

# **“And It Happened Like This”: Summary and Unfolding in Biblical Hebrew Narrative Structure**

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## **1. Introduction**

First we will make a brief digression into biblical poetry:

James Kugel titles the opening chapter to his famous work *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* “The Parallelistic Line: ‘A is so, and *what’s more*, B’.” He goes on to qualify this in many ways (as there are indeed many kinds of parallel structures in the Hebrew Bible), yet he maintains that the basic structure or parallelism is still this A, *what’s more*, B pattern: “‘What’s more’ is in itself an inexact version of the concept of subjunction. But it has been stressed in the belief that this approach ultimately leads to a proper orientation toward *all* [poetic] lines.”<sup>1)</sup>

Robert Alter agrees with Kugel in this regard. Alter uses as the basis of his analysis of parallelism those couplets which contain numbers (3,4; 7,8) which he rightly asserts overwhelmingly support an intensification in the second line of biblical Hebrew poetry: “...the logic of numbers in parallel versets is not equivalence but an assertion of *a fortiori*, ‘how much more so’, and this impulse to intensification is also the motor force in thousands of lines of biblical poetry where no numbers are present.”<sup>2)</sup>

Neither Kugel nor Alter base their arguments for this “motor force” on specific grammatical relationships or structures (though Kugel in particular does make use of grammar for the analysis of specific parallel lines). In any case, most often all the grammatical connection that exists between parallel poetic

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1) J. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 1, 57.

2) R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 11.

lines in biblical Hebrew is a simple *vav* (“and”). Thus the term “semantic” (and one might add “structural”) parallelism is most often used to describe the most famous element of biblical Hebrew poetry. Apparently all that is needed for the most salient (to this point at least) element of Hebrew biblical poetry is pure structural conjunction combined with semantic subjunction (to use Kugel’s term) of an intensifying kind.<sup>3)</sup>

An example of this can be found in Psalm 38:11, translated in the NRSV as follows: “My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction, and my neighbors stand far off.” The Good News Translation understands the Hebrew *וְקָרֹבִי* not as “neighbors” but as “family”: “My friends and neighbors will not come near me, because of my sores; even my family keeps away from me.” The GNT rendering is consistent with the ‘A is so, and *what’s more*, B’ understanding of biblical Hebrew parallelism in this verse. And the argument for that understanding is based not on grammar or even so much on lexical semantics *per se* as on the simple structural and logical relationship of the two lines.

This seeming digression from the topic of Hebrew narrative structure into biblical poetry is simply to lay the groundwork for a logical and structural analysis of the texts in question as opposed to a grammatical (or some other methodological) treatment. My point will be that just as with semantic parallelism, simple ordering and repetition of elements combined with content related in some possible logical way(s) is often enough to recognize narrative discourse strategies which in turn can be important for translation.

In particular, there are a number of texts (and most likely quite a few more than have been gathered below as first examples) which follow a kind of summary/unfolding narrative pattern. In this pattern, there is a brief summary statement, followed by a detailed unfolding of the narrative. The summary is then repeated later on (in some form), as if to catch the reader up to the story in progress. The “unfolding” section forms a kind of back-story for the summary and the subsequent continuation of the narrative.

Often it clarifies the summary/unfolding structure to translate (literally or imaginatively) the equivalent of “and it happened like this”, or a relevant

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3) Though important work has been done in biblical Hebrew poetry since the time of Alter and Kugel, the basic outline of semantic (and structural) parallelism has remained unchanged. See for e.g. J. K. Kuntz, “Biblical Hebrew Poetry in Recent Research, Part II”, *Currents in Research* 7 (1999), 35-79.

variant. The examples below should illustrate this point clearly. As with semantic parallelism, all that connects the elements of the summary/unfolding structure (if anything at all does) is the simple conjunction “and” (Hebrew *vav*) which otherwise functions as a straightforward narrative element in the text.

This structure is a kind of repetition, and as such takes its place alongside a number of repetitive structures in the Hebrew Bible. Besides semantic parallelism, there are numerous other repeated words and phrases which are used in various literary devices such as *inclusio* and as means of achieving emphasis. Perhaps the most common repetitive pattern in the Hebrew Bible are the many cases of extended instructions followed by word-for-word descriptions of compliance to those instructions.

This particular pattern is repetitive not so much at the word or phrase level (though it can be), but as with the majority of cases of semantic parallelism, is rather at the level of basic content and logic. It will be argued that once one understands one element of the structure as a summary, the unfolding falls into place and the whole makes more sense than otherwise would be the case.

This structure also looks like an interruption in many cases (see below). As such, translators will perhaps wish to consider restructuring so as to remove the interruption. But restructuring would not always be practical (moving Gen 11:1-9 before Gen 10, for example), and such a restructuring would necessarily do away with either the summary statement or the return to the main narrative thread. Instead, understanding (and perhaps even translating) a phrase such as “And it happened like this...” between the summary and the unfolding reveals the structure of the pattern and makes the “interruption” disappear. This corresponds to the parallel structure in poetry necessitating (at least at times) in translation an addition of “not only... but even more so...”.

What follows below are eleven different examples of this phenomenon of summary/unfolding, chosen for their clarity in illustrating the structure. The conclusion will deal with implications for translators, including possibly translating “And it happened like this...” in some languages and/or cases to clearly represent this often not-recognized narrative structure.

## 2. Examples:

## 2.1. Creation

### 2.1.1. Text: Gen 1:1, 2ff:

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning when **God created the heavens and the earth**,<sup>4)</sup>

<sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters...

<sup>2:4</sup>These are the generations of the **heavens and the earth** when they were **created**<sup>5)</sup>

### 2.1.2. Commentary:

Genesis 1:1ff is so well-plowed a field that one hesitates to comment further on it. The UBS Handbook for translators states: “All the ancient versions as well as many modern ones understand verse 1 to be an independent sentence, which serves as a general heading for the entire story of creation and affirms the creation of the earth in the formless state described in verse 2. Other scholars point out that the Hebrew form of the phrase translated In the beginning should be translated as a subordinate time clause, and so “In the beginning when God created...”<sup>6)</sup>

Nahum Sarna seems to take the first view, and sees taking verse 1 as an independent clause as “a momentous assertion about the nature of God: that He is wholly outside of time, just as He is outside of space, both of which He proceeds to create.”<sup>7)</sup> Claus Westermann goes further: “The sentence in 1:1 is not the beginning of an account of creation, but a heading that takes in everything in the narrative in one single sentence...”<sup>8)</sup>

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4) All biblical citations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted: B. M. Metzger, et. al., *The New Revised Standard Version Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

5) The text examples will be formatted to show the summary/unfolding structure more clearly, except for Genesis 14, where both the standard format and the summary/unfolding structure are represented.

6) Thus NRSV. But even in this case, a slight variant of our model “[And] It happened like this...” fits quite nicely here.

7) N. M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 5.

If one follows the summary/unfolding narrative structure to interpret the passage, 1:1 is taken as a kind of title or section heading, and what follows thereafter is an explanation/expansion of that general summary statement. Seeing it this way actually supports the interpretation of the focus of creation in Genesis as being that of order out of chaos more naturally than that of creation as *ex nihilo* (which is then simply not in view), since it throws the narrative back to the start of the story.

One way to make that relationship of summary/unfolding explicit would be to translate (or at least understand) “And it happened like this...” or something similar before verse two. This makes the text sound like a story-teller inviting his or her audience to lean in and absorb the details of the up-coming tale, having back-grounded the grandiose opening general summary statement.

## 2.2. The Flood

### 2.2.1. Text: Gen 6:5-10; 6:11-9:19:

<sup>5</sup>The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup>And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup>So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord. <sup>9</sup>**These are the descendants of Noah.** Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. <sup>10</sup>**And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.**

<sup>11</sup>Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence...

<sup>9:18</sup>**The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan.** <sup>19</sup>**These three were the sons of Noah;** and from these the whole earth was peopled.

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8) C. Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 94.

### 2.2.2. Commentary:

This example and the next one are complex variations on the summary/unfolding structure in that they form a kind of “chain” of summaries/unfoldings.<sup>9)</sup> This already was true of Genesis 2:4a above, but only works once (for Gen 2:4a itself as both an *inclusio* for Gen 1:1 as well as the summary for the story of creation in Gen chapter 2), while here the structure is first chained (Gen 9:18) with the next example and then that example is in turn interwoven (Gen 10) with the one following it.

It is tempting to see the *inclusios* at 6:9-10; 9:18-19 as each beginning new sections (see the NRSV section headings). But seen as structural elements in the summary/unfolding pattern they form nice bookends to the detailed story of the Flood that comes in between. Furthermore, the Flood story begins nicely in 6:11: “*Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence...*” and the following story of Noah’s drunkenness (9:20-28) also begins nicely **after** the mention of the sons of Noah: <sup>20</sup>*Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard...* Of course in these chains of summaries/unfoldings each *inclusio* ending once section begins the next one, and so has a double function (see thus 6:9-10; 9:18-19; 10:1, all of which say with only slightly different wording that Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth).

## 2.3. Noah’s drunkenness

### 2.3.1. Text: Gen 9:18-19; 9:20-10:32:

<sup>9:18</sup>**The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. <sup>19</sup>These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.**

<sup>20</sup>Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. <sup>21</sup>He drank some of the wine and became drunk...

<sup>10:32</sup>**These are the families of Noah’s sons, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.**

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9) These examples as well as those from Deuteronomy were pointed out to me in private correspondence by Lénart de Regt.

### 2.3.2. Commentary:

This example not only is chained to the previous and following examples, but is interwoven with the following example. Thus while 9:18-19 are closely echoed in 10:32, including not only the names of Noah's sons but the fact that the earth was populated by them after the flood, but in 10: we get an extra mention of the sons of Noah formula, and the next opening *inclusio* (“*These are the descendants of Shem...*”) comes at 10:31, just before the closing bookend to this cycle in 10:32 (<sup>32</sup>“*These are the families of Noah's sons, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood...*”).

## 2.4. The Tower of Babel

### 2.4.1. Text: Gen 10; 11:

<sup>1</sup>**These are the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth;** children were born to them after the flood...

<sup>10:24</sup>**Arpachshad** became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. <sup>25</sup>To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. <sup>26</sup>Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, <sup>27</sup>Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup>Obal, Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup>Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the descendants of Joktan. <sup>30</sup>The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar, the hill country of the east. <sup>31</sup>**These are the descendants of Shem,** by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. <sup>32</sup>These are the families of Noah's sons, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

### *The Tower of Babel*

<sup>11:1</sup>Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup>And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for

ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”<sup>5</sup>The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” <sup>8</sup>So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

### ***Descendants of Shem***

<sup>10</sup>**These are the descendants of Shem.** When Shem was one hundred years old, he became the father of **Arpachshad** two years after the flood;...

#### **2.4.2. Commentary:**

This example is easy to overlook, since it comes at a chapter break as well as a switch in discourse type from summary to unfolding. In chapter 10 we find what is sometimes called the table of nations, a list of the descendants of Noah after the Flood. At the end of this list comes the summary statement which also functions as a kind of *inclusio* to the chapter (see 10:1). Then in chapter 11 the discourse abruptly changes to a folk narrative (unfolding): the story of the Tower of Babel.

The problem in this case is sometimes noticed by sharp-eyed translators, who point out that it is illogical that all the people of the earth speak one language and live in one place (Shinar), when in chapter 10 we see them dispersed in various places and seemingly speaking different languages. In fact, the text of 10:25 “... *for in his days the earth was divided...*” seems to presuppose exactly the story of the Tower of Babel. Interestingly, the UBS Handbook passes over this issue without comment. When commentators do notice, it is usually to simply document the inconsistency: “...note does need to be taken that the way in which humanity spread, and language developed [in chapter 10], is at odds with the story told in Genesis 11...”<sup>10</sup>

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10) D. W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 65.

There are several possibilities to explain this situation. One is that in the transmission of the text these elements were arranged not in terms of strict chronology, but by some other narrative logic (as with the Gospel of John vs. the Synoptics, for example). Another is that there were two dispersions, one in chapter 10 and another in chapter 11. Yet another, quite close to our suggestion, is that chapter 11 is a flashback to the situation at the beginning of chapter 10. But the summary/unfolding proposal accounts for the data in the most elegant and comprehensive way. Understanding (and perhaps even putting in some translations) “And it happened like this...” at the beginning of chapter 11 makes clear what was arguably the narrative intention of the collocation of chapters 10 and 11 next to each other in order with their specific content.

Sarna has understood this well without explicitly dealing with the literary issue: “...the biblical Narrator is disturbed by the vast diversity of languages that characterizes the human race. Given the Bible’s presupposition that all mankind constitutes one great family traceable to a common ancestry, it becomes necessary to account for the rise of a polyglot humanity. The present narrative deals with this development.”<sup>11)</sup> Westermann seems not to understand the literary structure as presented here. He says of 10:32b: “‘And from them the nations spread on the earth after the flood’, does not suit the context very well.” Nevertheless, he does capture much of the force of the beginning of 11:1: “The וַיְהִי is more like our ‘once upon a time’ which introduces the situation at the beginning of the tale.”<sup>12)</sup>

## 2.5. Abraham, the king of Sodom, and Melchizedek

### 2.5.1. Text: Gen 14:17, 18ff:

#### *Abram Blessed by Melchizedek*

<sup>17</sup>After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). <sup>18</sup>And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. <sup>19</sup>He blessed him and said,

11) N. M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 80.

12) C. Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 513, 542.

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
maker of heaven and earth;  
<sup>20</sup>and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him one tenth of everything. <sup>21</sup>Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” <sup>22</sup>But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have sworn to the Lord, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup>that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ <sup>24</sup>I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me— Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their share.”

### 2.5.2. Commentary:

This example is one of those most difficult for translators to understand as it stands. Not only are the king of Sodom and the king of Salem mentioned in close proximity to each other, but the king of Sodom remains unnamed, while the brief story of Melchizedek (somewhat rudely) interrupts what otherwise seems to be a story of the encounter of Abram with the king of Sodom after Abram returns from rescuing Lot along with much of the king’s wealth.

To make matters worse, the format (and title) of the text in most versions does not expose the narrative structure of the Hebrew text, but rather reflects a decision about the theological prominence of the role of Melchizedek in the story(ies). Thus the title in NRSV is *Abram Blessed by Melchizedek*, and there are no breaks of any kind in verses 18 and 21 (where the story of the king of Sodom changes to that of Melchizedek and back again). Finally, the fact that most of the Melchizedek section is in poetry means that the format (over-)reflects that structure while ignoring the basic narrative form.

The UBS Handbook only deals with half of the problem. It suggests, with no explanation of how to handle the text as it is, that verse 17 may be the result of some kind of textual corruption. For verse 21ff they do better: “Verse 21 continues the narrative that was interrupted at verse 18 with the Melchizedek episode. In some languages it may be necessary to make a transition to verse 21 that will show that the main story line now continues.” Sarna does better when he states: “...the intrusive nature of the report here, interrupting the smooth

sequence of verses 17 and 21, is obvious... [yet]. The artfulness with which the Melchizedek episode is integrated into the narrative is proven by the priest-king's mention of Abram's victory..."<sup>13)</sup> Westermann agrees: "וַיֵּאמֶר at the beginning of v. 21 follows directly on אַבְרָם in v. 17."<sup>14)</sup>

One can see how the underlying narrative structure could be made more explicit by arranging the text (and title) above as follows:

***Abram returns victorious from battle***

<sup>17</sup>After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, **the king of Sodom** went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

<sup>18</sup>And **King Melchizedek of Salem** brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. <sup>19</sup>He blessed him and said,

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
maker of heaven and earth;

<sup>20</sup>and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

And Abram gave him one tenth of everything.

<sup>21</sup>Then **the king of Sodom** said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." <sup>22</sup>But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the Lord, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup>that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, 'I have made Abram rich.' <sup>24</sup>I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me— Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their share."

Although it is a bit of an unusual example, it fits the summary/unfolding pattern as well. If one imagines understanding (or even translating) "And it happened like this..." before verse 18, then verse 17 becomes a general statement about Abram's return and encounter with the king of Sodom, and 18 begins that

13) N. M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 109.

14) C. Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 12-36* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 202.

story with Abram’s prior encounter with Melchizedek. That story picks up on with its main line again in verse 21, but seen in this way, 17-20 is simply the first small act in the two-part structure of the triumphant return of Abram from battle.

## 2.6. The Lord appears to Abraham at Mamre

### 2.6.1. Text: Gen 18:1, 2-33:

<sup>1</sup>The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.

<sup>2</sup>He looked up and saw three men standing near him...

<sup>33</sup>And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

### 2.6.2. Commentary:

One immediately notices that in this example the *inclusio* is not so prominent as in other cases, yet the Lord and Abraham are repeated, as are verbs of appearing and speaking, leaving and returning.<sup>15)</sup> It is also a clear case of where a translator could easily get confused about whether what happened in 18:1 was a separate incident to what happened in 18:2-33. And in that sense it is very relevant to the study of the summary/unfolding pattern.

## 2.7. Joseph tells his dream to his brothers

### 2.7.1. Text: Gen 37:5, 6-8:

<sup>5</sup>Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

<sup>6</sup>He said to them, “Listen to this dream that I dreamed. <sup>7</sup>There we were,

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15) L. de Regt, “Flashbacks and Other Forms of Non-Chronological Arrangement in Hebrew Narrative”, *Tulkojums – Kultūrvēsturisks Notikums – Bībeles tulkojumi: teorija, vēsture, mūsdienu prakse (Valsts Valodas Komisija Raksti 5)* (Rīga: Latvijas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja, Zinātne, 2009), 132.

binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.”<sup>8</sup> His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?”

So **they hated him even more** because of his dreams and his words.

### 2.7.2. Commentary:

This is a small, but classic example of the form in question. It is easy to miss the structure here. For example, Westermann states: “vv. 5–6 are introductory and announce the dream; v. 7 presents the dream itself and v. 8 the reaction of the brothers.”<sup>16</sup> This comment misses the fact that the reaction of the brothers is already found in v. 5 in summary form.

## 2.8. From Sinai to Paran

### 2.8.1. Text: Num 10:11-12; 10:13-12:16:

#### *Departure from Sinai*

<sup>11</sup>In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant. <sup>12</sup>Then the Israelites set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud settled down **in the wilderness of Paran**.

<sup>13</sup>They set out for the first time at the command of the Lord by Moses...

<sup>12:16</sup>After that the people set out from Hazeroth, and camped **in the wilderness of Paran**.

### 2.8.2. Commentary:

Here the UBS handbook recognizes the phenomenon:

A typical narrative pattern in the Pentateuch is to begin with a short

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16) C. Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 37–50* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 38.

summary of the account to come and then to give the details. Part II-A begins with a very short summary of the journey from Sinai to Paran, near the Land of Canaan (10:11-12). The same journey is then presented again in what follows, but in much greater detail (10:13–12:16). Thus, the Israelites’ same encampment in the wilderness of Paran, which was already mentioned in the summary (in 10:12), is mentioned again at the end (in 12:16).<sup>17)</sup>

Though the handbook authors claim it is a “typical narrative pattern in the Pentateuch”, (and indeed it may well be), it has rarely been discussed either in the biblical commentaries or in translation studies. As to the summary in Numbers 10:11-12, the handbook goes on to (correctly) state:

This opening paragraph gives a summary of what is to come in 10:13-12:16, as explained above. Chronologically, then, 10:13-12:16 does not follow after this opening paragraph, but overlaps it. If this is not understood, the reader will draw the wrong conclusion that the people arrived in Paran (10:13) before they came to Kibroth-Hattaavah and Hazereth (11:35) and somehow went back to Paran again (12:16)!<sup>18)</sup>

And finally again at 12:16 they conclude:

This verse brings the Israelites’ journey from Sinai to Paran (10:13-12:16) to its conclusion. The encampment in the wilderness of Paran was mentioned already in 10:12 (in the initial summary of this journey in 10:11-12).<sup>19)</sup>

An added phrase such as “And it happened like this”: (or a well-placed sub-title) may be justified in some translations just before 10:13ff. That this is such an extended unfolding makes it a bit more difficult to represent in translation. The careful use of subtitles at 10:11 (“From Sinai to Paran”) and in chapter 12 (Miriam punished; “arrival at Paran”) may help to show the itinerary

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17) L. de Regt, and E. Wendland, *A Handbook on the Book of Numbers* (New York: UBS, forthcoming, 2015). Page numbers are not cited as the document is still in pre-publication (electronic) form, but the citations will be easily found according to the biblical references.

18) Ibid.

19) Ibid.

structure within which the various story elements play out.

## 2.9. The Israelites spy out the land of Canaan

### 2.9.1. Text: Num 13:21, 22–24:

<sup>21</sup>So **they went up and spied out the land** from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath.

<sup>22</sup>They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) <sup>23</sup>And they came to the Wadi Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them. They also brought some pomegranates and figs. <sup>24</sup>That place was called the Wadi Eshcol, because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down from there.

<sup>25</sup>At the end of forty days **they returned from spying out the land.**

### 2.9.2. Commentary:

If the previous example involved a long explanation, this one is extremely short. Again the UBS handbook on Numbers has noted this case:

“It is recommended to start a new paragraph at verse 22, since verses 22-24 are a more detailed description of the journey in the south of the land, while verse 21 is a short, more general, summary of the journey throughout the land, from south to north.”

But they miss the fact that the unfolding actually ends in v. 25 (“spied... spying”) and not in v. 24. Both NRSV and CEV have a new section start in v. 25, but according to the summary/unfolding structure in vv. 21-25, v. 25 should come at the end of the previous section.

## 2.10. David mourns Saul and Jonathan

### 2.10.1. Text: 2Sa 1:11-12; 13ff:

<sup>11</sup>Then **David** took hold of his clothes and tore them; and all the men who were with him did the same. <sup>12</sup>They **mourned and wept**, and fasted

until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

<sup>13</sup>David said to the young man who had reported to him, “Where do you come from?” He answered, “I am the son of a resident alien, an Amalekite.” <sup>14</sup>David said to him, “Were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?” <sup>15</sup>Then David called one of the young men and said, “Come here and strike him down.” So he struck him down and he died. <sup>16</sup>David said to him, “Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have killed the Lord’s anointed.’ ”

<sup>17</sup>**David intoned this lamentation** over Saul and his son Jonathan. <sup>18</sup>(He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said:

<sup>19</sup>Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!

How the mighty have fallen!

<sup>20</sup>Tell it not in Gath,

proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon;

or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice,

the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult...

### 2.10.2. Commentary:

Below we will look some at the neuroscientific underpinnings of the move from correlation to causation and its relation to creating and recognizing the summary/unfolding pattern, but the next example is one of the better examples of the role of logic in this pattern.

The story we have in the first chapter of 2 Samuel is that of David resting at Ziklag after defeating the Amalekites in battle. A man (interestingly also an Amalekite, but a resident alien in Israel and presumably a soldier in Saul’s army) comes to David with the news of Saul’s defeat at the hands of the Philistines. He claims to have killed Saul himself, and as proof Saul’s death, hands David Saul’s crown and armlet. He apparently expects a reward (or at least a commendation) from David in that he offers the treasure to David, apparently as booty. It would appear that he tries to cover the possibility that David might not be entirely pleased by stating that Saul was going to die anyway when he killed

him at Saul's request as an act of mercy.

Then in verses 11-12 we have a brief statement of David's reaction, as well as that of David's soldiers:

<sup>11</sup>Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them; and all the men who were with him did the same. <sup>12</sup>They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

What happens next (if the text is taken as strictly chronological) is a bit surprising for a couple of reasons. David, having already heard the Amalakite's story, apparently now dries his tears for a moment and turns to the man and asks where he is from. After hearing he is an Amalakite (something he had already been told in verse 8), David angrily accuses him of daring to raise his hand against the Lord's anointed and has the man killed immediately.<sup>20</sup> By itself this would not be so strange. But what follows in vv. 17ff is the famous lament that David makes over Saul and Jonathan, meaning (in this reading) that David interrupts his mourning to have the man killed and then immediately returns to his mourning already in progress.

But also strange is the fact that the Amalakite (in a straight chronological reading) would be waiting around all afternoon to receive a reward that would look less and less likely as time wore on and the mourning by David and his men continued.<sup>21</sup> Far more intelligible and logical is that the reader of this text is meant to understand an implicit "And it happened like this..." before verse 13. In this reading the first act of David's mourning would be to have the Amalakite killed, from whence he goes on to the lament proper (summarized already in verses 11-12). Understanding verses 11-12; 13ff as an example of a summary/unfolding narrative pattern solves the apparent logical inconsistencies

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20) While the text indicates that David has the man killed for daring to kill the Lord's anointed, it may not be irrelevant that he is also an Amalakite (see 1:1). It still is strange that David would ask where the man was from, given that he already should know from verse 8.

21) Commentators generally agree that this was the Amalakite's intention: to get credit for killing Saul from Saul's presumed enemy and successor David, while at the same time walking the line as a resident alien as to his freedom to take such action. Clearly it was a miscalculation. See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Dover: Van Gorcum, 1986), 638ff.; A. F. Campbell, *2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 21.

in the text, and reveals the story of the execution of the Amalakite as the opening act of the larger narrative of the lament by David and his soldiers summarized in verses 11-12.

## 2.11. Elijah at Horeb

### 2.11.1. Text: 1Ki 19:9b; 11ff:

<sup>9b</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>10</sup>He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

Elijah Meets God at Horeb [move section head to before 9b?]

<sup>11</sup>He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; <sup>12</sup>and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. <sup>13</sup>When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>14</sup>He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” <sup>15</sup>Then the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. <sup>16</sup>Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. <sup>17</sup>Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. <sup>18</sup>Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

### 2.11.2. Commentary:

Of all the examples given here, this one is the least like the rest. The summary is odd, since it consists of nothing more than the core question and answer, succinctly stated in nearly the exact wording contained in the expanded story that follows (see bold text above).

This appears nearly exactly (but for slightly different first phrase) as here buried in the text of the story that follows. But if this is taken as a summary (understood as something like “The time the word of the Lord came to Elijah saying ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” or even simply moving the NRSV title of 11ff — *Elijah Meets God at Horeb* — to before 9b), the repetition of what follows the mention of the word of the Lord or the Lord speaking to Elijah no longer is strange, and the reader is not forced to think of verse 9b-10 as a sort of flash-forward once he or she has read the story in 11ff. Again the combination of the collocation of 9b-10 just before 11ff along with the illogic of the repetition should encourage the reader to consider a summary/unfolding reading here. Otherwise the modern reader is forced to consider some kind of long-range textual issue of homoeoarcton or homoeoteleuton.<sup>22)</sup> Verses 15-18 return the reader to the narrative main line, and contain the encounter for which vv. 11-13 are merely an introduction.

Apparently there is considerable variation in the form a summary can take (see Gen 10-11). One must assume that if this is not an error of some kind, the ancient readers and hearers would very likely already have come to the text with the necessary expectations to immediately recognize the summary/unfolding pattern, even when the summary consists in nothing more than the repetition of the core statement in the unfolding. This could be made clearer in printed translations by moving the NRSV section heading “Elijah Meets God at Horeb” to just before 1 Kings 19:9b to better reflect the summary/unfolding structure of the text.

Here the UBS Handbook records the fact that verse 14 repeats exactly the content of verse 10, but makes no further comment on the matter. Other

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22) This commentary simplifies somewhat the situation in the passage. One could argue that the summary in fact includes verses 11-12, or even through verse 13. And it could even be argued that there is a summary/unfolding (vv. 11-12, 13ff.) within a summary/unfolding (vv. 9b-10, 11ff). But it seems the best place for the unfolding “And it happened like this” is in verse 11. See J. T. Walsh, *1 Kings* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 274ff.

commentaries divide up the text in various ways, but without taking the view presented here.<sup>23)</sup>

### **3. Implications for translators:**

What implications does the above have for translators? We have seen how often the commentaries do not deal with the issue of summary/unfolding, even when the commentaries are intended for translators. But there are languages and cultures which seem to require more explanation than translators have been accustomed to look for or provide in the past. The reason for this seems to be both linguistic and cultural. Mayan languages and cultures in particular are often quite insistent on details often not clearly provided in the biblical texts or in majority language translations.

Some of this is straightforwardly a matter of grammar and lexicon: if the language is inclusive/exclusive, or if it is ergative, or if it resists nominalization, certain adjustments will need to be made. And if directionality is a part of the verbal system, this aspect will have to be present in the translation even if it is not explicitly a part of the source texts. And if brother/sister family relationships are instead rendered with older sibling/younger sibling, the translator will have to try to guess which people in the text are older and younger when the text does not say.

It may not be an accident then that the examples above all were uncovered in translation checking sessions, most with Mayan language projects. The seeming desire on the part of many translators from this linguistic and cultural group to have things as specified as possible has led through the years to having to answer questions such as why the people of the earth all lived in one place and spoke one language after the text clearly states they lived in many places speaking various languages.

Having to answer these questions as a matter of curiosity is one thing, but translators are generally interested in having their audiences understand the text as close to as well as the original receptors did as possible. Thus one can see a

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23) V. Fritz, *A Continental Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 197.; S. J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (Dallas: Word Inc., 2003), 235.

range of options, from preserving the verbal structure of the form and letting the modern receptors discover the pattern implicitly (as the original receptors presumably did), to highlighting the structure in the format of the text, to using various helps, to finally even putting “And it happened like this...” or its equivalent in the text.

<Keywords>

Summary, Unfolding, Structure, Inclusio, Repetition.

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<Abstract>

## **“And It Happened Like This”: Summary and Unfolding in Biblical Hebrew Narrative Structure**

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In a number of passages in the Hebrew Bible, one finds what at first seem to be repetitions in the text. Not simply repetitions of events, but also at the beginning and end of the repetitions of the events, repetitions of actual wording. What is more, these seeming repetitions make it appear that the biblical author is confused about temporal sequence, since the same events are being repeated and in the repetition even earlier events are being related following later events (see Gen 10-11). But upon closer examination a distinctive structure appears: one of summary and unfolding. First will appear a summary statement, followed by a repetition of the contents of the summary in detailed form (the unfolding). Finally, a phrase repeated from the summary (an *inclusio*) closes the unfolding section and brings the reader back to the main narrative line. Eleven different examples of this will be documented, and a brief concluding comment made on the implications of this structure for translators of the Bible.