THE LAST WORDS OF JACOB AND JOSEPH

A RHETORICO-STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 49:29-33 AND 50:24-26

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Summary

This article utilises what is here termed the rhetorico-structural method of analysis with application to the final episodes of Genesis. By means of this approach, the final major section of the book, contrary to what is found in many commentaries, is identified as 49:29–50:26, which is structured in the shape of an inverted parallel pattern. Analysed in this way the pericopae concerning the last words and death of Jacob and the last words and death of Joseph are placed in a corresponding relationship, inviting a comparison between the two. This reveals differences but also an essential unity in the final wishes of each patriarch. Though manifested in different ways their dying requests are governed by a common faith in the future fulfilment of the divine promise to give the offspring of Abraham the land of Canaan. The author's use of a particular literary device to show the appropriateness of Jacob's burial in the cave of Machpelah is identified. Finally, the article offers an explanation for the amount of space the narrative gives to Jacob's burial as contrasted with that of Joseph.

1. Introduction

A number of recent studies on Old Testament narrative have usefully applied that approach to textual study which is variously called 'structural analysis' or 'rhetorical analysis'.[1] Such studies have

[1] Sometimes also known as 'rhetorical criticism'. On terminology, see Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (Sheffield: Sheffield

demonstrated that the elements of Hebrew narrative and the direct discourse contained within it are frequently organised into serial or symmetrical patterns. This phenomenon is observable at the level of both the macrostructure and the microstructure of the text. This is to say that patterns are evident in larger and smaller spans of discourse, based upon components from the level of whole episodes or paragraphs at one end of the scale, to single words or phrases at the other. It is commonly accepted by the exponents of this approach that the purpose of such arranging of the text is not merely to create patterns for their own sake. The artful employment of parallel and symmetrical sequences helps to mark off the boundaries of textual units and sub-units, and also serves to underscore that information which the author regards as thematically prominent.[2] Both of these are fundamental considerations in the exegetical process.

Several studies have been undertaken which utilise the rhetorico-structural method to examine the whole or parts of the book of Genesis. The best known of these is Fokkelman's *Narrative Art in Genesis*.[3] Wilson's *Divine Symmetries* also contains an enlightening chapter on this particular book,[4] and Dorsey, in his commentary on the literary structure of the Old Testament, includes an extensive treatment of Genesis from a similar perspective.[5]

There exists a whole range of instances where rhetorico-structural analysis has produced significant results. Regarding Genesis, the flood narrative[6] and the tower of Babel episode[7] might be cited as classic examples of analyses at the macrostructural level and microstructural

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Academic, 1998): 37-40. A helpful introduction to this method of analysis is provided by Phyllis Trible in *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994): 5-52.

[2] For a fuller account of these and other benefits of this approach, see chapter 5, 'Value of Structural Analysis', in David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1999): 42-44; also Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis*, chapter 8, 'The Fruits of Rhetorical Analysis for Biblical Exegesis'.

[3] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1991).

[4] Victor M. Wilson, *Divine Symmetries: The Art of Biblical Rhetoric* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1997): chapter 4.

[5] Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 47-63.

[6] See Robert E. Longacre, 'The Discourse Structure of the Flood Narrative', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979): 89-133; cf. Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 52.

[7] Examined extensively by Fokkelman in *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 11-45.

level respectively. It can only be to the benefit of biblical scholarship that the fruits of such studies are now increasingly finding their way into modern Old Testament commentaries.[8]

It is the purpose of this article to apply the rhetorico-structural approach to the closing episodes of the book of Genesis. Our aim is firstly to determine how the text has been structured, that is, to delineate the larger and smaller units of text and to ascertain their particular form of arrangement and the interrelations between them. Secondly, those elements which are highlighted by structural means are identified and examined. The results of the latter are undertaken especially with a view to the message of Genesis in general.

2. The Final Section of Genesis

We first consider the material that constitutes the closing section of Genesis. As the life of Jacob draws to an end we read of the aged patriarch gathering his sons and blessing them each in turn (Gen. 49:1-27). After the pronouncement of these blessings in the form of poetic oracles, the words of 49:28 provide a narrative conclusion: 'All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him' (ESV). That this verse functions as a closure and the following verse signals the commencement of a new section is recognised in numerous commentaries and translations.[9] Yet, the extent of the next section is not so obvious. Many commentators take it as relating solely to the death and burial of Jacob, extending from 49:29 to 50:14,[10] while some others include 50:15-21.[11] It is here proposed, however, that all the remaining paragraphs of Genesis, up to the death of Joseph in 50:26, be

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[8] E.g. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26* (New American Commentary; Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 1995): 352-53, 468; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001): 19-21, 126-27, 175-76.

[9] Mathews terms this verse 'a closing narrative frame', in *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (New American Commentary; Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 2005): 910; cf. also John H. Sailhamer, 'Genesis' in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990): 280; Waltke, *Genesis*, 614-15; John D. Currid, *Genesis* (vol. 2; EP Study Commentary; Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003): 388; NRSV, NIV, NKJV, TEV, NLT.

[10] E.g. Sailhamer, 'Genesis', 282; Currid, *Genesis*, 388; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 911.

[11] E.g. Waltke, *Genesis*, 616.

included in a single final section of the book. A structural analysis of Genesis 49:29–50:26 points in fact to a unified composition.[12] These closing paragraphs may be analysed at the level of macrostructure as a concentric pattern[13] consisting of five major units of text:

A	The last words and death of Jacob	(49:29–50:3)
B	Joseph's appeal to Pharaoh	(50:4-6)
C	The funeral of Jacob	(50:7-14)
B'	The brothers' appeal to Joseph	(50:15-21)
A'	The last words and death of Joseph	(50:22-26)

That this (to the best of our knowledge) previously undetected pattern is indeed the intended structure is borne out by certain verbal and formal correspondences between the parallel units:

A-A'. Here the dying man in each case speaks to (וַיֹּאמֶר ... אֶל-) his relatives. No explicit response is recorded in either instance, but the patriarch's wishes are implicitly granted. His farewell words begin with a statement of his approaching death, consisting of a *futurum instans* participial clause:[14] 'I am about to be gathered to my people' (49:29); 'I am about to die' (50:24). There then follow instructions about the disposal of his remains, invoking in each case the names of earlier Hebrew patriarchs and the promised land (49:30 and 50:24). Immediately subsequent to his last words, the death of the patriarch is recorded and then the fact that they embalmed (וַיַּחַנְטוּ) his body (50:2 and 26).

B-B'. In these elements the correspondence is more one of form than content. Both contain a request with a positive response. In each case the request is made indirectly, rather than to the face of the person concerned (v. 4 and v. 16). Both requests begin with reference to the

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[12] 49:29–50:26 is also taken as a unified section by Ross, though without reference to the internal structural evidence, see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1996): 712-15.

[13] See Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 30-32. Some writers employ the term 'concentric' as if synonymous with 'chiastic', but strictly speaking the latter lacks a single central element; see Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 376. The former is of the order ABCC'B'A', the latter ABCB'A'. Both schemes may be described by the more general terms 'introverted' or 'symmetrical'.

[14] On this particular use of the participle, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990): 627.

wishes of Jacob in the form of a subject-verb clause,[15] with the noun 'father' occupying the preverbal position, accompanied by the direct speech complementiser, 'saying' (לֵאמֹר): 'My father made me swear an oath, saying' (v. 5 אָבִי הִשְׁבִּיעַנִי לֵאמֹר); 'Your father gave instructions before his death, saying' (v. 16 אָבִיךָ צִוָּה לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ לֵאמֹר). Having presented the father's wishes as the basis of the appeal, the appeal itself is in both instances introduced by 'So now' (וְעַתָּה)[16] and expressed through a volitional verb form with the interjection נָא to add force to the request (v. 5 and v. 17).[17]

C. The central section is distinguished from the others by its complete lack of direct discourse on the part of its major participants. Apart from the etiological explanation of v. 11, it is composed entirely of narrative. The section is structured around the movement from Egypt to Canaan, and back to Egypt, and its boundaries are marked by a clear instance of inclusio.[18] This latter is created by the occurrence of the following textual features: (a) the name 'Joseph' as grammatical subject (v. 7 and v. 14; nowhere else in this passage[19]); (b) the infinitival clause 'to bury his father' (לִקְבֹּר אֶת־אָבִיו v. 7 and v. 14); (c) the clause 'all ... went up with him' (וַיַּעֲלוּ אִתּוֹ כָּל... v. 7; וְכָל־הָעֹלִים אִתּוֹ v. 14), referring to the Egyptians; and (d) the phrase 'and his brothers' (וְאֶחָיו v. 8 and v. 14).

Also to be observed is the tail-head linkage[20] between the central C unit and its two adjacent units, B and B'. This is to say, the closing verse of B (v. 6) contains verbal links ('go up', 'bury', 'father') with

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15 For the significance of this subject-verb word order, see Jean-Marc Heimerdinger, *Topic, Focus and Foreground in Ancient Hebrew Narrative* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999): 214-18; also Katsuomi Shimasaki, *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL, 2002): 143-48.

16 For the logical use of this discourse marker, see Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000): 333.

17 See van der Merwe et al., *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 335.

18 On inclusio, or 'inclusion' as it is sometimes known, as a literary device in the Old Testament, see Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 250, where it is a defined as 'parallelism of words, phrase, or sentences between the beginning and ending of a unit'. A more detailed description is offered in Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical, 2001): 57-59.

19 The name Joseph appears in v. 10 in several English versions (e.g. NIV, REB, TEV, NJB, NLT), but the Hebrew only marks the subject at this point through the third person masculine singular form of the verb.

20 More technically known as *anadiplosis*. For this manner of connecting literary units, see Ernst R. Wendland, *Analyzing the Psalms* (Dallas, Texas: SIL, 1998): 103; cf. Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 248.

the beginning of C (v. 7), while the final verse of C (v. 14) likewise has links ('Joseph', 'brothers', 'father') with the opening of B' (v. 15). The use of this device at these junctures in the text supports our analysis of verses 7-14 as a distinct sub-unit.

Besides the verbal parallels the pattern produced merely by the nature or absence of direct discourse itself gives the text span of 49:29–50:26 a distinct outline: monologue–dialogue–narrative–dialogue–monologue.

3. Comparison of the Patriarchs' Last Words

Viewing the macrostructure in the way delineated above invites a comparison between the account of Jacob's final words with that of Joseph's, that is, the first and last units of the concentric configuration. Upon closer examination we discover that 49:29-33 and 50:24-26a, giving the last words and death of the respective patriarchs, are themselves symmetrically configured, as shown:

Genesis 49:29-33

A	Then he instructed [וַיְצַו] them: 'I am about to be gathered to my people [נֶאֱסָף אֶל־עַמִּי].	(29a)
B	Bury me with my fathers in the cave [הַמְּעָרָה] in the field [בִּשְׂדֵה] of Ephron the Hittite [הַחִתִּי], the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought [קָנָה] as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field.	(29b) (30)
C	There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah.	(31)
B'	The field [הַשָּׂדֶה] and the cave [הַמְּעָרָה] in it were a purchase [מִקְנָה] from the Hittites [בְּנֵי־חֵת]'.	(32)
A'	When Jacob had finished instructing [לְצַוֹּת] his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people [וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו].	(33)

The symmetry produced by the distribution of various words and phrases is self-evident. In this instance the arrangement is concentric, that is, with a single central element (C). The parallel passage relating to Joseph employs a strictly chiastic scheme,[21] that is, with two central elements. Again the correspondences are unmistakable:

Genesis 50:24-26a

A	Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die [מֵת].	(24a)
B	But God will surely visit you [וֵאלֹהִים פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם] and take you up [וְהֶעֱלָה] from this land [מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת]	(24b)
C	to the land he swore on oath [נִשְׁבַּע] to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'	(24c)
C'	And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath [וַיַּשְׁבַּע]	(25a)
B'	and said, 'God will surely visit you [פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם], and then you will take up [וְהַעֲלִתֶם] my bones from here [מִזֶּה].'	(25b)
A'	So Joseph died [וַיָּמָת] at the age of a hundred and ten.	(26a)

On the former occasion, following the death of his father, Joseph mourns, Jacob is embalmed, and the Egyptians also mourn his passing (50:1-3). Upon Joseph's own death, by way of contrast, there is no account of any mourning,[22] though like his father his body too is embalmed (26b).

Obvious differences exist between the dying wishes of Jacob and of Joseph. The former left instructions for his body to be immediately transported to the cave near Mamre purchased by his grandfather Abraham (Gen. 23). Joseph on the other hand was content for his bones to remain, at least for the time being, in Egypt. The focus of Jacob's wishes was to be united with his forefathers. Joseph, however, wished to abide with the descendants of those forefathers.

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[21] See fn. 13 above.

[22] This fact may suggest how, several decades later, Joseph's deliverance of Egypt in time of famine had been forgotten by the Egyptians. This was possibly an indication of the development towards that state of affairs in which Joseph was unknown by the ruler of Egypt (cf. Exod. 1:8).

Yet at a more fundamental level these discourses have two elements in common. First, both patriarchs desire to be laid at rest among their own people. There is in each case a clear expression of solidarity with the Hebrews, one with the dead, the other with the living. Secondly, neither wants to be permanently interred in Egypt. What they both share is the desire for Canaan, though at different times and in varying circumstances, to be their permanent resting place. Jacob locates the cave of Machpelah 'in Canaan' (49:30), while Joseph speaks of 'the land he [God] swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' (50:24), that is, Canaan.

This focus upon the land has obvious links to the divine promise originally made to Abraham and then repeated to his descendants, which forms a major theme running through the Genesis narrative (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:7; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3; 28:13; 35:12; 48:4). Seen against this background of the promise, the dying words of Jacob can be taken as a reflection of his faith in God to fulfil that promise. An indication of Jacob's expectation shines through the poetic oracles of chapter forty-nine. When he spoke to his sons of what would happen to them in the days to come (v. 1), he saw the tribes descended from them living in their own land in varying degrees of prosperity and stability.[23] Amidst the prophetic oracles, verse eighteen stands out as the only direct address to God and the sole occurrence of the divine name,[24] 'I wait for your deliverance [יְשׁוּעָה], O LORD', a prayer[25] that was fulfilled when God delivered the Hebrews from the Egyptians at the time of the exodus.[26] Evidently Jacob believed that after being buried in Canaan, his living descendants would later join him there.

Joseph also had a similar trust in the fulfilment of the ancient promise of the land. His twofold declaration that God would visit his

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[23] Cf. Gerard van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (vol. 1; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1997): 181.

[24] It is not without interest that this monocolon forms the centrepiece among the concentrically arranged oracles. The structure is basically according to the mothers of the various sons: A – Leah (vv. 3-15), B – handmaid (vv. 16-17, six cola), C – prayer to Yahweh (v. 18), B' – handmaid (vv. 19-21, six cola), A' – Rachel (vv. 22-27). Viewed in this way, v. 18 can be seen to stand out prominently from the rest of the poem.

[25] On interpreting Genesis 49:18 as a prayer for future deliverance, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1994): 482.

[26] Cf. Exod. 14:13, 'See the deliverance [יְשׁוּעָה] of the LORD', and v. 30 of the same chapter.

people (50:24b, 25b) and so bring them up from Egypt brims with confidence and certainty.[27]

Viewing the patriarch's dying words from a rhetorico-structural perspective enhances the place given to the land in their final requests. It is widely recognised by proponents of this analytical method that in symmetrically arranged material such as we are dealing with here, it is the centre which attracts the most attention.[28] By arranging his material in a particular way the author is able to highlight the information which he deems most significant for his purpose. In these final wishes of Jacob and Joseph the centrepiece of each inverted structure (i.e. 49:29 and 50:24c-25a), as shall be demonstrated, provides the grounds for their respective requests, and in each case the focus upon the *land* is apparent. Since, by this structural means, special attention is being drawn to these statements, we will consider them further.

Taking the words of Joseph first, the two central elements of the chiastic configuration (C and C') both contain derivations from the Hebrew root שׁבע, *šbʿ*. In the first instance it is a Niphal denominative verb, 'swore' (v. 24c),[29] with God as subject, a reference to the original promise of the land to the Hebrew forefathers (cf. Gen. 24:7; 26:3). The second occurrence is a Hiphil causative 'made to swear' (v. 25a), here indicating the fact that Joseph made his brothers[30] take an oath to the effect that when God brought them up out of Egypt, they would carry his bones with them.[31] The manner in which lines C and C' are placed in a structural relationship highlights the fact that one oath is based upon the other. Such is Joseph's confidence that God would indeed give his people the land sworn to their ancestors, that he is able to place his brothers under oath to remove his bones from Egypt when

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[27] Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 929-30. The writer to the Hebrews (11:22) picks out this particular aspect of Joseph's faith: 'By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones' (NASB).

[28] Dorsey, *Literary Structure*, 40, 'In the symmetrical scheme ... the center is normally the natural position of prominence'; cf. Walsh, *Style and Structure*, 14, 'the central subunit(s) ... are generally the most important part of the whole structure'.

[29] For the denominative use of the Niphal, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 391.

[30] The word 'brothers' need not mean that Joseph died before his literal brothers, most of whom were older than him. As Wenham observes, it may have the broader sense of 'relatives', *Genesis 16–50*, 491.

[31] It is later recorded that the Hebrews did in fact keep their oath (Exod. 13:19; Josh. 24:32).

the time of divine visitation comes. The past oath of God becomes the present grounds for Joseph's adjuration. We may also note in these two central elements the parallel between the names of those associated with the oath, that is, 'Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' over against 'sons of Israel'. The former are those to whom the oath was originally sworn, the latter those to whom it will be fulfilled. The author's choice of the phrase 'sons of *Israel*' is noteworthy. To use Jacob's alternative name rather than merely to repeat 'his brothers' as in the speech introduction (v. 24a), or to use the pronominal 'them', stresses the continuity between the forefathers and their descendants. That this phrase was deliberately selected at this point is suggested by its rarity in the Genesis narrative.[32]

At the centre of the dying words of Jacob lies 49:31. The content is striking. Here we simply find a list of all his ancestors who had been buried in the cave purchased by Abraham. If viewed as merely the imparting of information these words are surely redundant. The sons to whom Jacob was speaking had lived in Canaan for many years, no great distance from Mamre (cf. 35:27). They were all alive at the time when their grandfather Isaac was buried in the cave (35:23). It could hardly be possible that they would not have been acquainted with the location of the cave and its contents. Jacob's reference to his departed forefathers must therefore be rhetorical.

Considering the names of the ancestors recorded in verse 31, we first observe that it is a logical ordering rather than a chronological one. The sequence of those interred in the cave appears as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah. Although we learn from Genesis 23 that Sarah's death occurred before that of Abraham, the husband is here listed first, as would be conventional. Genesis tells us nothing concerning the deaths of Rebekah and Leah, but again the man, Isaac, precedes his wife Rebekah in the list, with Jacob's own deceased first wife Leah coming last. Rachel his second and most loved wife, we are told elsewhere, was not buried in this cave but in the vicinity of Bethlehem to the north (35:19).[33]

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[32] Only four times elsewhere in narrative sections: 32:32 [33 MT] (an explanatory aside referring to the Israelites of a later generation); 42:5; 45:21; 46:5. This does not include the genealogy presented in 46:8. It is a point of interest that the later reference back to 50:25 in Exodus 13:19 retains the phrase 'sons of Israel'.

[33] The attentive reader will also be aware that the cave holds the messianic line (Matt. 1:2). It contained the divinely elected line, that is, not Ishmael born of Abraham and Hagar, but Isaac born of Abraham and Sarah; not Esau, but Jacob; and not Jacob's

The names of these five Hebrew figures are expressed in a highly stylised fashion. It is not just a list, but has the characteristics more of a semi-poetic recounting of the names. This aspect of the verse is more apparent if we set out the Hebrew by clauses:

שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם	There they buried Abraham
וְאֵת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ	and Sarah his wife,
שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־יִצְחָק	there they buried Isaac
וְאֵת רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ	and Rebekah his wife,
וְשָׁמָּה קָבַרְתִּי אֶת־לֵאָה׃	and there I buried Leah.

From this we note the use of balance and repetition. Each line begins with the same locative adverb שָׁמָּה 'there', which in each instance is followed by the perfective verb 'buried' with its object(s). The differences in the length and form of the last line are due to the historical fact that Leah had not yet been joined by her husband and by the necessary change of person from third person plural to first person singular. It is also a typical characteristic of Hebrew poetic style to signal closure by some departure from the established pattern.[34]

In that Biblical Hebrew generally places focussed words in the clause-initial position,[35] it is the first item in each line that commands the greatest attention. The threefold repetition of שָׁמָּה is surely needless. A single occurrence would have sufficed to identify the place in question. We see here then a multiplicity of prominence-giving devices employed with reference to that place with which Jacob is concerned. By means of the repetition of the adverb, and by means of its fronted placement, and through the central position of verse 31 in the concentric structure of verses 29-33, Jacob is giving a high degree of prominence to one particular location. That place to which שָׁמָּה refers anaphorically is that mentioned in the previous verse: 'the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan', the only portion of Canaan which at that time the Hebrews could rightfully claim as their

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beloved wife Rachel, nor Zilpah nor Bilhah, but Leah from whom Judah was born (Gen. 29:35). While this is of momentous importance, further investigation of this fact lies outside the scope of the present study.

34 See Nicholas P. Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Differentiating Pragmatics and Poetics* (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006): 148-49.

35 See van der Merwe et al., *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 344-49.

own. Like Joseph, Jacob's wishes are also centred upon the land of promise.

Furthermore, in Genesis 49:31 we detect a remarkable literary device which has escaped the attention of modern commentators. The Hebrew names of the five ancestors interred in the cave are as follows:

'Abraham'	אַבְרָהָם	*'abrāhām*
'Sarah'	שָׂרָה	*śārāh*
'Isaac'	יִצְחָק	*yiṣḥāq*
'Rebekah'	רִבְקָה	*ribqāh*
'Leah'	לֵאָה	*lē'āh*

The initial letters of the names in the order in which they appear in the text are:

א ' ש ś י y ר r ל l

These are precisely the same five consonants contained in the Hebrew name 'Israel', יִשְׂרָאֵל (*yiśrā'ēl*). This fact might be conceived as merely coincidental, especially since the order in which the letters occur seems arbitrary. Yet it is contended here that the sequence is significant and itself is indicative of deliberate design. In considering these consonants, the prevalence of inverted structures in Genesis must be borne in mind, as those studies mentioned at the beginning of this article have shown. Inverted symmetrical patterns have been found employed at all levels.[36] Here we propose that this also explains how the author construed the initial letters of the patriarchal names. In such symmetrical structures the principal idea is found at the centre. Taking the initial consonants of the five names working outwards from the centre, the letters do in fact fall in the correct order for spelling 'Israel':

			א '	
	ש ś			
י y				
		ר r		
				ל l

This phenomenon is just one of many similar features that are commonly employed in the Hebrew Old Testament. In Genesis alone a wide variety of linguistic and numerical devices are to be seen. Many

[36] For example, even the list of Abraham's possessions in 12:16 has been symmetrically arranged. See Walsh, *Style and Structure*, 27.

are recognised and discussed in the commentaries. Here we mention just a few by way of illustration:

(1) Phonological word-plays on personal names. Several of these are to be found, for example, in Genesis 49—'Judah [יְהוּדָה *yəhūdāh*], your brothers will praise you [יוֹדוּךָ *yōdūkā*]' (v. 8); 'Dan [דָּן *dān*] will judge [יָדִין *yādîn*] his people' (v. 16); 'Gad [גָּד *gād*], raiders [גְּדוּד *gədūd*] will raid him [יְגוּדֶנּוּ *yəgūdennū*]' (v. 19).

(2) Phonological word-plays on thematic terms. Here we include the interplay between the roots נוח *nwḥ* ('rest', 'Noah'), חן *ḥn* ('grace'), and נחם *nḥm* (Niphal 'be grieved') in the flood narrative,[37] and the nouns בְּרָכָה *bərākāh* ('blessing') and בְּכֹרָה *bəkōrāh* ('right of firstborn') in the conflict between Esau and Jacob.[38]

(3) Plays on the meanings of names. In Genesis 14:2 the names of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah are given as Bera and Birsha, or in Hebrew בֶּרַע and בִּרְשַׁע. These names in the originally unvocalised Hebrew text could (not inappropriately, considering the characters being referred to) be read as 'in/with evil' and 'in/with wickedness'.[39]

(4) Numerical patterns. The clearest instance of this in Genesis is with respect to the ages of the patriarchs.[40] Comparison of the leading figure of each successive generation shows a related sequence: Abraham (Gen. 25:7) $175 = 7 \times 5^2$; Isaac (35:28) $180 = 5 \times 6^2$; Jacob (47:28) $147 = 3 \times 7^2$. A decreasing series of odd numbers is multiplied by an increasing series of squares. Last in the sequence comes Joseph, whose age of 110 (50:26) $= 1 \times (5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2)$. In this way, as Wenham comments, 'Joseph is the *successor* of the pattern (7, 5, 3, 1) and the *sum* of the predecessors $(5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2)$'.[41]

It will be noted that certain of the above are overt, that is, they are discernible at the surface level of the language, in the sound or appearance of the word. Others, especially the last, are hidden and require some analysis in order to be detected. The hidden name of 49:31 would come under this second category.

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[37] Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part One: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998): 289.

[38] J. P. Fokkelman, 'Genesis' in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, eds. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (London: Fontana, 1989): 46-47.

[39] See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: JPS, 1989): 104.

[40] C. J. Labuschagne, 'The Life Spans of the Patriarchs', *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 25 (1989): 126.

[41] Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 491.

In view of the prevalence of such features elsewhere in Genesis, the appearance of a comparable device in the last words of Jacob ought not to be lightly dismissed. Contextually this indirect hint at the name 'Israel' makes a significant point. This, as we recall, is Jacob's divinely given other name (Gen. 32:28). For it to appear, albeit in hidden form, at the focal point of his dying words adds great weight to his final wishes. As the divine name 'Yahweh' was placed overtly at the centre of Jacob's last words regarding his sons,[42] so the name 'Israel' given to him by Yahweh was placed covertly at the climax of his final wishes for himself. Jacob is there requesting his sons to bury him in the cave in Canaan, not simply because his forefathers rest there, but because in cryptic fashion 'Israel' lies there. Jacob, who is called Israel, must needs be laid to rest in the promised land with this other 'Israel'.

To conclude this section, we see that both Jacob and Joseph agree in their focus upon the land as the chief ground for their dying wishes. Jacob should be buried as requested in the place specified as 'Israel' was buried there. The sons of Israel should swear to take Joseph's bones with them to that land, because God himself had sworn to give it to them.

4. The Significance of Jacob's Funeral

Lastly, we come to briefly consider one final question regarding this closing section of Genesis (49:29–50:26). This is the matter of the relative prominence given in the narrative to Jacob and Joseph in their respective deaths and burials. It needs no detailed analysis to show that at the close of the book it is Jacob's passing away that receives greater treatment. From Jacob's death to the completion of his burial spans fifteen verses (49:33–50:14), containing some 220 words in the original Hebrew. The corresponding material about Joseph, on the other hand, consists of a single verse (50:26) of just eleven words. What makes this more surprising is the fact that in the latter part of the book it is clearly Joseph who forms the centre of attention. From chapter 37 onwards, with only a few diversions, the action has focussed on Joseph. Indeed, scholars refer to these chapters as the 'Joseph

[42] See fn. 24 above.

cycle'.[43] It was Joseph who interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, not Jacob. It was Joseph and not his father who was promoted to become the king's right-hand man and who delivered the people of Egypt as well as of other lands during the time of famine. Yet when he dies there is not a single remembrance of any of his achievements. Rather the final section is dominated by the death of Jacob, who came to Pharaoh's notice at a much later time and did nothing that is recorded for the benefit of the land of Egypt. It is Jacob who is buried with great honour and lamentation, not Joseph, as one might have expected. Some explanation for this imbalance is now offered by way of conclusion.

That Jacob's funeral is actually the narrator's principal concern is borne out by our analysis of this section of Genesis outlined in section two above. There it was shown that the episode relating the burial of Jacob in Canaan (50:7-14) forms the centrepiece of a concentric pattern, which as stated earlier[44] is where the author places material of greater salience for his purpose. Why would he locate Jacob's funeral at the focal point of the final section of the book? The answer to this question is to be found in a typological interpretation of the passage in question.

The relative prominence given to the burial of Jacob can be readily appreciated once it is recognised that Genesis 50:7-14 serves as a foreshadowing of the exodus. This would not be the first narrative type of that momentous event. Earlier in the book (Gen. 12:10–13:4) the descent of Abraham and Sarah into Egypt at the time of a famine and his subsequent return to Canaan also provides us with a clear typological description of the same event. This was first noted long ago by rabbinic exegetes,[45] and is now accepted by numerous modern commentators.[46] On the similarities between the Abrahamic narrative and the exodus Cassuto comments:

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[43] E.g. Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000): 113-15, 123; Waltke, *Genesis*, 21.

[44] See fn. 13.

[45] See Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004): 64.

[46] Among these are included: Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 2: From Abraham to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997): 334-36; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC; Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1987): 291-92; Terence E. Fretheim, 'Genesis' in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 1* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1994): 429; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 273; Waltke, *Genesis*, 217; cf.

> This account of the going down of Abram and Sarai to Egypt presents a striking parallel to what is related subsequently, at the end of the Book of Genesis and the beginning of the Book of Exodus, concerning the migration of the children of Israel to that land. There is hardly a verse or half a verse in this section that does not remind us of a parallel statement in the narratives pertaining to the Israelites.[47]

These parallels are recorded in most detail by Sailhamer, who lists some eighteen points of contact.[48]

Genesis 50 contains indicators which suggest that just as the earlier descent of Abraham into Egypt in 12:10–13:4 foreshadowed the later exodus event, so too the coming out of Egypt described in connection with the burial of Jacob is to be interpreted the same way. It looks both ways, back to the earlier Abrahamic account, and forwards towards the actual exodus itself. Here are the most noteworthy verbal connections and similarities in detail with the two other narratives:

(1) The use of the verb 'go up' describing the journey out of Egypt. Genesis 13:1 states that 'Abram went up from Egypt' (וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם). In the narrative of Genesis 50:7-14 this same verb is employed four times (vv. 7 [twice], 9, 14), also denoting the going up from Egypt. It occurs frequently with reference to the later exodus, such as in Exodus 13:18, 'The sons of Israel went up from the land of Egypt' (עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם). Cf. also 17:3; 32:1; 32:7; 33:1, etc. The preposition אֶת 'with' is joined to this verb when speaking of those foreigners who accompanied the Hebrews, as in Genesis 50:7 (וַיַּעֲלוּ אִתּוֹ) and Exodus 12:38 (עָלָה אִתָּם).

(2) The phrase 'very substantial' (כָּבֵד מְאֹד, literally 'very heavy') occurs in all three accounts. In Genesis 13:2 Abraham came out of Egypt with much wealth, flocks and herds, silver and gold, which had been given him by Pharaoh (cf. 12:16). In 50:9 the same phrase describes the host of Egyptians who accompanied Joseph and his

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Richard L. Pratt, Jr, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990): 100-101.

[47] Cassuto, *Genesis, Part 2*, 334.

[48] J. H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992): 142. The most obvious are as follows: (1) the famine as the cause of the migration from Canaan (Gen. 12:10); (2) Abraham and Sarah 'sojourn' [גּוּר] in the land of Egypt (12:10); (3) conflict with Pharaoh (12:18-19); (4) God struck the Egyptians with plagues (12:17); (5) Abraham is commanded to 'Take and go' (12:19); (6) Pharaoh 'sent away' [שִׁלַּח] Abraham (12:20); (7) Abraham is enriched through the Egyptians (12:16); (8) Abraham journeys back to the promised land (13:3). All these details have close counterparts in the exodus account.

brothers in the funeral procession. The phrase also appears in Exodus 12:38 regarding the flocks and herds that the Hebrews brought with them out of Egypt.[49]

(3) On the occasion of Abraham's descent into and ascent from Egypt it is stressed that 'the Canaanite was then in the land' (Gen. 12:6, וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אָז בָּאָרֶץ; cf. 13:7, 'the Canaanite and the Perizzite were then living in the land', וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי אָז יֹשֵׁב בָּאָרֶץ). At the time of Jacob's burial a similar phrase, 'the Canaanite living in the land' (Gen. 50:11, יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי) is found.

(4) It is in accordance with Jacob's command that his sons transported his body to Canaan, 'His sons did for him as he commanded them' (Gen. 50:12, וַיַּעֲשׂוּ ... כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּם). The exodus was similarly a response of obedience. On that occasion it was Moses and Aaron who took the initiative in leading the people of Israel to Canaan 'as Yahweh had commanded them' (Exod. 7:6, ... וַיַּעַשׂ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתָם; cf. 6:13).

(5) The use of the noun 'possession' (אֲחֻזָּה) in Genesis 50:13 referring to the plot purchased for burial points forward to the possession of the land of Canaan subsequent to the exodus (e.g. Lev. 14:34; 25:24; Deut. 32:49; Josh. 21:12; cf. Gen. 17:8; 48:4).

(6) Other common words and phrases include:[50] 'sheep and cattle' and 'livestock' (Gen. 12:16; 13:2; 50:8; Exod. 10:26; 12:32, 38), 'chariots and horsemen' (Gen. 50:9; Exod. 14:9, 17, 18, 23, 26, 28; 15:19),[51] 'infants' (Gen. 50:8; Exod. 10:24; 12:37), 'camp' denoting the Egyptian army (Gen. 50:9; Exod. 14:20), 'officials of Pharaoh' (Gen. 12:15; 50:7; Exod. 9:20; 10:7; 11:3, etc.), and Pharaoh's 'house' (Gen. 12:15; 50:7; Exod. 8:24). It will be noted that some of these are used contrastively. At the time of the actual exodus, the Israelites took their children and animals with them, while on the occasion of Jacob's burial they remained in Egypt. Likewise, the Egyptian chariots and horsemen in the earlier account actually escorted the Hebrews, yet later were to pursue them.[52]

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[49] We are reminded of God's words to Abraham that after a period of slavery in Egypt his descendants would come out with great possessions (Gen. 15:16).

[50] Many of these are listed in Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 489.

[51] In all of these references the order is first 'chariots' (רֶכֶב), then 'horsemen' (פָּרָשִׁים).

[52] Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, 618.

(7) Finally, it has been noted that the procession in Genesis 50 takes the same approximate route as the later exodus, skirting round the southern end of the Dead Sea and approaching Canaan from the east side of the Jordan.[53]

It would seem then, in the light of these intertextual parallels, that this account in the last chapter of Genesis is intended by the author to be taken as a picture of 'Israel' coming up out of Egypt to Canaan.[54] In this way, together with the Abrahamic episode, it forms a manner of inclusio bracketing the patriarchal history (Gen. 12–50). Not just once but twice, at the beginning and the end, is the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt adumbrated in the narratives of their forefathers.

5. Conclusion

From the foregoing we would conclude that the narrator's neglect of Joseph is strategic. His selection of material concerning Jacob allows it to have its important typological function, something that might easily not have been discerned had Joseph's passing away and funeral been given the place it deserved on account of his achievements. In contrast to what is recorded of Jacob, we observe respecting Joseph an opposite trend leading up to the note on which the book ends. The final unit relating the end of Joseph's life (50:22-26) contains a sequence of seven occurrences of the proper name יוֹסֵף 'Joseph' in the Hebrew text. That this is artistically motivated rather than linguistically required is apparent from merely a brief glance at these verses. Pronominal forms would have been suitable in several of these cases,[55] but the writer chose the full name instead. In such instances it is not for

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[53] See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995): 697.

[54] Several commentators on Genesis, while not listing all the correspondences in detail, give general consent to the above understanding of the burial of Jacob. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 492, calls it 'an acted prophecy'; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 239, claims that 'the story of Jacob's burial in the land foreshadows the time when God will bring Jacob back from captivity'; Waltke, *Genesis*, 579, says that 'Jacob typifies Israel's Exodus out of Egypt', and 616, 'This is a fore-shadowing of Israel's future'; R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2004): 567, holds the view that 'the procession from Egypt to Canaan was a mini-rehearsal of Israel's grand exodus from Egypt ... It was a proto-exodus'.

[55] The redundancy in the usage of the name is evident from the English translations. In the NIV of vv. 22-26 'Joseph' appears four times, in the GNB only three, and in the REB just twice.

the sake of unambiguous participant reference that the name appears but for literary effect. The chain of successive 'Josephs' is repeated throughout the unit until it terminates with the words וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף 'Joseph died' (v. 26a). Upon his death there follows a noticeable shift in the established pattern. He is represented in the next clause, concerning his embalming, only by the object pronoun 'him' (אֹתוֹ). Then in the very final clause, relating the deposition of his body (וַיִּישֶׂם בְּאָרוֹן בְּמִצְרָיִם), he has vanished entirely.[56] In these ultimate words of the book Joseph diminishes and then fades away completely. Reflected in this literary artistry is the fact that the fate of Joseph is the fate of the Israelites with whom he chose to remain united in his death. If Jacob's funeral is a picture of Israel going up to the promised land, then Joseph's death prefigures what would befall the Israelites in Egypt. Once honoured guests, they were eventually to be downtrodden, enslaved and confined to Egypt, where they would remain in their bondage until the time of divine visitation.

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[56] Commentators express some doubt over how the verb וַיִּישֶׂם (*wayyîśem*) is to be understood. As it stands it is a third person masculine singular Qal *waw*-imperfective form from the root שים, meaning 'he/it put'. Since there is no explicit object, some recommend following the Samaritan Pentateuch by altering the second *yod* to a *waw* to create a Hophal וּיוּשַׂם, 'and he was put'. Alternatively, the form could remain unchanged and be read as a Qal passive, which would not differ in meaning from the Hophal. This latter is, however, mere supposition, since such a form for this verb is unattested elsewhere. The fact is that the MT makes good sense as it stands. As Ibn Ezra unequivocally states, the verb phrase means שם אחד אותו 'someone put him', where the unexpressed subject is 'one/a certain one', and the object is unambiguously implicit from the context (i.e. Joseph). See H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis* (New York: Menorah, 1988): 452. Such an assumption of an impersonal agent may indeed be behind the LXX rendering καὶ ἔθηκαν ('and they put'), which again has no explicit object. Ultimately the actual reading of the verb makes only a minor difference to the point being argued, since if the verb is taken as a passive the downward gradation in the reference to Joseph is nevertheless still discernible, except that in the final case he is merely represented through verbal morphology rather than being left totally implicit.

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