Marking Closure

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FURTHER NOTE: In the last sentence of the introductory portion of this article, I state the following: "In a follow-up article, to appear in the next issue of this journal, I will expand the notion of marking closure from individual passages and pericopes to larger swaths of material, including entire books." Said article, however, will not appear in *Vetus Testamentum,* though a treatment of the topic will be found in my forthcoming book, *How the Bible Is Written* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2016), ch. 14, "Marking Closure (Writ Large)."

Abstract:

The literary device of stylistic change to indicate closure is barely recognized by biblical scholars. Apart from Aharon Mirsky, who wrote the seminal article and monograph on the subject, very few scholars have paid attention to this technique. The present article summarizes the work of Mirsky and two others (with six examples total), and then proceeds to present an additional nineteen examples of this literary device.

The Israeli scholar Aharon Mirsky wrote the seminal article on this subject, entitled "Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew",[1] though to be sure the article itself and its findings seems little known amongst biblicists. With a fine eye to the manner in which literature operates, Mirsky observed that in a series of corresponding passages (typically four or more, though sometimes as few as three), the syntax or wording of the last one in the sequence is altered. This device alerts the reader that she has reached the end of the thought-unit.

Only a few scholars have taken note of Mirsky's observation – among them Meir Par᾽an and Amos Frisch – so that one of the purposes of the present essay is to bring this literary technique to the

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[1] Aharon Mirsky, "Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew", *Semitics* 5 (1977), pp. 5-23. See also in his monograph, Aharon Mirsky, *Signon ᶜIvri* (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 11-69, with many more examples. In a few places (nos. 5, 11, and 20), I will cite examples treated by Mirsky, though I present them anew, usually in greater detail and with some fresh information.

attention of a wider audience. I shall do so first by using paradigm examples put forward by the aforementioned scholars, and then by presenting many more illustrations of this manner of 'marking closure' within biblical prose and poetry.

To set the stage, we begin with two paradigm examples identified by Mirsky (no. 1-2), after which I present further illustrations of the phenomenon detected by Parʾan (nos. 3-4) and Frisch (nos. 5-6). The remainder of the article will then present nineteen additional examples of this manner of marking closure, identified by the present writer. This collection of examples should serve to demonstrate how ubiquitous this device is throughout the biblical corpus.[2] In a follow-up article, to appear in the next issue of

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[2] For earlier studies on the subject, though with different foci, see Isaac Gottlieb, "*Sof Davar*: Biblical Endings", *Prooftexts* 11 (1991), pp. 213-224; and Susan Zeelander, *Closure in Biblical Narrative* (Biblical Interpretation Series 111; Leiden, 2012). For a work devoted to English literature, especially poetry, see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago,

this journal, I will expand the notion of marking closure from individual passages and pericopes to larger swaths of material, including entire books.

1. Psalm 115:5-7 (Mirsky)

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⁵ פֶּה־לָהֶם וְלֹא יְדַבֵּרוּ עֵינַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְאוּ׃

⁶ אָזְנַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִשְׁמָעוּ אַף לָהֶם וְלֹא יְרִיחוּן׃

⁷ יְדֵיהֶם ׀ וְלֹא יְמִישׁוּן רַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יְהַלֵּכוּ לֹא־יֶהְגּוּ בִּגְרוֹנָם׃

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⁵ A mouth they have, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see.
⁶ Ears they have, but they do not hear;
A nose they have, but they do not smell.
⁷ Their hands, but they do not feel,
Their legs, but they do not walk-about;
They do not utter in their throat.

1968). Among the devices studied by Smith is 'terminal modification' (her term), especially in the poetry of Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542).

In this well-known passage, the Psalmist mocks the idols of the

foreign nations (see vv. 2-4), by enumerating seven body parts that

they (seemingly) possess, but which are unable to perform the

applicable action. For the first six body parts (mouth, eyes, ears,

nose, hands, legs), the body part is listed first, with the verbal

statement following, e.g., 'eyes they have, but they do not see' (v.

5b). In the seventh and final passage, however, the order is

reversed, so that one reads 'they do not utter in their throat', with

the verbal clause preceding the body part.

2. Genesis 23 (Mirsky)

Gen 23:4   וְאֶקְבְּרָה מֵתִי 'so that I may bury my dead'

Gen 23:6a קְבֹר אֶת־מֵתֶךָ 'bury your dead'

Gen 23:6b מִקְּבֹר מֵתֶךָ 'from burying your dead'

Gen 23:8   לִקְבֹּר אֶת־מֵתִי 'to bury my dead'

Gen 23:11 קְבֹר מֵתֶךָ 'bury your dead'

Gen 23:13   וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת־מֵתִי 'so that I may bury my dead'

Gen 23:15 וְאֶת־מֵתְךָ קְבֹר 'and your dead, bury'

Genesis 23:3-16 constitutes the contracted negotiations between Abraham and the Hittites of Hebron (or from v. 10 onward one particular such person, Ephron) to purchase a burial place for his deceased wife Sarah. For simplicity's sake, I have truncated the seven expressions above, but the main point is discernible nonetheless.[3] In the first six cases, regardless of who is speaking and what the tone or tenor may be, the verb ק-ב-ר 'bury' appears before the object מֵת 'dead, deceased'. In the last instance, however, one notes the change in word order in Ephron's final words: וְאֶת־מֵתְךָ קְבֹר 'and your dead, bury' (v. 15), with the object preceding the verb in the imperative form. While this modification by itself should signal the end of the negotiations, just in case the reader missed the point, the next verse confirms the point rather prosaically: וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם אֶל־ הַכֶּסֶף עֶפְרוֹן וַיִּשְׁקֹל אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרֹן אֶת־ 'and Abraham heeded Ephron, and

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[3] Mirsky (p. 21) attributed this example to the insightful Mordechai Breuer, though note that I have expanded the discussion from the three phrases treated by Mirsky and Breuer (vv. 6b, 11, 15) to the seven iterations listed here.

Abraham weighed for Ephron the silver' (v. 16). In Mirsky's words, "change in the order of words indicates the end of the dialogue, and also the end of the incident".[4]

In several recently published articles, I have focused on variation for the sake of variation as a literary device within biblical literature.[5] These passages from Genesis 23 afford us further illustrations of the technique. Note, for example: a) וְאֶקְבְּרָה מֵתִי (v. 4)

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[4] Mirsky, "Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew", p. 22.

[5] Gary A. Rendsburg, "Variation in Biblical Hebrew Prose and Poetry", in Maxine L. Grossman (ed.), *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin* (Bethesda, Md., 2013), pp. 197-226; and Gary A. Rendsburg, "Repetition with Variation in Legal-Cultic Texts of the Torah", in Edward L. Greenstein, Mayer Gruber, Peter Machinist, and Shamir Yona (eds.), *Marbeh Hokma: Studies in Honor of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz* (Winona Lake, Ind., forthcoming), pp. 433-461.

vs. וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת־מֵתִי (v. 13), both spoken by Abraham and both meaning

'so that I may bury my dead'; and b) קְבֹר אֶת־מֵתֶךָ (v. 6a) vs. קְבֹר מֵתֶךָ

(v. 11), the first spoken by the Hittites at large, the second spoken by

Ephron, and both meaning 'bury your dead'. In both pairs of verses,

in one case the particle אֶת is present, while in the other it is lacking.

Though just to keep the reader on his or her toes, in the clauses of

illustration (a), it is the former which lacks אֶת and the latter which

includes it; while in the clauses of illustration (b), the opposite

obtains, with the former containing אֶת and the latter lacking the

form. The biblical author foregoes no occasion to use language to

advance his goal of literary artistry.

Notwithstanding the seminal nature of Mirsky's article, as

implied above, in my perusal of dozens, nay, hundreds, of

commentaries on biblical books, monographs devoted to particular

selections of biblical literature, standard reference works, and so on –

only a handful of scholars (to my knowledge) have taken notice of

"Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew". These include Wilfred

Watson, who provides a brief discussion on the endings of poems in

his valuable handbook, though without offering further examples,[6] and Meir Parʾan and Amos Frisch, both of whom identified additional instances of the phenomenon.[7] We continue our treatment of this literary device with two passages ascertained by Parʾan, the first of which simply sets the stage, the second of which is more central to his project concerning stylistic devices within the priestly material in the Torah.

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[6] Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (London, 2005), pp. 62-65

[7] Meir Parʾan, *Darkhe ha-Signon ha-Kohani ba-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 183-204; and Amos Frisch, "Hedim be-Sifre Neviʾim le-ʾIssure ʿḤoq ha-Melekʾ she-be-Sefer Devarim", in Shmuel Vargon, et al. (eds.), *Menaḥot Yedidut we-Hoqra le-Menaḥem Kohen* (ʿIyyune Miqraʾ u-Paršanut 7; Ramat-Gan, 2005), 263-281, esp. pp. 272, 276-277.

3. Psalm 74:13-17 (Parʾan)

13 אַתָּה פוֹרַרְתָּ בְעָזְּךָ יָם
שִׁבַּרְתָּ רָאשֵׁי תַנִּינִים עַל־הַמָּיִם׃
14 אַתָּה רִצַּצְתָּ רָאשֵׁי לִוְיָתָן
תִּתְּנֶנּוּ מַאֲכָל לְעָם לְצִיִּים׃
15 אַתָּה בָקַעְתָּ מַעְיָן וָנָחַל
אַתָּה הוֹבַשְׁתָּ נַהֲרוֹת אֵיתָן׃
16 לְךָ יוֹם אַף־לְךָ לָיְלָה
אַתָּה הֲכִינוֹתָ מָאוֹר וָשָׁמֶשׁ׃
17 אַתָּה הִצַּבְתָּ כָּל־גְּבוּלוֹת אָרֶץ
קַיִץ וָחֹרֶף אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּם׃

[13] You crushed with your strength Yam,

   You shattered the heads of the Tanninim over the waters.

[14] You smashed the heads of Leviathan,

   You give him (as) food to the people of the deserts.

[15] You split spring and wadi,

   You dried-up the everflowing streams.

[16] To you is day, yea, to you is night,

   You set luminary and sun.

[17] You established all the boundaries of the earth,

   Summer and winter, you created them.

In these poetic lines, the psalmist ascribes to God ten different acts of

creation (not necessarily derivative of Genesis 1, but rather exploits

more typically associated with the mythologies of the ancient world,

such as the defeat of Yam/Tannin/Leviathan, ascribed to Baʿal in

Ugaritic myth). The first nine stichs begin with 'you', with the object

following. The pronoun 'you' may appear as an independent form,

אַתָּה 'you', as it does six times; it may be built into a suffix-

conjugation verb, as it does once, שִׁבַּרְתָּ 'you shattered' (v. 13); it

may be built into a prefix-conjugation verb, as also occurs once, תִּתְּנֶנּוּ

'you give him' (v. 14); or it may appear as a pronominal suffix

attached to a preposition, as occurs with לְךָ 'to you' (v. 16), though

still as the headword in the poetic line.[8] This pattern is altered in the

tenth and last line of this section of Psalm 74; in the colon קַיִץ וָחֹרֶף

אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּם 'summer and winter, you created them', the two-noun

object appears first, with the 'you' expression following.

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[8] In this particular case, what follows, namely יוֹם 'day', and

then later in the verse לַיְלָה 'night', are technically the grammatical

subjects of verbless clauses – and hence not objects strictly – but the

point remains nonetheless, since the reader realizes of course that

the line refers to God's creation of day and night (in this case, yes,

something noted in the canonical creation account in Genesis 1).

4. Leviticus 1:4-9 (Parʾan)

4 וְסָמַ֣ךְ יָד֔וֹ עַ֖ל רֹ֣אשׁ הָעֹלָ֑ה
וְנִרְצָ֥ה ל֖וֹ לְכַפֵּ֥ר עָלָֽיו׃
5 וְשָׁחַ֛ט אֶת־בֶּ֥ן הַבָּקָ֖ר לִפְנֵ֣י יְהוָ֑ה
וְ֠הִקְרִיבוּ בְּנֵ֨י אַהֲרֹ֤ן הַכֹּֽהֲנִים֙ אֶת־הַדָּ֔ם
וְזָרְק֨וּ אֶת־הַדָּ֤ם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּ֙חַ֙ סָבִ֔יב אֲשֶׁר־פֶּ֖תַח אֹ֥הֶל מוֹעֵֽד׃
6 וְהִפְשִׁ֖יט אֶת־הָעֹלָ֑ה
וְנִתַּ֥ח אֹתָ֖הּ לִנְתָחֶֽיהָ׃
7 וְ֠נָתְנוּ בְּנֵ֨י אַהֲרֹ֧ן הַכֹּהֵ֛ן אֵ֖שׁ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּ֑חַ
וְעָרְכ֥וּ עֵצִ֖ים עַל־הָאֵֽשׁ׃
8 וְעָרְכ֗וּ בְּנֵ֤י אַהֲרֹן֙ הַכֹּ֣הֲנִ֔ים אֵ֚ת הַנְּתָחִ֔ים אֶת־הָרֹ֖אשׁ וְאֶת־הַפָּ֑דֶר
עַל־הָעֵצִים֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר עַל־הָאֵ֔שׁ אֲשֶׁ֖ר עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּֽחַ׃
9 וְקִרְבּ֥וֹ וּכְרָעָ֖יו יִרְחַ֣ץ בַּמָּ֑יִם
וְהִקְטִ֨יר הַכֹּהֵ֤ן אֶת־הַכֹּל֙ הַמִּזְבֵּ֔חָה עֹלָ֛ה אִשֵּׁ֥ה רֵֽיחַ־נִיח֖וֹחַ לַֽיהוָֽה׃

⁴ And he shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt-
   offering,

  And it shall be acceptable unto him, to expiate for him.

⁵ And he shall slaughter the herd-member before Yʜᴡʜ,

  And the sons of Aaron the priests shall bring-forth the
   blood,

  And they shall dash the blood on the altar all-around,

   which is at the opening of the Tent of Meeting.

⁶ And he shall flay the burnt-offering,

  And he shall section it into sections.

⁷ And the sons of Aaron the priest shall place fire upon
   the altar,

  And they shall arrange the wood upon the fire.

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⁸ And the sons of Aaron the priests shall arrange the
sections, the head, and the suet, upon the wood
which is upon the fire which is upon the altar.
⁹ And its entrails and its legs, he shall wash in water;
And the priest shall burn-as-smoke the whole on the
altar (as) a burnt-offering, a sacrificial-gift of
pleasing odor unto YHWH.

The book of Leviticus commences with a detailed presentation
of the individual sacrifices, including a step-by-step description of
the specific priestly actions. In Lev 1:4-8 nine separate activities are
mentioned, conducted either by Aaron alone (4x, with appropriate
verb in the singular) or by his sons as a collective unit (5x, with
appropriate verb in the plural). In each case, the verb is clause-
initial, with the object following. For the tenth and final stage in the
ritual, the text presents a different ordering: וְקִרְבּוֹ וּכְרָעָיו יִרְחַץ בַּמָּיִם
'and its entrails and its legs, he shall wash in water' (v. 9a) – with
object first and verb following, as reflected in my English rendering.
The reader thereby realizes that this action represents the final stage
in the ritual ceremony. The following half-verse (v. 9b), "And the
priest shall burn-as-smoke the whole on the altar (as) a burnt-

offering, a sacrificial-gift of pleasing odor unto Yʜᴡʜ", returns to the usual word order, but this passage does not represent a specific action, but rather serves as a summary statement for the sacrificial ritual as a whole.

I next present several fine illustrations of the marking-closure device detected by Frisch.

5. Deuteronomy 17:16-17 (Frisch)[9]

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16 רַק֘ לֹא־יַרְבֶּה־לּ֣וֹ סוּסִים֒ . . .

17 וְלֹ֤א יַרְבֶּה־לּוֹ֙ נָשִׁ֔ים . . .

וְכֶ֣סֶף וְזָהָ֗ב לֹ֥א יַרְבֶּה־לּ֖וֹ מְאֹֽד:

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¹⁶ Only he may not multfiply for himself horses . . .

¹⁷ And he may not multiply for himself women/wives . . .

   And silver and gold he may not multiply for himself greatly.

The law of the king in Deuteronomy 17 legislates three essential prohibitions. In the first two cases, the verbal clause occurs first, with the direct object ('horses' and 'women/wives') following. In the

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⁹ Though see also Mirsky, *Signon ʿIvri*, pp. 23-24.

third instance, the direct object ('silver and gold') is fronted, with the verbal clause following. In addition, the first two prohibitions contain additional relevant material (indicated here by the ellipses), while the third statement stands by itself. Finally, the third one includes the adverbial מְאֹד 'greatly', a term that is lacking in the first two proscriptions.

6. Jeremiah 50:35-38 (Frisch)

35 חֶרֶב עַל־כַּשְׂדִּים נְאֻם־יְהֹוָה וְאֶל־יֹשְׁבֵי בָבֶל וְאֶל־שָׂרֶיהָ וְאֶל־חֲכָמֶיהָ:
36 חֶרֶב אֶל־הַבַּדִּים וְנֹאָלוּ
חֶרֶב אֶל־גִּבּוֹרֶיהָ וָחָתּוּ:
37 חֶרֶב אֶל־סוּסָיו וְאֶל־רִכְבּוֹ וְאֶל־כָּל־הָעֶרֶב אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכָהּ וְהָיוּ לְנָשִׁים
חֶרֶב אֶל־אוֹצְרֹתֶיהָ וּבֻזָּזוּ:
38 חֹרֶב אֶל־מֵימֶיהָ וְיָבֵשׁוּ כִּי אֶרֶץ פְּסִלִים הִיא וּבָאֵימִים יִתְהֹלָלוּ:

³⁵ A sword against the Chaldeans, declares YHWH;

    and against the inhabitants of Babylon,

    and against her princes, and against her wise-men

³⁶ A sword against the diviners, that they may be foolish,

    A sword against her heroes, that they may be dismayed.

³⁷ A sword against his horses and against his chariotry,

    and against all the mixed-crowd which is in her midst,

    that they may become women;

    A sword against her treasuries, that they may be plundered.

³⁸ A drought against her waters, that they may be dried-up,

      for it is a land of idols, and for the dreads they go mad.

The prophet Jeremiah envisions a series of five swords to be unleashed against Babylon. Each line, accordingly, is introduced by the word חֶרֶב 'sword'. In most clever fashion, the sixth and culminating line ever-so-slightly changes the crucial word to חֹרֶב 'drought'. In the original Hebrew text, with no vowel points, the words would have looked exactly the same, thus חרב ḤRB, though the reader would have known to intone the first five as ḥɛrɛb 'sword' and the last one as ḥōrɛb 'drought', most fitting, of course, given the reference to 'her waters' in this final line.[10]

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    [10] To be totally accurate, though, notwithstanding the same *written* letter [ח], the pronunciation of the first consonant would have been different in ancient Israel, with the noun 'sword' realized with [ḥ], a pharyngeal fricative (cf. Ugaritic ḥrb 'sword'), and with the noun 'drought' realized with [ḫ], a velar fricative (cf. Ugaritic ḫ-r-b 'dry up'). From the 3rd century B.C.E. onward, the two consonants merged to /ḥ/, but this was not the case originally. For details, see

We now build upon the work of Mirsky, Parʾan, and Frisch by presenting additional examples of the phenomenon, beginning with two familiar wordings in Gen 1:31.

7. Genesis 1

Gen 1:31 יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי ‘the sixth day’

Gen 1:31 וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד ‘and behold, very good’

1) During the first five days of creation, the names of the days of the week are presented without the definite article, thus: יוֹם אֶחָד ‘day one’ (v. 5), יוֹם שֵׁנִי ‘a second day’ (v. 8), יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי ‘a third day’ (v.

Gary A. Rendsburg, “Ancient Hebrew Phonology”, in Alan S. Kaye (ed.), *The Phonologies of Asia and Africa* (Winona Lake, Ind., 1997), pp. 65-83, in particular pp. 71-72; and Gary A. Rendsburg, “Phonology, Biblical Hebrew”, *EHLL*, vol. 3, pp. 100-109, esp. pp. 102-103. Though regardless of this phonological issue, Frisch’s observation holds nonetheless.

13), יוֹם רְבִיעִי 'a fourth day' (v. 19), and יוֹם חֲמִישִׁי 'a fifth day' (v. 23).[11]

For the final day of creation, however, we read יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי 'the sixth day', with the definite article.

2) Throughout Genesis 1 the reader encounteres the refrain כִּי־טוֹב 'that it was good' (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). In its last iteration, however, the author writes וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד 'and behold, very good' (v. 31), with several discernible differences: a) the particle כִּי 'that' is changed to וְהִנֵּה 'and behold'; and b) the word טוֹב 'good' receives the adverb מְאֹד 'very'.

These changes, however slight, inform the reader that she has reached the end of the story, which in this case also denotes the end of God's creative actions.

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[11] Standard Hebrew usage calls for the cardinal number 'one' in this instance, as opposed to the ordinal number 'first' (for another example, see Gen 2:11-14, where the rivers of Eden are enumerated). Accordingly, the ordinals commence only with 'second'. My glosses include the indefinite article 'a', which is necessary in English, though naturally there is no such part of speech in the Hebrew.

8. Genesis 41:26-27

26 שֶׁבַע פָּרֹת הַטֹּבֹת שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים הֵנָּה
וְשֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הַטֹּבֹת שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים הֵנָּה חֲלוֹם אֶחָד הוּא:
27 וְשֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת הָרַקּוֹת וְהָרָעֹת הָעֹלֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים הֵנָּה
וְשֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הָרֵקוֹת שְׁדֻפוֹת הַקָּדִים יִהְיוּ שֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי רָעָב:

26 The seven good cows, they are seven years,

And the seven good ears-of-grain, they are seven years

– it is one dream.

27 And the seven thin and bad cows that come-up after

them, they are seven years,

And the seven empty ears-of-grain, blasted by the east-

wind, they will be seven years of famine.

These lines constitute the key portion of Joseph's

interpretation of Pharaoh's parallel dreams.[12] Each of the dream

components represents seven years. The first three are marked

by the identical clause שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים הֵנָּה 'they are seven years',

without further comment. The fourth and culminating

expression is יִהְיוּ שֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי רָעָב 'they will be seven years of famine',

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[12] I am grateful to Everett Fox (oral communication), who

directed my attention to this example.

with a future tense verb, a different way of expressing 'seven years', and the climactic word רָעָב 'famine'.

9. Numbers 1

Num 1:42 בְּנֵי נַפְתָּלִי 'the sons of Naphtali'

Numbers 1 constitutes a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. In order to commence the census, the tribe descended from the firstborn son of Jacob, namely Reuben, is introduced with a special formula: וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי־רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל 'and the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, were' (v. 20), with both the epithet 'firstborn of Israel' and an actual verb 'were'. The following tribes are each introduced with the simple phrase לִבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן 'of the sons of Simeon' (v. 22), לִבְנֵי גָד 'of the sons of Gad' (v. 24), לִבְנֵי יְהוּדָה 'of the sons of Judah' (v. 26), etc. One would expect the last tribe in the enumeration to follow suit, but with characteristic flair the text diverges, so that the final tribe is introduced as בְּנֵי נַפְתָּלִי 'the sons of Naphtali' (v. 42). Textual critics typically emend the passage to

include the preposition -לְ 'to, of', so that the Naphtali passage

accords with the ten preceding tribes (Simeon [v. 22] through Asher

[v. 40]).[13] In doing so, they typically rely on versional support, such

as the Samaritan Torah, which reads לבני נפתלי 'of the sons of

Naphtali' here, and the Vulgate, which reads *de filiis Nepthali* 'of the

sons of Naphtali' – though to my mind these readings are evidence of

harmonizing. In light of the many examples of variation to mark

closure presented in this study, the Masoretic Text not only should

be retained, but should also stand as a reminder of the creative

abilities of the ancient Hebrew literati. Indeed, even in the most

mundane of texts – a census list! – the literary imagination shines

through.

10. Numbers 2 – the tribal encampment around the Tabernacle
(census figures)

9 כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִים֩ לְמַחֲנֵ֨ה יְהוּדָ֜ה מְאַ֥ת אֶ֛לֶף וּשְׁמֹנִ֥ים אֶ֖לֶף וְשֵׁ֥שֶׁת־אֲלָפִ֖ים וְאַרְבַּע־מֵא֑וֹת
לְצִבְאֹתָ֖ם רִאשֹׁנָ֥ה יִסָּֽעוּ׃

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[13] See, for example, *BHS*, ad loc.

16 כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִ֞ים לְמַחֲנֵ֣ה רְאוּבֵ֗ן מְאַ֪ת אֶ֡לֶף וְאֶחָ֣ד וַחֲמִשִּׁ֣ים אֶ֩לֶף֩ וְאַרְבַּע־מֵא֨וֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁ֧ים לְצִבְאֹתָ֖ם וּשְׁנִיִּ֥ם יִסָּֽעוּ׃

24 כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִ֞ים לְמַחֲנֵ֣ה אֶפְרַ֗יִם מְאַ֥ת אֶ֛לֶף וּשְׁמֹֽנַת־אֲלָפִ֥ים וּמֵאָ֖ה לְצִבְאֹתָ֑ם וּשְׁלִשִׁ֥ים יִסָּֽעוּ׃

31 כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִים֙ לְמַחֲנֵ֣ה דָ֔ן מְאַ֣ת אֶ֗לֶף וְשִׁבְעָ֧ה וַחֲמִשִּׁ֛ים אֶ֖לֶף וְשֵׁ֣שׁ מֵא֑וֹת לָאַחֲרֹנָ֥ה יִסְע֖וּ לְדִגְלֵיהֶֽם׃

9 All those counted of the camp of Judah (totaled) one hundred thousand and eighty thousand and six thousand and four hundred [186,400], according to their armies; they would proceed first.

16 All those counted of the camp of Reuben (totaled) one hundred thousand and fifty-one thousand and four hundred and fifty [151,450], according to their armies; and they would proceed second.

24 All those counted of the camp of Ephraim (totaled) one hundred thousand and eight thousand and one hundred [108,100], according to their armies; and they would proceed third.

31 All those counted of the camp of Dan (totaled) one hundred thousand and fifty-seven thousand and six hundred [157,600]; they would proceed last, according to their flags.

This section of the book of Numbers describes the camp of the Israelites, divided into four sections, each with a tribal unit as its lead organizer, one on each flank of the Tabernacle. The verses above provide the number of adult males (capable of military service

23

apparently) in each section, as a summary statement for the more individualized census figures listed in this chapter. The first three verses follow the same pattern, while the fourth one (v. 31) departs in two distinct ways: a) the word לְצִבְאֹתָם 'according to their armies' is omitted; and b) the word לְדִגְלֵיהֶם 'according to their flags' is added.

11. Numbers 3 – the number of Levites encamped (+ נָשִׂיא)[14]

23 מִשְׁפְּחֹת הַגֵּרְשֻׁנִּי אַחֲרֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן יַחֲנוּ יָמָּה:

24 וּנְשִׂיא בֵית־אָב לַגֵּרְשֻׁנִּי אֶלְיָסָף בֶּן־לָאֵל:

29 מִשְׁפְּחֹת בְּנֵי־קְהָת יַחֲנוּ עַל יֶרֶךְ הַמִּשְׁכָּן תֵּימָנָה:

30 וּנְשִׂיא בֵית־אָב לְמִשְׁפְּחֹת הַקְּהָתִי אֱלִיצָפָן בֶּן־עֻזִּיאֵל:

35 וּנְשִׂיא בֵית־אָב לְמִשְׁפְּחֹת מְרָרִי צוּרִיאֵל בֶּן־אֲבִיחָיִל עַל יֶרֶךְ הַמִּשְׁכָּן יַחֲנוּ צָפֹנָה:

[23] The families of the Gershonites behind the Tabernacle encamped sea-ward [i.e., to the west].

[24] And the leader of the ancestral house of the Gershonites: ᵓElyasaph ben Laᵓel.

[29] The families of the Kohathites encamped, on the south flank of the Tabernacle.

[30] And the leader of the ancestral house of the families of the Kohathites: ᵓEliṣaphan ben ʿUzziᵓel.

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[14] See similarly Mirsky, *Signon ʿIvri*, pp. 26-27.

³⁵ And the leader of the ancestral house of the families of Merarites: Ṣuriʾel ben Aviḥayil; on the flank of the Tabernacle they camped northward.

Numbers 3 describes the three groups of Levites encamped on different sides of the Tabernacle (the fourth side, facing east, is the domain of the priests). In vv. 23-24 and 29-30, the first two Levitical groups are presented in the order of 'Tabernacle flank' + 'leader of ancestral house', that is, Gershonites to the west led by ʾElyasaph, and Kohathites to the south led by ʾEliṣaphan. In the third instance, as seen in v. 35, the order is 'leader of ancestral house' + 'Tabernacle flank', that is, Merarites led by Ṣuriʾel, encamped to the north. The information for the first two groups, moreover, is spread over two verses, while the information for the third group is presented in a single verse.

12. Numbers 28-29 – festival sacrifices

28:9 (Sabbath) וּבְיוֹם֙ הַשַּׁבָּ֔ת 'and on the day of the Sabbath'
28:11 (New Moon) וּבְרָאשֵׁי֙ חָדְשֵׁיכֶ֔ם 'and on your new moons'

28:16 (Pesaḥ, day 1) וּבַחֹ֣דֶשׁ הָרִאשׁ֗וֹן בְּאַרְבָּעָ֥ה עָשָׂ֛ר י֖וֹם לַחֹ֑דֶשׁ 'and on the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month'

28:25 (Pesaḥ, day 7) וּבַיּוֹם֙ הַשְּׁבִיעִ֔י 'and on the seventh day'

28:26 (Shavuʿot) וּבְי֣וֹם הַבִּכּוּרִ֗ים 'and on the day of first-fruits'

29:1 ('Rosh ha-Shana') וּבַחֹ֤דֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי֙ בְּאֶחָ֣ד לַחֹ֔דֶשׁ 'and on the seventh month, on the first (day) of the month'

29:7 (Yom Kippur) וּבֶעָשׂוֹר֩ לַחֹ֨דֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִ֜י הַזֶּ֗ה 'and on the tenth (day) of this the seventh month'

29:12 (Sukkot, day 1) וּבַחֲמִשָּׁה֩ עָשָׂ֨ר י֜וֹם לַחֹ֣דֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִ֗י 'and on the fifteenth day of the seventh month'

29:17 (Sukkot, day 2) וּבַיּ֣וֹם הַשֵּׁנִ֔י 'and on the second day'

29:20 (Sukkot, day 3) וּבַיּ֥וֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁ֖י 'and on the third day'

29:23 (Sukkot, day 4) וּבַיּ֥וֹם הָרְבִיעִ֖י 'and on the fourth day'

29:26 (Sukkot, day 5) וּבַיּ֥וֹם הַחֲמִישִׁ֖י 'and on the fifth day'

29:29 (Sukkot, day 6) וּבַיּ֥וֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁ֖י 'and on the sixth day'

29:32 (Sukkot, day 7) וּבַיּ֥וֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִ֖י 'and on the seventh day'

29:35 (Sukkot, day 8 / ʿAṣeret) בַּיּוֹם֙ הַשְּׁמִינִ֔י 'on the eighth day'

Numbers 28-29 comprises the most detailed exposition of the daily and festival sacrifices in the Torah. The long section commences with the daily sacrifices (Num 28:3-8) and then proceeds to the new moon and festival offerings. Each of the new sub-sections is introduced with -וּבְ 'and on', with the details following. The exception, as the above list demonstrates, is the final holiday in the

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annual calendar, to wit, the eighth-day festival that follows Sukkot

(Šemini ʿAṣeret in Jewish parlance). As we have seen previously (see

above, no. 9), once more we note how two of the ancient versions

harmonize this passage with the preceding ones. The LXX adds καὶ

'and' at the beginning of v. 35; while the Samaritan Torah reads וביום

השמיני 'and on the eighth day'.

13. Judges 3:20-23

20 . . . וַיֹּאמֶר אֵהוּד דְּבַר־אֱלֹהִים לִי אֵלֶיךָ
וַיָּקָם מֵעַל הַכִּסֵּא׃
21 וַיִּשְׁלַח אֵהוּד אֶת־יַד שְׂמֹאלוֹ
וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַחֶרֶב מֵעַל יֶרֶךְ יְמִינוֹ
וַיִּתְקָעֶהָ בְּבִטְנוֹ׃
22 וַיָּבֹא גַם־הַנִּצָּב אַחַר הַלַּהַב
וַיִּסְגֹּר הַחֵלֶב בְּעַד הַלַּהַב כִּי לֹא שָׁלַף הַחֶרֶב מִבִּטְנוֹ
וַיֵּצֵא הַפַּרְשְׁדֹנָה׃
23 וַיֵּצֵא אֵהוּד הַמִּסְדְּרוֹנָה
וַיִּסְגֹּר דַּלְתוֹת הָעַלִיָּה בַּעֲדוֹ
וְנָעָל׃

²⁰ And Ehud said, "I have a word of God for you'; and he [sc. Eglon]
arose from his chair. ²¹ And Ehud sent his left hand, and he took the
sword from his right thigh, and he blasted it into his stomach. ²²
And also the hilt entered after the blade, and the fat closed around
the blade, because he did not withdraw the sword from his stomach;

and the feces exited. [23] And Ehud exited via the colonnade, and he closed the doors of the upper-chamber about him, and he locked.

As is typical in Hebrew narrative prose, the author of our passage employs the *wayyiqtol* to relate the events. Ten such forms occur in Judg 3:20-23[15] – until we reach the final verb in this scene. Here we find, quite atypically, וְנָעָל 'and he locked', formed by conjunctive -וְ 'and' + *qatal* נָעַל 'he locked'.

Robert Longacre noted this atypical usage, with the following explanation: "[Judg 3:20-23] constitutes a rather celebrated case where a *wəqatal* form occurs at the end in place of the expected *wayyiqtol* form. The passage is a graphic and detailed description of what is undoubtedly depicted as a high point in the story. . . . The problem here is the occurrence of the *wəqatal* form in [the final clause] after the long string of *wayyiqtol* forms. Ingenious attempts have been made to explain it as a frequentative: perhaps there were a series of bolts to draw or bolts on several doors. But if we take this

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[15] There is also one *qatal* form in a subordinate clause, 'because he did not withdraw the sword from his stomach', as expected.

as a special marking, what is the rationale for its use here? Is it

climactic or anticlimactic? . . . At any rate, we are at a great moment

of a story and we can expect the narrator to indulge in a few

tricks".[16] While he did not state so explicitly, Longacre is correct:

our narrator has played a trick, with a focus on the word וְנָעַל 'and he

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[16] Robert E. Longacre, "*Weqatal* forms in Biblical Hebrew Prose:

A Discourse-modular Approach", in Robert D. Bergen (ed.), *Biblical*

Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics (Dallas, 1994), pp. 71-72. See also

Jan Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew: A New Synthesis*

Elaborated on the Basis of Classical Prose (Jerusalem Biblical Studies

10; Jerusalem, 2012), p. 324: "If וְנָעַל expresses a distinct nuance,

one wonders what it is". Joosten makes the correct distinction

between *wəqatal* (with future reference) and *wə-* + *qatal* (with past

reference), as here in Judg 3:23. With 3rd masc. sg. forms, the two

are 'grammatical homonyms' (p. 223).

locked' given its position as the closing act (pun intended?) in this action-packed scene.[17]

14. **Judges 16** – Samson and Delilah

16:9   וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו פְּלִשְׁתִּים עָלֶיךָ שִׁמְשׁוֹן

And she said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson'.

16:12   וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו פְּלִשְׁתִּים עָלֶיךָ שִׁמְשׁוֹן

And she said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson'.

16:14   וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו פְּלִשְׁתִּים עָלֶיךָ שִׁמְשׁוֹן

And she said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson'.

16:20   וַתֹּאמֶר   פְּלִשְׁתִּים עָלֶיךָ שִׁמְשׁוֹן

And she said,   'The Philistines are upon you, Samson'.

Four times Delilah attempts to gain the desired information regarding the source of Samson's strength from her lover. Four times she toys with him and then warns him about the presence of the Philistines about him. The first three statements are introduced by

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[17] All of this, of course, renders the proposal by some scholars (e.g., *BHS*, *ad loc.*) to emend the last verb to וַיִּנָּעֵל unnecessary.

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וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו 'and she said to him'. The fourth iteration involves only a slight change, hence simply וַתֹּאמֶר 'and she said' (note the spaces that I have left in the presentation above, to highlight this change) – thereby informing the reader that she has reached the denouement of the narrative.

15. 1 Samuel 8

11 וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה יִהְיֶהֹ מִשְׁפַּט הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִמְלֹךְ עֲלֵיכֶם
אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם יִקָּח וְשָׂם לֹוֹ בְּמֶרְכַּבְתֹּו וּבְפָרָשָׁיו וְרָצֹוּ לִפְנֵי מֶרְכַּבְתֹּו:
12 וְלָשׂוּם לֹו שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְלַחֲרֹשׁ חֲרִישֹׁו וְלִקְצֹר קְצִירֹו
וְלַעֲשֹׂות כְּלֵי־מִלְחַמְתֹּו וּכְלֵי רִכְבֹּו:
13 וְאֶת־בְּנֹותֵיכֶם יִקָּח לְרַקָּחֹות וּלְטַבָּחֹות וּלְאֹפֹות:
14 וְאֶת־שְׂדֽוֹתֵיכֶם וְאֶת־כַּרְמֵיכֶם וְזֵיתֵיכֶם הַטֹּובִים יִקָּח וְנָתַן לַעֲבָדָיו:
15 וְזַרְעֵיכֶם וְכַרְמֵיכֶם יַעְשֹׂר וְנָתַן לְסָרִיסָיו וְלַעֲבָדָיו:
16 וְאֶת־עַבְדֵיכֶם וְאֶת־שִׁפְחֽוֹתֵיכֶם וְאֶת־בַּחוּרֵיכֶם הַטֹּובִים וְאֶת־חֲמֹורֵיכֶם יִקָּח
וְעָשָׂה לִמְלַאכְתֹּו:
17 צֹאנְכֶם יַעְשֹׂר וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לֹו לַעֲבָדִים:

[11] And he [sc. Samuel] said, "This is the rule of the king who will rule over you: your sons he will take, and he will place them for himself in his chariotry and in his cavalry, and they will run before his chariot; [12] and he will place (them) for himself (as) officers of the thousands and (as) officers of the hundreds; and to plow his plowing and to harvest his harvesting, and to make his implements of war and his

implements of chariotry; [13] and your daughters he will take,
as perfumers and as cooks, and as bakers; [14] and your fields
and your vineyards, and your good olive-groves he will
take, and he will give (them) to his servants; [15] and your
seeds and your vineyards he will tithe, and he will give
(them) to his eunuchs and to his servants; [16] and your
servants and your maid-servants and your good young-men
and donkeys he will take, and he will make (them) for his
labor your; [17] your flocks he will tithe, and you will be unto
him as servants."

In this famous passage, the prophet Samuel cautions the people
about the future actions of the king whom they seek as their ruler.
His initial warning commences 'your sons he will take', with each
subsequent declaration beginning, not surprisingly, with the
conjunction -וְ 'and'. It is rather striking, accordingly, to find the last
admonition omitting this particle, hence simply צֹאנְכֶם יַעְשֹׂר 'your
flocks he will tithe'. The experienced reader, of course, understands
this slight change as the author's method of indicating closure. Once
more the Septuagint follows an independent course by adding καὶ
'and' at beginning of v. 17 (see similarly above, no. 12) – but this

32

evidence should not serve as a license for scholars to emend the

Masoretic Text.

16. Isaiah 40:12

מִי־מָדַ֨ד בְּשָׁעֳל֜וֹ מַ֗יִם
וְשָׁמַ֙יִם֙ בַּזֶּ֣רֶת תִּכֵּ֔ן
וְכָ֤ל בַּשָּׁלִשׁ֙ עֲפַ֣ר הָאָ֔רֶץ
וְשָׁקַ֥ל בַּפֶּ֖לֶס הָרִ֑ים
וּגְבָע֖וֹת בְּמֹאזְנָֽיִם׃

Who has measured with the hollow of his hand the water,

And gauged the heavens with a span,

And contained with a third the dust of the earth,

And weighed with a scale the mountains,

And the hills with a balance?

We now return to some examples of poetic verses (as with most

of the passages identified by Mirsky), with a change indicated in the

final stich. The present example has five lines characterized by

synonymous parallelism. Each of the first four cola includes a verb,

a measuring tool, and the item measured; in the final colon, no verb

is included, as a way to indicate closure. Obviously, 'verb gapping' is

involved here (to use the technical term employed by scholars,

referring to the absence of a verb), but one notes how the poet did

not employ this technique until the final line.

17. Isaiah 44:5

זֶ֤ה יֹאמַר֙ לַיהֹוָ֣ה אָ֔נִי
וְזֶ֥ה יִקְרָ֖א בְשֵֽׁם־יַעֲקֹ֑ב
וְזֶ֗ה יִכְתֹּ֤ב יָדוֹ֙ לַֽיהֹוָ֔ה
וּבְשֵׁ֥ם יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל יְכַנֶּֽה׃

This-one will say, 'To YHWH am I',

And this-one will call in the name of 'Jacob';

And this-one will write (on) his hand 'To YHWH',

And in the name of 'Israel' he shall be branded.

The first three lines follow the pattern of זֶה 'this-one' + verb

+ name (relating either to God or the people of Israel). This

arrangement is altered in the final stich, with זֶה 'this-one' omitted

and with the name preceding the verb.

18. Isaiah 58:13

If you honor it, (refraining)	וְכִבַּדְתּוֹ
From doing your ways,	מֵעֲשׂ֣וֹת דְּרָכֶ֔יךָ
From seeking your desire,	מִמְּצ֥וֹא חֶפְצְךָ֖
And (from) speaking (your) business.	וְדַבֵּ֥ר דָּבָֽר׃

The prophet urges his listeners to honor the Sabbath by desisting from business activities. Note that the first two actions are introduced by the preposition מ- 'from', plus the nouns bear the pronoun suffix ך- 'your'. In the third and final stich, however, these two grammatical items are lacking (thus my use of parentheses around 'from' and 'your' in the translation above).[18]

19. Psalm 19:8-10

8 תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נָפֶשׁ
עֵדוּת יְהוָה נֶאֱמָנָה מַחְכִּימַת פֶּתִי׃

9 פִּקּוּדֵי יְהוָה יְשָׁרִים מְשַׂמְּחֵי־לֵב
מִצְוַת יְהוָה בָּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינָיִם׃

10 יִרְאַת יְהוָה ׀ טְהוֹרָה עוֹמֶדֶת לָעַד
מִשְׁפְּטֵי־יְהוָה אֱמֶת צָדְקוּ יַחְדָּו׃

8 The teaching of Yhwh is perfect, it restores the life-essence;
   The testimony of Yhwh is truthful, it makes-wise the simpleton.

9 The decrees of Yhwh are upright, they gladden the heart;
   The commandment of Yhwh is clear, it enlightens the eyes.

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[18] Note the comment of Amos Ḥakham, *Isaiah 36-66* (Daʿat Miqraʾ; Jerusalem, 1984), p. 721: שִׁעוּרוֹ׃ וּמְדַבֵּר דָּבָר

¹⁰   The fear of Y<small>HWH</small> is pure, it abides forever;

   The laws of Y<small>HWH</small> are truth, they are-righteous together.

These three verses from a well-known psalm include six stichs praising God's ways, as embodied in his teaching / testimony / decrees / commandment / fear / laws – for our present purposes, we may consider these six terms as essentially synonymous. The first five stichs follow the same structure: the a-line in each is comprised of 'X of Y<small>HWH</small>' followed by a predicate adjective; while the b-line in each contains a participle followed by an appropriate object.[19] The sixth stich, v. 10b, departs from the pattern. In the a-line, 'X of Y<small>HWH</small>' is followed by a noun, אֱמֶת 'truth' (that is, not an adjective); while in the b-line a suffix-conjugation verb צָדְקוּ 'they are-righteous'

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[19] In the fifth line, v. 10a, the participle עוֹמֶדֶת 'endures' (lit. 'stands') is followed by the adverb לָעַד 'forever' (and hence not an object). This represents a slight change, though we also must recognize that this phrase is a standard idiom in Biblical Hebrew psalmody (see Ps 111:3, 111:10, 112:3, 112:9).

appears (that is, not a participle).[20] The reader of the poem is expected to notice the syntactic differences in the sixth stich, thereby realizing that she has arrived at the final 'X of Y<small>HWH</small>' statement.

20. Psalm 135:16-17[21]

16 פֶּה־לָהֶם וְלֹא יְדַבֵּרוּ עֵינַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְאוּ:

17 אָזְנַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יַאֲזִינוּ אַף אֵין־יֶשׁ־רוּחַ בְּפִיהֶם:

[16] A mouth they have, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see.
[17] Ears they have, but they do not listen;
However/nose, there is no breath in their mouth.

This passage is a shorter version of our paradigm example above (see no. 1), with the description of the idols limited to their facial body parts – mouth, eyes, ears, mouth (with wordplay on 'nose', see anon). In the first three stichs (v. 16a, v. 16b, v. 17a), the sentence

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[20] This change, unfortunately, cannot be captured in English translation – but it is clearly present in the Hebrew.

[21] See similarly Mirsky, *Signon 'Ivri*, p. 21.

order is body part followed by verbal action (in the negative). A different syntax presents in the final stich: a) the author utilizes a verbless clause; and b) the body part בְּפִיהֶם 'in their mouth' appears at the end of the verse. The attentive reader recognizes the difference and realizes that she has reached the end of the unit.

This passage allows us to see other literary devices at work. First, not wishing to engage in verbatim repetition throughout, the poet alters the expression from Ps 115:6 אָזְנַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִשְׁמָעוּ 'ears they have, but they do not hear' to Ps 135:17 אָזְנַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יַאֲזִינוּ 'ears they have, but they do not listen', replacing שׁ-מ-ע *š-m-ʿ* 'hear' with its synonym א-ז-ן *ʾ-z-n* (Hiphʿil) 'listen' (a denominative verb based on the noun 'ear'). By such statement, I do not mean to imply that the same poet is responsible for both Psalm 115 and Psalm 135. But at some point in the creation of the Psalter, I can imagine that an overarching scribe/author/editor exerted effort to ensure as little

duplication as possible in the various phrases that appear within the canonical book.[22]

The second additional feature to be studied here is the delightful wordplay introduced by the use of אַף ʾap 'however/nose' at the head of v. 17b. If the reader had any sense of the longer list of the non-actions of the body parts of idols presented in Ps 115:5-7, then she would expect v. 17b to describe a non-action associated with the nose. After all, Ps 115:6 flows from v. 6a concerning the ears (reproduced in the previous paragraph) to v. 6b concerning the nose: אַף לָהֶם וְלֹא יְרִיחוּן yərîḥun 'a nose they have, but they do not smell'. In the most clever of linguistic turns, the author of Psalm 135 also follows the 'ears' line with the word אַף ʾap – but at some point

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[22] For another illustration of this phenomenon within the book of Psalms, indeed one with much greater variation, stretching over several dozen parallel passages, see Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985), pp. 127-129. These pages present 11 instances of interrelated phrases, though see also p. 154, n. 1, for a listing of 16 further passages.

in the reading process the listener to v. 17b becomes aware that her

expectation for this one-syllable word to mean 'nose' has not been

realized, for instead the word is employed here with the connotation

'however'. Indeed, given the wording אַף אֵין־יֶשׁ־רוּחַ בְּפִיהֶם

'however/nose, there is no breath in their mouth', this awareness

does not surface until the very last word of the verse. For until this

point, the string of four words אַף אֵין־יֶשׁ־רוּחַ makes perfect sense,[23]

with the assumption that the final word would be בּוֹ* *bō 'in it'

presumably. In fact, I might argue that the exceedingly rare negator

אֵין־יֶשׁ *ʾen yεš* 'there is no'[24] in this stich (for אֵין *ʾen* alone would

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[23] Especially given the fact that the two key nouns אַף *ʾap* 'nose'

and רוּחַ *ruaḥ* 'breath' appear together in Gen 7:22, Exod 15:8, 2 Sam

22:16 // Ps 18:16, Prov 14:29, 16:32, Job 4:9, 27:3, Lam 4:20, in

addition to Ps 115:6, with אַף *ʾap* 'nose' collocated with the

denominative verb ר-ו\י-ח *r-w/y-ḥ* 'breathe'.

[24] The only other instance of this usage in the Bible is 1 Sam

21:9 אִין יֵשׁ *ʾin yeš* 'there is not' (actually 'is there not', since the

suffice) is used in order to extend the string of words as much as possible before the reader has her expectation dashed at the very end of the verse.

21. **Psalm 119:176** – the last verse of the longest psalm

תָּעִיתִי כְּשֶׂה אֹבֵד בַּקֵּשׁ עַבְדֶּךָ כִּי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ לֹא שָׁכָחְתִּי׃

I have strayed like a lost sheep – seek your servant –

for your commandments I have not forgotten.

This example from biblical poetry is rather banal, and yet it illustrates the technique studied here nonetheless. Psalm 119 is the longest poem of the Bible, an alphabetic acrostic, with 8 lines for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. As a glance at any Bible will demonstrate, the first 175 verses of this psalm proceed in like fashion, line after line, stanza after stanza, with only two stichs to each verse. In the last verse, however, the author interposes a two-word phrase between the two stichs, as he turns to God with his

construction occurs in a question), though with dialectal variation reflected in the /i/ vowel instead of expected /e/.

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plea בַּקֵּשׁ עַבְדֶּךָ *baqqeš ʿabdɛka* 'seek your servant'. The inclusion of

this phrase hardly constitutes literary creativity at its finest, but its

presence in the last line nevertheless serves as a signal to the reader

(not that such is necessary, given the structure of the poem) that she

has reached the final line of this exceedingly long composition.

22. Psalm 146:6-9

6 עֹשֶׂה ׀ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם
הַשֹּׁמֵר אֱמֶת לְעוֹלָם:
7 עֹשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט ׀ לָעֲשׁוּקִים
נֹתֵן לֶחֶם לָרְעֵבִים
יְהֹוָה מַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים:
8 יְהֹוָה ׀ פֹּקֵחַ עִוְרִים
יְהֹוָה זֹקֵף כְּפוּפִים
יְהֹוָה אֹהֵב צַדִּיקִים:
9 יְהֹוָה ׀ שֹׁמֵר אֶת־גֵּרִים
יָתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה יְעוֹדֵד
וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים יְעַוֵּת:

[6] Who makes heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them,
Who guards truth forever.
[7] Who makes judgment for the oppressed,
Who gives bread to the hungry,
Yʜwʜ releases the imprisoned.
[8] Yʜwʜ opens-(the-eyes) of the blind,
Yʜwʜ makes-upright the bent-over,
Yʜwʜ loves the righteous.
[9] Yʜwʜ guards the resident-aliens,

The orphan and the widow he sustains,
And the path of the wicked he makes-tortuous.

This poetic selection ascribes a series of moral and ethical actions and qualities to God. In the first nine lines, the pattern is participle verb followed by object (in the first four cola, God is implied, based on the mention of the deity in the preceding v. 5; in the next five stichs, the divine name יְהֹוָה 'Yahweh' appears explicitly). In the final two lines of this litany, the poet produces a different configuration, with object mentioned first (as indicated in my rendering above), followed by a *yiqtol* form of the verb (a point which cannot be reflected in the English).

23. Job 1:16-18 – the series of calamities

1:16   עוֹד | זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמַר

This one still was speaking, and this one came and said.

1:17   עוֹד | זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמַר

This one still was speaking, and this one came and said.

1:18   עַד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמַר

This one yet was speaking, and this one came and said.

I have treated these passages in an earlier study devoted to repetition with variation in the Bible, as part of the many variations within the recurring phrases of Job 1-2.[25] It remains to point out here that the variation in this particular case is introduced in the third and final iteration. Horrific as each one is, the reader is hereby notified that the calamity to be described by the current messenger is the last of the series.

24. Ruth 1:16-17

16 כִּ֠י אֶל־אֲשֶׁ֨ר תֵּלְכִ֜י אֵלֵ֗ךְ וּבַאֲשֶׁ֤ר תָּלִ֙ינִי֙ אָלִ֔ין עַמֵּ֣ךְ עַמִּ֔י וֵאלֹהַ֖יִךְ אֱלֹהָֽי׃

17 בַּאֲשֶׁ֤ר תָּמ֙וּתִי֙ אָמ֔וּת וְשָׁ֖ם אֶקָּבֵ֑ר

[16] For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people, my people; your God, my God;

[17] Wherever you die, I will die; and there I will be buried.

These words, which bridge Ruth 1:16-17 (they are properly v. 16b and v. 17a), are part of a long (and famous) speech from Ruth to Naomi. The basic point is: whatever and wherever are associated

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[25] Rendsburg, "Variation in Biblical Hebrew Prose and Poetry", pp. 212-213.

with Naomi, so shall they be with Ruth as well. For the first five items, the key words – which we may list as 'go', 'lodge', 'people', 'God', and 'die' – are repeated within each clause, whether they are verbal (the first, second, and fifth) or nominal (the third and fourth). The pattern is broken with the last item, however: וְשָׁם אֶקָּבֵר 'and there I will be buried'. The reader notes the lack of an a-phrase, which we may postulate as 'and wherever you are buried', with only the b-phrase present. Obviously, burial by itself marks closure, though to emphasize the point the author employs the literary device of phraseological change to mark conclusion.

25. Qohelet 3:2-8 – 'time for x, time for y'

2 עֵת לָלֶדֶת וְעֵת לָמוּת עֵת לָטַעַת וְעֵת לַעֲקוֹר נָטוּעַ:
3 עֵת לַהֲרוֹג וְעֵת לִרְפּוֹא עֵת לִפְרוֹץ וְעֵת לִבְנוֹת:
4 עֵת לִבְכּוֹת וְעֵת לִשְׂחוֹק עֵת סְפוֹד וְעֵת רְקוֹד:
5 עֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעֵת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים עֵת לַחֲבוֹק וְעֵת לִרְחֹק מֵחַבֵּק:
6 עֵת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת לְאַבֵּד עֵת לִשְׁמוֹר וְעֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ:
7 עֵת לִקְרוֹעַ וְעֵת לִתְפּוֹר עֵת לַחֲשׁוֹת וְעֵת לְדַבֵּר:
8 עֵת לֶאֱהֹב וְעֵת לִשְׂנֹא עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת שָׁלוֹם:

    [2] A time to give-birth, and a time to die;

    A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.

    [3] A time to kill, and a time to heal,

A time to break-down, and a time to build.

4 A time to cry, and a time to laugh,

A time to mourn, and a time to dance.

5 A time to cast stones, and a time to gather stones;

A time to hug, and a time to be-distant from hugging.

6 A time to seek, and a time to lose,

A time to guard, and a time to cast-away.

7 A time to tear, and a time to sew,

A time to be-quiet, and a time to speak.

8 A time to love, and a time to hate,

A time of war, and a time of peace.

This famous passage from Qohelet presents 14 pairs of opposites.

The first 13 pairs are all verbs, in fact, all infinitive forms. The last

pair עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת שָׁלוֹם 'a time for war, and a time for peace' presents

two nouns as opposites. The reader thereby realizes that she has

reached the final item in the litany.

As we have seen in the foregoing, Mirsky's seminal article[26]

merely touched the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Not only are there

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[26] Along with his monograph, written in Hebrew and thus

virtually unknown outside Israeli academic circles, I must report.

many more examples of the device of stylistic change to mark

closure in the Bible, the ancient authors engaged in a variety of

'tricks' (to use Longacre's term, noted above) while employing this

technique.

One further notes that the above examples extend throughout

the Bible, both in prose and in poetry, in various genres (law, cult,

narrative, psalmody, prophecy, etc.), and across time. Thus, for

example, nos. 1, 3, 19-22 are from the book of Psalms; nos. 6, 16-18

appear in prophetic texts; nos. 2, 7-8, 13-15, 23-24 are from

narrative compositions; nos. 4, 9-12 occur within priestly-cultic

material; no. 5 occurs within a legal text; and no. 25 occurs within

the *sui generis* book of Qohelet.

From a chronological perspective with specific attention to the

narratives, example no. 14 occurs in the Samson story, a

paradigmatic representative of early biblical narrative; nos 8 and 13

occur in slightly later yet still classical narratives (Joseph story and

Ehud story, respectively); while example no. 23 occurs in a late

narrative (Job 1-2).[27]

Turning to the poetic material, examples such as nos. 1, 3, and

19 should be considered pre-exilic psalms, while no. 21 is a clear

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[27] For the dating of these first three texts, I rely on Frank Polak,

"The Oral and the Written: Syntax, Stylistics and the Development of

Biblical Prose Narrative", *JANES* 26 (1998), pp. 59-105 (see

especially the convenient chart on p. 70); with additional relevant

comments in Frank Polak, "Oral Substratum, Language Usage, and

Thematic Flow in the Abraham-Jacob Narrative", in Brian Schmidt

(ed.), *Literacy, Orality and Literary Production in the Southern Levant:*

Contextualizing the Creation of Sacred Writing in Ancient Judah

(Atlanta, 2015), pp. 000-000. For the late dating of the prose

framework to the book of Job, see Avi Hurvitz,"The Date of the

Prose Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered", *HTR* 67 (1974), pp.

17-34. For an alternative view, see Ian Young, "Is the Prose Tale of

Job in Late Biblical Hebrew?" *VT* 59 (2009), pp. 606-629.

post-exilic composition.[28] Of the prophetic material, I have presented examples only from Jeremiah (no. 6) and Second Isaiah (nos. 16-18), though to be sure, Mirsky also included passages from First Isaiah and Ezekiel.

The debate continues concerning both the relative and absolute datings of the Priestly and Deuteronomic legal-cultic material in the Torah, though in any case, both corpora are represented in my treatment (nos. 4, 9-12, and no. 5, respectively).

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[28] My working hypothesis is to consider only those psalms with a concentration of Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) features, as identified by Avi Hurvitz, *Ben Lašon le-Lašon* (Jerusalem, 1972), to be post-exilic psalms. For Hurvitz's treatment of Psalm 119, to which he assigns a late date, see pp. 130-152. Certain psalms, with clear references to the Exile (most famously, Psalm 137), are to be dated to the 6th century B.C.E. Otherwise, the default should be to consider the other compositions within the canonical book of Psalms to be pre-exilic.

In short, and to repeat what I stated above, the passages treated herein span the biblical corpus, both through time and across genre boundaries. Moreover, as Mirsky showed, this stylistic device continued into post-biblical Hebrew literature, as illustrated by various Tannaitic and Amoraic passages which he put forward.

The conclusion is obvious: marking closure in the manner described here remained a salient feature of ancient Hebrew rhetoric throughout antiquity.