Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis

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The Abraham Cycle (chs. 12–22)

A  Genealogy of Terah (11:27–32)
B  Start of Abram’s Spiritual Odyssey (12:1–9)
C  Sarai in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abram and Lot part (12:1–13:18)
D  Abram comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (14:1–24)
E  Covenant with Abram; Annunciation of Ishmael (15:1–16:16)

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

E′  Covenant with Abraham; Annunciation of Isaac (17:1–18:15)
D′  Abraham comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (18:16–19:38)
C′  Sarah in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abraham and Ishmael part (20:1–21:34)
B′  Climax of Abraham’s Spiritual Odyssey (22:1–19)
A′  Genealogy of Nahor (22:20–24)

The Jacob Cycle (chs. 25–35)

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

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

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

D  Messengers (28:10–22)

E  Arrival at Haran (29:1–30)

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

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

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

E’  Flight from Haran (31:1–54)

D’  Messengers (32:1–32)

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

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

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


The Joseph Story (chs. 37–50)

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

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

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

D  Joseph hero of Egypt (40:1–41:57)

E  Two trips to Egypt (42:1–43:34)

F  Final test (44:1–34)

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

F'  Conclusion of test (45:1–28)

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

D'  Joseph hero of Egypt (47:13–27)

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

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

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


The Primeval History (chs. 1–11)

A  Creation, God’s Words to Adam (1:1–3:24)
B  Adam’s Sons (4:1–16)
C  Technological Development of Mankind (4:17–26)
D  Ten Generations from Adam to Noah (5:1–32)
E  Downfall: The Nephilim (6:1–8)

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

A’  Flood, God’s Words to Noah (6:9–9:17)
B’  Noah’s Sons (9:18–29)
C’  Ethnic Development of Mankind (10:1–32)
E’  Downfall: Tower of Babel (11:1–9)
D’  Ten Generations from Noah to Terah (11:10–26)