

SUMMARY of Lesson 2 Part 1 which follows:

- I. METANARRATIVE (Fee, 95ff.)... Hierarchy of Narratative (reverse pyradid? metanarr; redemption; stories)
- II. PERSPECTIVES TO MAINTAIN WHILE READING BIBLICAL NARRATIVE
 - A. Purpose = rehearse redemptive HISTORY ... to demand moralizing is **ABUSE**
 Fee-Stuart, 96-97
 Fee-Stuart, 107-111
 - B. History is a catalyst. The audience already perceives success and failure to worldview. That aspect does not need to be stated [HIGH CONTEXT to them; usually LOW context to us].
 - C. Interpretation of that history is subtle...writer uses "clues" to show perspective.

The Bible was written "to be HEARD" (oral, aural)
READ OUT OF THE NARRATIVE NOT INTO IT (Fee 104)
 - D. Meaning is from WHOLE to PARTS Episodes MUST be understood WITHIN the whole [LATER CHARTS will illustrate this]
 - E. Understanding / Communicating a narrative REQUIRES:
 1. ACCURACY of literary analysis (if this fails; all fails)

Narrative does not mean in ...
 Narrative does mean ...
 2. Experiential Concretness (tedious)
 - F. Illustration of abusing a narrative...Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (p. 3)
- III. LITERARY DEVICES USED BY THE AUTHORS OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE (p. 4)
 - A. Narrative development (often TOO Western...)
 - B. Sample literary devices:
 1. REPETITION (remember...written for a HEARING culture)
 2. BOUNDARY markers
 3. Sophisticated devices, e.g. CHIASM
 4. CHRONOLOGICAL DISJUNCTION
- IV. ADDITIONAL NARRATAIVE EXAMPLES (see distributed sheets)

**Reading the Bible Again...For the First Time
(Hermeneutics: The Science and Art of Biblical Interpretation)**

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LESSON 2: BIBLICAL NARRATIVE
Part 1 The Old Testament

Literary genre is a *kind* of literature; it is a certain way of writing. A writer can tell a story, compose a poem or a proverb. Each kind of writing makes a point *in its own way*. I first learned about “genre” in a children’s literature course! So, if genre is a new thought to you, you are like I was, about to enter a new world of reading.

The most frequent literary form in the Bible is narrative. “Over 40 percent of the OT and nearly 60 percent of the NT consist of narrative. This involves books such as Genesis, Exodus, Joshua through Esther, Matthew through Acts, and large portions of Numbers, Deuteronomy and the Prophets.” (Stein, 79)

A narrative is a story, but it is a well-crafted piece of literature that makes its point within the story by using an array of literary “signals” (devices). These stories are intended to be a history of God’s people with all of their struggles, good and bad.

- I. “**Metanarrative**” is a term we use to represent the BIG story of the Bible.
 - A. The biblical metanarrative is: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration.
 - B. This idea explains Genesis to Revelation; Genesis to Malachi; and Matthew to Revelation!
 - C. Furthermore, this “total story” leaks from every part of the Bible. It is the whole history of redemption and it is your individual story. In some way, it frames everything the Bible teaches and should be applied to every issue that needs explanation.

For example, when you are challenged by a person who hates Christianity because it condemns their personal life practice, your response should be a calm rehearsal of the elements in the metanarrative and how they explain your experience (while knowing that that person is operating from another metanarrative that is different than yours).

- II. **Perspectives to maintain while reading biblical narrative**

- A. The purpose of biblical narrative is to recount redemptive history, often indicating how that history relates to biblical faith (and the standards of that faith/belief are usually unstated in the narrative since they are already part of the understanding of faith. That is, narratives presuppose known teaching from God). This aspect, however, is frequently abused by “moralizing” without contextual reasons; that is, saying “what it means to me” **rather than** what it meant in the original context. Because Bible stories have a commonality to life, it is easy to put meaning into the narrative that an author did not intend.

Illustration: The oratory candidate to be taught by Aristotle!

Fee & Stuart warn about **the abuse of narrative** in their statement on “**What Narratives are Not**” (pp. 96-97):

- “Old Testament narratives are *not allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings.*” Consequently, they are not to be “spiritualized” by our imaginations (even if our content may be shown to be biblical from OTHER places). Some examples are below.
- “Individual Old Testament narratives are *not intended to teach moral lessons.* The purpose of the various individual narratives is to tell what God did in the history of Israel, not to offer moral examples of right or wrong behavior. ...unless the biblical narrator makes that point...” We may see lessons of life in narratives, BUT that may not be what the Bible is teaching THERE. Until we exhaust what the text/s intend to teach, we should not default to our imaginations.
- “However, even though the Old Testament narratives do not necessarily teach moral values directly, they often illustrate what is taught explicitly and categorically elsewhere” since divine teaching is the larger circle of truth. **Such ‘general correspondence comparisons’ must be clarified as illustrative and not the immediate intent of the text...otherwise, your imagination is your only limitation.**

B. History is the catalyst for God to convey his view of things whether directly (i.e. event like Sinai) or through an intermediary (e.g. the author of a Bible book).

It is necessary to study the Ancient Near East to understand the OT. Narratives about multiple wives, birthright, levirate [Latin for “husband’s brother”] marriage, social structures and expectations (e.g. inheritance, hospitality, etc.). A good Bible dictionary should address most all of these needs. In redemptive history, God deals with people/culture as he finds it. Sometimes, change is demanded; sometimes patience (in retrospect) is applied.

C. The interpretation of history in narrative form is more subtle (implicit) than direct (explicit). The **reader must be alert to “clues”** which convey perspective on the story. Merely summarizing a story that “seems” obvious is not adequate because it is the subtle devices in the story that directed its contextual meaning. Because these stories were maintained orally, when recorded, they contain the same characteristics as the original context.

“Orality” and “Aurality”

“High Context” and “Low Context”

“Fast Message” (e.g. A Proverb, legal code) or “Slow Message” (Narrative)

ANE Narrative is not like modern history (e.g. chronology is not crucial). ANE historiography does not have the same rules as Western history. Differences (e.g. chronological disjunction) relate to how it works and thus how it MEANS.

D. The **meaning of narrative is in understanding how the whole context dictates/directs the meaning of its parts.** When a larger narrative is identified, the episodes within it must be related to that larger theme...they are NOT intended to be “free standing” pieces.

E. The communication of a narrative (e.g. in teaching or preaching) requires

1. Accuracy in literary analysis (**if this fails, meaning fails**)

Narrative does NOT “mean” in

- An isolated verse or “proof text” manner;
- Narrative items are not to be “spiritualized”
 - Gen 12:10-20, Egypt as a “type” of the world (Mr. Sell’s car!)
 - 1 Sam 17, “slay the giant in your life”
 - Joseph as a “type” of Christ (Bible never says so...and....)

Narrative does mean

- “holistically” (see Abraham narrative chart; See Flood narrative chart; Exod 18-Num 10 is a narrative)
 - Analogy: a Play with acts and scenes
 - Analogy: a Symphony with movements
- “contextually” (parts are to be read in light of whole; details often accommodate culture of the time, e.g. Levirate marriage, Deut 25:5-10; Gen 38:8)
- ‘intertextuality” (cf. 1 Sam 2:1-10 Hannah reflected in Mary’s Magnificent, Luke 1:46-55)
- “selectivity and arrangement” Biblical narrative is **not** bound by the Western expectation of chronological sequence but it orders the material to tell the story to make its point (true in OT and in the Gospels).
 - See Gary N. Knoppers, “The Synoptic Problem? An Old Testament Perspective. *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.1 (2009): 11-34. (should come up in Google)
 - I will illustrate this issue when we look at the Gospels.
- “text” and “event” ... which has authority? We are bound by the text. When one shifts to the event, they begin to fill in details from their imagination rather than the Bible itself (the text). “Filling in” details not in the text may sound biblical in content and may seem compelling, but it is the replacement of the Bible with our own imaginations and speculations.

2. “Experiential concreteness” in delivery

The use of story takes us beyond the record of brute facts and solicits us to *share the experience*. We must transport ourselves into the story so that we can feel what the characters felt. Reading stories requires *experiential concreteness*. Have you not felt the embarrassment of Abraham, the confusion of Lot, the tension of David, the rage of Moses, the disfunctional homes of Jacob (cf. brothers and Joseph episode), Ahab and Jezebel, the compassion of Jesus? *Narrative must be engaged to be effective. Experiential concreteness, however, is not a license to add data to the narrative but to “feel” the data that is present in the original context.*

F. How to abuse a narrative.

You know the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:4-8; 26-40). While driving one day I heard a prominent radio preacher convey the account of Phillip as “a lesson on commendable traits of a soul winner.” He tied the following key words to verses: Sensitivity, Availability, Initiative, Tactfulness. While this **sounds** like **good** preaching, it **actually abuses the Bible**. The points may be good advice in a manual on visitation, but they have **nothing** to do with what the text intended to convey.

Why is this account in Acts? It is one part of the larger narrative of the spread of the gospel. Acts 1:8 indicates to the disciples that the story of Jesus will spread in a geographical fashion: from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Then we watch the text lay this out (cf. 8:4, 12, 25, 35, 40). Consider how Acts 8 itself interfaces with the larger narrative:

- The activities in Jerusalem prior to being scattered (1:1-8:1)
- The Church scattered out from Jerusalem (8:2-3)
- Philip proclaims Christ in Samaria (8:4-25)
- Philip proclaims Christ to the ends of the earth (8:26-40)
- Then Paul's conversion and missionary activity finish Acts (9:1-28:31)

Acts 8 is sort of a microcosm of the rest of the Book of Acts as it continues to portray the development Acts 1:8 noted. The Phillip story is part of the factual expansion of Christianity beyond Jerusalem. Luke-Acts is actually one big narrative (will explain in NT part).

III. Literary devices used by the authors of biblical narrative.

A. Narrative development (the terms often used are a Western literary way of explaining it)

1. Scene development—the portrayal of the action of the story
 - Plot (The events, often set in conflict, which generate the story line and lead to a conclusion; plot is revealed in literary techniques)
 - Character/s (Those who populate the story)
 - Setting (The historical space in which the events take place)
 - Point of View (The way the narrator presents the story and sometimes interprets it, e.g. the Lot episode)
2. The presence of a narrator/author, whether telling the story or a dialogue among its parties (Comment on Sodom, Gen 13:10-13; Joseph's summary, Gen 50:19-21; Read the book of Jonah, a sort of prophetic narrative with a strong narrator; the Conflict Motif in the Gospels)

B. Scenes are developed BY literary devices that provide clues to meaning.

1. Repetition (REMEMBER, this was an oral/aural culture)

- a. Most OT books contain descriptive phrases that signal narrative meaning.

Genesis, *toledoth*, “these are the generations of” (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2); the Patriarchs alone are not the organizing feature of Genesis.

Kings / Chronicles

“what was right in God's eyes” (1 Kgs 14:8; 15:5; 22:43; 2 Kgs 10:30; 14:3; 15:3, 34; 18:3; 22:2; 2 Chron 24:2; 25:2; 26:4 29:2; 34:2)

“evil in the eyes of the Lord” (1 Kgs 11:6; 15:26, 34; 16:19, 25; 21:25; 22:52; 2 Kgs 3:2; 8:18, 27; 13:2, 11; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 21:2, 15-16, 20; 23:32, 37; 24:9, 19; 2 Chron 12:14; 22:4; 33:2, 9; 36:5, 9, 12)

Genesis “scatter” in 9:19; 10:18 prepares the reader/hearer for 11:1-9
 1 Samuel 15:10-11, 29, 35 (“relent”, change mind)
 2 Samuel (“send” in chs 10-12) cf. 10:2, 3 (2xs), 4, 5, 6, 7, 16; 11:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, (3xs), 12, 14, 18, 22, 27; in **12:1 the LORD sends!**
 2 Samuel 11-12 (Bathsheba) 11:2, 3, 5, 11, 26, 27; 12:9, 10, 15, 24
 Judges (“there was no king in Israel” 17:6; 18:8; 19:1; 2:25)
 Ruth 1 uses “turn; return” 13 times
 Hosea uses *rib* (“lawsuit”); 2:2; 4:1; 4:4; 12:2)
 “God Remembered” is an OT code word: Gen 8:1; 9:15; 19:29; 30:22; Exod 2:24; 6:5; 1 Sam 1:19; etc.
 Acts “the Word of God grew” (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20)
 1 Cor 1-4 uses “wisdom” 21 times

2. Boundary markers (“framing”)

Genesis 39:2-3, 21, 23 “the LORD was with Joseph”
 Exodus 3:6-12 with Deuteronomy 34:9-12 ... Moses is the man
 Job 1-2 and 42 are narrative, framing the poetry of 3-41
 Luke 3:4-6 with Acts 28:26-27; Luke 4 with Acts 28:28 > Gentile mission
 Galatians 5:13-6:5, “law”

Robert Alter, in the award winning *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Perseus Books, 1981: 3-13; **see attached doc**), describes how Genesis 38, the story of Tamar and Judah, is an integral part of the larger Jacob narrative rather than just an interpolated story.

Genesis 37:32-33 “recognize” (*hkr*) is designed to conceal
 w/ Genesis 38:25-26 “recognize” (*hkr*) is designed to reveal/expose
 cf. Genesis 42:7-8 “recognition” where expose and conceal is again worked

Ancient Midrash *Bereshit Rabba* 84:11, 12 saw how Genesis 38 played in the context by commenting: “The Holy One Praised be He said to Judah, ‘You deceived your father with a kid. By your life, Tamar will deceive you with a kid’ ... The Holy One Praised be He said to Judah, ‘You said to your father, *haker-na*. By your life, Tamar will say to you, *haker-na*.’” [*haker* = recognize]

Framing is also important in the New Testament. Luke-Acts is best understood with the Isaianic frame in Luke 4 and Acts 28:25-28 is taken into account (revealing God’s mission to the Gentiles as the central point of Luke-Acts). Another example is the Galatians 5-6 framing of the “works of the flesh” and the “fruit of the Spirit.”

3. Sophisticated devices like Chiasm (common in the ancient world)

Flood Narrative chart illustrated below (p. 7)

4. Chronological Disjunction (scenes, episodes are put in an other-than chronological order. The order the writer chooses tells the story) When working in Kings/Chron one needs a “Harmony” similar to the NT Gospels.

There are many more devices, but these illustrate the domain. They show **“HOW”** the Bible means. These items and more will be noted as we look at OT and NT narrative.

IV. Some Additional Narrative Examples (Below)

Genesis Narrative (Chart below)
 Abraham Narrative (Chart distributed)
 Flood Narrative (Chiasm, chart below and distributed)
 Judges Narrative (Chart distributed)
 David Narrative in Samuel (below)

NARRATIVE EXAMPLES

So how does an average Bible reader “SEE” this stuff? **You see it just like I see it ... reading-research of good sources.**

The Narrative Structure of Genesis *Toledot*

“These are the generations of ...” (KJV)

“This is the account of ...” (NIV)

There are **ten *toledot* structures that organize the narrative of Genesis.**

The account of the heavens and earth	2:4-4:26
The account of Adam’s line	5:1-6:8
The account of Noah’s line	6:9-9:29
The account of Noah’s sons’ line	10:1-11:9
The account of Shem’s line	11:10-26
The account of Terah’s line	11:27-25:11
The account of Ishmael’s line	25:12-18
The account of Isaac’s line	25:19-35:29
The account of Esau’s line	36:1-37:1
The account of Jacob’s line	37:2-50:26

Each of these sections has its own literary pattern, with chiasmic structures being frequently represented (cf. Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*. Zondervan, 2001). Waltke presents the Joseph story as follows:

The Joseph Cycle: concentric pattern (The Account of Jacob’s Line)

- A Introduction: beginning of Joseph story (37:2-11)
- B Jacob mourns “death” of Joseph (37:12-36)
- C Interlude: Judah signified as leader (38:1-30)
- D Joseph’s enslavement in Egypt (39:1-23)
- E Joseph savior of Egypt through disfavor at Pharaoh’s court (40:1-41:57)
- F Journey’s of brothers to Egypt (42:1-43:34)
 - G Brothers pass Joseph’s test of love for brother (44:1-34)
 - G’ Joseph gives up his power over brothers (45:1-28)
- F’ Migration of family to Egypt (46:1-27)
- E’ Joseph savior of family through favor at Pharaoh’s court (46:28-47:12)
- D’ Joseph’s enslavement of Egyptians (47:13-31)
- C’ Interlude: Judah blessed as ruler (48:1-49:28)
- B’ Joseph mourns death of Jacob (49:29-50:14)

A' Conclusion: End of the Joseph story (50:15-26)

The Abraham Narrative (sheet attached)

Genesis Flood Structure (Chiasm; via Gordon Wenham, *Vetus Testamentum* 28 [1978]:336-348; see also Lawlor chart attached)

- A Noah (6:10a)
- B Shem, Ham, and Japheth (6:10b)
- C Ark to be built (6:14-16)
- D Flood announced (6:17)
- E Covenant with Noah (6:18-20)
- F Food in the ark (6:21)
- G Command to enter ark (7:1-3)
- H Seven days waiting for the flood (7:4-5)
- I Seven days waiting for the flood (7:7-10)
- J Entry to ark (7:11-15)
- K Yahweh shuts Noah in (7:16)
- L Forty days of flood (7:17a)
- M Waters increase (7:17b-18)
- N Mountains covered (7:19-20)
- O One hundred fifty days waters prevail (7:21-24)
- P GOD REMEMBERS NOAH (8:1-2)**
- O' One hundred fifty days waters abate (8:3)
- N' Mountain tops visible (8:4-5a)
- M' Waters abate (8:5b)
- L' Forty days end (8:6a)
- K' Noah opens window of ark (8:6b)
- J' Raven and dove leave ark (8:7-9)
- I' Seven days waiting for waters to subside (8:10-11)
- H' Seven days waiting for waters to subside (8:12-13)
- G' Command to leave ark (8:15-22)
- F' Food outside ark (9:1-4)
- E' Covenant with all flesh (9:8-10)
- D' No flood in future (9:11-17)
- C' Ark (9:18a)
- B' Shem, Ham, and Japheth (9:18b)
- A' Noah (9:19)

Narrative Structure of Judges (sheet attached)

David Narrative in 1 Sam 16 to 2 Sam 5:10 (From ABD)

4. 1 Sam 16–2 Sam 5:10. The central character of the books of Samuel does not appear until 1 Sam 16:1. It is as though the literature has withheld this character as long as possible, in an intentional attempt to enhance the drama. It is generally held that with the appearance of David in 1 Sam 16:1–13, we have a new piece of literature, referred to as “The Narrative of the Rise of David,” which extends through 2 Sam 5:10 (though Gunn [1978] divides the material differently).

This material is marked by (1) a narrative quality that allows for playfulness and a kind of naïveté which likely is quite artistically crafted, (2) intense redactional activity so that there is some evidence of traditions which are often repetitious and occasionally contradictory, and (3) an intense fascination with David that is celebrative and uncritical. The combination of narrative mode and the celebrative presentation of David suggests that this material is free from (and perhaps prior to) the disputes concerning monarchy. This material presents the emergence of the institution of monarchy under David as an unmitigated good.

The narrative moves from an idyllic picture of the shepherd boy (1 Sam 16:1–13) to the establishment of the shepherd (king) over Israel (2 Sam 5:3). The central subject of the narrative is the conflict between Saul and David, which of course comes to an end in 1 Samuel 31 with the death of Saul. (It is clear from 2 Sam 9:3 that David and the literature continue to be haunted by the Saul legacy and cannot put its reality and danger to rest.) The break in the narrative between 1 and 2 Samuel is organized around Saul’s death and is marked by the exquisite poem of lament in 2 Sam 1:19–27.

Jobling (1978: 4–25) and Humphreys (1978; 1980) have shown that notwithstanding all the redactional activity and the fact that old narratives have been secondarily employed, **there is indeed an intentional literary design to the construction of the whole.** The story line concerns the unhindered advance of David and the corresponding demise of Saul. The intent of the story line and the artistic skill of literary design are matched by the theological intentionality of the story, for it is clear that David’s heroic buoyancy is held in close relation to the purposes of Yahweh. This theological affirmation of David is evident in the initial transitional episode of 1 Sam 16:1–13 and is reaffirmed in the concluding formula of 2 Sam 5:10: “And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.” The formula perhaps appeals to the old slogans of holy war (“I am with you,”) and is the basis of the claim of Immanuel (“God with us,”), a programmatic claim of the Davidic dynasty (see also 1 Sam 25:28). The narrative is able to discern and articulate in a seemingly unreflective mode the powerful and resilient purpose of Yahweh, so that the very shape of the narrative makes the assertion of God’s will for this dynasty. As the narrative presents it, the person of David overrides the misgivings and disputes of 1 Samuel 7–15. Those issues simply are not present to a Davidic purview of reality.¹

Ruth Narrative Illustration (*Anchor Bible Dictionary* entry on “Ruth”)

Selections illustrate narrative analysis.

RUTH, BOOK OF The story of Ruth and Naomi is a tale of human kindness and devotion transcending the limits of national- or self-interest. It is the book of the OT which has long been cited as a perfect example of the art of telling a story.

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- A. Summary of Plot
 - B. Composition
 - C. Date
 - D. Author
 - E. Text and Versions
 - F. Literary-Exegetical Interpretation
 - 1. Genre
 - 2. External Design
 - 3. Internal Structure and Interpretation
 - 4. Theology
 - G. Legal Allusions

¹ Brueggemann, W. (1992). [Samuel, Book of 1–2: Narrative and Theology](#). In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 5, p. 970). New York: Doubleday.

- H. Purpose
- I. Canon
 - 1. Placement
 - 2. Meanings

A. Summary of Plot

In the days of the judges a family from Bethlehem journeys to Moab because of famine. There the father Elimelech dies, and the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, take Moabite wives, Ruth and Orpah. After ten years the sons also die, leaving no offspring. Their mother Naomi is bereft. Hearing of food in her native land, she decides to return. When the daughters-in-law resolve to accompany her, Naomi bids them stay. Orpah consents but Ruth clings to Naomi. In Bethlehem the two women seek food. Ruth gleans in the fields of a wealthy man named Boaz who belongs to the extended family of Elimelech. His kindness prompts Naomi to conceive a plan for securing Ruth a home. Obeying her mother-in-law, Ruth goes to the threshing floor at night and asks Boaz to marry her. Though willing, he must first determine if a nearer relative wishes to assume responsibility. The unnamed man refuses, and so Boaz marries Ruth. She bears a son, Obed. A blessing to his grandmother Naomi, Obed continues the family line to become the grandfather of David.

[The “Plot” often “seems obvious” ... but its meaning is determined by the literary devices present in the telling. The devices are often not obvious to a casual/surface reading.]

.....

2. External Design. A symmetrical design structures the book (Bertman). Three sections in the first half (chapters 1 and 2) match, in reverse order, three in the second (chapters 3 and 4). The first section is the family history (1:1–5). The second, surrounded by the travels of the women (1:6–7 and 1:22), concerns kinship ties (1:8–18) and reports a meeting between the women of Bethlehem and Naomi (1:19–21). The third, after the introduction of Boaz (2:1), contains five elements:

- (1) Ruth receives Naomi’s permission to glean in the fields (2:2).
- (2) Ruth goes to the fields (2:3).
- (3) Boaz seeks the identity of Ruth (2:4–7).
- (4) Boaz requests that Ruth stay, deems her worthy of blessing, and gives her food. He also orders his men to cooperate (2:8–17).
- (5) Returning to Naomi, Ruth reports the meeting and receives counsel (2:18–23).

The second half of the book opens with five analogous elements:

- (1) Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor (3:1–5).
- (2) Ruth goes to the threshing floor (3:6).
- (3) Boaz seeks the identity of Ruth (3:7–9).
- (4) Boaz deems Ruth worthy of blessing, requests that she stay, and gives her food. He also protects her from other men (3:10–15).
- (5) Returning to Naomi, Ruth reports the meeting and receives counsel (3:16–18).

The next section corresponds to section two of the first half. It concerns kinship ties (4:1–13) and reports a meeting between the women of Bethlehem and Naomi (4:14–17). The genealogy of the closing section (4:18–22) returns in theme to the family history at the beginning. Symmetrical design secures the unity of the story, gives balance and rhythm, highlights important motifs, and suggests the richness and complexity of form, content, and meaning.

.....

The words *ḥesed* and *bārûk/běrukāh* are central. *Ḥesed* connotes faithfulness [covenant loyalty] in action and attitude. *Bārûk* bestows the God-given blessing of life upon another. *Ḥesed* appears alone near the beginning of the story and *bārûk* alone near the end. In the middle they occur together twice. Naomi sees Orpah and Ruth as models of *ḥesed* in their devotion to her and her family (1:8). When she blesses (*bārûk*) the man who took notice of Ruth (2:19), she blesses (*bārûk*) Boaz by Yahweh and cites divine *ḥesed* (2:20). Later when Boaz invokes blessing (*běrukāh*) by Yahweh upon Ruth, he commends her for a second act of *ḥesed* in seeking an heir for Naomi (3:10; cf. 2:12). At last, the women of Bethlehem bless (*bārûk*) Yahweh for goodness to Naomi (4:14).

[End quote]