ENDINGS - ESPECIALLY REVERSAL ENDINGS

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Abstract

This article deals with different endings and especially with reversal endings. This kind of endings is of especial significance to the understanding of the work as a whole, because they cast it in a new or different light. The article contains three examples of reversal endings: the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38); the book of Judges; and psalm 104. It seems to me that the knowledge that sometimes the ending of a biblical unit – story, poem or an entire book – directs readers to re-examine and consider the whole sequence in the light of its concluding information, contributes to our interpretations and may even lead to novel and possibly contradictory ones.

1. Endings in the Bible – A Neglected Subject

The 18th century writer Gotthold Lessing defined the difference between "spatial arts", such as painting and sculpture, which are swiftly perceived, and "time's arts", namely poetry – thus also literature and music – which are perceived over a period of time, and therefore demand more of the recipient. "That which the eye takes in at a single glance" he wrote "he [the poet] counts out to us with perceptible slowness, and it often happens that when we arrive at the end of his description we have already forgotten the first features. […] To the eye, parts once seen remain continually present; it can run over them again and again. For the ear, however, the parts once heard are lost unless they remain in the memory. And even if they do remain there, what trouble and effort it costs to renew all their impressions in the same order and with the same vividness; to review them in the mind all at once with only moderate rapidity, to arrive at an approximate idea of the whole!".[1]

This view of literature as an art of time caused literary research to focus on the sequence of the text – namely, its linear nature in which the elements follow one another in sequence, with a beginning and an end. According to Lessing and those who followed him, the mental absorption of a linear work demands time and effort. Consequently, the artist who is aware of this devotes much thought to the starting point and the conclusion of the process – that is, the beginning and end of the work – which constitute its framework and are thus of special significance. There is no doubt that in every text the beginning and the end are painstakingly worked and given special prominence.[2] While the opening introduces the reader to the world of the work, presents its background and directs the attention to particular features, the ending represents a finality, directing the reader to consider the

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1. On literature as an art of time, see Lessing 1984:86.
2. The climax or turning-point may be debatable. For example, in the story of the rape of Tamar by Amnon, is the critical point the rape itself, or Tamar's expulsion from Amnon's house and the locking of the door after her? In the story of the rise of David, is the turning-point the encounters between him and Saul in the Judean desert, David's flight to Achish king of Gath, or the clash between Saul and Jonathan when the latter realizes that "it was determined of his father to slay David" (1 Sam. 20:33)? In the story of the succession, is the climax Absalom's rebellion or his death at the hand of Joab?

sequence of the text in light of the concluding information and to evaluate the work as a whole.[3]

In biblical literature the beginning and ending of many texts are left to the reader's judgment, rather than the author's poetic decision. Thus the literature of the Pentateuch and Early Prophets is presented as a long sequence of stories, beginning with the creation (Gen. 1:1) and ending with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:30). Through this sequence the reader must determine where each story begins and where it ends. Much the same goes for the books of prophecy – in most cases there are no formal indications where a particular prophecy begins or ends, and it is left up to the reader to define it. Obviously, the division into portions, closed or open-ended, and into chapters, often does not solve the problem and, notoriously, may even mislead.

In recent decades the scholars have refined a number of criteria that help the reader of biblical literature to determine the points of departure and conclusion of unbounded texts – they include theme, circularity, style, editorial expressions, opening and closing formulae. But these are not unequivocal criteria, and for many texts they are only partially applicable.[4] Therefore every boundary decision may give rise to commentarial debate, and in many cases the reader or the commentator feels no need to explain or justify their demarcation.[5] Inevitably, the growing interest in reasoned boundary definition, in structure of works and in their absorption processes, has highlighted these stages of opening and ending. Nevertheless, greater attention has been paid to the openings of biblical stories.[6] As Polak has put it very reasonably: "The determination that a story has reached its conclusion must be based mainly on the opening of a new narrative that follows.[7] This dual function of the biblical story's opening naturally heightens the conscious or unconscious interest in it.[8]

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3. On the importance of the final statement, see Gottlieb (1991:213): "Conclusions are the author's last word on his subject." On retrospective observation as an integral, progressive part of the reading process, see Perry 1977: 42-51, with additional bibliography. See also ibid. 1979 and the bibliography there.

4. On the first four criteria, see Perry-Sternberg 1970:631-642; on the reader's responsibility in determining the boundaries of a story unit, on the fifth criterion of opening and ending formulae, as well as for examples of the application of these criteria and the debate on boundaries - see Amit 2001: 14-21.

5. See the extensive debate on the subject in the periodical "Hasifrut", which opened when Perry-Sternberg (1968) gave no reasons for their boundaries of 2 Sam. 11 - the story of David and Bathsheba - and Arpali (1970:587-589) and Simon (1970:598-600) disagreed. Consequently, Perry-Sternberg (1970: 631-642) opened a theoretical discussion and offered reasoned criteria. See also Polak 1994: 109-110.

6. This is especially marked in the fourth chapter in Bar-Ephrat's book that discusses plot (1989: 93-140), and in the sixth, which deals with the story of Amnon and Tamar (pp. 239-282). In the former he devotes eleven pages (111-121) to the opening, and about three and a half to the ending (124-125, 130-132). In the latter, he discusses the opening in some seven pages (239-245), and the ending in about three (273-275). I have to admit that in the fourth chapter of my book (Amit 2001:33-45), where I examine openings and endings, I deal mainly with the openings and only briefly with the endings. On the awareness of literary scholars of the difficulties about endings in works delineated by their author, see Gottlieb 1991:213.

7. Polak 1994:112. Seligman (1992:47) shows greater sensitivity to the endings and their neglect: "We shall be chiefly occupied with the form of ending and its significance. Though frequent, it has not so far received sufficient attention." He illustrates this with a number of typical endings.

8. The great interest in literary openings in general is evidenced by the various studies devoted to the subject - e.g., Said 1978; Hareven (1991:172), who begins, "Every writer knows that the opening sentence is the hook on which the entire book hangs"; Oz's book, "Opening a Story" (1999:5), stresses that "It is hard to begin." It stands to reason that this difficulty, and the major role the writer ascribes to it in establishing the connection between him and the reader, justify the preference of and interest in openings. In her introduction, Smith (1968, vii) speaks of the neglected ending (see also the article by Richards 1963, quoted here): "I also found that, although literary theorists from Aristotle on have been occupied with beginnings, middles and ends, there had not been (aside from a brief and somewhat whimsical essay by IA Richards) any treatment of this subject as such."

2. Story Endings

Frank Polak opens his discussion of the subject as follows: "The indications that the story has come to an end are not evident as the indications of its beginning. Sometimes the story ends without being explicitly marked." Polak illustrates this with the story of Abram and the four kings, which ends abruptly with a dialogue between Abram and the king of Sodom concerning the war booty (Gen. 14:24).[9] In fact, that ending is clearly indicated by the start of a new story that follows directly: "Some time later, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision" (Gen. 15:1a ff).[10] Such signs include an editorial expression noting an unspecified interval of time – "Some time later"; the new subject matter, namely, the divine manifestation; and the different speakers – no longer Abram and the king of Sodom, but God and Abram.

Polak's assertion hints at a disagreement with Gunkel's discussion of the stories in Genesis: "Every single legend that is preserved in an early form is a complete whole by itself; it begins with a distinct introduction and ends with a very *recognisable* close." (my emphasis).[11] While Polak speaks of the difficulty of determining the endings, and refers to stories that lack endings, Gunkel simplifies the matter, referring to stories with un-mistakable endings, such as the one about fetching a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:67: Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife, Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death."), and concludes, "Everyone can see that the story ends here".[12] However, this firm conclusion clearly rests on the fact that the next passage begins a different story:

> "Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah" (Gen. 25:1). Gunkel likewise re-marks about the ending of the story of Isaac's binding, "and they departed together for Beer-sheba" (Gen. 22:19): "it closes at the point where the complication that has arisen is happily resolved: no one can ask, What followed?".[13] But here too the next passage indicates a switch to a different and new subject: "Some time later, Abraham was told, 'Milcah too has borne children to your brother Nahor" (ibid., v. 20). Thus this example also shows that the most certain way to determine an ending is the immediate beginning of a different subject.

Following Gunkel, Bar-Ephrat offers another indication of a story's ending, which may be dubbed "point of relief": "the narrative reaches a point of calmness at the end, the tension drops, the story-line descends and life returns to its former pace and daily routine."[14] Gunkel emphasizes that "Many stories are entirely spoiled by following them up imme-diately with new ones which drive the reader suddenly from one mood to another. Every skilful story-teller, on the contrary, makes a pause after telling one such story, giving the imagination time to recover, allowing the hearer to reflect in quiet on what he has heard

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9. Polak (1994: 111). Other examples he mentions that lack an explicit indication of ending are Gen. 34:31 and 1 Kgs 1:53.
10. Seeligmann (1992:50) defines this kind of editorial expression as "techniques of linking by means of connecting phrases".
11. Gunkel 1964: 43.
12. Gunkel, ibid. Note that Gunkel revises the masoretic version, which he regards as a late emendation, and reads it as "found comfort after his father's death".
13. Gunkel (ibid., 44). Note that commentators who were puzzled by the absence of Isaac from this verse wondered what happened next. Abrabanel's commentary on Verse 19 suggests that Abraham sent Isaac by a short route to his mother who was living in Hebron. See Spiegel 1950:471-473, for other suggestions.
14. Bar-Ephrat 1989:129. See also Polak, ibid., pp. 111, 118; Amit 2001:36-37; and cf. Smith (1968:33-37), who refers to the ending as the point beyond which there are no expectations or a sequel, or as a return to a static state.

while the chords that have been struck are permitted to die away".[15] Polak lists the
following signs of a point of relief: a reference to death and burial (Jud. 16:31; 1 Sam.
21:14); a statement that the protagonist remained permanently in a particular place (Gen.
4:16; 1 Sam. 7:1-2); a reference to the building of a permanent structure, such as an altar
(Gen. 13:18; 2 Sam. 24:25); a passage describing a calamity may end with a note that it was
averted or resolved (Gen. 20:17-18; 1 Sam. 16:23); and most commonly, the departure of
the protagonists and the statement that they went their different ways (Gen. 32:1; Num.
24:25; 1 Sam. 21:1).[16] Polak adds other criteria, such as a summary or explicit reference to
final outcome, as at the ending of the story of Solomon's judgment (1 Kgs 3:28), the story
of Solomon's enthronement (Ibid., 2:46b), and others.[17] Many biblical stories conclude with
an etiological motif, which may account for a natural phenomenon (Gen. 9:13-17), a
custom (Ibid., 32:33), or some other interesting phenomenon, such as an explanation of a
name, a feature known as Midrashic name (19:37-38). The decision to place such an
explanation at the end of a story may be due to the desire "to create a link between the
world of the narrative and that of the reader. In that case, the explanatory comment is an
appropriate ending, as the narrator who accompanied the reader (or mainly the listener),
leads him mentally back to reality."[18] However, it should be noted that the features that
characterize endings may also appear in the course of the story – as for example Saul's
building of an altar in the story of the battle of Michmash (1 Sam. 14:35), or a Midrashic
name (1 Sam. 1:20) in the story of the birth of Samuel and his dedication to the temple (1
Sam. 1:1-2:11).[19] Therefore, Polak rightly argues, "the determination that the story has
come to an end must be based chiefly on the start of a new story that follows."[20]

A common feature is a circular ending, characterized by its connection to the beginning of
the bordered text. An example of a circular ending can be the protagonist's return to the point of
departure. Such, for example, is the story of Saul's visit to the woman of En-dor (1 Sam. 28:3-
25). Saul and his men, having gone from the Israelite camp in Gilboa to the woman of En-dor,
return to the place whence they had come. "Nevertheless, in a story with a concentric ending,
the hero or heroes only seem to return to the condition which they had set out, because the
events have affected them – and the reader with them. The reality to which they return is not the
same as it was. When Saul returned to the camp at Gilboa, he did not go back to the status quo
but to a far harsher reality, because he had learned from the encounter with the spirit of Samuel
at the necromancer's house exactly what fate lay in store for him, his sons and the people of
Israel."[21] Often the circular ending takes the readers back to the story's calm point of departure,
but since the protagonists have undergone an experience that may well have changed them, it is,
in fact, not the same calm state but a new condition. It stands to reason that Job who was tested
and withstood the test is a different man, although "the Lord blessed the latter years of Job's life

15. Gunkel, ibid., p. 44.

16. Polak 1994: 111. According to Bar-Ephrat (p. 139): "The conclusion is clearly marked in many biblical
    narratives", and see his examples in pp. 130-132. He concludes the list as follows: "The explicit statement that
    the principal character has gone on his or her way, returned home or died clarifies to the reader that the
    narrative is concluded or that a stage in the plot has terminated" (p. 132).
    Seeligmann (1992:48), notes that the "novelistic story is essentially an episode, which begins by introducing
    the protagonists and juxtaposing them, and ends with their separation."

17. Smith (1968:36) distinguishes between an ending which is a break, and one which is final and conclusive, and
    which she calls a closure.

18. Polak 1994: 111.

19. See Bar-Ephrat 1989:131; Polak 1994:111-112. On the different options of closures in this unit see Amit
    2001:20.

20. Polak 1994:112.

21. Amit 2001:34-36. Quote taken from p. 36.

more than the former" (Job 42:12a). The conclusion, which takes the reader back to the old-new reality – "Afterward, Job lived one hundred and forty years to see four generations of sons and grand sons. So Job died old and contented" (ibid., vv. 16-17), leaves a great deal unsaid. Similarly, we do not know what Abraham felt after the test, nor Isaac, who was saved from slaughter in the nick of time. If indeed the two of them returned to Beer-sheba, it is safe to assume that their experience at Mount Moriah affected them and their relationship profoundly.

An ending is most effective when it combines several of the above-mentioned features, as we have seen in – for example, the ending of the Book of Job, or the ending of the story of Abimelech (Jud. 9:55-57), which includes the death of the protagonist (v. 55a), the dispersal of the Israelites to their homes (v. 55b), and a summary of Abimelech's kingship (vv. 56-57), which takes the reader to the beginning of the description (vv. 1-24).[22]

Many biblical stories are parts of larger narratives, either story cycles like the one about Abraham, or long linked tales like that of Joseph. These sometimes include preliminary endings that are of great importance in tying together the parts of the narrative: "Such an ending serves two purposes: it concludes, while preparing the ground and hinting at the sequel."[23] One example of many is the conclusion of the story of the rape of Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1-22): "Absalom didn't utter a word to Amnon, good or bad, but Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar." The reader is in no doubt that Absalom's silence is ominous, and that his hatred for Amnon will impel him to seek justice. It is also clear that the story ends here and not with all the protagonists returning to their respective homes, since Tamar remains desolate in her brother Absalom's house. This new reality, made worse by David's passivity, justifies Absalom's hatred and leads the reader to speculate about his future moves.

Thus far I have summarized a number of endings. I shall now focus on a particular kind of ending, not listed above, which – following Menahem Perry – I propose to call Reversal Endings.[24]

3. Reversal Endings

There are biblical texts whose endings are of especial significance to the understanding of the work as a whole, because they cast it in a new or different light. I call them Reversal Endings. Even if you do not find all the following examples convincing – though they seem convincing to me – they ought to encourage readers to pay close attention to endings, and especially to look for reversal endings for their unique contribution to the meaning of the entire text.

The reader recognizes a reversal ending when there is tension or some inconsistency between it and the preceding text. The discovery of the tension leads to renewed examination of the whole text and its significance. Thus, the ending contributes to the different meaning of the whole text.

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22. On the combination of phenomena, see also Bar-Ephrat, ibid., p. 130.
23. Polak 1994:113-115.
24. Perry's studies (1968; 1969; 1977; 1979), which deal with the semantic structure of Bialik's poems, discuss their phenomenon of the reversing poem: "More than ten percent of Bialik's poems are unquestionably what I call 'reversing poem'. If we include the marginal cases of reversing poems, and those markedly organized by a surprise that dispels expectations, the percentage of these poems would amount to more than a quarter of the poet's total output. To these must be added scores of cases in which drastic changes in the sequence occur as localized features" (1977:57). According to Perry the minimum features of the inverted poem are: 1) The sequel or the ending change the subject as perceived at the start of the reading. 2) The new subject contrast with the earlier one. 3) Aesthetic needs require that the poem "mislead" the reader. 4) The poem points to the true direction from the start. 5) The inversion of the poem reorganize the semantic composition of the whole poem.

3.1   The Ending of the Story of Judah and Tamar

There is no mistaking the boundaries of the story of Judah and Tamar, the wife of Er (Gen. 38), precisely because it interrupts the Joseph story sequence.[25] It ends with the birth of the twins Perez and Zerah (38:27-30), which is the happy conclusion of the complex denouement that led up to it. For Judah, the birth of the twins compensates for the death of his two sons, Er and Onan.[26] Moreover, Perez, the first to be born, is the subject of a blessing: "And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah – through the offspring which the Lord will give you by this young woman" (Ruth 4:12, 18-22; see also 1 Chr. 2:3-15). Readers familiar with biblical motifs appreciate that the mere report of the birth implies divine intervention, since no birth takes place except at God's will.[27] Moreover, when the motif of the specially-granted primogeniture is added to the motif of the birth, readers are left in no doubt that this is a welcome birth that holds future promise.[28] Finally, experienced readers know that Perez is one of King David's ancestors.[29] Such a favorable ending obliges the reader to wonder if Judah's transgression was indeed so heinous. The narrative seems to be critical of Judah – he not only married a Canaanite woman (Gen. 38:2), but prevented Tamar's levirate marriage to her younger brother-in-law (ibid., v. 11), and to cap it all, committed incest with her (vv. 26-31).

Some commentators regard Judah as a vile sinner – for example, Shinan and Zakovitch, who describe the story as "an anti-Judahite tale, meant to mock the forefather of the tribe of Judah and the house of David."[30] In their view, the opening of the story suggests that "Judah disregards his father's bitter mourning and sets out to live his own life. He adds insult to injury by associating with strangers and marrying a Canaanite woman." They argue that the text shows Judah without a single redeeming quality – "first he associates with Canaanites, then with whores." Even when Judah says, "She is more in the right than I," and the narrator adds, "And he was not intimate with her again" (v. 26), they note, "Though Judah admits his fault when Tamar presents the damning evidence, he does so half-heartedly... The scene ends with the disdainful remark, that Judah 'was not intimate with her again.'" They regard even the description of Perez' birth as pejorative: "Just as

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25. This story is bound by a resumptive repetition (Gen. 37:36 and 39:1), causing many scholars to regard it as a late insertion. See Seeligmann 1992:53-60; Shinan-Zakovitch 1992:207; Ravid 1993:5-6, 84-86, and lately Petersen 2004:120. Ravid and Petersen refer as well to the tradition of critical commentary.

26. This concept of restitution, which modern readers find unpleasant, is well established in the Bible - e.g., Eve's statement that "God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain had killed him" (Gen. 4:25). Similarly, when God blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning, he gave him "seven sons and three daughters" (Job 42:13), the same number as before.

27. Cf. 1 Sam. 1:19-20: "And they went back home to Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and the Lord remembered her. And at the turn of the year Hannah conceived, bore a son..." It is not enough for Elkanah to know his wife - the divine memory must be involved for conception to occur. The Septuagint reverses the order of the clauses in the verse: 'And the Lord remembered her, and she conceived', thus underlining the link between the sexual congress, divine intervention and conception.

28. This motif appears in relation to Isaac and Ishmael (Gen. 16 - 21), Jacob and Esau (ibid., 25:19 - 27). In the case of David and his brothers there is no birth story (1 Sam. 16:1-13), and others.

29. This presumes that the story is a late one. The genealogy from Perez to David appears only in the later texts: Ruth 4:18-21; 1 Chr. 2:3-15.

30. Shinan-Zakovitch 1992:207-220. Quote taken from p. 220. On page 240 it is said that "the biblical story of Judah and Tamar is a typical anti-Judahite one... depicting him and his conduct in an unsavory light." Nevertheless, the authors concede (ibid.) that only "few of the sources, which refer to this story, as we shall see, continue this trend (see following paragraph); most of them actually find positive qualities in Judah and reverse the picture."

Judah deceived his father about Joseph, so does Perez trick his twin Zerah to gain the primogeniture. Having Perez as its ancestor is scarcely a credit of the house of David."[31]

Nevertheless, readers who are aware of the significant motifs in the story's ending will regard it, as did the author of the book of Ruth, as a positive one of blessing. These readers will not only give Judah credit for his courage in justifying Tamar and confessing the truth, but will also acknowledge the narrator's intentional demonstration that Judah acted inadvertently (vv. 15-16), and once aware, avoided repeating the incest (v. 26b).[32]
Thus the ending of this story is crucial to its purpose, which is not an indictment of Judah but, in the final analysis, his vindication. Had the story ended with Verse 26, it would have sufficed to show that Judah admitted his fault and repented it. But the description of the birth of the twins and the hint at the ancestry of David direct the reader to view the story in a non-condemnatory light, as demonstrating God's complex and unexpected ways, justifying Judah's divine election, with the positive overcoming the negative.

3.2   The Ending of the Book of Judges
The stories about Gideon and Abimelech in the book of Judges offer a critical view of monarchy. Gideon rejects the kingship saying, "I will not rule over you myself, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord alone shall rule over you" (Jud. 8:23). A few verses further on we come to the story of Abimelech and the parable of Jotham (ibid. 8:29-9:57), that present monarchy in a bad light: It is a position rejected by the useful trees, while the one which accepts it is Abimelech, the bramble which gives no shade and threatens its surroundings with fire – that is, with fratricide. Two such texts in close proximity would seem to suggest that monarchy is seriously considered as an option – that is, as an alternative to the rule of judges – and then rejected, seeing that Gideon refuses it and Abimelech's kingship is depicted as a threat. Yet the book of Judges concludes with a statement suggesting that monarchy may be a preferred solution, promising a more orderly and secure life, in contrast to the anarchy and lawlessness of the rule of judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did as he pleased." (Jud. 17:6, 21:25; see also 18:1a, 19:1a).[33]

Scholars generally consider the final chapters of the book of Judges (17-21) to be an addendum attached to the book at some stage, which is not integral to the book's main import. As such, it is not surprising that the worldview expressed in this addendum differs from that of the main text. Having, I believe, already proved my case, I shall not expand on this subject, but would postulate that the book of Judges ends with chapters 17-18.[34] Treating these chapters as the ending of the book – i.e., as the summary of the period of judges and a statement on the necessity of monarchy – casts a different light on the period and exposes the inadequacy of the judges as national leaders. Their leadership is characterized by disorders in the different aspects of life – family relations, human relations, personal security, religious worship, the judicial system and the inter-tribal

31. Quotes taken in order of appearance in Shinan-Zakovitch's book, pp. 209, 213, 218, 219.

32. See Ravid 1993, whose purpose is to prove that "the original intent of the hidden author/editor was in fact to show Judah's actions as demonstrating his greatness and hinting at his resemblance to God" (p. VII). She underlines throughout her work the effect of the poetic devices and the circles of interpretation about the readers' changing hypotheses. See also Amit 2001:91-92. Petersen (2004:119-164) analyses the various readings while stressing the changes that Judah undergoes; here also additional bibliography.

33. On the subject of monarchy in the book of Judges, see Amit 1999:92-118, with additional bibliography.

34. On the difference between appendix and ending, and the interpretation of Jud. chapters 17-18 as an ending, as opposed to chapters 19-21, being an appended unit and an editorial deviation - see Amit 1999:310-357.

relations. If chapters 17-18 are seen as ending the book, then readers will re-evaluate the preceding narrative and ask themselves if the book offers a critical view of the time of the judges. What then did the text's implied editor think of the judges' leadership?[35] Readers would conclude that the impact of the judges – each in his time and all of them throughout the period – was temporary and limited; that when the judges followed one another in an unbroken sequence (Jud. 10:1-5, 12:8-15) the cycle stopped; and that the order of their presentation, ending with Samson, gives rise to disillusionment with their leadership. This in turn begs another question, namely, if the ending implies approval of monarchy, what are we to make of the texts that are usually interpreted as critical of it? One possible answer is to regard them as an addendum or a late insertion, and another is to consider them as integral to the book. I prefer the latter possibility, according to which Jotham's parable criticizes the kingship of Abimelech, rather than monarchy as such, and that Gideon's rejection of the kingship offered him by the men of Israel was not a principled repudiation of monarchy and a recommendation of God's kingship as an exclusive solution, but a rejection of a kingship proposed by the warriors rather than by the representatives of the people as a whole.[36] Gideon's position was borne out by the disaster of Abimelech's kingship, which was supported by the warriors and led to a bloody internecine war (Jud. 9, particularly v. 55).

We may conclude that a view of chapters 17-18 as the pro-monarchical ending of the book of Judges encourages the reader to consider the pros and cons of the rule of the judges, as well as to re-evaluate the texts that seem to repudiate monarchy. Reading the book in light of its reversing ending enables the reader to examine the failings of the judges' leadership and to understand the texts on the monarchy as circumstantial criticism relating to the period of Gideon-Abimelech, rather than as a principled repudiation of monarchy. In the final analysis, the implied editor of the book of Judges opts for monarchy.

3.3   Psalms 104

Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise to God for the creation.[37] The poet jubilantly describes the diverse elements of the creation, each of which has its place and boundary, and the harmony in the world. "The more detailed the description of the creation, the greater the praise of God."[38] Seeking to glorify the divine act of creation, the poet ignores its darker aspects. Thus human labor is not sorrowful, nor is bread won by the sweat of the brow (Gen. 3:17-19) – rather, the bread is said to strengthen man's heart and wine makes it glad (Ps. 104:14-15). Likewise, the relations between man and the wild animals is equally benign, as the young lions hunt by night and when the sun rises they retire to their dens, just when man goes out to his work – predators and laborers are kept safely apart (ibid., vv. 20-23).[39] Moreover, even the roaring of the young lions is described as entreating God for their prey, and as if that were not enough, the whale (leviathan) is said to be a plaything for God's leisure (v. 26). Finally, even death is transient and therefore unthreatening: "send back Your breath, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth" (v. 30). The reader naturally expects the hymn to conclude with the same exultation as the earlier exclamation,

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35. On the terms "implied editor", "implied editing" and "author-editor", see Amit 1999:1-24.
36. Amit 1997.
37. According to the Gunkel-Begrich (1998:22) categorization of the psalms, this one is a hymn. See Hoffman 1992:*13-*14 and there note 3, and also Allen 2002:39.
38. Hoffman 1992:*15.
39. A different view is found in the Hymn to the Aten 1997:44-46. Noted also by Hoffman, ibid.:*17-*19, as well as other interpreters of this hymn, see recently Allen 2002:40-41.

"How many are the things You have made, O Lord; You have made them all with wisdom; the earth is full of Your creations" (v. 24).

But the final verse appears to dent the perfect picture: "May sinners disappear from the earth and the wicked be no more" (v. 35a).[40] Suddenly it seems there is something in the world that disturbs its harmony and must be removed, namely, the sinners and the wicked. The second part of this verse, which is the hymn's ending uses the opening phrase, "Bless the Lord, O my soul" (v. 35b).[41] The ending shows that the creation is not entirely perfect and even needs rectifying, and calls to God to do so – as Amos Hakham puts it, "He [the poet] ends the hymn with the words that begin it, hinting that when the wicked are no more, creation will have reached perfection, and the blessing to the Creator, as was said about the six days of creation, will once again be said wholeheartedly."[42]

This circular ending (enclusio) directs the reader back to the beginning of the hymn and casts a different light on the opening and the sequence, all of which – until the ending – is laudatory. As Yair Hoffman puts it, "The opening – 'Bless the Lord, O my soul' – diverges somewhat from the convention by starting with a blessing rather than praise... There is something awkward about the transition from the self-exhortation and prompting to bless the Lord to its validation with a description *of the beauty* [my emphasis] of creation. One would expect the description of creation's perfection and grandeur to open with an exclamation of adoration, not with a prompting to bless the Lord."[43] Thus the ending – implying that "the presence of sins in this world detracts from the perfection of the divine glory as revealed in the creation, and that while the wicked continue to exist in the world, joy in the Lord is incomplete"[44] – explains why this Psalm opens with the exhortation to bless, rather than with praising the Lord. The link between the opening and the ending is further highlighted by the fact that both are expressed in the first-person (i.e., the first part of verse 1 and verse 34 ff), while throughout the body of the hymn God is addressed by a second-person or third-person. Thus the opening, with its defamiliarization, its prompting to bless, its slight variance from the following verses, and the ending which specifies when the Lord will be fully worthy of the blessing and the speaker able to rejoice in Him, form the hymn's framework which casts the itemized praises in a distinctive light. Now it becomes evident that all those praises – at times utopian and pre-lapsarian, and hardly a reflection of real life – are essentially an introduction to what troubles the poet most. In contrast to the creation story in Genesis 1, Psalm 104 does not conclude with "and found it very good."[45] The laudatory verses are shown to be a long preface that prepares the

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40. According to the Septuagint they will be gone forever. Many scholars see v. 31 as the start of the ending - e.g., Kraus 1989:303-304; Hakham 1990:249, 264; RaDaK (1971:232) sees the motif of the wicked beginning in verse 31: "May the glory of the Lord endure forever [...] and this will be when the wicked are no more." Gerstenberger (2001:225-226) has found in this unit (vv. 31-35) several voices. This suggests to him that the entire hymn contains many voices. Gottlieb (1991:217-218) refers to the root *tmm,* which also appears in the ending of Ps. 19 (v.14) and 102 (v. 28).

41. The words "Hallelu-jah" (=Praise the Lord") seem to be an editorial addition which occurs in 12 other psalms: 105, 106, 113, 115, 116, 117, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150. See Allen 2002: 48.

42. Hakham 1990:262. Kraus (1989:304) thinks that: "The petition for elimination of all רשעים is to be understood on the basis of the whole psalm.

43. Hoffman 1992:*20, also p. *21 and note 27, in which he stresses that while the word "bless" in the Psalms has a retrospective meaning of "praise", and even if we regard the formula "Bless the Lord, O my soul" as a liturgical gloss, nevertheless we would expect the opening to be a cry of exaltation, as in Psalms 8 and 103.

44. Hakham 1990:262.

45. Weiss (1984:88-90) notes, like many commentators, the similarity between this psalm and the description of the creation in Gen. 1: "It has been well said of our psalm that it is like a symphony on the theme: 'And God saw all that He had created and behold it was very good' (Genesis 1:31). Our Psalm describes and exemplifies

background to the final complaint about social injustice, a detailed list to point out to the deity that, in view of the marvels He has made and may make again, there is but one more act that will enable the speaker to bless Him and rejoice in Him wholeheartedly, and which he begs to witness with his own eyes (v. 33).[46] This reading of the hymn prompts the question whether it is a song of praise or a wisdom hymn, in which the poet pleads and expects God's promise that "Their light is withheld from the wicked, And the upraised arm is broken" (Job 38:15). [47] This question would not have arisen without verse 35, or, in other words, if the ending did not include the first part of the verse, but proceeded from verse 34 directly to the second half of 35, thus: "May my prayer be pleasing to Him; I will rejoice in the Lord. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

The existence of verse 35a prompts Weiss to ask, "is this not a sharp dissonance after the sweet harmony of the entire hymn, especially following the preceding verses and before the following one 'Bless the Lord, O my soul'? Is it possible that the one who blessed is also the one who curses?"[48] Although Weiss concludes that "there is no dissonance," he goes on: "and even if there were dissonance, it was intended to complement the general harmony and to make it totally perfect. Only one who has this dissonant wish in his heart yearns for this perfect harmony."[49] Thus ultimately Weiss does see a dissonance which he regards as dialectically necessary. His use of the musical term "dissonance" strikes me as an attempt to play down the reversing effect of the verse, treating it as merely a jarring note in the sweet harmony of the hymn as a whole. To me it seems that the appearance of this verse or jarring-note right at the end of the hymn gives it the quality of a powerful chord that counter-balances the preceding text. This ending, acknowledging the existence of a problem, disrupts the perfect harmony presented to the reader up to that point, and reveals that the speaker knows perfectly well what is wrong in our world and what to criticize about the creation.

Hoffman interprets Verse 35 differently: "A conclusion rather than an entreaty – in such a perfect world in which the deity can do whatever He wishes, there is no room for the sinful and the wicked, therefore their existence is transient and there is no doubt that they will perish."[50] Hoffman also concedes the existence of sinners and wicked men, but ascribes to the poet a naive faith in the triumph of justice and the transience of evil: "The perfect harmony in the cosmos that the author describes leads him to conclude that it is impossible for the wicked to persist in it."[51] Nonetheless, belief in the perfection of the natural world does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that it prevails, or would prevail, in the faulty human sphere, and I am more persuaded by the commentators who argue that it gives rise to hope, and above all to a plea that implies hope too.[52]

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this 'very good', which is the bond of mutual helpfulness between all creatures." (The quotation from the end of p.89 ff.).

46. Despite the foregoing praise, "send back Your breath, they are created" (v. 30a).

47. On the wisdom nature of this psalm, and of the book of Psalms as a whole, see Reindl 1981, which discusses the secondary status of vv. 31-35 (ibid., pp. 348-350). Hoffman (1992:*23) follows Weiss (1984:87; 1987:249-251) in opposing the suggestion that the final verses were not an original and integral part of the hymn.

48. Weiss 1987:249. Weiss (ibid., pp. 249-250) rejects Bruriah's reading of Tractate Brakhot 10a, that the word "Hattaim" means "sins" rather than "sinners", which parallels "wicked". Her interpretation is that sins are part of creation, but Weiss regards it as a Drash and resorts to the masoretic traditional reading, though its dialectical interpretation is closer to that of Bruriah.

49. Weiss, ibid.: 250.

50. Hoffman 1995:128.

51. Hoffman 1992:*23.

52. On complaints and individual or public pleas at the end of hymns, see Gunkel-Begrich 1998:121. Among the examples cited are Psalm 19:13; 139:19; and more.

As I see it, a closer look at the entire hymn in light of the reversing ending leads one to conclude that the speaker is less naive or optimistic than was previously thought. The direction to circle back to the opening of the hymn, the appreciation that it opens with a prompting to bless rather than with praise, the recognition that the praise is purposeful and unrealistic – all these reveal the hymn to be not only a celebration of creation, but a palliative in the run-up to the main point, which is a precise and unequivocal statement on what must be done for the harmony to be indeed complete.

4. Summary

As noted above, Menahem Perry has dealt with the phenomenon he calls "a reversing poem".[53] When poems are written in this form, "the text moves on 'innocently', and the reader needs to organize the early parts of the poem in a different way. This happens because a crucial central detail in the 'old' pattern, which had been constructed by gap-filling, is explicitly contradicted by the sequel; or because the old pattern does not fully sustain the following details; or because the addition of new semantic material causes the reader to discover that the total would be better organized in a different pattern from that which organized its earlier parts."[54]

It seems to me that Perry's theory can enhance our comprehension of biblical literature and our appreciation of the reversing ending's special role. The reader of biblical literature, encountering a text ending that introduces new and different information, will realize that it directs him to re-read the text from the beginning and to see to what extent the new material integrates into the preceding semantic pattern, or whether it is necessary to find a new semantic structure appropriate to all of the text's components, including the ending with its added information. In this way it will be discovered that the story of Judah and Tamar is intended not to vilify him, but to depict him as a human being capable of error, but essentially conscious of justice. This interpretation also applies to Judah's part in the Joseph story, revealing that when Judah advised selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites, he was playing a key part in the divine plan – "the survival of many people" (Gen. 50:20). Likewise, it will be seen that the book of Judges is not opposed to monarchy on principle – on the contrary, it implies that monarchy is a political solution, though with the proviso that it must not resemble that of Abimelech. In other words, monarchy is a positive institution, provided it is timely and occupied by the right person. Thus, too, it will be seen that Psalm 104, more than it exalts the creation, it calls for its amelioration.

Elsewhere I argued that "one of the striking characteristics of biblical literature is its polemical tendency."[55] I would now add that the use of reversal endings serves the polemical writing. This technique sharpens the criticism and the protest against the opinions that the text appeared to support before. In any case it forces the reader to confront opposing opinions. It seems to me that the knowledge that sometimes the ending of a biblical unit – story, poem or an entire book[56] – directs readers to re-examine and consider the whole sequence in the light of its concluding information, contributes to our interpretations and may even lead to novel and possibly contradictory ones.

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53. Perry 1968; 1969; 1977; see note 24 above.
54. Perry 1977:57.
55. Amit 2000:3.
56. For an examination of some endings of books, see Zakovitch 2000.

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