



There are keys which unlock many books and chapters and passages of the Bible. A chiasm is one of those keys, and it organizes and often explains what a passage of Scripture is all about.

A chiasm organizes a passage, so that there is a parallel with the beginning of the chiasm with the end of it; the second portion of the passage finds its match in the second to the last portion of the passage; etc.

Chi [pronounced *khee*] is a letter of Greek alphabet from which this organization gets its name. The idea is, the passage can be lined up against the left side of this Greek letter: X. I realize that you think that is an “X”, but is it actually a chi.

This is [Lesson #180 of the Basic Exegesis](#) series.

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Chiasmus from <http://www.inthebeginning.org/chiasmus/introduction/chexamples.htm> accessed February 22, 2012 and slightly modified. They also go under the happy name, [The X-Files](#).

The key that you have come across a chiasm is not that you see the words *chiasmus ahead* written anywhere, but you notice these parallel verses, parallel thoughts, or a set of 3 or more words which match exactly 3 or more words which have come before.

I have no clue that, when Scripture was read, whether such things were noted or not by the cadence, pauses or inflection of the speaker.

What follows is the structure along with the text of Gen. 17:

- A Abram's age (v. 1a): *When Abram was 99 years old*
- B The LORD appears to Abram (v. 1b): *the LORD appeared to Abram*
- C God's first speech—God's covenant with Abraham (vv. 1b-2): *and He said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be spiritually mature, that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly."*
- D Abram falls on his face (v. 3): *Then Abram fell on his face.*
- E God's second speech; (Abram's name changed, kings; vv. 4-8): *And Elohim spoke with him, saying, "Behold Me! My covenant [is] with you and you have been the father of a multitude of nations. Your name will no longer be called Abram, but your name has been Abraham, for I have made you a father of nations. I have made you exceedingly fruitful, and I have made you into nations, and kings will come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants [lit., *seed*] after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants [lit., *seed*] after you. And I will give to you and to your descendants [lit., *seed*] after you the land of your wanderings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."*
- X God's Third Speech: the covenant of circumcision; (vv. 9-14): *And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you [all]. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be*

cut off from the peoples of the covenant; he has violated [or, *made ineffectual*] My covenant."

- E' God's fourth speech; (Sarai's name changed, kings; vv. 15-16): And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name." And I have blessed her; furthermore, I have given you a son from her. When I have blessed him, then he has become nations—kings of peoples will come [lit., *will be*] from him."
- D' Abraham falls on his face (vv. 17-18): Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"
- C' God's fifth speech—God's covenant with Isaac (vv. 19-21): God said, "On the contrary, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you will call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and I will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."
- B' God "goes up" from Abraham (i.e., He no longer appeared to Abraham) (v. 22): When He had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him.
- A' Abraham's age (vv. 24-27): Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

What this chiasm does is, help to organize this chapter into a unified whole. If I want to learn this chapter—even to memorize it word-by-word, I first learn the structure of the chapter, and then I fit the text into this structure. The extensive use of chiasm and other memory aids suggests that much of the early portions of Genesis, very early on, was memorized. This does not take from their historicity; this simply means that a structure was given to various sections, to make this easier to memorize.

There is a second important aspect to a chiasm; the chiasm tells me what is most important in this chapter, and the central theme of this chapter is the very middle of the chiasm (marked with a chi, X): God's mandate to Abraham to be circumcised and for all the males associated with him to be circumcised. Since I have repeated this a few dozen

times, when you hear the word *circumcision*, you immediately think of Abraham being *sexually reborn* and you think of *spiritual birth*. This is the key to this chapter.

Now let's move from the center of the chiasm (circumcision) to the E/E' tiers: what happens when you have been born? You are given a name; the person who has given you life gives you your name. Abram is reborn by God; he is spiritually born; and so, God gives him a name: *Abraham*. *Abram* was an exalted father; a *father of high and lofty things*; but now, he is *the father of a multitude*; he is the *father of many*. On the other side of this is Sarai, and for many years of their marriage, Abram called her, "My prince" and she often told him what to do. The end results were not very pretty. However, she is reborn; she is born again by God; therefore, God gives her a name: *Sarah*. She is now Abraham's *princess*.

Now, think in terms of principle, not in terms of chronology. The principle is first, there is the spiritual birth and then there is renaming of this person, which represents imputed righteousness. Because Abraham and Sarah are reborn, they become children of God with His imputed righteousness. The new names represent this new birth and the One giving them new life gave them their names.

God the Holy Spirit, inspiring the writer of these words, from the first book of the Bible, tells us all about being born again; being born from above, and that the One giving them new life—Y^ehowah Elohim—also gives them new names. Again, this is not a call for your pastor or spiritual leader to start giving everyone in his congregation a new name. Did he regenerate you? Of course not! God had regenerated you; and God regenerated Abram and Sarai; and therefore, God is able to name them.

Quite obviously, God did not do all of this when they first believed in Him. At that point in time, Sarai was still telling father of the high and lofty what to do. They had not grown spiritually. Therefore, they were not quite ready to obey God's commands, which commands were designed to have meaning for us down until today.

Let's move out into the D/D' blocks. Abraham falls on his face. It has been 13 years since God has come to him. God even went and spoke to his mistress Hagar, but God has not spoken to him for 13 years. So, when God comes to Abraham, he prostrates himself before Him.

In the second instance that Abraham falls on his face, God reveals to him exactly what is going to happen and how the covenant (promise, contract) is going to be fulfilled. This time, Abraham is laughing, and he hides his response from God. All of a sudden, those promises from God are not for some distant time off in the nebulous future, but God puts a date to it: next year. And God tells Abraham how it will all happen. So, Abraham is laying there, face down, smiling, laughing, and asking himself, "Will Sarah bear me a child? Hasn't that train left the station already?"

We know that Sarah is an extremely beautiful woman; and we may reasonably assume that she and Abraham had relations throughout their marriage, but, nothing came of that.

There were no children to be had in all their years of marriage. However, now, even though they could not bear children when they were both healthy and young, God tells Abraham that she will bear him a son, even though they are clearly past the time of fertility.

This gives us (1) the spiritual birth (represented by circumcision); (2) the new names (representing being born into a new family); and (3) the promises of God given to those who are His.

Now let's look at the C/C' block: *and He said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be spiritually mature, that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly."* God comes back to Abraham after 13 years and he tells Abraham to walk before God and to be spiritually mature. Part of that spiritual maturity is to listen to God and to obey Him. Now Abraham expresses some doubt about Sarah bearing him a child, and *God says, "On the contrary, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you will call his name Isaac. And I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and I will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."* In both paragraphs, God speaks of His covenant, first with Abraham and then with a yet unborn and not-yet-conceived Isaac. God promises to multiply Abraham greatly and He promises for His covenant with Isaac to be eternal.

In other words, (4) Spiritual maturity means that God's promises are imminent. You will also notice that God has answered prayer, which becomes a greater factor in the life of someone who is spiritually mature.

The B/B' block: *...the LORD appeared to Abram...[and] When He had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him.*

God had to wait for awhile. Abraham had to find out that his own works of the flesh, his own human good, was not the way to go. Listening to his wife and obeying her; not the way to go. Having a child by a mistress; not the way to go. So, after 13 years, where there were no doubt some conflicts and difficulties that arose because of what Abraham chose to do, now Abraham is ready and willing to do things God's way, exactly God's way. So Abraham, despite his falling down and laughing, that very day, circumcises all the males of his household.

And, finally, the A/A' block: *When Abram was 99 years old...Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.*

Abraham is 99 years old when God appears to him and he obeys God right there and then, when he is 99 years old. Abraham is now ready to move forward spiritually; he is ready to get a down payment toward God's promises to him. In one year, Abraham would be blessed with a son, his first and only son by Sarah, when he is 100 years old.

Or, more briefly (taking the A and B blocks together), (5) Occupation with the Person of Christ resulting in obedience to the mandates of God.

Now let's put all of these together: (1) the spiritual birth (represented by circumcision); (2) the new names (representing new life and entering into a new family); (3) the promises of God given to those who are His; (4) Spiritual maturity means that God's promises are imminent; and (5) Occupation with the Person of Christ resulting in obedience to the mandates of God, which will eventually result in fulfillment of God's promises. .

In case you did not get this, we began in the middle of the chiasm and worked our way to the outside, and this gives us the logical order of our spiritual lives.

One more thing about how amazing the Word of God is. This chapter has been around for about 4000 years. Millions upon millions of people have studied it. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that you have heard this chiasm taught in this particular order, going from the center to the outer blocks, resulting in an outline of the spiritual life. Nothing here was new about the spiritual life; but it was just hidden here within this chiasm waiting to be unearthed. The Bible is like that. God's wisdom is great and He wants His Word to be examined thoroughly.

To me, the chiasm is one of the fascinating things in the Word of God. I believe that these historical narratives were repeated for several generations, passed along to many people. Furthermore, we are going to find that the knowledge of God, at this time, was not confined merely to Abraham, but that it existed in many places in the Land of Promise. We have already seen Melchizedek, to whom Abraham paid tithes and to whom Abraham gave respect. But this truth of God's Word and Who and What God is could be found all over the world, sometimes simply remembered by means of a chiasm.

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