

Poetic Seams in the Torah
Numbers 23—24

“The technique of using a poetic speech and a short epilogue to conclude a narrative is well known in biblical literature and occurs frequently within recognizable segments of the Pentateuch itself.”

(John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 35)

At the Micro Level

NARRATIVE	POEM	EPILOGUE
Creation Account (Genesis 1:1—2:22)	Adam’s Praise of Eve (Genesis 2:23)	Nature of Marriage (Genesis 2:24)
The Fall (Genesis 3:1-13)	Curse on Serpent, Woman, and Man (Genesis 3:14-19)	Banishment from the Garden (Genesis 3:20-24)
Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-22)	Lamech’s Song (Genesis 4:23-24)	Birth of Seth (Genesis 4:25-26)
...		
Joseph Narrative (Genesis 37:1—48:14)	Blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:15-16, 20)	Reaffirmation of Land Promise (Genesis 48:21-22)
Exodus Narrative (Exodus 1—14)	The Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-18)	Death of Pharaoh (Exodus 15:19-21)
...		

At the Macro Level

“More importantly, however, the pattern recurs at a much higher level within the Pentateuch, and this suggests that the technique was extended as part of the structure embracing the whole of the book.” (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 35)

NARRATIVE	POEM	EPILOGUE
The Patriarchal Narratives (Genesis 12—48)	Jacob’s Blessing (Genesis 49)	Death of Joseph (Genesis 50)
Wilderness Narratives (Exodus 15:22—Numbers 22:41)	Balaam’s Oracles (Numbers 23—24)	Baal Worship at Peor (Numbers 25)
On the Plains of Moab (Numbers 26—Deuteronomy 31)	Song and Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 32—33)	Death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34)

“A close look at the material lying between and connecting the narrative and poetic sections reveals the presence of a homogeneous compositional stratum. It is most noticeably marked by the recurrence of the same terminology and narrative motifs. In each of the three segments, the central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses) *calls an audience together* (imperative) and *proclaims* (cohortative) *what will happen in ‘the end of days.’*” (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 36)

Parallel Introductory Formula		
Jacob’s Blessing (Genesis 49)	Balaam’s Oracles (Numbers 23—24)	Song and Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 32—33)
Then Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come [בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים]. (Gen. 49:1)	And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days [בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים]. (Num. 24:14)	²⁸ Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears ... in the days to come [בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים] evil will befall you (Deut. 31:28-29)

“Such convergence of macrostructure, narrative motifs, and terminology among these three strategically important poems of the Pentateuch can hardly be accidental ... argues strongly for our taking these connecting segments to be part of the final work on the Pentateuch. To state it clearly, they reveal the work of the final composer or author of the Pentateuch. As such, they are also a clear indication of the author’s hermeneutic. The author shows throughout his work an intense interest in past events. His repeated and strategic return to the notion of “the last days” in giving his work its final shape reveals that his interest is in the future as well. In sum, the apparent overall strategy of the author in these three segments suggests that one of the central concerns lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch is an attempt to uncover an inherent relationship between the past and the future.” (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 37)

Messianic Prophecy		
Jacob's Blessing (Genesis 49)	Balaam's Oracles (Numbers 23—24)	Song and Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 32—33)
⁸ Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. ⁹ Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? ¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. ¹¹ Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. ¹² His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.	³ and he took up his discourse and said... ⁷ "Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. ⁸ God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. ⁹ He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you." ... ¹⁵ And he took up his discourse and said... ¹⁷ "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. ¹⁸ Edom shall be dispossessed; Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly. ¹⁹ And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!"	⁷ And this he said of Judah: "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him in to his people. With your hands contend for him, and be a help against his adversaries."

"In a direct reference to the promise of a king in Genesis 49, Moses prays [in Deuteronomy 33] that God would fulfill his promise to Judah and send the promised king" (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 478)