisha is introduced telling the story of his prophetic vocation (1 Kgs 19:19–21). At this point it is interesting to digress and ask ourselves why the biblical authors do not recount the births of the great king David, of the prophet Elijah or of Gideon, but rather introduce them as adults? We can see that often the life of each of these main characters is introduced at a precise moment in a story that is larger than the individual, and which therefore must include different characters (typically judges, kings or prophets) in their respective functions. What interests the author, however, are the specific conditions

in which the character finds himself when he enters the story and takes on the mission assigned to him by God.[2] Another question: why are the patriarchs Isaac, Esau and Jacob introduced with a story about their births, while this treatment is denied to the first great patriarch, Abraham? The answer to this question requires an in-depth analysis of the role of the protagonists who have received a divine order, and which we will explore later (see section 1.3.1).

Returning to the case of David (1 Sam 16:1–13), he is introduced with the story of his anointing as king in the place of Saul. It is this fact which is central and which gives the character his importance, as it deals with the history of the monarchy in Israel. After having described some aspects of his physical appearance and thereby creating a pause in the main action, the narrative reaches its climax at the moment of anointing by Samuel and the irruption of the Spirit of God. It is interesting that the name of David is revealed at this moment: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon (*ʿel*) David from that day forward" (1 Sam 16:13). The preposition *ʿel* basically introduces the concept of movement, direction or orientation, but it can also indicate a given position, a gesture, a manifestation or a perception (Alonso Schökel 2013, 45). In this stylistic construction we note the principal elements: *verb—subject—preposition ʿel—terminus*, that is, *the new character*. In the sentence "The Spirit of God came upon David" (v. 13), the subject of the verb "came upon" (*wattiṣlaḥ*) is the Spirit of the Lord, who carries out an action directed toward David. We can therefore observe that David appears as the object of the movement expressed by the verb *ṣlḥ*.

In the case of Gideon, he is introduced with a narrative of vocation, and he is the only judge to be presented in this fashion. The story of Gideon begins with an exposition containing the usual outline of succession of the various judges. Interestingly, the stylistic construction used by the biblical author has Gideon appear for the first time in a secondary position, while carrying out a prolonged action over time (Judg 6:1–21). The author uses the stylistic construction *wᵉ*—X—*participle* after a *wayyiqṭōl* that describes the action of another character in the foreground: "The messenger of the Lord came (*wayyāḇō'*) and stopped under the oak tree that was in Ophrah and which belonged to Joash, of the family of Abiezer." In the meantime, Gideon, son of Joash, was "threshing" (*ḥōḇēṭ*) wheat in the winepress in order to keep it out of sight of the Midianites. In this narrative, while the messenger carries out a precise action in the foreground ("came," *wayyiqṭōl*), Gideon comes on stage, "threshing" (*participle*) grain that is, carrying out a prolonged action, but in the

2 The introduction of the judge Samson with the story of the announcement of his birth (Judg 13) could be considered an exception. The narrative of the birth of Samson breaks with the usual pattern with which the other judges are introduced, because "according to the usual pattern of the stories of the various judges, a verse such as Judg 13:1—which denounces the corruption of the Israelites—should be followed by a description of the oppressor, then by the cry of the people and finally by the intervention of God who sends a saviour. Not here. The narrator surprises us with the story of a man, Manoah, whose main characteristic is that he has a barren wife." (Rzepka 2015, 351)

background. Only later, when entering into dialogue with the messenger of the Lord, does Gideon come into the foreground.[3]

In the case of the vocation of Elisha, he appears after the introduction of the prophet Elijah, and the tie between Elijah and Elisha is reflected in the stylistic construction used by the author to introduce Elisha. In fact, in 1 Kgs 19:19, Elisha appears as the direct object of the verb *māṣā'*, while the subject of this verb is the prophet Elijah: "Elijah departed and found (*māṣā'*) Elisha."[4] Note that when the direct object is a definite noun or the proper name of a person, it is preceded by the direct object marker *'et*. In addition, the vocation of Elisha is accompanied by a symbolic gesture of Elijah, who throws his cloak over Elisha (v. 19).

1.1.1. Stories of the Birth of a Protagonist

In ancient Greek and Latin literature we find numerous stories of the birth and childhood of illustrious men, announcing their future greatness and fame.[5] In *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch writes, e.g., with regard to Cicero:

> It is said that Cicero was born, without travail or pain on the part of his mother, on the third day of the new Calends, the day on which at the present time the magistrates offer sacrifices and prayers for the health of the emperor. It would seem also that a phantom appeared to his nurse and foretold that her charge would be a great blessing to all the Romans. And although these presages were thought to be mere dreams and idle fancies, he soon showed them to be true prophecy; for when he was of an age for taking lessons, his natural talent shone out clear and he won name and fame among the boys, so that their fathers used to visit the schools in order to see Cicero with their own eyes and observe the quickness and intelligence in his studies for which he was extolled, though the ruder ones among them were angry at their sons when they saw them walking with Cicero placed in their midst as a mark of honour. (Plutarch, *Lives* [LCL 99, 85])

An attentive reader can see that in the Hebrew Bible there are a number of narratives concerning the birth of a hero: Isaac (Gen 21:1–3); Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28);

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3 Eli is introduced in the same way in 1 Sam 1:9: "Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh, while the priest Eli was seated was sitting on his seat beside the door of the temple of the Lord." Hannah's action is part of the foreground. She rose, while Eli continued to be seated, that is, he remained in the background. He comes into the foreground only afterwards, when he enters into dialog with Hannah (v. 14).

4 "Man" is introduced with the same stylistic element in the creation story in Gen 2–3: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (2:7). In this sentence man is the direct object of the verb "formed," the subject of which is God. Cf. also Esth 2:7.

5 The stories of the birth of a future leader and of the trials he must overcome is a common element in ancient literature. Often, the founding hero of a people is abandoned by his parents or relatives, is saved by somebody, becomes the origin of a new dynasty and founds a new city, as e.g., the Assyrian hero Sargon, abandoned on the river Tigris and saved by a farmer.

Moses (Exod 2:1–20); Samson (Judg 13:3–24); and Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–20).[6] These stories have certain points in common, and can be considered as "twin" passages, because of their resemblance. Therefore particular attention to this group of texts seems justified.

1.1.2. The Use of a Formula for the Birth of a Son

From a stylistic point of view, in the biblical stories of the birth of a protagonist, we note the sequence of information, the principal elements of which are: (a) the news of a marriage; and (b) the following actions, marked by the verbs *wattahar*, *wattēled*, *wattiqrā'* ("she conceived, bore and called…"). In different stories this formula is applied with variations regarding either the description of the marriage of the couple who afterwards will give birth to the protagonist, or with the distribution within the story of the three verbs "conceived," "bore" and "called," which describe the conception, birth and choice of a name for the baby.[7]

The formula appears and is repeated many times in Gen 29:15–30:24, which recounts the birth of the eleven sons of Jacob. The two marriages of Jacob take up several verses (29:15–30), but afterwards the story accelerates in synchrony with a kind of race between the two wives, Leah and Rachel, in bearing sons, so that it seems like a summary. The concise nature of the formula itself adds to the speed of the story, since the three verbs include the long interval from conception to birth, and from the birth of one son to the birth of another. The sequence of the three verbs, *wattahar*, *wattēled*, *wattiqrā'*, appears for the first time with the birth of Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, born of Leah (Gen 29:32): "Leah conceived and bore a son and called him Reuben…." The formula recurs ten times in the story with the birth of the other sons of Jacob.

The three verbs of this formula (*wattahar*, *wattēled*, *wattiqrā'*) can also be woven into the development of the action of the story and not listed one after the other as in Gen 29:15–30:24. We find an example of this type in the story of the birth of Moses (Exod 2:1–20). The life of the newborn is threatened from the beginning, but thanks to his mother's actions, he escapes the danger of death (Czerski 2000, 35).[8] In this

6 The formula of the birth of a son can also be found in Gen 38:3 (Er, son of Judah); in 1 Sam 1:19–20 (Samuel) and 2:21 (sons and daughters of Hannah); in 1 Chr 7:23 (the birth of Beriah, son of Ephraim); and in the prophecy of Isa 7:14.

7 The story of Cain also begins with his birth (Gen 4:1), but the verbs that announce it are different: "Adam knew Eve, his wife, who conceived and bore Cain, saying: 'I have gotten a man from the Lord.'" We note the use of the three verbs, *yd'*, *hrh*, *yld*, in which the subject of the first verb (*yd'*) is Adam, the father of the protagonist, whereas the subject of the other two (*hrh* and *yld*) is his mother, Eve, who conceived and gave birth to Cain. A wordplay links the name of Cain with the verb "acquire." In recounting the birth of the second son, Abel, only one verb is used *yld*, the subject of which is Eve: "Then she gave birth (*yld*) again to his brother Abel" (v. 2). The same verbs are used to describe the birth of Enoch in Gen 4:17.

8 According to the author the stories of the births of illustrious men often have the following pattern: the announcement of the birth (sign, vision or dream); the newborn finds himself in danger; Divine Providence protects the baby. Janusz Czerski maintains that the birth of Moses is presented according to this

story, the formula of the birth of a son creates a kind of inclusion in the story. In fact, one can see that the elements of the formula are distributed throughout the story at strategic points. Verse 1 tells of the marriage of Moses' parents. In the following verse there are two verbs from the formula, *wattahar* and *wattēled*: the woman conceives and bears a son (v. 2); but we need to wait until verse 10 to find the final element of the formula, the verb *wattiqrā'*. In fact, it is only after the description of the rescue of the newborn Hebrew son in verse 10 that Pharaoh's daughter gives the baby, drawn from the water, the name of Moses.[9] We also note that along with the story of the birth, in which Moses is introduced into the biblical story, we also have the story of his vocation, which begins his true and definitive mission (Exod 3:1–4, 18).

1.1.3. The Use of Type Scenes in the Narratives of the Birth of a Protagonist

The biblical authors use conventions known to the ancient reader, thus providing keys to their interpretation, which, with the distance of time, are no longer part of the cultural baggage of the modern reader.[10] The narratives in which the biblical authors introduce certain protagonists reveal, in fact, the use of so-called "type scenes." These literary conventions were analysed for the first time by Walter Arend (1933) in his study of Homer. He identifies a series of repetitive patterns, which, according to him, are consciously used by the author in the composition of stories that represent the same situation (e.g., arrival, voyage, assembly, hospitality, clothing of the hero). A "type scene," therefore, must contain a certain number of fixed elements arranged in an order that can be changed, but the number of the characteristic elements must be sufficient in order for the "type scene" to be recognizable as such (Ska 2012, 64; Aletti et al. 2006, 82; Britt 2002, 37–59).

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pattern (Exod 2:1–20) and, in the intertestamental literature, the same pattern is used to present the births of Noah, Abraham, Samuel and Elijah.

9 The author of the story of the birth of Isaac uses the same formula in a similar way in Gen 21:1–3. Verse 2 announces that Sarah "conceived and bore" a son, but only afterwards, in verse 3, does it say that Abraham "called" his name Isaac: "And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac." We find another example in Gen 25:19–28, in which Isaac's wife remains pregnant until verse 21; then in verse 24 the time comes for Rebecca to give birth. In verse 25 the first of the twins is born and is given the name Esau, and in verse 26 the second twin is born, and is called Jacob. In this way the three verbs of the formula of the birth of a son are distributed throughout the strategic points of the story in verses 21–26. Similarly, in the story of the birth of Samson, in Judg 13:3–24, the event is announced twice: first by an angel to the mother of Samson (v. 3), and the second time by her to her husband Manoah (v. 7); it is only in the conclusion to the story, in verse 24, that we learn that the woman really gave birth to a son whom she called Samson.

10 The fundamental study of the topic scenes is that of Alter 2011. The author cites typical scenes as examples: the meeting of the future wife next to a well (in Gen 24; 29:1–4; Exod 2:15–22; the announcement of the birth of the hero to a barren woman (Gen 16; 18; 1 Sam 1; Judg 13) and also three stories in Genesis in which the patriarch presents his wife as his sister (Gen 12:10–20; 20; 26:1–12).

An example of a narrative of the birth of a protagonist particularly rich in the diverse elements of type scenes can be found in the story of the birth of Samson, in Judg 13:2–24 (Alter 1983, 115–30; 2011; Ska 2012, 63–68; Rzepka 2015, 351–74; Assis 2014, 1–13). In fact, the story has some very particular traits, because the author uses three type scenes, to wit: "the announcement of the birth of a son," "the appearance of an angel (announcing) a future saviour," and "hospitality" (Ska 2013, 38–39; Rzepka 2015, 366). The formula of the birth of a son in this case contains only two verbs: *wattēled*, *wattiqrā'* ("the woman bore a son to whom she gave the name Samson," v. 24). A comparison between Judg 13 and other stories of "the birth of a son" reveals both common elements and differences: Judg 13:2b presents a barren woman, which corresponds to 1 Sam 1:2b.5; in Judg 13:3, the woman receives the announcement of the birth of a special son and of his particular destiny, which corresponds to what is reported in 1 Sam 1:11, 17, as well as in Gen 16:9–11; 17:19; 18:10–14 (Niditch 2008, 142). In Judg 13:24 the woman gives birth and the baby is given a name. This element finds a correspondence in 1 Sam 1:20; Gen 21:1–3; and Exod 2:1–10. In addition, both Samson and Samuel are Nazirites. The originality of the story in Judg 13 is found in the differences present in the narratives: the woman in Judg 13, in contrast with Hannah (1 Sam 1), is not named, but is called "the wife of Manoah"; she doesn't have a fertile rival as in the other stories; the mother of Samson doesn't ask God for a son, whereas Hannah prays to God and makes a vow to the Lord (1 Sam 1:11); in Judg 13 the name of the baby is revealed only at the end (v. 24), as in the case of Moses (Exod 2:10) (Rzepka 2015, 364–68; Reinhartz 1992, 25–37; Mollo 2014, 90–91; Exum 1980, 47–48; Crenshaw 1978, 129). The narrator insists on the story of the Nazirite, because it is a means by which the extraordinary physical strength of Samson acquires a religious significance. At the end of Samson's story, we find out that his only real failing consists in his inability to maintain the obligations of a Nazirite (Judg 16:17) (Rizzi 2012, 365). The scene of "the appearance of the angel of the Lord" in Judg 13:8–25 recalls the narrative of the vocation of Gideon (Judg 6:11–23), while certain traits of the scene of "hospitality" in Judg 13:15–21, are also found in Judg 6:18–19 and in Gen 18:6–8 (Savran 2003, 119–49).

We note that the narrative of the birth of Samson (Judg 13) is particularly elaborated. An analysis of the different type scenes in Judg 13 reveals a particular intention of the author, namely that of creating connections between the person of Samson and other biblical characters. The author presents Samson as a "hero" on a par with the patriarchs Isaac, Esau and Jacob and the judges Samuel and Gideon. The portrait of Samson in Judg 13 contrasts with the picture that emerges from the other stories of the cycle (Judg 14–16). The author, recalling such characters, intends to reinforce the idea that the power of God is also at work in the life of Samson. The result, however, is ambiguous, because in recalling these illustrious figures, Samson's inglorious end and failure in the role of judge stand out (Rzepka 2015, 368; Blenkinsopp 1963, 65–73; Block 1999, 396).

The analysis of the use of the type scene in narratives of the birth of a protagonist reveals its extraordinary flexibility. It constitutes an exceptional tool both for the construction of the plot and the characterisations of the individuals. The juxtaposition of the protagonists in the stories of their births allows their different personalities to emerge. The similarities between the type scenes create multiple relationships and mutual references, illuminating a number of particular elements, which offer depth and color to the facts and to the protagonists who are introduced into the story with the narrative of their birth. Comparing the texts allows us to discover their singular expressiveness, the play between the fixed elements of a type scene and their variations, and between what they have in common and what is specific to each narrative and each character.

1.2. Introduction of the Protagonist with an Exposition of the Plot

From the analyses of the texts, it is clear that there is a group of protagonists to whom the biblical authors dedicate one or more verses at the beginning of the narrative in order to introduce them. Think e.g., of the introductory formulas in 1 Sam 1:1, where Elkanah is introduced, or 1 Sam 9:1–2 where Saul appears, or the introduction to the Book of Job (Job 1:1–5), which alerts the reader to the fact that the story concerns a righteous man, but that he will suffer. In summary, at the beginning of the storyline constituting the exposition of the plot, the author gives the reader information about the initial situation, indispensable for the full understanding of the story (Ska 2012, 42; Zappella 2010, 52). The information includes the circumstances, the everyday and historic settings of the lives of the main characters, their relationships, and the presentation of the protagonist in the story. In this type of exposition, e.g., we meet for the first time in the story: Abram (Gen 11:26–32), Noah (Gen 6:8–10), Joseph (Gen 37:2), Jephthah (Judg 11:1–5), Saul (1 Sam 9:1–2), Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1–2), Ruth (Ruth 1:1–4), Esther (Esth 2:5–7), and Job (Job 1:1–5).

During the exposition, the author can also give the reader a key to a better understanding of the story; this is true in particular for information that creates a kind of pact between the narrator and the reader and generates a certain atmosphere at the beginning of the story. The expositions, as we have observed above, contain general facts, but also serve to create the context of the situation, which is often static and repetitive. For this reason, we find in the expositions stative verbs, noun phrases or frequentative verb forms, that is, *yiqṭōl* and *wᵉqāṭaltî*.

To introduce the protagonist in the exposition of the story, the biblical authors use different stylistic constructions, which are represented in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of stylistic constructions with which the protagonist is introduced in the exposition of the story

Stylistic construction	Protagonist
W^{e}—X—*qāṭal*	Noah (Gen 6:8); Jephthah (Judg 11:1); Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1)
The formula *tôl^{e}dōt* and the verb *yālad*	Abram (Gen 11:26–27); Noah (Gen 6:9)
X—*hāyāh*—*participle*	Joseph (Gen 37:2)
The direct object indicator *ʾet*	Esther (Esth 2:7)
The formula of the name: *šemô*; *ûšemô*; *ûšemāh*	Ruth (Ruth 1:4); Saul (1 Sam 9:1–2); Job (Job 1:1)

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

The protagonist of the story of the flood, Noah, enters the scene in Gen 6:8 with information that contrasts with God's perception of the situation in the world that He had created (cf. Gen 1). Indeed, God looks at the earth, sees the wickedness (v. 5), reacts (v. 6), and consequently, although regretful, decides to destroy it (v. 7). Here, the author informs the reader that "nevertheless Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," using the construction *we*—X—*qāṭal*, which often begins a story or a new scene.[11] Its usual function is to emphasise the introduction of a new character onto the stage, whose presence will be decisive for the action that follows. In addition, through the use of this construction, the narrator highlights the position of the protagonist. The exposition in which Noah is presented is more complex (Ska 2000, 74–79),[12] because it continues with a second introduction to the story, which begins with the *tôl^{e}dōt*[13] formula for Noah, followed by information about the human and religious qualities of the protagonist: "These are the generations (*tôl^{e}dōt*) of Noah. Noah was (X—*qāṭal*) a just man and irreproachable among his contemporaries. Noah walked with God" (v. 9).

The *tôl^{e}dōt* formula also begins the story in Gen 37:2: "These are the generations of Jacob." The protagonist Joseph is introduced right after the formula of the *tôl^{e}dōt*, together with his brothers: "Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding (*hāyāh rōʾeh*) the flock with his brethren" (v. 2). The author uses a stylistic construction, the principal elements of which are: X—*hāyāh*—*participle*. Here, the verb

11 Other protagonists are introduced into the story in the same way, e.g., the serpent (Gen 3:1), Jephthah (Judg 11:1) or Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1).

12 The construction is complex because it contains two different introductions of the protagonist. In fact, the story combines two redactional layers.

13 The *tôl^{e}dōt* formula, which belongs to the priestly source, can introduce either a genealogy (Gen 11:10; 25:12; 36:1) or a narrative section (Gen 6:9; 11:27; 25:19; 37:2).

"to be" (*hāyāh*) followed by the "participle" (*rō'eh*) expresses with precision that the long-term, habitual action unfolded in the past, i.e. that Joseph "was shepherding" the flock. The new protagonist is therefore introduced into the story with the description of his age, the relationship with his brothers and his habitual work.

A frequent way of introducing the protagonist in relationship with other characters is the formula of the name, *šēm*; *šᵉmô*; *ûšᵉmô*; *ûšᵉmāh*, which we find with respect to Ruth (Ruth 1:4), Saul (1 Sam 9:1–2) and Job (Job 1:1), among others. In the exposition of the Book of Ruth (Ruth 1:1–5), e.g., we glimpse the principal facts: the famine in Israel during the time of the judges; the sojourn of a man of Bethlehem in the land of Moab, together with his wife and his two sons; the revelation of the names of some of the characters: Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Chilion; the death of Elimelech; the marriage of Mahlon and Chilion with two Moabites, Orpah and Ruth; and the death of the two sons of Naomi. The revelation of the names of the characters and their meaning is a frequent element in the exposition. In stories in which the author introduces the names of two characters together, the noun phrase is usually coordinated with a simple *waw*: *šēm … wᵉšēm*, as in the case of Ruth and her sister-in-law: "The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth" (1:4). Other information appears later on, at strategic points, to stimulate the interest of the reader, e.g., the existence of a close relative, Boaz (Ruth 2:1); of another even closer relative (3:12); and also of a field that belonged to Naomi (4:3).

A typical example of an exposition can be found at the beginning of the Book of Job (Job 1:1–5), in which the protagonist is introduced with a formula that contains his name:

> There was in the land of Uz a man named (*ûšᵉmô*) Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil. And there were born to him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus did Job continually.

In this exposition, the narrator does not simply let the reader know the name of the protagonist, but tells him who Job was, where he lived and the composition of his family; he speaks of his possessions and his usual behaviours, but above all, he reveals his moral qualities. In this way, before the action even begins, the reader has a very positive image of this fully righteous man, who soon will lose everything and will have to endure extreme suffering.

In conclusion, we can observe that the protagonist introduced in the exposition occupies an important space, because in addition to his name, the authors from the beginning of the action provide the reader with more complete information, necessary for understanding the story.

1.3. Introduction of the Protagonist in *Medias Res*

From the analyses of the biblical stories, we can see that some authors decide to introduce the protagonist *in medias res*, without any exposition of the facts or circumstances. In this case, the hero appears all of a sudden, called by God, who gives him a very specific order. Once the protagonist is introduced, the author places a few elements of the exposition at strategic points in the story, thus arousing the curiosity of the reader. Characters introduced in this way include Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2), Joshua (Josh 1:1–9), and Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1–4). The practice of beginning the story with the entrance of the protagonist *in medias res* and its variations is analysed in Table 3.

Table 3. Introduction of the protagonist *in medias res*

Stylistic construction: the verb *wayyiqṭōl*; preposition ־ʾ*el*	**Protagonist**
"The word of the Lord came to (*ʾel*) Jonah"	Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2)
"After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke (*wayyōʾmer*) to (*ʾel*) Joshua"	Joshua (Josh 1:1–9)[14]
"Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said (*wayyōʾmer*) to Ahab, 'As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.' And the word of the Lord came to (*ʾel*) him saying…"	Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1–2)

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

It is worth focusing on the examples shown in Table 3, because they present a few interesting variations worth exploring. The classic example of a story that begins *in medias res* is the Book of Jonah: "The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying: Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their

14 It is worth noting that Joshua is introduced in the same way when he appears in the story about the fight against Amalek in Exod 17:9: "Moses said to Joshua…." Joshua appears in the story for the first time as the interlocutor of Moses, who speaks to him with the order to choose men and go out to fight Amalek. It is only afterwards that the reader discovers that Joshua was able to conquer the enemy thanks to the prayer of Moses. We must point out, however, that the protagonist of the story in Exodus is Moses; Joshua, on the other hand, is introduced as one of the secondary characters.

wickedness is come up before me" (Jonah 1:1–2).[15] The story begins with the phrase in which the subject, that is, "the word of the Lord" came to (*ʿel*) Jonah. The protagonist of the story appears for the first time in the story as the interlocutor of God, with an indirect presentation that emerges from the action: God gives Jonah the order to go preach to Nineveh and Jonah gets up, but instead of going to Nineveh, he goes in the opposite direction, to Tarshish. This introduces an element of surprise for the reader. Other information about Jonah and about his being sent to Nineveh are scattered throughout the narrative in exposition form: the religious beliefs of Jonah (1:9); the description of Nineveh (3:3b); the nature of God according to Jonah (4:2); and other details about Nineveh (4:11). "These different elements of the exposition appear in dramatic moments, allowing them to have a major impact on the action and to reveal new aspects of the relationships between the three principal characters: God, Jonah and Nineveh." (Ska 2012, 48) Note that the preposition *ʿel* introduces the name of the protagonist in close relationship with God. In oral expression, the preposition *ʿel* is normally used to indicate the interlocutor. In this case, the stylistic construction is as follows: *verbum dicendi* or the noun "word" with the verb *wayhî—subject—preposition ʿel—interlocutor*, that is, the name of the new character, in this case, Jonah.

In Josh 1:1, Joshua enters on the scene, taking the place of Moses, and in introducing him, the author uses the same stylistic device, that is, the preposition *ʿel*. From the point of view of analysis of the plot, however, his appearance differs slightly from that of Jonah. Indeed, in Josh 1:1 we read: "After the death of Moses, servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua…." We observe that the introduction of Joshua, whom God is addressing, is preceded by a brief element of exposition concerning a circumstance, that is, "the death of Moses, servant of the Lord." The story presents a variation on the norm, since it does not begin exactly *in medias res*.

Elijah, on the other hand, is introduced rigorously *in medias res* in 1 Kgs 17:1. The text begins with the direct discourse of Elijah: "Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead said (*wayyiqṭōl*) to Ahab…." Elijah thus enters the scene by accomplishing the action expressed by *wayyiqṭōl*. We therefore have two direct discourses: (1) the prophet addresses king Ahab saying: "As the Lord God of Israel lives, whom I serve: there will be neither dew nor rain these coming years unless I give the word" (1 Kgs 17:1); (2) God addresses the prophet: "The word of the Lord came to (*ʿel*) him…." In this verse, Elijah is indicated by the pronominal suffix to the preposition *ʿel*. We note that in the first verse there is also a brief element of exposition, that is, the information that he was "the Tishbite" (v. 1).

15 In the Book of Jonah the protagonist is introduced *in medias res*; one might think, however, that he is somehow already known to the reader, because he is mentioned in 2 Kgs 14:25–27.

1.3.1. The Introduction of the Protagonist in *Medias Res* and the "Narrative Program"

At this point in the analyses of the introduction of a protagonist *in medias res*, we must make a few important observations concerning the literary elements common to the plot of these stories. In the first place, we note that the entrance of the protagonists is accompanied by an order from God: Jonah must get up and go to Nineveh and preach against the wickedness of its inhabitants (Jonah 1:1); Joshua receives the order to cross the Jordan and lead the people into the promised land (Josh 1:1); the prophet Elijah on the other hand must go eastward and hide near the river Cherith.

The divine command, with which all the above stories begin, contains a "narrative program." Its actualisation arouses the interest of the reader, who wonders about the ability of the protagonist, and the manner in which he will accomplish his mission. In this model of the analysis of the plot, the actualisation of the "narrative program" is called a "performance" and closes with a report, called a "sanction" (Ska 2002, 157). It can involve a task, a plan, a mission to accomplish or a conflict to resolve. The model also uses other categories like the "subject," that is the protagonist, who must possess certain abilities in order to accomplish the "narrative program." In the "performance," the "subject" accomplishes the program, or not; the "sanction" follows, which is the final assessment of the accomplishment of the program (Ska 2012, 57).

In the stories that begin *in medias res*, the divine order is usually followed by its execution. Indeed, Joshua immediately carries out the order of God in commanding the people to prepare themselves to cross the Jordan (Josh 1:11). Similarly, Elijah "went and did according to the word of the Lord; for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith…" (1 Kgs 17:5). This is not, however, the case with Jonah. Jonah is sent on a mission to Nineveh and leaves, but flees to Tarshish; therefore the "narrative program" of the story fails. Not only does he not go to Nineveh; he flees and goes in the opposite direction, "far from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3). In Jonah 3:1, God entrusts the same mission to Jonah a second time, which he will eventually accomplish successfully.

We can conclude that the decision to introduce the protagonist *in medias res* allows the biblical authors to emphasise the mission entrusted to him, as well as the "narrative program" revealed by the order of God that the protagonist must accomplish. In addition, we note that beginning the story *in medias res* and introducing the protagonist in this way involves the virtual absence of action at the start. This will follow with elements of the exposition, in the strategic moment of the development of the action.

1.3.2. An Intriguing Case of Protagonist Introduction: Abraham and the Divine Command

An interesting case of the introduction of a protagonist to whom God addresses a command is found in the narrative of the patriarch Abraham. In this case, the initial question concerns why the first patriarch is not introduced through a birth narrative, as is the case with his son Isaac, his grandsons Esau and Jacob, or even Moses. It is, in fact, striking that the entrance of the major protagonist Abraham into the biblical narrative is not prepared, but is instead encapsulated within a brief summary (Gen 11:27–32).

In answering this question, we must observe that Abraham's case presents certain peculiarities. Although Abraham first appears within the genealogy (*tôl^{e}dōt*) of Terah (Gen 11:26) and in the exposition of Gen 11:27–32, a closer analysis of the text reveals that this exposition is not dedicated to Abraham as the central protagonist of the narrative, but rather to a group of persons, represented by Terah and his family, of which Abraham is a part. In Terah's genealogy, Abraham is only briefly mentioned alongside his brothers Nahor and Haran, and it is only later, in Gen 12:1, that Abraham clearly emerges as the protagonist of the unfolding narrative.

It is important to recognize that the literary strategy of the author is to place emphasis on Abraham precisely at the point when the action is set in motion (Gen 12:1), preceded by an exposition that does not foreground the protagonist himself, but instead presents the contextual and factual elements that influence the narrative's initial movement. The analysis thus reveals that Abraham's introduction as protagonist bears certain similarities to Jonah's entrance *in medias res*, yet it is in fact preceded by an exposition of the plot. Conversely, the exposition in Gen 11:27–32 does not introduce the protagonist in the manner of the classical example of Job, but rather frames the family from which the protagonist will emerge at the onset of the narrative action.

In conclusion, the distinctive feature of Abraham's introduction into the narrative lies in the combination of two elements: the exposition, in which Abraham is merely one component of the narrative setting, and the sudden divine command—characteristic of narratives that begin *in medias res*—through which Abraham steps onto the scene as the protagonist of the story that follows (Gen 12:4–25:11). In the divine speech addressed to Abraham in Gen 12:1–3, he is presented as God's direct interlocutor and the recipient of divine promises, which in turn elicit in the reader an expectation for their fulfillment. It is precisely this feature that reveals how the divine command contains, as in the case of Jonah, the "narrative program," which consists of two main elements: (a) the command to undertake a journey (Gen 12:1), and (b) the promise of a great posterity that will become a divinely blessed nation (Gen 12:2–3).

The narrative invites the reader to ponder how Abraham will accomplish his mission and how God will fulfill His promises. Immediately afterward, in Gen 12:4–9,

we witness the realization of the first step in the "narrative program": "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him…" (v. 4). Yet from the very moment of its proclamation, the second part of the "narrative program" faces two significant obstacles: Sarah, Abraham's wife, is barren (Gen 11:30), and both Abraham and Sarah are advanced in age. Indeed, Abraham enters the narrative scene at 75 years of age (Gen 12:4b). This allows the reader to grasp the magnitude of God's promise and to wonder how these obstacles might be overcome for the narrative program to reach fulfillment. The birth of Isaac (Gen 21:1–3) constitutes the first step toward this fulfillment, demonstrating that God is capable of overcoming even the most formidable barriers—such as barrenness and old age—in order to realize His promises.

We may thus conclude that the "narrative program" initiating Abraham's story not only characterizes the protagonist and serves as a narrative thread throughout much of the Abraham cycle, but also introduces from the very outset a dramatic tension that determines the author's literary strategy.

In final analysis, it becomes evident that the introduction of a new protagonist in biblical narratives is not limited to a single method—such as presentation in the exposition or sudden entrance *in medias res*—but rather involves a functional combination of multiple strategies. These are shaped in accordance with the communicative goals, the theological message, and the literary design of the author.

1.4. The Presentation and the Characterisation of the Protagonist at the Moment When He Enters the Story

A character in a narrative can present himself or be introduced by another character, or by the narrator, or they can be presented in many ways together. From the analyses, it is clear that in the biblical stories the protagonists are always introduced by the narrator himself, independently of the type of stylistic construction and other strategies that the author uses to introduce them. "After his entrance on the scene, the dramatic progression of the character depends on how he acts, reacts and is influenced by events, as well as his 'name.'" (Ska 2012, 135) We can, however, ask ourselves whether, at the moment of his entry onto the scene, we can already identify some typical traits of his characterisation. In this regard, it seems particularly relevant to observe the relationship between the characterisation of the protagonist and the stratagems that the biblical authors use to introduce him, that is, in beginning the dramatic progression of the story.

The characters can be described directly, that is, with reference to the characteristics and information attributed to them by the narrator, or indirectly, by their speech or actions. From the analysis it appears that both types are present in the biblical stories, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Description of the protagonist
and the use of different stylistic constructions to introduce him

Direct description	Indirect description
The formula of the birth of a son: Isaac (Gen 21:1–3); Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:10–28); Moses (Exod 2:1–10); Samson (Judg 13:3–24); Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–20)	–
The formula *tôl^{e}dōt* and the verb *yld*: Abram (Gen 11:27); Noah (Gen 6:9)	–
The formulas of the name *w^{e}šēm; š^{e}mô; ûš^{e}mô; ûš^{e}māh*: Ruth (Ruth 1:4); Saul (1 Sam 9:1); Job (Job 1:1)	–
–	***Wayyiqṭōl*:** Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1); Joseph (Gen 37:2b)
***W^{e}*—X—*qāṭal*:** Noah (Gen 6:8); Jephthah (Judg 11:1); Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1)	–
The direct object marker *ʾet*: Elisha (1 Kgs 19:19); Esther (Esth 2:7)	–
The preposition *ʿel*: David (1 Sam 16:13); Jonah (Jonah 1:1); Joshua (Josh 1:1)	–
***W^{e}*—X—*participle*:** Gideon (Judg 6:11); or **X—*hāyāh*—*participle*:** Joseph (Gen 37:2a)	–

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

From Table 4, it is clear that the biblical stories favor a direct description of the protagonist. Indeed, in the vast majority of cases, the stylistic constructions used to introduce the protagonist give a direct description, and only some employ an indirect modality, e.g., when a new character is introduced performing an action expressed with a *wayyiqṭōl*.

It is worth noting that in some stories the authors combine different stylistic constructions, either direct or indirect. For example, in Gen 37:2, the author combines the stylistic construction X—*hāyāh*—*participle* with a simple *wayyiqṭōl* (cf. also Exod 3:1). In this mixed description of the character, from the direct characterisation of the narrator, we know that the young Joseph at 17 years of age was a shepherd (*participle*) along with his brothers; on the other hand, from his telling (*wayyiqṭōl*) his father about the bad reputation that was circulating about his brothers, we learn indirectly that he was an informer.

We need to emphasise that from the characterisation of a person and the events in the story, we can distinguish his way of "being" and his "attributes," the distinctive traits of his "actions," his "speech," or of his way of "seeing" reality. The author may delineate the physical, personal, demographic, socioeconomic, ideological or

psychological traits of the character. These last allow the characterisation of the person to be traced back to different typologies, identifying him as someone who is "well-rounded" or "flat," "kinetic" or "static" (Zappella 2010, 145). The present study, concerned with the analysis of the introduction of a character in the story, does not identify the typology from a psychological point of view, as "well-rounded" or "flat," etc., because this is fully revealed only at the end of the story.

Descriptions of the physical aspects of the characters in biblical stories are rather rare at the beginning, and when they are present, they are significant. For example, at the moment of the birth of the twins, Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:25), we learn that the first one was "reddish and all over like a hairy garment," and therefore he was called Esau. Of Moses on the other hand, it is said that he was beautiful at the moment of his birth; therefore his mother hid him for three months. Of David, in the story of his anointing as king, the author says that he was a redhead, with beautiful eyes and a beautiful appearance. The reader can also learn immediately about the social situation of these protagonists, e.g., we learn that Moses was of the tribe of Levi; that David was from Bethlehem, that his father was named Jesse, that he shepherded his flocks, that he had seven brothers and that he was the youngest. Also, with respect to Saul, we find the following description: "Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" (1 Sam 9:2).

The traits of the protagonists that are described in the exposition can involve not only personal data, as e.g., in the case of Joseph, of whom we learn that he was 17 years old (Gen 37:2), or their character traits, as in the case of Job, a just man, "perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil." The author offers us also various socioeconomic data: we know that Job was the richest of all the men of the east and that he was from Uz, the father of seven sons and three daughters. He is also described from a cultural point of view, revealing his religious habits (Job1:1–5). Another portrait of a protagonist at the moment of his introduction is that of Naaman. We learn not only about his social position (he was, in fact, the commander of the army of the king of Aram), but also the fact that he was very influential and esteemed by his lord and that he was a brave soldier, so much so that he managed to guarantee the safety of his people. Only later do we learn that he was also a leper (2 Kgs 5:1).

We recall that the protagonists introduced into the story *in medias res* can be characterised either by a direct or an indirect description. In the first case, it is the narrator who describes the protagonist's response to the order of God, as in the cases of Joshua (Josh 1:11) and Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2). In an indirect description, on the other hand, the biblical authors have their protagonists appear in action, as in the case of Elijah, who addresses King Ahab: "As the Lord God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, unless I give the word."

Elijah's words reveal him to be a powerful man, capable of commanding even the rain (1 Kgs 17:1).

In conclusion, while the author has a large space for characterisation when the characters are introduced both with an entire narrative and an exposition of the plot, the entrance of the protagonist *in medias res* limits this space, but emphasises the characterisation of the hero as an interlocutor of God himself and recipient of his orders, thus constituting the pivot of the entire story which follows.

1.5. Ways of Introducing the Protagonist and His Name

One of the "characterising" aspects of a person is his name, which is a summary of his unique character. For this reason, it seems useful to revisit the question in the larger context of the different modalities with which the protagonist is introduced. The name can have a "proleptic" function, as, e.g., in the case of Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:25–26). Indeed, later in the story we will find that the development of their characteristics is already summarised and revealed in their names. The anticipatory function of the name of the person is evident above all in the case of the change of a name, which usually reveals the change in the character's destiny and opens the way to a new orientation of the plot, as e.g., in Gen 17:5, 15 (Abram and Sarai); Gen 32:29 (Jacob); or in Num 13:16 (Joshua) (Ska 2012, 138). The development of the character's story is in some sense determined by his name and anticipated in it. It therefore seems that the moment in the plot in which the name of the protagonist is introduced is of strategic importance. One can also observe that, through the stylistic constructions used in the direct description of the character, the "formula of the name" (*wᵉšēm*; *šᵉmô*; *ûšᵉmô*; *ûšᵉmāh*) occupies a privileged position.

The analysis reveals an element common to all the stories analysed above, i.e. that the character begins to exist only from the moment when his name is revealed. Independently of the modalities by which the protagonist is introduced into the story, he does not exist until his name is revealed, because we do not know about whom the story is talking. For example: we do not know the identity of the newborn around whom the rescue action takes place until the daughter of Pharaoh calls him Moses (cf. Exod 2:1–20). We do not know who the boy is, "ruddy, with beautiful eyes and handsome," chosen by God as the future king, until his name, David, is introduced by the narrator (cf. 1 Sam 16:1–13). The same can be said of Samson, whose name we learn only at the conclusion of the story of his birth (1 Kgs 19:19–21), or of the prophet Elisha, whose name is introduced, by contrast, with the first words of the story of his vocation (1 Kgs 19:19–21). Similarly, we learn to whom God's order is addressed at the moment when the narrator reveals his name to the reader (e.g., Jonah in Jonah 1:1). This shows the importance of the moment of revelation of the name of the protagonist, which often seems to be thrown into the story like a seed into the ground that conceals the DNA of the life that will develop from it in the

future.[16] From this moment he will bear his name like an "identity card" throughout his existence in the story. Thanks to this element of recognition, the reader is able to attribute to the character the actions that characterise him and the events that concern him.

In the stories of a birth, the name of the protagonist is introduced by the verb *wattiqrā'*, which is part of the formula for the birth of a son, that is, the sequence of the three verbs *wattahat*, *wattēled*, *wattiqrā'*. It is worth noting that in this case, the revelation of the name of the protagonist constitutes the final element in the formula of the birth of a son. In this context, the name concludes the narrative dedicated to the introduction of the protagonist. We can observe a similar situation in the story of the anointing of David, where the revelation of his name appears as the final element in his introduction. The appearance of this new character can be sensed first with Samuel's relentless search for him, and then with a description of his youthful nature. Finally his name appears, after the anointing and when he is invested by the Spirit.

When the protagonist is introduced with the exposition of the plot, the revelation of his name is prepared by information that is part of the initial picture. In this case, the biblical authors use the typical stylistic constructions *wᵉšēm*; *šᵉmô*; *ûšᵉmô*; *ûšᵉmāh*, as e.g., in the cases of Ruth (Ruth 1:4); Saul (1 Sam 9:1); and Job (Job 1:1). Elsewhere, on the other hand, the name is introduced as the first element of the presentation of the protagonist, so that the stylistic construction can be, e.g., *we*—X —*qāṭal*, as in the cases of Noah (Gen 6:9); Jephthah (Judg 11:1); and Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1).

The introduction of the name of the protagonist *in medias res* is very interesting. In this case the only information about the protagonist, whose name we will soon learn, is that God addresses his word specifically to him. This stratagem on the part of the author highlights not only the name of the protagonist, but also the fact that he is the interlocutor of God and recipient of his orders, as in the cases of Joshua (Josh 1:1–11), Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1), and Jonah (Jonah 1:1).

1.6. The Specific Effects of the Use of Diverse Stylistic Constructions in the Introduction of a Protagonist

In the course of the analyses we observed that the stylistic constructions allow the author to obtain specific effects in the story. In fact, the way of presenting a character changes according to the type of stylistic construction used by the author. The formula of the birth of a son, e.g., has the new character emerge gradually during the course of the story. From the time of the baby's conception, to the moment of his birth and up to the giving of his name, time passes, and this allows the introduction

16 As, e.g., the names of the characters at the beginning of the Book of Ruth, chosen for their meaning: the two sons who die, Mahlon—"sickness" and Chilion—"fragility"; Orpah—"who turns her back"; Naomi—"my sweetness/gracious one" and the protagonist Ruth—"friend."

of other information about the character, e.g., in the cases of Moses (Exod 2:1–20) and Isaac (Gen 21:1–3). In the latter situation, much time passes and different events occur between the promise of a son given to Abram and its fulfilment, with the announcement of the name of the unborn child, and all of this prepares the entrance of Isaac into the story,[17] thus creating an atmosphere of anticipation. Similarly, in the story of the anointing of David (1 Sam 16:13), the author describes the appearance of the boy before revealing his name, introduced by the preposition *ʿel*, when the Spirit of the Lord descends on David. The same happens with the use of the formula of the name (*šᵉmô*), which also introduces the characterising element represented by the name, but must be preceded by other information about the character, in order to be able to say "his name is," e.g., Job (Job 1:1). On the other hand, some formulas used to introduce the protagonist create in the reader the impression that the new character lands in the story out of nowhere, e.g., Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1), introduced by a simple *wayyiqṭōl*; or Noah (Gen 6:9), Jephthah (Judg 11:1), and Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1), who are introduced with the formula *wᵉ*—X—*qāṭal*.

We can conclude that the use of stylistic constructions in the introduction of a protagonist depends on the type of characterisation of the protagonist (direct or indirect) and appears to have the function of creating a particular effect desired by the author in order to communicate to the reader some essential elements of the story.

2. Introduction of a Secondary Character in a Biblical Story

In general, secondary characters occupy less space in the story, appearing only as they participate in the action of the protagonist, although their role is often essential. The greater or lesser presence of a secondary character in the story depends on his tasks. Once these are achieved, he exists the scene. One example is found in Gen 24, where the servant of Abraham is introduced *in medias res* and receives a precise order from his master ("and Abraham said to his servant…" v. 2). In the cycle of Abraham, this servant appears only in Gen 24. The order of Abraham, confirmed by the swearing of a solemn oath on the part of the servant, involves a journey, which constitutes the "narrative program" in the story. His objective is to find a wife for Isaac, and once the action has been completed, he disappears from the story.

2.1. Introduction of a Secondary Character and the Plot of the Story

While the protagonist is introduced at the beginning of the story, a secondary character can be introduced at different moments of the plot, depending on his function.

17 Other examples: Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28); Samson (Judg 13:3–24); Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–20).

But the question arises as to the stylistic strategies used by the biblical authors to make a character appear at a given moment in the story. A summary of the treatment of these aspects can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Stylistic constructions and the introduction of a secondary character in the plot of the story

Stylistic element	The beginning of the story (cycle, episode, scene)	In the middle of the story
The formulas of the name: *wᵉšēm; šemô; ûšemô; ûšᵉmāh*	Sarai (Gen 11:29); Hagar (Gen 16:1); Goliath (1 Sam 17:4); Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam 25:2–3); Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1:1–7a)	Laban (Gen 24:29); Leah (Gen 29:16); Boaz (Ruth 2:1); Mordechai (Esth 2:5); Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 1:15)
Wayyiqṭōl	Korah (Num 16:1); Balak (Num 22:2)	Miriam (Exod 15:20); Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:43); Michal (1 Sam 18:20)
Wᵉhinnēh*—X—*participle	Three men (Gen 18:2)	Rebecca (Gen 24:15); Rachel (Gen 29:6); Aaron (Exod 4:14)
The directo object marker ¯’*et*	Sarai (Gen 12:5); Joash (2 Kgs 11:2)	Zilpah (Gen 29:24); Jezebel (1 Kgs 16:31)

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

From Table 5 one can see that the biblical authors use the same stylistic constructions to introduce a secondary character at the beginning of the plot and in the middle of the dramatic action, indicating their rather universal character. From the standpoint of analysis of the plot, it is interesting to note that, e.g., the revelation of the name of the character, whether at the beginning or in the middle of the story, remains a crucial element of the exposition. More precisely, the introduction of the secondary character at the beginning of the plot with the formula of the name belongs to the classic type of exposition, as in the cases of Sarai (Gen 11:29); Hagar (Gen 16:1); Goliath (1 Sam 17:4); Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam 25:2–3); and Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1:1–7a). For example, in Gen 16:1, Hagar appears for the first time in the story: “Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children, but she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar.” This sentence creates the framework for the action of the episode that begins in the following verse, in which Sarai proposes to Abram to take her slave as a wife. We note that Hagar is introduced into the story with the formula of the name as part of the exposition, which is usually found before the action and which prepares it.

On the other hand, when the character is introduced with the same formula of the name in the middle of the dramatic action, his entrance creates a pause in the

action, as in the cases of: Laban (Gen 24:29); Boaz (Ruth 2:1); Mordechai (Esth 2:5); and Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 1:15). When, e.g., the author in Gen 24:29 has Laban enter the scene, the dramatic action is in full swing and everything happens with a certain speed. Indeed, the author says that Rebecca "ran to her mother's house and told them all these things," namely, what had happened at the well. At this point, the author introduces the element of the exposition in which he has Laban join the action: "Now Rebecca had a brother whose name (*šᵉmô*) was Laban." As we can see, the name of Laban is preceded by another element of the exposition, i.e. the information that he is the brother of Rebecca. After a moment's pause to update the picture, once Laban is introduced, the action resumes at the same speed and includes him. Indeed, the narrator affirms that "Laban also ran out to that man at the well" (Gen 24:29). Thus we see that the introduction of the secondary character, together with the information about him, creates a pause when they are introduced during the course of the action.

Another way of introducing a new secondary character into the action is the use of a simple *wayyiqṭōl*. The narrator can assign some specific actions that constitute the underlying theme of the story to different characters, including secondary characters. Very often in the Hebrew Bible stories, the action that takes place in the foreground becomes the occasion for a character to appear, who, by his own action, becomes involved in the chain of events. One of the many examples we can cite is found in Exod 15:19–20, when Miriam enters the stage:

> For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

In the action praising the victory, recounted by the author, Miriam appears, and with her action the celebrations begin (v. 20). The author inserts Miriam into the story *in medias res*, giving her an action to accomplish: "Miriam took… a timbrel in her hand…" (Exod 15:20). In Hebrew the sentence begins with a *wayyiqṭōl* (*wattiqqaḥ*) followed by the name of the character, who is the subject of the verb. The elements of this construction are the following: *wayyiqṭōl*—X—*direct object*. This manner of introducing a character creates an impression of his coming into the story out of the blue, without preparation. In this case, the narrator provides a single element of exposition, that is, the information that Miriam is Aaron's sister. Characters in other stories are similarly introduced with a simple *wayyiqṭōl*, e.g., Korah (Num 16:1, *wayyiqqaḥ qōraḥ*); Balak (Num 22:2, *wayyar' bālāk*); Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:43, *wayyimlōḵ reḥaḇʿām*); and Michal (1 Sam 18:20, *watteʾĕhaḇ mîkal*).

The stylistic construction whose main elements are *wᵉhinnēh*—X—*participle* creates an effect of surprise with emphasis. According to Luis Alonso Schökel, the

principal function of the particle *hinnēh* is to draw "attention, with a certain emphasis, to a character, an object or an action. It serves to present and to identify." (Alonso Schökel 2013, 215) We can easily see that its presence at the moment of introduction of a new character creates an effect of surprise; its precise function depends, however, on the context in which it is used. Rebecca is introduced into the middle of the action with the use of *wᵉhinnēh*—X—*participle* in: "Before he had done speaking, behold, Rebecca came out…" (Gen 24:15). In this case, *wᵉhinnēh*, followed by the subject, Rebecca, and the verb *yōṣē't* (*participle*) create an effect of surprise, drawing the attention of the reader to Rebecca, that is, to the fact that at the very moment when the servant finishes speaking, Rebecca comes out.[18]

There is another interesting stratagem, namely that of a secondary character who first appears in the background and only afterwards comes into the foreground. This involves the use of a "participle,"[19] as in the case of *wᵉhinnēh*—X—*participle*. For example, when Rebecca appears on the scene she is in the background (Gen 24:1–67), following the action expressed by the "participle," while in the foreground the servant is still praying.[20]

The same device is used to introduce Rachel in Gen 29:6; the shepherds, speaking to Jacob, say she is coming.[21] To obtain the effect of surprise by introducing Rachel, who appears suddenly and in the background, the biblical authors use the construction *wᵉhinnēh*—X—*participle*, in which two elements intersect: *wᵉhinnēh*, which produces an effect of surprise, and the *participle*, which expresses the action in the background. It seems evident that the particle *wᵉhinnēh* is used as an expression of surprise by the biblical authors to draw the attention of the reader to the new character who enters on the scene.

In Gen 18:2, three men appear in the story in the background, while the foreground is occupied with the specific action of Abraham, who "lifted his eyes and

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18 The effect of surprise, obtained by the use of *wᵉhinnēh*, is also evident in the story of the birth of the twins Esau and Jacob in Gen 25:24. The particle *hinnēh*, however, is used here in a different way: "And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb." Only at the moment of birth does everything become clear, that is, that Rebecca was carrying twins in her womb. One must note, however, that in this case *wᵉhinnēh* is not followed by a participle, but introduces a noun phrase. Therefore it does not serve to attract attention to a present action, but to identify that which was unknown up to the moment of birth, that is, the two twins.

19 Cf. e.g., the case of Elijah in 1 Sam 1:9.

20 In this case we can note that when introducing the heroine Rebecca into the story, the author dedicates an entire narrative (Gen 24), using the type scene of the meeting with the future bride at the well. We can conclude that the introduction of Rebecca with an exceptionally long narrative in which she is the objective of the "narrative program" underlines the importance of her role as heroine in the history of the patriarchs.

21 Aaron is introduced in a similar manner in Exod 4:14: here God, speaking with Moses, informs him of the arrival of his brother. In this case the construction is presented differently than in the other cases, because Aaron is named first, while the personal pronoun is used in the announcement of his arrival and the particle *hinnēh* creates an effect of surprise.

looked and lo, three men stood by him…." In this case, however, the use of the construction *wᵉhinnēh*—X—*participle* creates a variation, because it is preceded by the verb of perception *rāʾâ*: "and he looked and lo, three men stood by him": Here *wᵉhinnēh* introduces a sort of object of the verb *rāʾâ*, i.e., "three men." Indeed, while the reader of Gen 18:2 was expecting the appearance of YHWH, announced in the preceding verse, surprisingly three men appear before Abraham (cf. also Gen 33:1).

From the analysis of the relationship between the introduction of a secondary character and the plot of the story, we can conclude that they appear for the first time at different moments of the plot and that they are introduced both with the elements of exposition and *in medias res*. In the case of a secondary character, contrary to that of a protagonist, the biblical authors do not dedicate much space at the moment of his entry into the story; he is not the subject of an entire narrative and therefore we do not find introduced by the formula of the birth of a son, e.g., which by contrast occurs frequently in the presentation of a protagonist. We can conclude that in the case of both protagonists and secondary characters, the biblical authors use different formulas and stylistic constructions, depending on the effect they wish to achieve.

2.2. The Presentation of a New Secondary Character in a Story

The analysis shows that in the biblical stories, not only the protagonists but also the secondary characters are introduced by the narrator himself at the moment of their entry into the plot. There are, however, some exceptions, e.g., the case of Rachel (Gen 29:6). Her introduction, in fact, occurs in the dialogue between Jacob and the shepherds, whom he questions for information about Laban. By way of an answer, the shepherds announce the arrival of the daughter of Laban, Rachel, who is introduced not through the voice of the narrator, but by other characters, that is, the shepherds. Another exception concerns Aaron's entrance on the scene (Exod 4:14). God, seeking to convince Moses of his mission in Egypt, announces the arrival of his brother Aaron, who is to accompany the protagonist in his task. In this case also, the new character, Aaron, is presented not with the narrator's voice, but with that of another character, in this case, God.

2.3. The Characterisation of a New Secondary Character and the Use of Stylistic Constructions

At this point in the analysis, it seems particularly relevant to observe the characterisation of a new secondary person at the moment of his entrance into the story and the stylistic constructions used by the biblical authors to introduce him. These authors have different ways of describing the characters, the most common of which are the revelation of the name of the character; the description at the beginning of or

during course of the story; dialogues with other characters or with God; and oracles, dreams or visions (Ska 2002, 162).

As in the case of the protagonists, the characterisation of a person can be accomplished in two ways: through a direct description, that is, in a narrative mode ("telling") with the characteristics attributed to him, usually presented by the narrator, or else by an indirect description, that is, in a scenic mode ("showing"), by way of the character's speech or actions (Sternberg 1985, 101–3, 122), as exemplified in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison of direct and indirect descriptions of secondary characters and the use of various stylistic constructions

Direct description	Indirect description
Formulas of the name *wᵉšēm*; *šᵉmô*; *ûšᵉmô*; *ûšᵉmāh*: Sarai (Gen 11:29); Hagar (Gen 16:1); Laban (Gen 24:29); Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 1:15); Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam 25: 2–3); Elkanah, Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1:1–2); Goliath (1 Sam 17:4); Boaz (Ruth 2:1); Mordechai (Esth 2:5)	–
–	***Wayyiqṭōl*:** Balak (Num 22:2); Korah (Num 16:1); Miriam (Exod 15:20); Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:43); Michal (1 Sam 18:20)
***Wᵉhinnēh*—X—*participle*:** three men (Gen 18:2); Rachel (Gen 29:6); Aaron (Exod 4:14)	–
The direct object marker *ʾet*: Sarai (Gen 12:5); Zilpah (Gen 29:24); Jezebel (1 Kgs 16:31); Joash (2 Kgs 11:2)	–

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

From Table 6 it is clear that the authors favor direct description of the character. As we have observed in the study of protagonists, in the case of secondary characters it is the narrator himself who outlines the portrait of the character by attributing some characteristics to him. In fact, the formulas and stylistic constructions used (e.g., *šᵉmô*; *wᵉhinnēh*—X—*participle*; or *ʾet*) are elements of the exposition and therefore constitute a direct description of the new character.

It should be noted that the descriptions of secondary characters in the Bible are usually short, and that we rarely find out other information concerning them. For example, when the two midwives commanded by Pharaoh to exterminate all the male Hebrew babies are introduced, we know only their names, that "the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah" (*šēm … wᵉšēm*, Exod 1:15); only later do we learn that they feared God. When Bathsheba first appears, we learn that she was "very beautiful to look upon" (2 Sam 11:2). Sometimes the narrator gives additional information about a secondary character, as in the case of Nabal (1 Sam 25:2–3).

Before we learn his name, we are told that he was a Calebite from Maon, but that he had property in Carmel; his socioeconomic status was that of a very rich man, while his psychology was said to be "surly and mean." His wife was named Abigail, and at the moment when he appears on the scene, he was in Carmel, shearing his numerous sheep. We need to emphasise that the name Nabal, announced in the exposition with the formula *wᵉšēm*, has a proleptic character. In fact, *nābāl* means "fool, senseless, idiot, stupid, mean" (Alonso Schökel 2013, 522–23) and later in the story, Nabal will show himself to be exactly what his name says, that is, stupid. The direct description of his personality by the narrator in the exposition finds its confirmation in the indirect description that emerges from his behaviour: the insulting lack of hospitality toward David and his servants. Abigail's own words describe her husband when she asks David for mercy for him: "Let not my lord, I pray thee, take notice of this wretched man, Nabal: he is just what his name Nabal means: 'Churl' is his name and churlish his behaviour" (1 Sam 25:25).

One of the longest physical descriptions of a biblical character is that of Goliath (1 Sam 17). Beyond giving his origin in Gath, the description is totally dedicated to his physical aspect, mostly involving his armour:

> A champion came out from the Philistines, a man named Goliath, from Gath; he was over nine feet in height. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore plate armour of bronze, weighing five thousand shekels. On his legs were bronze greaves, and one of his weapons was a bronze dagger. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and its head, which was of iron, weighed six hundred shekels. His shield-bearer marched ahead of him (1 Sam 17:4–7).

Table 6 presents a few cases in which the indirect description occurs only when a secondary character, when coming on stage, accomplishes a specific action, expressed with a *wayyiqṭōl*. For example, Michal is introduced into the story with the news that she "fell in love (*wayyiqṭōl*) with David" (1 Sam 18:20), which at the same time constitutes an indirect description of her personality, that is, that she was a woman in love. The same mode of indirect characterisation at the moment of entrance on the scene, can be seen with other characters such as Balak (Num 22:2); Korah (Num 16:1); Miriam (Exod 15:20); and Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:43). We note that when a secondary characters enters on the scene following an action represented by a *wayyiqṭōl*, his characterisation is very short, because it is expressed in a single action, but as the story unfolds, it can prove essential for understanding the character himself.

Conclusion

To answer the initial question as to how the biblical authors introduce new characters, we have examined a few biblical texts in which different characters appear for the first time on stage from the point of view of analysis of the plot and style. The first part of the study was dedicated to the ways of introducing a protagonist and seeing how he is usually introduced into the biblical story from the beginning of the plot by means of three main modalities:

1) Dedicating an entire narrative to the entrance of the protagonist, in which the character appears slowly and is awaited. We have analysed the particular traits and the singular expressiveness of the stories of the birth of a hero which, being type scenes, may seem repetitive on first reading, but which in their most intimate aspects can conceal a unique intensity. A comparison of these type scenes[22] reveals both the similarities, that is, the underlying pattern, and the unique elements in the stories of the birth of a protagonist.
2) Using the initial part of the plot called "exposition," with a range of information necessary for the understanding of the action which follows. In this case, the characterisation of the hero is given by the narrator in a direct description and also includes the circumstances in which he appears.
3) Introducing the protagonist *in medias res*, in which the hero meets the reader without previous preparation. We note that in all the cases studied, God gives an order to the character that includes a "narrative program." When the protagonist enters the story, the reader already recognises that he is the interlocutor of God and learns of his reaction to the divine order given to him.

As to the secondary characters, the analysis shows that, in contrast to the protagonists, they appear for the first time in different parts of the plot according to their function. They can be included from the beginning of the story, but ordinarily an entire narrative is not dedicated to them, as in the case of the protagonists. Instead, they are given a limited space in the exposition, or they can be inserted directly into the dramatic action through their actions or brief parts of the narrative picture.

Furthermore, one can see that the introduction of a new character can be made up of different elements. One of these, whether for a protagonist or for a secondary character, is the revelation of the name, which gives the character his identity. His naming can be identified as the moment of his "birth" in the story, independently of the type of character and his role; often this name also has a proleptic value.

During the course of the analysis we have observed that the biblical authors use different stylistic constructions to introduce a new person into the story, constructions

22 For type scenes of the birth of a future hero, see Isaac (Gen 21:1–3); Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28); Moses (Exod 2:1–20); Samson (Judg 13:3–24); Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–20).

that present themselves as real and true formulas or conventions. Generally, the same construction is found in various stories. There is therefore no single stratagem for introducing a new character in the biblical stories; rather, the authors have created a variety of stylistic constructions, formulas and conventions. The study also asked why an author chooses a particular construction to introduce his character. From the in-depth analysis a plurality of reasons emerge: the use of a specific option seems to be determined in part by the moment in the plot and the dramatic action in which the character is introduced; by the role which the character himself plays in the plot; and above all, by the particular effect that the author wants to achieve in presenting the new character to the reader. In each case, the biblical authors seek to guide the reader to identify the essential elements of the character's characterisation, which are instrumental in understanding his role and the construction of the plot.

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