

proposed a chiasmic parallelism for the episodes in 12:1–22:19. Since this material is bounded by two genealogical bookends, I have expanded the Abraham Cycle to include all of 11:27–22:24. Within these chapters we may note 1) five units in 11:27–16:16 which are then duplicated by five units in reverse order in 17:1–22:24; 2) a large series of theme-words and parallel expressions and ideas which link the matching units; 3) the focal point of the Abraham Cycle at 17:1–5; 4) two controls, the introduction of the divine element Elohim and the patriarch's name change from Abram to Abraham, which point to the correctness of our proposed structure; and 5) catchwords and phrases which link successive units. The presence of these devices in the narrative betokens a well-conceived blueprint expertly executed by the individual responsible for bringing together the various traditions surrounding Israel's first patriarch. In keeping with the terminology adopted in this book, we may label this the redactional structuring of the Abraham Cycle.

conveniently presented in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 15 (1971) cols. 1387–88. There it is noted that a division occurs at 17:1, our focal point in the Abraham Cycle.

III

THE JACOB CYCLE

The stories which commence with Jacob's birth in 25:19–26 and conclude with Benjamin's birth in 35:16–22 are generally recognized to be an integrated narrative complex.¹ In 1975, Michael Fishbane advanced our understanding of these chapters by demonstrating most conclusively that the stories of the Jacob Cycle are aligned in perfectly symmetrical fashion.² In other words, redactional structuring may be detected not only in the Primeval History and the Abraham Cycle but in the third major division of Genesis as well. The structure of the Jacob Cycle as outlined below is essentially that of Fishbane's, though I have made one slight adjustment.³

- 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)

¹ G. von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia, 1961) 258; and J. Morgenstern, *The Book of Genesis* (New York, 1965) 184–205.

² M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19–35:22)," *JJS* 26 (1975) 15–38. A slightly altered version of this article appears as chap. 3 in M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York, 1979) 40–62.

³ What Fishbane calls F, I divide into F and F'. In "Composition and Structure," 32, and *Text and Texture*, 56–57, he recognizes that two units are present but does not label them as such. Also, Fishbane considers 29:31–35 part of E whereas I attach it to F.

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

A detailed investigation of the Jacob Cycle has been executed expertly by Fishbane, so that what follows is in large part merely a rewording or reorganization of his work. Before proceeding to an analysis of each of the paired units in 25:19–35:22, let me take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge Professor Fishbane's permission to reproduce freely in my own words the findings of his excellent studies.⁴

A ORACLE SOUGHT, STRUGGLE IN CHILDBIRTH, JACOB BORN (25:19–34)

A' ORACLE FULFILLED, STRUGGLE IN CHILD- BIRTH, JACOB BECOMES ISRAEL (35:1–22)

As is well known, the Jacob Cycle is fraught with tensions and conflicts. Fishbane noted that these various themes—fraternal strife, deception, barrenness, etc.—all appear in 25:19–34 in proleptic form and do not entirely disappear until the Cycle's denouement in 35:1–22. He backs up this proposition with a number of items which cement the relationship between A and A'.

- i. An oracle is sought in 25:23 which predicts the ascendancy of Jacob. The oracle is fulfilled in 35:11–12 with

⁴ In the interest of economy, I refrain from citing the page numbers of each of the points raised by Fishbane. The interested reader is requested to consult the two works listed in n 2 above, both of which are easily available.

- God telling Jacob the full extent of the greatness in store for him.⁵
- ii. Rebekah struggles in childbirth in 25:21–22; and Rachel suffers far worse in her delivery in 35:16–20.
- iii. Jacob is born and named in 25:26. Jacob's name is changed to Israel in 35:10.⁶
- iv. Central to A is the *b'kôrâ*, 'birthright,' in 25:31–34; and central to A' is the *b'rākâ*, 'blessing,' in 35:9–12, as indicated by *way'bārek*, 'he (God) blessed,' in 35:9.

Still other features and theme-words serve to unite the first and last units of the Jacob Cycle.

- v. Parental differences are noted in 25:28 where Isaac favors Esau and Rebekah favors Jacob. Parental differences reoccur in 35:18 where Rachel gives her son a pejorative name, Ben-oni, while Jacob gives him a propitious name, Benjamin.
- vi. The first hint at fraternal strife appears in 25:29–34, and the Jacob–Esau struggle is last mentioned in 35:1, 35:7.
- vii. In 25:23 we read how primogeniture will be set aside among Isaac's sons. In 35:22 we learn the circumstances which will lead to the abrogation of this rule among Jacob's sons.
- viii. *mippaddan ʔārām*, 'from Paddan Aram,' obtains in 25:20 and 35:9.
- ix. The root *rbh* occurs in 25:23 with *rab*, 'older,' and in 35:11 with *r'bēh*, 'multiply.'
- x. The root *gdl* occurs in 25:27 with *wayyigd'lu*, 'they (the boys) grew,' and in 35:21 with *migdal*, 'Migdal.'

⁵ God has blessed Jacob similarly earlier in the Cycle, but this is by far the most complete and important of the speeches. The wording is very reminiscent of God's talk to Abraham in 17:6, 17:8, the focal point of all divine communications to the first patriarch. See further von Rad, *Genesis*, 334.

⁶ Of course he properly receives the new name in 32:29, but he is not referred to in the narratives as Israel until after 35:10, e.g., in 35:21–22. Earlier references to Israel may be interpreted as references to the nation; for 32:33 this is obvious and on 33:20, see J. Skinner, *Genesis* (New York, 1910) 416.

- xi. In 25:27 we read of Jacob *yôšēb ʔōhālīm*, 'a dweller in tents'; and in 35:21 we read about the patriarch *wayyēl ʔōhōlōh*, 'he pitched his tent.'
- xii. We are not told specifically that Rebekah received any assistance in childbirth and childrearing in 25:21–26, but we might assume that Deborah was present. In 35:8 we read of Deborah's death and she is specifically called *mēneqet ribqâ*, 'Rebekah's wet-nurse.'

As in the previous chapters, we are able to gain an understanding of the compiler's *modus operandi* by paying attention to redactional structuring. A is a very unified story with each of its smaller episodes leading neatly from one to the other. Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, Rebekah's sterility and Isaac's entreaty, Rebekah's childbearing, the boys' growing up, and the introductory fraternal strife all flow very naturally. A', on the other hand, is very clearly "a series of fragmentary excerpts"⁷ which do not naturally interconnect. But each of these fragments at the close of the Cycle has a clear purpose: to evoke in the reader's mind the start of the Cycle. 35:1–7 recalls the strife with Esau now finally over, 35:8 suggests the boys' births, 35:9–15 brings to mind Jacob's naming, the oracle delivered to Rebekah, and the *b'kôrâ/b'rākâ* relation, 35:16–20 prompts the struggle in Rebekah's womb, and 35:21–22 raises the issue of the firstborn's fall from favor. Accordingly, the redactor has utilized most economically the short pieces brought together in 35:1–22 to link this unit with the single episode in 25:19–34.

B INTERLUDE: REBEKAH IN FOREIGN PALACE, PACT WITH FOREIGNERS (26:1–34)

B' INTERLUDE: DINAH IN FOREIGN PALACE, PACT WITH FOREIGNERS (34:1–31)

It does not take more than a brief look at these two units to conclude that they are anomalous within the

⁷ Skinner, *Genesis*, 422.

Jacob Cycle. Individual commentators have realized this before,⁸ but Genēsis scholarship had to wait for Fishbane's work on the structure of the Cycle to learn that this was done purposely. That is to say, within the Cycle of stories concerning the third patriarch, by design the second and next-to-last episodes have no direct connection with the narrative at large. Fishbane writes:

... we first note that *both* chapters are anomalous in their context and that both are in symmetrical relationship to each other. To move from an observational to a functional-evaluative standpoint the issue can be stated differently: Gen. 26 serves as a narrative interlude between the opening tensions and their historical development; similarly, Gen. 34 serves as an interlude between the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau and the final resolution and blessing at Beth-El.⁹

Fishbane recognized the following common features and theme-words in B and B'.

- i. As implied in the above quotation, B has no connection with A immediately preceding it or C immediately following it. The same is true of B' vis-à-vis C' and A'.
- ii. As also implied above, B "increases the tension of the developing action" whereas B' "delays the denouement and release of the entire Cycle."¹⁰
- iii. B concerns the early Israelite interaction with the Philistines, the uncircumcised people par excellence in the Bible (though *ʿārēl/ʿārēlīm*, 'uncircumcised,' is not specifically used in this chapter). B' concerns the early Israelite interaction with the uncircumcised Shechemites; cf. *ʿorlâ*, 'foreskin,' in 34:14.
- iv. Isaac deceives Abimelech in 26:7 and Jacob's sons deceive the Shechemites in 34:13–29.

⁸ On 26:1–34 see, for example, Skinner (*Genesis*, 355) who terms it "misplaced"; on 34:1–31 see, among others, E. A. Speiser (*Genesis* [Garden City, NY, 1964] 266) who says, "The narrative is unusual on more counts than one."

⁹ Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," 24.

¹⁰ Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," 24.

- v. A pact is formed between Isaac and Abimelech in 26:26–33 and a treaty between Jacob's family and Schechem is proposed in 34:8–23.
- vi. *ʔāḥôt*-, 'sister,' is used in 26:7, 26:9, and in 34:13, 34:14.
- vii. The verbal root *škb*, 'lie,' occurs in 26:10 and in 34:2, 34:7.
- viii. *ʔāḥiṯw*, 'his brother,' appears in 26:31; and *ʔaḥehā*, 'her brothers,' appears in 34:11.

Beyond these similarities pointed out by Fishbane may be noted one important theme and numerous theme-words.

- ix. Rebekah in Abimelech's palace and Dinah in Shechem's palace are reflexes of the common East Mediterranean "Helen of Troy" motif.¹¹
- x. The Hiph^cil of *rbh* occurs in 26:4 with *w^ehirbêti*, 'I will multiply,' and in 34:12 with *harbû*, 'increase.'
- xi. The verbal root *hrg*, 'kill,' is used in 26:7 and 34:25–26.
- xii. In 26:10 we have the expression *ʔaḥad hā^cām*, 'one of the people'; and in 34:22 we have *am ʔehād*, 'one people.'
- xiii. *miqnēh*, 'flock,' appears in 26:14 (bis); and the same word with pronominal suffixes is used in 34:5, 34:23.
- xiv. The root *rḥb* is used to denote expanse of land and ample room in which two parties may coexist in 26:22 with *r^eḥóbôt*, 'Rehoboth,' and *hirḥīb*, 'expanded,' and in 34:21 with *rahābat*, 'expanse.'
- xv. Abimelech's cohort in 26:26 is named *ʔāḥuzzat*, 'Ahuz-zath'; and the same root obtains in *hē^cʔāḥāzû*, 'acquire real estate,' in 34:10.
- xvi. Of different roots and different meanings but very alike in sound are *bēnôtēnû*, 'between us,' in 26:28, and *b^enôtēnû*, 'our daughters,' in 34:9, 34:21.
- xvii. A key word in 26:29, 26:31 is *šālôm*, 'peace'; and the same root is used in 34:21 with *š^elēmîm*, 'friendly, upright.'

In short, these two pericopes have little or nothing to do with the Jacob Cycle storyline and appear to have little in

¹¹ See further C. H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York, 1965) 285.

common with each other. But deeper investigation has turned up several similar motifs in B and B' and numerous theme-words which link them together. Furthermore, they function in the same way within the Cycle, as important interludes craftly placed by our master compiler.

C JACOB FEARS ESAU AND FLEES (27:1–28:9)

C' JACOB RETURNS AND FEARS ESAU (33:1–20)

After the interlude of 26:1–34, the story returns to developing the tension between Jacob and Esau first suggested in 25:19–34. Before the interlude of 34:1–31, that same tension appears as Jacob and Esau reunite after years apart. Fishbane noted the following similarities between C and C'.

- i. Jacob deceives Isaac in 27:18–29 and Jacob plans to deceive Esau in 33:1–2.
- ii. Jacob fears Esau in 27:41–45 and again in 33:1–8.
- iii. Jacob flees Canaan in 28:5 and he returns to Canaan in 33:18.
- iv. Perhaps most important of all, Jacob steals the *b^erākā*, 'blessing,' from Esau in 27:18–29, but returns it to him in 33:11.
- v. The verbal root *nšq*, 'kiss,' occurs in 27:26–27 and in 33:4.

These are, of course, the most important features shared by the two episodes and they are enough to ascertain the relationship between them. But there are many more theme-words which can be cited which serve to further link 27:1–28:9 and 33:1–20.

- vi. C begins *wattikhenā ʔēnāw mē^eʔôt*, literally 'his (Isaac's) eyes had faded from seeing,' after which Esau enters the scene. C' begins *wayiśśā^c ʔa ʔāqōb ʔēnāw wayyar^c*, 'Jacob lifted his eyes and saw,' after which Esau again enters the picture.
- vii. Jacob brings (Hiph^cil of *bw^c*) good things to Isaac in 27:10, 27:14; and he brings (Hoph^cal of *bw^c*) good things to Esau in 33:11.

- viii. The verbal root *ngš*, 'approach, come near, bring near,' is used in 27:21–22, 27:25–27, and in 33:6–7.
- ix. The pun on the root *š^cr* used whenever Esau is spoken of is achieved here as well. In 27:23 we read *š^cīrôt*, 'hairy'; and in 33:14, 33:16 we have *šē^cīrâ*, 'to Seir.'
- x. Irony is introduced into the stories. In 27:28 we read that Jacob will receive *rôb*, 'abundance'; but in 33:9 it is Esau who appears as *rāb*, 'abundant.'
- xi. Further irony occurs in 27:29 with *w^cyištaḥāwû*, 'will bow down,' and in 33:3 with *wayyištaḥû*, 'bowed down.' In the first instance it is Jacob's brothers who are to pay homage to him, but in the second case it is Jacob prostrating himself to Esau!
- xii. Similarly, in 27:40 Esau is told he will throw off the yoke *mē^cal šawwā³rekā*, 'from your neck'; and in 33:4 we read *wayyippōl^c al šawwā³rāw*, 'he (Esau) fell on his (Jacob's) neck.' The brothers' necks also converge at 27:16 where Jacob uses goatskins to disguise the smoothness of his neck in imitation of Esau's neck.
- xiii. Irony is also achieved by the use of the consonants *p^cmym*. In 27:36 Esau bemoans that Jacob has tricked him *pa^cāmayim*, 'two times'; but in the end it is Jacob who prostrates himself before Esau *šēba^c p^cāmīm*, 'seven times,' in 33:3.
- xiv. *wayyēbk*, 'he (Esau) cried,' appears in 27:38; and *wayyibkû*, 'they (Esau and Jacob) cried,' occurs in 33:4. If we accept the suggestion of some textual critics to emend *wayyibkû* to *wayyēbk* in 33:4 due to haplography (the next word begins with *waw*),¹² then the likeness is exact; in each case we would understand that Esau alone cried.
- xv. Not only are the stories the flight from and return to Canaan (see point iii above), but conversely they are the flight to and return from Paddan Aram, mentioned specifically in 28:2–7 and 33:18.
- xvi. Esau learns of Jacob's marriage plans in 28:6–7, then meets the wives in 33:5–7.
- xvii. Perhaps the greatest irony of all, in each vignette in C there are always only two individuals present but never

¹² Skinner, *Genesis* 413; Speiser, *Genesis*, 259; and BHS, ad loc.

Jacob and Esau together.¹³ In C', when the conflict is at last settled, it is the two brothers who hug and kiss and engage each other in long conversation.

These seventeen points show conclusively that C and C' are matching episodes. Recognition of this fact will again allow us to understand a literary critical problem which has long been debated by Genesis commentators. Scholars have noted that the Jacob stories can be separated into a group of Transjordanian ones and a group of Cisjordanian ones.¹⁴ Whatever the value of this division, it is clear that C' traces Jacob's reentry into Canaan either through Succoth (33:17) or through Shechem (33:18). While it is true that the two can be reconciled geographically,¹⁵ it nevertheless seems that we have variant traditions concerning the patriarch's itinerary.

But since C and C' are paired units, we are able to determine why there are two traditions at this juncture. There need to be two reentry sites because 27:1–28:9 records for us two reasons for fleeing in the first place. On the one hand we have Esau's anger as a cause for leaving, and on the other hand we have Isaac's and Rebekah's mutual desire for Jacob not to marry a Canaanite.¹⁶ And while it is true that these two ideas can also be reconciled, for the text as we have it is certainly coherent,¹⁷ there are nevertheless two motives for leaving. In other words, as a finished product—regardless of the prehistory of the narratives—the Jacob Cycle is symmetrical

¹³ This was noted by B. Jacob (*Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* [Berlin, 1934] 577) but to my knowledge no other commentator has pointed this out.

¹⁴ R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1978) 172–73.

¹⁵ Y. Aharoni and M. Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (New York, 1977) 29, map 27.

¹⁶ See von Rad, *Genesis*, 276; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London, 1906) 262; Speiser, *Genesis*, 215–16; Morgenstern, *The Book of Genesis*, 223; and R. Davidson, *Genesis 12–50* (Cambridge, 1979) 142–43.

¹⁷ See D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL, 1967) 157; Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," 26; and Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 48–49.

even within its symmetry. Not only are the stories of Jacob's leaving and homecoming matched, but there are two reasons for parting from Canaan and thus two routes for returning to Canaan.

D MESSENGERS (28:10–22)

D' MESSENGERS (32:1–32)

Fishbane notes that between Jacob's leaving Canaan in C and his arriving in Haran in E there occurs the episode which has the patriarch encountering divine messengers. Symmetrical with this is a unit of several stories concerning messengers, both human and divine, sandwiched between Jacob's leaving Haran in E' and his return to Canaan in C'.¹⁸ Fishbane noted the following parallels between 28:10–22 and 32:1–32.

- i. D begins with a reference to Jacob's journey to Haran in 28:10; and D' begins with the final parting of Jacob and Laban in 32:1.
- ii. *mal'ākê 'ēlōhīm*, 'messengers of God,' occurs in 28:12; and in the three sections comprising C' we have *mal'ākê 'ēlōhīm*, 'messengers of God,' in 32:2, *māl'ākīm*, '(human) messengers,' in 32:4, 32:7, and *'ēlōhīm*, 'God,' in 32:31.
- iii. The verbal root *pg*, 'encounter,' is used in 28:11 and 32:2.
- iv. Jacob receives a blessing in each unit and the root *brk*, 'bless,' is used specifically in 28:14 and 32:27, 32:30.

Again there are many more theme-words and ideas shared by the two units.

- v. *māqôm*, 'place,' is ubiquitous in 28:11–19, and *m'qômô*, 'his place,' occurs in 32:1.
- vi. *wayyālen šām*, 'he spent the night there,' appears in 28:11 and 32:14, each time referring to Jacob.
- vii. In 28:13 we read *'ēlōhê 'abrāhām 'abikā wē'lōhê yiṣḥāq*, 'the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac';

¹⁸ Parts of what follow were also noted by Davidson (*Genesis* 12–50, 179) and von Rad (*Genesis*, 310–11).

and in 32:10 we have *'ēlōhê 'ābī 'abrāhām wē'lōhê 'ābī yiṣḥāq*, 'the God of my father Abraham and the God of my father Isaac.' In each case the pronouns refer to Jacob and in each case there is an identification with Yahweh.

- viii. *zar'ekā/zar'ākā*, 'your seed,' occurs in 28:13 and in 32:13.
- ix. The verbal root *šwb*, 'return,' referring to returning to the land of Canaan, obtains in 28:15 and 32:10.¹⁹
- x. *wayyirā*, 'was awed/afraid,' is predicated of Jacob in 28:17 and 32:8.
- xi. *wayyaškēm ya'āqōb babbôqer*, 'Jacob arose in the morning,' is used in 28:18; and *wayyaškēm lābān babbôqer*, 'Laban arose in the morning,' is used in 32:1.
- xii. In 28:19 we read *wayyiqrā 'et šēm hammaqôm hahû*, 'he (Jacob) called the name of that place'; and in 32:3 we have *wayyiqrā šēm hammaqôm hahû*, 'he (Jacob) called the name of that place,' and in 32:31 we have *wayyiqrā ya'āqōb šēm hammaqôm*, 'Jacob called the name of the place.'
- xiii. The encounter at Bethel ends with Jacob's recognition of the divine aspect of the event in 28:17; and the encounter at Peniel ends with the patriarch's recognition of the divine character of that event in 32:31.
- xiv. After each encounter there is reference to a particular Israelite custom; in 28:22 it is tithing and in 32:33 it is the refrain from eating the hip sinew.

The stories in these units are among the oddest and most difficult to interpret in the Bible. That they purposely parallel each other has been demonstrated by Fishbane and reaffirmed here.

E ARRIVAL AT HARAN (29:1–30)

E' FLIGHT FROM HARAN (31:1–54)

Units E, F, F', and E' form what Fishbane calls "the inner tale," that is, the story of Jacob and Laban within

¹⁹ This point and the two preceding ones, and the general tenor of 28:13–15 and 32:10–13, were also recognized by Davidson (*Genesis* 12–50, 183).

the greater span of the Jacob Cycle. As the Cycle as a whole reflects redactional structuring, so does the inner tale where symmetry may also be observed. E relates Jacob's arrival at Haran and his meeting and negotiations with Laban. E' relates Jacob's departure from Haran and his parting from and final negotiations with Laban. Fishbane pointed out these similarities between the two episodes.

- i. The verbal root *nšq*, 'kiss,' directs our attention to Jacob's kissing Rachel in 29:11 and Laban's kissing Jacob in 29:13 during the arrival scene, and then to Laban's complaint in 31:28 that he was unable even to kiss his children goodbye before they left.
- ii. Laban recognizes his oneness with Jacob with *ʿašmî ūbsārî ʔattâ*, 'you are my bone and my flesh,' in 29:14; and then says *nikrētâ b'rît ʔānî wāʔattâ*, 'let us make a pact, you and I,' in 31:44.
- iii. Central to the discussion in each chapter is *maškurt-*, '(Jacob's) wages,' in 29:15 and in 31:7, 31:41.
- iv. The pacts are both marked by ceremonial meals, in 29:22 and in 31:46, 31:54.
- v. Deception plays a role in each story, with Laban duping Jacob in 29:23–26 and in turn being deceived first by Jacob in 31:20 and then by Rachel in 31:33–35.

A few other shared theme-words further illuminate the bond between E and E'.

- vi. *wəgālʾlū ʔet hāʔeben*, 'to roll the stone,' in 29:3, 29:8, and *wayyāgel*, '(Jacob) rolled,' in 29:10, are echoed in 31:46 where *gāl*, 'mound,' and *ʔābānīm*, 'stones,' are collocated.
- vii. Shepherding plays a role in 29:1–10 and in 31:4–12, 31:38–39.
- viii. Jacob refers to the general populus as *ʔaḥay*, 'my brothers,' in 29:4, and to his and Laban's families at large as *ʔaḥēnū*, 'our brothers,' in 31:32.
- ix. When deceived by Laban, Jacob responds *mah zōʔt ʿāsītā lī*, 'what is this you have done to me,' in 29:25; when the tables are turned, Laban says to Jacob *meh ʿāsītā*, 'what have you done,' in 31:26.
- x. Seven years and seven years are detailed in 29:20–30, and the same fourteen years are referred to in 31:41.

Clearly these two units are conceived as a matching pair, opening and closing the inner tale and forming the encasement for Jacob's success story at the center of the entire Cycle.

F JACOB'S WIVES ARE FERTILE (29:31–30:24)

F' JACOB'S FLOCKS ARE FERTILE (30:25–43)

These two units stand at the center of the action and include within them the focus of the entire Cycle, as Fishbane correctly recognized. He pointed to the one major similarity between them and one common theme-word.

- i. The main thrust of F is to detail the fertility of Jacob's wives and the main thrust of F' is to describe the fertility of his flocks.
- ii. *š'kārī*, 'my reward/payment,' is used in 30:18 and in 30:32–33 (see also 30:28).

But other similarities may also be noted.

- iii. The root *yld*, 'bear,' occurs throughout 29:32–30:23 and is used in 30:39 also.
- iv. Popular devices to increase fertility are used in each episode: the mandrakes in 30:14–16 and the wooden rods in 30:37–43.
- v. Wordplays dominate F and a pun is incorporated into F' with *lābān*, 'white,' and *libneh*, 'poplar,' in 30:35–37, amid numerous references to *lābān*, 'Laban.'²⁰
- vi. Perhaps another word play is intended by the names *rāḥēl*, 'Rachel,' and *lēʔā*, 'Leah.' The former means 'ewe' and the latter may be etymologized as '(wild) cow.'²¹ The reproduction of these female "animals" is echoed by the fertility of Jacob's real animals.

Throughout most of the Jacob Cycle things do not go too well for the patriarch. He strives with and fears

²⁰ See Davidson, *Genesis* 12–50, 166; Speiser, *Genesis*, 237; and von Rad, *Genesis*, 297.

²¹ Skinner, *Genesis*, 383; Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis*, 589; and BDB, 521.

his brother, he encounters and struggles with divine messengers, and he is duped by and then dictated to by his father-in-law. Even 34:1–31 which is not directly connected to the other narratives ends with Jacob in trouble. But F and F', coming at the middle of the Cycle, are Jacob's successes and thus perfectly matched and meant for each other.

OVERVIEW

The Jacob Cycle reflects a deliberate structure in which the compiler has organized twelve individual units into reverse sequences. It is therefore akin to the palistrophe noticed for the Abraham Cycle. Fishbane first recognized the symmetry of the Jacob Cycle, and further investigation has shown his schema to be absolutely correct.

We are introduced to the Jacob narratives in A, then comes an interlude in B, and next follow Jacob's fear of Esau and his departure from Canaan in C, his encounter with messengers in D, his arrival at Haran in E, and his success through the fertility of his wives in F. At this juncture comes the focal point, to wit, 30:22–25 which bridges F and F'. The favored wife, Rachel, at long last gives birth, to the son who will eventually be the patriarch's favorite, Joseph. F' begins with the telling statement, "After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me leave that I may return to my homeland.'" Jacob has been successful throughout F, but the ultimate success is not realized until Rachel herself produces a son in 30:22–24. The very next verse, 30:25 translated above, connects this fact with Jacob's desire to return home.

Fishbane calls this "the archetechtonic pivot of the Cycle,"²² the focus upon which all the action hinges. After this point all the themes and episodes of A through F are repeated in reverse order. In F' we read of Jacob's success through the fertility of his flocks, then comes his flight

²² Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," 32.

from Haran in E', his encounters with messengers in D', and the resolution of his fear of Esau and his return to Canaan in C', next occurs an interlude in B', and finally we have the denouement of the whole narrative in A'. The Jacob Cycle is unquestionably a masterpiece, well-conceived, brilliantly constructed, and expertly executed.

But the redactor did not stop here. As in the Primeval History and in the Abraham Cycle, incorporated into the Jacob Cycle are a series of nexuses linking successive units. The root *šb*^c, 'swear,' is used in A at 25:33 and in B at 26:32–34. Esau's marriages and the concern they caused his parents are the subject of a brief notice at the end of B at 26:34–35; this issue is echoed in C at 27:46–28:9. In C Jacob receives a blessing from his father at 27:27–29; and in D he gains God's blessing at 28:13–15. D and E share the word *ʿeben*, 'stone,' in 28:18 and 29:10, with Jacob utilizing it in each instance. In E Jacob gains his two wives and their maid-servants in 29:23–30, and these four produce his children in F in 29:31–30:24.

F and F' have a number of nexuses because they are not only successive but also paired in the redactional structure. Moreover, we may point to the focal point where 30:22–24 and 30:25 both mention Rachel's giving birth to Joseph in F and F' respectively. F' and E' have in common the discussion of the flocks and their peculiar characteristics in 30:32–43 and in 31:8–12. The verbal root *nšq*, 'kiss,' in 31:28 and 32:1 bridges E' and D'. Jacob's fear of Esau and attempted bribery appear in D' at 32:4–22 and in C' at 33:5–11. C' ends with a reference to Shechem and Hamor in 33:19, a point which is loudly echoed throughout B' in 34:1–27. The *benê yaʿāqōb*, 'sons of Jacob,' and their exploits are prominent throughout B' in 34:7–31; and they occur again in A' at 35:5.

As with the first two major cycles of Genesis, the third one uses common ideas and vocabulary items to tie its various units into a neat bundle. Theme-words cement the relationship between parallel episodes, and catch-words tie each unit to the succeeding unit. These catch-words are especially important between A and B, B and C, C' and B', and B' and A', because they bring the two

interludes, with no immediate connection to the Jacob narratives, into the mainstream of the Cycle. A notice such as 26:34–35 concerning Esau's wives and a reference to Shechem and Hamor at 33:19 are seemingly out of place, but they are important bridges between the interludes and the story at large.

In chaps. I and II we saw that the natural breaks in the structures of the Primeval History and the Abraham Cycle are often in agreement with the rabbinic division of Genesis. Therefore, it is apropos to comment on any accord between sections of the Jacob Cycle according to our analysis and according to the rabbis. It may be noted that 25:19 marks not only the beginning of the Jacob Cycle but also that of Parshat Toledot. Fishbane notes that the rabbinic division also attempts to isolate the inner tale, i.e., the Paddan Aram material along with the messenger encounters before and after it. Thus Parshat Wayyetze commences at 28:10 as does D, though we would extend it beyond 32:3 to include all of D' which ends at 32:33.²³ Beyond this one can note, as does Fishbane, "that our thematic sub-divisions agree, almost completely, both with the chapter divisions introduced by Christian scholars in the Middle Ages and with the Masoretic unit divisions found in Rabbinic Bibles."²⁴ Of course, we end the Jacob Cycle at 35:22 whereas the third traditional Jewish portion in these chapters, Parshat Wayyishlah concludes at 36:43. The extra material, obviously too short to comprise its own rabbinic division, is parallel to the material in Parshat Hayye Sarah (23:1–25:18) and will be discussed in the next chapter.

We can conclude this chapter by summarizing. The Jacob's story's unity has been recognized often in the past, but it took until 1975 for Fishbane to point out exactly how united the Cycle is. Deeper analysis confirms his conclusion. The redactor of these chapters 1) aligned the units in matching sequences of reverse

order, 2) included shared themes and theme-words in the parallel units, 3) hinged the Cycle on the pivot at 30:22–25, and 4) used nexuses to connect each successive unit.²⁵

²⁵ For still other stylistic devices in the Jacob Cycle, see the detailed treatment by J. P. Fokkerman (*Narrative Art in Genesis* [Assen and Amsterdam, 1975] 83–241).

²³ Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," 30, n 43.

²⁴ Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," 21.