

Standards of Cohesion and Coherence: Evidence from Early Readers

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1.0 Introduction

What can we know about the standards of cohesion and coherence held by the authors of ancient Israelite texts? If we recognize the fact that when we read we may be imposing our modern conventions on ancient literature, this becomes no small question. In this essay, I will consider the issue by examining evidence from early readers of biblical literature.¹ I will begin with the earliest explicit reader statements about textual cohesion and coherence, then examine actual reading practices, moving back in time in order to determine whether responses to a perceived lack of cohesion and coherence change in various ways. I will conclude with reflections on what we can and cannot learn from this evidence.

2.0 Defining Cohesion and Coherence

I will take the following premises as starting points: first, cohesion refers to formal connections at the surface structure of a text, and coherence refers to connections in one's mental model formed during the reading process.² Second, there are degrees of cohesion and coherence, and some texts are typically experienced by readers as more or less cohesive or coherent than other texts. Third, incoherence may be perceived either as a function of

¹ I will use the term "biblical literature" below although it is anachronistic for some of the periods under investigation. For issues that must be considered when using the word "Bible," see Karin Finsterbusch and Armin Lange, *What is Bible?* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

² Strictly speaking, texts do not "have" coherence any more than they "have" meaning; coherence, like meaning, is something that exists in the heads of authors and readers. Nevertheless, the way texts are (or are not) shaped necessarily relates to coherence (or the lack of it) in a reader's mental model. For definitions of cohesion and coherence, and for the question of how readers construct coherent mental models out of texts, see M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976); Robert de Beaugrande and Wolfgang Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London: Longman, 1981), 48–112 (esp. 3–4: "COHESION . . . concerns the ways in which the components of the SURFACE TEXT, i.e. the actual words we hear or see, are *mutually connected within a sequence*. . . . COHERENCE . . . concerns the ways in which the components of the TEXTUAL WORLD, i.e. the configuration of CONCEPTS and RELATIONS which *underlie* the surface text, are *mutually accessible and relevant*"); Patricia L. Carrell, "Cohesion is Not Coherence," *TESOL Quarterly* 16.4 (1982): 479–88; idem, "Comments on Patricia Carrell's 'Cohesion Is Not Coherence': The Author Responds," *TESOL Quarterly* 18.1 (1984): 161–68; Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 190–99, 223–71; Michel Charolles, "Text Connexity, Text Coherence and Text Interpretation Processing," in *Text Connexity, Text Coherence: Aspects, Methods, Results*, ed. Emel Sözer (Hamburg: H. Buske, 1985), 1–15; Lita Lundquist, "Coherence: From Structures to Processes," in *Text Connexity, Text Coherence*, 151–75; Nils Erik Enkvist, "From Text to Interpretability: A Contribution to the Discussion of Basic Terms in Text Linguistics," in *Connexity and Coherence: Analysis of Text and Discourse*, ed. Wolfgang Heydrich et al., RTT 12 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 369–82; Marsha Bensoussan, "Redundancy and the Cohesion Cloze," *Journal of Research in Reading* 13.1 (1990): 18–37; R. F. Lorch, Jr. and E. J. O'Brien (eds.), *Sources of Coherence in Reading* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995); Walter Kintsch, *Comprehension: A Paradigm for Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

presence (i.e., the processing of the text seems to require multiple contradictory or mutually exclusive connections), or as a function of *absence* (i.e., something in one's mental model cannot satisfactorily be connected to anything else). Fourth, incoherence can exist on a variety of levels of analysis—analysis of plot, analysis of character, and so on. Readers attempt to construe whether an event happened in one way or in another way; whether one event is causally related to another event; whether a character embodies one set of traits / goals / motives or another; whether one description can be correlated with another description. I should clarify here the relationship between *gaps* and *incoherence*: on the one hand, reading is by definition a process of reducing indeterminacy and “filling gaps”; on the other hand, all textual worlds are necessarily incomplete representations, just as our perception of the real world is also incomplete.³ One's constructed mental model is the result of an attempt to fill gaps, but will itself always contain gaps. And while some gaps may not be perceived as a threat to coherence, others may.⁴

3.0 Explicit Statements: Josephus and Philo

It might be possible to form an idea of ancient literary conventions by looking at early readers' explicit statements on the subject. After all, we possess treatises on grammar, poetics, and rhetoric that shed light on ancient Greek and Roman standards of cohesion and coherence.⁵ Can we find similar evidence with respect to biblical literature?

Our earliest extant reflective statements about cohesion and coherence come from the Second Temple-period authors Josephus and Philo. In some cases, polemical or apologetic concerns seem to have elicited their statements; in others, they are responding to the presence of difference or diversity in the text. For example, in his treatise *Against Apion*, Josephus claims that the lengthy composition process of some Greek literature resulted in “disagreement” (διαφωνίας), that Greek historiographers “say contradictory things concerning the same matters” (τάναντιώτατα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν λέγειν), and that they “disagree” (διαπεφωνήκασιν). In contrast, he argues, there is no “disagreement” (διαφωνίας)

³ For descriptions of gaps, indeterminacies, and the reading process, see Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” *New Literary History* 3.2 (1972): 279–99; idem, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 110–13, 163–79.

⁴ Or more precisely (as I will show below): different readers will have different perceptions of what constitutes incoherence.

⁵ For statements about cohesion, see e.g. the treatments of conjunctions in the grammar attributed to Dionysius Thrax, or the treatment of anaphoric pronouns in the syntax of Apollonius Dyscolus, both of which speak about discourse linkages. For texts and translations, see Gustav Uhlig (ed.), *Dionysii Thracis Ars Grammatica* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1883), here 86–91; Alan Kemp, “The *TEKHNE GRAMMATIKĒ* of Dionysius Thrax,” *Historiographia Linguistica* 13.2–3 (1986): 343–63 (here 359); Gustav Uhlig (ed.), *De Constructione Libri Quattuor (Peri Sntaxeōs)* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1910); Fred Householder, *The Syntax of Apollonius Dyscolus. Translated, and with commentary* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1981), here 90. For statements about coherence, see e.g. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450b21–36, 1451a32–34; Plato, *Phaedrus* 264 C 2; Horace, *Ars Poetica* 1–9, 23. These authors speak about the necessity of order (τάξει), organization (συνεστάναι), how parts should be related and form a coherent whole (πρέποντ' ἀλλήλοις καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ γεγραμμένα), and how a poetic work should be “simple and uniform” (*simplex et unum*). All compare artistic works to a properly formed living organism. See Stephen Halliwell (trans.), *Aristotle's Poetics*, LCL 199 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Harold North Fowler (trans.), *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, LCL 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914); H. Rushton Fairclough (trans.), *Horace: Satires, Epistles, The Art of Poetry*, LCL 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

in Jewish scripture; these books are not like those of the Greeks, “disagreeing with and contradicting each other” (ἀσυμφώνων καὶ μαχομένων).⁶

Philo—trying to make sense of the Pentateuch’s diversity when it speaks of life in terms of both “breath” (LXX Gen 2:7) and “blood” (LXX Lev 17:11, 14)—likewise argues for the coherence of the Pentateuch: “Now we must notice that it is the writer’s [= *Moses*] invariable habit never to forget for a moment the principles which he has laid down at the outset; he is scrupulously careful to let his later statements be such as follow from and agree with what he has said before.”⁷ This is in line with what Philo says elsewhere about the unity of the Pentateuch:⁸

Accordingly, the Legislation is in some sense a unified creature, which one should view from all sides in its entirety with open eyes and examine the intention of the entire writing exactly, truly, and clearly, not cutting up its harmony or dividing its unity. For when things are deprived of their common element, they appear to be of somewhat different form and species.

These statements are valuable, but we should not overlook the fact that they are rare. Moreover, these authors do not explain at what point perceived dissimilarities in a text are enough to outweigh the perception of unity. What for Josephus and Philo *would* constitute incoherence in these texts? Here we must turn from what these authors *say* to what they actually *do* when they read.

4.0 Implicit Responses: Repairing Incoherence and Strengthening Coherence

When motivated readers perceive a lack of (or a potential threat to) cohesion or coherence during the reading process, they will typically attempt to engage in “repair” or “strengthening” activities. A great deal of effort has gone into recognizing when reading comprehension breaks down due to lack of coherence, and into facilitating solutions to this problem.⁹ Publishers rely on proof-readers and copy-editors to ensure the readability of books, and teachers urge students to re-read and correct their essays. Software engineers have attempted to automate the process of repair by creating computerized spell- and grammar-checkers.¹⁰ Is it therefore possible to find examples of how early readers of biblical texts attempted to respond to a perceived lack of or threat to cohesion and coherence?

⁶ Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.12, 15, 18, 37–38; see John M. G. Barclay, *Against Apion: Translation and Commentary*. Vol. 10 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Volker Siegert (ed.), *Flavius Josephus: Über die Ursprünglichkeit des Judentums (Contra Apionem). Band 2: Beigaben, Anmerkungen, griechischer Text* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

⁷ Philo, *Det.* 81: καὶ μὴ τῶν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὑποθέσεων ἄκρως εἴωθε διαμεμνησθαι τὰ ἀκόλουθα καὶ ὁμολογούμενα τοῖς προτέροις δικαίων ἐφαρμόττειν. See F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (eds.), *Philo. Volume II*, LCL 227 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 256–57.

⁸ Philo, *QG* 3.3. See Ralph Marcus (trans.), *Philo. Supplement I. Questions and Answers on Genesis*, LCL 380 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 178–79.

⁹ See e.g. Susan R. Goldman, Arthur C. Graesser, and Paul van den Broek (eds.), *Narrative Comprehension, Causality, and Coherence: Essays in Honor of Tom Trabasso* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999); T. Trabasso and E. Bouchard, “Teaching Readers How to Comprehend Text Strategically,” in *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*, ed. C. C. Block and M. Pressley (New York: Guilford, 2002), 176–202; Danielle S. McNamara (ed.), *Reading Comprehension Strategies: Theories, Interventions, and Technologies* (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007).

¹⁰ Ironically, the use of such automated tools occasionally results in greater incohesion and incoherence: words that do not exist in the spell-checker database are replaced by the algorithm with what might be plausible substitutes, but which are actually erroneous. See “The word: Cupertino effect,” *New Scientist* 196, Issue 2632,

4.1 Josephus and Philo

As I noted above, both Josephus and Philo claimed that scripture was coherent: it did not contradict itself and was consistent with itself. But when we look at how these commentators actually handle the text, they certainly seem to be responding to incoherence or the possibility of incoherence.¹¹ The following examples are representative:

4.1.1 Lexical and syntactic incohesion

Gen 1:5 Why is the day described in this verse designated with a cardinal number, while all other days in Gen 1 are designated with ordinal numbers? Josephus spots this lack of consistency and promises to explain it (*Ant.* 1.27, though in fact he does not provide the explanation in this work). What seems to have elicited his response is the heavily repetitive and patterned nature of Genesis 1, which has prompted an expectation of similarity and regularity. A breach in this similarity and regularity can be perceived as the breakdown of a pattern—a lack of cohesion.¹²

Gen 2:16–17 (LXX) Why the sudden shift from second person singular to plural address?¹³ Philo (*QG* 1.15) spots this shift and feels the need to account for it (here he “explains” it by means of a moral allegory). Philo notices other referent shifts as well: he spots differences in appellations for God (from “Lord” in LXX Gen 8:15 to “God” in v. 20, and to “Lord God” in v. 21) and attempts to explain them (*QG* 2.53). Both this example and the one cited above (*Det.* 81) may also indicate that Philo actually experiences diversity of description as incoherence.

4.1.2 Incoherence at the level of character analysis

Num 22:1–38 The biblical authors do not always explicitly describe a character’s motives, leaving readers to infer them from the contextual data and from their own experience. But when it is difficult to explain a character’s actions, readers may perceive this as a threat to coherence.¹⁴ For example: why, after God has told Balaam not to go with Balak’s messengers (*Num* 22:12–13), does he suddenly change his mind and tell Balaam

1 December 2007, p. 62; Matthew Moore, “The Clbuttic Mistake: When obscenity filters go wrong,” *The Telegraph*, 2 September 2008.

¹¹ For studies of Josephus’ text-handling techniques, see Michael Avioz, *Josephus’ Interpretation of the Books of Samuel*, LSTS 86 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015); Christopher Begg, *Josephus’ Account of the Early Divided Monarchy (AJ 8,212–420). Rewriting the Bible*, BETL 108 (Leuven: Leuven University Press / Peeters, 1993); idem, *Josephus’ Story of the Later Monarchy (AJ 9,1–10,185)*, BETL 145 (Leuven: Leuven University Press / Peeters, 2000); Louis Feldman, *Studies in Josephus’ Rewritten Bible*, JSJSup 58 (Leiden: Brill, 1998). For studies of Philo’s text-handling, see Adam Kamesar, “Biblical Interpretation in Philo,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65–91; Maren R. Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); idem, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); D. T. Runia, *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Variorum: Aldershot, 1990); Folker Siegert, “Early Jewish Interpretation in a Hellenistic Style,” in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation. Vol. I: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300), Part 1: Antiquity*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 130–98.

¹² See the comments on the differences in MT and LXX of Genesis 1 below.

¹³ This could also be categorized under plot incoherence, since there is no one other than Adam to whom God could be speaking at this point in the story.

¹⁴ A good example is Exod 4.24–26 (which, unfortunately, neither Philo nor Josephus comment on). James Kugel notes: “These verses seem completely mysterious. Why, having commissioned Moses to return to Egypt, should God then decide to kill him? And why should Zipporah’s circumcising her son and her mention of a “bridegroom of blood” have apparently led to God’s leaving “him” (Moses?) alone? Even today, most biblical commentators seem baffled by this brief passage.” See James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 517–19.

to go with them the second time they ask (Num 22:20)—but then become angry at him for going (Num 22:22)? According to Philo (*Mos.* 1.268), what God said in v. 20 was actually a dream recounted by Balaam to the messengers.¹⁵ According to Josephus (*Ant.* 4.107), God’s command in v. 20 was a deliberate plan to deceive Balaam.¹⁶ For both interpreters, then, the textual depiction of God requires explanation in order to produce coherence at the level of character analysis.

4.1.3 Incoherence at the level of plot analysis

Gen 1–2 How should the similarities and differences in Gen 1–2 be explained? The threat to coherence in this case stems from the perception of redundancy or contradiction. Both authors respond to the same problem using different strategies: Philo explains the material as a single report of a two-stage creation process,¹⁷ whereas Josephus explains the material as two reports (using different kinds of discourse) of a single creation process.¹⁸

Gen 3–4 (in relation to Gen 2:17) Why didn’t Adam and Eve die “in the day” they ate from the tree?¹⁹ Philo resolves the problem by an allegorical understanding of the reference to death and by exploiting a formal feature in the text (the repetition of the verbal root in the expression θανάτω ἀποθανεῖσθε, Gen 2:17): “it is for this reason that God says not only “die” but “die the death,” indicating not the death common to us all, but that special death properly so called which is that of the soul becoming entombed in passions and wickedness of all kinds.”²⁰

Gen 4:14, 17 Who does Cain fear, and who does he marry, if the text presents Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel as the only humans present? Josephus (*Ant.* 1.52) fills this gap by arguing that Adam and Eve had daughters as well as sons (cf. Gen 5:4b), and in *Ant.* 1.59 explains Cain’s fear of being killed by “all who find me” (Gen 4:14) as fear of wild animals.²¹

Gen 9:24–27 Why did Noah curse Canaan, if Ham was the offender? The incoherence here lies in the difference between the reader’s expectations and the story’s outcome (in the storyline so far, deed and consequence have been tightly linked). Actually, there are two issues here: why Noah *didn’t* curse Ham, and why Noah *did* curse Canaan. As to the first, Philo believes that a curse on one’s offspring is a suitable punishment for one’s own misdeeds; as to the second, Philo believes that Canaan must have somehow been involved in Ham’s actions (*QG* 2.77; cf. 2.70). Josephus resolves the incoherence differently: Noah did not curse Ham because they were immediate blood relatives (*Ant.* 1.142). With respect to the second issue, Josephus seems to recognize that there is a larger anti-Canaanite narrative strategy at work in the Pentateuch (*Ant.* 1.142; cf. 1.185).

Judg 1:8 Why does the text say that Judah successfully conquered Jerusalem and burned it, when according to Josh 15:63; Judg 1:21 the Israelite tribes were unable to capture the city of Jerusalem, and the Jebusite inhabitants remained there (cf. 2 Sam 5:6)? Josephus (*Ant.* 5.124) responds to this by arguing that Jerusalem had

¹⁵ Philo’s explanation seems to have been triggered by the statement that “God came to Balaam at night” (v. 20); he uses this temporal reference to explain God’s speech as a dream imagined or fabricated by Balaam to justify his greedy desires.

¹⁶ Josephus may be drawing on the theme of prophetic deception in 1 Kgs 22:19–23; Ezek 14:7, 9–10.

¹⁷ Philo, *QG* 1.19 (Marcus, *Philo*, 12): “Why are beasts and birds now again created, when their creation was announced earlier in the six-day (creation story)?” He concludes that that the things created in Gen 1 were “incorporeal” (ἀσώματα), “symbolically typical species” (δεικτινὰ καὶ τροπικὰ ἰδέα), while those created in Gen 2 were perceptible physical entities. See also Philo, *Opif.* 129–130, 134.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 1.34; see H. St.-J. Thackeray (trans.), *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities. Books 1–3*, LCL 242 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 16–17: “And here, after the seventh day, Moses begins to interpret nature [φυσιολογεῖν].”

¹⁹ Philo, *Leg.* 1.105–107; see F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (eds.), *Philo. Volume I*, LCL 226 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 216–17: “And yet after they have eaten not merely do they not die, but they beget children and become authors of life to others.” This could be taken as a contradiction either on the level of plot analysis or character analysis, as an incoherence in the depiction of the character of God (who made a promise he did not keep).

²⁰ *Ibid.*; see also Philo, *QG* 1.16.

²¹ Note, however, that Josephus does not explicitly say Cain married his sister. See also Philo, *Post.* 33–34 (who denies that Cain married his sister), and *QG* 1.74 (where he, like Josephus, concludes that Cain was afraid of wild animals).

two levels or districts: the Judahites were able to conquer the lower city and kill its inhabitants, while the upper city remained unconquered.

What are we to make of these examples? On the one hand, it seems clear that both Josephus and Philo approach the text with expectations of cohesion and coherence on multiple levels of analysis (lexical semantics, syntax, character portrayal, plot). On the other hand, it could be argued that in some cases, their expectations are shaped by non-native conventions. They both live centuries after the period in which the texts were composed, and write from a Hellenistic Jewish literary milieu. Josephus states that he is writing for a wide, Greek-speaking audience (*Ant.* 1.1–5), and Philo clearly reads the biblical text with categories derived from Greek philosophical traditions, as evidenced by his sharp reaction to anthropomorphisms (*Leg.* 1.43–44; *Post.* 1–9), his interpretation of Gen 1–2 as a two-stage creation of incorporeal things and their perceptible counterparts (*QG* 1.19; *Opif.* 129–130, 134), and his pervasive allegorical explanations of the text (*Opif.* 157–158; *Leg.*).²²

4.2 Second Temple-Period Interpretive Literature

Moving back in time, our next source of data is Second Temple-period Jewish interpretive literature written in Hebrew or Aramaic. The authors of these works do not provide us with explicit reflective statements, but we might be able to infer something about expectations of cohesion and coherence by looking at their text-handling techniques.

4.2.1 *Incoherence at the level of semantic analysis*

Gen 49:4 What does it mean to say that Reuben “profaned the bed” of his father? The verb is typically used elsewhere (particularly in priestly literature) to refer to things that are understood as holy: God’s name is profaned by child sacrifice (Lev 18:21) or by false oaths (Lev 19:12); the land is profaned by idolatry (Jer 16:18); God’s sanctuary is profaned when approached or entered by those who do not belong there (Lev 21:23; Ezek 7:22; 23:39). What then does it mean for a *bed* to be “profaned,” and to what incident could this possibly refer?²³ 4Q252 frg. 1, 4.3–7 explains it with reference to Gen 35:22: “its interpretation is that he rebuked him because he lay with Bilhah his concubine.”

4.2.2 *Incoherence at the level of plot analysis*

Gen 1–2 How should the two creation reports in Genesis be understood in relation to each other? The author of Jubilees attempted to fit all events into a chronological framework based on the seven-day schema found in Gen 1. For example, Jub 2:7 (cf. 4Q216 6.2–4) locates the planting of the Garden (Gen 2:8) on the third day of creation (Gen 1:9–13). But what about the creation of humans and animals? According to Jub 2:13–14 (4Q216 7.1–3), land animals and humans were made on the sixth day of the first week (cf. Gen 1:24–27). The mention of animals in Gen 2:19–20a is not a creation account, but the bringing of animals *already created* in order to be named by Adam in the *second* week (Jub 3:1–2). So what does Jubilees do with the creation of the woman presented in Gen 2:22? According to the author, the woman *was* created on the sixth day of the first week, but only in the form of Adam’s rib—which was then fashioned into the woman and revealed to Adam in the second week (Jub 3:6, 8).

²² See Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria*, 181: “Philo stresses problems in the literal text in order to make room for allegory on the one hand while assuming authorial intention and anchoring allegory within the literal text on the other. The literal dimension of Scripture thus is not dismissed but shown to be problematic to a degree that renders the allegorical meaning plausible, if not necessary.”

²³ For attempts to explain the expression “profane her father” (Lev 21:9), see below.

Gen 3–4 (in relation to Gen 2:17) Why didn't Adam and Eve die "in the day" they ate from the tree? According to Jubilees 4:29–30, because Adam lived 930 years (Gen 5:5), and because "1000 years are like a day in [God's] sight" (Ps 90:4), Adam *did* die in the "day" he ate.

Gen 4:17 Who did Cain marry, and how did humanity spread, if the story has mentioned only four people? According to Jubilees 4:9, 10, Adam and Eve had other children, and Cain married his sister.

Gen 9:18–19 Why does v. 18b only list the descendants of Ham, and what is the reader to do with this information?²⁴ If on the one hand the notice is simply to prepare the reader for the curse of Canaan (Gen 9:24–27), it is redundant (see v. 22a); if on the other hand the notice is genealogical in nature, it is incomplete (see Gen 10:1–32). The Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen 12.9–13) rearranges the presentation of the story by taking details from chap. 10 and placing them between Gen 9:18 and 9:20. The result is a genealogy of *all* of Noah's sons. The reader now understands how to integrate v. 18b into its context, resulting in a coherent reading.²⁵

Gen 9:24–27 Why did Noah curse Canaan, if Ham was the offender? According to 4Q252 frg. 1, 2.5–7, Noah could not curse Ham because God had already blessed him (Gen 9:1). The author attempts to adjust the reader's perception of incoherence by using details in the local context.

Gen 12:13 Why does Abraham's later report of what he said to Sarah (Gen 20:13) not match his earlier speech in Gen 12? The Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen 19.19–20) creates coherence by placing details of the Sarah-Abimelech story (Abraham's reference to "every place where we come," Gen 20:13) in the Sarah-Pharaoh story to match Abraham's later comment to Abimelech.

In these earlier examples taken from works composed in Hebrew or Aramaic, we are perhaps somewhat closer to the conventions of the authors of biblical texts. It is noteworthy that the repair of incoherence is typically accomplished by using material from the surrounding context. Still, the number of these interpretive works is small, and even here we occasionally see a foreign *Tendenz* creeping in (e.g., the sanitizing of Abraham in the Genesis Apocryphon—something that was not a concern for the authors / redactors of Genesis).

4.3 Scribal Transmission and Translation

It might be possible to get even closer to the conventions of the biblical authors and redactors by looking at scribal practice as attested in ancient textual witnesses to these compositions. The scribes who copied and translated them introduced changes that seem in some cases to be attempts at repairing a lack of cohesion or coherence.²⁶

4.3.1 Asymmetry / lexical incohesion

²⁴ Philo (*QG* 2.65) also explicitly comments on this as a problem to be solved.

²⁵ Moshe J. Bernstein, "Re-Arrangement, Anticipation and Harmonization as Exegetical Features in the Genesis Apocryphon," *DSD* 3.1 (1996): 37–57. See his comments: "One of the means by which "Re-written Bible" "improves" on the Bible is by attempting to create a more seamless narrative than the biblical original through the removal of slight irregularities and inconsistencies in the story by the furnishing of useful details in advance of their occurrence in the biblical narrative. . . . The techniques which we call "anticipation," "re-arrangement" and "constructive harmonization" are related devices whose goal is the production of the smoother narrative of which we speak" (38); "The rearrangement in this portion of the Apocryphon is thus conditioned by the desire to create a smoother and more coherent narrative" (42).

²⁶ For other examples, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); John W. Wevers, "The Interpretive Character and Significance of the LXX," in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation. Vol. I. From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300). Part 1. Antiquity*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 84–107.

Genesis 1:1–2:3 The material in the Hebrew text is highly repetitive and patterned—though in some cases, there appear to be gaps or asymmetries in the pattern which can be perceived as incohesion. The Hebrew *Vorlage* behind the Greek translation strengthened the pattern by moving “and it was so” from v. 7 to v. 6 (after the speech report, thus matching the pattern in vv. 9, 11, 14–15, etc.), inserting “and God saw that it was good” in v. 8 (to match the notices on the other days), and inserting “and it was so” in v. 20 (again, after the speech report).²⁷

4.3.2 Syntactic incohesion

Isa 12:5 The expression יהוה יִמְרוּ attested in MT *Isa 12:5* is ambiguous: is Yhwh the recipient of song, or should the Divine Name be treated as a vocative? The scribe who copied 1QIs^a eliminated the ambiguity by adding a preposition: זמרו ליהוה, “Sing to Yhwh” (in line with the syntax of v. 4, הודו ליהוה). The function of the constituent has been clarified, and cohesion is thus restored.²⁸

Ezek 11:16–18 The sudden shifts in the text (see MT) from third person plural forms (v. 16) to second person plural forms (v. 17) back to third person forms (v. 18) are levelled by the Greek translator, who changes the forms in v. 17 to third person.²⁹

4.3.3 Strengthening coherence by specifying a referent

Gen 29:21–25 This text is syntactically cohesive, but contains inflected forms whose referents are not consistently specified in an explicit manner. It is clear that the subject of some of the verbs in these verses can only be Laban, whereas the subject of other verbs—and the antecedent of the masculine suffixed form “to him” in v. 23—can only be Jacob. But the reader of the Hebrew text must make these identifications on pragmatic grounds and by looking at the wider context. In contrast, the Greek translation inserts the name “Jacob” three times in vv. 23, 25 in order to facilitate the reader’s ability to track the referents more efficiently. We see the same phenomenon in the Greek translation of 1 Kgs 19:3, 6, 10, 14, which explicitly inserts the name “Elijah” where the Hebrew text contains only a masculine inflected form.

4.3.4 Repair of incoherence by introducing a referent

Isa 40:2a In the Hebrew text, Yhwh urges someone to “speak to the heart of Jerusalem” (דברו על-לב ירושלים), but the identity of this person is not disclosed. The Greek translation fills the gap by inserting a plausible addressee—Israel’s priests (ιερείς, λαλήσατε εἰς τὴν καρδίαν Ἰερουσαλημ), who would quite naturally be thought of as the ones who would proclaim that guilt had been atoned for (v. 2b).

4.3.5 Incoherence at the level of semantic analysis

Lev 21:9 (MT, SP) What does it mean for a woman to “profane her father” (את אביה היא מחוללת) by fornication? 4QLev^c explained the expression as “profaning the *house* of her father” (using Deut 22:21 as a resource), and the Hebrew *Vorlage* behind the Greek translation explained it as “profaning the *name* of her father” (using Lev 20:3 as a resource).³⁰

²⁷ Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press 1998), 20–24, 30–31.

²⁸ See also Ps 47:7 זמרו לאלהים, which some manuscripts clarify by changing to זמרו לאלהים.

²⁹ See the recognition formulas in Ezek 13:9 (LXX changes second plural to third plural forms); Ezek 28:22 (LXX changes third plural to second singular forms); Ezek 35:15 (LXX changes third plural to second singular forms); and the address in Deut 5:2–3 (LXX changes first plural to second plural forms).

³⁰ See David Andrew Teeter, *Scribal Laws*, FAT 92 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2014), 125, 197–98.

4.3.6 Incoherence at the level of character analysis

Ezek 6:1–7 This oracle is addressed to the “mountains of Israel” (v. 3). To some readers, the language in this oracle posed a problem: how could (obviously inanimate) mountains possess “bones” (v. 5b)? To other readers, the answer was obvious: by metonymy, the word “mountains” referred to the *people* on the mountains (cf. Ezek 22:9). To prevent misunderstanding, a scribe introduced a line from Lev 26:30 into Ezek 6:5a (present in MT, but absent in the Greek translation), clarifying that the “the sons of Israel” were being spoken of.³¹ Curiously, this strengthening of coherence created a lack of cohesion: the inserted material in Ezek 6:5a uses a third-person reference (“their idols”) that breaks up the surrounding flow of second-person forms in vv. 3–4, 5b–7.

Ezek 21:8b The Hebrew text states that God will “cut off from you [= Jerusalem] righteous and wicked” (והכרתי מִמְךָ צְדִיק ורשע). One way to read this expression is as a merism denoting complete destruction, in line with the earlier statement (v. 3) that God would start a fire in order to burn “every green tree and every dry tree.”³² Another way to read it is to take it literally, as the Greek translator did—which results in an incoherence in how Yhwh is portrayed in the corpus of scripture. How could a deity who was depicted elsewhere as committed to justice (e.g., Gen 18:23–26; Ps 33:5) treat righteous and wicked in the same way? To maintain coherence, the translator changed the text to read “I will cut off from you *un*righteous and wicked” (ἐξολεθρεύσω ἐκ σοῦ ἄδικον καὶ ἄνομον).³³

4.3.7 Incoherence at the level of plot analysis

Gen 2:2 On what day did God “finish” (כלה) his creative work? The Hebrew text represented by the MT states that “God finished on the seventh day his work” (ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו), then consecrated that day, “because on it he rested from his work” (כי בו שבת מכל-מלאכתו) (v. 3). But does the verb “finish” presume an inclusive or exclusive counting of days? The wording of v. 2 leaves open the possibility that God worked even on the seventh day, then stopped on that day. But such an understanding contradicts how the seventh day is treated by other texts (e.g., Exod 31:14–15, 17). Other textual witnesses (LXX, SP, Syr) clarify that the last creative actions took place on the *sixth* day; thus no work at all was performed on the seventh day.

Gen 2:19 (LXX, SP) As we have seen, early readers had to resolve the question of the relationship between Gen 1 and Gen 2 so as to avoid contradiction or redundancy: Philo read the text as a single story of a two-stage creation procedure, Josephus read it as two accounts of a single creation procedure, and Jubilees had its own complex strategy based on the seven-day schema. Another strategy can be detected in the ancient textual witnesses, two of which depicted the creation of animals in Gen 2:19 as an *additional* (ἔτι, τῶν) act of creation distinct from Gen 1:20–25.

Exod 7:18 and 27:19 At many points in the Pentateuch, the authors describe a divine command, then state that the command was carried out (e.g., Gen 6:13–21 → 6:22; Exod 24:12 → 24:15). In some cases, texts describe a command but not its performance, motivating a scribe to insert the performance (e.g., SP and 4QpalaeoExodus^m insert the description of an action in Exod 7:18b whose performance was commanded in 7:15–18a).³⁴ Conversely, some texts describe an action without any mention of an explicit command to do so, motivating a scribe to supply the command (e.g., SP and 4QpalaeoExodus^m insert a command at the end of Exod 27:19 to perform the action that is described in Exod 39:1). This linking of command to performance strengthens coherence.

³¹ This seems to have been motivated by existing verbal connections between Ezek 6:3–6 and Lev 26:25, 30–31.

³² Given the rhetoric of Ezekiel, the reader may wonder whether the author allowed for the existence of *any* righteous people in Jerusalem—though this response too is based on attempts to create a coherent reading of the book.

³³ See also Exod 22:19 in the Samaritan Pentateuch and Masoretic Text. Either both are clarifying what is meant by אלהים (after all, shouldn't one sacrifice to the God of Israel?), or else SP preserves the original text which then suffered haplography and was subsequently corrected by proto-MT.

³⁴ See Emanuel Tov, “Proto-Samaritan Texts and the Samaritan Pentateuch,” in *The Samaritans*, ed. Alan D. Crown (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), 397–407 (on pp. 402–403, Tov describes this as “harmonization”); Molly Zahn, “The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Scribal Culture of Second Temple Judaism,” *JSJ* 46.3 (2015): 285–313 (here 288–90).

LXX Josh 2:15 If the gates of Jericho were shut, how could the Israelite spies escape the city via a window? The Hebrew text contains a scribal interpolation clarifying that Rahab “lowered them with a rope through the window” because “her house was on the face of the (city) wall, and she lived in the wall.” This clarification seems to be based on information provided in the following verses (vv. 18, 21).

LXX Josh 11:19 The text states that Israel “took in battle” all the Canaanite cities (cf. vv. 16–17) after they entered the land.³⁵ At this point a reader might protest: surely not *all* cities; what about the events related in chap. 9, in which the inhabitants of Gibeon survived by tricking Israel into making a peace treaty? The Hebrew text of Josh 11:19 is longer, and explicitly notes these events as an exception: “There was not a city that *made peace with the sons of Israel (except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon)*; they took all in battle.”³⁶

It is significant that in many of the examples listed above, the repair of perceived incohesion and incoherence was accomplished by the scribe’s use of material from either the wider textual context or from elsewhere in the scriptural corpus. This has the effect of simultaneously creating cohesion and coherence at both local and large-scale levels.

4.4 The Chronicler as Reader

We now come to the question of the standards of cohesion and coherence held by the composers and redactors of the texts themselves. We lack explicit statements about their literary conventions, and any repair of incohesion and incoherence will largely be invisible to us because for the most part we lack the authors’ source material. However, we might examine how one text in the biblical corpus uses another—namely, how the book of Chronicles uses Samuel-Kings. This must be done cautiously, as we cannot assume that the source material Chronicles used was identical at all points to our version(s) of Samuel-Kings.

4.4.1 Repair of syntactic incohesion

1 Kgs 5:1a The second half of the clause contains a noun phrase that is unconnected to the beginning of the clause: “And Solomon was ruling over all of the kingdoms, from the River . . . *the land of the Philistines* and as far as the border of Egypt.”³⁷ *2 Chr 9:26* repairs the lack of cohesion by inserting a preposition: “And Solomon was ruling over all of the kingdoms, from the River *as far as* (ועד) the land of the Philistines and as far as the border of Egypt.”³⁸

4.4.2 Repair of syntactic and semantic ambiguity

1 Kgs 9:1–2 These verses state that “when Solomon finished building the house of Yhwh and the house of the king *and all the desire of Solomon which he desired to do*,” Yhwh appeared to him.³⁹ But is “desire” the object of “build” (and does it refer to e.g. the building projects listed in 9:15)? Or is “desire” to be taken (rather awkwardly) as the object of “finished”? And if so, what Solomonic desires are in view here? *2 Chr 7:11* clarifies the ambiguity by shaping the second half of the verse into a new clause: “and all that came into the mind of Solomon to do in the House of Yhwh and in his own house, he accomplished.”⁴⁰

³⁵ *LXX Josh 11:19* καὶ οὐκ ἦν πόλις, ἣν οὐκ ἔλαβεν Ἰσραηλ, πάντα ἐλάβοσαν ἐν πολέμῳ.

³⁶ *MT Josh 11:19* בלחמה לקחו את־הכל יושבי גבעון את־הכל לקחו במלחמה

³⁷ *1 Kgs 5:1* ושלמה היה מושל בכל־הממלכות מן־הנהר ארץ פלשתים ועד גבול מצרים (so *MT*; *TgJon*, *Syr*, and *Vg* ignore the article on הנהר and read “from the river of the land of the Philistines”).

³⁸ See Thomas Willi, *Die Chronik als Auslegung: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Gestaltung der historischen Überlieferung Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 174; Isaac Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 108–110.

³⁹ *1 Kgs 9:1* ויהי ככלות שלמה לבנות את־בית־יהוה ואת־בית המלך ואת כל־חשק שלמה אשר חפץ לעשות

⁴⁰ *2 Chr 7:11b*: ואת כל־הבא על־לב שלמה לעשות בבית־יהוה ובביתו הצליח. See Willi, *Die Chronik*, 171.

4.4.3 Incoherence at the level of character analysis

2 Sam 5:21 This verse states that after the Philistines abandoned their idols, “David and his men carried them away” (וישאם דוד ואנשיו). But what was their motive for carrying the idols away, and what did they do with them? Does this imply that David and his men kept the idols for worship, like the idolatrous Danites (Judg 18:14–31)? But wouldn’t this create incoherence at the level of character analysis, given the narrator’s positive evaluations of David (2 Sam 5:10, 12, 25)? 1 Chronicles 14:12 rewords the text to avoid ambiguity and incoherence by stating that “David commanded, and they were burned with fire” (ויאמר דויד וישרפו באש)—a repair based on the command in Deut 7:25, “the images of their gods you shall burn with fire” (פסילי אלהיהם) (תשרפון באש).

2 Sam 6:6–7 Why did God kill Uzzah for trying to catch the Ark when it was in danger of falling off the cart? 1 Chronicles 15:1–24 is a large block of material absent from Samuel (compare 2 Sam 6:10–12 vs. 1 Chr 13:13–14; 15:25) clarifying at numerous points that the Levites should have been *carrying* the ark—as they did in fact do the second time they moved it (1 Chr 15:2, 12–15, 26). But it appears that Chronicles already repaired the incoherence in the account of the first attempt: 1 Chr 13:10 states that God “struck him [Uzzah] *because he stretched out his hand to the ark*” (ויכהו על אשר-שלח ידו על-הארון)—an explanation for God’s actions that is absent in 2 Sam 6:7.⁴¹ Chronicles’ clarifications fit the practices described in Exod 25:14; Num 4:15; Deut 10:8.

1 Kgs 9:11–14 Why did King Solomon give King Hiram twenty cities, which Hiram felt were of poor quality? The location of 1 Kgs 9:11b after vv. 10–11a suggests that Solomon gave these cities as payment to Hiram for timber and gold, which Solomon had used to build the temple. But why, if Solomon is depicted elsewhere as a glorious king who both gave generously and received gifts from others (e.g., 1 Kgs 10:1–2, 10, 13, 23–25 // 2 Chr 9:1, 12, 22–24), is he here depicted as a giver of less-than-desirable payments? And why is this followed by a reference to Hiram sending Solomon a payment of gold (v. 14)—particularly after receiving what he apparently thought was insufficient payment (vv. 12–13)?⁴² 2 Chronicles 8:2 seems to have repaired this lack of coherence by replacing 1 Kgs 9:11–14 with a report that Solomon *received* cities *from* Hiram (= Hiram), and by omitting the reference to Hiram sending a payment of gold.⁴³

4.4.4 Incoherence at the level of plot analysis⁴⁴

2 Sam 5:25 This verse reports that David did “just as Yhwh commanded him,” and “struck down the Philistines” (ויך את-הפלישתים). 1 Chronicles 14:16 re-words the report as “and they struck down *the camp of the Philistines*” (ויכו את-מחנה פלשתים) to match the wording of Yhwh’s command in the previous verse (2 Sam 5:24 / 1 Chr 14:15); now David’s actions are indeed “just as” (כאשר) Yhwh commanded.⁴⁵

2 Kgs 22:16 This verse relates how Huldah the prophetess proclaimed doom on Judah in accordance with “all the words of the book which the King of Judah read” (את כל-דברי הספר אשר קרא מלך יהודה). But the sharp-eyed reader knows that the King of Judah did not actually read the book; rather, Shaphan the scribe read it to the king (v. 10). To repair this contradiction,⁴⁶ 2 Chr 34:24 states that the doom consists of curses written “on the book which *they read before* the king of Judah” (על-הספר אשר קראו לפני מלך יהודה).⁴⁷

⁴¹ It looks as if MT 2 Sam 6:7 received a later attempted correction (lacking in the Greek translation) that was not completed: ויכהו שם האלהים על-השל “and God struck him there *because of the str[etching out]* (?)”

⁴² Perhaps v. 14 could be taken as an oddly placed note clarifying the amount of gold referred to in v. 11a.

⁴³ So Kalimi, *Reshaping*, 40–42. For a different analysis, see Willi, *Die Chronik*, 75–78; H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 228–29.

⁴⁴ Kalimi, *Reshaping*, 38–46, offers a list of examples where the Chronicler “remov[ed] internal contradictions.” Most of these involve details that are present in Samuel-Kings but absent in Chronicles, a phenomenon which by itself could be explained in various ways. Nevertheless, the repeated absences in Chronicles of certain details present in the parallel passages of Samuel-Kings seems to amount to a fairly consistent strategy of preventing incoherence.

⁴⁵ For this and other examples, see Kalimi, *Reshaping*, 159–65.

⁴⁶ Would the author of Kings have recognized this as a contradiction?

⁴⁷ Kalimi, *Reshaping*, 156. For other examples, see Willi, *Die Chronik*, 111–75; Kalimi, *Reshaping*, 108–65.

Even these examples, however, only give us a partial picture. First, the compositional techniques of the Chronicler are not precisely the same as those of the author/redactors of other genres and books. Second, the study of repair mechanisms to inform our understanding of ancient coherence standards is problematic in that it is one-sided; it does not account for the vast majority of readers' experiences (both ancient and modern) in which no repair is needed. It seems to be the case that when readers expect cohesion and coherence, they tend to comment on their absence and not their presence.

5.0 Summary and Reflections

The evidence listed above offers an ambiguous, complex, and deficient picture of standards for cohesion and coherence in antiquity. It is deficient in that the examples above are by no means comprehensive, and most are based on narrative to the exclusion of other genres. Nor do the examples above represent the full state of affairs: a focus on repair mechanisms does not account for instances where no repair was thought necessary—and this was most of the time. Furthermore, it seems that some reader repairs of perceived incohesion and incoherence were based on non-native standards and cannot therefore help us reconstruct the conventions of the biblical authors.⁴⁸ Finally, we are still left wondering why things that both early and modern readers have perceived as incoherent were tolerated by the authors and redactors of the compositions themselves. Still, it seems that we can arrive at some conclusions.

First, while perceptions, tolerance, and explanations of incohesion and incoherence may vary, the *expectation* of cohesion and coherence seems to be universal. This is likely due to the nature of human language, to human cognitive processes (particularly those involving the recognition of similarity, patterns, and symmetry), and to shared human experience. However, this is not to say that the standards of coherence readers bring to texts, or form in the process of reading texts, are identical.⁴⁹ Philo perceives some things as incoherent that do not trouble Josephus, and vice versa. Similarly, Malcolm Heath has investigated notions of unity in ancient Greek poetics, and has demonstrated both that ancient conventions of coherence do not neatly match modern conventions, and that even within the Greek tradition there is variation in the extent to which incoherence is tolerated.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, some of the examples above show that readers separated in time perceived the same things as problems to

⁴⁸ Some may object to my use of the word “repair” as historically inappropriate: did early readers really feel that the text was “broken,” and then attempt to “fix” it? For the most part, I think this is unlikely to be the case, and my use of the term simply reflects an attempt to describe (in a rather mechanistic way) the cognitive processes undertaken by readers. Still, in at least one instance (*QG* 2.37) Philo speaks of the author’s language as problematic.

⁴⁹ See Bertram Gawronski and Fritz Strack (eds.), *Cognitive Consistency: A Fundamental Principle in Social Cognition* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012); Paul van den Broek et al., “When a Reader Meets a Text: The Role of Standards of Coherence in Reading Comprehension,” in *Text Relevance and Learning from Text*, ed. Matthew T. McCrudden, Joseph P. Magliano, and Gregory Schraw (Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2011), 123–39; Paul van den Broek and Anne Helder, “Cognitive Processes in Discourse Comprehension: Passive Processes, Reader-Initiated Processes, and Evolving Mental Representations,” *Discourse Processes* 54.5–6 (2017): 360–72.

⁵⁰ Malcolm Heath, *Unity in Greek Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Heath (*Unity*, 3–10, 12–27) notes modern readers’ frustrations when searching for a single “unified thematic structure” in e.g. Euripides’ *Suppliants* or Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and suggests that these modern readers are bringing expectations of “centripetal” unity to the text rather than recognizing ancient conventions of “centrifugal” unity. He further notes differences among Greek authors in how “embellishment” (ποικιλία) or “digressions” (ἐπεισόδια, ἐκτροπαὶ τῶν λόγων) are treated as acceptable or unacceptable, and under what circumstances they are justified (*Unity*, 28–37, 45–55, 127–28).

be addressed: both Philo and the author of Jubilees attempt to explain why Adam did not die “in the day” he ate the fruit; both Josephus and the author of Jubilees attempt to explain where Cain’s wife came from; not only SP and 4QpaleoExodus^m but also the author of Chronicles are concerned that divine commands are closely linked to reports of their performance; not only Josephus but also the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Septuagint respond to asymmetries and breaks in the patterned structure of Gen 1.

Second, it is not difficult to detect features in the biblical text that exhibit cohesion and promote coherence. We can identify the presence of syntactic cohesion in the texts under consideration. We can also successfully identify elements of lexical cohesion, such as patterned repetition, *inclusio*, refrain, and *Leitwort*.⁵¹ In addition, we can observe authors and redactors providing explanations that can be understood as attempts to create coherence at both small and large text-segment levels.⁵² We are also able to trace how narrative coherence is created by plot and characterization: we can identify plot complication and resolution; we see authors supplying motives for characters’ actions (e.g., 1 Sam 18:8–9) and creating large-scale plot patterns that shape characterization and link actions with consequences (e.g., Judges); characters’ statements are employed to point forward to later events (e.g., Gen 15:13–16) or back to previous events (e.g., Josh 24:32); there is a pervasive use of narrative analogy in which events and characters are modelled on earlier events and characters. Individual episodes (which likely originated from different sources or traditions) are linked together by repeated words and plays on words, by recurring motifs, and by continuity in character and plot.⁵³ In some cases, we can observe early readers responding to the same kind of lexical and thematic features. For example, 4Q504 juxtaposes and conflates allusions to a variety of texts on the basis of shared locutions and themes, and 4Q176 collects and juxtaposes text extracts on the basis of the shared word נחם and the theme of consolation. Similarly, 4Q252 frg 1, 4.1–2 juxtaposes allusions to and quotations of Gen 36:12, Exod 17:14, and Deut 25:19 (all passages dealing with Amalek).

Third, things that modern readers identify as conventions of ancient authors and redactors were in some cases perceived by early readers as incohesive or incoherent. An example: Philo thinks it odd that the author presents first Abel’s then Cain’s occupations in Gen 4:2b, and God’s response to first Abel’s then Cain’s offerings in Gen 4:4b–5. He is responding to the fact that these orderings of Abel before Cain are an inversion of brothers’ birth order (Gen 4:1–2a).⁵⁴ But chiasmic inversion is a widely-used technique in ancient Hebrew

⁵¹ See in particular Adele Berlin, “Lexical Cohesion and Biblical Interpretation,” *Hebrew Studies* 30 (1989): 29–40. For patterned repetition, see e.g. Gen 1:1–2:3. For *inclusio*, see e.g. Ps 103; 118; 146–150. For refrain, see e.g. Ps 42–43, 46, 57, 80, 107, 136. For *Leitwort*, see e.g. references to vision and forms of the word ראה in Gen 16, 21–22; the use of the word צחק in Gen 17–18, 21, 26; the repetition of יירשו־ארץ in Ps 37; the repetition of סוד in Ps 89 or Ruth; and the repetition of מלכות and שלטן in Daniel.

⁵² For explanations at smaller levels, see e.g. Gen 35:6 (הוא בית־אל); 36:1, 8, 19, 43 (עשו הוא אדם; עשו הוא אדם; הוא עשו אבי אדם); 1 Kgs 8:2 (הוא החדש השביעי), or the explanatory digressions in Deut 2:10–12, 20–23. For explanations at larger levels, see e.g. 2 Kings 17:7–23.

⁵³ In e.g. Genesis, repeated words and plays on words include ברכה, ברך, בכור, בכרה, זרע, and recurring motifs include sibling rivalry, barren women, and threats to offspring. Even in prophetic literature—arguably some of the most difficult texts to read because of their composite nature, denseness of imagery, and poetic genre—we see features that can be understood as editorial strategies to create coherence: repetition of locutions (Isa 5:25; 9:11, 16, 21; 10:4; 12:1; 14:26–27), the linkage of problems to solutions via placement of material (Isa 1:2–23 > 1:24–31), collection and juxtaposition of originally independent units on the basis of similar content (Ezek 12:21–14:11, dealing with the nature of prophecy; Ezek 25–32, oracles against the nations), and inner/inter-textual referencing (Isa 65:25 → Gen 3:14 + Isa 11:6–7, 9).

⁵⁴ See Philo, *Sacr.* 11–15 and *QG* 1.61 (he explains the presentation of the younger followed by the older by means of a moral allegory).

literature.⁵⁵ What Philo perceives as an aberration is part of a larger pattern of alternation that is designed to create cohesion across verses: Gen 4:1–2a (Cain, Abel), v. 2b (Abel, Cain), vv. 3–4a (Cain, Abel), vv. 4b–5 (Abel, Cain).⁵⁶ Another example: the gap-filling that is so characteristic of Second Temple period literature is in a great many cases a response to details that are not explained in or supplied by the biblical text. Yet such reticence is typically described as one of the most distinctive features of Hebrew narrative.⁵⁷

Fourth, cohesion and coherence exist on a continuum, and different kinds of cohesion and coherence can be present or absent on different levels of analysis.⁵⁸ As I noted above, the insertion of material in MT Ezek 6:5a in order to strengthen coherence simultaneously created a lack of cohesion.⁵⁹ The converse effect may also be observed: authors can attempt to strengthen cohesion across material whose diversity makes it difficult to process in a coherent matter. A good example is the use of *Wiederaufnahme*, where interpolated material is framed by lexical repetition.⁶⁰ It seems likely that texts which were difficult to process in a coherent manner (due to their complex content and composite shape) were given linkages at various levels to promote readability.

Fifth, things that are perceived as incohesive or incoherent can be accounted for in very different ways. We have already seen this to be true for early readers when comparing Josephus and Philo on the differences between Gen 1 and Gen 2. But this is also true for modern readers: Anthony Grafton shows how editors of Petronius initially proposed emendations for “mistakes” before realizing that the syntactic irregularities were intentional

⁵⁵ See Moshe Seidel, *חקרי מקרא* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1978); Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Discovering a New Path of Intertextuality: Inverted Quotations and their Dynamics,” in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 31–49.

⁵⁶ See also *Conf.* 142–144, where Philo tries to account for the apparently superfluous statement “which the sons of men built” (Gen 11:5), and *QG* 2.37, where he tries to account for the statement “the water dried up from the earth” (Gen 8:7, which he thinks is incorrect, and wants to rephrase as “the earth dried up from the water”).

⁵⁷ See e.g. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 190–91: “He [*the narrator*] presents external occurrences alone, deeds and words, leaving his agents’ inner lives opaque—even though in a dramatic narrative of this type it is precisely the motives and thoughts of the characters that interest the reader most. . . . Biblical narratives are notorious for their sparsity of detail.” See also Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 114–15: “Biblical narrative offers us, after all, nothing in the way of minute analysis of motive or detailed rendering of mental processes . . . and we are given only the barest hints about the physical appearance, the tics and gestures, the dress and implements of the characters, the material milieu in which they enact their destinies. In short, all the indicators of nuanced individuality . . . would appear to be absent from the Bible.”

⁵⁸ As Jeffrey Stackert notes, “in addition to the inconsistencies among them, there are many instances of consistency—i.e., cohesive ties—among and across the sources combined in the Pentateuch”; see Jeffrey Stackert, “Pentateuchal Coherence and the Science of Reading,” in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Israel, Europe, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz et al., FAT 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 253–68 (here 259).

⁵⁹ Something similar occurs at the editorial level in Ezek 1, 10. Zimmerli argues that the odd mix of masculine and feminine forms for the feminine חיות in Ezek 1 is a side effect of the redactional attempt to bring chap. 1 into closer connection with chap. 10 and its masculine כרובים (see the comment in Ezek 10:20, which explicitly links the two vision accounts and equates the חיות with כרובים). See Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, Hermeneia, trans. Ronald E. Clements (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 102–105.

⁶⁰ See e.g. Exod 6:14–25 (framed by lexical repetition in vv. 10–13, 26–30); Ezek 28:25–26a (framed by lexical repetition in vv. 24, 26b), and Gen 38 (a lengthy digression, which is framed by lexical repetition in Gen 37:36; 39:1). This last example is also instructive for the way the content of a digression can be linked to the surrounding narrative by repeated locutions and motifs; see David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 34–45; Eva Salm, *Juda und Tamar: Eine exegetische Studie zu Gen 38*, Forschung zur Bibel 76 (Würzburg: Echter, 1996); Esther Marie Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 73–82.

literary devices.⁶¹ And in biblical texts, unexpected lack of cohesion in person / gender / number can be explained in some cases syntactically,⁶² in other cases stylistically or rhetorically,⁶³ and in still other cases as instances of redactional interpolation.⁶⁴ In some texts, the frustration of a coherent reading experience (at least initially) seems to be quite deliberate; certain wisdom compositions, such as the book of Job, are arguably examples.⁶⁵ Ambiguity can, after all, be a deliberate compositional strategy.⁶⁶

6.0 The Significance of this Study

How might the findings of this essay impact the discipline of Hebrew Bible studies? It seems to me that there are clear implications for how we study and describe scribal practice in antiquity and how we approach the experience of reading ancient texts.

First, the survey of responses to incoherence provided above corresponds to some extent with the historical judgment of textual critics that the *lectio difficilior* is generally to be preferred (assuming, of course, that the more difficult reading is not nonsense).⁶⁷ The findings above show that “difficulty” may exist on a wide variety of levels of analysis: lexical semantics, syntax, plot, and characterization. The study of individual manuscripts and the scribal techniques associated with them should therefore be performed with an eye to discovering whether scribes display *patterns* of cohesion- or coherence-strengthening activity.

Second, the broad use of the word “harmonization” can be misleading or blur categories when thinking about cohesion and coherence.⁶⁸ We should distinguish between e.g. the insertion of one text in another as *evidence of* their perceived coherence (e.g., 4QDeutⁿ = Deut 5:12–15 + Exod 20:11) versus the insertion of one text in another to *strengthen* coherence (e.g., the flashback in 4QNum^b = Num 36:1–2, 27:2–11, 36:3–4, 36:1–2, 36:5–12) versus the insertion of one text in another to *repair* a perceived lack of cohesion or coherence (e.g., the plus in SP Exod 27:19 to correspond to the actions in Exod 39:1) versus the modification of one text in light of another text to *remove* a perceived contradiction (e.g.,

⁶¹ See Anthony Grafton, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Past as Revelation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 212–14.

⁶² See GKC §145.

⁶³ This is one way to explain the shifts between second person plural and singular in Deuteronomy. See Timothy A. Lenchak, “Choose Life!” *A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of Deuteronomy 28,69–30,20*, AnBib 129 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1993), 12–16.

⁶⁴ See e.g., Isa 5:15 and Ezek 34:23–24, both of which lack antecedents, and can be plausibly explained as secondary insertions into their respective contexts.

⁶⁵ See also Suzanna R. Millar, “When a Straight Road becomes a Garden Path: The ‘False Lead’ as a Pedagogical Strategy in the Book of Proverbs,” *JSOT* 43.1 (2018): 67–82.

⁶⁶ See Mordechai Cohen, “*HESED*: Divine or Human? The Syntactic Ambiguity of Ruth 2:20,” in חזון נחום: *Studies in Jewish Law, Thought, and History Presented to Dr. Norman Lamm on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Yaakov Elman and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 11–38; Paul R. Raabe, “Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter,” *JBL* 110.2 (1991): 213–27.

⁶⁷ See P. Kyle McCarter, *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986), 17: “The “more difficult reading” is not to be preferred when it is garbage.”

⁶⁸ See the cautions offered by Teeter, *Scribal Laws*, 182–83, 244–45; Michael Segal, “The Text of the Hebrew Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Materia Giudaica* 12.1–2 (2007): 5–20 (esp. 11–17); Molly M. Zahn, *Rethinking Rewritten Scripture: Composition and Exegesis in the 4QReworked Pentateuch Manuscripts*, STDJ 95 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 143–56.

SP's movement of the command to sprinkle Aaron from the beginning of Exod 29:20–28 to the end in light of the order of events in Lev 8:23–30).⁶⁹

Third, it seems clear that early readers' perceptions of incoherence were not shared at all points by the biblical authors and redactors: we see early readers responding to features that were apparently simply not problematic for the authors of the text. This strongly suggests that we cannot assume that *our* perceptions of incoherence were shared by the text's authors and redactors. It is instructive to note how some modern readers respond to repetition in ancient Hebrew texts: for Gottwald, the style of the book of Ezekiel is "woefully dull and repetitive," "awkward in expression," "turgid and prolix."⁷⁰ For Gray, the repetition of the divine name in Num 6:24–26 is "solemn," but the repetition in the list of offerings in Num 7:12–83 is "wearisome."⁷¹ For Von Rad, the repetition in 1 Kgs 19:9b–10, 13b–14 is a "maladroit anticipation."⁷² Yet many handbooks of poetics demonstrate that repetition is one of the most important ancient Israelite literary conventions, and that it serves a wide variety of strategic functions.⁷³

Similarly, some modern readers perceive certain sections of the Pentateuch as so incoherent that they claim it is unreadable,⁷⁴ while other readers are more sanguine about the possibility that the text's authors thought otherwise.⁷⁵ Who is correct? It seems to me that the only way to find out is to let the text itself be our guide, allowing its structure and features to inform us as to what constitutes tolerability or readability. We should at least consider the possibility that our initial impressions of incoherence may be based on incomplete information; the things that we perceive as incohesive or incoherent on a local level may actually play an important role on a global level. For example, readers are likely to be

⁶⁹ For these examples, see Zahn, "Samaritan Pentateuch"; see esp. her comment, 288: "The most important issue here is diversity of function. Although all the major changes in pre-SP can appropriately be characterized as in some way meant to increase the internal consistency of the Torah, this happens in different ways."

⁷⁰ Norman K. Gottwald, *A Light to the Nations: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959; repr. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 381.

⁷¹ George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Numbers*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903), 74.

⁷² "It is perfectly obvious that vss. 9–14 are not a unity. But the whole thing falls into place if vss. 9b–11a are taken as a maladroit anticipation and struck out"; see Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 2:19.

⁷³ See Granville J. R. Kent, *Say It Again Sam: A Literary and Filmic Study of Narrative Repetition in 1 Samuel 28* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2011); Michael O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 361–70; Meir Sternberg, "The Structure of Repetition: Strategies of Informational Redundancy," in idem, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 365–440; Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 2001), 145–54; Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 222–25, 273–79.

⁷⁴ For example, Baruch Schwartz finds Genesis 37 "unintelligible" because of its "four functionally equivalent, competing doublets, six irreconcilable contradictions, and eight inexplicable disruptions"; similarly, Joel Baden finds "significant—in some places insurmountable—narrative inconsistencies and outright contradictions" in this passage. See Baruch J. Schwartz, "How the Compiler of the Pentateuch Worked: The Composition of Genesis 37," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 263–78 (here 263); Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 3; see further Baden, "Why is the Pentateuch Unreadable? Or, Why Are We Doing This Anyway?" in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Israel, Europe, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz et al., FAT 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 243–51.

⁷⁵ John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 43–44: "However, the fact remains that the finished text of a work as complex, 'incomprehensible', genre-less as the Pentateuch does now exist and must presumably have been assembled by *someone*: it is not a natural phenomenon. And the person who assembled it (like the people who collected the Psalms or edited the books of the prophets) no doubt intended to produce a comprehensible work, and had some notion of its genre."

confused by the lack of cohesion in Aaron's statement, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Exod 32:4b). If Aaron made a single golden calf (vv. 4a, 5a), why is he represented as referring to it in the plural (v. 4b)? It is only when we encounter 1 Kgs 12:28–29 that we connect the two texts as part of a larger intertextual argument about apostasy. Another example: the incoherence in Gen 37:27–28, 36 may be deliberate—not simply because it is an artifact due to the combination of pre-existing source material, but also because the contradictory references to Ishmaelites, Midianites, and Medanites are intertextual references back to Gen 21:9–21; 25:1–6, and are part of a larger argument structure in Genesis about enmity and reconciliation.⁷⁶

What we need, then, is to acquire the conventions for reading composite tradition-literature. One way to further explore the nature of cohesion and coherence in ancient Israelite texts would be to construct a database of features along the lines of the Project "Typology of Anonymous and Pseudepigraphic Jewish Literature of Antiquity, c.200 BCE to c.700 CE." The benefits of this project are described as follows:⁷⁷

[The modular structure of the Inventory] allows treating features which cause us to doubt the text's 'coherence' in exactly the same way as features which do not. Each feature is recorded independently of the others, even though it is defined in terms that respect the togetherness of text parts in a whole text. The mutual independence of features allows exploring what may have constituted, for ancient readers, the experience of a coherent text—the 'tolerances' for incoherent may have been quite different from those we take for granted in our own reading. The database of Profiles makes visible how frequently a particular feature occurs, and where exactly it occurs in the corpus. It thus assembles, for the first time, the large-scale empirical data that modern scholars need to make judgements also about the frequency and distribution of a particular feature of 'incoherence'. And the database may also show that features which produce 'incoherence' can, and usually do, occur alongside other features that produce 'coherence' in the same text.

Such a database for Israelite literature composed before 200 BCE remains a *desideratum*.

⁷⁶ See S. Nikaïdo, "Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study," *VT* 51.2 (2001): 219–42 (here 237–38); Joel Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 95, 237 n. 69. See also Yair Zakovitch, "And You Shall Tell Your Son . . .": *The Concept of Exodus in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 31–32 (though he sees a somewhat different strategy at work here).

⁷⁷ See Alexander Samely, in collaboration with Philip Alexander, Rocco Bernasconi, and Robert Hayward, *Profiling Jewish Literature in Antiquity: An Inventory, from Second Temple Texts to the Talmuds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17–18.