

IV

THE LINKING MATERIAL

Genesis commentators have noted, quite accurately, that the patriarchal narratives can be divided into three sections, the Abraham Cycle, the Jacob Cycle, and the Joseph Cycle. Separating the three are two groups of material, the one serving to link the Abraham and Jacob Cycles, the other serving to link the Jacob and Joseph Cycles. These sections, 23:1–25:18 and 35:23–36:43, are hodgepodes of material which have been culled from various sources. But even here our compiler was able to evince a redactional structuring. Just as each cycle consists of matching sequences, so these two sections are conceived along parallel lines. None of the beauty of the longer cycles has been achieved in 23:1–25:18 and 35:23–36:43, but a systematic design is evident nonetheless. The two sections match up as follows:

- A Death and burial of Sarah (23:1–20)
- B Marriage of Isaac (24:1–67)
- C Abraham's sons (25:1–6)
- D Death and burial of Abraham (25:7–11)
- E Ishmael's sons (25:12–18)
- A' ———
- C' Jacob's sons (35:23–26)
- D' Death and burial of Isaac (35:27–29)
- B' Marriages of Esau (36:1–5)
- E' Esau's sons (36:6–43)

Immediately we notice that the material in the second set duplicates to a great extent the material in the first set. But we also notice some imperfections, especially the

lack of a corresponding A' for A and the poor position of B' between D' and E'. Thus our previous statement that the aesthetic quality of the longer cycles is lacking in these chapters. But we should excuse our compiler, for he had before him more difficult material to work with. The flow of the Abraham and Jacob cycles could not be accomplished here given the long lists which dominate 23:1–25:18 and 35:23–36:43, especially the latter. Nevertheless, a redactional structure is achieved, and as the following unit-by-unit survey will show, the imperfections are explicable.

A DEATH AND BURIAL OF SARAH (23:1–20)

A' ———

The death and burial of Sarah is not passed over in a simple notice (as is the case with others' deaths and burials; see below on D and D'), rather it is described in a fairly long pericope. It is all the more striking, therefore, that we have no parallel to it. The parallel we expect is the death and burial of Rebekah, but this is one of Genesis's most glaring lacunas. This matriarch's end goes unrecorded.

If we have learned anything in this investigation, it is that nothing is accidental in the redaction of Genesis. And thus we should expect a very good reason why Rebekah's death and burial are omitted.¹ The deception of Isaac, it will be recalled, was effectuated by two conspirators, Rebekah and Jacob. The latter receives his just desert in 29:25–26, illuminated by Laban's words *lō' yē'āseh kēn bimqômēnū lātēt haṣṣe'îrâ lipnê habbēkîrâ*, 'it is not the custom in our place to put the younger before the firstborn.'² But what about Rebekah? She after all was the instigator

¹ Passing reference is made later on, in 49:31, but it is inconsequential.

² See U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis* (Jerusalem, 1961) 64; and R. Davidson, *Genesis 12–50* (Cambridge, 1979) 155.

in deceiving Isaac and thus we expect her deeds to be likewise recompensed.

Genesis is silent on this issue; but it is this very silence which is the key. Jacob's gaining the birthright and the blessing moves Esau to seek to kill him, and Jacob must flee to Haran. Never again in the narratives do we hear of Rebekah. The story continues to trace the life of Jacob, and we never again encounter his mother. We are left to conclude that she never saw her beloved son (see 25:28) again.³ This was to be Rebekah's punishment, but it was one which she brought upon herself: *'ālay qil'ēlātā b'ēnī* 'upon me is your curse, my son,' she proclaims in 27:13. Clearly she must have died and been buried while Jacob was in Haran.⁴ Accordingly, there is a very good explanation why Rebekah's death and burial receive no mention in Genesis.⁵ The compiler sacrificed a more perfect redactional structure to drive home the point of Rebekah's punishment. As U. Cassuto said, "Undoubtedly a lesson that is taught by implication is capable of exerting a greater influence than one explicitly stated."⁶

B MARRIAGE OF ISAAC (24:1–67)

B' MARRIAGES OF ESAU (36:1–5)

The marriage of Abraham's son, Isaac, is one of the largest units in all of Genesis. The marriages of Isaac's son, Esau, are of less concern to the biblical audience and

³ Noted by D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL, 1967) 157. Cassuto (*Documentary Hypothesis*, 64) merely states that Rebekah's punishment was having to send "her dearly loved son away," but it is actually much greater.

⁴ This is stated explicitly in Jubilees 35:27; Josephus, *Antiquities*, I.22.1; and in the few Midrashic sources cited by L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* V (Philadelphia, 1953) 318, n 302.

⁵ See further G. A. Rendsburg, "Notes on Genesis XXXV," *VT* 34 (1984) 361–65.

⁶ Cassuto, *Documentary Hypothesis*, 63.

are therefore merely listed. But within the two linking sections, these units are parallel, a point which is brought out by two similarities.

- i. In 24:3, 24:37, we read Abraham's instructions to his servant *lō^o tiqqah^h ʔiššā libnī mibb^hnôt hakk^hna^hānī*, 'do not take a wife for my son from among the Canaanite women.' In 36:2 we read by contrast *ʔēšāw lāqah^h ʔet nāšāw mibb^hnot k^hnā^han*, 'Esau took his wives from among the Canaanite women.'
- ii. On the other hand we have a correspondence, for Isaac and Esau both marry a cousin. In B it is Rebekah the daughter of Bethuel and sister of Laban; in B' it is Basemath the daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. Note that in each case paternal and fraternal references are made.

The marriages of Esau are obviously very much out of sequence, coming as they do between D' and E'. But the redactor had very little choice, as he wished to present all the Esau-Edom material together. We will return to this problem below.

C ABRAHAM'S SONS (25:1-6)

C' JACOB'S SONS (35:23-26)

Each section of linking material includes the sons of the patriarch who dominates the cycle just completed. Abraham's sons are not Ishmael, the one born to Hagar, and Isaac, the one born to Sarah, but the multiple children born to Keturah. This list is incorporated in 25:1-6 to more closely parallel the twelve children of Jacob in 35:23-26. The two units share two similarities.

- i. *kol ʔēlleh b^hnē q^htūrâ*, 'all these are the sons of Keturah,' appears in 25:4; and *ʔēlleh b^hnē ya^hāqōb*, 'these are the sons of Jacob,' appears in 35:26.
- ii. Keturah's sons live in *ʔereš qedem*, 'the land of Qedem,' in 25:6; and Jacob's sons are born in *paddan ʔārām*, 'Paddan Aram,' in 35:26. That these two geographic locales are equated in Genesis can be seen at 29:1.

By recognizing the parallel character of C and C', we are perhaps able to shed light on a long standing crux in biblical studies. Scholars have noted that 35:23-26 places Benjamin's birth in Paddan Aram, at variance with 35:16-18 which has him born in Canaan. No sound explanation for this problem has been forthcoming except to say that Benjamin "must be tacitly excepted"⁷ or to ascribe variant traditions to different sources.⁸ But it is also possible that Benjamin is included in this list to place all of Jacob's sons in Mesopotamia, the domain of Abraham's sons through Keturah.

D DEATH AND BURIAL OF ABRAHAM

(25:7-11)

D' DEATH AND BURIAL OF ISAAC (35:27-29)

Many scholars have noted the similarity between these two units, including the various theme-words and phrases which highlight the correspondence.⁹

- i. The ages of the patriarchs are given in 25:7 and 35:28.
- ii. In 25:8 we read *wayyigwa^h wayyāmot ʔabrāhām*, 'Abraham expired and died'; and in 35:29 we have *wayyigwa^h yišhāq wayyāmot*, 'Isaac expired and died.'
- iii. The root *šb^h*, 'full,' is used in 25:8 and 35:29.
- iv. *wayyēʔāsep ʔel ʔammāw*, 'he was gathered unto his people,' occurs in 25:8 and 35:29.
- v. *wayyiqb^h rû ʔōtô*, 'they buried him,' is predicated of Abraham's two sons, in 25:9 and of Isaac's two sons in 35:29.
- vi. Mamre appears in 25:9 and 35:27.

⁷ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London, 1906) 312; similarly B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin, 1934) 669.

⁸ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, NY, 1964) 273.

⁹ Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 312; Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis*, 669; Speiser, *Genesis*, 273; Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 205; B. Vawter, *On Genesis* (Garden City, NY, 1977) 366; and J. Skinner, *Genesis* (New York, 1910) 428.

E ISHMAEL'S SONS (25:12–18)

E' ESAU'S SONS (36:6–43)

Commentators on Genesis have also noted that these units parallel each other.¹⁰ The story of the first patriarch is complete, and before moving on to the Isaac and Jacob material in 25:19–35:22 the redactor included Ishmael's family tree to close the book on Abraham. Similarly, the story of Isaac is over, and before moving on to the Jacob and Joseph material in 37:1–50:26 the redactor incorporated detailed material on Esau to close the book on the second patriarch's family. The analagous units share one expression which further link the two lists.

- i. *wē'ēlleh šēmôt b'ne yišmā'ēl*, 'and these are the names of Ishmael's sons,' in 25:13, is paralleled by *ēlleh šēmôt b'ne 'ēśāw*, 'these are the names of Esau's sons,' in 36:10.

OVERVIEW

The material in 23:1–25:18 which links the Abraham and Jacob Cycles is paralleled in 35:23–36:43 which links the Jacob and Joseph Cycles. The correspondences are not always perfect, but the redactor has attempted to bring them together nonetheless. For example, in B it is Abraham's chief heir, Isaac, who marries; but in B' it is a secondary character, Isaac's son Esau, who marries. The story of the marriage(s) of Isaac's chief heir, Jacob, would be hopelessly out of place here, because it played such an important role in the Jacob Cycle itself. So the redactor limited himself to dealing with Esau's marriages here, which, as noted above, explains why B' is apparently misplaced. It logically belongs before E', the list of Esau's sons, regardless of the redactional structure. Again, we may excuse our redactor whose task was most difficult in aligning these units.

¹⁰ Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 312; Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis*, 671; and Davidson, *Genesis 12–50*, 208.

The imperfect correspondences of 23:1–28:18 and 35:23–36:43 are also evident from the fact that Abraham in A through E is usually paralleled by Isaac in A' through E' but once by Jacob. That is to say, it is Abraham's son who marries in B and Isaac's son who marries in B'; it is Abraham who is buried in D and Isaac who is buried in D'; it is Abraham's son Ishmael who is the subject of E and it is Isaac's son Esau who is the subject of E'; and it is Abraham's wife Sarah who dies in A and presumably Isaac's wife Rebekah who dies in the glaringly absent A'. But C concerns Abraham's sons while C' concerns Jacob's sons. Obviously, the compiler had no choice, for Isaac simply did not have a multitude of sons from another woman. Instead, he inserted a list of Jacob's numerous sons here, and cemented the relationship between C and C' by utilizing the resemblances discussed above.

Finally, let it be noted, as was done at the end of chap. II, that the units of A through E exactly equal the rabbinic Parshat Hayye Sarah. The rabbis recognized 23:1–25:18 as an independent section, attaching it neither to the Abraham Cycle which precedes it nor to the Jacob Cycle which follows it. 35:23–36:43 is much shorter in length, so it could not stand as its own division of the Torah in the traditional Jewish reading cycle. Accordingly, it forms the end of Parshat Wayyishlah.