

# New analysis of Genesis reveals 'death sandwich' literary theme

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An online tool has, for the first time, revealed a common literary technique in the Book of Genesis that has remained hidden in the text for millennia.

Researchers at Keele University, UK, and Amridge University, USA, have discovered that Genesis uses an early example of a technique known as 'bracketing', which sandwiches one theme between two mentions of another theme. The technique is commonly used today, such as when bad news is sandwiched between two bits of good news. The new analysis of Genesis reveals a striking pattern between the two key themes of 'life' and 'death'. The opening and closing verses of the book contain frequent mentions of life, whereas mentions of death are only found in clusters in the middle.

Informally dubbed by researchers the 'Genesis Death Sandwich', this pattern offers the first clear example of this common rhetorical structure being used in the text describing the creation of the universe. The discovery was made thanks to a new tool for analysing texts developed by Dr Gordon Rugg, senior lecturer in Computing and Mathematics at Keele University. The text-analysis tool, called Search Visualizer, represents entire texts as a grid with each square representing a word and coloured squares representing search keywords. When used to examine the words 'life' and 'death' in the King James Version of Genesis, the new pattern emerged.

Dr Rugg explains: "This is a significant discovery for [historians](#) and

theologians interested in the [Old Testament](#), and shows that whoever wrote the version of the text that been passed down to us was clearly employing this rhetorical structure. Whether this was done consciously or subconsciously will probably remain a mystery, although possible reasons for the pattern might be to soften the negative messages of death, or perhaps to juxtapose life and death for greater impact.

"Our new method for visualising texts means an entire book can be represented on a single page of A4, allowing you to see patterns very easily. It offers a quick and simple way for researchers to identify patterns, or see which of their ideas might be red herrings, which is an important insight for researchers dealing with large texts."

Dr Gordon Rugg from Keele University and Dr David Musgrave from Amridge University, USA, have also used Search Visualizer to explore other significant texts including the Iliad. They have uncovered a pattern in the text that provides new evidence supporting a theory that one section, 'The Catalogue of Ships', is in fact an older poem incorporated into Homer's epic story.

As well as exploring patterns in historical texts and literature, the new tool has a wide range of other potential applications. One such use is re-examining cold-case police investigations by analysing old witness statements to identify correlating stories. Using Search Visualizer, patterns can be seen that might have been very difficult to identify by reading through large numbers of documents manually. The software can also be used as a new way of searching the web.

The search tool is available at [www.searchvisualizer.com](http://www.searchvisualizer.com)

Provided by Keele University

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