

# From stumbling blocks to cornerstones: The function of problematic episodes in the Primary History and in Ezra-Nehemiah<sup>1</sup>

Jan-Wim WESSELIUS

In the historical books of the Old Testament, there are a number of difficult chapters and episodes, where it seems very hard, if at all possible, to read the text as one coherent narrative. Most of these instances of non-linear narrative have already attracted attention in antiquity, and have since been discussed in thousands of articles and books. Best known, of course, are the cases where two stories appear to contradict each other, such as the two creation stories in Genesis 1-2 or the two versions of the first introduction of David at Saul's court, either because of his qualities as a musician or because he defeated and killed the Philistine giant Goliath, in 1 Samuel 16-17. Cases which have also puzzled the exegetes of all centuries are supposed insertions of a few verses or an entire chapter into an otherwise apparently unitary story or narrative cycle, such as the appearance of Melchizedek in the story of Abram's fight with the kings of the East in Genesis 14, or the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in the Life of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. To these instances of evident discontinuity one can also add a number of instances of what one could call super-continuity, where we see clear intertextual connections which are unexpected within the confines of a linear narrative. To this category belong the cases which are usually designated as duplications, such as the three stories about a patriarch letting his wife pose as his sister (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:1-11) or the two cases of Hagar leaving Abraham's family (Gen. 16:1-14; 21:8-21),<sup>2</sup> or elements which appear to 'cling together' in spite of belonging to different stories. A famous case of the latter phenomenon, which we shall discuss below, is the transition from the nearly identical lists of people returning from the Babylonian captivity around 539 BCE in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 to the episodes following,

<sup>1</sup> Part of this article was read as a paper for the *Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap* (Dutch Old Testament Society) on 2 June 2005 in Nijmegen. Translations of biblical texts will be given according to the *Revised Standard Version*, with some adaptations if a more literal agreement with the Hebrew text is necessary.

<sup>2</sup> See regarding such cases especially Aulikki Nahkola, *Double Narratives in the Old Testament. The Foundations of Method in Biblical Criticism* (BZAW 290; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001).

which describe the restoration of the altar and the public reading of the Law, respectively: completely different stories which describe events almost a century apart, which begin with almost the same sentences. To this number we shall add a few less obtrusive cases below.

In the modern scholarly study of these cases, several conflicting tendencies can be distinguished, each of which attempts to identify the regular state of the text underlying the supposed irregularities in our present text. The various approaches can be divided into two main groups. Firstly, the present state of the text can be explained as the result of an historical development, for example the episode of Melchizedek supposedly having been inserted secondarily into the story of Genesis 14, or two different stories about David making the acquaintance of king Saul having been incorporated into the Bible text as we now have it, without the differences and contradictions first having been ironed out. Such cases are therefore understandably regarded as a support for the critical study of the text of the Old Testament, which we see in its most extensive form in the Documentary Hypothesis in the Graf-Wellhausen tradition. The authors who follow this lead try to tune in to all the greater and smaller signs of discontinuity in the text, and if at all feasible, attempt to use these for reconstructing a historical model which can explain the present discontinuous or super-continuous text as resulting from a number of continuous texts.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, one can try to solve the problem on the literary level. This literary approach, by contrast with the historical one, draws our attention to the continuity which can be discerned in these cases besides the evident discontinuous and super-continuous features. It also tends to minimise the significance of the discontinuous elements, for example by indicating comparable cases in other literatures or by explaining the discontinuities by referring to the psychology of people in antiquity, thus explaining how, what appears to a modern eye as irregular, was in fact, regular and normal. In other words, this approach is in many cases an attempt to convince us that there is

<sup>3</sup> Probably the best and most complete survey of such historical analysis of in particular the Pentateuch is C. Houtman, *Der Pentateuch. Die Geschichte seiner Erforschung neben einer Auswertung* (CBET 9; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994). Compare also Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction à la lecture du Pentateuque. Clés pour l'inter-prétation des cinq premiers livres de la Bible* (Le livre et le rouleau 5; Brussels: Éditions Lessius, 2000) and, for a popular presentation, R.E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit Books, 1987).

nothing wrong with the text as we have it now.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that a clear disadvantage of most literary explanations of these cases is, that we still do not understand why these cases of discontinuity or super-continuity are found at the places where they are now, unless we are content with the idea that the author wanted to show off his literary capabilities in this way in more or less random locations.

In this article I will argue that there is no narrative regularity underlying these cases, whether historical or literary, and that we are dealing with very real and intentional discontinuities and super-continuities, balanced by signs of continuity. The main purpose of the presence of these irregularities apparently is to focus the readers' attention on the location in the text of the events narrated, especially in connection with their position within the historical context in the books Genesis – 2 Kings (nowadays often designated as the Primary History), from the Creation until the aftermath of the taking of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BCE. We shall see that the same observation applies in a somewhat different way in the book Ezra-Nehemiah. We shall divide the relevant instances into four different types, numbered I-IV below and in Table 1 and 2, with the addition of a fifth ('V') in the discussion of Ezra-Nehemiah and in Table 3. For most cases, the individual texts will be discussed very briefly, with short notes and references to some key publications from the abundant secondary literature only.

### **Interruption of the narrative**

In Genesis 14, the patriarch Abram pursues and defeats five kings from the east, who had plundered the city of Sodom and abducted his nephew Lot with his family. He returns all the prisoners and the spoils of Sodom, and is welcomed by the king of Sodom on his return, but the story of their meeting is suddenly interrupted in verse 18 by a second encounter, this time of Abram with a certain king-priest Melchizedek, who rules over the city of Salem, which is almost certainly identical with Jerusalem. Melchizedek blesses Abram in the name of 'God most high, creator of heaven and earth', two divine epithets which are well known in the ancient West Semitic world.

<sup>4</sup> The most ambitious of the studies with this purpose is still that of Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961). The very numerous literary studies of the decades after about 1975 attempt to prove this only for details of the Pentateuch or the historical books Joshua – 2 Kings, usually not for the entire work.

Abram gives Melchizedek a tithe, one tenth, apparently of the possessions which he took from the kings, an amount which reminds us of the usual source of income of the Israelite priests in Jerusalem in later days. After this interlude, Abram's encounter with the king of Sodom continues, again without any formal transition.

It is interesting to note that the verses 18-20 can be left out of the text without inflicting any damage on the remaining account or leaving any kind of hiatus, which appears to support the commonly held critical position that this episode is a secondary insertion in its present place. By contrast, literary researchers point out that Abram's words to the king of Sodom in verse 22 look like a perfect copy of what Melchizedek said to Abram three verses before, with only the addition of the name of his own God: 'the Lord, God most high, creator of heaven and earth'. They also note that the Melchizedek episode is also connected with its present context by means of a wordplay on the consonants *mem-gimel-nun*, which appear in Melchizedek's congratulations for Abram: 'who has delivered (*miggen*) your enemies into your hand', and in God's promise to Abram in 15:1, 'I will be for you a shield (*magen*)', and another wordplay on the consonants *ayin-sin/shin-resh*, which we find in Abram giving a tithe (מעשר) to Melchizedek, and saying to the king of Sodom: 'So that you cannot say "I made Abram rich (הי עשר)"'.

It is hardly surprising that in view of these observations the question arises of whether we are indeed dealing with the result of editorial work, and not with the work of one author only.<sup>5</sup> But in the latter case, how are we to explain the very real discontinuity in this chapter? In other words, why did the author not simply write something like: 'At the very moment that Abram saw the king of Sodom, he first met a certain Melchizedek'?

We shall leave this question for the time being, and shift our attention to Genesis 38, where the exegetes' dilemma is much the same. The end of Genesis 37 and the beginning of 39 are closely connected: in fact the last verse of chapter 37, 'The Midianites sold him [Joseph] in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard', is echoed in 39:1, 'Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there'. If

<sup>5</sup> For example in D. Elgavish, 'The Encounter of Abram and Melchizedek King of Salem: A Covenant Establishing Ceremony', in: André Wénin (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Genesis* (BETHL 155; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 495-508: 505.

the chapter and the near-repetition in the verses preceding and following it had not been there, we could simply have read on without noticing anything irregular. So Genesis 38 with its story about Judah and Tamar really looks like a *corpus alienum* in the context of Joseph's biography. Yet it has often been pointed out that the chapter in many other respects fits very well in the place where it is now. Firstly there is an extremely clear intertextual connection between Judah's proposal to deceive his father Jacob and his own deception at the hands of Tamar, formally indicated by the high degree of similarity between the interaction of Jacob and his sons in 37:31-33 and that of Judah and Tamar in 38:25-26; and secondly the change of heart of Judah from his base behaviour in chapter 37 and 38 to his felicitous and magnanimous interventions in chapter 43 and 44 is perfectly well explained by his experience in the episode of Tamar. Moreover, there are a number of additional links between Genesis 38 and the rest of the life of Joseph, which can hardly be ascribed to coincidence.<sup>6</sup> In this case also, historical and literary explanations have been proffered, but no theory is capable of explaining all the features of the case.

One can, of course, attempt to have the best of both explanations, both in these two cases and elsewhere, by assuming that there were literary or religious reasons why the supposed editors of such texts acted as they did, making one strikingly well-formed literary work out of several sources, while apparently refraining from removing the seams between them: the editor apparently wanted the discontinuities to be in the text for some reason. This is an interesting point of view, which gives at last a partial explanation of the present state of the text (though the motives of the supposed editor remain basically unexplained), but then the question inevitably rises as to whether in that case the assumption of a junction of several originally separate texts is still necessary. Can we not simply assume that we are dealing with a literary strategy of playing with continuity and discontinuity in one text, instead of assuming such a half-hearted, never fully explained harmonisation of several sources? Proof for such a strategy can only be provided by demonstrating that there are additional instances of

<sup>6</sup> As eloquently set forth by J.P. Fokkelman, 'Genesis 37 and 38 at the Interface of Structural Analysis and Hermeneutics', in: L.J. de Regt, J. de Waard, J.P. Fokkelman (eds.), *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 152-187. See also André Wénin, 'L'aventure de Juda en Genèse 38 et l'histoire de Joseph', *RB* 111 (2004), 5-27; Richard J. Clifford, 'Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story', *CBQ* 66 (2004), 519-532.

this sort, and by indicating a possible and preferably even a likely reason for its application. This is what I will attempt to do in the following pages.

When an anonymous narrator, who does not reveal much about himself other than the occasional and usually not very specific statements, such as ‘until this day’, tells the history of Israel as set forth in the books Genesis – 2 Kings, this entails some grave disadvantages. In such a style, it is very difficult to tell the reader that something is important, or unusual, that certain events are shocking, or related to other events, or are their cause or consequence. It would seem that the need to express such verdicts or connections was still being felt, and that the author or authors worked around this limitation by the application of literary methods which surpass the linear narration, for example by an intertextual link with another passage, or by the use of poetry, or by structuring the flow of the narrative in a peculiar way.<sup>7</sup>

I will try to prove that the cases which we are discussing here also serve as signposts in the text, because the all-important instances of the beginning (and sometimes the end) or the first mention of the acquisition of the Promised Land, of the position of Jerusalem, the Temple, the tribe of Judah and the family and kingship of David, as well as the introduction of major personages into the narrative, are customarily marked by means of at least four different complex literary figures which cannot be made to fit easily into the normal flow of the narrative, if at all.

It would seem that our two cases of interruption belong to this category, as both appear to draw the readers’ attention to a momentous episode in history: the first mention of Jerusalem, with an allusion to the temple service, in Genesis 14, and the first mention of the family of Judah and with it of the family of his descendant David (as supplemented by the information in the book of Ruth) in Genesis 38. We get the impression of a well-construed dilemma in the text, which leaves the reader, challenged by continuous and discontinuous elements in the same text, baffled and puzzling about the passage, and pausing to consider the importance of what is told in it.

<sup>7</sup> J.W. Wesselius, *The Origin of the History of Israel: Herodotus’ Histories as Blueprint for the First Books of the Bible* (JSOTSS 345; London: Sheffield Academic Press/ Continuum, 2002), 105-116.

### **Chronological riddles in the text**

Two other instances of a problematic passage at a critical juncture in Israel's history are to be found at the beginning of the book of Joshua, in chapters 1-5, which deal with the Israelites' journey across the Jordan to Jericho, the beginning of their conquest of the Promised Land, and at the transition between 1 and 2 Samuel, where the final campaign and death of king Saul and the contemporaneous acts of David are described, which mark the beginning of his kingship. In both cases we are dealing with a kind of chronological puzzle, where many explicit and implicit indications of the passing of time almost invite the reader to attempt a reconstruction of the chronological framework underlying them. For our purpose it is somewhat less important whether it is possible to reach an unequivocal solution to this problem, though in both cases a period of one week seems to be a reasonable outcome, as proposed by Jan Fokkelman for 1 Samuel 28 to 2 Samuel 1, and for Joshua 1-5 by Marieke den Braber and me in a forthcoming article.<sup>8</sup> What is really important is the presence of these puzzles at the location where they are found. The intricacies of the chronological puzzles have led many scholars to suppose that here, as in the pair of supposed insertions discussed above, the present state of the text is to be explained by historical causes, going back to various original sources where the chronological indications would supposedly have been unproblematic. However in view of the above observations it would seem that most readers' feeling of puzzlement about the variety of the temporal indications was intended, and that these indications cannot be regarded as an independent reason for changing the text.<sup>9</sup>

### **Identical beginning of the next story**

Yet another example of such a disturbing phenomenon in the middle of otherwise smoothly flowing texts, this time of a real supercontinuity, has been described by Sean McDonough. He drew attention to the fact that both Abraham and David are described at the

<sup>8</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, 'Structural Reading of the Fracture between Synchrony and Diachrony', *JEOL* 30 (1989), 123-136; Marieke den Braber, Jan-Wim Wesselius, 'The Unity of Joshua 1-7 and its Relation with the Story of King Keret' (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> See about these problems in Joshua 1-5 for example Klaus Bieberstein, *Josua – Jordan – Jericho: Archäologie, Geschichte und Theologie der Landnahmeerzählungen Josua 1-6* (OBO 143; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995).

beginning of a story using a relatively rare expression, ‘old, advanced in years’, right after their acquisition by purchase of the first and the last piece of the Promised Land. Abraham bought the place where he wanted to bury Sarah for 400 shekels, and David the place where the temple was built by his son Solomon for fifty. McDonough ascribes this remarkable similarity to an editor’s work on the transition between 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, intended to recall Abram’s earlier action, without, however, providing a precise model of how we are to understand this supposed editor’s work in the context of the books of Samuel and Kings.<sup>10</sup> I think that, in view of the observations made in this article, the only reasonable option, as in the case of the list of returnees from Babylon in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 and its sequel (see below), is that this unusual literary form is not meant to recall the earlier case only, but serves in both passages as a signpost, a bookmark if one likes that term, for the importance of the events being described. In the case of David an additional literary reason may be present. Sara Mandell and Noel Freedman demonstrated that there is a remarkable literary congruence between the Primary History and Herodotus’ *Histories*, the transition between the penultimate and the last of their originally nine books being in the middle of an episode, the Persian mission to Athens in the *Histories* and the Succession History of David in the Primary History, and in the *Histories* even in the middle of a sentence. To this observation we can now add that not only is the transition between Samuel and Kings in the middle of a coherent episode, it is even in the middle of an identifiable intertextual reference, providing us with an additional instance of the author of the Primary History emulating the *Histories*, and attempting to improve on his literary model.<sup>11</sup>

### **Ambiguous start of biographies**

The most extensively used type of non-linear narration serving as a hallmark of important events in the history of Israel is to be found in

<sup>10</sup> Sean M. McDonough, ‘“And David Was Old, Advanced in Years”: 2 Samuel xxiv 18-25, 1 Kings i 1, and Genesis xxiii-xxiv’, *VT* 49 (1999), 128-129. Though Dominic Rudman in his ‘The Patriarchal Narratives in the Books of Samuel’, *VT* 54 (2004), 239-249, provided a number of very welcome additions to the dossier of the parallels of the stories about the family of Jacob and of David, he made no reference to the radically different literary nature of the parallel pointed out by McDonough.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Mandell, David Noel Freedman, *The Relationship between Herodotus’ History and Primary History* (SFSHJ 60; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993), 179; Wesselius, *The Origin of the History of Israel*, 62; cf. also p. 66.



the introductions to the eight biographies, of the first man, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Saul, and David, which together form the books of Genesis up to and including 2 Samuel. The basic observations are known to most readers and students of the Hebrew Bible, but only when these cases are studied together does a coherent picture emerge. All of these biographies start with two alternative stories or episodes, which are juxtaposed in such an ambiguous way that the reader is bound to hesitate about whether they should be harmonised and read as consecutive, or whether they are to be regarded as contradictory and mutually exclusive. These alternatives or their characteristic features start narrative threads which are continued throughout each of these biographies, with only the feature of the two divine names from Genesis 1-2 extending much farther, at least into the biography of Moses. The contrast between these threads, or narrative voices as one could call them, is emphasised through the peculiar super-continuity of highly similar stories, episodes or type-scenes. Elsewhere I propose to understand this ambiguity as representing God's inscrutable choice of certain people to play a role in the history of mankind and of the people of Israel, but in the present discussion it is important that the chosen form confronts the reader with formidable problems, which he is bound to ponder about, and in this way apparently heralds the fact that a new biography is beginning, and with it a new episode in the history of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Though a detailed treatment of these eight cases would let us stray too far from the limited purpose of this article, it is worthwhile noting that they can conveniently be divided into four consecutive pairs, on the basis of the subject of the competing versions at the beginning of their biographies; this moves them even closer to the three pairs of cases which we have just discussed. The first man is moved into Mesopotamia in Genesis 2:8-15, whereas Abram leaves that region for Canaan in 11:31 and 12:4-5. Both Jacob and Joseph leave Canaan because of the hatred of their brother(s), but in contrary directions, to Mesopotamia and to Egypt, respectively. The birth of the non-royal leaders Moses and Samuel is discussed in some detail, and in both cases the mothers take leave of their sons at an early age. In the case of the kings Saul and David we see an emphasis on their physical features, and in both instances one of the alternative stories concerns their being anointed in secret by Samuel.

<sup>12</sup> See for details my forthcoming book *God's Election and Rejection: The Literary Strategy of the Historical Books at the Beginning of the Bible*.

In spite of this possible division into four pairs, however, these cases exhibit a remarkably uniform structure. As noted above, they start with two alternative courses of history, one usually with close ties with the preceding and the other connected especially with the sequel, which can only be read as consecutive or supplementary with great effort, and are connected at most by one or two ambiguous sentences. The narrative threads which are started by them run on as different voices through large part of the biographies. The voices can be distinguished by means of characteristic features of the two alternative episodes at the beginning of the biography, such as the divine names YHWH or Elohim, the question as to whether the Midianites or Joseph's brothers sold him into Egypt, or whether the Philistines or the other nations were the greatest enemies of Saul, who was able to field at most a few thousand men against the former (1 Sam. 13:2 and 15), but the amazing number of 330,000 against the Ammonites (1 Sam. 10:8). Once this framework of two voices has been established, only one of a pair of stories needs to be explicitly characterised in this way, and in some cases even the mere side-by-side existence of two apparent alternatives or duplicates may be sufficient to distinguish the two voices. Interestingly, one of the two options appears to be denied or made almost impossible near the end of the biography. Nice examples are the fourth of the Ten Com-mandments in Exodus 20:8-11, where God appears to confirm the first account of Creation (note that this element is absent in the parallel in Deut. 5:12-14), and the note in 2 Samuel 21:19, where the killing of Goliath is ascribed to another man from Bethlehem, making David's role in his demise at least problematic.<sup>13</sup>

Together with the observation that, apart from the figures of the first man and Samuel, all these biblical persons together are part of the emulation of the protagonists in the work which appears to have served as a literary model for the Primary History, the Greek-language *Histories* of Herodotus of Halicarnassus (ca. 480-420 BCE)<sup>14</sup>, we see

<sup>13</sup> J.W. Wesselius, 'Collapsing the Narrative Bridge', in: J.W. Dyk a.o. (eds), *Unless Some One Guide Me. Festschrift for Karel A. Deurloo* (ACEBTSS; Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 2001), 247-55; id., 'Towards a New History of Israel', *JHS* [online journal: [www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS](http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS) or [www.purl.org/jhs](http://www.purl.org/jhs)] 3 (2000-2001), article 2; pdf-version p. 1-21.

<sup>14</sup> J.W. Wesselius, *The Origin of the History of Israel, passim*, and 'Alternation of Divine Names as a Literary Device in Genesis and Exodus', a paper read for the IOSOT Congress in Leiden in 2004, to be published with other papers of the congress by Professors M. Augustin and H.M. Niemann.

that on a deep level we are dealing with a very intricate literary structure here, which has apparently been deliberately obscured on the surface of the narrative by the irregularities of its visible structure, where these biographies are completely different from each other.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Life of Moses**

Of the eight cases of the introduction of the protagonist in the Primary History we shall study some aspects of the Life of Moses, which is especially appropriate in a book dedicated to Cornelis Houtman. Research into this topic has been greatly assisted by his profound and extensive commentary on the book of Exodus.<sup>16</sup>

The story of Moses' birth and early life, and of the events which directly precede it and evidently shaped the conditions for it, is generally recognised to be very complex, with a number of gaps and discontinuities in it. This is not the place to study all the literary problems involved, so we shall merely investigate how it fits into the literary pattern which we noted to be characteristic of the introduction of protagonists in the Primary History. Four episodes can be distinguished. First there is Pharaoh's fear that the Israelites will become too numerous and his command to employ them in heavy labour (Exod. 1:8-14). Then we have the story about Pharaoh's abortive attempt to stem the growth of the people by instructing the two midwives ministering to the Israelite women to kill the new-born male babies, while letting the females live (1:15-21). Third, and most briefly told, is his command to all the Egyptians to throw the Israelites' male babies into the Nile, with the females again to be spared (1:22), and finally there is the story of Moses' birth with his mother hiding him at first and finally entrusting him to the water of the Nile in a basket (2:1-3). One striking gap in the narrative is that we are not told that the edict to throw the boys into the Nile was revoked or disregarded, but we have to assume that in any case, otherwise the Israelites would simply have died out during the eighty years from Moses' birth to the Exodus (Exod. 7:7).

Of course there are considerable differences between these introductions. To mention only one example, when we compare the introduction of Moses with the beginning of the story of Joseph, the two

<sup>15</sup> See Wesseliuss, *God's Election and Rejection*, and for the time being 'Alternation of Divine Names as a Literary Device'.

<sup>16</sup> C. Houtman, *Exodus* Vol. 1 (HCOT; Kampen: Kok, 1993); Vol. 2 (HCOT; Kampen: Kok, 1996); Vol. 3 (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2000); Vol. 4 (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

versions are not on the same level as regards the succession of events in the narrative. In Genesis 37 the alternative proposals of Reuben and Judah can both produce the outcome of Joseph being taken to Egypt: in the first case Joseph would have been stolen by the Midianites and sold to the Ishmaelites; in the second case the brothers would have sold him to the Midianites who apparently were in the caravan of the Ishmaelites. The story of Exodus 2, by contrast, needs the command of Pharaoh to throw the boys into the Nile, a command which Moses' mother finally complied with, although in such a way that a small hope remained that the little boy would survive.

In many other respects, however, we are dealing with alternative versions in almost the same manner as in the other introductions. Firstly there is the striking similarity of the terminology which Pharaoh uses for his command that the boys must be killed, whereas the girls are to be kept alive:

Exod. 1:16 If it is a son, you must kill him, and if it is a daughter, she may live (*'im ben hu wah<sup>a</sup>miten 'oto we'im bat hi wahaya*).

Exod. 1:22 Every son who is born you must throw into the Nile, and every daughter, you may let (her) live (*kol habben hayyillod hay'ora tashlikuhu wekol-habbat t<sup>e</sup>hayyun*).

Note the pair son // daughter, in both verses at the beginning of the sentence, and the explicit mention, which looks somewhat superfluous in both cases, of the staying alive of the daughters at the end.<sup>17</sup> Secondly there is the ambiguous connection between the two alternatives. The omission of the gentilic 'Israelite' or the expression 'to the Israelites' in 'every son who is born' in the last verse forces the two versions together, while otherwise there is no direct connection between the two, an omission which was so acutely felt by most readers, that the majority of modern and ancient translators add something like 'Then' or 'because of that' before 'Pharaoh commanded his people' in verse 21. Thirdly each version starts a narrative line which runs on throughout the story of the Exodus, the journey through the Wilderness and even until the period of the Judges. Even a cursory reading of the biblical account of Exodus, the journey through

<sup>17</sup> It is clear that there is an intertextual connection with Gen. 12:12 also, where Abram says to Sarai: *wehaya ki yir'u 'otak hammisrim we'am<sup>e</sup>ru 'ishto zot wehar<sup>e</sup>gu 'oti we'otak ye<sup>e</sup>hayyu*, 'And when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife"; then they will kill me, but they will let you live', but for our purpose here this parallel seems of minor importance only.

the Wilderness and the beginning of life in the Promised Land makes it clear that two different views of the people of Israel and their adventures are presented in one narrative.

The scale of the two alternatives is very different from the start. In the first case two midwives appear to be sufficient for helping with all the births among the Israelites and for restraining their population growth; in the second Pharaoh needs to ask his entire nation for assistance. While the first version flows quite naturally from Pharaoh's worries about the increase in number of the Israelites in Exodus 1, the second version clearly follows on with the subsequent episode of the birth of Moses and his being hidden for three months before his mother puts him in the famous basket on the waters of the Nile. It also continues with what is clearly the Egyptians' punishment for killing the Israelite boys by throwing them into the Nile: first the turning of the water of the Nile into blood in Exodus 7:14-25, and afterwards the Egyptians' drowning in the Red Sea in 14:26-28. So we can say that to a degree the first alternative gives a small-scale view of the Israelites' stay in Egypt, in which they are little more than one extended family, whereas the second begins the account of the immense Exodus of the millions of Israelites, indeed more numerous than the Egyptians themselves.<sup>18</sup>

The story of Moses' birth in Exodus 2, where we would expect some information about this to be given, leaves both options open by introducing his family in an ambiguous way: 'A man from the house of Levi went and took to wife the daughter of Levi' (Exod. 2:1). This verse was regarded as so problematic by modern and ancient versions that only a few translated it literally, whereas most removed or diminished the suggestion of close family ties between Moses and the patriarch Levi.<sup>19</sup> In the course of the further narrative of the Exodus, however, this suggestion is confirmed gradually, but very clearly, at first still somewhat implicitly in Exodus 6:16-20, 'These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari [...] The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel [...] Amram took to wife Jochebed his father's sister and

<sup>18</sup> See in general about this passage J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York, etc.: Doubleday, 1992) 145; Houtman, *Exodus* 1, 261-265; J.I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1987), 9-13; F.E. Gaebelien, *EBC* 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 305-307; W.H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18* (AncB; New York etc.: Doubleday, 1998), 136-147.

<sup>19</sup> Houtman, *Exodus* 1, 270-271; Durham, *Exodus*, 15-16; Gaebelien, *EBC* 2, 308-310; Propp, *Exodus* 1-18, 148.

she bore him Aaron and Moses’, and, when read in combination with this passage, without any ambiguity in Numbers 26:57-59: ‘These are the Levites as numbered according to their families: of Gershon, the family of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the family of the Kohathites; of Merari, the family of the Merarites. These are the families of Levi: the family of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlites, the family of the Mushites, the family of the Korahites. And Kohath was the father of Amram. The name of Amram’s wife was Jochebed the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram Aaron and Moses and Miriam their sister.’

On the one hand we are told about events with almost cosmic significance: millions of people pass through the dry seabed of the Red Sea and stay in the Wilderness for forty years and are miraculously fed during that period, all having been witnesses to a divine revelation at Mt Sinai and all above the age of twenty dying before the people enter the Promised Land. On the other hand we have a group of manageable size, which can be addressed by one person (*passim*), which can be together in one location (also *passim*), and which can see justice applied by only one person, albeit with great effort (Exod. 18:1-27). The protagonists of the events are usually closely related, in the cases where we are informed about their pedigree at most some five or six generations from their ancestor Jacob or Israel. Thus we find that Korah, who rebelled against Moses, was his uncle, a brother of his father Amram (Num. 16:1). In other instances, the relationship is kept ambiguous, as in the case of Achan, who stole some of the spoils of Jericho and is described as ‘Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah’ (Josh. 7:1); of course one of Judah’s surviving sons was indeed called Zerah (Gen. 38:30), and this identification would make Achan also into a comparatively close relative of Moses: his grandfather was Moses’ second cousin. The first sentence of Exodus 2, where Moses’ parents are mentioned without their names and with an ambiguous connection with the preceding generations, now appears to represent a deliberate ambiguity, as found in most of the other introductions: a sentence which can be fitted into both scenarios, in this case one which implies a limited family circle and another one which involves Moses being the leader of innumerable masses. As we noted above, the close family relationship of Moses himself with the great patriarchs is gradually unfolded in the margin of the narrative. Finally, the second version is implicitly contradicted when grandsons of Moses and Aaron figure in two stories

at the end of the book of Judges, which can in no way be only one generation or less removed from the events before and during the Exodus.

As noted above, the dual view of the people of Israel as a relatively small group and as an incredibly numerous nation continues in the Life of Saul, a phenomenon which in a way parallels the continuation of the two alternatives for designating Israel's God as YHWH or as Elohim in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Moses (see above).

### **Moses' grandson**

One of the most intriguing verses of the book of Judges is found in chapter 18, where we are told that the Danites, who were on their way from the South of Canaan to conquer the Canaanite city of Laish in the North, which they subsequently renamed Dan after their eponymous ancestor, took along a certain Levite and his cultic attributes, finally appointing him as their priest there: 'And the Danites set up the graven image for themselves; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land' (Judges 18:30). Of course, critical, literary and fundamentalist scholars have an entire array of methods to get around the embarrassing contradiction between this verse and the description of history up to this point, but if we try to read the Primary History as the unitary literary work as which it presents itself to us, such options are not open to us. Moses' son Gershom has been brought to our especial attention in a number of passages (Exodus 2:22 and 18:3, note also the 'bridegroom of blood' episode on Moses' return from Midian to Egypt in Exodus 4:24-26). If we find here a Levite, Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses, within such a closely knit literary work, this can only serve as a direct reference; the letter *nun* written in the Masoretic text above the line in the name of Moses, which would make it into an otherwise unknown Manasseh, complicates the situation but its addition does not really give a viable alternative (see also below).<sup>20</sup> Note, however, that it is impossible to fit this descent into the chronological framework otherwise provided in Exodus – Judges: even if we compress the time needed as much as possible, with Gershom being born just before the Exodus and the

<sup>20</sup> See Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the OT* (OBO 36; Freiburg & Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 1981), 225-229; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, and Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1992), 57.

events of Judges 13-18 taking place as early as possible in the period of the Judges, there must be at least 130 years between the birth of Gershom and his son being called a 'young man' (*na'ar*: Judges 17:7, 11, 12; 18:3, 15; 40 years in the Wilderness, at least 30 for Joshua in the Promised Land, 40 years of Judges 13:1 [possibly including the 20 or so of Samson's youth] and 20 of Samson's activities [15:20; 16:31]). Apart from that, as the Israelites started to sin only after the death of Joshua's generation (Judges 2:10), Jonathan must have been at least 60 at the time of the story (again 40 years of Judges 13:1, including 20 of Samson's youth, and 20 of his activities), an evident impossibility for a 'young man'.

It can also be noted that we now perceive a little more of the chronological and narrative considerations underlying the structure of the Book of Judges: this chronological trap, which the conscientious reader who does not want to cut up the present text of the Primary History cannot escape from, is only possible because Samson belongs to the tribe of Dan, which during his lifetime is evidently still living in the south of the Promised Land, so he must have lived before the migration of Dan to the north! It can be added that the presence of such a chronological trap in the present form of the text makes it unlikely that it is the result of a more or less arbitrary editing process.

As if to attract our attention even more and to balance this contradiction, both this episode and the story of Moses' birth in Exodus 2 show us one or more Levites closely related to Moses, whose name is kept from the reader for a long time: his parents and sister in Exodus, and his grandson Jonathan son of Gershom in Judges; note also that the incomplete pun on Gershom's name in Exodus 2:22 (*ger hayiti*) seems to be echoed in a complete form in Judges 17:7 (*hu gar-sham*).<sup>21</sup>

And there is even more: the idea that in the stories at the end of the book of Judges the second generation from the leaders of the Exodus is still alive is confirmed by the otherwise completely unexpected mention of the officiating priest in Bethel, Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron, in Judges 20:28, which thus completes a kind of literary protection for the mention of Moses in Judges 18:30: if Aaron's well-known grandson (see for example Exod. 6:25; Nu. 25:7, 11; Nu. 31:6; Judg. 22:13, 30, 31, 32 and Jos. 24:33) is to be found at the end of Judges, the presence of Moses' grandson would not be very surprising.

<sup>21</sup> This appears to leave open the possibility that the anonymous Levite of Judges 18 is not Jonathan, but his father Gershom, though this does not seem very likely.



Even apart from the arithmetic performed above, the staging of Moses and Aaron as founding fathers of the priestly dynasties in the Northern Israelite sanctuaries of Dan and Bethel in Judges 17-21 is in stark contrast to nearly everything else we are told in the Primary History about the history of Israelite religion. It is interesting to note that the genealogy of Moses, the most prominent individual in the Hebrew Bible, which thus encompasses the entire account of the Exodus and the Conquest (for the Danites are the last tribe to take possession of a share of the Land) and which is explicitly presented to the reader, is disregarded almost entirely by most scholars.<sup>22</sup>

Our conclusion should be that the general pattern of the literary form of introduction of protagonists which we identified in the Primary History is found in the case of Moses also: alternative versions of the background of Moses' birth, which can be read as sequential only at the cost of certain inconsistencies, and which are characterised as parallel by the repetition of the sentence dealing with Pharaoh's verdict on the Israelite boys, are continued throughout the episodes of Exodus, the journey through the desert and the Conquest, though the second one with its emphasis on the role of the Nile and the enormous size of the Israelite army is directly taken up again in the sequel. At the end of the story of the Conquest, this second option, with its tremendous political and social events involving millions of people, is finally rejected because of the complete impossibility of fitting Moses' and Aaron's family relations into the chronological framework of the Exodus, the Conquest and the period of the Judges.

### **Dilemmas of the Documentary Hypothesis**

All this confronts us once more with a defect of the traditional Documentary Hypothesis which can be overcome if the well-known cases of discontinuity, duplication and contradiction are considered in isolation, but proves to be an insurmountable obstacle for this theory once they are studied together. Our passage about Pharaoh's attempts to have the Israelite boys killed is, in fact, a very good example. Most authors want to ascribe the verses Exodus 1:16 and 22 to two different

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, J. Van Seters, *The Life of Moses. The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (CBET 10; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), who makes no attempt to deal with the precise genealogical information, and hardly refers to it at all. But even scholars who have a particular interest in Moses' family, for example Yaira Amit, *The Book of Judges. The Art of Editing* (Biblical Interpretation 38; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 311-312, do not attempt to assign his genealogy a meaningful place within the present form of the text.

sources, usually E (or another one, if no separate Elohist is assumed) and J, respectively. This is a reasonable solution as long as one is willing to assume that the wording of the accounts in these two stories were very much alike, or were brought into a remarkably close congruence through an editor's work. For one or two texts this seems quite acceptable, but in view of the picture sketched above, where each introduction of a protagonist and the account of his life exhibits such close congruence in wording between the two alternatives, the extension of this theory to a larger part of the Primary History would lead *ad absurdum*. For we would have to assume that there would have existed two or more highly similar accounts of the early history of Israel, with exactly the same persons being highlighted and their lives being described with almost the same words in crucial places. This is extremely unlikely, of course, and the only feasible alternative would seem to be that a conscious literary strategy underlies the consistencies which have been observed above.

### **Ezra/Nehemiah**

Of course one wonders whether the literary instruments which have been discussed above were unique, only used by the author or authors of the Primary History, or were perhaps more frequently applied in the literary world which produced the Hebrew Bible. Though much further research would be needed to give a complete answer to this question, at least one book clearly exhibits most or all of the remarkable literary techniques discussed above, namely the book Ezra-Nehemiah, one single book in the Hebrew canon and two separate books Ezra and Nehemiah in the Christian tradition.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, the function and place of these instruments seem to be somewhat different, which is hardly surprising in view of the much more modest size of the book in comparison with the Primary History (something like 1:17) and its completely different scope. Elsewhere I pointed out that the layouts of the two parts of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah appear to mirror each other, with the places of the journeys to Jerusalem of Ezra (Ezra 7-8, in the seventh year of the Persian king Artaxerxes = 458 BCE) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2, in Artaxerxes 20 = 445 BCE), and of the exiles from Babylon under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2 and

<sup>23</sup> See about Ezra-Nehemiah in general: Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1989); Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (OTR; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (OTG; London: Routledge, 1999); H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

Nehemiah 7, ca 539 BCE), appearing in corresponding places. The episodes with third-person and first-person accounts are also rather precise mirror-images in the two, with Nehemiah on the whole having third-person narrative where Ezra uses the first person, and vice versa.

To our surprise, at least three of the four literary methods identified above in the Primary History seem to be applied in this book also, serving to support this diptych-like character of Ezra-Nehemiah by connecting corresponding episodes in the two parts. Thus we see apparent insertions interrupting the normal flow of the narrative in Ezra 4:6-23, dealing with the planned restoration of the city walls of Jerusalem in a period which is much later (during the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes) than the direct context of this episode, which deals with the rebuilding of the temple under Darius I, whereas Nehemiah 5 describes Nehemiah's social justice and the modesty of his household during his tenure of office until a much later period (*cf.* the mention of the 32nd year of king Artaxerxes in 5:14), clearly out of place in the account of his hectic rebuilding of the city walls in less than two months in chapters 3-6. We also find a chronological puzzle connecting both parts of the book. The arrival in Jerusalem of Ezra and Nehemiah can be shown to have been on exactly the same date by counting back from the completion of the wall on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month of Ellul (Nehemiah 6:15): 52 days of work (*ibid.*) preceded by three days before Nehemiah's nightly reconnaissance (2:11-15) bring Nehemiah's arrival to the first day of the month of Ab, the same date on which Ezra arrived in Jerusalem thirteen years previously (Ezra 7:9). Finally, there is the above-mentioned case of supercontinuity in corresponding places. The two lists of the returnees under Zerubbabel in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 are followed by two different stories, which, however, start in the same highly characteristic manner, namely <sup>70</sup>'So the priests, and the Levites, and the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities. <sup>1</sup>And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem' (Ezra 2:70-3:1), and <sup>73</sup>'So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and the people, and the Nethinim, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities. <sup>1</sup>And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate' (Neh. 7:73-8:1). This identity of the sequel of the lists has never received a satisfactory

explanation, as no editorial work can be conceived which would explain this situation, unless one assumes a hopelessly inept editor, who just cut off one story in an arbitrary place, inserted it in another place and then continued with another story at the point of the break. In any case, all these connections have close parallels in numbers I, II, and III of Table 1.<sup>24</sup>

Though it is not a very close parallel, it seems rather likely that we also have the idea of two accounts of history existing side-by-side, without the reader being provided with the means of discerning whether they follow each other in time or are to be regarded as mutually exclusive alternatives (no IV in the table), in the journeys and assignments of Ezra and Nehemiah. Especially in the later account of Nehemiah 1-6 it seems very strange that there should be no reference at all to the person of the highly revered priest and scribe Ezra. In the second half of Nehemiah, however, we see Ezra appearing, first in the scene of the reading of the Law (Neh. 8), and then even, as if to deny our perception of Ezra playing no role of importance in the events of Nehemiah's governorship, as his co-leader in the festive procession of two groups to the Temple after the completion of the city walls (Neh. 12:36), which makes it even stranger that he is not mentioned even once in Nehemiah's account in Neh. 1-6. This compares, albeit in a rather different way, to the surprises which await the reader at the end of the biographies in the Primary History, where, as noted above, commonly one of the two alternatives at the beginning is either denied or strongly affirmed.

### **Implicit transition between third-person and first-person narration**

It would seem, finally, that this use of discontinuity and supercontinuity in Ezra-Nehemiah is not merely the result of emulation of the same phenomenon in the Primary History, as there is at least one type of such a literary instrument which is used to structure the book, but is apparently not found in the Primary History, namely the mirroring of third-person and first-person account in the two parts of the book, with third-person narration in one book where the other one uses the first person, apart from the appendixes to Nehemiah, which have no parallel in Ezra and look like a completion of both parts at the

<sup>24</sup> See for the time being about this mirror-like structure of the book: J.W. Wesselius, 'Ezra en Nehemia' [in Dutch], in: Jan Fokkelman, Wim Weren (eds), *De Bijbel Literair. Opbouw en gedachtegang van de bijbelse geschriften en hun onderlinge relaties* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2003), 425-434.

same time. There is an ambiguous transition from third to first person and vice versa in the seventh chapter of each part, with Ezra suddenly starting to react in the first person on the letter of Artaxerxes in Ezra 7:27, after which he continues to narrate the subsequent events (so that we can be sure that it was indeed Ezra who started to speak in 7:27), and Nehemiah starting the list of Nehemiah 7 in the first person in 7:5 as a natural sequel to the sixth chapter and the beginning of the seventh, with an unexpected third-person sequel to it. In Table 3 this ambiguous transition figures as no V.

### **Complex literary methods and the Documentary Hypothesis**

In the cases which have been discussed above the literary instruments which are applied, though very different on the surface, seem to be closely connected on a deeper level. Because of an apparent insertion which emits signals of continuity and discontinuity at one and the same time, because of a chronological puzzle which allows a solution with great effort only, if at all, because of the conjunction of highly characteristic identical sentences or passages with stories which appear unconnected to them, and because of the presentation of alternative versions for the introduction of the protagonists in the text, a linear reading as one coherent text becomes impossible. This turns the reader's attention to the text itself, which in each of these cases deals with a momentous episode in the flow of the narrative of the Primary History. Especially in types I-III, the occurrence in pairs helps to identify the episode intended, as the two cases of each pair normally refer to the same or related landmarks of history. In the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, by contrast, the same or similar literary instruments have been applied for a completely different and much more limited purpose, namely to stress the unity of this book by emphasising its mirror-like aspects, with the overall structures of Ezra and Nehemiah echoing or mirroring each other.

With respect to all these cases, we have been like travellers from a far-away planet encountering strange blue and white billboards by the side of the roads on Earth, studying them by pointing out inconsistencies and various problems of reading and interpretation, without ever realising that they were meant to show the way to motorists.

The application of unusual and, through discontinuity or supercontinuity, seemingly incorrect literary forms on the highest level of the Primary History has an interesting parallel on the level of its

component stories. Gary Rendsburg has convincingly demonstrated that confused (morpho-)syntax of words uttered by a character of a story often serves the purpose of attracting the readers' attention to his or her confused state of mind.<sup>25</sup> Although this phenomenon is certainly not very close to what we see here, the two do coincide in their deliberate use of uncommon literary or grammatical forms to influence the readers' perception of the narrated events. They clearly issue from a highly sophisticated literary view of the process of hearing or reading a text and of the ways to influence reader or hearer.

As noted above, most of these cases have traditionally been used as proof or demonstration of critical approaches to the text of the books they are in, but in view of the regularity in the use of this literary strategy it now seems quite impossible to adapt the critical model in such a way that it can accommodate the above observations. I can think of no diachronic model which is capable of explaining the situation which has been described above. Indeed, it would seem that these cases bear the hallmarks of great literary talents composing the ensemble of the books of the Primary History and the book of Ezra-Nehemiah as a whole, irrespective of whether this talent belonged to one author or to a group of writers for either of the two works involved. This is not to say, of course, that there cannot be a historical dimension to the composition of the works under discussion here, only that to understand the present state of the text such diachronic explanations are not necessary.

What is especially important is that this view of the text allows us to understand the relative success of the Documentary Hypothesis and related critical approaches to the text. The super-continuous as well as the discontinuous features of the text practically invite the reader to see it as an originally continuous unity or as an ensemble of originally continuous unities, which have been changed by the normal vicissitudes of all texts which are copied, amalgamated with another one or edited. It is difficult to determine whether this is an intended effect or the result of accident only, but it is certainly reinforced by the predilection for ambiguity as evinced, for example, in the eight introductions to the main biographies of the Primary History, and the technique of making two different voices heard in the text by means of

<sup>25</sup> Gary A. Rendsburg, 'Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative', *JHS* 2 (1998-1999), article 6, pdf-version of 20 pages. It is easy to find additional instances of the phenomenon described by Rendsburg, for example Rebecca's words in Gen. 25:22 and those of Hagar in Gen. 16:13.

the duplication of stories or their elements in these biographies. A systematisation of these observations, coupled with the other unusual literary instruments which have been described above, into the assumption of a number of different sources will always have a considerable degree of success, as the character of the supposed sources will necessarily be a culmination of very real distinctions in the text. Still, since these distinctions were almost certainly not made with such a unification process of a number of the alternatives in different biographies in mind, the result is bound to remain indecisive. In such a case, the theory will just return its input: the supposed sources combine the characteristics of a more or less arbitrary choice from the alternatives and the parts which are separated through discontinuity. In other words: the theory can explain the observations which occasioned it to be formulated in the first place, but is clearly not productive in the sense that it can assign texts which have not been studied before to this or that source. So we must conclude that the Documentary Hypothesis is a reasonable explanation of many of the strange features of the text of the Primary History, but is not a productive theory. Its ability to explain certain phenomena in the text is in the last resort merely a reflection of the text's peculiar bipolar literary structure.

### Table 1.

Fourteen cases in four groups (I-IV) of a pivotal point in Israel's history (in bold) expressed by means of non-linear narrative style (described in italics).

#### I.

*Interruption of one episode by another one, with indications of continuity and discontinuity.*

1. Genesis 14:18-20 Abram's encounter with Melchizedek interrupts the episode of his encounter with the king of Sodom on his return from defeating the kings of the east.
2. Genesis 38 The story of Judah and Tamar interrupts Joseph's biography in Genesis 37-50.

**First reference to Jerusalem and the priesthood and to Judah and his descendant, king David, respectively.**

#### II.

*Chronological puzzle with concurrent events, with a number of indications of the passing of time, which allow a reasonable reconstruction of the time-frame.*

1. Joshua 1-5 Journey of the Israelites from Shittim to Jordan and Gilgal, and from there to Jericho, and of the spies to Jericho and back.
2. 1 Samuel 28 – 2 Samuel 1 Journey of David to and from the northerly Afek and his battle against the Amalekites, death of Saul and episode of the Amelekite in Ziklag.

**Beginning of the conquest of the Promised Land and of the reign of David over it, respectively.**

#### III.

*Two episodes of comparable content are followed by identical expressions at the beginning of the next story.*

1. Genesis 23 Abraham buys the cave of Machpelah from the Hittites for 400 shekels; Genesis 24:1 Abraham is 'old and advanced in years', and asks his servant to get a wife for his son Isaac.



2. 2 Samuel 24:18-25 David buys the threshing floor of Arauna the Jebusite (the location of Solomon's temple) for fifty shekels; 1 Kings 1 David is 'old and advanced in years', and is infirm, impotent and a toy of his environment.

**The first and the last acquisition of part of the Promised Land is made by Abraham and by David buying a piece of land.**

IV.

*Two competing stories or episodes concerning main persons of the narrative, which are connected in a highly ambiguous way; the narrative threads which are connected with either of them continue throughout a large part of the following biographies.*

1. Genesis 1-2 Man is created either at the beginning or at the end of the work of creation.
2. Genesis 11-12 Abram departs for Canaan from Ur and/or from Haran.
3. Genesis 27-28 Jacob goes to Mesopotamia to find a wife and/or out of fear for his brother Esau.
4. Genesis 37 Joseph is sold to Egypt by his brothers and/or a company of Midianites.
5. Exodus 1-2 Moses is born into an extended family and/or into an extremely numerous nation.
6. 1 Samuel 2-3 Samuel and/or Eli's sons are the protagonists in the events at Shiloh prior to the defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines.
7. Saul becomes king through Samuel's anointing and/or in a royal lottery.
8. David arrives at Saul's court through his musical talents and/or because he defeated the giant Goliath.

**Eight persons whose biographies cover all or nearly all of the books from Genesis up to and including (2) Samuel are formally introduced.**

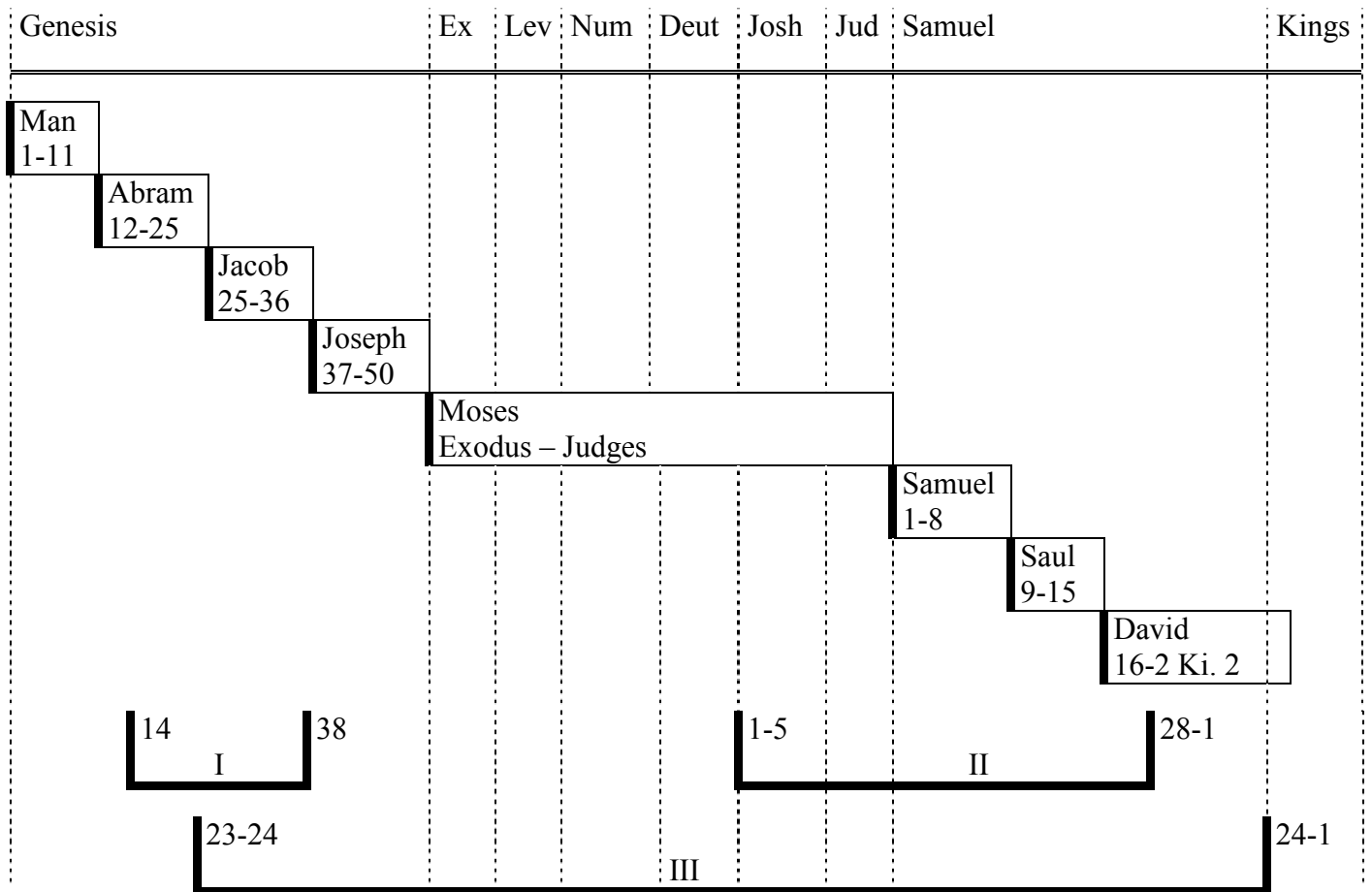


Table 2. The fourteen cases of non-linear narrative set against the nine books of the Primary History. The double vertical lines indicate the presence of two alternative versions of the introduction of the protagonists (no IV). Note that narrative lines from earlier biographies sometimes run on into the newer ones. One can also assume that the biography of Moses ends at the end of Deuteronomy, followed by a void until the end of Judges. The bold lines with the Roman numerals I-III designate the same pairs as in Table 1.

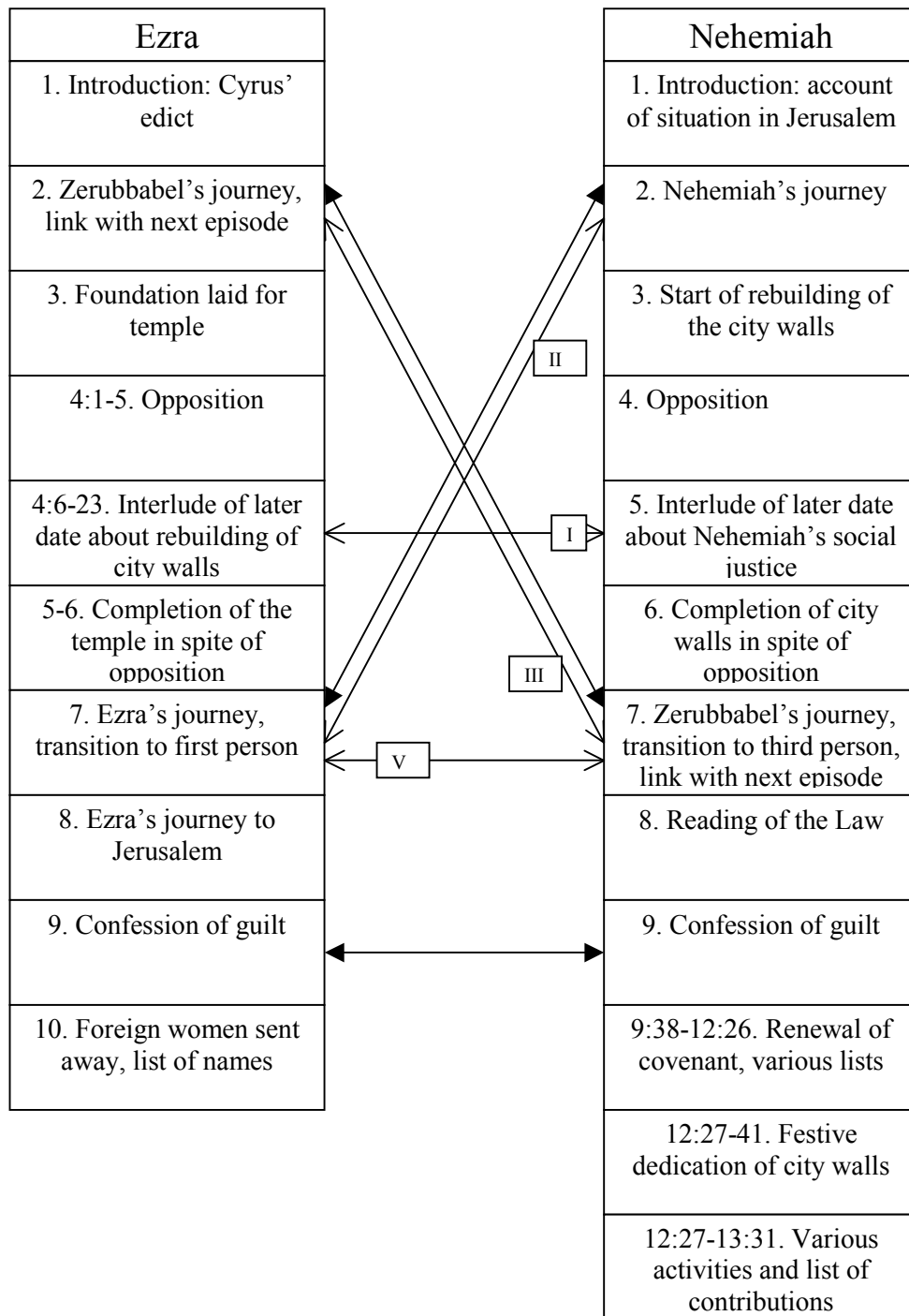


Table 3. The mirror-like structure of the book Ezra-Nehemiah, with ordinary correspondences of contents between the two parts (closed arrows), and five categories of discontinuous or super-continuous literary instruments (open arrows and Roman numerals I, II, III and V)

From:

Riemer Roukema, Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, Klaas Spronk,  
and Jan-Wim Wesselius (eds.), *The Interpretation of Exodus: Studies in  
Honour of Cornelis Houtman* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), p. 37-63.