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Analyzing the Use of Chiastic Structures Within Patriarchal Narratives in Genesis

By

Hunter Seehorn

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
University Honors Scholars Program  
Honors College  
and the  
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Department of Literature and Language  
East Tennessee State University

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## ABSTRACT

Analyzing the Use of Chiastic Structures Within Patriarchal Narratives in Genesis

By

Hunter Seehorn

Chiastic structures are utilized throughout the entirety of the Bible but are prominently found in the book of Genesis. This paper aims to research the stories of four different patriarchal characters of the Bible to see how chiastic structures are used in these stories. By looking at the stories of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph in Genesis, I will demonstrate the effectiveness of chiastic structures covering the entirety of the stories, as well as how smaller chiasmi work within each. An appreciation of these chiastic structures deepens our appreciation of the formal structuring of Biblical narratives and the transformational character development arcs of the patriarchs and helps to give insight into the God of the Old Testament.

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## Introduction

The Bible is objectively one of the most recognized books worldwide. From a religious perspective, literary standing, or just through general knowledge, many people across the globe are familiar with the Bible to some extent. Yet, lesser known is the structural way some of the Biblical stories are formulated, a structure called a chiasmus, or chiastic structure. A chiasmus is a type of parallelism, a circular sequencing; in its simplest form, it would follow an ABCCBA template. More specifically, a chiasmus is a literary structure where a sequence of events occurs in the rising action, and then the falling action presents these same events in reverse order. The Bible utilizes this structure quite abundantly in its stories, and several key Biblical passages, including those from the psalms, epistles, and gospels have been shown to be structured in a chiastic pattern (Breck). J.P. Fokkelman, a Dutch biblical scholar, and central figure in emphasizing a literary approach to the Bible, recognizes the importance of chiasmi in Genesis: “Thus a dialectic game of identity and difference is created which challenges us to compare parallelisms at various levels and to ask questions such as: What has remained unchanged, and why? What differences occur and what do they mean?” (46). Yet, the Bible adds a certain element to the traditional chiasmus, something known as the X moment. The X moment, an isolated moment in the center of the chiastic structure, is comparable to the climax of a story; it is often the most important event in the narrative, and it stands alone. Of the X moment, Fokkelman says, “The pairs AB and B’A’ frame X as the heart, and X indeed has its own nature. The axis on which the circular scheme ABXB’A’ revolves is to be found precisely in the middle of the middle” (52). Though he references a singular cycle found in Jacob’s story here, I argue that this rings true for all chiastic X moments, that the legs of each chiastic cycle serve to frame the X as the heart of the structure. This moment also often serves to highlight an act of divine



intervention or characterize God. As John Breck, a theologian of the Orthodox Church in America, suggests, these chiastic structures are found throughout the Bible; they are not limited to one author, much less a singular book. However, chiasmi are abundantly available and structurally essential to the first book of the entire Bible, the book of Genesis. Genesis uses chiasmi throughout the entirety of the book, and by examining the four large structures spanning over the patriarchal lives of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, it can be seen how the structures use different techniques and types of parallels, including important Hebraic references, to elevate and isolate the X moment and largely characterize God, and also how smaller chiasmi within these larger structures work similarly in a lesser context, and by examining these chiastic factors, we can see how Genesis uses chiasmi to isolate moments of divine intervention and represent intense transformational moments in the lives of the patriarchs.

## Chapter I

### Noah

#### I.I – Introduction to Noah’s Chiasmus

Noah’s Biblical story and the flood narrative in Genesis occupy a major chiasmus that spans the entirety of the account, and is the first to occur chronologically. The chiasmus begins in Genesis 6:10 and concludes with Genesis 9:19. The flood narrative that Noah’s chiasmus covers spans almost the entirety of his life; the structure neglects to include his birth in the last few verses in Chapter 5, which includes the shift in emphasis from Noah’s father, Lamech, to Noah himself, and the structure stops before Noah’s death at the end of Chapter 9, also excluding from the structure Noah’s drunken and naked adventure in which he blesses Japheth and curses Canaan, the son of Ham. Noah’s large chiastic structure hinges around the X moment found in the first two verses of Genesis 8, isolating the moment God saves Noah from the flood, and symbolizes the transformational moment in Noah’s life from entering the ark amidst a world of unrighteousness to exiting into a world created anew.

A – Genesis 6:10a – Noah’s three sons

B – Genesis 6:10b – Shem, Ham, Japheth

C – Genesis 6:14-16 – ark

D – Genesis 6:17 – flood of waters, destroy all flesh

E – Genesis 6:18 – establish my covenant

F – Genesis 6:21 – God gives Noah food that is to be eaten

G – Genesis 7:1-2 – enter into the ark, bringing clean beasts by sevens

H – Genesis 7:4 – seven days

I – Genesis 7:10 – seven days

J – Genesis 7:13-15 – Noah entered into the ark

K – Genesis 7:16 – The Lord shut Noah inside the ark

- L – Genesis 7:17 – the flood was 40 days
- M – Genesis 7:19-20 – waters prevailed, covered the tops of mountains
- N – Genesis 7:24 – waters prevailed on the earth for 150 days
- X – Genesis 8:1-2 – God remembers Noah
- N' – Genesis 8:3 – after 150 days, the waters were abated
- M' – Genesis 8:5 – water receded; tops of mountains seen again
- L' – Genesis 8:6a – end of forty days
- K' – Genesis 8:6b – Noah opened the window of the ark
- J' – Genesis 8:7-8 – Noah sent forth a raven and dove from the ark
- I' – Genesis 8:10 – seven days
- H' – Genesis 8:12 – Noah stayed inside the ark another seven days
- G' – Genesis 8:16-17 – go forth from the ark, bring forth every living thing
- F' – Genesis 9:3 – God gives meat to Noah
- E' – Genesis 9:9 – establish my covenant
- D' – Genesis 9:15 – flood of waters, destroy all flesh
- C' – Genesis 9:18a – ark
- B' – Genesis 9:18b – Shem, Ham, Japheth
- A' – Genesis 9:19 – Noah's three sons

(Wenham)

The chiasmus spanning the flood narrative includes 14 pairs of parallels but utilizes three different types. The first recognized type is repetition, occurring when a word, words, or a phrase is repeated in both parallels. “Repetition is used at practically every level of the hierarchy which the text constitutes, from sounds, words, and clauses to stories and groups of stories. It is rarely applied mechanically or inartistically, and usually it features ingenious variations.” (Fokkelman 46). For example, A and A' and B and B' are examples of repetitional parallels. Genesis 6:10,

which encompasses A and B, reads, “And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.”<sup>1</sup>

Skipping to the end of the flood narrative to Genesis 9:18-19, A and B are reciprocated and repeated: “... were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth... These are the three sons of Noah...”.

Another instance of repetitional parallels in the first main flood chiasmus is E and E’; In Genesis 6:18, the Lord says to Noah, “But with thee will I establish my covenant...”. Then, in Genesis 9:9, E’ repeats the same phrase: “And I, behold, I establish my covenant...”. This type of chiasmic connection is perhaps the simplest to recognize, as two nexus are connected through exact or almost exact mirroring of words or phrases.

The second type of parallel is conceptual parallels, where the phrasing is not mirrored exactly, but the concepts in the mirrored sections are uniform. One example of conceptual parallelism in the Noah chiasmus is in F and F’. F, in Genesis 6:21, includes the Lord commanding Noah to “take unto thee all food that is eaten” into the ark. When F is paralleled in Genesis 9:3, the Lord is again talking about food, but in a different context: “Every moving thing that liveth under the sea shall be meat for you...”. In this way, the concept of food and physical fulfillment remain the same, but the words and phrasing used between the parallels are different.

Lastly, many of the paralleled sections utilize oppositions, where there may be some similarities in words or phrasing, but the concepts between the parallels are opposites. K and K’ exhibit oppositional parallelism; in Genesis 7:16, the Lord shuts Noah, his family, and all the animals up inside the ark. In Genesis 8:6, K’ states that “Noah opened the window.” Though K and K’ are fundamentally different and share no repeated words or phrases, it is the polar opposition that connect them. In K, something is shut, and in K’, something is opened.

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<sup>1</sup> All Biblical quotes and verses come directly from the King James Version translation of the Bible

The first six sets of chiastic parallels utilize repetition to make the connections between the pairs. A and B, in Genesis 6:10, makes mention of Noah begetting three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. A' and B' in Genesis 9:18b-19 read, "Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. These are the three sons of Noah...". The mention of Noah's three sons and then the list of their names is repeated and inversed to commence and close out the chiastic flood narrative and story of Noah. C and C' are in Genesis 6:14-16 and Genesis 9:18a, respectively. 6:14 is the first mention of the ark in the flood narrative, and then the word is used four times throughout the three verses. This parallel is another one of repetition, because 9:18a, C', says that Noah's son goes forth from the ark, which is the last time the word is used in this context. Genesis 6:17, D, includes God telling Noah he will bring a "flood of waters" and "destroy all flesh," and in D', Genesis 9:15, God remembers his covenant, saying "the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." The similarities between the two are inherent, with both sections mentioning a flood of waters and the phrase "destroy all flesh," though the context of the phrase is important. God tells Noah he will destroy all flesh, then promises to him that he will never again send a flood to destroy all flesh. In E and E', Genesis 6:18 and 9:9, God tells Noah he will establish his covenant. In fact, the exact four-word phrase repeats itself: "I establish my covenant."

Genesis 6:21 houses F, and makes mention of food for Noah inside the ark. This is mirrored in Genesis F' when God tells Noah after exiting the ark that "every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you...". An example of conceptual parallelism, F and F' use the notion of physical fulfillment to make the connection.

G and G' is the first example of oppositional parallelism in the chiasmus. Genesis 7:1-2, G, is God's commandment to Noah to enter the ark, taking with him seven of every clean beast.

8:16-17, G', is God's commandment to leave the ark and to take all the living things with him. In G, God tells Noah to "come thou and all thy house into the ark," and in G', the Lord tells him to "go forth from the ark." Thus, the connection of oppositions is in coming and going, and this direct opposition is what is meant to connect the two units.

H, in Genesis 7:4, and I, in Genesis 7:10, both use repetition, and are strikingly similar to one another, which helps in recognition of the chiasmus; both include the phrase "seven days." In H, God tells Noah the rain will begin in seven days, and in I, Genesis 7:10 reads, "And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth." H' comes in Genesis 8:12, and it is another repetition of "seven days," when Noah stays seven more days inside the ark before sending forth the third dove; similarly, Genesis 8:10, I', also repeats "seven days." In this verse, Noah stays in the ark seven days before sending out the second dove. The H and I parallels are simple repetitions, but the obvious and specific use of seven days calls attention to the mirroring.

The remaining five sets of chiastic connections all utilize oppositional parallels in order to make the X moment abundantly clear. In J, Genesis 7:11-15, Noah enters into the ark with his sons, wife, their families, and all the animals. The act of entering is what is mirrored in J', Genesis 8:7-8, as Noah sends a raven and dove to go from the ark after the rains had stopped. Thus, entering and exiting are enacted as opposites. K and K', Genesis 7:16 and 8:6b, also oppose each other, as K reads, "the Lord shut him in," referencing the act of God shutting the door to the ark behind Noah and his family. K' involves Noah opening the window of the ark, which proves that, again, the actions of the two parallels are opposites: closing and opening. L, in Genesis 7:17, tells that the flood was upon the earth for forty days, and M, in Genesis 7:19-20, say that the "waters prevailed exceedingly," covering the tops of all the mountains. M', in

Genesis 8:5, reads that the waters of the flood continually decrease until the tops of the mountains could be seen, which opposes the act of waters rising, and L' is mirrored in 8:6a, when the Bible mentions that “at the end of forty days,” Noah opened the window. N and N' come in the last verse of Genesis 7, 24, and Genesis 8:3. In N, the waters prevail and increase upon the earth for 150 days, and in N', the waters abate after the end of 150 days. Again, the repetition of this specific number is meant to be recognized, because it highlights the X moment that falls directly in between, and the specific use of oppositional parallels in these last five connections helps to emphasize the coming climax.

## **I.II – Significance of Hebrew in Noah’s Chiasmus**

Hebrew, the original language of Genesis, often offers key insights into the significance of the chiasmic structure in the flood narrative and helps to reinforce the connections. There are several instances in the larger chiasmus that parallels are better utilized in Hebrew to recognize repetition, similarities, or oppositions. Genesis 6:14-16 and Genesis 9:18, respectively C and C' in Noah’s chiasmus, are an example of how Hebrew is used to highlight the connections. Genesis 6:14-16 makes use of the Hebrew word *tebah*<sup>2</sup>, תִּבָּה. This word is used in the Hebrew Bible on two occasions: once in Noah’s flood narrative as a noun for the ark, and again when describing the vessel Moses is placed into as a baby (Ham 22). In 6:14-16, *tebah* is used four times, then the word is repeated in the parallel, 9:18, which is the last time the word is used in the flood narrative. Surely the limited use of this Hebrew word in the Bible as well as the specific designation to its most abundant use (C) and final use (C') is meant to act as a connection.

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<sup>2</sup> All Hebraic translations and symbols come directly from the Bereshith found at qbible.com

*Mayim*, מַיִם, and *hamabul*, הַמַּבּוּל, are two other words that are utilized to make connections in the chiasmic structure. In D and D', these Hebrew words are used to represent the flooding of waters, with *mayim* used as a looser translation of water, and *hamabul* specifically referencing the flood, and both of these words repeated in each parallel. The unmodified words *leshachet* (לְשַׁחֵת) – to destroy) and *kol-basar* (כָּל בְּשָׂר) – all flesh) are also strung together in both parallels, meaning “to destroy all flesh”. The same is true with regards to E and E'. In both, *quwm* (קוּם), meaning “to rise” or “to stand”, but also being used to mean “appointed” or “established,” and *et-berith* (בְּרִית) - covenant) appears, which translates to “establish my covenant,” the exact phrasing in both sections. These repetitions are also recognized by Robert Alter, who emphasizes the identification of *leitwort*, or the importance of the repetition of key Hebraic word for thematic and structural effect, to which he says are “pervasive in biblical narrative” and are “instance(s) of the flaunted prominence of the verbal medium” (20). In all of these instances, the simple repetitional of Hebrew words, some of which get lost in translation to the English language, help to recognize and reinforce the connections between the parallels. These repetitions also serve to further highlight the structure, and thus making the central X moment unmistakable and easily recognizable.

The Hebrew language also serves to highlight the oppositional parallels. For example, in G, the term *bow'* (בּוֹא) is used, translating to “come in” or “enter”. This word is used when God tells Noah to come onto the ark; in the inverse, *yatsa'* (יָצָא) appears, translating to “come or go out”, as when God tells Noah to “go forth from the ark.” Circumstantially, *bow'* and *yatsa'* are polar opposites, as come and go are opposites in English. This again appears in J and J'; in J, when Noah enters the ark, *bow'* is used in the context of going in, or entering. In J', the Bible uses the word *shalach* (שָׁלַח), another word meaning “to send”, but also used to indicate more



emotional actions, such as casting or freeing, when Noah sends out the dove and raven. Again, we see how the Hebrew Bible uses opposites to make a parallel connection, and like the Hebrew repetitions, the Hebraic opposites in the chiasmic structure serve to highlight the structure itself, in turn making the reader take notice of the defining X moment.

### **I.III – The X Moment**

The entirety of the chiasmic structure of the flood narrative serves to highlight one specific moment, called the X moment. The reason the X moment in this particular story, and most all other stories served by a chiasmus, is so important is because it is a moment of divine intervention and acts as a transition point in Noah's life. The author wants the reader to take special notice of how God acts and works in a specific setting, so this structure is designed to make sure that God's actions are taken with special consideration.

The X moment of the flood narrative is in Genesis 8:1-2:

And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the water asswaged; The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heavens were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained.

The reason the author wants to highlight these verses specifically is because they characterize God and highlight his intervention in Noah's life. In these two verses, God remembers not only Noah, but his family and all the animals that were on the ark with him. This emphasizes and isolates a moment that shows God's mercy and compassion shown toward Noah, and further characterizes Him as a limitless, all-powerful God.

The X moment also serves as the climax and transition point of the story. Chapters 6 and 7 acts as an introduction to Noah and the flood, as well as accent Noah bringing all the animals onto the ark and entering himself. The rising action, per se. After 8:1-2, the falling action of the flood narrative begins, where the water goes down and Noah exits the ark. In this way, the X moment symbolizes the transition from unrighteousness to purity: Noah enters the ark because of the wickedness in the world, and exits into a new, purified world, perhaps literally and figuratively washed of its unrighteousness. Similarly, the X moment represents a transition from judgement to deliverance; God judges the world as wicked and Noah as righteous, and then, after the transitional X, delivers Noah into the new world and saves him from the floods. Thus, in addition to highlighting God's intervention, the X moment acts as a transitional moment and also serves as the climax of the story.

If taken from a grammatical standpoint, it is obvious that God acts as the main character of the X moment. In Verse 1, God is the subject. The sentences in the King James Bible are grammatically written actively, so God is the one performing the action: God remembers Noah and God makes a wind to sweep the waters away. In Verse 2, the sentences are written passively, but they still retain God as the one performing the action. It reads that the windows of heaven *were* stopped and the rain from heaven *was* restrained, yet, if this sentence was written in the same grammatical tense as Verse 1, it would say, "God stopped the windows of heaven and God restrained the rain from heaven." Thus, even though God is not named in Verse 2 as he is in the first verse, the emphasis still remains on His divine intervention and the powerful acts of God. Thus, all of the parallels serve to highlight and exemplify the works of God and his remembrance of Noah. The readers of this story are meant to recognize the parallels, which lead them to the

climax of the story, the X moment, a moment that characterizes God and is supposed to be taken with careful consideration and read with close attention.

#### **I.IV – Smaller Chiasmi within the Larger Framework**

Within the larger flood narrative chiasmus, there are several smaller chiasmi, and the purpose of these smaller structures is to highlight smaller acts of divine intervention and characterizations of God that are still important and need to be noticed. Genesis 6:18-6:22 serves as a smaller chiasmus, highlighting God's passion and his remembrance of the animals aboard the ark.

A: <sup>18</sup> But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

B: <sup>19</sup> And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee;

X: they shall be male and female. <sup>20</sup> Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind,

B': two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. <sup>21</sup> And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them.

A': <sup>22</sup> Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

(Genesis)

A and A', in Genesis 6:18 and 6:22, are God instructing Noah, and then Noah obeying all that which God had commanded him. B and B', Genesis 6:19a and 6:20b, include God telling Noah to take two of every sort of animal upon the ark to keep them alive. This makes the X

moment Genesis 6:19b-20a: “they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind.” Though not as implicitly an act of divine intervention as God remembering Noah in the X of the main chiasmus, God’s caring nature is meant to be highlighted as he remembers the less-important lives of the birds, cattle, and all animals upon the earth.

Another small chiasmus within the larger flood narrative chiasmus comes in 9:12-17, making known the nature of God, and highlighting his actions in the narrative.

A: <sup>12</sup> And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

B: <sup>13</sup> I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

C: <sup>14</sup> And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:

X: <sup>15</sup> And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

C’: <sup>16</sup> And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it,

B’: that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

A’: <sup>17</sup> And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

(Genesis)

In A, verse 12, God tells Noah, “This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you.” In Verse 17, God speaks to Noah a remarkably similar phrase: “This is the token of my covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.” B, in Verse 13, and B’, in 16b, both make mention of the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature, and C, in Verse 14, and C’, in Verse 16a, both mention the “bow (that) shall be seen in the cloud,” which is what God sends as the token of the everlasting covenant. Thus, the X moment is in 9:15: “And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.” Perhaps one of the strongest X moments of the smaller chiasmi, this X once again characterizes God by revealing His promise to remember His covenant. This central X moment is also explicit, as not only is it a direct quote from God, but it involves his interactions with Noah and his family, and his promise to them, which strengthens this particular X moment in highlighting God.

These two smaller chiasmi can also be seen through the transitional lens, reinforcing the X moment as a transition point, as the first one occurs before the X moment of Noah’s larger structure, and the latter after. In the first smaller chiasmi, the underlying theme is of judgement; Noah’s act of gathering the animals to be placed on the ark so they can be saved from God’s judgement against the unrighteous. Then, in the smaller chiasmi after the X moment, the emphatic climax reveals a thematic element of deliverance: “The waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.” In this way, God’s deliverance to Noah is returning him into the renewed world with a promise never to send flood to wash the earth again. The smaller chiasmi serve to help reinforce the X moment as a transitional moment by reflecting the elements of judgement and deliverance both before and after the X moment of Noah’s larger chiastic structure.

## **I.V – Conclusion**

The chiasmus of Noah and the flood narrative uses three distinct types of parallels to make chiastic connections: repetition, and conceptual and oppositional parallels. These parallels serve to highlight the X moment of the chiasmus, which brings to the forefront important knowledge of God's remembrance and his Divine Intervention. We can get a better understanding of how the chiasmus works by looking at Genesis in Hebraic text, where we continue to find examples of repetition and opposition that parallel and serve to help the reader make the connections. There are a number, too, of smaller chiasmi embedded within the larger flood narrative structure, yet these chiasmi serve the same purpose: to characterize God and showcase His acts of divine intervention.

## Chapter II

### Abraham

#### II.I – Introduction to Abraham’s Chiasmus

Abraham is the first patriarch of Genesis chronologically and was a tenth-generation descendant of Noah. Abraham’s chiasmus begins in Genesis 11 and closes at the end of Genesis 22; it begins with his understood birth during the genealogy of his father, Terah, yet his chiastic structure does not conclude with his death, but instead with another genealogy reading, this time of Nahor, his brother. Abraham death is not recorded until 3 chapters after his chiastic structure has concluded. Thus, the chiasmus does not include Abraham’s encounter with Ephron or the burial of Sarah in Chapter 23, nor Abraham sending his servant to find Isaac a wife in Chapter 24. I suggest the reason that Abraham’s chiasmus does not span his entire life is for two reasons: One, as we will see in Section III, the readings of the genealogies give well-defined parameters for Abraham’s chiasmus to complete itself. Secondly, after the genealogy reading of Nahor, though Abraham is still alive, the attention begins to shift from Abraham to Isaac, as the narration becomes about finding him a wife, before ultimately switching to Jacob, which begins the third large chiastic structure in Chapter 25. Abraham’s chiastic structure and his name change in the X moment highlights a transformational moment, as Abram dies and Abraham is born, while God’s presence is heavily felt throughout the structure.

A – Genesis 11:27-32 – Genealogy, generations of Terah, Abram’s father

B – Genesis 12:1-9 – Beginning of Abram’s spiritual journey

C – Genesis 12:10 – 13:18 – Sarai taken; Abram and Lot part

D – Genesis 14:1-24 – Abraham rescues Lot, restores Sodom

E – Genesis 15:1 – 16:16 – Covenant with Abram; annunciation of Ishmael

X – Genesis 17:1-5 – God changes Abram’s name to Abraham

E’ – Genesis 17:6 – 18:15 – Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Isaac

D’ – Genesis 18:16 – 19:38 – Abraham saves Lot by defending Sodom and Gomorrah

C’ – Genesis 20:1 – 21:34 - Sarah taken; Abraham and Ishmael part

B’ – Genesis 22:1-19 - Abraham’s spiritual faithfulness is tested

A’ – Genesis 22:20-24 – Genealogy, generations of Nahor, Abraham’s brother

(Rensburg)

Abraham’s chiasmus deals primarily in episodic parallels, often spanning many verses or multiple chapters. Episodic parallels are not present in the flood narrative chiasmus, but are another type of connection, similar to repetition, oppositional parallels, and conceptual parallels. In each episodic parallel, in which chunks of text with similarities embedded within that mirror similarities embedded in another chunk of text, present are several conceptual parallels. For example, B and B’ use episodic parallels to make the connection. In B, God sends Abram out of his country, and Abram obeys unquestioningly. Later in the B unit, God delivers to Abram land for him and his family, and these three events happen in the order that is listed. If these events were meant to be separate, and not all included in the B unit, it would create an ABC chiastic chain instead of all three events being grouped into the B unit. In B’, God sends Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and he again obeys unquestioningly, and then God delivers to Abraham a ram. As is evident, the events happening in both B and B’ are conceptually the same: God sends Abraham on a quest, Abraham obeys unquestioningly, and God delivers to Abraham. Yet, the reason these parallels are not treated individually and, instead, grouped together in larger



units, is because, if taken individually, they would create an ABCABC pattern based on the order in which each individual event occurs, which does not create a chiasmic chain. Instead, by grouping larger chunks of text together, say Genesis 12:1-9 for B and Genesis 22:1-19 for B', we can find numerous different similarities within each, even though the connections inside each unit do not adhere to the specific order that a chiasmus demands. In other words, this chiasmus is episodic because the similarities B and B' are still similarities and parallel one another, but they may be found in a different order than the traditional chiasmic style, so each event could not stand alone as its own chiasmic unit.

The parallel between A and A' is apparent, with each genealogy serving as either the starting point or ending point of Abraham's chiasmus. This again occurs in Jacob's structure, with the listing of family signifying a start and a stop. This is crucial to the chiasmus in this case because it serves to isolate the structure, making it more easily recognizable, and highlighting the content inside.

B, Genesis 12:1-9, and B', Genesis 22:1-19, are conceptually connected through Abraham's spiritual journey. B begins with the initiation of Abram's spiritual journey, when God appears to him and instructs him to leave his country; this is mirrored with the climax, or the ultimate test, if you will, of Abraham's spiritual journey, when God gives him instructions to sacrifice his son Isaac in B'. There are several key parallels that connect the nexus between these two sections. On the surface, the connection between B and B' is reinforced through the use of episodic parallels. Both sections offer instances of God sending Abraham on a journey, Abraham accompanied by his loved ones on his journey, God's blessing on Abraham, Abraham obeying God without question, God's deliverance to Abraham (land, ram), Abraham building an altar, and Abraham atop a mountain. The narrative further strengthens the connection through use of

homonyms – In unit B, Abram passes through Moreh, and journeys to Moriah in unit B' with Isaac. Rensburg suggests, “The two toponyms alliterate with each other, albeit at a distance of ten chapters,” which is not a coincidence, but rather a reinforcement of the connection. Lastly, unit B is the first time in which the Lord speaks to Abram, and unit B' represents God's final words to Abraham (Rensburg). Thus, the connection between B and B' is meant to be unmistakable and indisputable, as through the use of episodic parallels, alliteration, and moments of firsts and lasts the nexus is made clear.

The thematic element connecting C, Genesis 12:1-13:18, and C', Genesis 20:1-21:34, is the portrayal of Sarah inside of a foreign palace and the separation of Abraham and kin. Twice, once in each unit, Abraham becomes fearful for his life, thinking he will be killed so Sarah could be taken, and twice, he lies and says that he and Sarah are siblings. In each episode, Sarah is taken, first by Pharaoh and then by Abimelech, and they are both threatened by God for taking another man's wife. These two episodes are strikingly similar, so much so that the units would not need any more reinforcement for the connection to be made. Yet, at the end of unit C, Abram and Lot separate into their new lands, and Ishmael, Abraham's son, separates himself from Abraham in unit C'. Thus, the practically identical events of Sarah in a foreign palace, joined with the notion of separation of Abraham from kin, join together to formulate one of the strongest chiasmic connections of the book of Genesis.

Units D and D', though not nearly as strongly connected as the almost selfsame C and C', are connected through a broad idea of Abraham saving Lot, his nephew, and Sodom, where Lot resides. First Lot is taken in the looting of Sodom, but Abraham returns all of the stolen goods and rescues Lot from his captors in Hobah. This is mirrored when Abraham learns of God's intentions of destroying Sodom, to which Abraham tries to reason with God. Though his efforts

are ultimately futile in saving the city, “God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt” (Genesis 19:29). Because Sodom ends up in ruins by the end of D’, the emphasis here in this section is obviously placed on Abraham saving Lot – directly, as seen in D, and then indirectly, as is made clear when “God remembers Abraham” before saving Lot.

## II.II – Significance of Hebrew in Abraham’s Chiasmus

Similar to Noah, by looking at Abraham’s story, certain keywords, and phrases of the chiasmus in Hebrew, we can find connections within the structure that might have been overlooked in English but reinforce the chiastic nexus. The passages representing the beginning and the end of Abraham’s chiasmus are both lists of genealogy, which often serve to separate major stories in the Bible. Fokkelman describes the listing of the genealogies as begettings: “The begettings provide a solid framework that supports and meticulously articulates the various sections of Genesis” (41). In the first genealogy, A, the generations of Terah are listed. The English word used in chapter 11, verse 27 is, in fact, “generations.” The Hebrew word used is *toledoth*, תולדות, which translates to “descendants”, “genealogies”, or “history”. Although A’ does not specifically repeat the same word, it is apparent that Abraham’s chiasmus concludes with another *toledoth* by listing the descendants of Abraham’s brother, Nahor. Thus, by utilizing two *toledoths* in Abraham’s chiasmus, we get well-defined parameters in which to start and stop the structure.

In B and B’, God tells Abraham that he will bless him and his descendants, once when he sends Abram out of his country into a new land, and again after Abraham prepares his son

Isaac as an offering. In both instances, the Hebrew word *barak*, בָּרַךְ, is presented three times. Each time this word is used in either of these instances, it is directly translated to “being blessed” or “a blessing”. Because God uses *barak* three times in B and three more times in B’, the recognition of blessing is emphasized and one of the connections is made between the two sections. The use of the word three times in each unit is not coincidental either, as yet again, an exact mirroring is purposefully constructed. Rensburg makes another connection to units B and B’ in reference to the Hebrew Bible. The first is the use of the phrase “go forth” – in the Hebrew Bible, this phrase is represented as הֵלֵךְ-לְךָ. This phrase is used once in 12:1, and then again in 22:2; “these are the only two places in the entire Bible where this key phrase occurs” (Rensburg). Not only does the isolated use of this phrase stick out in the Hebrew Bible, but it reinforces the chiasmus because the only two places it is used are intended to be connected with one another.

There are many connections throughout the rest of Abraham’s structure that are highlighted when the Hebrew language is accounted for. In C and C’, Abraham fears death, for he believes respectful rulers will kill him if they know Sarah is his wife. Abraham tells Sarah they will kill him, and the word he uses is *harag*, הָרַג. This word is translated in the King James Version as “to kill,” but it literally means “to smite with deadly intent.” In the C’ mirroring, Abraham lies to Abimelech, who takes Sarah. Abraham later reveals that he is again afraid he will be killed if someone finds out that Sarah is his wife. The same word, *harag*, is used, this time translating to “slay.” The dual use of this word is not coincidental, but would have been selected purposefully by the author to reinforce the relationship between the two parallels, yet is a missed repetitional connection when seen through the English translation.

### II.III – The X Moment

The X moment, or the moment that the entire chiastic structure serves to elevate and isolate, comes in Chapter 17, Verses 1-5 of Genesis:

<sup>1</sup>And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. <sup>2</sup>And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. <sup>3</sup>And Abram fell upon his face: and God talked with him, saying, <sup>4</sup>As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. <sup>5</sup>Neither shall thy name any more be Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

Like the X moment in Noah, the reason the authors of Genesis want this particular section of text to stand out from the body of Abraham's story is because it characterizes God and gives us a glimpse to the extent of his power. The first way God's power is shown in the X moment is his willingness and ableness to give Abraham the ability to multiply exceedingly, despite his old age. He promises Abraham will become a father of many nations, which to Abraham probably seemed impossible at the age of 99. Yet, because of God's promise, and then the fulfillment of said promise, we see that God is powerful enough to make Abraham the father of many nations, despite any factors that might otherwise hinder him.

This X moment also characterizes God; throughout the first half of Abraham's story, he follows God's commandments without hesitation or question. When God tells him to relocate his

family and his home, he does so immediately. He blesses God after he helps save Sodom and rescue Lot, and he never shows any outward remorse toward God for his inability to have children with Sarah. Thus, perhaps his obedience is rewarded with God's generosity, when he promises him to be a father of many nations. God also hints at his perfection while talking to Abraham in the X moment, saying, "walk before me, and be thou perfect."

By changing Abram's name to Abraham, God uses Abraham as a reminder for those in the future of his generous nature and ultimate power. Abraham's original name in Hebrew would have been Avram, meaning "high father." When God changes it, he changed it to Avraham, meaning "father and chief of multitudes." God changes Abraham's name before he becomes a father of nations, and even before Sarah bares Isaac. Thus, if Abraham had NOT gone on to become the first patriarch, the father of the Abrahamic religions, and, as he is called in Jewish culture, Avraham Avinu – Abraham our Father (Posner) – then God might have been characterized as a liar or someone powerless. Instead, because his prophecy about Abraham is fulfilled, and the meaning of his name is lived up to, the changing of Abram to Abraham is symbolic of remembrance for God's ultimate power in deciding the fates of persons and nations.

Similarly to the X moment found in Noah's chiasmus, Abraham's X moment symbolizes a transitional moment in Abraham's life and his character development, which is largely seen through his name change. Changing from Abram to Abraham is symbolic of a rebirth; Abram dies, and Abraham is born. This moment is important in Abraham's life because it reveals his future as a patriarch and settles him as a servant of God. In this way, the X moment is comparable to that of Noah's because, as Noah's X moment symbolized a transition from judgement to deliverance, Abraham's X moment and his name change represent the transitional moment from Abram to Abraham. Yet, the difference between the transitional moments lies in

the character of the transition; in Noah's chiasmus, God initiates the transition from judgement to deliverance, and Abraham's X moment, though still initiated by God, heavily emphasizes Abraham as the main transitional character in the changing of his name.

#### **II.IV – Smaller Chiasmi within the Larger Framework**

There are several notable chiasmi within the larger framework of the Abraham chiasmus, and the purpose of these is to highlight smaller acts of divinity and continually characterize God. The first mini chiasmus within Abraham's structure is in Genesis 13:8-17, and it shows God's keenness to his creation, and ability to destroy unrighteousness.

A: <sup>8</sup> And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. <sup>9</sup> Is not the whole land before thee?

B: separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

C: <sup>10</sup> And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan,

X: that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

C': <sup>11</sup> Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

B': <sup>12</sup> Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. <sup>13</sup> But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly. <sup>14</sup> And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated

from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

A': <sup>15</sup> For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.<sup>16</sup> And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.<sup>17</sup> Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

(Genesis)

A, in Genesis 13:8-9, and A', in Genesis 13:15-17, both talk about land. In A, Abram tells Lot that the entire land before them is theirs: "Is not the whole land before thee?". In A', God tells Abram to rise and walk through all of the land, for he had given it all to Abram and his family. In B, Genesis 13:9, and B', Genesis 13:12, the separation of Abram and Lot is mentioned. In B, Abram tells Lot to choose which side of the land he wants, and says he will take the opposite. In this instance, not only are Abram and Lot talking about separating themselves, but they are also talking about separating their lands one from another. In B', the first part of verse 12 reads, "Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain." This mirrors the separation of B, both of Abram and Lot and of their lands. C, Genesis 13:10a and C', Genesis 13:11, both talk about Lot and the plains of Jordan. Thus, the X moment falls in Genesis 13:10b, when Lot notices that the plains of Jordan are "well-watered" like the "garden of the Lord." This verse also notes that this occurs "before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah." This suggests that the plains of Jordan are well taken care of and exude a natural beauty like the Lord's own garden, conjuring Eden-esque images. This imagery of serenity and beauty characterizes God by showing his keenness for natural beauty and his creation. Yet, by mentioning that this occurs before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we



see God's power in his capability of destroying cities, particularly those that are unrighteous and wicked.

The entirety of Genesis 16 is also a chiasmus that characterizes God. A, Genesis 16:1-3, and A', Genesis 16:15-16, both talk about Hagar. In A, Sarai gives Hagar to Abram so that she can bear him a child and A' presents Hagar while she gives birth to Ishmael, Abram's son. In B, Genesis 16:4-5, the Bible says that Sarai is "despised in [Hagar's] eyes," so Sarai goes to Abram and tells him this. In B', Hagar calls upon the name of the Lord, saying, "Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?". The connection between these two parallels can be hard to see at first, so you must look closely. The connection is an optical one, with Sarah being despised *in the eyes* of Hagar, and then Hagar calling on the God that *seeth* her. In C, Genesis 16:6, Abram tells Sarai that Hagar "is in thy hand," and when Sarai deals harshly with Hagar, "she fled from her face." In C', Genesis 16:9-12, Hagar tells an angel of the Lord, "I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai." The angel then instructs Hagar to "return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." In both, a reference to being under someone's hand is made, as well as a reference to Hagar fleeing from Sarai's face. This means the X moment occurs in Genesis 16:7-8. In these verses, an angel of the Lord finds the distraught Hagar in the wilderness. Even though it was not the Lord himself that approaches Hagar, surely the angel would have been remiss in finding Hagar on his own. Thus, this X moment shows God's compassion toward all people, even "lowly" people such as Hagar. God cares enough about Hagar to send an angel to rescue her from the wilderness, an instance of divine intervention, proving his compassion and caring nature, and showing his ultimate control over everything (Genesis).

Fokkelman makes note of another smaller chiasmus within the story of Abraham, falling in Chapter 22, or the story of the Binding of Isaac. “The chapter is divided into halves 1-10 and 11-19, problem and solution, or command and execution” (Fokkelman 49). In saying this, Fokkelman reveals the chiasmus in this chapter, which excludes the final five verses of the chapter, consisting of the naming of Nahor’s children, is connected by a type of cause-and-effect relationship and culminates with Abraham bearing the knife down on his son’s neck in verse 10. “The basic pattern (or warp) is binary and is controlled by the plot, whose most fearful moment occurs in 10b, when the knife of the father hovers above Isaac’s throat” (Fokkelman 49). The problem, or command, in A, which is God’s commandment to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, is directly connected to the latter half of the chapter, the solution, or execution, as God intervenes and Abraham sacrifices a ram.

## **II.V – Comparison of Abraham and Noah’s Chiasmi**

The overarching chiasmus of Noah and the smaller chiasmi within his larger structure and the overarching chiasmus of Abraham and the smaller chiasmi within his larger structure are inherently similar, but differ from each other in several ways. The similarities between the chiasmi of Noah and Abraham are implicit, as both serve the same purpose. Both the main structures of Noah and Abraham, as well as the smaller chiasmi within both stories, serve to highlight acts of divine intervention and acts of God, and also to characterize this God. In the X moment of all studied structures thus far, God is highlighted through an interventional act, or He is characterized as to the type of God He is, or, in many cases, both.

The differences between the chiasmi in the two main structures we have studied so far are more technical. In the entirety of the flood narrative chiasmus, there are three identifiable

types of parallels: repetition, and conceptual and opposition parallels. Yet, in Abraham's chiasmus, though we still find conceptual parallels and repetitions, especially of Hebrew words and phrases, more abundantly found are episodic parallels, where large segments of text form units, such as B and B', which each house several parallels and similarities that connect each one to the other. Thus, the chiasmus of Abraham is more episodic than that of Noah, which is the main structural difference between them.

Another difference between Abraham's chiasmus and that of Noah's is the nature of the transition. The X moment in both chiasmi represent a transitional moment, and both transitions are initiated by God. Yet, the difference between the two lies in the character of transition. In Noah's X moment, the transformation is heavily reliant on God – from His judgement to His deliverance. Yet, in the X moment of Abraham's chiasmus, his name change is the main point of transition, so the emphasis of transition falls on Abraham himself, even though God is again the one initiating this transformation.

## **II.VI – Conclusion**

The chiasmus of Abraham uses episodic segments of text and conceptual parallels to form five pairs of chiasmic groupings, which apex in the X moment of Genesis 17:1-5. Thus, the “legs” of the chiasmus, reinforced through Hebraic use of homophones and isolated instances of phrasing, serve to highlight this central X moment, which is when the Lord changes Abram's birthname to Abraham, establishing a covenant with him and blessing him, promising Abraham will become “a father of many nations.” The reason the chiasmic structure works to highlight this moment is because Genesis 17:1-5 characterizes God and further extends the readers knowledge of the extent of God's power. The X moment also serves as an important transitional period in

Abraham's character development, as it symbolizes the death of Abram and birth of Abraham, the father of multitudes. The smaller chiasmi embedded within the larger framework serve the same purpose, characterizing God and showing him at work, allowing the reader to recognize moments of His divine intervention readily and more clearly.

## Chapter III

### Jacob

#### III.I – Introduction to Jacob’s Chiasmus

Jacob is the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, and a far-removed descendant of Noah and his son, Shem. Jacob’s chiasmus begins in Genesis 25:12 and concludes in Genesis 35:26, beginning directly after the recorded death of Abraham. Like Abraham, the chiasmus does not incorporate Jacob’s entire life; in fact, Jacob does not die until Chapter 49, but the ending of his chiasmus is well-placed so that it does not interfere with the chiastic structure of his son, Joseph. Instead, Jacob’s structure ends in Chapter 35, and Chapter 36, which is mainly a listing of Esau’s descendants, acts as an interlude between the chiasmi of Jacob and then the beginning of Joseph’s structure in Chapter 37. Jacob’s chiastic structure revolves around the X moment found in 30:22-25, which not only isolates a moment of divine intervention, but represents a transitional point in Jacob’s life from alone to multitude, and from fleeing to reunion.

A – Genesis 25:12-18 – Genealogy and generations of Ishmael

B – Genesis 25:19-34 – Struggle in childbirth; Jacob born

C – Genesis 26: 1-35 – Trouble with foreigners; deceit; pact with foreign nation

D – Genesis 27:1-28:22 – Messengers; Jacob fears and flees Esau

E – Genesis 29:1-30 – Arrival at Haran

F – Genesis 29:31-30:21 – Fertility of Jacob and his wives

X – Genesis 30:22-25 – God’s remembrance

F’ – Genesis 30:26-43: Fertility of Laban and Jacob’s flocks

E' – Genesis 31:1-54 – Flight from Haran

D' – Genesis 32:1-33:20 – Messengers; Jacob returns and fears Esau

C' – Genesis 34:1-31 – Trouble with foreigners; deceit; pact with foreign nations

B' – Genesis 35:1-22 – Struggle in Childbirth; Jacob reborn

A' – Genesis 35:23-29 – Generations and genealogy of Jacob

(Rensburg)

Similar to Abraham's chiasmus, the beginning and end of Jacob's chiasmus is signaled through the use of *toledoths*, or listing of genealogies, which serve as A, in Genesis 25:12-18, and A', in Genesis 35:23-29. Again, these *toledoths* remain as resetting points, allowing the reader to recognize a beginning and ending and focus on the content inside them to begin searching for the new structure.

B and B', Genesis 25:19-34 and Genesis 35:1-22, conceptually parallel two instances of birth: one involving Jacob, and the second incorporating problems and hardships in childbirth; the nexus also includes an episodic instance of Jacob receiving and hiding. The main connection between B and B' is through birthing imagery, including Rebekah struggling during the birthing of Esau and Jacob, and Rachel having a hard labor, and eventually dying, during Benjamin's birth. In B, Rebekah, Isaac's wife, conceives, yet "the children struggle within her" (Genesis 25:22), which is when she finds out that she has twins. This is conceptually mirrored in the latter section when Jacob's wife, Rachel, gives birth to Benjamin, but dies during labor. Thus, struggle during birth is one of the conceptual parallels that link the two sections. Another image of birth paralleled in each is Jacob's birth, which is done so literally and explicitly in B,

but metaphorically in B'. As Jacob travels to Bethel, as the Lord has commanded, God again appears to Jacob, saying "thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name." In this way, Jacob is reborn, for in Hebrew, Jacob means supplanter (Abarim), but his new name, Israel means "he who turns the head of God" (Benner). Thus, the renaming is symbolic of a rebirth because gone is the Jacob who steals his brother's birthright and Isaac's blessing, and born is Israel, a disciple of God. Aside from the birthing imagery that connects the two sections, there is also a situation of giving and hiding in both, where in B, Esau gives Jacob his birthright while Jacob hides his true intentions from Esau, and then in B', Jacob's household gives him their strange gods and riches, which Jacob hides from them by burying under an oak tree. The connections here are too apparent to be coincidental, which reinforces the purposeful nature of the chiasmic concept.

Like those in B and B', the parallels of C and C' are largely conceptual through an underlying thematic element, which in these sections happens to be through mirroring of deceit, issues with foreign nations, and pacts with those same nations. When Isaac lies to Abimelech, saying Rebekah is his sister (sound familiar?), Abimelech seems to recall his problems with Abraham, so Rebekah is not actually taken by Abimelech in C. Yet, the notion floods memories of Sarah being taken twice in Abraham's chiasmus. Then, in C', when Dinah is taken into a foreign palace by Shechem the Hivite, who defiles her, there is a connection of two female characters inside a foreign palace. Though we do not get two female figures kin of Jacob and Isaac actually taken into a foreign palace, the similarity between Sarah and Rebekah, and Dinah taken by Hamor, is surely meant to be connected. In both sections, both Jacob's family and Isaac's family have trouble with men of foreign nations, with the Philistines being envious of Isaac's wealth and filling his father's wells with dirt, and eventually kicking them out of the city,

and then Shechem defiling Dinah, preceded by his father, Hamor, asking Jacob to give Dinah to Shechem for marriage, which brings about great anger among the sons of Jacob. The notion of deceit is connected between the two sections, as first, Isaac deceives Abimelech about his relation to Rebekah, and then Jacob's sons deceive the Hivites in response to their anger against Hamor, making the Hivites circumcise themselves only to slay all the males of the city three days later. The last parallel, a pact with a foreign nation, is quite apparent in C, when Abimelech meets Jacob in Gerar to swear an oath of peace between the two, but it is trickier to connect to C'. However, when Hamor comes to Jacob, asking for Dinah to give to Shechem, Dinah's brothers say, "But in this we will consent unto you: If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised; Then we will give our daughters unto you..." In this way, a pact, or agreement, is come to, and although Jacob's sons do not keep their end of the pact, nor did they ever intend on doing so, this pact is meant to be connected to that in C in order to strengthen the chiasmus.

While there is a powerful sense of parallels between D and D' that again present themselves conceptual and episodic, these connections deviate from the three former chiasmic connections, as there is a strong presence of oppositional parallelism as well. In D, Jacob fears for his life because he has taken Esau's blessing from him, and he fears Esau will kill him for it. This is paralleled in D', when Jacob returns back to Esau, and fears so much Esau's reception of him will be deadly that he first sends messengers to him, and then splits his group up into two bands. The conceptual parallel of Jacob fearing Esau plays hand in hand with a strong oppositional parallel in this section: leaving, when Jacob flees from Esau, and then returning back to him. Esau's emotion toward Jacob is oppositional paralleled, because, in D, Esau hates Jacob, but, in D', when Esau runs to Jacob and embraces him, he conveys an emotion opposite of hatred – forgiveness, grace, and even love toward his brother. There is also a strong messenger



parallel in each; in D, God appears to Jacob in a dream, thus conveying a message to him, which is connected to the actual messengers Jacob sends ahead of him to Esau in D'. Lastly, in both sections, Jacob struggles with divinity. At first, when God appears to Jacob in a dream in D, Jacob becomes afraid, saying the place where he resides is dreadful. This is meant to be connected to the physical fight Jacob has with an angel of the Lord in D', which, without realizing its purpose in the chiasmus, might otherwise seem out of place, random, or meaningless. Yet, it serves as yet another connector to D, and is meant to be paralleled with Jacob's struggle with divinity in Chapter 28. Looking at Jacob's altercation with God also helps to justify why the episode takes place, in that it fits the chiasmus, though it does not seem to make sense when reading narratively.

Fokkelman notes how angels help strengthen the connection between D and D'. "Immediately before and after the period in Haran, and nowhere else in the text, a large host of angels appears on Jacob's horizon" (Fokkelman 47). In D, angels appear to Jacob in a dream, which is directly reciprocated when a host of angels meets Jacob in Mahanaim. Fokkelman notes how the angels have an unclear effect on Jacob based on his apprehension in meeting Esau again, but how it becomes clear that the intent of both groups of angels is virtually identical: "The one group *is* the other, an escort on behalf of the God of Abraham for the new bearer of the blessing, on the verge of the Promised Land" (Fokkelman 47). Fokkelman's connection between the angels in D and D' is more than a conceptual connection, as he argues that the group of angels is one and the same, serving the same purpose in escorting Jacob on behalf of God, which would make this connection one of repetition.

E, Genesis 29:1-30, and E', Genesis 31:1-54, are connected through oppositional parallels of arrival and departure, and of deception by first Laban, and then of Jacob. In E, Jacob

arrives to Haran and meets Rachel, who takes him to Laban. This arrival in Haran is mirrored in E' because, in this section, Jacob, under the instructions of God, flees from Laban and Haran with his families. Within these parallels there is an underlying theme of deception that also connects both sections. In E, Laban deceives Jacob when, after working for him for seven years to receive his youngest daughter Rachel, he gives him Leah: "Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?" (Genesis 29:25), Jacob asks of Laban. In E', however, the deception is not only paralleled, but inversed. Laban is deceived twice, once by Jacob, when he leaves with his wives without telling him, to which Laban asks, "Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me...?" (Genesis 31:27). He is again deceived by Rachel, who secretly steals Laban's idols. Thus, E and E' are inversely connected and oppositional paralleled through arrival and departure, and again through the element of deception that underlies the sections.

F and F' are the last set of parallels, the ones that sandwich the X moment, and they are conceptually paralleled through fertility. From the onset of F until the final verse that is included, the focus is on fertility and childbearing. It begins with the Lord opening Leah's womb, but closing Rachel's. When F ends, Jacob has 11 children with three different women: Leah, Leah's maid Zilpah, and Rachel's maid Bilhah. That is, in 26 verses, Jacob fathers 11 children. The fertility concept is mirrored in F', though not of Jacob or another person, but of Jacob's flocks, as promised to him by Laban. Laban promises Jacob animals in his flock that are blemished, so Jacob ingeniously sets up rods of green poplar so that when the flocks conceive, they will birth cattle "ringstraked, speckled, and spotted." This section ends by stating, "And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle..." (Genesis 30:43). In this way, the fertility of Jacob's women is mirrored and paralleled conceptually in the fertility of Jacob's livestock and flocks.

### III.II – Significance of Hebrew in Jacob’s Chiasmus

Rebekah and Rachel’s birthing struggles in B and B’ bring about one important connection in Hebrew that connects it back to the chiasmus. In B, the Hebrew word used when discussing Rebekah is *harah*, הָרָה, which literally means “to conceive, become pregnant, or be with child.” In contrast, when Rachel bears Benjamin, the word used is *yalad*, יָלַד, meaning “to bear, beget, or travail.” Perhaps the two use different words to reinforce and emphasize the tremendous struggle and pain that Rachel goes through while birthing Benjamin, but the literal meanings of the two words are so synonymous that one can easily connect the two parallels.

The harshness and struggle of both childbirths is again connected through two other words, *ratsats*, רָצַץ, in B and, in B’, *qashah*, קָשָׁה. The Hebrew words *ratsats* translates to “to crush” or “to crack into pieces,” and is used to describe Esau and Jacob inside Rebekah’s womb, but is unjustly translated into English as “struggled.” In B’, *qashah* appears in reference to Rachel’s hard labor, but in Hebrew the word means “to be severe” or “to be fierce.” Thus, though the King James translation does not do justice to the harshness of either birth the way that original Hebrew did, we can see the connection of the painful births of Esau, Jacob, and Benjamin by looking at the Hebrew words in context, which further strengthens the parallel of struggling through childbirth between B and B’.

Like-sounding words in the Hebrew language can be used to strengthen the chiasmic connection, which is done so in D and D’. In 27:11, Jacob tells his mother that Esau is hairy – *sa’iyir*, שְׂעִיר, literally meaning “hairy” or “he-goat.” This would be a difficult word for the author to repeat in D’, but would be an easily recognizable connection based on its meaning, so a homonym is used to make the connection in 33:16 – “So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir” (Genesis 33:16) – “unto Seir” translates to *Se’iyir*, שְׂעִיר – an almost identical word, and one

that is surely uncoincidental. “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” (Rensburg). The parallels between Jacob’s fear of Esau are too recognized and perhaps strengthened through use of the Hebrew language. Between the two sections, the Hebrew word *yare’*, אָרַע, appears numerous times; the word, which translates to meaning “to fear, revere, or be afraid,” is present when God appears to Jacob in his dream and when Jacob is returning back home to meet Esau. In D, Esau says he will slay Jacob, which would surely cause Jacob *yare’* as well. Thus, the prevalence of this word, and the thematic understanding of fear running through the sections, is strongly enforced in Hebrew.

The Hebrew language plays a significant role in connecting the sections of F and F’, as we can see how the Hebrew language reinforced the elements of fertility in each. In F, Rueben, the first son of Jacob, finds mandrakes, and brings them to his mother, Leah. Rachel then finds out about them, and begs Leah to have them. In Hebrew, the word for mandrakes is *duwday*, דּוּדָי. The importance of this word is in the literal translation, which is “love-apple,” and the connotations of mandrakes in Hebrew culture, where they traditionally served as an aphrodisiac; therefore, *duwday* only seems appropriate when the emphasis is on fertility (Fleisher). Further strengthening the concept, F uses the Hebrew words *harah*, הָרָה, which means “to conceive” or “to become pregnant” nine separate times, and *yalad*, יָלַד, “to bear” or “to bring forth,” 15 separate times. Between the extensive use of both of these words, and the presence of the mandrakes, the fertility element is surely prevalent in F. In F’, a different Hebrew word is used to introduce fertility among the livestock: *yacham*, יָחַם. The reason the same Hebrew word is not repeated between the sections is because *yacham*, meaning “to be hot” or “to conceive,” predominantly pertains to animals and carries a bestial connotation, so any other Hebrew word

used in this place seems incorrect or out of place. Yet, the prevalence of fertility in both sections is strong enough to be connected with the use of *harah*, *yalad*, *yacham*, and the presence of mandrakes, or the “love-apple.”

### III.III – The X Moment

The X moment in the larger Jacob structure falls in Genesis 30:22-25, and the reason these particular verses are highlighted as the X moment is because they show God’s power over humans and showcase God’s remembrance.

<sup>22</sup>And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. <sup>23</sup>And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: <sup>24</sup>And she called his name Joseph; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son. <sup>25</sup>And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.

Up until this point, Jacob has fathered 11 children, but none with Rachel, the woman he has worked 14 years for Laban to get. Earlier in Chapter 29, God opens Leah’s womb because He sees Jacob’s love for Rachel is far more abundant than that he has for Leah. 11 children later, God remembers Rachel and opens her womb, allowing her to bear a child. In this instance, God remembers Rachel, showing that the God of Jacob is one of remembrance, similar to how the God of Noah is portrayed in the X moment of the flood narrative chiasmus.

With the X moment falling on these verses, we see that God is one of control and remembrance, but also one of unprecedented and unmatched power. Not only does God open Rachel’s womb, allowing her to conceive, but the child she bears is Joseph, who goes on in the

later parts of Genesis to become the second highest-ranking man and the savior of Egypt and a liaison for God in many ways, which will be explored in the next section. Thus, the significance of the X is that it shows the God of Jacob to be one of remembrance, but also one of extreme power, as seen by the emphasis on Joseph's birth, and the extreme impact Joseph will go on to have later in Genesis.

The X moment serves as a transitional moment in the life of Jacob as he goes from a man wondering alone to one who places a heavy emphasis on his family, and the X moment also marks a transition from fleeing to reunion. In the first half of Jacob's chiastic structure, before the X moment, there is not a strong reliance on his family. While his brother Esau, mother, father, and even Leah and his eleven children are all present before the X moment, the narration rests solely on Jacob; perhaps this is credited to Jacob's struggle with his dynamic family, stealing Isaac's blessing and fleeing from Esau, and then his inability to have a child with the woman he works 14 years for, though he has them abundantly with other women. In this case, the X moment, which includes God opening Rachel's womb, would have to serve as a transitional period – the latter half of the chiastic structure becomes much more emphatic of Jacob's family because Jacob is no longer a man wondering alone. When Jacob flees Laban after the X moment, it is with his family. His reunion with Esau is filled with love and forgiveness, and not the bitterness of the first half, and even Jacob and his sons' protection of Dinah is reminiscence of the strong family dynamic that courses through the latter half. In this way, the X moment serves as a transitional point for Jacob from a solo wanderer to a family man, which directly serves the transition from fleeing Esau in the first half to the brother's reunion in the second.

### III.IV – Smaller Chiasmi within the Larger Framework

There are a few smaller chiasmic structures inside the larger Jacob structure that serve to characterize God and highlight his acts of divine intervention. The first mini chiasmus falls in Genesis 26:2-6, when the Lord appears to Isaac, Jacob's father, during a famine and instructs him not to go into Egypt but instead sojourn where the Lord would show him:

A: <sup>2</sup>And the Lord appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:

B: <sup>3</sup>Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries,

X: and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father;

B': <sup>4</sup>And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of earth be blessed;

<sup>5</sup>because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

A': <sup>6</sup>And Isaac dwelt in Gerar.

(Genesis)

A and A' focus on Isaac dwelling; first, in verse 2 when God tells him to dwell in the land he has told him, and then this is reciprocated in verse 6, in which it says that Isaac dwelt in Gerar. In B, verse 3, God says, "for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries," which is mirrored in verse 4: "And I... will give unto thy seed all these countries." Thus, this makes the X moment fall in the latter part of verse 3: "and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father." The reason this section of verse 3 serves as the X moment is because

it, like the X moment of the larger Jacob chiasmus, characterizes God as one of remembrance. In telling Isaac he will perform the oath he swore to Abraham, he is reassuring him that He has not forgotten His oath, and will follow through with it in Isaac.

Another small chiasmus within the larger structure is in Genesis 28:1-6, when Isaac blesses Jacob and sends him to Laban's house, instructing him to take a wife there instead of marrying a Canaanite woman, and this chiasmus is another example of how the Bible uses the X moment to highlight an action of God and his ultimate power.

A: <sup>1</sup>And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan.

B: <sup>2</sup>Arise, go to Padanaram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother.

X: <sup>3</sup>And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people;<sup>4</sup>And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.

B': <sup>5</sup>And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padanaram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

A': <sup>6</sup>When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padanaram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan;



(Genesis)

In this section, A, verse 1, and A', verse 6, both repeat the same exact phrase: "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan." B, verse 2, and B', verse 5, both deal with the act of leaving for Padanaram, with Isaac telling him to go seek Laban, and then Jacob actually leaving for Padanaram to seek Laban. Both of these sets of parallels serve to highlight the two verses that come in between, verses 3 and 4. These verses are Isaac speaking to his son, Jacob, and they are significant because they serve to show the power of God; Isaac says God has the ability to bless Jacob, making him fruitful and giving him a multitude of people. These verses also serve as a reminder of the role God plays in Abraham's life, making the reader recall how God blesses Abraham and impacts his life, especially when considering Isaac mentions the blessings of Abraham twice in verse 4.

The last small chiasmus I mention in the larger Jacob narrative is Genesis 32:28-32. This smaller chiasmus mirrors the larger Abraham structure, again highlighting an act of divine intervention, and justifying a somewhat out of place and otherwise perhaps unexplainable tale in the fight between Jacob and an angel of the Lord.

A: <sup>25</sup> And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

B: <sup>26</sup> And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

C: <sup>27</sup> And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

X: <sup>28</sup> And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

C': <sup>29</sup> And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said,  
Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?

B': And he blessed him there.<sup>30</sup> And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have  
seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

A': <sup>31</sup> And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

<sup>32</sup> Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of  
the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.  
(Genesis)

A and A', verses 25 and 31-32 respectively, both deal with the hollow of the thigh - in A, the man whom Jacob wrestles touches the hollow of his thigh, which causes it to come out of the joint. The mirroring of this, using very repetitive language in "hollow of the thigh," is an explanation as to why the children of Israel do not eat "of the sinew which shrank," that is because "he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh." B and B', verses 26 and 29b, both involve blessings, first with Jacob asking to be blessed, and then receiving the blessing. C, verse 27, sees God wrestling Jacob, asking him for his name, and C', verse 29, reciprocates this with Jacob returning the question. Thus, the X moment is verse 28, which strongly mirrors the X moment of the larger structure of Abraham. In this verse, the Lord changes Jacob's name to Israel, saying "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Jacob wrestling with God as a parable often seems out of place and confusing at first glance. However, with an understanding of the chiasmus, we can note how the Bible uses this story to make the reader key in on God's act of changing Jacob's name to Israel, as he did with Abram to Abraham. As Abraham's name change serves as a reminder of God's power and presence, Jacob's name change serves to highlight that, as Jacob "hast thou power with God," he shall prevail.

### III.V – Comparison of Abraham and Noah’s Chiasmi to Jacob’s Chiasmus

The chiasmi of Jacob, Noah, and Abraham carry many differences, but there are several recognizable and significant similarities among them as well. Like Abraham’s chiasmus, Jacob’s is largely conceptual and episodic. There are many sections in both that deal with conceptual parallelism, such as focuses on fertility, first of Jacob’s wives, and then on Jacob/Laban’s sheep and livestock. The X moment of Jacob’s chiasmus largely resembles that of Noah’s, as both highlight God’s remembrance to someone in a time of need or worry. The X moment of Abraham’s larger structure is also mirrored in one of the smaller chiastic structures in Jacob’s story, when Abram becomes Abraham and Jacob becomes Israel. Also, like Noah’s structure, Jacob’s chiasmus exhibits oppositional parallelism, something we did not see in that of Abraham. In D and D’, Jacob’s fleeing Esau is inverted in Jacob returning to Esau, which is largely reminiscent of some of the parallels in Noah, such as shutting of the ark door and opening of the window.

One of the main differences between Jacob’s chiasmus and those of Abraham and Noah is the focus in the X moment. While the focus in all three have been about highlighting an act of God and characterizing Him, Jacob’s structure is the first structure looked at that puts an emphasis on a matriarch. Genesis is largely a patriarchal book, so the notion of God remembering Rachel and opening her womb, and these verses being so crucial to Jacob’s story that they serve as the X moment of the larger chiasmus sets Jacob’s chiasmus apart from the first two. Yet, while there is an emphasis on Rachel, the focus still falls upon isolating a moment of divine intervention.

### **III.VI – Conclusion**

Jacob's chiasmus uses six different segments of parallels to form the structure. This structure uses a variety of different techniques to link two segments of text, among them repetition, conceptual, episodic, and oppositional parallels, and Hebraic homophones and thematic similarities. Yet, the point of all these connection techniques is the same as those in Noah and Abraham's structures, which is to elevate the central X moment. While the X moment in Jacob's chiasmus shows God's remembrance and control in opening Rachel's womb, this is the first chiasmus that has a matriarch highlighted, which is nothing short of significant in a patriarch-dominated book.

## Chapter IV

### Joseph

#### IV.I – Introduction to Joseph’s Chiasmus

Joseph, the favored son of Jacob and Rachel, and the outcome of the X moment in Jacob’s chiasmus, is the final patriarch included in this analysis of Genesis chiasmi. Joseph’s chiasmus runs from Genesis 37 – Genesis 50. When Joseph’s chiasmus begins in Chapter 37, it comes after he has already been born, but seamlessly follows the ending of Jacob’s chiasmus. Joseph’s death comes in the last verse of Genesis, 50:26, meaning that the final patriarchal chiasmus in Genesis ends with the death of said patriarch. The X moment of this chiasmus again isolates and highlights an act divine intervention and represents a transitional moment in Joseph’s character development as he transitions from an outcast to the hero of Egypt.

A – Genesis 37:1-36 – Death; Departure

B – Genesis 38:1-30 – Interlude; Joseph not present

C – Genesis 39:1-23 – Reversal – Joseph and Potiphar’s wife

D – Genesis 40:1-41:57 – Joseph, hero of Egypt

E – Genesis 42:1-43:34 – Journeys to Egypt

F – Genesis 44:1-34 – Final test

X – Genesis 45:1-8 – Joseph’s revelation

F’ – Genesis 45:9-28 – Conclusion of the test

E’ – Genesis 46:1-47:12 – Migration to Egypt

D’ – Genesis 47:13-27 – Joseph, hero of Egypt

C’ – Genesis 47:28 – 48:22 – Reversal – Ephraim and Manasseh

B’ – Genesis 49:1-28 – Interlude; Joseph only nominally present

A' – Genesis 49:29-50:26 – Death; Departure

(Rensburg)

A and A' begin and end Joseph's chiasmus not with *toledoths*, as seen in the previous two chiasmi of Abraham and Jacob, but with a strong example of conceptual parallelism in the notions of death and departure. When Joseph departs from Jacob in A to join his brothers while they are feeding their father's flock, neither father nor son know this will be their last time seeing one another for many, many years. Thus, Joseph's departure from Jacob stands out to the reader as a highly significant moment in the story. When this is mirrored in A', it is done so conceptually and oppositely, for, while the concept of departure remains the same, is it Jacob departing from Joseph in death. These parallels play hand in hand with another parallel found in these sections, which is death. Unlike A', which houses the scene of Joseph's father Jacob's physical death, the "death" in A is one of perception. When Joseph goes out to his brothers, they plot to kill him, with Judah and Reuben deterring them to profit off him instead. They sell him into slavery, yet dip his coat into goat blood and show their father. Understandably, Jacob believes Joseph has been killed: "an evil beast hath devoured him." The Bible uses notions of departure and death in the opening and closing of Joseph's story so that the reader can recognize the ends of Joseph's chiasmus.

The sole connection of B and B' is a lack of presence from the central figure of the chiasmus, Joseph. In B, Chapter 38, the story of Judah and his family, and of Tamar is told. The story serves as an interlude between two important scenes of Joseph being sold into slavery, and then preceding Joseph's rise in the rankings in Potiphar's house, which is followed by his rapid descent. The same is true in B', where Joseph is not present and only nominally mentioned by Jacob as he prophesizes on his death bed about the twelve tribes of Israel. This too acts as an

interlude, sandwiched by the blessing of Joseph's children Manasseh and Ephraim by Jacob before, and then Jacob's death and burial directly after. Thus, these two sections are connected not only through the absence of Joseph, but also in the way they each serve as an interlude, a break in the action between two essential elements of Joseph's chiasmus.

The nexus between C and C' is not as clearly defined as some of the parallels we have seen throughout this study, but the two sections are skillfully, though maybe elusively, connected through conceptual parallels. The predominant theme of both C and C' that connects them is reversal due to the actions of Joseph's superior. In C, this appears when Potiphar's wife tries to take Joseph to bed, then blames Joseph, landing him in Potiphar's jail. In this scene, Potiphar acts as Joseph's superior, and the reversal is the supposed guilt of Joseph and innocence of Potiphar's wife, which is the opposite of the reality of the situation. In C', Jacob acts as Joseph's superior, blessing Ephraim, Joseph's youngest child, over the first-born, Manasseh. Being the older child, Manasseh should have received his grandfather's blessing, but Jacob's reversal serves as a strong conceptual connector to C.

The connection between D and D', like its predecessor, is rooted in an underlying thematic element with lexical similarities that reinforce the connection. In both D and D', Joseph serves as the hero of Egypt, both preceding the famine and during it. First, Joseph saves food during the seven years before the famine, enough so that "when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do" (Genesis 41:55). Joseph saves enough food that the Egyptians are able to come to him in their time of need, painting him as the savior and hero of Egypt. In D', Joseph again is portrayed as the hero of Egypt, as he supplies the Egyptians seed, to which the Egyptians replied, "Thou hast saved our lives" (Genesis 47:25). The nexus is

reinforced through the dominance of numerals present in both D and D'. In D, numbers are referenced almost 50 times, and the number seven makes up 28 of those references. Thus, it is quite apparent this is made intentional by the author to reinforce the chiasmic connection, but requires mirroring in D'. D', a much shorter length of text, has three explicit numerical references, but also deals mainly with declining monetary values, lack of food, lack of money, and lack of cattle, all of which carry numerical connotations, mainly of zero. Thus, the abundance of numbers in D is meant to be a connector to the numerical connotation of D', which strengthens and reinforces the nexus between them.

Journey and migration are conceptually paralleled in E and E', with one episodic recurrence to reinforce the connection. There are two journeys to Egypt in E, when Jacob twice sends his sons into Egypt to buy grains during the famine. This is mirrored by the migration into the land of Egypt in E' when the Lord tells Jacob to "fear not to go down to Egypt" (Genesis 46:3). Thus, the migration into Egypt, which includes Jacob's sons, those who made the two trips into Egypt in E, is strongly mirrored. The thematic element of hospitality reinforces the nexus, as Joseph takes his brethren in to his home and "give[s] them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender" (Genesis 43:24). Another way this connection is strengthened is through an episodic repetition, when Joseph weeps when he speaks to his brothers in E, then weeps again when he meets with his father in E'.

Like C and C', the connection of F and F' is not made as apparent as B to B' or D to D', but the two are adjoined through the final test of Joseph's brothers and the aftermath of the test. Benjamin is to be left behind by his brothers and become Joseph's servant in F because he is found with Joseph's silver cup in his bag, though unbeknownst to him and through no fault of his own. Judah speaks up, begging for Joseph not to take Benjamin, for arrival to Jacob without him



will surely kill their father. Though likely Joseph did this so that he could be with his only full brother, his other brothers, the same ones that had plotted to kill Joseph and sold him into slavery, show that they have changed from their devious ways, perhaps passing this final test before Joseph's revelation. Skipping the eight verse that serve as the X moment, F' then comes in as the aftermath or conclusion of this final test: "Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not" (Genesis 45:9) Thus, because the brethren pass this test and do not allow Benjamin to be left behind, and showing to Joseph that they have deviated from their evils ways (at least, in part), they are all invited into Egypt where Joseph promises to "give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land" (Genesis 45:18).

#### **IV.II – Significance of Hebrew in Joseph's Chiasmus**

By studying the Biblical Hebraic translation of both A and A', we can get a sense of how the Hebrew Bible connects the parallels and better understood them. One word that appears repeatedly in both A and A' is *bakah*, בָּכָה. This word translates as "to bewail," but in the King James Version of Genesis, it takes on meaning as "wept" and "mourned," specifically when Jacob thinks Joseph dies in A and then again during the mourning of Jacob. In this way, the nature of the lamentation is similar, both being for someone who has died, but while the same Hebrew word is repeated throughout the unit, the King James Version changes the word to mourned, wept, and lamenting, depending on the context. Thus, the English translation loses the repetitional connection that is present in the Hebrew text because the singular word in Hebrew takes on several forms in English. There is a strong underlying theme of grief and loss in these

parallels, which is strengthened in the Hebrew Bible because of the rampant repetition of this word.

Looking at C and C' can help reinforce the connection between the two sections that, on the surface, don't appear to have much to connect themselves with. Much of C deals with Potiphar's wife trying to get Joseph to sleep with her. Thus, there is strong bedroom imagery, specifically when Potiphar's wife tells Joseph to lie with her "day by day" (Genesis 39:10). This mentioning makes it necessary to include the bed in some capacity in C', which is done so explicitly in 47:31 with the Hebrew word *mittah*, מִטָּה, which translates to "bed." This connection is further strengthened with excessive use of *shakab*, שָׁכַב, "to lie down". The verb is used four times in C, then mirrored in C' once, in 47:30 (Rensburg). It would not have been necessary to include the verb in C', when Jacob says where he wants to be buried after he dies, but by saying, "I will lie with my fathers," he allows the same Hebrew verb to be used and the chiasmic connection strengthened. Also in C, Joseph is given rule over everything Potiphar owns, "save the bread which he did it." Here, bread is translated into *lechem*, לֶחֶם. While this could be taken literally, Rensburg suggests it could also have a sexual connotation, especially when considering what is revealed by Joseph's speech in 39:9, while speaking to Potiphar's wife: "Neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife..." According to Rensburg, this use of *lechem* in unit C "demands its presence in Unit C'. This is done so in 48:7: "...and I buried her there in the way of Ephraim; the same is Bethlehem." This quote, taken from Jacob while talking about Rachel's death, is questionable: Biblical scholars debate about why Jacob would even bring up Rachel's death, and why the last four words are even present in the text (Rensburg). Yet, like Jacob fighting with God, the chiasmic structure makes this a necessary element in the story; Bethlehem means to "House of Bread", or *beyth lechem* - בֵּית לֶחֶם,

explaining the necessity of the Jacob's quote, as it serves as a connecting point – one that is recognized in Hebrew but lost in the English translation – from C to C'.

Perhaps buried under the abundance of numerals in D, though perhaps highlighted by its singular use is number five. Five is only used once in D, 41:34, when Joseph tells Pharaoh to “take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt” – which translates to *chamash*, חמשה, literally meaning “to take one-fifth of.” This verse is the only instance in the Hebrew Bible this particular derivative of the Hebrew word for five is used, yet its singularity would suggest repetition in D'. Though not repeated exactly, D' has two explicit mentioning of five, the latter of them, 47:26, being *chomesh*, חומש, meaning fifth part, a strikingly similar Hebrew word, as one marking above the third character differentiates them. This too, is the sole use of this word in the Hebrew Bible, and the similarity of the two words, along with the singular use of each and the isolated number five in D, is an obvious connection point in the Hebrew Bible and serves to strengthen the nexus.

#### IV.III – The X Moment

The X moment in Joseph's story falls in Genesis 45:1-8:

<sup>1</sup>Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. <sup>2</sup>And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. <sup>3</sup>And Joseph said unto his brethren, I *am* Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I *am* Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into

Egypt. <sup>5</sup>Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup>For these two years *hath* the famine *been* in the land: and yet *there are* five years, in the which *there shall* neither *be* earing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup>And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup>So now *it was* not you *that* sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

This X moment serves two purposes: first, it is the culmination of Joseph's emotions that have been building throughout the first half of his cycle, but this X moment also serves to show how God uses Joseph through hardships, and highlights how he has had his hand in everything that has taken place in Joseph's life. It is not uncommon to read about Joseph weeping throughout this cycle; in fact, he seems to do so regularly. Yet, when he weeps here, it is because the emotions of seeing his brothers and potential to see his father once again is too overwhelming for him to bear, so he reveals himself finally to his brethren, who have been clueless about Joseph's identity all along. His brothers are afraid and troubled when Joseph reveals himself to them; rightfully so, considering the last time they knowingly saw him, they sold him into slavery. Seeing him now, Joseph's brothers realize he has the power to enact any type of revenge on them he pleases. However, it is partially in his lack of revenge that we see why this serves as the X moment, which becomes a moment of forgiveness and reconciliation between brothers that caps a narrative which begins what fratricide; in verse 8, he reassures his brothers, telling them that God sent him to Egypt to save the people from the famine, not his brothers. In this way, the X moment highlights God by showing his ultimate plan for Joseph, using his life to save the lives

of many others from the famine. According to Joseph, as revealed in the X moment, God has a plan for him all along, and enacts his plan in Joseph's life, though it does not seem like it when he is sold into slavery or is sitting in jail. In this way, the X moment shows God's ultimate power to use people and enact his plan through perhaps unsuspecting people. By divinely intervening in Joseph's life, the Lord brings him to Egypt to save the people from the famine, which Joseph strongly believes.

The X moment is also significant because it represents a transitional moment in Joseph's life as he goes from an outcast in the first half to the hero of Egypt and its people, including his brothers, those who made him an outcast, in the second half. At the beginning of Joseph's chiasmus, his brothers contemplate killing him before selling him into slavery. Away from his family, he is then sent into prison. In both instances, he is painted as an outcast: first, from his brothers, and then from Potiphar and the kingdom of Egypt. When Joseph finally gets out of prison, he begins working his way up through the rankings of the Egyptian kingdom, which culminates in the second half of the chiasmus after his brothers realize he is second only to the Pharaoh; thus, the X moment is symbolic of Joseph's character transition because it is when he reveals his status to his brethren and becomes the hero of Egypt.

#### **IV.IV – Smaller Chiasmi within the Larger Framework**

The first small chiasmus within Joseph's cycle comes in Genesis 39:21-23, after Joseph has been placed into prison and makes friends with the prison keeper:

A: <sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

B: <sup>22</sup> And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison;

X: and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.

B: <sup>23</sup> The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand;

A: because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper  
(Genesis)

In this chiasmus, A, in verse 21, mirrors A' in verse 23 with almost identical phrasing about the Lord being with Joseph. B, the beginning of verse 22, and B', the beginning of verse 23, both comment on the keeper of the prison, then make a reference to the hand. Thus, the X moment lies in the latter half of verse 22: "and whatsoever they did there, [Joseph] was the doer of it." At first glance, this X moment may appear insignificant and more about Joseph than God. Yet, I argue that, in the context of the larger structure, and knowing that the X moment of the larger structure serves to highlight how God works his plan in Joseph's life, this X moment shows how God uses Joseph inside the prison, highlighting God's ability to use people and enact his plan even in the darkest of places. This is because God is the one who puts Joseph in the prison, and making him the so-called "doer" is a part of His ultimate plan for Joseph's life.

Another smaller chiasmus in the Joseph cycle, Genesis 48:9-18, is a classic example of a straightforward X moment, one in which God is characterized by a central Biblical figure, who in this instance happens to be, Jacob.

A: <sup>9</sup> And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me,

B: and I will bless them. <sup>10</sup> Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them.

C: <sup>11</sup> And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed. <sup>12</sup> And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.

D: <sup>13</sup> And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. <sup>14</sup> And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn.

E: <sup>15</sup> And he blessed Joseph, and said,

F: God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk,

X: the God which fed me all my life long unto this day,

<sup>16</sup> The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them,

F': and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

E': <sup>17</sup> And when Joseph saw

D': that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head.<sup>18</sup> And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head

C': <sup>19</sup> And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.

B': <sup>20</sup> And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless,

A': saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.  
(Genesis)

This chiasmus is an example of repetition because every parallel deals with repetition in varying capacity. These repetitions serve to make obviously clear the X moment, which is a classic example because Jacob is recounting the blessing God has given him. Jacob remembers the God that fed him his whole life, and the God who rescued and redeemed him from evil. In this way, the author wants the reader to take special note of the ways Jacob recognizes God working in his life so we, too, could recognize such things.

The nature of Jacob's blessing is reminiscent of that of Isaac's blessing, which connects Joseph's chiasmus to the large chiastic structure of Jacob. In this scene, Jacob is subverting primogeniture, blessing the youngest with would have traditionally belonged to the oldest. Recalling Jacob's chiasmus, this is exactly what Jacob does to Esau: he subverts primogeniture to receive Isaac's blessing, that which should have belonged to Esau. Thus, in the X moment.,



Jacob reveals all of the blessings he recognizes despite his subversion of primogeniture of Esau, which connects Joseph's chiasmus to that of Jacobs and makes Jacob unafraid to again subvert primogeniture with Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph's children.

#### **IV.V – Comparison of Abraham, Noah, and Jacob's Chiasmi to Joseph's Chiasmus**

Looking at all four of these chiasmi from each member of the Genesis patriarchy, we can recognize several similarities and differences among them, both in style of structure and in how the X moment operates. Joseph's chiasmus is similar to all the other three because of its use of and reliance on repetitional and conceptual parallelism. Unlike Noah's chiasmus and Jacob's chiasmus, oppositional parallelism does not factor in predominantly in Joseph's chiasmus, which makes it more similar to Abraham's structure. The X moment in Joseph's chiasmus is alike the others because it highlights an act of divine intervention and showcases God's power, but this X moment also continues to isolate the X moment of Jacob as the only chiasmus with a matriarch taking a large role.

Another way that the X moment of Joseph's chiasmus is different than the previous three is that it serves a secondary purpose to highlight Joseph's overwhelming emotions. We do not see this type of human emotion or portrayal in the first three structures explicitly; they solely highlight God and his works. Because of the emphasis of Joseph's emotions, we are meant to recognize this as a turning point for Joseph and his family, which, in turn, points to God, as this is the culmination of all the work he has done in Joseph's life thus far.

Lastly, Joseph's X moment serves to act as a transitional moment in his character development, which is consistent with those of Noah, Abraham, and Jacob. With all four major patriarchal chiasmi using their X moments as a moment to signal transitional moments for the

patriarchs and their families, it is evident that, while the chiasmi isolate moments of divine intervention, they also serve to represent major transitional moments in the character development of these patriarchs.

#### **IV.VI – Conclusion**

Joseph's chiasmus utilizes conceptual and episodic parallels to formulate six pairs of chiasmic groupings, which serve to formulate and aggrandize the X moment in the first eight verses of chapter 45. This central moment, which acts to show how God intervenes and has worked in Joseph's life, is emphasized because of the successful use of repetition of words and phrases in paralleled sections, deliberate and uncoincidental conceptual and episodic parallels between two connected sections, and then reinforced through isolated uses of Hebraic words and intentional alliterates. The smaller chiasmi serve a similar purpose, using similar techniques, as repetitional parallels help emphasize smaller moments of characterizations of God, acts of divinity, or highlighting his plan for Joseph.

## Conclusion

By examining how four large chiasmi of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph utilize connection techniques such as repetition, conceptual, episodic, and oppositional parallelism, Hebraic homophones and lexical similarities, and common underlying thematic elements, we can see how the structures are used to elevate and isolate the X moment in each, which serves to characterize God or show an act of Divine Intervention. There are also smaller chiasmi present inside the larger structures, which also serve the same purpose, but to a lesser extent. As mentioned before, these chiastic structures are found abundantly throughout the Bible, from stories in the book of Esther to songs in Psalms. Yet, it is important to recognize these structures in a literary sense because they help the readers to understand what the Bible is trying to convey, specifically about God, who He is, how He operates, and what He thinks.

By following these chiastic structures and examining them, we can also see how the Bible wants to focus on transformational moments, whether that be a transformation in moments of divine intervention or a transformational moment in a person. For example, Noah's chiasmus focuses on a transformation from judgement to deliverance, which carries a heavy reliance on God, while Jacob's chiasmus shows a personal character transformation, that of Jacob transforming from being alone to having a strong reliance and emphasis on his family. In this way, apart from isolating an individual X moment, Biblical chiasmi prove that the Bible wants us to see how Biblical moments are connected, and how Biblical characters are transformed throughout their lives but what they experience.

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