Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis

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Introduction

Since I have published a detailed discussion on the subject announced in the title of this article, the present essay will provide only a summary of my earlier work, with ample key illustrations. My earlier treatment may be found in chapters 2, 3, and 5 of my book *The Redaction of Genesis* (1st ed., 1986; 2d ed., 2014).[1] As indicated, in what follows, I rehearse that material here, though for the sake of simplicity, I do not footnote each individual discussion.

Put simply, large-scale chiasmus may be seen in the three main cycles of the Ancestral Narratives in the book of Genesis: (1) The Abraham Cycle (Gen 11:27–22:24); (2) The Jacob Cycle (Gen 25:19–35:22); and (3) The Joseph Story (Gen 37–50). Earlier scholars, such as Umberto Cassuto, Nahum Sarna, and Yehuda Radday, had detected hints of the chiasmus in the Abraham cycle, though no one had developed a full study.[2] Michael Fishbane receives the credit for identifying chiasmus in the Jacob cycle, and my analysis thereof is indebted to him throughout.[3] Prior to my observations about the Joseph story, however, no one had recognized the same literary structure operative there as well.[4]

In each of these three main sections of the book of Genesis, a series of episodes unfolds, the narrative reaches a focal point or pivot point,[5] and then the parallel episodes unfold in reverse order. Moreover, for each of the matching units, one finds a series of lexical items which serve to solidify the connections inherent in the shared themes.

I. The Abraham Cycle (Genesis 12–22)[6]

The outline of the Abraham cycle is presented in figure 1:

Figure 1: The Abraham Cycle (chs. 12–22)

A Genealogy of Terah (11:27–32)

   B Start of Abram's Spiritual Odyssey (12:1–9)

      C Sarai in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abram and Lot part (12:1–13:18)

         D Abram comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (14:1–24)

            E Covenant with Abram; Annunciation of Ishmael (15:1–16:16)

Focal Point: 17:1–5: Abram > Abraham | Elohim introduced | covenant

            E′ Covenant with Abraham; Annunciation of Isaac (17:1–18:15)

         D′ Abraham comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (18:16–19:38)

      C′ Sarah in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abraham and Ishmael part (20:1–21:34)

   B′ Climax of Abraham's Spiritual Odyssey (22:1–19)

A′ Genealogy of Nahor (22:20–24)

Five units, labeled A through E, comprise the first half of the Abraham cycle. Throughout these episodes, (a) the patriarch is called Abram; (b) God is referred to as Yhwh; and (c) the word *bərit* "covenant" is mentioned only once, in the voice of the narrator (15:18). As we reach the focal point of the narrative in 17:1–5, our attention is drawn to further developments of these three key elements: (a) Abram's name is changed to Abraham (v. 5), and he will be called such for the remainder of his life; (b) the word Elohim "God" is introduced (v. 3), and the term will appear alongside Yhwh for the remainder of the Abraham cycle; and (c) the covenant concept is elucidated in great detail, with the word *bərit* "covenant" occurring now in the voice of God (2x in the focal point verses, and 13x altogether in ch. 17). Five matching units, labeled E′ through A′, comprise the second half of the Abraham cycle, with the themes and motifs of A and A′, B and B′, etc., aligning. To further solidify the connections between two corresponding units, the text uses the same, similar, or like-sounding lexical items.

To demonstrate this last point, I elect to use the two matching units B and B′, especially since they constitute two well-known episodes within the Abraham cycle. In the first unit, B = 12:1–9, God commands Abram to leave his ancestral home and journey to Canaan. In the second unit, B′ = 22:1–19, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. The

following themes, motifs, and lexical items serve to highlight the correspondence between B and B′:

1. 12:1–3   God speaks to Abram for the first time.

   22:16–18   God speaks to Abraham for the final time.

   NOTE: Several more stories concern Abraham (ch. 23, the death of Sarah and Abraham's purchase of a burial site in Hebron; ch. 24, the procurement of a bride for Isaac; ch. 25, Abraham's sons [vv. 1–6] and the death and burial of Abraham [vv. 7–11]), but 22:16–18 represent God's final words to Abraham.

2. 12:1   לֶךְ־לְךָ *lɛk lǝka* "go forth"

   22:2   לֶךְ־לְךָ *lɛk lǝka* "go forth"

   NOTE: These are the only two places in the entire Bible where this key phrase occurs.

3. 12:1   "to the land that I will show you"

   22:2   "to the land of Moriah . . . which I will point-out to you"

   NOTE: In both cases, Abra(ha)m is unaware of the specific destination of his journey.

4. 12:1   "from **your** land, and from **your** birthplace, and from the house of **your** father"

   22:2   "**your** son, **your** favorite, whom **you** love, Isaac"

   NOTE: Note the three-fold use of **you/your** in both passages.

5. 12:6   Abram's journey takes him to the terebinth of **Moreh**.

   22:2   Abraham's journey takes him to the land of **Moriah**.

   NOTE: The two toponyms alliterate with each other, albeit at a distance of ten chapters.

6. 12:7   "And he built there an altar to Yʜwʜ"

   22:9   "And Abraham built there the altar"

   NOTE: True, Abram builds an altar in 13:18 as well, but the construction of the two altars at Moreh (12:7) and at Moriah (22:9) serve as a nexus between the two scenes nonetheless.

7. 12:3   "And all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you"

   22:18   "And all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through your seed"

   NOTE: Only in these two passages in the Abraham cycle does God speak in such fashion to Abra(ha)m (though see also 18:18).

8. 12:6   "the place of Shechem" (*mǝqom šǝkɛm*)

   22:6 / 22:3 "the place" (*maqom*) + "and he arose" (*wayyaškem*)

   NOTE: The two words of 12:6 within the B unit echo in two separate verses within the B′ unit (vv. 3 and 6).

9. 12:7   "and Yʜwʜ appeared to Abram" . . .

              "to Yʜwʜ who appeared to him"

   22:14   "Yʜwʜ of Appearance" (*Yʜwʜ-yirʾɛ*) . . .

              "on the mount of Yʜwʜ who appeared"

   Nᴏᴛᴇ: God also appears to Abraham in 17:1 and in 18:1, with the use of the same verb (Niphʿal of ה-א-ר *r-ʾ-h*), but the double usage of the verb in 12:7 and 22:14 highlights the nexus between these two passages.[7]

10. 22:9   Abram journeys to the Negev.

    22:19   Abraham journeys to Beer-sheva.

    Nᴏᴛᴇ: Beer-sheva is the largest city in the Negev region of southern Israel.

11. 12:1–9   The story unfolds in two stages.

    22:1–19   The story unfolds in two stages (see v. 15 *šenit*).

    Nᴏᴛᴇ: In unit B, Abram journeys from Harran to Shechem (vv. 1–7), and then again to the area of Ai and Bethel and thence to the Negev (vv. 8–9). In unit B′, there are two stages to the story, with two sets of divine speeches, as indicated by the word *šenit* (v. 15), before Abraham journeys to Beer-sheva (v. 19).

12. 12:8   וַיַּעְתֵּק *wayyaʿteq* "and he proceeded"

    22:9   וַיַּעֲקֹד *wayyaʿaqod* "and he bound"

    Nᴏᴛᴇ: This pair of words constitutes one of the best examples of long-range alliteration in the Bible. The like-sounding lexemes cannot be present in the story coincidentally, but must have been selected quite purposefully, as one final item to enhance the interrelationship between the two episodes. I make this claim based on the rarity of both vocables. The former verb *wayyaʿteq* "and he proceeded" occurs only here in Gen 12:8 and (as a clear echo) in Gen 26:22. The root ʿ-*t-q* occurs twelve other times in the Bible, with a range of meanings, among which are three additional instances of the Hiphʿil stem (Prov 25:1, Job 9:5, 32:15), though with different connotations. The latter verb, *wayyaʿaqod* "and he bound," from the root ʿ-*q-d*, is a *hapax legomenon* in the Bible, used here instead of the common root *q-š-r* "tie, bind" (see, e.g., Gen 38:28, Josh 2:18, 2:21, Job 39:10, etc.).

To my mind, the overarching chiastic structure of the Abraham cycle bespeaks a single authorial hand for Gen 12–22. The series of linkages which yoke the individual scenes to one another, as demonstrated here for units B and B′, only confirms that conclusion. This approach of literary unity stands in contrast to those scholars who divide the Abraham narrative into three separate sources ('J', 'E', 'P').[8] For the specific case of units B and B′, note that most scholars assign the main portion

of Gen 12:1–9 to the 'J' source⁹ and all or most of Gen 22:1–19 to the 'E' source.¹⁰ And yet, one wishes to know, how is it possible, according to this theory, that two separate authors used the same words, themes, motifs, etc., which coincidentally ended up as the crucial scenes in the book of Genesis bracketing God's relationship with Abra(ha)m? The approach utilized here, which analyzes sustained narratives as narrative wholes, is much to be preferred.

II. The Jacob Cycle (Genesis 25–35)¹¹

We now turn our attention to the Jacob cycle, for which see figure 2:

Figure 2: The Jacob Cycle (chs. 25–35)

A Oracle sought, struggle in childbirth, Jacob born (25:19–34)

　B Interlude: Rebekah in foreign palace, pact with foreigners (26:1–34)

　　C Jacob fears Esau and flees (27:1–28:9)

　　　D Messengers (28:10–22)

　　　　E Arrival at Haran (29:1–30)

　　　　　F Jacob's wives are fertile (29:31–30:24)

Focal point: 30:22-25: Rachel gives birth, Jacob decides to return to Canaan

　　　　　F′ Jacob's flocks are fertile (30:25–43)

　　　　E′ Flight from Haran (31:1–54)

　　　D′ Messengers (32:1–32)

　　C′ Jacob returns and fears Esau (33:1–20)

　B′ Interlude: Dinah in foreign palace, pact with foreigners (34:1–31)

A′ Oracle fulfilled, struggle in childbirth, Jacob becomes Israel (35:1–22)

As with the Abraham cycle, so here with the Jacob cycle: we observe a chiastic structure which builds from the beginning of the narrative to the pivot point, and which then "unwinds" (for lack of a better term) from the pivot point to the end of the narrative. Six units, labeled here A through F, recount the first half of the story, including the story of Jacob's birth, his dealings with Esau, the journey to Aram, his settling there, and his life there. The focal point at 30:22–25 describes Rachel's giving birth to Joseph (after the period of her extended barrenness) and Jacob's concomitant decision to return to the land of Canaan. As the narrative recounts the second half of the story, six additional units follow, labeled here A′ through F′, including Jacob's preparations for the return home, his return journey, his reunion with Esau, and the eventual arrival

in Canaan. As we saw above in the Abraham cycle, here as well: to high-light the connections between two corresponding units, the text uses the same, similar, or like-sounding lexical items, alongside the matching themes and motifs.

To illustrate this last point, I elect to use the two matching units C and C′, the two scenes in which Jacob and Esau take center stage.

1. 27:18–29   Jacob deceives Isaac (and Esau).

    33:1–2   Jacob plans to deceive Esau.

    NOTE: No further comment is needed.

2. 27:41–45   Jacob fears Esau.

    33:1–8   Jacob fears Esau.

    NOTE: Again, the parallel is obvious.

3. 28:5   Jacob flees Canaan.

    33:18   Jacob returns to Canaan.

    NOTE: Once more, an extended comment is unnecessary here.

4. 27:18–29   Jacob steals the *bəraka* "blessing" from Esau.

    33:11   Jacob presents Esau with a *bəraka* "gift."

    NOTE: The key noun *bəraka* "blessing" occurs 7x in unit C,[12] especially since the goal of Jacob's deception was to procure the blessing from his father Isaac. The author managed to include the same word *bəraka*, albeit with the meaning "gift," in unit C′ at 33:11. These attestations con-stitute the only usages of this noun in the entire Jacob cycle.

5. 27:26–27   Isaac kisses Jacob (~ Esau).

    33:4   Esau kisses Jacob.

    NOTE: The significant kiss which Isaac places upon Jacob (thinking he was Esau, of course) in 27:26–27 is echoed by the kiss which Esau places upon Jacob in 33:4.

6. 27:10, 27:14 Jacob brings good things to Isaac.

    33:11   Jacob brings good things to Esau.

    NOTE: Once more, what transpired in the scene in which Jacob pre-sented himself before Isaac is paralleled in the scene in which Jacob appears before Esau.

7. 27:21–27   Verbal root *n-g-š* "approach, come near, bring near" (6x)

    33:6–7   Verbal root *n-g-š* "approach, come near, bring near" (4x)

    NOTE: The same verbal root occurs commonly in both scenes.[13]

8. 27:11   Jacob tells Rebekah that his brother Esau is *śaʿir* "hairy."

    27:23   Jacob's hands were *śeʿirot* "hairy," like Esau's.

    33:14, 33:16 Esau travels *śeʿira* "to Seir" (land of Edom).

NOTE: The hairiness of Esau is a key feature in unit C, and thus the author weaves the like-sounding word, albeit as a toponym, into unit C′.

9. 27:28   Jacob will receive *rov* "abundance."

     33:9   Esau informs Jacob that he is *rav* "abundant."

NOTE: Isaac promises Jacob (though he believes that he is speaking to Esau) abundance in 27:28, and thus the reader (from a sense of fairness) is gratified to learn in 33:9 that Esau too has achieved abundant possessions.

10. 27:29   Jacob's brothers "will bow down" to him.

     33:3   Jacob "bows down" to Esau.

NOTE: Again, when he spoke the words of the first blessing in unit C, Isaac imagined that one day Jacob would bow down to Esau, even though the reader knows that, in light of the deception, it is the other way around. Once more, in a sense of fairness perhaps, the reader may gain some delight to see that in fact Jacob does bow down to Esau in unit C′.

11. 27:16   Rebekah placed goat skins over the smooth skin of Jacob's hand and neck.

     27:40   Esau will throw off the yoke "from your neck."

     33:4   Esau "fell upon his [sc. Jacob's] neck."

NOTE: These are the only instances of the word צַוָּאר *ṣawwaʾr* "neck" in the Jacob cycle. In fact, they represent the first three occurrences of the word in the book of Genesis.

12. 27:38   "And he [sc. Esau] cried"

     33:4   "and they [sc. Jacob and Esau] cried"

NOTE: Esau's cry of anguish in unit C is an emotional highpoint in that scene, and thus the more loving tears in C′, shed by both brothers, serve to assuage both the reader and the characters.

13. 27:16   חֶלְקַת צַוָּארָיו *ḥɛlqat ṣawwaʾraw* "the smoothness of his neck"

     33:19   חֶלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה *ḥɛlqat haś-śadɛ* "the portion of the field"

NOTE: The Hebrew word חֶלְקָה *ḥɛlqa* (appearing in these two phrases as the construct form חֶלְקַת *ḥɛlqat*) means both "smoothness" and "portion" (especially for a plot of land). The adept author of the Jacob cycle skillfully employed the identical lexeme, albeit with different meanings, to create one further nexus between units C and C′.

14. C   two individuals present in each scene, but never Jacob and Esau together

     C′ Jacob and Esau meet

NOTE: The long unit C, comprised of 55 verses (27:1–28:9), includes seven individual scenes, in which two characters (and two characters

only) are "on stage":[14] Isaac and Esau (27:1–4); Rebekah and Jacob (27:5–17); Jacob and Isaac (27:18–29); Esau and Isaac (27:30–41); Rebekah and Jacob (27:42–45); Rebekah and Isaac (27:46); and Isaac and Jacob (28:1–5)—with the coda of Esau alone (28:6–9). The reader observes that the two key characters, Jacob and Esau, are never "on stage" together. They almost meet in 27:30, but do not. This makes the reunion of the two brothers in unit C′ all the more poignant.

As we saw above with the Abraham cycle, so here: the overarching chiastic structure of the Jacob cycle bespeaks a single authorial hand for Gen 25–35. The series of linkages which yoke the individual scenes to one another, as demonstrated here for units C and C′, only confirms that conclusion. This approach of literary unity stands in contrast to those scholars who divide the Jacob narrative into three separate sources ('J', 'E', 'P').[15] For the specific case of units C and C′, note that scholars typically assign portions of both pericopes into separate sources. In the former, 27:1–45 is allocated to 'J' and Gen 27:46–28:9 is allocated to 'P'; while for the latter, source critics differ on the allotment of the verses. One scheme identifies three sources, 33:1–17 = 'J', 18a = 'P', and 18b–20 = 'E';[16] while another assigns the entire chapter to 'E', save for the middle segment of v. 18, which is assigned to 'R' (the final Redactor).[17]

If one follows the former arrangement, then most of C and most of C′ are attributed to the 'J' source, so my criticism is not as forceful this time, since the same author easily could be responsible for the vast majority of the items listed above—indeed, basically all of them, save no. 13.[18] Let us look, accordingly, at item no. 13, with the remarkable use of the word חֶלְקָה *ḥelqa* with its two meanings of "smoothness" (27:16) and "portion, plot of land" (33:19). And yet the former is ascribed to the 'J' source, while the latter is attributed to the 'E' source.

If one were to follow the latter approach, with most of C and most of C′ assigned to different sources, then once again an entire litany of corresponding lexical items would need to be explained, per the list above, since most in unit C would appear in 'J' and most in unit C′ would appear in 'E.'

A better approach, to my mind, is to see a single author responsible for the Jacob cycle. Reading the narrative as a narrative whole allows the reader to appreciate the chiastic structure, to focus on the significance of the pivot point (more on this below), and to behold the manner in which linguistic and thematic features serve to unite the matching units.

III. The Joseph Story (Genesis 37–50)[19]

Let us now analyze the Joseph story, for which see figure 3:

Figure 3: The Joseph Story (chs. 37–50)

A   Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (37:1–36)

   B   Interlude: Joseph not present (38:1–30)

      C   Reversal: Joseph guilty, Potiphar's wife innocent (39:1–23)

         D   Joseph hero of Egypt (40:1–41:57)

            E   Two trips to Egypt (42:1–43:34)

               F   Final test (44:1–34)

Focal point: 45:1–4: Joseph reveals himself to his brothers

               F′   Conclusion of test (45:1–28)

            E′   Two tellings of migration to Egypt (46:1–47:12)

         D′   Joseph hero of Egypt (47:13–27)

      C′   Reversal: Ephraim first-born, Manasseh second-born (47:28–48:22)

   B′   Interlude: Joseph nominally present (49:1–28)

A′   Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (49:29–50:26)

    By now, the large-scale chiasmus should be familiar to the reader. The Joseph story has six initial units, A through F, which build to the climax, or focal point, after which six corresponding units, A′ through F′ bring the novella to its conclusion. In the case of the Joseph story, the climactic focal point is rather obvious: 45:1–4, where Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. As we saw above in the Abraham and Jacob cycles, here too: to highlight the connections between two corresponding units, the text uses the same, similar, or like-sounding lexical items, alongside the matching themes and motifs.

    To illustrate the technique with parallel units from the Joseph story, I elect to use units C and C′, the two reversal scenes. In so doing, I specifically select two units in which the nexus may not be that obvious. That is to say, the relationship between units B and B′ in the Abraham cycle (analyzed above) was announced to us rather clearly with the two usages of the phrase לֶךְ־לְךָ *lɛk ləka* "go forth" (12:1 and 22:2). Similarly, the correspondence of units C and C′ in the Jacob cycle (also analyzed above) is rather forthright, since both deal with Jacob and Esau. By contrast, in the Joseph story, there is nothing which at first glance would allow us to see the nexus between units C and C′, as the former deals

with Joseph and Potiphar's wife, while the latter deals with Jacob's bless-
ing to Ephraim and Manasseh. And yet, as we shall see immediately
below, the author of this narrative found numerous ways to produce the
necessary connections.

1. Reversal: Joseph guilty, Potiphar's wife innocent.

    Reversal: Ephraim first-born, Manasseh second-born.

    > NOTE: The major theme which joins the two units is that of reversal.

2. Joseph's superior (Potiphar) responsible for the reversal.

    Joseph's superior (Jacob) responsible for the reversal.

    > NOTE: As indicated, the reversal is not due to Joseph's actions or words,
    > but rather due to the actions and words of a superior.

3. 39:7   Action centers around the bed: implicit in C: "lie with me."

    47:31   Action centers around the bed: explicit in C′: *miṭṭa* "bed."

    > NOTE: See also the next item and comment.

4. Verbal root ב-כ-שׁ *š-k-b* "lie"—39:7, 39:10, 39:12, 39:14

    Verbal root ב-כ-שׁ *š-k-b* "lie"—47:30

    > NOTE: The root ב-כ-שׁ *š-k-b* "lie" is central to the falsehood fabricated by
    > Potiphar's wife (note its four-fold use in 39:7–14, three times in her voice)
    > in unit C;[20] and thus the author wove one usage of the same verbal root
    > into unit C′. These are the only instances of this lexeme in the entire
    > Joseph story.

5. Verbal root ך-ר-ב *b-r-k* "bless"—39:5

    Verbal root ך-ר-ב *b-r-k* "bless"—48:3, 48:9, 48:15, 48:16, 48:20 (2x)

    > NOTE: In this case, the opposite occurs. The verbal root ך-ר-ב *b-r-k* "bless"
    > is central to unit C′, in which Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, and
    > thus the author incorporated the same verbal root into one verse in
    > unit C.[21]

6. 39:8   "and he [sc. Joseph] resisted and said"

    48:19   "and his father [sc. Jacob] resisted and said"

    > NOTE: The phraseology is strikingly similar, with the collocation of the
    > verbal root ן-א-מ *m-ʾ-n* "resist" and the common verbal root א-מ-ר *ʾ-m-r*
    > "say."

7. 39:4   "and Joseph found favor in his [sc. Potiphar's] eyes"

    47:29   "if I [sc. Jacob] have found favor in your [sc. Joseph] eyes"

    > NOTE: The idiom "to find favor in one's eyes" is relatively common in
    > the Bible, and indeed the phrase occurs elsewhere in the Joseph story
    > (47:25, 50:4). Nonetheless, one will assume that the placement of these
    > two usages, in 39:4 in unit C, and in 47:29 in unit C′, is intentional, as the

author of the narrative grasped every opportunity to correlate the word-ings in the corresponding units.[22]

8. 39:21   *ḥɛsɛd* "favor, fealty, kindness"

    47:29   *ḥɛsɛd* "favor, fealty, kindness"

    NOTE: Once more we are dealing with a common word (it appears again in the Joseph story in 40:14), but regardless of that point, the author once again places one instance of the word in unit C and another in unit C′.

9. Noun *yad* "hand" used 9x in C

    Noun *yad* "hand" used 5x in C′

    NOTE: The word *yad* "hand" is exceedingly common in the Bible.[23] Accordingly, any two pericopes or sections or chapters or texts of any length are almost undoubtedly sure to have the word present within the text. That said, we note that unit C attests to the word *yad* "hand" 9x, more than in any other unit within the book of Genesis. This noun is clearly an important lexical feature for the author of Gen 39.[24] More-over, the word occurs in manifold connotations: (a) Potiphar buys Joseph *miy-yad* "from the hand" of the Ishmaelites (v. 1); (b) everything prospers in Potiphar's house with all matters and concerns (save for Potiphar's wife) *bə-yado* "in his (sc. Joseph's) hand" (vv. 3–4) or *bə-yad yosep* "in the hand of Joseph" (v. 6), a point which Joseph himself makes with the word *bə-yadi* "in my hand" (v. 8); (c) Joseph leaves his garment *bə-yadah* "in her hand," that is, in the hand of Potiphar's wife (vv. 12–13); and then (d) the jailer puts everything in Joseph's charge, once again with either the phrase *bə-yad yosep* "in the hand of Joseph" (v. 22) or the word *bə-yado* "in his hand" (v. 23).[25] In the matching unit C′ the word *yad* "hand" occurs 5x, in order to create the nexus, with three of the attestations used in the key scene of Jacob's blessing Joseph's two sons. Note the following: (a) Jacob's instructions to Joseph to place his hand under his thigh (47:29); (b) Jacob's criss-crossing his hands during the blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim (48:14, 48:17 [2x]); and (c) the expression *miy-yad* "from the hand of" the Amorites (48:22).[26]

10. 39:6   *lɛḥɛm* "bread" (though figuratively "wife")

    48:7   *bet lɛḥɛm* "Beth-lehem" (lit. "house of bread")

    NOTE: The word *lɛḥɛm* "bread" may be understood literally in 39:6, if we assume that Potiphar entrusted everything to Joseph, except for the food that he ate, given different dietary customs amongst the Egyp-tians and the Israelites (as intimated in Gen 43:22). But the word also carries a sexual connotation, as is revealed by Joseph's own speech in 39:9, where he informs Potiphar's wife that the only item in the house-hold not in his charge is she.[27] The presence of this key word in unit C demands its presence in unit C′, and the author obliges with the phrase

בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָת הִוא בֵּית לֶחֶם *bə-dɛrɛk ʾɛprat hiʾ bet laḥɛm* "on the way to Ephrath, that is, Beth-lehem." Many scholars have questioned either the whole of Jacob's thrust here (why raise the matter of Rachel's death at all), and/or the last three words as a later gloss, especially as it sounds extremely odd in Jacob's speech.[28] One would expect him to refer to his burial of Rachel "on the way to Ephrath" without defining the location as "that is, Beth-lehem." But the words are necessary, I submit, in order for the word *lɛḥɛm* "bread" (the second component in the toponym "Beth-lehem") to echo its mate in 39:6.

As I noted above (see n. 19), the Joseph story constitutes a more integrated narrative than the Abraham and Jacob cycles—hence, my use of the word "story" as opposed to "cycle." In the case of the two earlier cycles, with more loosely connected scenes about Abraham and about Jacob, the chiastic structure helps to weave the disparate units into a consistent narrative. Given the greater unity inherent in the Joseph story, accordingly, one might think that a chiastic structure was less necessary for Gen 37–50. And yet, given the manner in which the stage was set with the first two major narratives concerning the ancestors of Israel, the author of the Joseph story felt the need to follow suit. The result is once again a superb narrative with a crucial scene serving as the pivot point—more on this anon.[29]

In my treatments of the Abraham cycle and the Jacob cycle above, I identified a number of lexical features in matching units which militate against the documentary hypothesis. The same may be demonstrated for the Joseph story. According to the source theory, all of chapter 39, our unit C, is ascribed to 'J'; while 47:28–48:22, our unit C′ divides into three authors: 47:29–31 = 'J', 48:1–2, 8–22 = 'E', and 47:28, 48:3–7 = 'P'.[30] And yet once again we observe a host of interconnections between these two sections of the Joseph story, including as specific a phrase as "and he resisted and said" in 39:8 (with Joseph as subject) and "and his father resisted and said" in 48:19 (with Jacob as subject)—see item no. 6 above.

For a second specific example, we may look at item no. 10 above, already discussed in some detail. As indicated, the key word *lɛḥɛm* "bread" (though figuratively "wife") in 39:6 is assigned to 'J', but its echo embedded within the toponym *bet lɛḥɛm* "Beth-lehem" (lit. "house of bread") in 48:7 is ascribed to 'P'.

One can only repeat the words already expressed above: rather than dividing the Genesis (and other) accounts into dissected parts, the literary approach employed here, which reads sustained storylines as narrative wholes, is much to be preferred.[31]

Conclusion

With one or two minor exceptions, everything that I have expressed above may be found in my aforecited monograph, *The Redaction of Genesis*. Here towards the article's end, accordingly, I would like to offer something new. Indeed, what I present in the following occurred to me neither while writing the first edition of the book (1986), nor while preparing the second edition of the book (2014), but rather only while contemplating the material yet again in advance of the chiasmus conference held at Brigham Young University in August 2017.

Let us look more closely at each of the three focal points standing at the center of the three main cycles of the Ancestral Narratives. As we saw, in the Abraham cycle, the focal point at 17:1–5 introduces the crucial concept of covenant, the linkage between God and Abraham, and through his descendants, between God and the people of Israel. In the Jacob cycle, the focal point at 30:22–25 highlights Jacob's decision to return to the land of Canaan. Finally, in the Joseph story, the focal point at 45:1–4 shines the spotlight on the emotional reunion of Joseph and his brothers.

The three themes expressed in the three pivot points, when read together, constitute the essence of the book of Genesis. Indeed, one could say, they embrace the essence of the Torah, if not, in fact, the entire Bible. The three themes are: (a) the *covenant*; (b) the *land* of Canaan; and (c) the *people* of Israel. When woven together, these three elements— *land, people, and covenant*—create the essential message of the Bible: God and the people of Israel are forever inextricably linked via the covenant; God is to be the God of the people of Israel, while Israel is to be people of God; and this drama is to unfold in the land of Canaan, a gift from God to the people of Israel. The three items appear together in a number of biblical passages, though two citations will suffice here:

- Gen 17:7–8—"And I will establish my covenant between me and you, and between your seed after you for their generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be for you as God, and to your seed after you. And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

- Ezek 37:25–26—"And they shall dwell in the land which I gave to my servant Jacob, and in which your ancestors dwelled; they and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever; and David my servant shall be their leader forever. And I

will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will set them and I will multiply them, and I will set my sanctuary in their midst forever."

The Genesis passage anticipates the long relationship of God and the people of Israel resident in the land of Canaan. The Ezekiel passage, spoken in Babylonian Exile after a tortuous history, foresees the restoration of that vision.[32]

Nowhere, of course, is any of this spelled out for the reader of the book of Genesis. Nowhere, for example, does the text state: pay attention, dear reader, to these three pivot points, for in them is to be found the essential message. Though this is true, of course, for the entire ancient Hebrew literary tradition. To state the obvious, the Bible does not come with charts of the type that I have produced above, in order to highlight the role of the pivot point in each of the three narrative cycles. Rather, the text reveals little, thereby demanding the reader's active engagement. Only through such an encounter with the text will the reader garner the fullness of its message.

Appendix: The Primeval History

There is, of course, one additional large chunk of text in the book of Genesis, to wit, the Primeval History, comprising the first eleven chapters of the book. The alert reader already may have asked him- or herself: does chiasm appear in Gen 1–11 as well? The answer is no, it does not. Instead, a different manner of redactional structuring occurs in this narrative, per the following outline in figure 4:

Figure 4: The Primeval History (chs. 1–11)

A Creation, God's Words to Adam (1:1–3:24)

   B Adam's Sons (4:1–16)

      C Technological Development of Mankind (4:17–26)

         D Ten Generations from Adam to Noah (5:1–32)

            E Downfall: The Nephilim (6:1–8)

Focal point: 6:8-9: Noah found favor in God's eyes, Noah was righteous

A′ Flood, God's Words to Noah (6:9–9:17)

   B′ Noah's Sons (9:18–29)

      C′ Ethnic Development of Mankind (10:1–32)

         E′ Downfall: Tower of Babel (11:1–9)

        D′ Ten Generations from Noah to Terah (11:10–26)

As the reader can determine, in the Primeval History, the five units proceed A through E, and then are repeated in the same order, A′ through E′ (and not in chiastic order), with one necessary diversion, since D′ and E′ have switched slots. Credit for this discovery goes to Jack Sasson,[33] and then once again I direct the interested reader to my book for further details.[34] Apparently, the overall author/editor/compiler/ redactor of the book of Genesis sought to distinguish the Primeval History, with its more universalistic tones (creation, flood, nations of the world, etc.), from the Ancestral Narratives, with their more particularistic concerns, per the above, with their focus on the covenant, the land of Canaan, and the people of Israel. He accomplished this distinction not only through the contents of the different sections but via the different literary patternings inherent in the extended narratives.

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Notes

1. Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (2d ed.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014). The relevant page numbers are: pp. 27–52 (= ch. 2); pp. 53–69 (= ch. 3); pp. 79–97 (= ch. 5), though other material is germane as well. Note that the page numbers are the same for both the first edition and the second edition of the book.

2. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part Two; From Noah to Abraham* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 296; Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1966), 160–61; and Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analysis, Exegesis* (ed. John W. Welch; Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 104–5. To be sure, Cassuto died while working on the Abraham material for his multivolume commentary on the book of Genesis, so all that we possess is his outline statement.

3. Michael Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19– 35:22)," *JJS* 26 (1975): 15–38; Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 40–62. This book was reprinted as *Biblical Text and Texture* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), with the same pagination.

4. Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis,* 79–97. See also Gary A. Rendsburg, "Redactional Structuring in the Joseph Story: Genesis 37–50," in *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text = Bucknell Review* 33, no. 2 (ed. Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier; Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 215–32. For a very brief treatment, see also Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," 102.

5. I shall use the terms "focal point" and "pivot point" interchangeably.

6. As we shall see immediately below, the Abraham Cycle properly begins at Gen 11:27, though in this section heading, as the reader can see, I prefer to use whole chapter numbers only. See similarly, n. 11 below.

7. Admittedly, though, my rendering of the verb *yir'ɛ* as "Appearance" plays slightly with the grammar, since this form of the verb is in the Qal construction.

8. For the clearest and most important recent statement, see Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (Harper: San Francisco, 2003), 49–66. Here and below, I simplify Friedman's slightly more complex formulation, which includes 'RJE' (Redactor of combined 'J' and 'E'), 'R' (final Redactor), and the occasional 'Other' (e.g., Gen 14). From more than a century ago, see the classic treatment of S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1913), 11, 15. See also the convenient chart based on Driver's analysis in Nahum M. Sarna and S. David Sperling, "Genesis, Book of," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2d ed.; Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 7:443.

9. Most scholars, including Driver and Friedman cited in the previous note, assign 12:4b–5 to the 'P' source.

10. Driver assigns all of Gen 22:1–19 to the 'E' source, whereas Friedman sees the hand of 'RJE' (that is, the redactor who combined 'J' and 'E') in vv. 11–15 and in the two-word phrase *nə'um yhwh* "utterance of Yhwh" in v. 16. Friedman analyzes the text in such fashion in order to explain the five-fold use of the name Yhwh in this short section, for according to his view in the Elohist source God does not reveal his name Yhwh until later in the Torah, specifically to Moses in Exod 3:14–15.

11. Technically, the Jacob cycle does not commence until Gen 25:19, and it ends at Gen 35:22, with a few verses in ch. 35 remaining, but to keep the chapter numbers whole, I have simplified the range to Gen 25–35 in this section heading. See similarly above, n. 6.

12. The fact that specifically seven occurrences of this key noun appear in unit C may not be a coincidence.

13. For the sole other attestation of this verb in the Jacob cycle, see 29:10.

14. Again, the fact that the account may be subdivided into specifically seven (!) scenes is probably intentional. In my listing of the two individuals, I place the more active and dominant character first.

15. See, for example, Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed,* 71–90; and Driver, *Introduction,* 11, 16, with the latter summarized by the convenient chart in Sarna and Sperling, "Genesis, Book of," 443.

16. Thus, Driver, *Introduction,* 16; see also Sarna and Sperling, "Genesis, Book of," 443.

17. Thus, Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed,* 86–87, though with the caveat that this section of the narrative offers "some of the most difficult problems for distinguishing between J and E" (p. 86, n.).

18. To be more precise, both elements in items nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 above appear in passages ascribed to 'J,' while both elements in item no. 3 above appear in passages ascribed to 'P.' Item no. 14 is very general (save for the specifically seven scenes in unit C), so a single author, presumably 'J,' could be responsible for the large picture which emerges by comparing C and C′.

19. I have adopted the scholarly consensus here, which is to refer to the Abraham and Jacob narratives as "cycles," as they are comprised of relatively disparate scenes (see, for example, ch. 14 in the former and ch. 34 in the latter), but to refer to the Joseph narrative as a "story," since it reveals a more integrated storytelling and continuous plot line.

20. My prose here includes an unintentional pun. I use the word "lie," per the meaning of the Hebrew verb, in the sense of "lie down." The continuation of my comment, however, segues into the "lie, falsehood" perpetrated by Potiphar's wife.

21. In the same verse, see also the noun phrase בִּרְכַּת יְהֹוָה *birkat Yhwh* "blessing of Yhwh."

22. The Hebrew noun in these two passages is *ḥen* "favor," used frequently in this idiom. Its near synonym *ḥesed* "favor, fealty, kindness" is treated in the next item.

23. In fact, the word occurs 1627 times, thereby ranking 12th in frequency amongst nouns in the Bible.

24. See further Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (2d ed.; New York: Basic Books, 2011), 137–38.

25. The reader using a Bible translation may not encounter the word "hand" 9x, however. I note, for example, that RSV uses "hand" only 4x, while NJV uses "hand" 5x. Neither translation renders it in v. 1, electing for the simpler "from the Ishmaelites." In other instances, RSV and NJV have matters in Joseph's charge (in Potiphar's household) or in Joseph's care (in the prison). It is for this reason that translations such as those by Everett Fox and Robert Alter are to be preferred, especially in this instance since both scholars use "hand" 9x. See Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 186–89; and Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 221–25.

26. In this case, RSV uses "hand" all 4x, though NJV omits the word in the last instance.

27. Such was recognized by the rabbis of old, for which see Bereshit Rabba 86:6, along with the medieval commentaries of Rashi (1040–1105) and Ramban (1194–1270). Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1167) was aware of this interpretation, but he stressed the plain meaning "bread, food," with an eye to the different dietary customs, as I indicated above.

28. For details, see Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis,* 88. See further below, regarding the assignment of these verses to 'P', in an otherwise mainly 'E' narrative.

29. See below, in the Conclusion to this chapter.

30. Thus Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed,* 97–98. Driver, *Introduction,* 17, agrees in the main, though he found it too difficult to distinguish 'J' and 'E' in 48:8–22 and thus contented himself with the designation 'JE'. See also the convenient chart in Sarna and Sperling, "Genesis, Book of," 443.

31. If I have engaged herein consistently with the publications of S. R. Driver and of Richard Elliott Friedman, even if to take issues with their apportionment of the narratives into different sources, I do so with the utmost respect for these two singular scholars. It goes without saying that Driver was the greatest biblical scholar of his day; while Friedman remains the most eloquent spokesperson for the JEDP Theory, a sincere dialogue partner on the academic issues which separate us, and an esteemed colleague. For a recent essay of mine, with similar content and with similar engagement with the analyses of Driver and Friedman, see Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Literary Unity of the Exodus Narrative," in *"Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?" Biblical, Archaeological, and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives* (ed. James K. Hoffmeier, Alan R. Millard, and Gary A. Rendsburg; Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 13; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 113–32.

32. The rabbis of old, in fact, saw the connection between Ezek 37:15–28 and the focal point in Gen 45:1–4, for the former serves as the prophetic reading which accompanies the Torah portion of *way-yiggaš* "and he [sc. Judah] approached," the incipit of Gen 44:18–47:27. In the former, the prophet foresees the reunion of the Judahites (led by Judah) and the Israelians (led by Joseph) embodied by the diptych created by the two pieces of wood. This vision, in turn, evokes the scene of the brothers, led by Judah, reunited with their long-lost brother Joseph. (The Karaites, incidentally, use a different prophetic portion for this section of the Torah, to wit, Josh 14:6–15, based on the opening phrase of v. 6, "and the children of Judah approached.")

33. Jack M. Sasson, "The 'Tower of Babel' as a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History," in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon* (ed. Gary A. Rendsburg et al.; New York: Ktav, 1980), 211–19.

34. Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis,* 7–25.