

# 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)

Umberto Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), p. 296.

Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1966), pp. 160–161.

Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), pp. 104–105.

Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986/2014), pp. 27–52.

## **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)

Michael Fishbane, “Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle,” *JJS* 26 (1975), pp. 15–38.

Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979), pp. 40–62.

Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986/2014), pp. 53–69.

## 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)

Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), p. 102.

Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986/2014), pp. 79–97.

Gary A. Rendsburg, “Redactional Structuring in the Joseph Story: Genesis 37–50,” in Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier, eds., *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text = Bucknell Review* 33:2 (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 1990), pp. 215–232.

## **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)

Jack M. Sasson, "The 'Tower of Babel' as a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History," in Gary A. Rendsburg, et al., eds., *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon* (New York: Ktav, 1980), pp. 211–219.

Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986/2014), pp. 7–25.