

Examples of the Pentateuch's Literary Beauty

When studying the structure of literary units, it becomes clear that literary units usually do not correspond to the source divisions proposed by the Documentary Hypothesis. Often smaller literary units may exist within the structure of a larger unit; thus, providing further evidence of an intentional literary design. It is through the understanding of Ancient Near East literature and the study of literary units, both large and small, that brings to light the beauty of the Pentateuch.

For example, Genesis begins with an *inclusion*, a repetitive phrase at the beginning and end of a literary unit, and sets off this unit apart from its context. Within this *inclusion* Hebrew parallelism tells the story of creation.

- A. God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1-2).
- B. Creation of light; 1st day (Gen 1:3-5).
- C. Creation of sea and sky; 2nd day (Gen 1:6-8).
- D. Creation of dry land and plants; 3rd day (Gen 1:9-13).
- B'. Creation of sun and moon; 4th day (Gen 1:14-19).
- C'. Creation of birds and fish; 5th day (Gen 1:20-23).
- D'. Creation of land animals that eat plants; 6th day (Gen 1:24-31).
- A'. The heavens and the earth were completed (Gen 2:1).

In a different example, a literary formula using the Hebrew term *tôledôt*, which means "these are the generations", is employed to introduce genealogical lists and provide a direction for the whole book of Genesis: from *creation* of the whole universe to a focus on an individual and his *death*, Joseph, the patriarch of the nation of Israel.

- A. "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth" (Gen 2:4).
- B. "This is the book of the generations of Adam" (Gen 5:1).
- C. "These are the generations of Noah" (Gen 6:9).
- D. "Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (Gen 10:1).
- E. "These are the generations of Shem" (Gen 11:10).
- F. "Now these are the generations of Terah" (Gen 11:27).
- G. "Now these are the generations of Ishmael" (Gen 25:12).
- H. "And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son" (Gen 25:19).
- I. "Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom" (Gen 36:1).
- J. "And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir" (Gen 36:9).
- K. "These are the generations of Jacob" (Gen 37:2).

There are several examples of chiasms, a Hebrew poetic device, that are used extensively to emphasize a point or deeper meaning intended by the author.

The chiasm of the Original Sin draws attention to Adam's attempt to hide his sin from God, and contrasts the blessings before sin against the curses after sin.

- A. Man's blessing: living in the Garden, fertile earth, easy agriculture, and access to the Tree of Life (Gen 2:4–17).
- B. Woman: innocence and naked (Gen 2:18–25).
- C. Serpent: temptation (Gen 3:1–5).
- X. Adam fails to hide his sin from God (Gen 3:6–13).
- C'. Serpent: consequences of temptation (Gen 3:14–15).
- B'. Woman: loss of innocence and clothed (Gen 3:16).
- A'. Man's curse: expelled from the Garden, infertile earth, difficult agriculture, and denied access to the Tree of Life. (Gen 3:17–24).

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The chiasm of Cain and Abel focuses on man's attempt to intentionally lie about his sin to mislead God and contrasts fellowship before sin against rejection after sin.

- A. Adam and Eve give birth to Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-2).
- B. The sacrifice of Cain is rejected (Gen 4:3-5).
- C. Cain finds his rejection unbearable (Gen 4:5-6).
- D. Cain warned that he must master his sin (Gen 4:7).
- E. Cain kills Abel (Gen 4:8).
- X. Cain fails to deceive God about his sin (Gen 4:9).
- E'. Cain confronted about Abel's murder (Gen 4:10).
- D'. Sin has mastered Cain (Gen 4:11).
- C'. Cain finds punishment unbearable (Gen 4:13-15).
- B'. Cain is rejected (Gen 4:15).
- A'. Cain and his wife give birth to Enoch (Gen 4:17-18).

The chiasm of the Flood draws attention to God's remembrance of Noah who waited on God's timing.

- A. Noah (Gen 6:10).
- B. Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 6:10).
- C. Ark to be built (Gen 6:14-16).
- D. Flood announced (Gen 6:17).
- E. Covenant with Noah (Gen 6:18-20).
- F. Food in the Ark (Gen 6:21).
- G. Command to enter the Ark (Gen 7:1-3).
- H. 7 days waiting for flood (Gen 7:4-5).
- I. 7 days waiting for flood (Gen 7:7-10).
- J. Entry to ark (Gen 7:11-15).
- K. Yahweh shuts Noah in (Gen 7:16).
- L. 40 days flood (Gen 7:17).
- M. Waters increase (Gen 7:17-18).
- N. Mountains covered (Gen 7:18-20).
- O. 150 days waters prevail (Gen 7:21-24).
- X. God remembers Noah (Gen 8:1).
- O'. 150 days waters abate (Gen 8:3).
- N'. Mountain tops become visible (Gen 8:4-5).
- M'. Waters abate (Gen 8:6).
- L'. 40 days (Gen 8:6).
- K'. Noah opens window of ark (Gen 8:6).
- J'. Raven and dove leave ark (Gen 8:7-9).
- I'. 7 days waiting for waters to subside (Gen 8:10-11).
- H'. 7 days waiting for waters to subside (Gen 8:12-13).
- G'. Command to leave the ark (Gen 8:15-17).
- F'. Food outside the ark (Gen 9:1-4).
- E'. Covenant with all flesh (Gen 9:8-10).
- D'. No flood in future (Gen 9:11-17).
- C'. Ark (Gen 9:18).
- B'. Shem, Ham, Japheth (Gen 9:18).
- A'. Noah (Gen 9:19).

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The chiasm of the Tower of Babel places an emphasis on man and his desire to be like God.

- A. These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood (Gen 10:32).
- B. Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words (Gen 11:1).
- C. Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, (Gen 11:2-4).
- D. The Lord came down to see (Gen 11:5).
- X. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them (Gen 11:6).
- D'. Let us go down (Gen 11:7).
- C'. And they stopped building the city. (Gen 11:8).
- B'. Therefore its name was called Babel, because the Lord confused the language of the whole the earth (Gen 11:9).
- A'. and from there the Lord scattered them abroad (Gen 11:9).

The chiasm of Abraham highlights the Abrahamic Covenant.

- A. Abraham's call: promise of Seed (Gen 11:31-12:3).
- B. Sojourn in Canaan (Gen 12:4-9).
- C. Sojourn in Egypt: denial of Sarai (Gen 12:10-20).
- D. Separation of Lot (land) (Gen 13:1-18).
- E. War on Sodom: rescue of Lot by Abraham (Gen 14:1-24).
- F. Covenant: Land (Gen 15:1-21).
- G. Sarai's effort (Gen 16:1-16).
- X. Covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:1-14).
- G'. Sarah's blessing (Gen 17:15-27).
- F'. Covenant made: Seed (Gen 18:1-15).
- E'. Destruction of Sodom: rescue of Lot by angels (Gen 18:16-19:38).
- C'. Sojourn in Gerar: denial of Sarah (Gen 20:1-8).
- D'. separation of Ishmael (Seed) (Gen 21:1-21).
- B'. Sojourn in Gerar (Gen 21:22-34).
- A'. Abraham's test: blessing of Seed (Gen 22:1-19).

Another similar but simpler chiasm of Abraham can be seen in the following:

- A. Sarah and Pharaoh (Gen 12).
- B. Saving of Lot (Gen 14).
- C. Covenant for Land (Gen 15).
- X. The Covenant with Abraham (Gen 17).
- C'. Covenant for Seed (Gen 18).
- B'. Rescue of Lot (Gen 19).
- A'. Sarah and Abimelech (Gen 20).

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Ancient Near East literature also revealed that Deuteronomy closely paralleled the form of Hittite suzerainty treaties of the second millennium BC. And in this context, Deuteronomy resembles a chiasm:

- A. The past – the historical prologue (Deut 1-3).
- B. Exhortation of the new generation (Deut 4-11).
 - X. Worship, holy life, and the Covenant stipulations (Deut 12-26).
- B'. Covenant ceremony with the new generation (Deut 27-30).
- A'. The future (Deut 31-34).

These chiasms are only a sample of the many other literary devices and genres that exist within the Pentateuch contributing to its beauty of design and structure. In this manner, Moses manages to integrate history, literature, morality, and theology in presenting biblical history with the divine purpose of revealing a loving God reaching out to man.