THE DYNAMICS OF PROMISE:

NARRATIVE LOGIC IN THE ABRAHAM STORY

By

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ii

ABSTRACT

The Abraham narrative (Gen 11:27-25:11) has long been approached as history, or as a source for history, whether of actual events, or of Israelite literature, religion, and theology. With the development of the modern principles of historical enquiry, biblical scholars felt the need to examine critically the historical veracity of the biblical text. Critics noted many textual features, which, from such a perspective, they interpreted as indications that the text was not a single, continuous account, but an assemblage of numerous earlier traditions. For the sake of historical honesty, and in search of historical knowledge, higher critics turned their attention to identifying and isolating these various sources.

Since the early 1960s, the historico-critical perspective has gradually been yielding to a literary-critical view of the Bible which is far more sympathetic to the integrity of the received text. From the new perspective, and in the light of recent developments in literary theory, it is possible to discern the equivocal character of the evidence higher critics advance in support of their hypotheses. The same data which seem so compelling for higher-critical reading also serve the radically different ends of a holistic literary-critical approach. The fact that the text (like any text) has a history is never denied, but it is irrelevant to the new approach.

This thesis offers a description of the plot of the Abraham narrative, accompanied by a detailed analysis of the first half of the narrative (11:27-17:27). The thesis concentrates on those features of the narrative which are crucial for understanding the text's structure, for example, key-words, repetition, anticipation, and defeated expectation, to mention but a few. The methodology employed is rooted in close reading, but with special attention to recent reader-response criticism (e.g. M. Perry, W. Iser, and U. Eco). Such an approach concentrates on the literary details and techniques of the narrative, and on the way in which they guide the reader's actualisation of the text. It is argued that the kind of description undertaken here is the prerequisite for evaluation of the text as literature, history, or theology.

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Anyone who has looked at the opening sections of doctoral dissertations knows that it is common practice for authors to acknowledge their wives. Prior to writing this thesis the frequency of the practice led me to believe that it was little more than a polite formality. Now that the dissertation is complete I realise the value of a wife's support. She was there when I needed her, and that was often. With immeasurable gratitude I dedicate this thesis to Teresa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

ENCOUNTERING THE NARRATIVE

The Abraham narrative (Gen 11:27-25:11) has long been approached as history, or as a source for history, whether of actual events, or of Israelite literature, religion, and theology. With the development of the modern principles of historical enquiry, biblical scholars felt the need to examine critically the historical veracity of the biblical text.[1] Critics noted many textual features, which, from such a perspective, they interpreted as indications that the text was not a single, continuous account, but an assemblage of numerous earlier traditions. For the sake of historical honesty, and in search of historical knowledge, higher critics turned their attention to identifying and isolating these various sources.

As these remarks intimate, the modern study of the Abraham narrative has both a literary and an historical dimension. The relationship between the two was described long ago by Abraham Kuenen, one of the fathers of the higher-critical approach:

> The [literary] critic is the ally of the historian, and furnishes him with the materials he must use in his work. Generally the critic and the historian are combined in the same individual, but for all that the former is the servant of the latter, and, although his work is twined inseparably into the other's, it yet remains subservient and logically antecedent to it throughout (1880:465).

Although many would question Kuenen's position that the purpose of literary criticism is to serve the needs of historical reconstruction

(e.g. D. Robertson 1976:547-548), his remarks nonetheless indicate that literary decisions are the more fundamental. As a logical corollary, reconstructions of any text thought to be prior to and contained within the received text must rest solely on literary evidence. Those based on notions of historical development -- be they of actual events, or of literature, religion, and theology -- are guilty of circular reasoning (cf. J. van Seters 1975:127-128; R. Polzin 1980).

Since the innovative studies of Meir Weiss (1963, 1965, 1971) and Luis Alonso-Schökel (1961, 1975), the historical-critical perspective has gradually been yielding to a literary-critical view of the Bible which is far more sympathetic to the integrity of the received text (cf. D. Robertson 1976). From the new perspective, and in the light of recent developments in literary theory, it is possible to discern the equivocal character of the literary evidence historical critics advance in support of their hypotheses. The same data which seem so compelling for higher-critical reading serve the radically different ends of an holistic literary-critical approach. It is in this fact that the significance of the priority of literary decisions lies. In addition to begging the question, the division of a text based on a predetermined historical notion may prevent a reader from achieving a proper understanding of certain literary features, and as a consequence lead him to an interpretation that is less than satisfactory.

During the modern period of biblical scholarship, the principles governing the way most critics interpret the literary

features of the Abraham narrative have been supplied by source (Literaturgeschichte) and form criticism (Gattungsforschung, Formgeschichte). While tradition history (Überlieferungsgeschichte), and to a lesser extent redaction criticism (Redaktionsgeschichte), have played major roles since the studies of Albrecht Alt (1929), the principles by which both interpret literary features stem from these other two methods.[2]

Source criticism was the first method to be systematically applied to the Abraham narrative by modern critics. This method focuses primarily on four features: changes in style, repetition, breaks in the story-line, and contradictory or diverging points of view. Convinced that no single author would employ such features in a continuous narrative, source critics interpret these features as indications that the present text is a conflation of different sources. It is the source critic's task, Klaus Koch instructs, ". . . to discover the original writings, to determine exactly their date of origin, and to grasp the personality of the writer as much as possible" (1969:69).[3]

With the development of form criticism came a whole new way of viewing the material in the Abraham cycle. Rather than defining the text in terms of continuous documents, as does source criticism, form critics focus on the individual episodes. According to the form critics, originally these episodes were all independent of one another until a series of later collectors and redactors gradually brought them together and recorded them in the same text. Although most form

critics and tradition historians agree that these collectors supplied some sort of framework for the earlier stories, they also feel they did not significantly alter them, and that to a large extent the originals remain recoverable.

Form criticism supports its position with two principal types of evidence. As indicated above, the first stems from the episodic nature of the text. Hermann Gunkel, for example, observes that each episode_ "begins with a distinct introduction and ends with a very recognizable close" (1964:43). "Each one," in the words of William McKane, "is a perfectly formed little gem" (1979:24).

The second type of evidence derives from generic concerns. While there exists an intense controversy over the genres contained in the patriarchal narrative, and over their possible oral nature, most [4] scholars nevertheless agree that distinctive genres prove that the Abraham narrative contains a mixture of originally independent materials. According to the prescription of G. M. Tucker (1971:10-17), the aim of the form critic is to isolate the different examples of the different literary types, and interpret each according to the canons appropriate for it.

Together the various branches of the higher-criticism base their claim that the Abraham narrative is not a unified work on six principal types of evidence: changes in style, repetition, breaks in the story-line, contradicting or diverging points of view, the episodic nature of the narrative, and the presence of different genres. The remainder of the chapter, therefore, will describe

and, in the light of current literary theory, reassess the literary force of this evidence. The main body of the thesis will then offer a new reading of the Abraham narrative, applying where appropriate any alternative ways of interpreting the literary features in question.

Changes in Style

Style is a broad term that is difficult to define in any precise way. For most biblical scholars it refers to the characteristic usage of terms, but it also includes vaguer categories such as the sense that arises from the way in which the text uses language in general. However, whatever different scholars may include under the rubric, "style," there is the underlying assumption that any given narrative will contain only one style of narration.

Higher critics, for example, have long noted the change in style that occurs when passing from Gen 12-13 to Gen 14. Yet despite the fact that chap. 14 presupposes both Lot's separation from Abram, and his removal to the Jordanian plain (13:9-12), critics are uncommonly united in their opinions that its unique narrative style belies any connection it may have with other sections of the patriarchal narrative.

While the differences between Gen 14 and its surrounding material are real, the presupposition that a change of styles indicates a change of narratives remains unproven and contradictory to the evidence of comparative literary studies. In their discussion of style in English fictional prose, for example, G. N. Leech and M. H. Short state that a theory of style ". . . has to confront the fact

that there may be a multiplicity of styles within the same work"
(1981:57).

Indeed, these two literary theorists identify two different
patterns of stylistic variation within single narratives: (1) an
evolutionary pattern, and (2) a pattern of alternation. As suggested
by its name, the first involves a process of continual change, each
stage of which develops out of the preceding style and into that which
follows. In contrast, the second type refers to a pattern in which
different narrative segments correspond to changes in narrative style
which do not develop in any such patterned way. Each block of
material may be of variable length, and any style may recur any number
of times throughout the course of the narrative. This pattern is
particularly significant for it is that of the Abraham narrative, as
anyone familiar with it will recognise.

According to Leech and Short, stylistic variation is a
function of a text's overall meaning (1981:38-40, 56-64, 136-145).
While this understanding has had little impact on biblical criticism,
it is not entirely new to the field. In a short monograph that has
been largely ignored W. J. Martin (1955) argued for a more literary
approach to the study of style in biblical narrative. Martin objects
to the higher critical presumption that style should be explained in
terms of authorial knowledge, and its implication that an author did
not know what he did not use. The style used to describe any
particular situation in a narrative, he adds, is not determined by
what it uses elsewhere, but by its needs and purposes at that

particular juncture. Returning to the words of Leech and Short, "we must search for explanations of stylistic value . . . in terms of considerations internal to the work itself." (1982:138).

According to Martin, the style a narrative employs at any given point depends on at least two factors: (1) narrative type, and (2) its subject matter (cf. Leech and Short 1981:136-138). With respect to the former Martin identifies three main categories of narratives: "(a) descriptive prose, which is devoted to the description of objects in space; (b) narrative prose, which deals with the narrative of events in time; and (c) expository prose, that is the exposition of ideas in order" (1955:12). Functioning in conjunction with these factors is the literary context(s) of any given episode. An author will use a different style in those sections of his work describing legal proceedings than he will in those which describe a love affair. Similarly, sections designed to evoke the reader's sympathies will employ a style different from those intended to convince him of some cause or argument.

To these two factors can be added a third. According to Leech and Short, style will also vary according to narrative voice, or what literary critics often refer to as point of view (1981: chaps. 5 and 9-10). This involves making the distinction between a story's narrator(s) and its characters. First person narrators, being actively involved in the story they tell will, by virtue of their subjective perspective, employ a different style than third person narrators, who stand outside the events they describe. If there is

more than one narrator, each will use a style appropriate to his own perspective and attitude. A similar set of criteria also functions at the level of the narrative's characters. Since different characters usually have different personalities, points of view, and backgrounds, authors will describe them and have them speak in styles that correspond to and highlight their differences.

Thus, while the "annalistic official style" of Gen 14 may indeed mark "the passage sharply off from the narratives by which it is surrounded," the conclusion that it is an "isolated boulder in the stratification of the Pent[ateuch]" (J. Skinner 1930:256) does not necessarily follow. Rather, the change of style can be seen as a function of the change of scene, and of the needs of the narrative at that particular point. Unlike Gen 12-13, which describe Abram's excursions through the Near East, or Gen 15, which describes a covenant ceremony, Gen 14 relates an invasion of Canaan by a coalition of four apparently powerful monarchs. The style, which mimics that actually used by monarchs to recount their feats of conquest, is thus appropriate to the purpose of the chapter.

While little has yet been said about the role of Gen 14 in its wider narrative context, which is a question of plot and structure not style, the above discussion indicates that the issue of narrative style is more complex than higher criticism has admitted. Simply to characterise the style of Gen 14 as "annalistic" is insufficient. A complete analysis must also account for the way that style contributes to a narrative's meaning. If, moreover, the narrative involves a

number of characters, narrators, or situations, there will inevitably be certain changes in style, any account of which must describe their relationship to the changes in content and context.

Repetition

According to higher critics, the strongest evidence that the received text is not a unified document is the existence of episodes that appear to repeat what has already transpired. In the Abraham narrative, for example, there are two accounts of the patriarch misrepresenting his wife as his sister -- three if the episode with Isaac is included (Gen 26). In both cases, Abram/Abraham travels to a foreign land and fears that the locals will kill him in order to possess Sarai/Sarah. In both cases the ruse succeeds: Sarai/Sarah is taken by the local ruler and Abram/Abraham is left unharmed. Again, in both instances, God intervenes on behalf of the patriarch and convinces the monarch to return Sarai/Sarah to her husband. Both comply with God's wishes, but also take the opportunity to scold Abram/Abraham for his deceit. Other examples include the two accounts of a covenant between the patriarch and God (Gen 15; 17), and the two episodes in which Hagar departs from Abram's/Abraham's home (Gen 16; 21:8-21).

The refusal to accept the narratological significance of repetition within a single text has until very recently prevented biblical scholars from exploring the types found in the Bible, and the ways in which they function. On the level of the event or episode

literary theorists have identified a number of types of repetition (G. Genette 1980:113ff.). Following J. Cohen, S. Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between the repetition of the sign, of the signifier, and of the signified:

> . . . a repetition of the whole sign is a re-telling of an event in the recit in exactly the same words, by the same narrator, the same focalization, etc.; a repetition of the signifier uses the same discourse (i.e. recit) elements to narrate different histoire-events, while a repetition of the signified narrates the same histoire-event using different discourse-elements (1980:152).

A cursory reading of the Abraham narrative suggests that the dominant type is repetition of the signifier, a suspicion corroborated by the recent studies of R. Polzin (1975), R. Alter (1981:47-62), and J. G. Williams (1980).

In Alter's opinion, scenes that appear to repeat one another can best be understood as a literary convention similar to the type-scene of Greek epic. In the epics, particular situations always unfold according to specific patterns. Followed by Williams (1980), Alter suggests that a similar convention is operating in the Old Testament. Genesis records three versions of the threat-to-the-matriarch, not because some redactor felt compelled to include them in order to be faithful to his sources, but because convention required that the action unfold in a particular way whenever the patriarch travelled with his wife to a foreign land.

The use of such a convention, however, does not mean that the details of any occurrence of a particular type-scene are fixed or pre-determined.[8] Indeed, Alter observes a great deal of variation between

the scenes, noting that sometimes only allusions are necessary for making the desired connections. This freedom allows the author to play on the expectations of his readers. Details in any given scene which do not normally appear in its type become foregrounded, and according to Alter, are usually significant for understanding the meaning of the text.[9]

While Alter's analysis provides a formal basis for admitting the presence of repetition in biblical narrative, its value for interpreting actual examples of the phenomenon is uncertain. Williams may have identified the essential elements of the sister-wife type-scene, and some of its variations, but he does not comment on their functions in their present contexts, or on their relationship to one another. If variations in a scene constitute a key to its meaning, as Alter claims, a proper interpretation of Gen 20 requires more than Williams's explanation of how it was possible for an ancient Jewish author to identify Sarah as Abraham's paternal half-sister when such a marriage clearly contravenes Levitical law (Lev 18:9; 20:7). In addition to being purely speculative, such socio-historical explanations avoid the more essential question of the function of such an identification at the level of the narrative itself. Related to this question are two others: (1) why does Abram not tell Pharaoh of his true relationship to Sarah in 12:10-20; and (2) why does the narrator not supply this information in 11:27-32?

Without such a discussion, there is nothing to demonstrate that the various examples of the type-scene belong to the same story-

line. If type-scenes were as common a literary device as Alter
suggests, it would remain a possibility that some redactor copied the
different versions of the wife-sister type-scenes from different
sources, and that they have no integral relationship to one another.
Of course, one could respond that since they occur in the same text,
the onus of proof lies with those who would argue that they are
unrelated, a line of reasoning with which I am in basic agreement.
However, the state of biblical scholarship over the last two centuries
demands that more be said. Williams himself seems aware of this need
with his favourable reference to Polzin's study of these three
episodes.

Polzin focuses on what he calls the "synchronic connections
between the stories." Through these he identifies "two sets of
transformations," which, he maintains, together constitute a
cumulative answer to the question of how "man finds out Yahweh's will
and purpose" (1975:81). More specifically, the first set addresses
the problem of knowing when someone is blessed by God, while the
second concerns the ways by which man learns of God's will.

Polzin's argument concerning the second set of transformations
is the more straightforward. Each version of the the threat-to-the-
matriarch describes a different means of realising God's will, each of
which, Polzin adds, correspond to the three-fold division of the
Tanak. In Gen 12:10-21 and the Torah God reveals his will through
divine intervention. In Gen 20 and the Nebiim he appears in
prophetic vision, while in Gen 26:1-11 and the Ketubim man discovers

God's purpose through his own powers of observation and reason.

Polzin arrives at his first set of transformations through an argument that is both more arduous and complex. They are designed, he maintains, to show that "God's blessing is actualized or made essentially complete only with the acquisition of wealth and progeny possessed under conditions established by Yahweh" (1975:91). Polzin sees these conditions operating at the level of a test of the patriarch's moral fibre, which, in all three cases, hinges on the situations into which they place their wives. Thus, while Abram acquires wealth in Gen 12:10-20, because he obtains it through the "actual adultery" of Sarai, it cannot be considered the result of God's blessing. Failing the test of wealth, Abram does not receive progeny and, as yet, has not obtained Yahweh's blessing.

In the second episode Abraham again acquires wealth. On this occasion, however, Abimelech's dream prevents him from committing "actual adultery," placing Sarah only in a situation Polzin refers to as "apparent adultery." Having this time averted an adulterous situation, Abraham has now successfully passed the test of wealth, which, appropriately, is immediately followed by the birth of Isaac.

The third example of the type-scene provides an opposite approach to the problem. Unlike Gen 20, where Abraham has wealth but no progeny, in Gen 26 Isaac has progeny but no wealth. On this occasion, after Isaac misrepresents his wife as his sister, Abimelech successfully deduces her true status before he or anyone else takes her. Thus, Isaac placed Rebekah only in a situation of "potential

adultery," which was never realised.   Having avoided an adulterous

situation, Isaac successfully passes the test and acquires the

necessary wealth to realise a state of blessedness.

While Polzin's approach is refreshing and worthy of careful

consideration, his results contain a number of difficulties.   First,

although the princes do take Sarai into Pharaoh's house, it is not

clear that this involved "actual adultery." Polzin suggests that it

does because there is "no information to the contrary . . ."

(1975:83).   Yet arguments based on negative evidence are notoriously

difficult. The monarch may only have taken advantage of the situation

to increase his harem.   Indeed, there are certain indications which

suggest that Sarai was not sexually violated.   Pharaoh, for example,

does not appear as an active participant in the episode until he

expels Abram from his land.   Prior to that he remains completely in

the background. His knowledge of Sarai's presence and beauty rests

entirely on the reports of his officials, and it is through them that

he makes his wishes known.   By portraying him in such a dispassionate

light, the text suggests he took no real interest in the woman, only
                                       10
in expanding his harem.

If it is difficult to see Gen 12:10-20 in terms of a test

failed due to actual adultery, it is equally difficult to see Abraham

as passing that test in Gen 20.   In both cases he misrepresents his

wife as his sister, and in both divine intervention is necessary to

restore her to him.   As L. ·Eslinger (1978:14-16) points out, it was

God's intervention that prevented the adultery of Sarah, not anything

that Abraham did.   Indeed, Abraham even equates his actions here with those in Gen 12:10-20.

According to Polzin, the birth of Isaac in Gen 21 is the result of Abraham successfully passing the test of Gen 20.   Yet, according to the text itself, the birth of Isaac occurred at the time of which God told Abraham (21:2). In the words of Eslinger, "Isaac is a result of a promise made, not a test passed" (1978:15).   The only event the text explicitly calls a test is the Akedah (Gen 22).   The Akedah, however, is not a test "concerning his possession of posterity" (1975:92), as Polzin maintains, but of his "fear of God" (22:12).

Even more difficult is Polzin's analysis of Gen 26.   According to Polzin Isaac enters the test with progeny but not wealth.   It is only after successfully passing the test that he gains the wealth necessary for the attainment of the divine blessing.   Yet 25:5 states that at Abraham's death Isaac received all his father's possessions. Long before he has any offspring, moreover, 25:11 explicitly states that God blessed Isaac.   Contrary to Polzin's thesis, this verse demonstrates that a state of blessedness does not require the prior attainment of both wealth and progeny.

Although the studies of Polzin, Alter and Williams have their shortcomings, they have demonstrated that it is possible to view repetition in biblical narrative from an entirely different perspective than that of historical criticism. Polzin's study fails to convince not because of his approach, but because he does not

properly apply it. In discussing the synchronic links among the three
versions of the threat-to-the-matriarch, he virtually ignores their
connections with their more immediate contexts, as well as the
function of the intervening material.

As implied by the above discussion, the meaning of a text is
determined at least in part by the order of its presentation.
According to M. Perry, for example:

> Literary texts may effectively utilize the fact that their
> material is grasped successively; this is at times a central
> factor in determining their meanings. The ordering and
> distribution of the elements in a text may exercise
> considerable influence on the nature, not only of the reading
> process, but of the resultant whole as well: a rearrangement
> of the components may result in the activation of alternative
> potentialities in them and in the structuring of a
> recognizable different whole (1979:35).

Thus, by isolating the three stories in which the patriarch
misrepresents his wife as his sister, Polzin, in effect, creates a new
and different text. While there is nothing inherently wrong with
making new texts, their value for interpreting the Bible is uncertain,
as becomes evident when Polzin's thesis is confronted with the fact
that Isaac is blessed in Gen 25:11, and Abram in 14:19 (perhaps also
in chap. 16). In describing the relationship between episodes that
contain repetition, or any others for that matter, the reader must
take into account the cumulative effect of the intervening material
(Rimmon-Kenan 1980:152-153).

The first episode in which Abram misrepresents Sarai as his
sister, for example, occurs in the context of his search for the land
Yahweh promises to show him (ᵓarᵓekā). As will be argued below,

through a series of word plays and puns based on the root r-h, and a chiastic structure based on geographical location, Gen 12:10-20 functions primarily to demonstrate that Egypt is not this shown land, even though it might appear blessed. In other words, here the text subordinates the sister-wife motif to the theme of the promised land, which it serves to define negatively.

D. J. A. Clines (1978:45-47) interprets Gen 12:10-20 as an expression of the attainment of progeny, which he and a number of others see as the main theme of the Abraham narrative (cf. M. R. Hauge 1975; L. R. Helyer 1983). By allowing Pharaoh to take Sarai, Abram jeopardises the divine promise that he will become a "great nation" (12:2; so G. von Rad 1972:169). While there is an element of truth in this interpretation, in Gen 12 this threat remains muted. At this point in the narrative there is nothing to suggest that Sarai will or must become a mother. She is, in fact, barren (11:30), and Yahweh has yet to reveal his plan to rectify the situation. It remains a possibility that Abram will adopt children, or have them through a second wife or concubine (cf. Gen 15:2-3; 16; 25:1-4).

The threat that Gen 12:10-20 poses to the success of the divine blessing becomes apparent only as the reader moves through chaps. 15-18, in which Yahweh gradually reveals his plans for Sarah. But it is Gen 20 that most forcefully brings to the fore the extent of the risks Abram took in Gen 12:10-20. This emphasis is due to both the similarities and the differences between the two episodes.

The similarities between the two are obvious (see above p.

10), and it is these that cause the reader to recall Gen 12:10-20 so clearly upon reading chap. 20. It is the change of context, however, that allows the reader to see the threat this earlier episode actually posed to Yahweh's intention to bringing the divine blessing into the world through Abraham and his descendants.

Unlike the first instance of the sister-wife motif, the second serves principally to heighten the tension surrounding the birth of the son to whom the divine blessing will pass. In Gen 17, Yahweh informs Abraham that he will have a son by Sarah, and that this particular son will be blessed by a special, covenantal relationship with the divine. In chap. 18 Yahweh reaffirms this promise and expresses his hope that Abraham will teach his offspring justice and righteousness in order that all nations of the earth might share in this blessing. Any uncertainties that Abraham, or the reader, might have had in the earlier chapters concerning the patriarch's posterity are here clarified: Sarah will indeed be the mother of the chosen son. Consequently, by allowing Abimelech to take Sarah at this stage of the narrative, Abraham critically jeopardises the divine promise. Thus, with the second occurrence of the sister-wife motif so forcefully expressing a threat to the chosen son at the same time that it brings to mind the first occasion on which Abram passes off Sarai as his sister, the reader comes to realise the threat this earlier incident also posed to the continuation of the divine blessing; but this is fully realised only in retrospect.[11]

Breaks in the Story Line

According to J. van Seters a "helpful and necessary" criterion for separating the received text into its component sources "is that of logical, dramatic or grammatical discontinuity . . ." (1975:156). He remarks, for example, that the account of Isaac's birth (21:2-7) constitutes the "natural continuation" of the divine announcement that Sarah will bear a child in 18:10-15. He therefore concludes that 21:2, 6-7 originally followed immediately upon 18:10-14, and that the intervening material represents a variety of different narratives and glosses which later redactors inserted into their present contexts (1975:204-206).

Van Seters himself admits that this criterion is "not entirely certain. It often depends," he writes, "upon the analyst's preconception of the unit's genre whether or not there is a logical or dramatic discontinuity within the passage" (1975:156-157). His attempt at using form criticism as a means of defining such "internal inconsistency" suffers from an equally questionable set of preconceptions, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The issue here is whether or not a single, continuous narrative can contain breaks in its story-line. Studies in comparative literature demonstrate that, in fact, they can.

Particularly significant is the distinction literary theorists make between the sujet and the fabula. All narratives are composed of discourse-elements, or what Meir Sternberg refers to as motifs. "The

sujet," Sternberg writes, "is the actual disposition and articulation

of these narrative motifs in the particular finished products, as

their order and interrelation, shaping and coloring was finally

decided on by the author." "The fabula," on the other hand, "is the

chronological or chronological-causal sequence into which the reader,

progressively and retrospectively, reassembles the motifs . . ."

(1978:8). By demanding that each narrative segment be in its

"natural" chronological-causal order, van Seters fails to make the

distinction between these two aspects of narrative sequence. While a

narrative's sujet may correspond to its fabula, it need not and,

indeed, usually does not (G. Genette 1980:35-47; cf. M. Perry 1979:37-

40).

According to M. Perry, sequence in narrative is justified by

its effects on the reader. In other words, it is a function of the

text's overall meaning, which, as an aspect of structure, is precisely

what could be expected:

> The distribution of materials may require modification or even
> retrospective replacement; it may raise meanings unexpectedly
> so as to intensify them, sometimes as these arise by way of
> retrospective re-patterning elements having at an earlier
> stage of the text-continuum constructed an opposite pattern
> which now serves as a sharpening contrast; the continguity of
> certain materials may create a confrontation and bring into
> relief certain aspects by analogy or contrast; contiguity may
> also result in mutual conditioning of the contiguous elements,
> bringing about effects of restraint and counterbalancing,
> ironic illumination, sentamentalization, increased "realism",
> etc.; material appearing early in the text may determine
> "shades of meaning" to be activated in later material, which
> is to be assimilated to it, accentuating certain aspects and
> weakening others; anticipating one bit of information about a
> character and delaying another, of a different nature
> entirely, may "prejudge" the reader in advance in favor (or
> against) the character, building up a "reservoir" of sympathy

(or reservation) that will be hard to renounce and will
condition details of a contrary nature later on in the text
. . . (1979:41).

In light of these remarks, van Seters's decision to exclude Gen
18:15-20:1 because it interrupts the natural link between the
announcement and fulfillment of Isaac's birth appears premature.
Perry's comments suggest that this break may have a particular
literary function, an examination of which is necessary for the
fullest possible understanding of the text.

The most obvious function of Gen 18:16-20:18 is to increase
narrative tension by delaying the birth of Isaac (R. Alter 1983:121).
Just when one expects the birth the narrative has been promising since
Gen 12:2, it breaks off and goes in another direction. A closer look,
however, reveals certain themes that integrate this narrative delay
with the announcement and fulfillment of Isaac's birth. The theme of
progeny, for example, recurs throughout this material. Gen 18:16-33
concerns what Abraham should teach his offspring and how this will
affect others (cf. J.-P. Klein 1977:84-85). The account of the
destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah ends by relating the birth of Lot's
sons, while chap. 20 ends with a note that Yahweh opened the wombs of
Abimelech's women, who then proceed to bear children.

As R. Alter (1983:121) notes, both intervening births occur in
contexts which appear to threaten the propagation and continuation of
man. The destruction of the Jordanian plain, for example, leads Lot's
daughters to conclude that "there is not a man on earth to come into
us after the manner of all the earth" (Gen 19:31). Similarly, at the

end of chap. 20, the reader realises that Yahweh had closed up the wombs of Abimelech's women. The significance of these facts, however, lies in the way these different groups finally acquire offspring. ·Lot's daughters get their father drunk and have intercourse with him. In chap. 20 Yahweh reopens the Philistine wombs only after Abraham prays on Abimelech's behalf, an act which should probably be understood in the light of Yahweh's promise that in Abraham nations will be blessed (Gen 12:3; 18:18).

. Like these births, that of Isaac occurs from a situation in which human propagation appears impossible. However, in contrast to the intervening births, Isaac is born when "Yahweh attended to Sarah as he had spoken . . ." (21:1). He is not the result of human deceit, as are Ammon and Moab, or of entreaty, as are Abimelech's offspring, but of a divine promise. His birth is thus defined antithetically through its comparison with those of others, as well as by Yahweh's positive proclamation in Gen 18:17-19. It is in this comparison, moreover, that the intervening material carries at least part of its significance. It explores the nature of human births during times when child bearing appears impossible, thus highlighting the special quality of the birth of Isaac to a barren woman.

Contradictions and Differing Points of View

·While this fourth criterion covers a wide range of literary phenomena (see· U. Cassuto 1961:55), the most important have been divergent renderings of God, · and details that contradict ·common sense or life as generally experienced by all men (cf. N. Habel 1971:24-26;

T. E. Fretheim 1976:839). J. K. Kuntz (1974:44-45) points to the two covenants God makes with Abraham (Gen 15, 17) as an example of the former. In chap. 17 God is austere and dignified. "God's role is that of speaker, Abraham's that of listener" (Kuntz 1974:44). By contrast, in Gen 15 God appears as a being who is much more personal. "Here," Kuntz states, "the deity is anthropomorphically portrayed as Abraham's concerned friend" (1974:45). These differences suggest to most higher critics that these chapters stem from different sources with different theological perspectives.

An often cited example of the category of contradiction is the episodes in which Abraham fears Sarah's beauty will lead to his death, especially Gen 20. "Sarah is here," J. Skinner writes, "conceived as a young woman capable of inspiring passion in the king" (1930:315). Yet the wider context clearly portrays her as an old woman (17:17, 21; 18:11), hardly the quality that inspires passion.

While differences like those Kuntz detects do indeed exist, his conclusion that they represent different narratives by different authors does not necessarily follow. Indeed, according to W. Iser (1978:108-118), such changes are a necessary corollary of the linear nature of the reading process, and of the resulting fact that the whole of the literary object cannot be perceived at one time:

> Apperception can only take place in phases, each of which contains aspects of the object to be constituted, but none of which can claim to be representative of it. Thus, the aesthetic object cannot be identified with any of its manifestations during the time-flow of the reading. The incompleteness of each manifestation necessitates syntheses, which, in turn, bring about the transfer of the text to the

reader's consciousness (1978:109).

When applied to a particular character in a narrative, Iser's statement implies that the total personality will become apparent only after all situations in which he or she plays a part have been read and synthetised (cf. S. Chatman 1978:119ff.). While a certain amount of consistency is normal, any one situation will reveal only certain parts or aspects of the character's personality. This situation is precisely what D. Patrick discovers in his analysis of the way the Old Testament portrays God:

> The art of characterization requires consistency of character. If the Old Testament employs this art to speak of God, to be successful he must be in character whenever he appears. It was argued . . . that such consistency can be discerned. It is to one and the same deity that all biblical God-language refers. He has a special biography that is frequently recalled and generally assumed. He has personal traits that are regularly manifested and coherently integrated into the total identity. Finally, he possesses attributes appropriate to one claiming exclusive deity.
> The identity of the biblical God, however, is not rigid or static. Rather, he is a persona whose identity emerges as dynamic, surprising and occasionally paradoxical, requiring of the reader a dialectical proc[e]ss of recognition. When a depiction borders on inconsistency, the interpreter must grasp it as a surprising manifestation of the one already known. When a depiction is polemical, the interpreter must recognize that the identity of Yahweh involves elements of paradox. When the true persona claims to surpass all traits of human personae, the interpreter should realize that it is characteristic of this persona, and no other, to possess such freedom (1981:59).

While Patrick unquestioningly accepts the higher critical view that the Pentateuch is a composite, his remarks here militate against the assumption that single narratives will not portray characters in a variety of ways, even if the character is God.

According to Chatman, "The setting 'sets the character off' in

the usual figurative sense of the expression; it is the place and collection of objects "against which" his actions and passions appropriately emerge" (1978:138-139). In other words, the context determines which aspects of personality or traits of a character will be revealed in any given section of a narrative (cf. E. M. Forster 1974:71-72). Yahweh appears as a personal friend in Gen 15, for example, because of the need to reassure Abram of his continual commitment to him. As his repeated demands for certainty suggest (15:2-3, 8), by chap. 15 Abram has reached a high level of anxiety. Yahweh had promised him both land and progeny if he would quit Ur (12:1-2) and, while he did as Yahweh asked, he had yet to receive either. Indeed, he has just watched the territories surrounding his new home fall into the hands of a powerful coalition of four kings. While he and his comrades successfully expel the intruders, they flee only as far as Damascus, remaining an ever present threat to Abram and the land of Canaan. Given the context, it should come as no surprise that Abram would need reassurance of his status vis-à-vis the divine plan, and demand this of Yahweh when he appears in chap. 15. Appropriately, Yahweh responds by drawing very close to Abram, and by revealing to him certain details of his future. While being close to the creator understandably causes another form of dread to come upon Abram (15:12), it also demonstrates that God has not forsaken him or his promise. And, if 15:6 is any measure, Yahweh's actions succeed in relieving Abram of at least part of his anxiety over this issue.

By Gen. 17, however, the situation has changed greatly. Abram

has finally had a son (Gen 16), and while he himself owns no land, he
"knows for sure" that his descendants will eventually possess Canaan
(15:13-21). God's promises seem clearly in the process of being
fulfilled and, appropriately, the anxiety the patriarch showed in
15:2-3, 8 is no longer in evidence.

Indeed, the problem Yahweh must overcome in Gen 17 is the
opposite of that in Gen 15. Rather than reassure an uncertain Abram
of his unfailing committment to him, on this occasion Yahweh must
inform the patriarch that Ishmael is not the promised son, and that
that son will be born by his first wife, Sarai, now to be called
Sarah. He also takes the opportunity to inform Abram -- now to be
called Abraham -- of the special covenantal relationship that will
exist between his descendants and himself, and of the sign Abram's
family must bear to participate in this relationship. The formality
and distance with which Yahweh addresses Abram place the deity in a
position of authority which stresses the importance of the covenant.
Apparently sensing God's urgency, the patriarch immediately responds
by circumcising all the males in his household.

In summary, it is methodologically dubious to isolate two
situations from a narrative and then claim, on the basis of changes in
the way a character acts, that they reflect two different authors with
two different theologies. On the contrary, Gen 15 and 17 demonstrate
that Yahweh responds to his creatures according to the needs of
specific situations. Neither chapter gives a full account of Yahweh's
character which, as remarked above, will only emerge after all

situations in which he participates have been actualised by the reader. If Gen 17 "cannot be considered a convincing, three-dimensional narrative" (1974:44), it is simply because it is not a complete narrative, but only a segment of a much larger work. Together these two chapters demonstrate that Yahweh can be either close and personal, or formal and removed. This rendering of the deity should come as no great surprise considering the fact that the Judeo-Christian tradition has long maintained the paradox of God's immanence and transcendence.

Notions of verisimilitude provide an equally shaky foundation for constructing higher critical conclusions. Such arguments make the assumption that discourse, and in this case narrative discourse, is consistent with or at least approaches "reality." However, as T. Todorov (1977a) comments, the relationship between a text and empirical reality is not so simple. Texts are free to construct their own worlds with their own rules (N. N. Holland 1975:63-103). This freedom, Todorov writes, "is limited by the internal requirements of the book itself . . . ." (1977a:83).

The fact that different genres have different standards, i.e. different verisimilitudes, complicates matters even further. The world of a detective novel works quite differently from that of an epic. The question of which genre best approaches "reality" -- a question whose very legitimacy is in doubt -- depends on the way one experiences reality, and is therefore a matter of opinion. Indeed, many texts seem more intent on challenging common notions of reality

than on copying them. According to E. S. Rabkin, for example, "The
fantastic [by which he means something that `contradicts perspectives'
1976:4)] is a potent tool in the hands of an author who also wants to
satirize man's world or clarify the inner workings of man's soul"
(1976:41). Indeed, according to Alan Cooper, this is precisely what
the Bible is about: "The Bible opens up for me a world which I could
never have perceived as a matter of course: it enables me to
understand· things which I could·not have understood without it"
(1983:64; cf. D. J. A. Clines 1978:102-111).

The difficulty of Abimelech finding the pregnant, ninety year
old Sarah attractive disappears in the light of the above comments.
Certainly such a situation is not a commonplace in the empirical
world, but the world of Genesis is a different one. It is a world in
which ·Abram and just 318 men are able to defeat a coalition of four
powerful monarchs -- an act itself not impossible however improbable.
It is also a world in which fire rains down out of heaven, and in
which God speaks directly to men. Is the fact that Abimelech finds
Sarah attractive any more contradictory than the fact that she can
become pregnant at ninety?

While most of the above examples serve to illustrate God's
power over nature or his care for his chosen one, the "contradiction"
between· the old woman and the king's passion is the result of two
literary needs coming together in Gen 20. As Hauge (1975) and Clines
(1978) note, most of the Abraham narrative explores' the problems
surrounding the birth of the chosen son. By giving up Sarah at the

very point the reader expects the birth of the promised baby. Abraham casts an uncertain shadow over the success of the divine promise, thereby increasing the level of narrative tension. The text employs the sister-wife motif as the means of expressing that tension because of its desire to recall Gen 12:10-20. Out of these two needs the "contradiction" is born. While the standards of "reality" -- at least "reality" as modern men perceive it -- may dictate that Sarah be either young and desirable or old and undesirable, the needs of the biblical world demand that she be old and desirable; and so she is! Whether a real woman living in the empirical world can be beautiful at the same time that she is old does not concern the narrative.[12] Or perhaps it is suggesting that most people who live in the "real world" do not know what constitutes real beauty.[13]

Episodic Character

As noted above, the application of this literary phenomenon as a basis for dividing the text into separate layers of traditions stems from H. Gunkel and the form critical method. Gunkel, and most form critics since him, believe that the episodic character of the Abraham narrative indicates that it is really a collection of once independent stories, a sort of anthology of ancient Hebrew folk tales.[14] As with the above mentioned criteria, this one is not unequivocal. As P. Goodman notes, there are a number of types of literature that employ an episodic plot, the best known of which is the epic. And similar to the way form critics describe the individual

episodes of the Abraham narrative, Goodman describes those of the epic
as "relatively self-contained" (1954:72). As a consequence of such a
structure, the relationship between the individual episodes and the
greater literary whole is a delicate one. Goodman describes the
balance strived for in the epic:

> On the one hand, the unity of over-all action must not be
> lost. In some stories (e.g. a voyage), there is an obvious
> progression, but in others the order must be made clear . . .
> On the other hand, the greatness of the individual exploits
> must not be lost; they must not be underwritten to hasten to
> the end or they will not be epic. The whole must not fall
> apart into an "episodic plot"; yet each episode must not be
> pusillanimous (1954:71).

In the epic, Goodman continues, the function of the episodic
plot is to demonstrate the hero's character and principles in
different and possibly unrelated situations. In such instances unity
stems not from a cause-and-effect relationship between events, but
from the way in which the characters, and especially the hero,
develop.

Other episodic narratives rely on different features to bind
the whole together. The Quest for the Holy Grail, for example,
records a series of adventures encountered by King Arthur's knights,
which, on the surface, have no obvious relationship to one another.
At the conclusion of each episode, however, a monk, sage, or heaven
itself delivers an oration expounding on its cosmic significance.
According to T. Todorov, it is these monologues that supply the themes
that unite the different adventures together:

> The organization of the narrative is therefore on the level of
> the interpretation and not on the events-to-be-interpreted.
> The combination of these events are sometimes singular,

incoherent, but this does not mean that the narrative lacks organization; simply this organization is situated on the level of ideas, not on that of events (1977b:130).

Such plot structures, moreover, give literary expression to these unifying principles through a series of themes and motifs. In something like The Quest for the Holy Grail the unifying theme is found in the medieval Christian view of salvation in Christ. The meaning of each episode stems from the degree to which it either approaches or retracts from this view.

Against such a background the Abraham narrative appears in an entirely new light. Indeed, it contains two complementary and interwoven elements which suggest that it should be read as an integrated, continuous whole. First, the story is bound by a uniform chronology. It begins with Abram's birth, describes his marriage, notes that he grows old, and ends with his death. The assignment of an absolute chronology to especially significant events further enhances this order. Abram is seventy-five years old when he leaves Haran from Canaan (12:4). He is eighty-six years old when Hagar bears him his first son (16:16). At ninety-nine Yahweh gives him the covenant of circumcision, informing him that Ishmael is not the son of the promise, and promising him that Sarah will give birth to that son in one year's time (17:1, 24). In accord with this promise, Abraham is one hundred years old when Sarah bears Isaac (21:5), who is then circumcised at eight days. Sarah dies at age one hundred twenty-seven (23:1), and Abraham at one hundred seventy-five (25:7).

The episodes are also bound by the theme of the divine

promise. The narrative cycle opens with Yahweh´s initial formulation of it (12:1-3), and draws to a close noting its fulfillment (24:1) and transference to the next generation (25:11). The intervening material continually restates or alludes to it. Not a single event passes without it in some way being related to the promise. Indeed, according to D. J. A. Clines (1978:45-47), the tensions of the narrative arise from the text´s exploration of the way certain situations affect, postpone, or even threaten its outcome.

These two features, moreover, are not independent of one another. As Clines (1978:29-32) notes, the promise consists of three interrelated elements: posterity, divine-human relationship, and land. Every instance that notes a character´s age is in some way connected with one or more of these elements. The first one (12:4), which records Abram´s initial journey to Canaan, and the last two (23:1; 25:9), which describe the burials of Sarah and Abraham in the cave of Machpelah, are concerned with the element of land (23:18-20; cf. M. Hauge 1975:137-139). The second (16:16) and fourth (21:5), describing, respectively, the births of Ishmael and Isaac, are concerned with posterity. While promising both progeny and land, the major concern of the third is the relationship between God and that branch of Abraham´s family that will inherit the blessing, of which circumcision is the sign (Gen 17:7, 11, 14, 19). The different elements of the promise are thus combined with the instances which mention Abraham´s age, according to the following chiastic pattern:

A: 75, land

B: 86, posterity

C: 99, divine-human relationship

B´: 100, posterity

.A´: 175, land.

Multiplicity of Genres

One of the principles of the form-critical method is that a fully independent, unified text will not include different genres. Or, conversely, form criticism assumes that any given work will correspond in its totality to just one genre. Thus, in her recent discussion of the form-critical method A. Ohler writes:

> Disparate Formen sind bunt gemischt: Erzählungen verschiedener Art, Listen von Namen, Orten u. a., Reste und Referate von Erzählungen, Gesetze unterschiedlicher Bauform, die Ordnungen verschiedener Zeiten Spiegeln.' Im Buch Genesis finden sich kurze Sagen, wie sie die mündliche Weitergabe prägt (die Sätze vergegenwärtigen nur das Geschehen selbst, sparen die inneren Vorgänge aus und deuten sie doch in den Gesten an). Daneben lesen wir auch die lange, farbenprächtige und geschehensarme Erzählung von der Werbung um Rebekka (Gen 24). . . . Solche Unterschiede zeigen an, dass wir es nicht mit Werken zu tun haben, die in einem Wurf enstanden sind, sondern mit Sammlungen verschiedenartiger Sprachstücke (1972:93).

Thus, one of the reasons C. Westermann (1981:203) separates 12:10-20 from 13:1-5 is that he sees the latter as an "itinerary," while identifying the former as a "family saga." Similarly, G. W. Coats separates Gen 15 from 14 because, "The governing structure in this unit is quite distinct" (1983:123). According to him Gen 14 "maintains its character as ANNAL, composed of battle REPORTS . . ." (1983:121). Gen 15, on the other hand, "is simply a DIALOGUE,

structured on the basis of the ORACLE OF SALVATION" (1983:125).

While the Abraham narrative certainly does contain various sorts of narration, there is little to support the form-critical contention that a unified, continuous narrative cannot contain such a mixture. In his discussion of the history of genres in the Old Testament, K. Koch (1969:23-25) makes a distinction between complex literary types and component literary types. A component literary type is a basic unit which can exist by itself. A complex literary type, on the other hand, is a form that comes into existence when an editor or redactor combines a number of component literary types together. Koch's example of the latter is the liturgy, which, he notes, is "built up" from the chorale, the prayer, and the sermon.

For Koch, the recognition of complex types serves two purposes. First, it allows him access to the component types. Since he views *die eigentliche constituierende Einheit* as foundational, he believes its identification is essential for the study of any text. As such, Koch is in basic agreement with Ohler and most other biblical form critics. According to him, the patriarchal narrative is a complex type which some redactor created when he brought together a number of originally independent component types (1969:24). Second, identifying component types allows the form critic to recover the history of genres by tracing their morphology through different arrangements of components into complexes.

One of Koch's assumptions is that complex types always use already existing texts as components. Thus, in rendering them down,

he believes he is just isolating those earlier, more basic works. He does, however, admit that there are exceptions; for example, when a lyric poem is written into a novel. "Then it is only a small part of a wider context: the novel is the greater unit, with the lyric a mere part within the whole" (1969:23; cf. Wilcoxen 1974:95). In such a case, it would be a mistake to claim that its component parts represent some earlier stage of the text.

Koch, however, does not supply any criteria for distinguishing between the two types of complex literature. It is entirely possible, for example, for an author to create a liturgy without employing preexisting texts, simply by composing a chorale, prayer, and sermon, and placing them in proper sequence. As with his example of the novel, in this case, the components do not represent an earlier stage of the text. On the other hand, if an author feels it suits his purposes, he may incorporate an already existing poem into his novel. But even in this case, the meaning of the lyric in the novel is determined by its new context, not its older ones. As W. Iser writes, "The very fact that the allusions are now stripped of their original context makes it clear that they are not intended to be a mere reproduction – they are, so to speak, depragmatized and set in a new context" (1978:79). According to J. Rosenberg, this is precisely the situation in the Old Testament:

> For there is, as the Biblical scholars have pointed out, a mixture of priestly, sermonic and narrative styles, interlaced with fragments of song, epigram, prayer and statute, each unit of which serves as a comment on the others [my emphasis] (1975:85-86; cf. O. Eissfeldt 1962:144).

Needless to say, this does not preclude examining the relationship between a text and its sources. However, the interpretation of sources is the interpretation of texts other than the Bible.[15]

This difficulty points to a more serious weakness in Koch's position: he does not recognize the self-sufficiency of the so-called complex literary types. That is to say, because complex types are nonetheless types, they stem from their own set of meaning matrices, and generate their own meaning expectations (Knierim 1973:455). The meaning and function of the liturgy is greater than the sum of the chorale, prayer, and sermon. Correspondingly, an analysis of a liturgy that divides it into its three compound types, and then interprets it according to the meaning matrices of those three genres will be insufficient at best, and, at worst, completely misleading. Koch's assertion that each literary text is governed in its totality by just one genre cannot be maintained. As R. Knierim has already observed, "The entirety of a text may be governed by more than one typical structure" (1973:462).

Thus, the fact that the Abraham narrative includes a variety of literary types does not mean that the genre to which it belongs —— whatever that might be —— is not entirely self-sufficient. Any interpretation must therefore give the narrative's intrinsic form priority over that of any of its components. All itineraries, genealogies, and other forms are only parts of the greater whole in which they are included and to which they are subordinated. Similarly, its complex nature does not mean that the concrete example

of any of its component types ever existed independently of their present literary context. Even if this were the case, however, their meaning in the present text is determined by their context in that text, not their earlier context(s). Although he did not always follow the implications of his methodological statements, over fifty years ago O. Eissfeldt expounded these very points:

> Das Aufzeigen selbständiger Erzählungsstoffe bedeutet also keineswegs den Nachweis, dass diese Einzelstoffe auch jemals eine für sich alleinstehende literarische Form gehabt haben, und noch viel weniger, dass, wenn es der Fall gewesen, jene Urform in der uns vorliegenden Form enthalten ist und durch Streichung der sie mit einem grösseren Zusammenhang verknüpfenden Worte und Sätze wiedergewonnen werden kann. Vielmehr kann die einmal selbständige Einzelerzählung von dem zu uns sprechenden Erzähler als blosser Rohstoff gebraucht worden sein.
> Die Grenzen einer selbständigen Erzählungs-Einheit sind darnach so weit zu stecken, wie der Horizont der jeweiligen Erzählung reicht. Reicht dieser über eine `Einzel-Erzählung` hinaus und sind ihre nach rückwärts und nach vorwärts weisenden Elemente integrierender Bestandteil von ihr, so ist sie keine selbständige literarische Einheit, sondern Teil einer grösseren. (1962b:144; cf. 1962a:375).

Koch, Westermann, and most other form critics err in confusing the history of genres with the history of actual texts. These two categories are independent and must be kept distinct.

. Recent discussions reveal a great deal of uncertainty over the applicability of the various forms of higher criticism to the biblical text. The source of this confusion, it seems to me, lies in the changing views of the nature of the material recorded in Genesis. Source criticism, for example, developed during a time when Genesis was viewed as a history book. However, when early source critics realized that the text includes features not usually

associated with historiography, rather than concluding that the text
was not history, they asserted that it was corrupt or bad history.
They then set out to reconstruct the original uncorrupted
histories they thought were contained within it. The paradox is that
while source criticism has since rejected the view that Genesis is
historiography, it has, nonetheless, accepted the methods and
conclusions founded upon that view. However, if the text is not
history, the use of criteria for working with history must be
questioned.

A similar paradox exists with the way form criticism is
applied. Gunkel originally developed the method to deal with Sagen,
which by definition are short, orally composed anecdotes. Later form
critics, however, decided that the episodes in Genesis do not belong
to this genre.[16] However, while they have now rejected this analogy,
and hence the basis of the theory that the episodes were at one time
independent and self-contained, they have nonetheless retained its
conclusions. But again, if Genesis does not record Sagen, the use of
criteria designed to deal with this category must be questioned (cf.
S. M. Warner 1979).[17]

In both cases, the confusion stems from approaching the text
with a predetermined belief about the type of writing the Abraham
narrative contains. If these models fail to do justice to the text,
however, should not the model be altered rather than the text? In
other words, the problems higher criticism has in interpreting the
Abraham narrative may not be the result of the text's failure, but of

its own interpretive processes. This situation, as well as the equivocal nature of the evidence advanced in support of historical critical theories, recommend a reevaluation of the possibility that the text is an integrated, meaningful whole.

A New Approach

In the last few years scholars have shown an increasing interest in the literary dimensions of biblical narrative. Although this concern has manifested itself in a number of ways, all share the conviction that the received text is a worthy object of study. One area that has proved particularly fruitful is the study of narrative structure. According to S. Bar-Efrat, "Structural arguments can be, and in fact have been, used to prove the unity of a given narrative or to determine the boundaries of a literary unit" (1980:172). Since the Abraham narrative has so often been seen as a disunity, an analysis of its structure will be particularly instructive.

The first problem is how to go about such a task. Bar-Efrat defines structure "as a network of relations among parts of an object or a unit" (1980:155). In a literary object, he adds, structure functions on four general levels: "(1) the verbal level; (2) the level of narrative technique; (3) the level of the narrative world; (4) the level of conceptual content" (1980:157). This statement is fine as far as it goes, but it does not explain the relationship between structure and the actualisation of the text by the reader. In other words, Bar-Efrat's definition does not explain the capacity in which structure unifies a narrative. Yet, this function is essential if, as

U. Eco claims, ". . . interpretation is not an empirical accident independent of the text qua text, but is a structural element of its generative process" (1979:9).

According to W. Iser, the meaning of a text, or its actualisation by a reader, is the results of "a dynamic interaction between text and reader" (1978:107). The text supplies certain elements or structural features which are organised in such a way as to both allow and control its comprehension. Each new element stands against the backdrop of those that precede it, while at the same time preparing the way for what follows.

> The individual segments, then, take on their significance only through interaction with other segments, and if we bear in mind the fact that all the perspectives (narrator, hero, etc.) represent something determinate and that these determinate elements are transformed by their interplay, it is obvious that the ultimate meaning of the text -- or the aesthetic object -- transcends all the determinate elements (1978:98).

The reader's role in this process is to synthetise the different textual segments. It is only by an act of cognition on his part that a semantic unit can be understood as a response to expectations raised earlier in the text, and as creating a series of new potentialities that later segments might explore. In the words of Iser:

> . . . throughout the reading process there is a continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories. However, the text itself does not formulate expectations or their modification; nor does it specify how the connectability of memories is to be implemented. This is the province of the reader himself and so here we have a first insight into how the synthetizing activity of the reader enables the text to be translated and transferred to his own mind (1978:111-112).

Iser's discussion can be translated into the more traditional language of plot, although with some modification. According to M. H. Abrams:

> The plot in a dramatic or narrative work is the structure of its actions, as these are ordered and rendered toward achieving particular emotional and artistic effects (1981:137).

As an aspect of plot, structure concerns the causal relationship between the various segments of a narrative (S. Chatman 1978:45-48; P. Brooks 1984:3-36). A full and accurate description of a narrative's structure must, therefore, take these causal links into account. What Iser's study argues is that while the text controls these links by the way it selects and orders its segments, the reader must himself formulate the way this ordering defines these relationships. The structure of a text is thus integrally related to the process of actualisation, which is its meaning.[18]

The importance of these relationships can be illustrated from G. Rendsburg's recent analysis of Gen 11:27-22:24 (1982). Developing a thesis first presented by U. Cassuto (1964:II:293-296), Rendsburg argues that the Abraham cycle has the following chiastic structure:

A. Genealogy of Terah (11:27-32)

B. Start of Abram's Spiritual Odyssey (12:1-9).

C. Sarai in foreign land; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abram and Lot part (12:10-13:15).

D. Abram comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (14:1-24).

E. Covenant with Abram; Annunciation of Ishmael (15:1-16:16).

E'. Covenant with Abraham; Annunciation of Isaac (17:1-18:15).

D´. Abraham comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (18:16-19:38).

C´. Sarah in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abraham and Ishmael part (20:1-21:34).

B´. Climax of Abraham´s Spiritual Odyssey (22:1-19).

A´. Genealogy of Nahor (22:20-24).

After supplying an extensive list of the verbal and thematic parallels he detects between the corresponding sections, he concludes that far from composing an unpolished narrative, "The compiler has artfully woven a literary structure which we can all marvel at."

While an analysis that presents the text is such a way may appear attractive, especially in the wake of two centuries of criticism that sought to show the disunity of the text, a closer examination reveals several difficulties. Many of the terms and expressions upon which Rendsburg defines the corresponding sections of the chiasmus also occur in other sections of the text. For example, while 12:10-13:18 and 20:1-21:34 do refer to Sarah as "Abram´s/Abraham´s wife" and "the woman," so do most other sections in which she appears. Similarly, the text contains many other parallels that Rendsburg does not consider. The covenant between Abram and the Amorites (Gen 14), for example, could very well be seen as a parallel with that between the patriarch and Abimelech (Gen 21). Or Yahweh´s appearance to Abram at Mamre in Gen 18 might be seen as corresponding to his earlier appearance at that very place in Gen 13. If structure were entirely formal, as Rendsburg implies, there is no reason why his associations should take precedence over any others -- including those

that might be disorderly -- especially since he supplies no reasons to the contrary.

Other than noting verbal agreements, Rendsburg does not discuss the relationship between the parallel sections. Do those in the second half of the chiasmus develop, reverse, or in some other way alter themes, concepts, or personalities introduced in the first half of the structure? And if so, by what means and to what end? Similarly, he does not deal with the linear relationship of the sections. How does the "ordeal" or Sarai's stay in Egypt develop out of the "start of Abram's spiritual odyssey," and lead into his "rescue of Sodom and Lot?" These lead to the more basic questions of why the author wrote what he did and in the order in which he presents it. Or again, what is the relationship between the plot of the narrative and its structure? Rendsburg's study leaves such questions untouched, giving the impression that his sections have no real links to their wider literary contexts.

Paradoxically, the necessity of describing such relationships can be highlighted by Rendsburg's comments on Gen·23:1-25:18. He is not disturbed that his chiasmus does not include this material because, he states, "it is not central to his [Abraham's] spiritual odyssey." Yet this sort of reasoning implies that the narrative has both a theme and a plot, and that their recognition is essential for the text to function as an "artfully woven . . . literary structure." However, if the Abraham narrative is defined by its concern for the patriarch's "spiritual odyssey," Rendsburg does not describe how the

various units employ it, or how it binds them together. Consequently, his study cannot and does not show how the text functions as a complete literary entity.

In what follows, I will describe the various structural-semantic units of the Abraham narrative as I perceive them. While the text's formal features serve as a control against gratuitous interpretations, it is only through one's understanding of the text that the reader foregrounds certain formal elements, and allows others to recede into the background. Thus, neither aspect takes priority over the other; they function together, each serving as a check against the other. In accordance with Iser's remarks, moreover, I will try to show how each unit emerges out of those that precede it, and anticipates things to come (cf. M. Perry 1979:45). It is only through such a process that one can check to see if the text is concerned with something like Abraham's "spiritual odyssey."

As the above comments suggest, the order in which structual-semantic units occur is crucial for the way readers come to understand texts. As M. Perry (1979) explicates, this is the necessary corollary of the linear nature of the reading process. Therefore, in the following description of the text the order in which the structural-semantic units occurs will be taken seriously into account. As a consequence, while it is legitimate to speculate about the possible directions in which a segment might lead, it would be a mistake to interpret a unit directly in the light of later segments. "Such a process would rob the text of its ability to use ambiguities and

uncertainties to create tensions and, consequently, of its capacity to function properly as literature.

Notes to Chapter One

1

The polar views of two of the foremost biblical scholars illustrate well the uncertainty over the historical accuracy of the patriarchal narrative. According to Julius Wellhausen: "It is true, we attain to no historical knowledge of the patriarchs, but only of the time when the stories about them arose in the Israelite people" (1973:318-319). In sharp contrast is the view of W. F. Albright: "The narratives of Genesis dealing with Abram (Abraham) may now be integrated into the life and history of the time in such surprisingly consistent ways that there can be little doubt about their substantial historicity" (1973:10).

2

Of tradition-history, for example, D. A. Knight says: "The traditio-historical examination must be preceded by the text-critical, literary-critical, form-critical, and Gattung-critical analyses of the unit in question" (1977:30-31). K. Koch refers to redaction criticism as "the last form-critical process" (1969:57).

3

Under the influence of form criticism and tradition history these features have also been interpreted as evidence of different layers of tradition, and not necessarily as indications of whole documents. Nonetheless, the supposition remains that these features would not occur in a single, continuous narrative, and that they are evidence of the process by which the text came to have its present form.

4

For a recent discussion of the state of the question see J. A. Wilcoxen (1974).

5

M. H. Abrams defines style as, ". . . the manner of linguistic expression in prose of verse -- it is _how_ a speaker or writer says whatever it is that he says. The characteristic style of a work or writer may be analyzed in terms of its _diction_, or choice of words; its sentence structure and syntax; the density and types of its figurative language; the patterns of its rhythm, component sounds, and other formal features; and its rhetorical aims and devices" (1981:190-191) For recent discussions of style see E. L. Epstein (1978) and G. N. Leech and M. H. Short (1981).

6

Traditionally the alternation of the divine names Elohim and Yahweh has occupied a special place in stylistic analysis. More recently, however, source criticism has admitted that the divine name is not always an accurate indication of sources (e.g. J. A. Soggin 1976:99; T. E. Fretheim 1976:839). "I am very skeptical," J. van Seters writes, "about making a division between two verses or parts of verses within the same unit only on the basis of vocabulary, such as

the alternation of the divine names Yahweh and Elohim" (1975:156).

7

For recent discussions of point of view in biblical narrative, see L. Eslinger (1983) and A. Berlin (1983:43-82).

8

It is at this point that Alter is at variance with form-criticism, which usually defines narrative types according to features that are fixed.

9

In his article, Williams (1980) lists those elements he thinks constitute the sister-wife type-scene, and the variations each of the three examples contains.

10

According to R. de Vaux (1961:I:115-116), in historical Egypt a large harem was a sign of a Pharaoh's wealth and prestige.

11

According to B. Kawin, repetition in narrative serves one of two general purposes: "The first, involved with the concepts of past and future, and believing in the integrity of memory, builds repetitions one on the other towards some total effect . . . . . The second, considering the present the only artistically approachable tense, deals with each instant and subject as a new thing to such an extent that the sympathetic reader is aware less of repetition than of continuity . . ." (1972:33). Depending on retrospection (see esp. Gen 20:13; 26:1-5) and the realisation of the changes in context, the repetition of the sister-wife motif proves to belong to Kawin's first type.

12

On the difference between homo sapiens and homo fictus, see E. M. Forster (1974:54-70).

13

This suggestion was anticipated long ago by John Calvin's judgment that: "Abimelech was less attracted by the elegance of form than by the rare virtues with which he saw her, as a matron, to be endued." (1965:I:522).

14

For a recent presentation of this view see the collected essays in G. W. Coats (1985).

15

Jeffrey Tigay's (1982) recent analysis of the evolution of the Gilgamesh epic is particularly informative. Unlike the Bible, the many extant versions of the epic supply the empirical evidence necessary for such a study. Tigay finds that there is no uniformity to the way each version deals with the materials upon which it drew. Each was composed according to its own needs, leading Tigay to recommend that "each version be taken seriously as a piece of literature in its own right . . ." (1982:20).

16
Under the influence of Westermann's study (1980), which is itself dependent upon the work of A. Jolles, many form critics now agree that the nordic sagas constitute the closest analogy to the patriarchal narrative (but see G. R. Tucker 1971:35). However, since the sagas are long, integrated narratives, even if this were the case it would vitiate the form critical contention that Genesis is a reservoir of small, discrete units of tradition (esp. J. van Seters 1975:134-138).

17
Other categories form critics employ to interpret the stories of Genesis are legend, folk-tale, novella, to mention only a few (see most recently the essays edited by G. W. Coats [1985]). In all instances, however, the method presupposes that Genesis is a collection of independent stories.

18
Representing a formalist approach, L. Alonso-Schökel (1975) agrees with Iser that a narrative's structure cannot be separated from its content. Where Iser differs is in his insistence that the meaning (and, hence, the structure) is not something lying exclusively in the text waiting for the critic to find, but emerges out of the interaction between text and reader in the process called reading.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LIMITS OF THE ABRAHAM NARRATIVE

Since the book of Genesis contains more than just the story of
Abraham, the question of the limits of this segment naturally arise.
Strangely, while most commentaries recognise that the stories about
Abram/Abraham form a group within the book of Genesis, few offer much
discussion about the limits they assign this group of stories, or
about the issues involved with dividing a narrative into its component
parts. This is all the more surprising since there is such a wide
variety of opinion on the matter.

The addition of the parašōt appears to be the earliest attempt
to divide the Old Testament into its component parts. Based on these
markers the story of Abraham contains three segments: (1) 12:1-17:27;
(2) 18:1-22:24; (3) 23:1-25:18. Whether each parašā was thought to be
of equal force is not clear. In any event, their placement indicates
that whoever put them in the text thought that Yahweh's commission of
Abram began a new unit in the book of Genesis. Stephen Langton
maintained this division when, in A. D. 1205, he added the chapter
numbers familiar from modern English translations. Their decision has
been accepted by such modern scholars as U. Cassuto (1964:II:250ff.,
291ff.), R. Davidson (1979:9-10), A. Dillmann (1897:II:1ff.), S. R.
Driver (1905:143ff.), H. Holzinger (1898:124ff.), B. Jacob (1974:331),
D. Kidner (1967:13, 42), E. König (1919:440ff.), J. Morgenstern
(1965:96), Y. Raddai (1972:16), C. A. Simpson (1952b:456), and E. A.

Speiser (1964:83ff.).

Those who added the parašōt, however, did not divide the text in order to highlight its structural features, but to serve the liturgical needs of the worshipping community (I. Yeivin 1980:39-40). This is not to say that traditional divisions cannot correspond to the structure of the narrative; many of them do. However, if the concern is the text as a literary phenomenon, the basis of any attempt to outline its structure must rest in the text itself, not in the liturgical calendar of a religious community.

Other scholars are not satisfied with this division. Many feel that the announcement of Abraham's birth and marriage properly belong with the rest of his story, and therefore maintain that the end of Gen 11 is actually the introduction to the Abraham narrative, not the conclusion to the preceding section, which most moderns refer to as the primeval history. While most exponents of this latter view agree that the introduction includes 11:27-32,[1] most recently W. Brueggemann (1982a:8-9, 21-23, 114-116) accepts only 11:30-32, relegating vv. 27-29 to the preceding section. N. Wagner (1965:27) and J. van Seters (1975:225, 313), on the other hand, expand the story's introduction to include 11:26. J. Skinner (1930:lxvi) is not certain whether the primeval history ends with 11:27 or 11:30, so he decides that it is probably best to stay with the traditional divisions.

This issue has been complicated by source criticism, which usually assigns vv. 27, 31-32 to P and vv. 28-30 to J (but van Seters

1975:225). Source critics of the first group mentioned above thus understand vv. 27, 31-32 as P's conclusion to the primeval period, and vv. 28-30 as J's ending. Those of the second group see these passages as P's and J's respective introductions to the patriarchal stories. O. Procksch (1913:87ff., 470ff.) and H. Gunkel (1910:156ff.), however, see no reason why the structural divisions of these two sources need concur. According to them 11:27, 31-32 form the conclusion of P's version of the primeval history, while 11:28-30 are J's introduction to the patriarchal stories.

O. Eissfeldt (1962a:368) and G. von Rad (1972:158ff.) offer two of the more unusual divisions. Von Rad maintains that the divine promises of 12:1-3, and Abram's response in 12:4-9, are meant as God's answer to the disaster that was the Tower of Babel (1972:154). He therefore assigns these verses to the primeval history, and, as a consequence, locates the beginning of the patriarchal history in 12:10. In sharp contrast Eissfeldt moves the introduction all the way back to 11:10 (so G. W. Coats 1983:103-105), although he cites no reasons for doing so.

Whether modern scholars accept or reject the traditional divisions usually depends on whether they focus on the genre or contents of 11:(26)27-32. Those who stress its genealogical character link it with 11:10-26, and consequently see it as part of the primeval history.[2] Those who stress its concern with Abram, on the other hand, link it to chap. 12ff., and see it as part of the Abraham narrative.[3]

While genre and content are literary categories, and may

contribute to a unit's definition, they do not constitute structure in themselves. As discussed in chapter one, what K. Koch refers to as complex narratives can contain any number of different genres. By the same token, narrative segments may also contain a variety of genres. Given this situation, it is not inconceivable that a unit should begin with the same genre with which the preceding unit ends. Indeed, a narrative can use such a strategy as a means of linking its different segments together, as will prove to be the case with the book of Genesis.

Similarly, since sections of a narrative can and usually do refer back and forth to one another, content is not enough in itself to define a unit. The book of Genesis, for example, refers to Abraham throughout its pages, yet no one would claim that all these references belong to a section of the text that might be called the Abraham narrative. Gen 25:19, "Abraham begot Isaac," is an appropriate example since, like Gen 11:27-32, it is genealogical in form and relates biographical information about Abraham and his family. Yet according to the structural analysis of M. Fishbane (1979:40-46), this verse belongs with what he calls the "Jacob cycle," not with the Abraham narrative.

Until recently the ending of the Abraham narrative has been discussed in a way similar to its beginning. Almost all agree that the narrative goes at least as far as the account of Abraham's death and burial (25:11; see below for the exceptions). Similarly, most recognise that Gen 25:19 begins the next major narrative section in

Genesis. The controversy surrounds the material that lies between these two verses (25:12-18). The vast majority of scholars include this material with the Abraham narrative.[4] A few like F. Delitzsch (1888:II:364) and C. F. Keil (1878:I:179), however, end the narrative with 25:11, and thereby exclude 25:12-18.

The seven verses at issue contain the list of Ishmael's descendants. Surprisingly, neither group offers much discussion on the matter. Keil and Delitzsch end the narrative at 25:11 because the tōl^edōt formula appears in 25:12. According to them this formula constitutes the structural basis of the book of Genesis. Each occurrence, they maintain, begins a new section of the book.

Few of those who include the list of Ishmael's descendants with the Abraham narrative elaborate on their decision. It appears that to a large extent they include it with the preceding material for lack of a better suggestion. As noted above, most recognise that Gen 25:19 begins a new section. Containing only seven verses, and no story-line, the list of Ishmael's descendants is consequently tacked on to the preceding material.

G. von Rad is one of the few to elaborate further. He contends that there are generic links as well as links of content that support the view that 25:12-18 belong to the Abraham narrative. On the generic level he compares the list of Ishmael's descendants to the list of sons Abraham has by his third wife, Keturah (25:1-4). He adds that the list of Ishmael's descendants brings to a close the story that began with Ishmael's birth in Gen 16.

G. W. Coats's recent analysis of this material exemplifies the uncertainty over the placement of these verses. At the beginning of the sixth chapter of his book he refers to the narrative unit that contains the material about Abraham as the "Shem Genealogy," which, he indicates, includes 11:10–25:11 (1983:103). At the end of the chapter, however, the reader discovers a discussion of 25:12-18, in which Coats states that vv. 12-16 constitute "a redactional element rounding off the narrative about Abraham and his sons," and that vv. 17-18 belong "to the group of units organized around the theme of the patriarch's (Abraham's) death and burial" (1983:174).

Three recent studies offer a more unusual division. Drawing upon the current trend in pattern analysis, Y. Radday (1972:16), G. Rendsburg (1982), and D. Sutherland (1983) agree that the Abraham narrative ends with Gen 22. They support their position with a large chiasmus which they claim defines the Abraham narrative. Although there is little agreement on the division, number, and alignment of the narrative components that make up this chiasmus, Sutherland and Rendsburg maintain that the genealogical notices in 11:27-32 and 22:20-24 form parallel segments that encompass the remainder of the narrative. To use their symbolism these passages are segments A and A´ respectively. According to them the chiasmus indicates that Gen 23ff. do not belong with the Abraham narrative.[5]

The difficulty with these studies was discussed in chapter one. Only two things need be said here. First, these studies are based on a process of abstraction and selectivity, but the principles

governing the degrees of abstraction or selectivity are unclear. The problem is evident from a comparison of the chiasms described in the three aforementioned studies.

Second, although genealogical lists will prove to be a key to the structure of the book of Genesis, not all genealogical information indicates narrative breaks of equal force. There are genealogical notations throughout the Abraham material. In addition to 11:27-32 and 22:20-24, there is Gen 16:1-3, 15-16, most of Gen 17, Gen 19:30-38, 21:1-5, and 25:1-11, to note just the most obvious examples. Potentially any set of two could constitute an inclusio around the material that lies between them. What needs to be determined, however, is the hierarchical relationship between segments. It is possible for a segment within a larger segment, for example, to have a chiastic structure, or a structure of any other pattern, or a structure of no recognisable pattern at all. Gen 22:20-24, for example, anticipates Isaac's marriage to Rebekah in Gen 24. On this basis it is possible to argue that Gen 22:20-24 forms a connecting link binding Gen 23-24 to Gen 11:27-22:19. As will be discussed below, the boundaries between major narrative sections of the book of Genesis are marked by only a certain type of genealogical notation, of which Gen 22:20-24 is not an example.

As discussed in chapter one, stories are composed of series of incidents, the causal relationship between which constitutes their plots. J. Culler makes the same point, but from the perspective of the individual incident: ". . . the basic units of the story were not

actions themselves but 'functions' or roles played by actions in a plot" (1975:136). As actions they will recount some sort of movement and/or transition, and, to the extent that this is so, reveal some measure of plot. It is this situation that lends narrative units a semblance of autonomy, and allows the reader to identify them as segments.

Since they are parts of a greater whole, however, the autonomy of units is not absolute. As Culler points out, any action can serve a variety of purposes: "One cannot determine the role or function of an action without considering its consequences and its place in the story as a whole" (1975:136). Thus, a section within a narrative, or even a section of sections, can be delineated only after its role in its wider narrative context has been identified. Or, to restate this from the perspective of the complete work, the segmentation of a narrative must rest on the basic structures of plot, not on its contents or genre. Thus, before the reader can describe the segmentation of Genesis, and decide on the alignment of such uncertain material as Gen 11:(26) 27-32 or 25:12-18, he must take into account the structure of Genesis as a whole.

Scholars have long recognised the structural function of the recurring phrase, ʾēlleh tōlᵉdōt (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). S. R. Driver, for example, claims that it constitutes the "unity of plan" of the book of Genesis (1905:iii). Similarly, E. König states that, "Die Darstellung der Genesis gruppiert sich um zehn Toledoth . . ." (1919:35). Nor have more

recent studies significantly altered this evaluation. Almost eighty
years after Driver published the above remarks, S. Tengström can still
agree that these formulas, "sind ein notwendiges Glied des
erzählerisches Hauptzusammenhangs der Genesis [Tengström's emphasis],
was wiederum ihre erzählerische Form begründen dürfte" (1981:26).[6]
According to these divisions, therefore, the account of Abraham
belongs to the tōl^edōt of Terah, and includes Gen 11:27-25:11.[7]

Given this unanimity, it might appear strange that most
commentaries do not take the tōl^edōt schema seriously when it comes to
the actual division of Genesis into its structural-semantic units.[8]
One does not have to look far, however, to discover the reasons for
this situation: most modern critics believe that the formula stems
from the P tradent, and is therefore a late addition to the text.
While a great debate continues to rage over whether P existed as an
independent narrative prior to its incorporation into the final text,
or whether it is only the last major revision of the Pentateuch, most
agree that its relationship to the remainder of the text is
redactional in nature, not integral. Consequently, the majority of
scholars view the tōl^edōt formula as extrinsic to most of the material
in Genesis, and its structural role as a secondary and artificial
superimposition. Most studies, therefore, seek to determine the
stages of the text's growth at which the formula was added, rather
than to explore the possibility that it is an integral part of the
narrative's structure, and the implications such an organisational
schema would have for the text's meaning.

Higher critics give two main reasons for their conclusion. First, the style of the formula is different from that of most incidents related by the text, which suggests to them that it stems from a different author and hence, a different narrative, or stage in the narrative's growth. Second, the formula appears in a variety of contexts, in a number of different episodes or collections of episodes, and in different types of narratives. Most modern critics take these as indications that the formula is a late addition, superimposed on what is basically a collection of independent anecdotes.

As anyone familiar with higher-critical methods will discern, these two arguments originate with source and form criticism respectively, although neither has remained the exclusive property of the method that spawned it. The evaluation of these methods in chapter one, however, shows that these criteria are inconclusive. Unified narratives are defined neither by a uniformity of style, nor by the typicalities of a single genre, nor by a rigorous chronological-causal story-line, although any given narrative may correspond in its entirety to any one of these items.

J. Skinner offers another line of reasoning. Responding to Delitzsch's use of the formula to divide his commentary into segments, Skinner rebuffs: ". . . the scheme is of no practical utility, -- for it is nonsense to speak of 11:10-26 or 25:12-18 as sections of Genesis on the same footing as 25:19-35:29 or 37:2-50:26" (1930:lxvi).

In his recent introduction, however, B. S. Childs notes that

there are two types of tōl^edōt. What he calls a vertical genealogy,

occuring in 5:1ff. and 11:10-26, traces only one line of descendants.

A horizontal genealogy, like 10:1ff., traces the relationship between

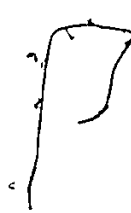different segments within a family (cf. S. Tengström 1981:19ff.).

"The crucial point to be made," Childs remarks,

> turns on the relationship between the two types of genealogy
> and the narrative material. The function of the vertical
> genealogies is to trace an unbroken line of descendants from
> Adam to Jacob, and at the same time to provide a framework in
> which to incorporate the narrative traditions of the
> patriarchs. The descendants of Adam are traced to Noah
> (5.1ff.) and the toledot formula of 6.9 introduces the
> traditions of the flood and Noah's sons in the chapters which
> follow. Next 11.10 continues the chosen line from Shem to
> Terah and the formula in 11.27 introduces the Abraham
> traditions. Again, in 25.19 the formula picks up the line
> with Isaac and introduces the Jacob narratives. Finally, the
> formula in 37.2 continues the story of Jacob's family by
> introducing the Joseph and Judah (ch. 38) stories. The three
> segmented genealogies (10.1; 25.12; 36.1) are placed in their
> proper sequential order, but remain tangential to the one
> chosen line which is pursued by means of narratives and
> vertical genealogies (1979:146).

The tōl^edōt formula, in other words, gives the text "the

structural ability to elaborate things and events that are important

to "the chosen line," and at the same time keep account of the proper

relationship between this special line and all other lines of men. It

is this strategy, moreover, that accounts for the fact that some

tōl^edōt describe in relative detail the lives of the men with which

they deal, while others mark only their births and deaths. Nothing

more is said of this latter group because those in it are, for one

reason or another, outside the chosen line, and hence, outside God's

purposes in choosing it. However, as Childs's comments imply, even

the tōl^edōt which concern the chosen line describe only those events
that have some bearing on the fact and/or nature of its election.
Through the tōl^edōt formula at 2:4, moreover, the special purpose of
this line is rooted in God's creative activities "in the beginning."
Thus, according to Childs, ". . . the major concern of the structure
is to describe both creation and world history in the light of the
divine will for a chosen people" (1979:146; cf. W. H. Green 1895b:1-3;
M. H. Woudstra 1970).*

Contrary to the higher critical view, Childs's description of
the structural role of the tōl^edōt schema suggests that it is an
integral part of the Genesis story. It is not just "the scarlet
thread on which the pearls of JE are hung" (1973:332), as J.
Wellhausen is famous for saying, but also, and most significantly, it
serves "to make clear the nature of the unity which is intended"
(Childs 1979:146). The importance of this description is that these
are precisely the terms which define a unified narrative, whereas such
criteria as style, a rigorous chronological-causal story-line, and the
existence of a single type of narration are not. There is
consequently no unequivocal evidence to support the claim that the
tōl^edōt schema is not an integral part of the Genesis story, and much
to suggest that it is. By the same token, if, as S. R. Driver wrote
long ago, "The entire narrative, as we possess it, is accomodated to
it" (1905:11), the division of the narrative, as we possess it, must
take the formula seriously into account.

Notes to Chapter Two

1

F. Delitzsch 1888:I:364ff., W. H. Green 1895b:148ff., C. F. Keil 1878:I:179ff., S. Tengström 1976:25ff., B. Vawter 1977:165ff., C. Westermann 1981:II:155-156, W. Zimmerli 1976:15ff.

2

This dichotomy may explain Eissfeldt's division, which seems to suggest that he was convinced by both arguments, i.e., that the subject matter of 11:27-32 abinds it to chap. 12ff., at the same time that its genealogical form links it to 11:10-26. While starting the Abraham narrative at 11:10 may solve this problem, it raises the new difficulty of accounting for an introduction that deals mostly with men other than Abraham.

3

Like Eissfeldt, von Rad is convinced that 11:27-32 belongs to the material that both precedes and follows it (1972:152-155). However, by stressing the thematic links he detects between 12:1-9 and the account of the Tower of Babel, he arrives at just the opposite conclusions. And the difficulties this division creates are just the opposite as well: how to account for the fact that certain episodes in which Abram is the main character do not belong with the rest of the incidents about him.

4

H. Holzinger 1898:172-173, H. Gunkel 1910:278-279, O. Procksch 1913:485-487, J. Skinner 1930:352-356, G. von Rad 1972:262-263, W. Brueggemann 1982:105ff.

5

In contrast to these two Radday offers a different alignment. Noticing that 12:1 and 22:2 contain a number of parallel expressions, he argues that they form the beginning and ending of the Abraham narrative. He does not discuss the genealogies in 11:27-32 or 22:20-24.

6

J. Wellhausen 1973:332, W. H. Green 1895b:1-3, O. Eissfeldt 1966, 1968, M. H. Woudstra 1970, F. M. Cross 1973:301-305, P. Weimar 1974, B. S. Childs 1979:145-146, R. E. Friedman 1981:77ff.

7

This segmentation assumes, of course, that the tôlᵉdôt formula is an introduction. In a reprint of his 1936 publication, P. J. Wiseman (1977:34-45), on the contrary, argues that it functions as a conclusion. His view, however, has received little support (but see D. W. Baker [1983:207-208] , who believes that it functions as both an introduction and a conclusion). As J. Skinner (1930:39-40), and more recently B. S. Childs (1979:145), point out, neither the syntax of the clause ᵓēlleh tôlᵉdôt PN, nor the semantics or etymology of the term tôlᵉdôt, will bear such a meaning (see also Tengström 1981:17-18).

8

Notable exceptions include those by F. Delitzsch (1888), C. F. Keil (1878), and W. H. Green (1895b).

CHAPTER THREE

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STORY'S PLOT

As stated in the preceding chapter, the analysis of structure is a description of the relationship between the whole of a text and its parts. Since, moreover, the analysis of the one is dependent upon the other, neither has any claim to priority over the other. "Both," to use T. Todorov's words (1981:8), "are secondary." An exposition, consequently, can proceed in two different ways: it can begin on the macroscopic level of the text by elaborating some of the patterns that span its entirety, and then support that description with an analysis of the details, or it can begin on the microscopic level of the text, and conclude by showing the way in which the details combine to form the whole.

While both procedures may be equally valid from a theoretical perspective,[1] when elaborating a particular reading of a text certain heuristic considerations favour the use of the former. The difficulty with a study that begins on the microscopic level of the text is that the relationship among the various details may not be evident to the reader of the work. Such a study risks losing the reader in what may appear as a quagmire of unrelated and directionless observations about a text. Only in the end will he have the opportunity to deduce the purpose of the details, and then only if he remembers them all. If the study begins with a description of the overall structure, on the other hand, it will be easier for the reader to see the contribution each

detail makes to the story as it progresses. In particularly difficult or important places, moreover, the detailed analysis can explicitly point out its role in and contribution to the whole story.

For these reasons this chapter will begin with an analysis of the overall plot structure of the Abraham narrative as defined in the preceding chapter. That is to say, this chapter will explore the possibility that Gen 11:27-25:11 has a plot, and, if so, the way in which the plot progresses from episode to episode. Subsequent chapters will examine more closely the individual episodes that make up the Abraham narrative. The purpose of these chapters is to arrive at some idea of the way these episodes are structured, and of the way episodes that appear to have at least some measure of structural integrity work together and contribute to a greater narrative whole.

This second part of the thesis (chaps. 4-7) will examine only those episodes located in Gen 11:32-17:27. As will be elaborated below, the break between Gen 17 and 18 constitutes the major structural division in the Abraham narrative. Gen 11:27-17:27 include the episodes up to the point where Yahweh changes Abram's name to Abraham, and for this reason might be referred to as the Abram narrative. This Abram narrative contains a sufficient number of episodes to be able to draw some preliminary conclusions about the way in which the text combines episodes together, and the literary effects such techniques create. The episodes in Gen 18:1-25:11 are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The Abraham narrative tells the story of Yahweh's plan to

bless the patriarch, and through him, "all the families of the earth."
Unlike Yahweh's previous blessings of mankind (1:28; 9:1), on this
occasion he does not bestow it immediately. Initially the blessing
exists only as a statement of intent: "Go from your homeland . . . that
I may bless you" (12:1-3). The use of this mood gives the narrative a
future orientation, the significance of which lies in the uncertainty
surrounding any statement of intent: in this instance, will the
blessing in fact be realised? The answer to this question is not self-
evident. The very fact that Yahweh's earlier efforts to bless his[2]
creatures were unsuccessful gives sufficient reason for concern. For
the reader sympathetic to the divine cause, hope, along with its
inverse, fear, are the two emotions that this uncertainty induces, and
that compel him to read on. Indeed, it is in the meeting of these
emotions and uncertainties that the impetus for plot lies.

The story progresses through two main movements, the
division between which corresponds to the change in the patriarch's and
matriarch's names. The first (11:27-17:27) seeks to define the
blessing, a task rendered necessary by the vagueness of the initial
formulation of Yahweh's purpose. In 12:2, for example, Yahweh promises
to make Abram a great and famous nation, yet according to 11:30 he has
no children and his wife, Sarai, is barren. L. Silberman (1983:18-19)
maintains that the text presents Lot as the likely heir, but this
possibility is quickly ruled out by Yahweh's requirement that Abram
leave his kin. As a consequence, Lot's presence with Abram poses
rather than solves a problem. The situation is complicated further by

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Yahweh´s description of Abram´s destination, which he defines only as
"the land which I will show you." · The principal difficulty is one of
identity: how does Abram choose a destination or even a direction in
which to set out? These questions lead to an even more urgent one: if
Abram does not discover the proper place, will the blessing promised in
12:2-3 be nullified?

The exploration and resolution of these uncertainties occurs
over two phases. The first (12:5-13:18), which records what is
ostensibly Abram´s response to the divine request, describes the
patriarch´s migration through the lands of Canaan and Egypt. These
wanderings follow a circuitous route, which formally defines this
section of the story as a chiasmus: Abram travels from Shechem (oak of
Moreh), to a mountain between Ai and Bethel, to the Negeb, to Egypt,
back through the Negeb to the same mountain, and finally to Hebron
(oaks of Mamre). Although Shechem and Hebron are certainly not the
same place, the expressions, ᵓēlôn môreh, and, ᵓēlônê mamrēᵓ are
clearly parallels.[3]

Rather than constituting a simple fulfillment of the divine
request, Abram´s journey dramatises the ambiguities inherent in the
promise, and the resulting difficulties in discerning and obtaining the
divine blessing. It accomplishes this function by placing Abram in a
series of situations which make the realisation of the blessing
increasingly difficult. Initially Abram travels to Canaan, although
the text does not give his reasons for choosing that particular land.[4]
Moreover, upon his arrival he discovers that it is already inhabited

(12:6) and blighted by a severe famine (12:10), hardly conditions in accord with what one normally associates with a blessing! To escape the famine he moves down into Egypt. At first "it goes well with him," but Egypt also proves to be susceptible to disaster, this time in the form of a plague. To make matters worse, Pharaoh blames the plague on Abram -- rightly so as 12:17 suggests -- and banishes him and all that is his from his realm. When Abram returns to Canaan his nephew Lot perceives that it does have one fertile region: the kikkar of the Jordan is "well watered everywhere" (13:10). But Abram loses the possibility of moving there when he and Lot agree to divide "the whole land" (13:9) between them in order to prevent their herdsmen from quarrelling.

Thus, at the end of this section Abram's relationship to the promise has grown increasingly ambiguous. While he is finally separated from Lot, this very separation prevents him from inhabiting any of the land that "looks like the garden of Yahweh, like the land of Egypt" (13:10). He is left only with that famine-ridden territory he earlier sought to escape, and a barren wife Yahweh prevented him from losing. Neither of these, it would seem, have the capacity to offer the blessing promised by Yahweh in 12:2-3.

While it is true that on two occasions during these wanderings -- once at the beginning and once at the end -- Yahweh appears to Abram and reaffirms his promise, these reformulations are vague, and clarify little pertaining to the particulars. Upon Abram's arrival at Shechem, for example, Yahweh appears to him and promises to

give "this land" to his descendants (12:7). While this statement confirms Lot's exclusion from inheriting Abram's promise, it does not explain how Abram will get these descendants. Moreover, it fails to delineate the full and true extent of the land. Is Yahweh referring to the area around Shechem, or just one section of it, as the mention of the oak of Moreh might suggest? Or again, is the expression a synecdoche for a greater area, and if so, what does it include? It is also not certain that the land Yahweh promises to give to Abram's descendants in 12:7 is the same as the one to which he had directed the patriarch in 12:1.

In his second appearance, Yahweh tells Abram to walk the length and breadth of the land, and that he will give him and his descendants all that he sees (13:14-17). By reformulating the promise in such a manner Yahweh effectively equates Abram's choice of land with his own, thereby alleviating any uncertainty about the identity of the land promised to Abram's descendants in 12:7, and that referred to in 12:1. On this occasion, however, it is Abram's response that raises questions about the land's actual identity. Following such an open-ended invitation the reader might expect Abram to embark on a wide-ranging journey. Instead, 13:18 records that he travels only to Hebron. Will Abram and his descendants therefore possess only the territory between Hebron and the mountain between Ai and Bethel, or is this move only the first part of a more extensive journey through "the land?" If the latter be the case -- as it will prove to be -- why does Abram hesitate on what he must understand to be a most important trip?

Hence, while Abram may continue to receive the divine promise throughout his wanderings, its specifics remain unclear, and his actual situation would appear to jeopardise its realisation. The circularity of the patriarch's route is thus appropriate to a journey in which the traveller makes no apparent progress towards his goal. And although from a strict geographical perspective the last leg of the journey seems to violate its circular quality, the assonance between Moreh and Mamre actually contributes to the theme of the identity and perception of the land to which Yahweh has ordered Abram.

As U. Cassuto has noted, the significance of the name môreh lies in a word play between it and the root r²h. Abram travels to môreh in response to the divine command to "go to the land which I will show you (²ar²ekā)," and it is there that Yahweh appears (*r²h) to Abram, who then builds "a cairn unto Yahweh who had appeared (hannir²eh) unto him" (12:7). The purpose of the word play, according to Cassuto, is to indicate "that this name was most appropriate to the place, since the Lord had appeared to him [Cassuto's emphasis] there . . ." (1964:II:327). This explanation, however, only accounts for the use of r²h in v. 7, and is therefore incomplete. Since Abram's displacement is logically connected to the command in v. 1 (see 12:4), as Cassuto himself notes, a full interpretation should also account for the root's appearance in that verse. The word play then intimates to the reader that Moreh is in fact the land "which ²ar²ekā," and Yahweh's appearance (wayyērā²) to the patriarch at that place can be understood as divine confirmation of Shechem's acceptability.

Abram's move to Mamre also follows a divine command in which the root r²h defines his destination. In 13:14-15 Yahweh instructs the patriarch to "lift now your eyes and look (Ur^e²eh) from the place where you are, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see (rö²eh), to you I will give it and to your seed forever."

The full force of this command lies in its comparison with the similar wording used to describe Lot's choice of territory (cf. W. Vogels 1974/75:53): "Lot lifted his eyes and saw (wayyar²) all the kikkar of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere . . . and Lot chose for himself all the kikkar of the Jordan" (13:10, 11). Applying r²h to Lot's choice of territory causes not a little uncertainty. Since this verb defines the special land of the blessing, and since the kikkār does "look like the garden of Yahweh," one may wonder whether Lot has somehow usurped Abram's role in the divine plan? By employing the same expression in 13:14 Yahweh's invitation acts to counter such an impression. But the question still remains, if the lands that look like the garden of Yahweh are in fact not the land of r²h, what then does it look like?[6]

As in Gen 12:1-7 the name of the place is suggestive. Through the pun between r²h and Mamre the text suggests the true identity of the land of r²h. There is one element, however, that causes some concern. A certain degree of confirmation was achieved in 12:1-7 by the appearance (*r²h) of Yahweh at Moreh. To balance the chiasmus the reader might expect Yahweh to appear to Abram at Mamre as well. The

lack of such an appearance adds to the uncertainty already established by Abram's limited response to the divine command in 13:14-17. Thus by the end of Abram's journey much has been suggested but little has been resolved. Appropriately, the story presses on.

The verb also plays a prominent role in the account of the Egyptian sojourn. Here it occurs four times. Unlike the other episodes where it refers to the land, however, in this episode all four occasions refer to Sarai, either to describe her or to describe the response of others to her. After fleeing the famine in Canaan, and just before entering Egypt, Abram asks Sarai to pose as his sister (12:13). He requests this of her because he knows that she is good looking (yᵉpat-marʔeh; 12:11), and is under the impression that when the Egyptians see (yirʔû) her they will take her and kill him (12:12). Whether or not Abram's evaluation of the Egyptian's character is accurate, when they see (wayyirʔû; bis, 12:14, 15) her they do indeed remove her to the royal harem.

The appearance of *rʔh in this episode brings it into the wider system of word-plays involving the verb. If the word-plays between rʔh and the place-names Mamre and Moreh indicate that they are "the land which I will show (*rʔh) you," the appearance of the root in reference to Sarai suggests that Sarai is the means by which Abram will realise the blessing of posterity promised by Yahweh upon entering that land. The irony of the situation is that after possessing both the land and the woman by which the blessing will be realised he abandons them both.

There is further irony on another level of the text. In all the above cases *r>h pertains to men's perception of what the world can offer them. Moreover, the use of the verb throughout this section suggests that those places that appear blessed (Egypt, the kikkār) are in fact not acceptable to Yahweh as the land of r>h, while the land and woman that seem least likely to fill that role will be the means by which the promised blessing will be realised. Of course the roles of Sarai and Moreh/Mamre suggested by this extended word play exist only on the formal level of the text's language. Abram has no access to this information and cannot know what the reader knows. This disparity between Abram's knowledge of his situation and the reader's is a crucial aspect of the narrative's strategy. While Abram may be uncertain about the means by which he will obtain the things promised him, the text subtly indicates to the reader that he already has them. It remains yet for Abram to discover them.

If in the first section of the story Yahweh is vague about the land and descendants he promises to give Abram, in the second (Gen 14-17) he is specific about both. Defining the land first in geographical terms, and then in terms of the peoples who inhabit it, Yahweh covenants to give (*ntn) Abram's descendants the land "from the river Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: and the Kenite, and the Kenizzite, and the Kadmonite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Rephaim, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Girgashite, and the Jebusite" (15:18-21). Two chapters later Yahweh identifies the offspring he will give the

patriarch in terms of the mother: "I will give (*ntn) you a son by her [Sarah] . . . and you shall call his name Isaac " (17:19).

Both land and progeny, then, are defined in terms of those items which in the first part of the story appear as obstacles to the promise. If, at the end of chap. 13, Abram is left with a barren wife in a blighted land, here Yahweh covenants that they are precisely the vehicles through which the blessing will be realised, thus verifying the suspicions generated by the word plays on *rᵓh in Gen 12-13. By defining the elements of the promise in such terms, the narrative shifts its direction. The tension no longer revolves around the identity of the promise, but around the means by which these obstacles can be overcome and the blessing realised.

Chaps. 14 and 16 are instrumental in effecting this shift. They demonstrate that blessing is not inherent in the world, and that man therefore cannot obtain it solely by his own efforts. According to 13:10, for example, Lot chooses the kikkār because of its lush, fertile appearance. But the area also attracts invasion and destruction, presumably for the very reasons Lot moved there. While the kikkār may appear "well watered everywhere," it turns out to be "full of tar pits" (14:10). Rather than offering the fruits of blessing, it offers only death and captivity. Only the intervention of Abram, supported (as he comes to realise) by Yahweh (14:19, 22-23), offers a reprieve for this place.

What chap. 14 does for the issue of the land, chap. 16 does for the promise of posterity. The difficulty facing this element

of the promise, as 16:1 reminds the reader, is Sarai's barrenness. The matriarch attempts to overcome her predicament by giving her handmaiden, Hagar, to Abram as a second wife. While this ploy does produce a son, Yahweh makes it clear in 17:16-21 that he is not the heir to the covenantal relationship Abram has with Yahweh. It is through the barren wife that the blessing will be realised and disseminated.

Hagar's nationality is significant in this regard. Like Abram before her (12:10), Sarai responds to the problems of infertility by recourse to Egypt. And as before, the initial results seem positive: Abram gains wealth while in the land of Egypt, and Hagar the Egyptian bears him a son. But in both cases the effort to tap the natural fecundity of this place proves counter-productive. The wealth Abram gains leads to the quarrel between his and Lot's herdsmen, which in turn leads to the division of the family and the land. Similarly, Hagar's pregnancy leads to the quarrel between her and Sarai which ultimately manifests itself in the contrary character of Ishmael. Thus Egypt, including things that resemble Egypt -- 13:10 likens the kikkār to it -- prove to be misleading, their blessing illusory. Neither the land nor its people offer a means of realising Yahweh's promise of blessing.

As the use of the verbs lqh and ntn in these chapters indicate, only Yahweh can provide the land and the blessing to be obtained in it. After Yahweh defeats the four eastern kings, for example, the king of Sodom suggests that Abram take (*lqh) all the

booty he recovered as a reward. But Abram knows the pitfalls of the kikkār, and, unlike his nephew, refuses the wealth it has to offer. Emphasising his resolve in this matter, Abram swears by Yahweh El Elyon, Maker of Heaven and Earth, that he will not let the king of Sodom make him rich. Rather it is Yahweh, this Maker of Heaven and Earth, who will reward Abram (15:1), free his descendants from slavery (15:13-14), and give (*ntn) them the land of Canaan (15:18ff.). While the offerings of the kikkār lead to bondage, as Lot discovered, the gift of Yahweh includes liberation from slavery.

A complementary use of the verb *ntn occurs in chaps. 16-17, but with reference to Abram's posterity. In an effort to overcome her barrenness, Sarai decides "to give" (*ntn) Hagar to Abram in order that she "will be built up through her" (mimmennâ). While this plan does result in the birth of Ishmael, Yahweh makes it clear that he is not acceptable as a member of the covenant (17:19-21). According to Gen 17:16 it is Yahweh who will bless Sarah and "give" (*ntn) Abram a son by her (mimmennâ). It is the son of this blessing, moreover, who will inherit the covenantal relationship Yahweh establishes with Abram.

The verb ntn is particularly frequent in chap. 17. It occurs six times, always predicating God's role in fulfilling the promise. Not only will he give (*ntn) Sarai her long-awaited for son, but he will also give (*ntn) Abram nations (v. 6), at least some of which he will give (*ntn) through Ishmael (v. 20). In 17:18, he reaffirms his promise to give (*ntn) Abraham and his seed the land of their

wanderings. All of these promises, moreover, are guaranteed by the covenant which God gives (*ntn) to the patriarch.

An important sign of the blessing's God-given quality is the change of Abram's and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah. Scholars have long been aware of the word-play in the patriarch's new name: he will henceforth be called ᵓabrāhām because he will be the ᵓab-hāmôn ("father of many") nations. But the full significance of this change comes from the verb Yahweh uses to bestow it upon the patriarch. Abram will be called Abraham, Yahweh explains, because a father of many nations "I will make you" (nᵉtattîkā). This same use occurs in the change of Sarai's name, even though her name involves no pun. "And God said unto Abraham, `As for Sarai, your wife, no longer shall you call her name Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. And I shall bless her and also I will give (nātattî) you a son by her . . .´" (vv. 15-16). The pointed use of *ntn in conjunction with the name changes, then, indicates Abraham's and Sarah's status as those who have received from God their blessing.

Thus, this phase of story (Gen 14-17) falls into two parts, each concentrating on the clarification of one element of the promise. And, corresponding to the hierarchy established in Gen 12:1-3, it deals first with the identity of the land, and then with that of Abram's posterity. Each of these parts, moreover, shares a similar two-part structure. Each begins with an event that has implications pertaining to the way in which the blessing can be realised. In both instances, moreover, the account of these events draws upon themes

introduced in Gen 12:5-13:18. In the case of the land, chap. 14 brings to a conclusion the possibility that in picking a place that "looked like the garden of Yahweh," Lot had prevented Abram from acquiring "the land which I will show you." Gen 16, on the other hand, continues the theme of Egypt's illusory state of blessing, first introduced in Gen 12:10-20. Each event is then followed by a divine communication in which Yahweh clarifies respectively the identities of the land and offspring he will give the patriarch. Abraham, moreover, only learns of the identity of the promise in the context of a covenant that stresses God's role as its source. The cumulative effect of this arrangement is two-fold: (1) it demonstrates that true blessing is not inherent in the world and that only Yahweh can disseminate it, and (2) it serves by an ironic analogy to lessen the difficulties posed to the promise by the infertility of both Sarai and Canaan. If those things that appear to offer blessing actually cannot, then perhaps those that seem incapable of such an offering might also prove otherwise.

With the specifics of the blessing now defined, the second half of the story (Gen 18:1-25:11) describes its fruition and preparation for transference to the next generation. And like the first half, this one also consists of two phases (Gen 18-22 and 23:1-25:11), the first of which also occurs within the framework of an extended journey. The events of Gen 18-19, for example, transpire while Abraham is at Mamre (18:1), a grouping which the parallelism between the opening scenes of the two chapters reinforces (b.

Uffenheimer 1975; W. Vogels 1975:145). That this station constitutes the starting point of an excursion is indicated by 20:1a, which states that Abraham "journeyed from there towards the land of the Negeb . . . ." From the Negeb he then travels to Philistia, where the events of Gen 20-21 occur. An inclusio formed by geographical notations clearly demarcates this segment (cf. W. Brueggemann 1982a:117). It opens by noting that Abraham "sojourned at Gerar" (20:1b), and closes with the notice that "Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days" (21:34). From there he is commanded to go to Moriah, where the final episode of this phase takes place. At the end of this event the text briefly notes that Abraham moves on to Beer-sheba (22:19).

In contrast to Abram's first set of wanderings, which dramatise the ambiguities inherent in the initial formulation of the promise, the events that occur in this set of travels concern the preservation of the divine promise in the face of various threatening elements. In chap. 19, for example, Yahweh destroys the cities of the kikkār, thereby extinguishing the evil that pervaded the eastern border of the promised land.[7] The importance of its destruction can be understood by reference to the events leading up to the Deluge (6:1-13).[8] There evil had become so pervasive that it had negated the blessing God had bestowed upon the world at the time of creation (1:22, 28; 2:3). Only after the flood had destroyed the world and the evil it had become could Yahweh reintroduce his blessing to the survivors (9:1). From this perspective the destruction of the kikkār is best understood as a preventive action, designed to inhibit evil from once

again overwhelming the divine blessing. The discussion between Abraham
and Yahweh in 18:23-33, and the encounter between Lot and the Sodomites
(19:4ff.), demonstrates that the men of the kikkār were in fact as
wicked as the narrator claims in 13:13. As Yahweh reveals in 18:19,
the blessing demands that men act towards one another in a just (mšpṭ)
and righteous (ṣdqh) manner, a principle explicitly rejected by the
Sodomites (19:9).
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In Gen 20-21 Yahweh overcomes two threats that originate
within Abraham's own family. First, at threat of death he orders
Abimelech, king of the Philistines, to return Sarah to her rightful
husband. Abraham had for the second time misrepresented Sarah as his
sister, and, as before, she was taken by the ruler of the land. The
loss of Sarai, Yahweh's designate as the woman by whom the promise of
seed will be realised (17:16, 19), had jeopardised the divine plan.
Yahweh's response indicates the seriousness of the situation.

The second threat in this segment, as Sarah (but
apparently not Abraham) recognises, is Ishmael. As a son of Abraham
Ishmael would be entitled to a share of the family inheritance
(21:10). Indeed, as the first born he might even lay claim to the
blessing, as Esau will do later (Gen 27). By expelling Ishmael from
the family Sarah, with Yahweh's approval, removes this threat. It is
one of the text's ironies that Sarah recognises the threat her own
efforts to overcome her infertility pose to the realisation and
preservation of the divine promise.

In the final episode of this journey (Gen 22) the

messenger of Yahweh intervenes to prevent Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. This is a particularly difficult episode since it is God himself who asks for the offering. Yet however the reader comes to grips with this problem, the implications of Isaac's death are clear. Had Yahweh let Abraham proceed with the offering, he would have destroyed the gift of the promise, and hence, the blessing. It is thus appropriate that when Yahweh reaffirms his promise to the patriarch after this ordeal, he reformulates it in terms of Abraham's seed, and not just in terms of the patriarch himself, as was the case in its original formulation.

There is thus something of a progression in these threats. While Abraham is at Mamre the threat comes from those already in the land. When in Philistia he and his family constitute the problem. At Moriah the story comes to its climax when Yahweh himself threatens the blessing. Thus the threats involve all three aspects of the promise: (1) that being promised, (2) the recipient of the promise, and (3) the one making the promise. In all cases, however, it is Yahweh who intervenes to assure its preservation and fulfillment.

Each of these averted crises, moreover, ends with a segment that brings to a close the role of Abraham's antagonists. With the destruction of the kikkār, for example, Lot's role in the story comes to an end. He had accompanied Abram to the land of r⊃h, and in so doing created tension in Yahweh's command that Abram leave his kin behind (12:1). While their increase in wealth finally leads to their separation, this split results in the division of "all the land"

(13:9). And although it may not be clear at the time whether or not the kikkār belongs to the land of rɔh, all doubt is removed in Gen 15:18-21. Thus the resolution of this initial tension leads to a second state of tension, this time pertaining to the element of land. The destruction of the kikkār resolves this second round of tension by forcing Lot out of the kikkār and into the surrounding mountains. Although the text does not name the mountains where Lot seeks refuge, the names of the children he fathers there -- Moab and Ammon -- suggest that they are outside the land of rɔh.

Similarly, 21:22-34 brings the conflict between Abraham and Abimelech to an end. Here the two men make a covenant in which Abraham agrees never again to deal falsely with Abimelech or his descendants, and Abimelech witnesses to the fact that certain wells claimed by his subjects were in fact dug by Abraham, and taken from him by force. And like 19:29-38, this episode resolves a tension that arose with Abram's initial entry into the land, namely, the existence of an indigenous population. For now, at least, Abraham and his seed will live amongst them according to contractual law. Abraham will be able to keep his wells, while agreeing not to deceive the Philistines: such deceptions, as they learned in Gen 20, can have devastating results.

The Akeda has no antagonist it can dispose of, and thus ends somewhat differently than the first two units of this phase. After Yahweh reiterates the promise to Abraham -- this time in terms of his descendants -- Gen 22:20-24 notes that Nahor, Abraham's brother back

in Aram, has fathered a large family. The significance of this notice emerges later, since the family includes Rebekah, Isaac's future wife. The full force of this notice derives precisely from its juxtaposition with the Akeda: The episode in which Isaac's future is jeopardised is followed by a prolepsis which guarantees both his future, and the future of the blessing he represents (cf. N. Sarna 1981:80).

The events of this second journey that pose a threat to the promise allude to those of Abraham's first journey through the land, but in reverse order. The events of Gen 18-19 presuppose the separation of Abraham and Lot, and their respective moves to Moreh and the kikkār (13:11-18).[10] The connection between Gen 20 and 12:10-20 is perhaps the most obvious. It is at these two places that Abraham loses Sarah by misrepresenting her as his sister. It is only at these two places, moreover, that Abraham and his actions are described by the root gwr. And although these two episodes occur at different places -- the one at Gerar and the other in Egypt -- both are preceded by an excursion through the Negeb (12:9; 20:1a). Thus, the geographical dimension is not entirely lacking. Finally, certain verbal parallels link Gen 22 with the circumstances surrounding Abraham's original entry into Canaan. These two are the only times that Yahweh requests Abraham to move using the rare expression, lēk-lekā. In both instances, moreover, Yahweh describes that from which the patriarch must separate in three stages, each successively more poignant. In 12:1 Yahweh commands: "Go from you country, your kin, and your father's home." In 22:2 he orders the sacrifice of "your

son, .your only son whom you love, Isaac." (cf. J. Crenshaw 1975:244-245; Y. Raddai 1972:16; U. Cassuto 1964:II:296).

Thus, although the two journeys do not share all the same stops, there is a level on which the second journey constitutes a reversal of the first. Through the literary tags just described, the events that at the time of the first journey, appeared only to dramatise the ambiguities of the promise, are, by those of the second journey, shown to have been real threats to the blessing's success. But in the second journey each threatening episode is resolved by Yahweh's intervention. And it is in this difference that the significance of the inversion lies: the second journey undoes the confusion dramatised by the first.

There is also a level on which the second journey constitutes a continuation and fulfillment of the first. As noted above, the first ends with Abraham's limited response to Yahweh's command to "lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northwards, and southwards, and eastwards and westwards; for all the land which you see I will give it to you, and to your seed forever. . . . Arise, go through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it . . ." (13:14-15, 17). The second journey, in contrast, takes Abraham within sight of Sodom and the kikkār, then into the Negeb, and finally to Gerar. According to the description of Gen 10:19, these places form respectively the eastern, southern, and western borders of the territory occupied by the Canaanites, which, according to Gen 15:18-21, is the land Yahweh has promised to give

Abraham and his descendants. While Abraham does not travel to the
north in this phase of the narrative, he had already seen that border
when he chased the four eastern kings to Hobah (14:14-15).[11] Thus the
difficulty posed by Abraham's original response to the command in Gen
13 is here resolved. Through this journey Abraham's actions are in
accord with both the command of 13:14-17, and the definition of the
land given by Yahweh in 15:18-21.

As elaborated above, the first phase of the story (11:27-
17:27) contains a series of word plays between the root r³h and the
names of the places at which Abram begins and ends his first passage
through the land. These word plays indicate to the reader that Abram
has ended up in the land which ³ar³ekā, even though he may not have
realised it at the time. That same literary device recurs in the
second journey. Its first episode opens with the remark that, "Yahweh
appeared (wayyērā³) to him at mamrē³ . . ." (18:1), the figurative
force of which is stressed by the two-fold use of *r³h in Abraham's
apperception of this divine appearance: "and he lifted his eyes and
saw (wayyar³) the men, and when he saw (wayyar³) them he ran to meet
them . . . ."

In the final episode of these wanderings Yahweh orders
Abraham to the land hammōriyyā (22:2). The patriarch's recognition of
this mysterious place employs the root r³h: Abraham lifts his eyes and
sees (wayyar³) the place from afar" (22:4).[12] The word play becomes
blatant at the end of the episode where Abraham renames the place
"yhwh yir³eh, because, as it is said to this day, bᵉhar yhwh yērā³eh"

13

(22:14; cf. Crenshaw 1975:251). In addition to those occurrences
where the word play clearly pertains to the identity of the place, Gen
22 employs *r⁾h in Abraham's reply to Isaac's question about the sheep
for the sacrifice -- "Elohim yir⁾eh-lô" -- and to describe the
discovery of the ram that is eventually offered in Isaac's stead --
"and Abraham lifted his eyes and saw (wayyar⁾) a ram caught in the
thicket."

As in the earlier journey, the word plays between the root
r⁾h and the names of the places at which Abraham stays indicate
something of the relationship between Abraham and the land Yahweh
promises to show him. There is, however, one essential difference
between the construction of the puns in these two excursions. In the
first *r⁾h never predicates any action by Abram. Although Yahweh uses
the root when commanding the patriarch to act, and although Abram
goes to places which are related to the verb through word plays, it
never describes anything he actually does. This is a function of the
meaning of that journey: Abram does not yet know the true identity of
the land of r⁾h, so, appropriately, r⁾h does not, indeed cannot,
describe his relationship to the land.

In the second journey, however, the construction of the puns
does involve occasions on which r⁾h describes Abraham's actions. At
both Mamre and Moriah he lifts his eyes and sees (*r⁾h), and in so
doing he finally acts in accord with Yahweh's earlier command to "lift
your eyes and look . . ." (13:14). As discussed above, this command
does not refer simply to the human sense of vision, but includes the

dimensions of perception and understanding. In its original context
it forms a contrast with Lot's selection of the kikkār, which he
perceived to be well watered everywhere. The recurrence of the
expression in the second journey, as a consequence, suggests not only
that Abraham sees the land Yahweh has promised him, but that he also
perceives, or is beginning to perceive, the meaning of the blessing
associated with it.

Thus the occasion of the divine visitation in chap. 18 reveals
something of the power of the blessing in a land that does not appear
to be blessed. The divine visitors, amongst whom is the Lord, come to
tell Abraham that Sarah will give birth within the year. Sarah
overhears the conversation and laughs in disbelief. Yahweh then
scolds her with the rhetorical question, "Is anything too difficult
for Yahweh?" (18:14) The answer to Sarah's disbelief lies in the very
feast she has just prepared for the visitors. Although the area
around Mamre may be sun-baked (18:1), it provides Abraham with plenty
of crops and supports a herd of cattle (vv. 6-8). And if a land that
does not appear to be blessed can be productive, so, by analogy, can a
14
barren woman bear children.

A comparison with Lot's fate emphasises the good fortune that
this unlikely land has bestowed upon Abraham. When the divine
messengers travel to Sodom, Lot is also able to offer them a feast.
But this is nothing more than one would expect from a region that
"looks like the garden of Yahweh." But when the place that looks most
fruitful actually becomes most barren it emphasises Abraham's success

all the more.

The use of wayyar³ and wᵉhinnēh in tandem to describe Abraham's response to the destruction intimates his growing awareness: "And he [Abraham] looked out (wayyašqēp) toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the kikkār, and saw (wayyar³), and behold (wᵉhinnēh), the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace" (19:28). Although the text does not explicitly state the inferences Abraham drew from this experience, it offers the reader certain clues by establishing a set of parallel scenes which, through verbal tags, comment on one another. As W. Vogels (1975:148) has observed, this description recalls the earlier occasion on which Lot "saw all the kikkar of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere" (13:10). Lot saw what appeared to be a blessed land, and apparently thought he could exploit it. Neither the invasion of the eastern kings (Gen 14), nor the angels' warnings of destruction (19:12-22), moreover, could dissuade him from his conviction. In contrast, the events of chap. 14 lead Abraham to realise that the appearance of blessing can be misleading, a theme augmented by the total destruction of the kikkār by Yahweh.[15] But when Abraham looks out over the kikkār he not only witnesses the paradoxical nature of fertility and well-being, as Gros Louis (1982a:56-58) has stressed, but experiences in a most ominous way the source of that paradox.

Contrary to Gros Louis, Abraham's process of realisation does not reach its apex in Gen 19, but in the Akeda, as M. Buber (1964:41) has recognised. What was implicit in the destruction of the

kikkār only becomes explicit in Gen 22 when, after the angel of Yahweh prevents Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, the patriarch proclaims, "Yahweh provides" (yir²eh; 22:14). If in Gen 18-19 Abraham experiences the paradoxical nature of good fortune, it is in Gen 22 that he experiences the preservation of the blessing in the most dramatic and personal way. Here Abraham learns the full meaning of "the land which ²ar²ekā." What Yahweh "causes Abraham to see" is that the land and blessing are provided by God, even when Yahweh appears to be destroying it.

If in the first journey the reader sees more than Abraham does, in the second the situation is reversed. In this phase the reader gains no new knowledge about the identity of the land of r²h -- the continued use of the puns only confirms what he already suspects. And while Abraham may now begin to perceive what the reader has known for some time, the basis of his knowledge must necessarily be different -- he has no access to the text that is describing him. His knowledge is gained from his experiences with history and Yahweh, and in this he surpasses what most readers can ever hope to know. He can actually perceive Yahweh and the blessing, while the reader can only read about these encounters. So, for example, when the three men visit Abraham in Gen 18 he is able to recognise the Lord (²ādōnāy) amongst them while the reader cannot. The only way the reader knows that Yahweh is amongst the visitors is courtesy of the narrator, who simply tells him that this is the case (18:1).[16] Similarly, in chap. 22 Abraham is able to recognise Moriah from afar, even though the

place remains unknown to the reader, and even though Yahweh gives him
no directions.

Yahweh's acclamation after the aborted sacrifice of Isaac —
"now I know that you fear (yᵉrēᵓ) Elohim" — constitutes divine
acknowledgment that Abraham has indeed come to some understanding of
what it means to live under the divine promise. Not only is the root
yrᵓ a near metathesis of rᵓh — thereby bringing it into the orbit of
the word plays around that root — but the expression yᵉrēᵓ ᵓĕlōhîm
looks and sounds invitingly like ᵓĕlōhîm yirᵓeh (22:7). Thus, in
acknowledging that Abraham fears (*yrᵓ) God, Yahweh is doing more than
simply crediting him with "right religion," as most critics interpret
the expression, he is acknowledging that Abraham has correctly
perceived something of the nature of the blessing, namely, that it is
provided (*rᵓh) by Yahweh, even if the deity also appears to be
threatening it at that very same moment.

It is still necessary to account for the central segment of
this second journey (chaps. 20-21), the first episode of which (Gen
20) also employs *rᵓh. After Yahweh reveals Sarah's true marital
status to Abimelech, the king asks Abraham, "What did you see (rāᵓîtā)
that you have done this thing" (20:10). Abraham responds that he
misrepresented Sarah because "I thought surely there is no fear
(yirᵓat) of God in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's
sake" (20:12). However, as v. 8 indicates, Abraham was wrong in his
evaluation of the Philistines; they can indeed be made to fear God.
Thus, unlike the episodes at Mamre and Moriah, in which Abraham has the

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advantage of divine revelations, in this one $*r^{\jmath}h$ indicates that Abraham has not perceived the reality of the situation.

The significance of the episode lies in its outcome. As it turns out Abraham is also a prophet, and as such can pray for the Philistines and avert Yahweh's wrath. Thus although Abraham may not always be able to perceive things accurately, if a misunderstanding inadvertently leads to some sin, there is a process which can set things right. Indeed, the fact that Abraham's prayers result in a restoration of fertility -- a sign of divine blessing -- suggests that intercession through prayer is one of the ways in which Abraham can mediate the blessing to other nations.

The final phase of the story (Gen 23-25:11) is its denouement. It consists of three episodes concerned primarily with the transference of the blessing to the next generation. In Gen 23 Sarah dies, thereby providing the need for a new matriarch. This need is filled in chap. 24 where Abraham sends his servant to his former homeland in search of a wife for Isaac. Then in 25:1-11 Abraham himself dies and is buried with Sarah at Machpelah, opening the way for Isaac to take over from his father. The final line of the $t\delta l^e d\delta t$ states that "after the death of Abraham, Elohim blessed Isaac, his son . . . ."

While this section may function as a transition to the next $t\delta l^e d\delta t$ and appear as something of a postscript to the main action, it should not be considered secondary, or outside the story of Abraham (contra Raddai 1972:16; Sutherland 1983:338-339; Rendsburg

1982). It serves to tie up loose ends, and to make certain claims about the success of Yahweh's plan. It is only in Gen 23, for example, that Abraham actually acquires a part of the land as a possession, thereby fulfilling the promise of 13:15, 17 and 17:8 (cf. S. McEvenue 1970:108-110; M. R. Hauge 1975:137-140). Until then, as he declares in 23:4, he was only a stranger and a sojourner in the land. But now he actually owns a part of it. The permanence of this possession, moreover, is symbolised by its purpose as a grave: Abraham's people will forever be in the land of Canaan. Similarly, while the first three phases of the narrative explore various aspects of the promise and its realisation, Gen 24:1 is the first time the narrator actually tells the reader that Yahweh has blessed Abraham. It is only here, then, that the fulfillment of the original promise of Gen 12 is made explicit.

With the inverted parallelism between the first phases of the story's two halves (12:1-13:18 and 18:1-22:24), one might expect to find some relationship between this final phase of the narrative and Gen 14-17. Indeed, both phases are concerned with the identities of the two concrete elements of the promise, and both explore these items in the same order. Gen 14-15 and 23 deal with the issue of land. In Gen 15 Yahweh promises to give the entire land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants, while in Gen 23 the patriarch buys the only plot of Canaanite land he will own.

Gen 16-17 and 24, on the other hand, are concerned with progeny, which they define in terms of the mother. Both, moreover, are

at pains to demonstrate the providential dimension involved. In chap.
17 Yahweh indicates that his promise of posterity will be realised
through the barren wife, Sarah, while in Gen 24 Abraham tells his
servant that the angel of Yahweh will guide his search for Isaac's
bride. A major concern of Gen 17, as discussed above, is the
transference of the blessing into the future by way of Isaac, which
only becomes a real possibility with his marriage to Rebekah. Thus,
in contrast to the inverted parallelism of the first (12:1-13:18) and
third (chaps. 18-22) phases of the story, the second (chaps. 14-17)
and fourth (chaps. 23-24) phases form a parallel structure. This too
is a function of the story's meaning. While Abraham's second journey
serves to reverse the ambiguities of the first, Gen 23-24 confirm the
covenants made by Yahweh in Gen 15 and 17, at least for one more
generation.

There remains 25:1-11. This passage constitutes the conclusion
of the story, and appropriately refers back to its opening in both form
and content. In 11:27-32 the text uses a genealogical form to list the
birth of Terah's sons, amongst whom is Abram. The form is briefly
expanded to note that Terah took some of his family from Ur and set out
for Canaan, although they only reached Haran. The section ends by
noting Terah's death. Gen 25:1-11 also uses an expanded genealogical
form. It opens by listing the offspring Abraham acquires by his third
wife, Keturah. Then, reversing Terah's flight to the west, Abraham
sends these sons to the east. And finally, the text also notes the
death of the patriarch. Thus, these two passages form an inclusio

around the entire narrative. The journey that Terah had initiated in 11:31, without any apparent reason, and with less than complete success, is brought to a meaningful, successful conclusion in 25:8-10.

In sum, it is the argument of this chapter that the tōlᵉdōt of Terah has a discernible plot, and can therefore be read as a continuous, unified narrative. Specifically, the story recounts the passage of the divine blessing from the form of a promise to its partial realisation. It is only a partial realisation because at Abraham's death much of what Yahweh had promised remains unfulfilled. Thus, for example, while he does acquire a part of the land, its dimensions are hardly those promised by Yahweh. His purchase of the family burial plot at Machpelah has more of a symbolic function, similar to, although not identical with, Jeremiah's purchase of the field at Anathoth (Jer 32:6-25). Similarly, while he gives birth to eight sons, by the time of his death these hardly constitute great nations with great kings. But, as 15:12-16 indicate, these aspects of the promise were given with an eye to the future, when Abraham would be long dead (15:15). And this fact is precisely why the final phase of the story spends so much time preparing the blessing for the generation that will inherit it and take it into the future. The blessing is something that is continually working itself out through time, and people must constantly work towards its realisation.[17]

Outline of the Plot Structure of the Toledot of Terah

On the basis of the above summary it is now possible to highlight the main structural contours of the story's plot. As noted

in the above discussion, the change in the matriarch's and patriarch's names divides the story into two main halves. In the section that refers to the patriarch as Abram the text is primarily concerned with the identity of the promised blessing. Yahweh finally reveals this information to Abram, but only in a context that stresses the deity's role as the one who gives it. The principal concern of the section that refers to him as Abraham, on the other hand, is the maintenance and preparation of the blessing for future generations. Here Yahweh demonstrates his commitment to the promise, but only in a way that enables Abraham to experience what it means to live under the divine promise, the most radical expression of which is the Akeda.

Each of these halves, moreover, is itself composed of two phases. On this level a series of scenic parallels give the narrative an A:B::A´:B´ structure. Both the A phases recount an extended journey through the land, while both B phases describe events that transpire outside the framework of a journey, and presumably while Abraham is dwelling at Mamre (14:13; 23:2). But the structure is more complicated than this would suggest. As discussed above, when the two A phases are compared the second proves to be a reversal of the first. Based on the three major stages in each journey, the relationship between them can be schematised as follows: a:b:c::c´:b´:a´. The result of this structure, appropriately, is that the ambiguities dramatised by the first journey are clarified by the second.

In contrast to this inverted or chiastic arrangement, the two B phases share the parallel a:b::a´:b´ structure. This design, as

explained above, is based on the order in which the two phases deal with the two concrete elements of the promise, land and progeny. And again this structure is appropriate to the role the second B phase has in confirming the future promised by Yahweh in the first. And finally, surrounding the entire narrative is the inclusio formed by the genealogical notations of 11:27-32 and 25:1-11. The first notes the transition from the generation of Terah to that of Abram, while the second announces the passage from Abraham to Isaac.

The basic plot structure of the Abraham narrative can be schematised as follows:

I   II

11:27-32; Background infor-
mation about Abram and his
family.

X

12:1-4; Yahweh's request for
Abram to leave, and the ini-
tial promise.

a   c'   18-19; Yahweh appears to
Abraham at Mamre, and
destroys the kikkār.

A'

A

12:5-7; Abram arrives at
Moreh.

12:8-9; Abram moves to the
mountain between Ai and
Bethel, and then the Negeb.

b   b'   20-21; Abraham travels via
the Negeb to Gerar. Isaac
is born and Ishmael expelled.

12:10-20; Abram flees to
Egypt to escape the famine.

13:1-17; Abram returns via
the Negeb to the mountain
between Ai and Bethel, and
Lot moves to the kikkār.

c   a'   22; Yahweh requests Abraham to
go to Moriah and sacrifice
Isaac.

13:18; Abram moves to Mamre.

14; Abram saves Lot and the
kikkār from invasion.

a   a'   23; Sarah dies and Abraham
buys a burial plot from the
inhabitants of the land.

15; Yahweh covenants to give
Abram's seed the land of
Canaan.

B'

B

16; Abram "goes into" Hagar
and fathers Ishmael.

b   b'   24; Abraham sends his servant
in search of a wife for Isaac.

17; Yahweh covenants to give
Abram a son by Sarai, and
changes their names to
Abraham and Sarah.

25:1-11; Abraham fathers more
sons by a third wife. He then
dies and Elohim passes the
blessing on to Isaac.

X

Notes to Chapter Three

1

According to M. Perry (1979) the reader actually engages in both operations at the same time. As he proceeds through his text he begins forming an hypothesis about the way in which the details he encounters combine to make up the text's larger patterns and movements. As he continues reading he integrates newly encountered data into his scheme, altering it whenever he feels it is warranted, and to whatever extent he thinks the evidence demands. The difficulty only arises when the critic wants to write about the text he is reading. Then, because of the linear nature of all writing, he must decide which procedure he will describe first.

2

The first occasion on which God bestows a blessing upon mankind is at the time of creation (1:28, cf. 1:22; 2:3). After bringing upon himself and creation a series of curses (3:14, 17; 4:11), however, man increases the evil in the world to such an extent that Yahweh decides he must destroy his creation with a flood. Yahweh then reintroduces the blessing on mankind (Noah) immediately after the flood's abatement (9:1). Again the state of blessing is assaulted most immediately when Noah curses his grandson, Canaan (9:25). Ironically, prior to the flood Lamech had predicted that Noah would relieve mankind from the curse that, according to him, Yahweh had placed upon the earth (5:29). Although the story of Babel does not use the word "curse," most critics agree that the scattering of a once united humanity reflects a state of being cursed. The Abraham narrative thus emerges as Yahweh's third effort to bestow the divine blessing upon a human race that has a propensity to counteract it by bringing upon himself a curse (cf. O. H. Steck 1971, G. von Rad 1972:152-155, L. Dequeker 1974:122ff., H. W. Wolff 1975:53-55, A. de Pury 1978). Interestingly, on this occasion Yahweh employs the threat of curse to protect his newest initiative to bestow a blessing upon mankind.

3

The effects of completing the chiasmus in such a manner are not trifling. By altering its basis from geographical location to assonance, the text shifts the emphasis from its external reference to the structure of its language, thereby emphasising the figurative function of the journey. The meaning of this shift will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

4

However, as 11:31 indicates, Canaan was Terah's original goal. Through the use of the same language to describe Terah's and Abram's journies (11:31; 12:5) the text portays Abram's trip as the continuation and completion of his father's unrealised goal.

5

M. Buber (1968:36ff.) has remarked on the prevalence of the root r²h in the Abraham narrative. According to him each occurrence

indicates a growing relationship between Abraham and Yahweh, culminating in Gen 22 where "God sees man, and man sees God." In what follows I will amplify Buber's observation by showing how this root contributes to the plot and structure of the Abraham narrative.

6

The significance of this paradox lies in Gen 3. After Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge, Yahweh expels them from the garden of Eden for fear that they will become immortal. He even goes so far as to guard its entrance with sword-wielding cherubim. After this event, men can live before Yahweh neither in the garden, nor, presumably, in places that look like the garden.

7

According to Gen 10:19 the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah form the eastern borders of the lands inhabited by the Canaanites.

8

The links between the destruction of the kikkār and the flood narrative have been recognised by a number of scholars, including N. Sarna (1966:145-146, 149), W. Brueggemann (1982a:174), C. Westermann (1984:52-53), and U. Cassuto (1964:I:305). J. Blenkinsopp (1982:119) has noted a number of allusions to that other story of primeval destruction, the Tower of Babel.

9

Compare Gen 7:1 where Yahweh saves Noah from the flood because he was "innocent (ṣaddîq) before me in this generation" (cf. 6:9).

10

J. van Seters (1975:203-207) and E. Haag (1981:174) are so impressed with the continuity between these two units that they rearrange the text so that chap. 18, or certain parts of it, follow immediately after 13:18 (cf. H. Gunkel 1910:193). Such a procedure, however, fails to take into account the purpose of the intervening material. And rather than improving the narrative, it actually results in the destruction of its plot and structure.

11

The Old Testament usually describes the northern border of Israel as the Euphrates (e.g. Gen 15:18; Exod 23:31; 1 Kgs 5:1) or the Gateway to Hamath (e.g. Num 13:21; Jud 3:3; Ezek 47:15). For a discussion of the relationship among the various accounts of Israel's borders see Y. Kaufmann (1953:46ff.).

12

To my knowledge the first modern critic to recognise the pun between *r²h and the name Moriah was G. J. Spurrell (1846#208), although he is anticipated by Genesis Rabba 55:2. More recently, J. van Seters (1975:238) argues that the name, Moriah, is derived from *yr², a possibility that was also entertained by pre-modern exegetes (see for example, Ramban). Whatever the etymological history of the word, the suggestions that it is in some way related to both roots will be argued below. Van Seters adds, "Such names give the whole account a highly symbolic and paradigmatic character."

13
      Strangely, although Crenshaw (1975:251) recognises that, "The name that Abraham gives to the holy place enshrouds at least four puns" involving the roots *r$^{\circ}$h and *yr$^{\circ}$, he does not recognise the inclusion of the name, Moriah. Indeed he destroys this important dimension of the word play by following the Syriac translation and replacing it with "the land of the Amorites" (1975:243).

14
      W. Brueggemann (1982b) makes a similar point. According to him Gen 18:1-15 makes the claim that "conventional definitions of reality do not contain or define what God will yet do in Israel" (1982b:622). His comments, however, are directed solely at Sarah. He does not see that the fertility of the blighted land functions as an analogy to what Sarah could expect.

15
      The recognition of this theme throughout the Abraham narrative is Gros Louis's major contribution in two essays that otherwise suffer from being overly psychological in their approach (1982a; 1982b). In his recent comments on Gen 12:1-9 W. Brueggemann remarks, "The juxtaposition of the barrenness of Israel and the speech of God is definitional for Israel [Brueggemann's emphasis]" (1982a:117).

16
      The distinction between Yahweh and the other men, as the text calls them, is complicated by the alternating use of singular and plural pronouns in the text's references to the visitors. Scholars have long commented on the difficulty facing the reader who tries to distinguish between them. They err, it seems to me, in their assumption that Abraham must share in their limitations. In a footnote Brueggemann provocatively suggests, ". . . it may be that the change [in person] is a deliberate move so that Yahweh comes more clearly into focus as the drama intensifies to its main point" (1982b:616, n. 6).

17
      In his short study on the Pentateuch, D. J. A. Clines identifies its theme as, ". . . the partial fulfilment -- which implies also the partial non-fulfilment -- of the promise to or blessing of the patriarch [Clines's emphasis]" (1978:29).

CHAPTER FOUR

BEGINNINGS (GEN 11:27-12:4)

Now that the structural contours of the story's plot have been
outlined; the remaining chapters of the thesis will take a closer
look at the episodes that make up the first half of the story. The
purpose of these chapters is two-fold: (1) to examine the way in
which the episodes advance their own plots and (2) to describe the way
in which these episodes advance beyond one another.

A major problem with the study of the Abraham narrative has
been the identity of its introduction. While most critics agree that
it includes 12:1-3, there is a great deal of uncertainty over its
precise extent. This tension stems from two related questions. The
first pertains to the relationship between the biographical
information in 11:27-32 and Yahweh's command in 12:1-3(4), and the
second pertains to the relationship between this command and the
journey on which Abram subsequently embarks. Since an introduction
usually establishes the issues a story will explore, it is important to
examine the arguments advanced by scholars concerning these two
questions.

This examination can begin with 12:1-3 because its introductory
role has been recognised since the ancient division of the text into
parašōt. One well known modern statement on its position and purpose in
the narrative is that of G. von Rad:

Here in the promise that is given concerning Abraham something is again said about God's saving will and indeed about a salvation extending far beyond the limits of the covenant people to 'all the families of the earth' (ch. *12.3). The transition from primeval history to sacred history occurs abruptly and surprisingly in vs. 1-3. All at once and precipitously the universal field of vision narrows; world and humanity, the entire ecumenical fullness, are submerged, and all interest is concentrated upon a. single man. Previously the narrative concerned humanity as a whole, man's creation and essential character, woman, sin, suffering, humanity, nations, all of them universal themes. In v. 1, as though after a break, the particularism of election begins (1972:154).

In an essay that develops and refines many of von Rad's points, H. W. Wolff adds, "All the other Abraham pericopes are probably meant to be seen in the brilliant light of this Yahwistic passage. . ." (1975a:56; cf. J; Muilenburg 1965:390-394; W. Zimmerli 1976:22; G. W. Coats 1981).

Many scholars, however, have suggested that 11:27-32 also contains information of an introductory type. S. Tengström, for example, calls these verses "eine typische Erzählungseröffnung" (1976:27). Comparing them with 1 Sam 1:1-3, Tengström describes their introductory role as follows: "Vergleicht man Gen.11,27-32 mit diesem Text, so erkennt man unmittelbar, dass beide von genau demselben Typus sind und dieselbe Funktion haben, nämlich eine Reihe von Personen vorzustellen, die für die folgende Handlung eine bestimmte Bedeutung haben" (1976:27). Among other things 11:27-32 introduces the reader to Abram, Sarai, and Lot, three of the story's main characters. It also introduces the reader to the family of Nahor, Abram's brother. While they will appear less frequently in the story, their role will nonetheless be important.

While the introductory function of both passages would suggest

that the story's introduction consists of both 11:27-32 and 12:1-4,
scholars have been reluctant to treat 11:27-12:4 as a unit. This
reluctance is exemplified most clearly by Westermann's assertion that
the story contains two different introductions. According to
Westermann:

> Die Geschichte von Abraham hat zwei Einleitungen. Die eine, 11,27-
> 32, ist ihrer Funktion nach Überleitung, ihrem Inhalt nach
> Genealogie mit einigen Itinerar-Sätzen. Diese Einleitung wird in
> Gn 12,4a weitergeführt, also dem Gn 12,1-3 abschliessenden Satz.
> Ganz ähnlich wie in Gn 11,27-32 tritt in 12,4b-5 (P) Genealogisches
> hinzu, V. 5c (P und J), V. 6-9 (J) berichtet dann von Wanderungen
> Abrahams in Kanaan, wobei V. 9 zu Erzählung 12,10-20 überleitet.
> Die andere Einleitung ist Gn 12,1-3 (oder 12,1-4a).' Sie ist ganz
> anderer Art. Auch sie ist ihrer Funktion nach Überleitung, aber
> sie ist eine theologisch bestimmte Überleitung von der Urgeschichte
> als ganzer, und darüber hinaus verklammert sie die Vätergeschichte
> mit der Volksgeschichte (GvRad). Ihrem Inhalt nach ist diese
> Einleitung ein mit einer Verheissung verbundenes Gebot des Auszugs,
> V. 4a berichtet die Ausführung. Dabei liegt der ganze Ton auf der
> Verheissung in V. 2-3, in der J, auf Gn 2-11 zurückblickend, den
> Introitus für die Vätergeschichte formt (1981:166).

As these remarks indicate, Westermann's reluctance to treat
11:27-32 together with 12:1-4 stems from his form-critical categories.
However, the distinction he makes between "theological" and
"genealogical" introductions is far from clear. The form of a
genealogy is well known, but that of a "theologisch bestimmte
Überleitung" is not, and Westermann does not clearly define it. In an
earlier book, The Promise to the Fathers, he identifies a group of
episodes he calls "theological narratives" (1980:71-73), in which he
includes Gen 12:1-3. But along with this divine monologue he includes —
such distinct sorts of narration as the story of the binding of Isaac
(Gen 22:1-19), and the dialogue between Abraham and Yahweh over the

fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:17-33).

It would appear that the adjective, "theological," refers only to the fact that God plays a role in these episodes, and has little to do with any formal aspect of the passages. Its use in distinguishing genres is therefore questionable, since many types of literature can and do have theological themes or purposes. Complicating the issue further is the fact that the Bible not only contains some genealogies in which God appears (e.g. Gen 5), but even some that trace the lineage of his own Son (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38).

Brueggemann's recent commentary implies a further criticism of Westermann's conclusions. Although he does not address Westermann's views directly, Brueggemann's remarks on the relationship between 11:30-32 and 12:1-3 seriously question the assumption that the genealogy in Gen 11:27-32 is not theological. Identifying 11:30-12:9 as the introduction to the story of Abraham, Brueggemann explains,

> The reason for this arrangement is that God does not begin the history of Israel ex nihilo. The history of promise does not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, the new history emerging from God's call in 12:1-3 is wrought by the power of God from the stuff of 11:30-32. The connection of 11:30-32 and 12:1-9 is proposed here for the purpose of understanding the new beginning worked by the power of God's word (1982:116).

Westermann, according to Brueggemann's standard, is too narrow in his definition of "theological." A passage need not mention God in order to have a theological dimension since it is possible for it to obtain that aspect from its wider literary context.

While Brueggemann's point is well taken, his comments do not go beyond this localised example. A full exploration must take into

account the fact that the genealogical schema spans the entire book of Genesis. As discussed in chapter two, the purpose of the genealogies is to keep account of the relationship between the ever increasing number of groups that inhabit the world by tracing them all back to Adam and Eve, that is, to God´s purpose in creation. Thus, not only do the genealogies have a theological dimension, their primary purpose is precisely to situate the various episodes that make up the story in the right theological context (M. H. Woudstra 1970; B. S. Childs 1979:145-150).

Moreover, Westermann himself does not fail to recognise the links between 11:27-32 and 12:1-4. He states, for example, that "Diese beiden Einleitungen sind so miteinander verbunden, dass sie einen zusammenhängenden Bericht bilden, der von Gn 11,27 bis 12,9 führt" (1981:167). He then supports this alignment with a point of grammar: "Der Satz: `Jahwe sprach zu Abraham [sic!]´ (12,1a) schliesst unmittelbar an 11,30 (J). Es ist ein Satz im Fluss der Erzählung, kein Beginn. Die Abrahamgeschichte beginnt mit der Genealogie (11, 27-32, J und P); 12,1a deutet an, wie aus der Genealogie ein Ereignis heraustritt" (1981:170). That he assigns more weight to the division between 11:32 and 12:1 than to the forces that unify them, however, is confirmed by the exegetical segment of the commentary in which he treats 11:27-32 and 12:1-9 as two separate units.

As indicated by the above citation, the tendency to view 12:1-9 as a discrete unit contributes to the uncertainty surrounding the relationship between 11:27-32 and 12:1-4. For the most part this view

rests upon the continuity scholars perceive between Yahweh's command that Abram should go from his homeland (12:1) and Abram's initial journey to and through the land of Canaan (12:4-9). While the continuity between the divine command and Abram's response is plain enough, the use of such terminology as "command" and "response" betrays a division within the verses.

Nor has this distinction gone undetected. Westermann, for example, recognises that, "Gn 12,1-9, das eng an 11,27-32 anschliesst, hat dann zwei Teile: 12,1-4a . . . und V. 4b-9" (1981:167). In his "Logotechnische" analysis of 12:1-9, C.-Schedl (1984) also recognises the break between these two sections, although he locates it between vv. 4 and 5. Significantly, the basis of Schedl's alignment is the difference in geographical location due to Abram's migration. He labels 12:1-4, "Gottes Wort in Haran," while v. 5 he entitles, "Der Weg nach Kanaan" (1984:256). U. Cassuto's comments on the literary function of 12:4b support Schedl's division over against Westermann's: "Here, at the end of the paragraph, it is quite in order, after the manner of so many Pentateuchal narratives, to indicate the age of the hero of the story at the time of the episode described (compare, for example, Gen. xvi 16; xvii 24f.; xxv 26; xli 46; Exod. vii 7) . . ." (1964:II:316).

Over against these remarks is the recent study of I. Kikawada, who claims that a structural analysis of 12:1-9 supports its integrity. According to him the division between the divine command and Abram's response corresponds to the division between two parallel

panels. Each panel contains three parts, the correspondence between which lends the panels their parallelism. These panels are enclosed within an introduction and conclusion, contributing further to the argument that they are a single unit. Using the letter X for the introduction and Y for the conclusion he illustrates the structure as follows:

X 12:1a

A 12:1b

B 12:2

C 12:3

A´ 12:4-5

B´ 12:6-7

C´ 12:8

Y 12:9

While this diagram appears well balanced, there are several problems with the correspondences that Kikawada claims to detect. The correspondence between A and A´, for example, is based on a different level of abstraction than that between B and B´. The correspondence between A and A´ is based on the contrast between what Yahweh commands Abram to leave behind, namely his homeland, his kin, and his father´s home, and what he takes with him, i.e., Sarai, Lot, the souls they acquired in Haran, and all their possessions. The correspondence between B and B´, on the other hand, rests upon a process of concretisation. That is, the general statement that Yahweh will make Abram a great nation is given more concrete expression in B´, in which

Yahweh promises to give "this land to your seed." More problematic is
the relationship between C and C´. While suggesting that they also
constitute a parallel pair, Kikawada does not describe what their
relationship is. After examining the text neither can I see any
parallels.

One further problem worth commenting on is the role of v. 9.
Kikawada claims that this is the unit's conclusion. Yet conclusions
invariably resolve or in some way conclude problems or tensions
introduced somewhere in the story-line, usually at the beginning. It
is not in any way clear what is being resolved or brought to an end
with the statement that Abram continued on his journey into the Negeb.
Indeed, Kikawada's own analysis suggests that v. 9 is not so much a
conclusion as it is a stage within a more extensive journey.
According to Kikawada each of the paragraphs in the second section
begins with a verb of motion "that express Abram's response to YHWH's
command go . . ." (1977:233). Yet this is precisely the way in which
v. 9 begins.

Without the support of the parallel scenes, there is nothing to
support Kikawada's view that 12:1-9 is a structural unity. In the
final analysis his study recognises that 12:1-9 is composed of two
elements, a divine command and a human response. Since both 11:27-32
and 12:1-4 play an introductory role, and since the account of Abram's
journey is not introductory in function, but an event that is
subsequent to the introduction, it makes sense to treat 11:27-12:4 as
the introduction to the Abraham narrative. These boundaries are not

unrecognised by scholars, but they do involve a shifting of the relative weights usually assigned to the divisions between 11:32 and 12:1 on the one hand, and 12:4 and 5 on the other hand.' An added advantage of this arrangement is that it unites the introductory material to form one two-part introduction, and permits the joining of the first part of Abram's journey with its subsequent stations.

As discussed in the first chapter, a narrative has three main sections, a beginning, a middle, and an ending. The importance of the beginning lies in its role as the initiator of the action or plot. It is the introduction of a story that usually establishes the initial conflict or tension out of which and in response to which the remainder of the story emerges. Thus, if Gen 11:27-12:4 is going to be seen as the introduction to the Abraham story it should display the narrative tension responsible for the generation of the story. The existence of this tension was noted in the previous chapter, at least as it pertains to the promise of posterity. A closer look at the way in which the text establishes this tension is now warranted. Since the break between 11:32 and 12:1 is unmistakeable, and since the function of this break is the major issue at stake, the analysis of 11:27-12:4 will begin by treating the two halves separately, and then discuss the way in which they interact to form the story's two-part introduction. Only in this way can the break between 11:32 and 12:1, which W. Brueggemann refers to as "perhaps the most important structural break in the Old Testament and certainly in Genesis" (1982:116), be properly accounted for.

Gen 11:27-32

As Westermann (1981:152) observes, this section consists of two parts surrounded by a frame. The first part (vv. 27b-30), which he labels a "genealogy," records the births of Terah's three sons, Abram, Nahor and Haran, the birth of Lot to Haran, Haran's death, and the marriage of Abram and Nahor. It adds that Abram's wife, Sarai, was incapable of bearing children. The second part (v. 31) records Terah's plans to move from Ur to Canaan, and the move itself, which, contrary to these plans, only gets as far as Haran. This segment Westermann labels an "itinerary." The frame consists of the introductory clause, "These are the tōl^{e}dōt of Terah" (v. 27a), and the notice of Terah's death in 11:32.

Unfortunately, Westermann's form-critical method prevents him from exploring fully the role of 11:27-32 in the introduction, and in the story as a whole. For him the appearance of two types of material -- genealogy and itinerary -- is evidence that vv. 27a, 31-32 and vv. 27b-30 were originally independent of one another. And despite his recognition of the unifying role of the frame (1981:155), and of the fact that v. 31 assumes the information related in vv. 28-29, (esp. J. van Seters 1975:225),[2] his exegesis of the passage is based on this presumed independence.

The presuppositions underlying Westermann's interpretation have been criticised in the first chapter, and need not be repeated here. If approached holistically from its present narrative context, 11:27-32 is concerned with two issues: the family's lines of descent,

and the family's homeland. By giving birth to three sons it would initially appear as though Terah's family has the potential to grow through three branches, despite the premature death of Haran. While only one of these has successfully entered the next generation, the mention of Abram's and Nahor's marriages is clearly proleptic. It is in this context, moreover, that 11:30 takes on a specific and poignant meaning. Being without children and barren it would appear that after the present generation Abram's line will pass out of existence (cf. W. Brueggemann 1982:116-117), and that Terah's family will now be able to perpetuate itself through only two branches, those of Nahor and Lot.

In addition to these verses, the second half (v. 31) records Terah's flight from Ur. In this verse Terah takes Abram and Sarai and Lot and sets out for the land of Canaan, although the text gives no reasons for his decision to migrate. His original plans, however, go unfulfilled. Again for reasons unstated, he goes only as far as Haran, which, according to 11:32, is where he eventually dies.

Of interest is the lack of mention of Nahor in the migration, especially in the light of Gen 24, which indicates that he and his family also moved to northern Mesopotamia. Whether they went with Terah or at a different time is not stated. Although it is possible that they are included in the vague, wayyēṣeʔū ʔittām, this is far from clear. As most scholars have stated, there is a problem with the text at this point.[3] In any event, by omitting mention of Nahor the text focuses attention on Abram and Lot, a proleptic comparison indeed (W. Vogels 1975:141). More important for the immediate context

is that with the omission of Nahor and the infertility of Sarai, Lot emerges as the most likely descendant to carry on the tôl^edōt of Terah (L. Silberman 1983:18-19, L. R. Helyer 1983:81-82).

Thus, throughout this first half of the introduction there is a gradual narrowing down of the branches through which Terah's family can grow. Vv. 27b-30 accomplish this end through the context of genealogical-type information, which notes the infertility of one of the lines. In v. 31, on the other hand, the narrowing of scope is achieved by means of a journey which ignores the family of a second son. Thus rather than being independent from the genealogy, as Westermann asserts, the account of Terah's journey defines the relationship between the genealogy's branches. The temporal (genealogical) and spatial (itinerary) concerns of this passage, moreover, come together in its concluding verse (v. 32). The notice that Terah died at the age of 205 continues the genealogical interest characteristic of the tôl^edōt form. The addition that he died in Haran recalls his migration, and also that he never completed it.

Gen 12:1-4

Westermann recognises that the structure of 12:1-4a, like that of the first half of the introduction, entails a frame surrounding a central segment. In the central segment (vv. 2-3) Yahweh informs Abram of his intentions to bless him, to make him a great and famous nation, to protect him, and to use him as a means of spreading the divine blessing to other peoples. The frame surrounding these verses is

formed by Yahweh's command for Abram to go (*hlk) from his homeland in 12:1, and the notice in 12:4 that he went (*hlk) "as Yahweh had spoken to him" (cf. U. Cassuto 1964:II:315-316; P. Auffret 1982:243). In Westermann's own words, "Den Rahmen bilden V. 1a und V. 4a: Jahwe gebietet und Abraham führt aus, was Jahwe gebietet" (1981:168).

Stressing the close relationship between Yahweh's command (12:1) and Abram's response (12:4), a number of scholars have suggested that v. 4 properly follows immediately upon v. 1, and that vv. 2-3 belong to a separate tradition and were only subsequently inserted into their present position in the narrative (R. Kilian 1966:10-12; J. van Seters 1975:223, 271; E. Ruprecht 1979a:176). They bolster their argument by claiming that the two groups are concerned with different things. According to them vv. 1 and 4a are concerned with migration while vv. 2-3 are concerned with the themes of blessing and posterity.

Neither of these reasons, however, is sufficiently strong from a literary perspective to maintain the proposed separation. There is no basis in the assumption that every line in a story, or unit of a story, must be about the same subject. Moreover, what constitutes a subject depends on various levels of association and abstraction. While land and posterity may appear as two disparate topics, under a broader category such as "promise" or "intentions for a new beginning" they may function as two facets of a single theme. Such an operation, it seems to me, is precisely what is going on in the Abraham narrative. As many scholars have recognised, the plan to bless Abram

represents a new beginning in the relationship between men and God.

This break with the past involves the abandonment of the land in which
that past transpired; Abram's relocation is a metaphor for this new
beginning.

The text, moreover, does not support the rigorous separation
of the themes of posterity and migration. Yahweh qualifies his
command that Abram go, for example, with four prepositional phrases.
He orders the patriarch to go "from your land ($m\bar{e}^{\jmath}ar\d{s}^e k\bar{a}$), and from
your kin ($\d{u}mimm\^oladt^e k\bar{a}$), and from your father's home ($\d{u}mibb\hat{e}t$
$^{\jmath}\bar{a}b\hat{\imath}k\bar{a}$), unto the land ($^{\jmath}el-h\bar{a}^{\jmath}\bar{a}re\d{s}$) which I will show you." While
the the inclusio formed by the first ($m\bar{e}^{\jmath}ar\d{s}^e k\bar{a}$) and last ($^{\jmath}el-$
$h\bar{a}^{\jmath}\bar{a}re\d{s}$) of these phrases emphasises the quest for a land, the second
and third define the migration in terms of the family from whom Abram
must part. V. 4a, with its mention of Lot, similarly combines the
themes of posterity and travel, a link that is all the more meaningful
in the light of what was said of Lot's role in 11:27-32. Thus,
although migration from one land to another is a clear concern of
12:1, filial relations define the land and hence the migration.

The other reason for the removal of vv. 2-3 from their present
literary context is equally dubious. There is nothing at all to
justify the assumption that the account of a human response to a
divine command must follow immediately after the recording of that
command.[5] Although the precise meaning of these verses may be unclear,
it is in them that Yahweh states his purpose in ordering Abram to go.
Grammatically vv. 2-3 contain a series of subordinate clause, and from

a syntactical perspective they occur exactly where a qualification of a main clause would be expected (F. I. Andersen 1974:111). Only after Yahweh finishes his full address to the patriarch does the text record that Abram "went as Yahweh had spoken to him."

Vv. 2-3, moreover, define the land to which Abram must go in a way comparable to the second and third min-phrases of v. 1, which define the land from which he must depart. As many scholars have noted, the five-fold use of the root brk emphasises the importance of the blessing for vv. 2-3.

Whatever else *brk may mean, it is clear that posterity is an important element of the blessing Yahweh wants to bestow upon Abram. In vv. 2-3 this concern takes on two dimensions. Yahweh sends Abram out of his homeland in order to make him a great and famous nation, and in order that his blessing might spread through the patriarch to the other families of the earth. Thus, just as the second and third min-phrases of v. 1 describe the land from which Abram must depart in filial terms, so do vv. 2-3 use filial terms to define the land to which Abram must go. The difference is that while the land from which he must part is defined in terms of his present family, the land to which he must go is defined in terms of a future family as promised by Yahweh.

Scholars have long noted that the focus of the prepositional phrases that qualify Yahweh's command in v. 1 grows increasingly narrow. They begin by demanding that Abram leave his land, then his kinfolk (môledet), then his immediate family (bêt-ʾāb), and end by

directing him to a new but unidentified land. Remarking on this progression J. Skinner writes: "There is intentional pathos in the lingering description of the things he is to leave . . . and a corresponding significance in the vagueness with which the goal is indicated" (1930:243).

As Westermann (1981:172) has noted, there is also a progression in the blessing of vv. 2-3. In contrast to the narrowing focus of that in v. 1, however, in these verses the focus grows wider as Yahweh speaks each element. The scope of the first leg includes only Abram, and the blessing is apparently solely for his benefit: he will be blessed and become a great nation. The second leg also appears to be directed at Abram, and at first also seems to be the result of Yahweh's blessing (E. Ruprecht 1979a:180). However, the qualification, "that you may be a blessing (weh^{e}yēh b^{e}rākāh)," indicates that the fame that Yahweh intends to bestow upon Abram is not for himself alone. The third clause indicates that the blessing others will receive is dependent upon their relationship to Abram. The fourth, as Wolff has stressed, indicates Yahweh's ultimate purpose for granting the patriarch such stature: Abram is to be some sort of medium through whom all families may participate in the divine blessing.[6]

When these two progressions are compared, an inverted or hourglass figure emerges. This shape not only lends a certain balance to Yahweh's address, but also reveals something of its strategy. As the command gradually narrows the focus of the things from which Abram

must depart they become increasingly personal, and presumably, increasingly difficult to leave. Moving from a land is not as difficult as separating from one's kinfolk, which in turn is less difficult than parting from one's immediate family. Conversely, when stating his intentions for the move, Yahweh begins by disclosing those elements of the blessing that will affect Abram most personally, and gradually widens the scope to the point where Abram is no longer the object of the blessing, but its means.

It may be, as some have suggested, that Yahweh structures the command incrementally for the purpose of easing Abram into the most radical implication of his plan, that is, that he must leave his family. The widening scope of vv. 2-3 can be seen as the positive counterpart to this strategy. By beginning his intentions for transplanting Abram with those elements of the blessing that most obviously constitute a boon for the patriarch, Yahweh may be trying to anticipate any objections Abram may have about the command to leave his family. Yahweh indicates in very concrete terms that it will be worth Abram's while to go as he has commanded. Only then, and gradually, does Yahweh reveal that Abram is to be as much a tool in Yahweh's plan as a personal beneficiary. From such a perspective, the hourglass figure that spans these three verses becomes a strategy to persuade Abram to comply with Yahweh's demands.

The final verse (v. 4) of the introduction contains three statements. First, it records that Abram went as Yahweh had spoken to him. It then adds that Lot went with him. Finally, it informs the

reader that Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Each of these statements contributes to the sense that v. 4 is the end of the introduction.

Scholars have focused most of their attention on the first of these statements. Usually they comment on the correspondence between it and the divine command in v. 1, which is emphasised by the use of *hlk in both the command and the account of Abram's compliance. By referring back to v. 1, v. 4a rounds off the unit and creates a sense of closure, an impression supported by the recent pattern analysis of P. Auffret (1982).[7]

The second statement (v. 4aβ), however, complicates this correspondence, and the degree to which Abram can be said to have complied with Yahweh's command. In v. 1 Yahweh orders Abram to separate from his kin, amongst whom Lot must surely be included. This situation thus adds to the uncertainties about Yahweh's plans already raised by Sarai's barrenness. Specifically, if the success of the divine plan is contingent upon Abram leaving his kin, the presence of his nephew complicates the issue.

This complication is highlighted by the use of the verb *hlk to describe Lot's actions. If in 12:4a the verb indicates a correspondence between Yahweh's command and Abram's response, the use of this same verb to describe Lot's actions raises questions about his relationship to both Abram and the divine plan. One possible interpretation is that Lot will inherit the blessing from Abram. This reading would interpret the use of *hlk to describe both Lot's and

Abram's actions as an indication that both men responded to the divine command in equally appropriate ways. This understanding of the verb would also support the interpretation that Lot and Abram have equal opportunities to acquire the blessing. Or, if Lot's presence disqualifies Abram from Yahweh's plans, then it is possible to interpret the verb as an indication that Lot is a satisfactory alternative upon and through whom Yahweh can bestow his blessing. At this point in the narrative these all present themselves as possibilities, and none is as yet ruled out. These complexities are in fact the raison d'être of the story that follows. Subsequent episodes address these difficulties.

There remains the question of 12:4b. Westermann does not consider this verse in his discussion of 12:1-4a since, as noted above, he feels it belongs to a subsequent literary unit and to another source. Cassuto's and Schedl's remarks, however, favour its inclusion with this section. This concluding formula subordinates the divine promise to the tōlᵉdōt schema that was initiated at the time of creation. As part of that schema it represents an historical continuation of Yahweh's purpose at creation.[8]

In the tōlᵉdōt that recur throughout the book of Genesis, age is a common concern. By noting Abram's age, 12:4b links Yahweh's plan to bless Abram to the tōlᵉdōt of Terah: it is a part of the growth of mankind and not something other than or separate from it. Although the genealogical lists usually note a character's age only when he fathers children or dies, the noting of a journey in this way is

warranted here because of its purpose. In his original blessing of creation Yahweh commands men to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, a command which he repeats after the abatement of the Flood. Noting the age at which men give birth and die marks the rhythms of this process. The role of the journey as a means of defining the growth of Terah's family has already been discussed. Here, the journey also serves to qualify the growth of the family, although it remains only in the form of a statement of divine intention.

Both halves of the introduction, then, conclude by noting the respective patriarch's age at the time of his passing from Haran, although Terah's passing (his death) is of a different nature than Abram's (his departure). This parallelism suggests not only that 11:27-32 and 12:1-4 are to be interpreted in relation to one another, but also that Abram's departure is some sort of continuation of Terah's incomplete journey. What Terah could not finish, perhaps his son can. Here too then the spatial and temporal concerns of the text come together. The qualitative difference between the journeys of the two generations is the divine commission. It remains to be seen, however, what the effect of this commission will be.

Gen 11:27-12:4

It is through the spatial and temporal dimensions just discussed that the introduction as a whole establishes the tensions that generate the rest of the story. In 11:27-32 the temporal dimension is expressed by the ability, or inability, of Terah's sons to father children and carry on the tōlᵉdōt. In 12:1-4 it is expressed

through Yahweh's stated intention to make Abram a great and famous nation. Thus, if Yahweh's word can be trusted, the family tōl^{e}dōt will reach greatness through at least one branch. The irony of the situation is that according to 11:30, Abram's is the one branch that is incapable of regenerating itself. Sarai is infertile, and her barrenness stands as a threat to Yahweh's plan to bless not only Abram, but, "all the families of the earth." As outlined in chapter three, it is to this contradiction or paradox that much of the following narrative addresses itself.

In both halves of the introduction the spatial dimension is expressed in terms of a journey from one land to a new homeland. In 11:27-32 Terah leaves Ur for the land of Canaan, but only gets as far as Haran, where he eventually dies. His original plans thus go unfulfilled. In 12:1-4 the journey exists in an inchoate form. In v. 1 Yahweh commands Abram to leave his home for the land that he will show him, and v. 4 records that he did depart from Haran. At this point in the narrative, however, no destination is indicated. Both halves of the introduction are thus characterised by journeys that are incomplete.

The difference between the two halves is the initiative of Yahweh. The first half describes a situation as it would unfold naturally, according to the principles of the tōl^{e}dōt. Both the journey, and the branch of the family through whom the inheritance would pass, are defined by the natural course of events. In contrast, in 12:1-4 both the journey and Abram's posterity are divine

propositions, though as yet unclarified. It is this difference, moreover, that accounts for the break between 11:32 and 12:1. Yahweh's interjection constitutes not only a break in the natural course of the tōl^{e}dōt, but a by-passing of the principles by which it usually functions. Nonetheless, as Brueggemann (1982a:116) has seen, this new beginning does not emerge out of a vacuum, but uses the material of the past. What Yahweh seeks to do is affect this material in a way appropriate to his plans. This change includes the intention to turn a barren family into not only a fruitful family, but a family that will become a great and famous nation, through whom all other families will share in the divine blessing. Yahweh wants to take a family with no future and not only give it a future, but a future with important implications for the future of all others. The question remains, how can Yahweh actually bring about this change? The journey on which Abram is commanded to embark is a metaphor of this change. Its direction and outcome, therefore, will indicate the success of Yahweh's plans. These matters are the subject of subsequent chapters.

From a literary perspective the most compelling reason for linking 11:27-32 with 12:1-4 is that the larger introduction creates the tensions that set the remainder of the story in motion. And it is these tensions, as I have tried to show in the previous chapter, that guide the order in which the episodes unfold. The promise that Abram will become a great and famous nation only acquires its full force from his childlessness and the barrenness of his wife (11:30; cf. S. Tengström 1976:31-32). Similarly, the theme of Abram's journey to a

new land is anticipated by his father's earlier but unsuccessful attempt to relocate in Canaan.

Notes to Chapter Four

1

In a recent exploration of Westermann's categories F. W. Golka denies that 12:1-3 is an example of a "theological narrative." Although, according to Golka, 12:1-3 is clearly theological, it does not record an event that moves from an initial point of tension to a resolution, Westermann's own criterion for a unit of text to be classified as a narrative. According to Golka, 12:1-3 was placed at the head of the patriarchal stories to bring them under the theological program expressed by the promises contained therein.

2

Critics usually assign vv. 28-30 to J and vv. 27, 31-32 to P on the basis that they record two different genealogies of Abram (e.g. J. Skinner 1930:235). However, as van Seters (1975:225) observes v. 28 is not an acceptable beginning to a genealogy, and besides, it assumes v. 27. Moreover, the information in vv. 29-30 does not duplicate that in vv. 27, 31-32. Vv. 29-30 report the marriages of Abram and Nahor, while v. 27 records their births. Vv. 31-32 record the journey and death of Terah. "There is no sound reason," van Seters states, "for making any division in vv. 26-32" (1975:225).

3

The difficulty surrounds the use of the plural pronominal suffix with the verb wayyēṣᵉʾ0. 11:31a states that Terah took his family and left Ur for Canaan. One would therefore expect the verb to have a singular suffix and read something like: wayyēṣēʾ ʾittām, or wayyōṣē ʾotām (see A. Dillmann 1897:I:412, J. Skinner 1930:238).

4

Auffret supports these observations with a pattern analysis of these two verses, or half verses as the case may be. Comparing the word order of the command and response, Auffret observes the following inversion:

```
1. (wyʾmr)
            yhwh
                  ʾl
                     brm
                        lk-lk
                        ...
                     4. wylk
                  ʾbrm
   (kʾšr dbr)  ʾlyw
            yhwh
```

5

Premsagar, for example, sees a theological reason for separating the accounts of Yahweh's command and Abram's obedience with a promise of blessing: "Between command and the obedient response of the patriarch, the promise-blessing theme is introduced, and this turns the apparently arbitrary command and demand for obedience into the gracious work of God for the salvation of man" (1974:118).

6

There is a great debate among scholars whether the niphal form of the verb, w^{e}nibr^{e}kû should be translated as a reflexive (e.g. F. Delitzsch 1888:I:379-380, J. Skinner 1930:244-245, E. A. Speiser 1964:86), or as a passive (e.g. C. F. Keil 1878:194-195, O. T. Allis 1927, U. Cassuto 1964:II:315). Recently E. Ruprecht (1979:182-183) maintains that since the text could have used a pual if it unambiguously meant the passive, or the hithpael if it wanted the reflexive, by using the niphal the text is intentionally ambiguous and means to include both senses at the same time.

7

This correspondence between Yahweh's command and Abram's response is often interpreted as an indication of the faith that Abram had in Yahweh to fulfill his promises, a position elaborated most recently by W. Brueggemann (1982a:121). However, this is not the only possible reading. Abram may have been motivated by fear. He originally came from Ur, and it was at Shinar, in the episode just prior to Abram's commission, that Yahweh confounded man's attempt to build a tower. Abram may have feared that if he did not do as he was commanded he might experience the wrath of God as did his countrymen before him. As Westermann asks, what other response would be expected from a man after the most powerful force in the universe told him to move? P. D. Miscall (1983:11-12) also cautions against interpretations based on a knowledge of Abram's psychology when the text says nothing about his state of mind. Miscall adds that 12:4a may be a "verbal simile" and does not necessarily imply cause. While Abram's departure may have corresponded to Yahweh's command, it is not necessarily because of Yahweh's order that he went. Miscall adds that the parallels between 11:31 and 12:5 suggest another motivation. Abram may have gone to Canaan in order to complete his father's original, unfulfilled goal.

8

It is in creation that Yahweh initially blesses his work, and it is the blessing that concerns him with his selection of Abram.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE JOURNEY

Gen 12:5-13:18 record Abram's journey to and through the lands of Canaan and Egypt. According to the majority of scholars this unit contains three major episodes (12:5-9, 12:10-20, and 13:1-18), each of which is thought to have undergone a certain amount of subsequent redaction. According to this reading, the first episode records Abram's entry into and migration through the land of Canaan. The second episode recounts the first occasion on which Abram misrepresents Sarai as his sister and transpires in Egypt. The third recounts another migration through Canaan, but appears most concerned with the division of the land between Abram and Lot.

This division is not as straightforward as it might seem. The most obvious difficulty is that according to most critics 12:5-9 is not a unit at all, but part of the longer segment, 12:1-9. However, according to the argument of the preceding chapter, 12:1-4 constitutes part of the story's introduction, and must be separated from 12:5ff. The division between Yahweh's command and Abram's response is not unrecognised by those who see all of 12:1-9 as a single unit, but, according to the reading presented here, they give it insufficient weight.

Even amongst those who give some weight to the division between Yahweh's commission and Abram's journey there is uncertainty

over its precise location.   Identifying v. 4 as part of the journey,

Von Rad places the break between 12:3 and 12:4. C. Westermann stresses

the inclusio between 12:1 and 12:4a and, concomitantly, puts it

between vv. 4a and 4b.   U. Cassuto offers a third alternative.

Identifying 12:4b as a typical concluding formula he locates the

division between vv. 4 and 5.

According to the argument of chapter four Cassuto's view is

the most acceptable.   That 12:5 functions as the beginning of a new
                                                                    1
unit is supported by its use of resumptive repetition.   V. 4 brings

the story's introduction to an end by noting that Abram departed from

Haran, and by commenting on some of the circumstances surrounding that

departure.   V. 5 begins the next unit: it repeats this information,

thereby linking the following journey to the one mentioned in v. 4;

then it adds the destination to which Abram sets out and at which he

arrives.   It is precisely in its concern with the destination that v.

5 advances beyond v. 4, which is concerned primarily with Abram's

compliance with the divine command of 12:1.

Controversy also surrounds the delineation of these episodes,

which is especially evident in the discussion of the limits of the

Egyptian sojourn.   While most agree that it begins with 12:10, some

argue that 12:9 constitutes its introduction (so H. Gunkel 1910:168-

169; J. Skinner 1930:247; C. A. Simpson 1952:579). The disagreement

over the episode's conclusion is even more contentious. The scholarly

community is about equally split between those who end it with 12:20

and those who see the episode's conclusion in 13:1.   Those of the

first group appeal to the sense of ending that occurs with 12:20, while those who support the second group refer to the inclusio formed by 12:10: "And Abram went down (wayyēred) into Egypt," and 13:1: "And Abram went up (wayyaᶜal) from Egypt."

A second but related problem is the relationship between these three episodes. According to the scholarly consensus, they are not related to one another in any integral way. As a consequence critics treat them as independent tales, refusing to interpret them in the light of one another, except to speculate about the reasons why a redactor or collector may have placed them next to one another. J. van Seters's remarks on Gen 12:10-20 are particularly enlightening in this regard since they indicate the status of all three episodes: ". . . the story is a self-contained unit. There is nothing in it that ties it to anything previous and there is nothing that follows as a sequel. It is in every way complete" (1975:170).

As the various studies of these chapters indicate, however, these episodes cannot be separated or rearranged without difficulty. For example, 13:3-4 state that Abram returned to the place where he had earlier built a cairn (mizbēah), between Ai and Bethel. These verses not only allude to 12:7-8, but imply that Abram had left the region and has now returned. The mention of Abram's wealth in 13:2 is important in this regard because it alludes to the circumstances of its acquisition in 12:16, thereby indicating that Abram's stay at the mountain between Ai and Bethel was interrupted precisely by the excursion down to Egypt. Furthermore, 12:10 and 13:1 describe Abram's

journey into and out of Egypt in reference to his migrations through the land of Canaan. He goes down because of a famine "in the land," and returns because Pharaoh expels him from Egypt.

Realising the implications of these verses, many scholars assign all or part of 12:8-9, 16, 13:1-4 to a later redactor, thereby eliminating the references between these episodes (e.g. H. Gunkel 1910:168, J. Skinner 1930:243, P. Weimar 1980:4-5, 47-49). However, as C. Westermann (1981:203-204) has remarked, there is nothing internal to the narrative itself suggesting that these verses should be omitted. Agreeing nonetheless with the higher-critical consensus that 12:1-9, 10-20, and 13:1-18 are discrete units of tradition, Westermann denies that these verses refer to one another, but to other occasions on which Abram might have visited these places, and of which the text says nothing.

Putting aside the many problems faced by historical enquiry into this story (see esp. T. L. Thompson 1974 and J. van Seters 1975), from a literary perspective such a procedure is entirely unacceptable. The use of verbs of motion in conjunction with infinitives, in both the absolute and construct forms, adverbs of direction, the ḥ-directive, and prepositions indicating place link all the episodes of 12:5-13:18 as constituents of one continuous journey. This sense of continuity is reinforced by certain stages which indicate not only the new place to which Abram travels, but also that from which he departs.

The journey opens with the statement that Abram and his family went forth to go (wayyēṣᵉʾū lāleket) towards the land (ḥ-directive) of

Canaan, and that they came (*bw‚) into the land (h-directive) of Canaan. Narrowing the focus, v. 6 adds that Abram passed through (*⁽br) the land unto (⁽ad) the place of Shechem, unto (⁽ad) the oak of Moreh. The next step in the journey opens with the statement that "he removed (*⁽tq) from there (miššām) towards the mountain (h-directive) between Ai and Bethel. V. 9 then states that "Abram then journeyed (wayyissa⁽), continuing (hālōk wᵉnāsō⁽a) toward the Negeb (h-directive). The excursion into Egypt opens with the explanation that there was a famine in·the land, in response to which Abram went down (*yrd) towards Egypt (h-directive). His move out-of Egypt states: "Then Abram .went up (*⁽lh) from (mi) Egypt towards the Negeb (h-directive)." In the next stage he goes on his journey (wayyēlek lemassā⁽āyw) from (mi) the Negeb unto (⁽ad) Bethel, unto (⁽ad) the place where he had earlier pitched his tent, unto (‚el) the place where he had built the mizbēah. The final stage of the journey is described as tenting (*‚hl), coming (*bw‚), and dwelling (*ysw) at (bᵃ) the oaks of Mamre, at (b⁻) Hebron.

From this perspective 12:5-13:18 does not contain three separate episodes, but a journey consisting of seven stages, each marked by notation indicating the new place to which Abram travels. 12:5-9 and 13:1-18 are not individual·episodes on an even footing with 12:10-20. 12:10-20 records an event that happens at one stage in the journey, while 12:5-9 and 13:1-18 each record three stages.

12:5 constitutes the journey's introduction. It informs the reader of Abram's destination, what he took with him, and that he

arrived at that destination. As indicated in the following schematisation, 12:5 functions as a general introduction to the journey that follows. It is separated from 12:6ff. in that it states in broad terms Abram's destination: he sets out for and arrives at the land of Canaan. The text is silent about what transpires on the trip from Haran to Canaan. Gen 12:6-13:18, on the other hand, supplies a detailed itinerary of the places at which Abram stops during his wanderings through this land, as well as numerous details of things that happened at each stage of the journey.

12:6-7 records the first stage in the journey. They include the record of Abram's arrival at Shechem/Moreh (12:6), and the account of what transpired there (12:7). The second stage in the journey recounts his move to the mountain between Ai and Bethel and is recorded in 12:8. 12:9 states that he moved towards the Negeb, and constitutes the third stage in the journey. 12:10-20 records the fourth stage. It opens with the note that Abram went down to Egypt (12:10), and includes those things that occurred while he was in that land (12:11-20). 13:1-2 constitutes the fifth stage. It includes the notice that Abram moved towards the Negeb (13:1), and the circumstantial clause elaborating the patriarch's wealth (13:2). The sixth stage is related in 13:3-17. Vv. 3-5 record Abram's return to the mountain between Ai and Bethel, while vv. 6-17 relate events that transpire while Abram is there. The final stage in this journey recounts Abram's move to Hebron/Mamre and is recorded in 13:18.

The path Abram follows throughout Canaan-Egypt is circular.

At the middle of this seven stage journey lies the Egyptian episode. The path Abram follows after departing from Egypt retraces that which initially took him there. As outlined in chap. 3 (see above p. 67), this circularity formally defines' 12:5-13:18 as a chiasmus:

I. Introduction, 12:5

II. The Journey, 12:6-13:18

   a Oak of Moreh (Shechem), 12:6-7

     b a mountain between Ai and Bethel, 12:8

       c the Negeb, 12:9

         d Egypt, 12:10-20

       c´ the Negeb, 13:1-2

     b´ the mountain between Ai and Bethel, 13:3-17

   a´ Oaks of Mamre (Hebron), 13:18.[2]

The parallels indicated in this schema are supported by several other features. In both a and a´ Abram "builds a mizbēaḥ unto Yahweh." Both also record Abram´s response to the divine command to "go" (12:1; 13:17). In b Abram pitches his tent, builds a mizbēaḥ, and proclaims the name of Yahweh. In b´ he returns to the place where he had pitched his tent and built the mizbēaḥ, and once again proclaims Yahweh´s name. C and c´ are united in the fact that they are the only two stages at which nothing occurs. Both note only that Abram set out towards the Negeb. As the central episode d has no parallel.

The chiasmus not only binds the stages of the journey together as a unit, but suggests that the second half constitutes some sort of

reversal of the first half. The significance of this is gained, in part, from 12:5, which names the land of Canaan as Abram's destination. By fleeing to Egypt Abram thus abandons his original goal, but returns to it when Pharaoh expels him from Egypt and he returns to Canaan. Appropriate to its position in the centre of the chiasmus the Egyptian sojourn is the journey's pivotal episode, and effectively divides it into two parts.

This reading is supported by several other features in the text. First, although the chiasmus is based on the places to which Abram travels, another set of parallels based on the places from which he travels crosses over these divisions. The language used to describe Abram's return to the Negeb (c´) and to the mountain between Ai and Bethel (b´) reflects that used to describe Abram's original move to these places (d and c respectively). 13:1 states: "And Abram went up (*^{c}lh) from Egypt . . . towards the Negeb," which, as many scholars have noted, recalls the statement in 12:10: "And Abram went down (*yrd) towards Egypt." Similarly, the statement in 13:3, "He went on his journeys (wayyēlek l^{e}massā^{c}āyw) from the Negeb unto Bethel," reflects the language of 12:9: "And Abram journeyed (wayyissa^{c}), continually journeying (hālōk w^{e}nāsōa^{c}) towards the Negeb." By beginning each stage of the return from Egypt with a notice indicating the place from which Abram came, and by wording that notice in terms similar to the description of Abram's original move to those places, the text indicates that the return from Egypt is a reversal of the excursion that took him there in the first place.

A further indication that the second part of the journey is a reversal of the first is the parallel language used to describe Abram's removal from Haran and his departure from Egypt. Most prominent is the way the text employs the verb *hlk. In 12:1 Yahweh uses the imperative, lek-lᵉkā, to order Abram from his home. Corresponding to this command, 12:4 uses the imperfect, wayyēlek, to describe Abram's response to the divine command. Employing the same form of the verb the text then adds that "Lot went (wayyēlek) with him." Echoing Yahweh's command, Pharaoh also employs the imperfect, wālēk, to order Abram to "go" from his land. Paralleling Abram's earlier response 13:3 again uses the form, wayyēlek, to describe his response to Pharaoh's command. Completing the parallel 13:5 adds that as before Lot was going (haholēk) with Abram.

Most of the above evidence is concentrated in two episodes (12:10-20 and 13:3-17). As remarked above, the first is the pivotal episode in the journey. It is the one in which Pharaoh commands Abram in language that recalls Yahweh's original commission. The second is the first stop on the return journey. Significantly it is at these two stages in the journey that the text relates extended episodes, each with its own plot. To understand the meaning of Abram's journey, consequently, a closer look at these two episodes is warranted.

Gen 12:10-20

Few episodes in the Abraham narrative have spawned more discussion than Gen 12:10-20. Although there are many outstanding

3
issues, there has long been a consensus that this episode is primarily

about Sarai, and that the plot advances according to her relationship
4
to Abram and Pharaoh. The events that lead up to the actual loss of

Sarai (variously located in vv. 10-16a or vv. 10-16b) constitute the

plot's complication or what Pratt calls the "rising action" (1983:163).

Correspondingly, those events that lead to Sarai's recovery (usually

located in vv. 17-20) constitute the story's resolution, or what Pratt

calls the "falling action" (1983:163). V. 17, all agree, contains the

event that effects the change from complication to resolution. The

combination of these actions constitutes what Westermann refers to as

the episode's "arch of tension." It is the spanning of this arch

over the entire episode that suggests to most scholars that 12:10-20

has its own structural integrity and is therefore independent of its
5
present literary context.

However, while there is agreement about the general story-line,

recent attempts to divide the episode into its component parts, and to

trace more closely the advance of the plot from scene to scene, have

not produced the same unanimity. All agree that the episode contains

an introduction (v. 10), a main body (vv. 11-19), and a conclusion (v.
6
20). V. 10 is recognisable as the introduction because it begins with

an .initial disjunctive clause, way^{e}hî rā^{c}āb bā$^{\jmath}$āreṣ, and supplies

information of an expository nature (G. W. Coats 1983:110). V. 10a

introduces the new theme of the famine, and v. 10b a new stage in

Abram's journey. V. 10c is a subordinate clause that links these two

items together.. Abram travels to Egypt because of the famine's

severity.

The conclusion is also easily identifiable. As Pratt (1983:162) observes, the resumption of consecution (way^{e}ṣaw) after lengthy simultaneity indicates that v. 20 constitutes a new segment in the episode. It is the narratorial description contained therein, however, that creates the sense of ending in this verse. The verses immediately prior to v. 20 record a conversation between Pharaoh and Abram in which Pharaoh eventually orders Abram out of Egypt. In v. 20 the narrator reports that under the eye of Pharaoh's men this command was successfully carried out.

The disagreement occurs over the main body of the episode. While Berg (1983:8-10) and Weimar (1977:14-16) agree that the middle section contains three scenes, they assign the scenes different contents. Weimar identifies them as vv. 11-13; vv. 14-16a; and vv. 17a, 18-19. Berg, on the other hand, defines them as vv. 11-13; vv. 14-16; and vv. 17-19. Offering yet another reading, Pratt argues that the middle section contains the following four scenes: vv. 11-13; vv. 14-16a; vv. 16b-17; and vv. 18-19.

As the various divisions indicate, the discussion revolves around the status of v. 16b. While the status of a half-verse may appear to be a minor thing, the controversy surrounding it reflects a more fundamental problem. The different solutions regarding v. 16b show how difficult it is to account for all the material in 12:10-20 when one reads the episode as a story about Sarai.

In past years those who accepted v. 16b usually interpreted it

as an elaboration of the statement in v. 16a that "it went well with Abram because of her" (e.g. A. Dillmann 1897:II:19-20; S. R. Driver 1909:150; U. Cassuto 1964:II:354) However, as Weimar (1977:9) indicates, this expression refers to Abram's original plan in v. 13, where out of fear for his life he plots to misrepresent Sarai as his sister. Employing the same language that appears in v. 16a Abram pleads with Sarai: "Say, I pray of you, you are my sister, that it may go well with me for your sake, and that I may live on your account." V. 16a, then, does not refer to the wealth that Abram acquires in v. 16b, but to the success of his plan to save his life by passing off Sarai as his sister. According to Weimar, then, v. 16b interrupts the natural flow between the loss of Sarai in v. 16a and Yahweh's intervention on her behalf in v. 17.

In a more recent attempt to retain v. 16b, Pratt argues that it belongs with v. 17, and that together they constitute the episode's "turning point" (1983:163). This reading leads to a comparison of Abram's wealth with the plague that comes upon Pharaoh. According to Pratt it is this comparison that enables the text to proceed to a resolution of the tension created by the abduction of Sarai. According to Pratt, "In order to move toward resolving this difficulty, Yahweh distinguishes between Abram and Pharaoh" (1983:164):

It is not clear, however, why the resolution of the problem of Sarai's removal requires such a distinction, or how such a distinction contributes to Sarai's restoration. The role of v. 17 in

reuniting Sarai and Abram is clear enough. It is Yahweh's intervention "because of Sarai, Abram's wife" that initiates the events that lead to the return of Sarai and the expulsion of Abram from Egypt. It is not clear, however, how Abram's acquisition of wealth contributes to this turn of events.[7]

Pratt supports his position with reference to certain formal features of the text. He observes that the introduction and the first two scenes begin with the verb wyhy (vv. 10, 11, 14). Observing that the next occurrence of wyhy is in v. 16b, Pratt reasons that, like the previous three occurrences, this one indicates that v. 16b begins the next scene.

This reasoning, however, is not without its difficulties. As Pratt himself realises, the verb does not occur in the second half of the episode. Neither his fourth scene (vv. 18-19) nor the conclusion (v. 20) begins with wyhy. Furthermore, although the introduction and the first two scenes do begin with wyhy, its grammatical function is different than in the introduction. In the introduction it stands alone in announcing the arrival of the famine. In the two scenes that follow it appears in conjunction with the verb *bwɔ, and marks Abram's advance into Egypt. V. 11 opens with the expression, wayᵉhî kaɔăšer hiqrîb lābôɔ miṣrāyᵉmā, while v. 14 begins with, wayᵉhî kᵉbôɔ ɔabrām miṣrāyᵉmā. The obvious sequentiality of these two clauses indicates that the two scenes are part of a single, continuous journey; they are thus bound together at a different level than v. 10 is bound to them. In v. 10 wyhy describes a condition while in vv. 11 and 14 it describes

motion.

A closer look at the structure of the episode will reveal that v. 17 does indeed divide the episode into two parts. V. 16b is not the beginning of a scene, but the end of the first half. The difficulties posed by this half-verse, moreover, disappear once it is realised that v. 17 not only marks the beginning of the second half of the episode, but also effects a shift in the basis upon which the plot advances.

As intimated above, the first half of the story is located in vv. 10-16. These verses contain the introduction (v. 10) and the first two scenes (vv. 11-13; vv. 14-16). The introduction is itself composed of three clauses. The first is an independent clause announcing the arrival of a famine in "the land." This is followed by a second independent clause that states that Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn. The third is a dependent clause which links Abram's journey causally to the famine. Abram decides to go to Egypt, "because the famine was severe in the land."

Presenting the problem in this way places the emphasis on the famine. Westermann wants to remove v. 10a because he thinks that it is an unnecessary repetition of v. 10c. Such a procedure, however, fails to appreciate the development that occurs in this verse. The first clause announces the famine. By using an independent clause the text focusses the reader's attention on the famine. In the second clause the text states that Abram decided to go to Egypt to sojourn. By using a second independent clause to announce Abram's decision to go to

Egypt, the reader has knowledge of two seemingly independent events.
It is only in the third clause that the relationship between the two is
clarified. Abram goes to Egypt because of the famine's severity. The
introduction moves from announcement of the famine, to the announcement
of Abram's journey, to the linking of the second event causally to the
first. The third clause also adds information to what the first clause
says about the famine: it was severe.

The second part of this section (vv. 11-16), records Abram's
actual descent into Egypt. This journey transpires over two scenes
(vv. 11-13; vv. 14-16). The first introduces a complication. Abram
believes that the Egyptians will kill him because Sarai is beautiful.
This potential threat forces the story to stop narrating Abram's
advance into Egypt in order to confront this problem. Abram, however,
would appear to have few options. He cannot return to Canaan because
that is where the severe famine is. He cannot continue his trek
because the Egyptians are waiting to kill him for his wife, or so he
believes. At this point the machinations of the story risk strangling
both the story and Abram. Abram's solution to this problem is to
misrepresent Sarai as his sister. Although the outcome of this
solution is not guaranteed at this point in the story, it allows both
Abram and the story to move on. The tension created by the
uncertainties surrounding the question of the plan's success compel the
reader to continue reading. Thus, at this point in the episode Abram
has two problems: an actual one in the guise of a famine, and a
potential one in the form of death at the hands of the Egyptians (so

Berg 1983:9).

The second scene (vv. 14-16) records Abram's successful arrival in Egypt. Although the Egyptians are impressed with Sarai's beauty, as Abram had predicted, they do not kill him. Abram's plan appears to have worked. With that problem out of the way v. 16b adds that "he acquired (way^{e}hî 1ô) sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and man-servants, and maid-servants, and she-asses; and camels." Having first avoided the difficulty facing his move to Egypt, Abram is able to take advantage of the wealth Egypt has to offer. Thus not only does his plan to misrepresent Sarai as his wife appear to have worked, but so has his plan to use Egypt as a place to escape the famine of "the land" (v. 10). The price of Abram's success, however, is that Pharaoh, apparently impressed by reports of Sarai's beauty, has her removed to his harem. As Petersen (1973:37) remarks, Abram's plan appears to have worked only too well.

The second half of the episode contains one scene (vv. 17-19) and the conclusion (v. 20). This scene contains Yahweh's intervention, and the events that result from it. The scene opens with Yahweh plaguing Pharaoh "because of Sarai, Abram's wife" (v. 17). The use of the qualification, "Abram's wife," suggests that the price of Abram's success in Egypt was unacceptable to Yahweh. The plague appears to have had its desired affect: Pharaoh returns Sarai to Abram. As with Abram's plan to misrepresent Sarai, the plague leads to more than the anticipated response. In addition to effecting the reunion of Sarai and Abram, the plague convinces Pharaoh to expel

Abram and his family from Egypt.

The conclusion brings the episode to an end by recording the fulfilment of Pharaoh's command. With an Egyptian guard Abram, his wife, and all that is his are escorted out of Egypt.

Thus, v. 17 effects a shift in the basis upon which the plot advances. In the first half (vv. 10-16) the story is concerned with Abram's journey to Egypt. While the issue of Sarai's beauty may occupy much of the first two scenes, as a theme it is secondary to that of Abram's journey. According to v. 10, the episode's initial concern is with Abram's efforts to escape a severe famine that had come upon "the land." Sarai is not even mentioned in this verse. Her beauty comes into play only at the Egyptian border, where it seemingly jeopardises the patriarch's efforts to use Egypt as an escape from the famine. The issue of Sarai's beauty is thus subordinate to Abram's quest for a land free from famine.

This reading is supported further by the beginning of the first two scenes. In both the events are described in terms of the stage of the journey at which they occur. The first scene begins with the clause wayᵉhî ka²ăšer hiqrîb lābô² miṣrayᵉmâ, while the second opens with wayᵉhî kᵉbô² ²abrām miṣrayᵉmâ. More than just formal devices that mark the beginning of scenes, these clauses indicate that the events that occur in each scene are a part of and thus subordinate to Abram's journey to Egypt.

From this perspective the role of v. 16b is understandable. According to Weimar and many others, v. 16b makes no sense in a story

concerned with Sarai's loss and recovery. However, in an episode about Abram's attempts to move to Egypt to escape a famine, not only does it make sense, but it is necessary to indicate whether Abram was successful in his efforts. V. 16b indicates that he was. One might argue that v. 16a indicates his success, rendering v. 16b redundant. However, as noted above, v. 16a refers to v. 13, and indicates the success of his plan to save himself by misrepresenting Sarai as his sister. Only v. 16b, which lists the possessions Abram acquires while in Egypt, indicates that he was successful in his original goal. Thus, contrary to those who remove it v. 16b plays an important role in the episode.

It is only at v. 17 that Sarai becomes the prime motivation upon which the plot advances. Yahweh sends a plague upon Pharaoh and his household (kingdom?) "because of Sarai, Abram's wife." Then, upon realising that Sarai is actually Abram's wife, Pharaoh scolds Abram for lying about her identity, returns her to him, and finally expels him, his family, and all that is his from Egypt. The Pharaoh, apparently, does not want to harbor someone who can bring a plague upon him.

Thus, the episode does not have an arch of tension spanning its entirety. There is an arch, but it spans only the first half (12:10-16). The initial point of tension is the famine Abram sets out to escape. The threat represented by Sarai's beauty constitutes a complication to this goal. After warding off the danger Sarai represents, his arrival in Egypt is successful. As Berg (1983:9) has

stated,

> Mit V.16 könnte die Erzählung zu Ende sein. Denn die beiden
> Notsituationen, die aktuelle, von der in V.10 die Rede ist,
> und die potentielle, von der Abraham in V.12 spricht und die
> durch die Auswanderung Abrahams und Saras nach Ägypten für
> Abraham hätte entstehen können, sind behoben bzw. überhaupt
> nicht eingetreten: Sara geht es gut am Königshof des Pharao
> aufgrund ihrer Schönheit; Abraham geht es gut "um Saras
> willen". Der Plan ist gelungen.

The second half of the episode (vv. 17-20) reverses this

resolution. After Yahweh plagues Egypt Pharaoh returns Sarai to Abram

and expels them from his realm. Thus, by the end of the episode Abram

has returned to the state he was in prior to his arrival in Egypt. His

wife is returned, and he is also returned to Canaan, the place of the

famine.[8] Thus the end of the episode does not resolve the initial

tension, but reaffirms it. In so doing the episode does not come to an

end, but points forward in anticipation of an answer to this problem:

how will Abram deal with Canaan, a land ridden with famine?

The significance of this question lies with Yahweh's promise to

bless Abram with posterity if he would go to "the land which I will

show you" (12:1). Abram soon discovers that Canaan is a land of famine

(12:10), hardly a condition associated with a blessing. By forcing

Abram to return to Canaan, Pharaoh sends Abram back to a land that

appears incapable of supporting the blessing.

Sarai is not merely the means by which the episode raises this

question. As von Rad (1972:169) has stated, her status raises the

question of Abram's descendants. It is not clear, however, that in

passing her off Abram jeopardises the promise, as von Rad and others

have argued. Indeed, since she was barren she posed a barrier to the

fulfilment of the promise. It is possible to view her removal as a removal of barrenness, and thus as part of the process of realising the blessing. By returning her to Abram, Pharaoh sharpens the question of the means by which Abram will acquire offspring and become a great and famous nation. Since it was Yahweh´s actions that led to her return, here too he appears to be working against his own promise.

Von Rad also claims that by fleeing Canaan the patriarch showed a distinct lack of faith in Yahweh´s promise of land. This interpretation, however, assumes that Abram knew the land´s identity, which is not the case. In 12:1 Yahweh only identifies the land as the "land which I will show you." At the oak of Moreh Yahweh reappears and promises to give his descendants "this land," but this expression is imprecise. If it refers only to the oak of Moreh then Abram abandoned it upon moving to the mountain between Ai and Bethel. It is possible that Abram may have thought Yahweh was referring to all of Canaan since, as 12:5 indicates, Canaan was his original destination. The language of v. 5 portrays Abram´s journey from Haran to Canaan as the completion of his father´s unfulfilled plans to travel to Canaan from Ur. Terah´s journey, however, was not commissioned by Yahweh, and there is nothing in 12:1-3 to suggest that Yahweh understood the journey that he commanded of Abram as a completion of his father´s aborted mission.

It is equally possible that in fleeing to Egypt Abram saw himself as seeking out the land that Yahweh promised him. Canaan was suffering a famine, not an element usually associated with a blessing.

Egypt was not only fruitful (12:16), but comparable with the "garden of Yahweh" (13:10). Abram may have understood his move as a part of his search for the land of blessing, and the flight from Canaan as a flight from a cursed land. In any event, when Abram leaves Egypt he returns to a land of famine.

In this dilemma lies the significance of the structure of Gen 12:10-20. The original resolution of Abram's goal occurs in the second or central scene of the episode (vv. 14-16). As outlined earlier in this chapter, Egypt is the central stop in Abram's seven stage journey through the ancient near east. Thus, in the central scene of the central episode of the journey Abram appears to be well on his way to realising the blessing. He has successfully fled a famine for a fruitful land, and lost his barren wife. By plaguing Pharaoh, Yahweh initiates both the return of Sarai to Abram and the return of Abram to Canaan. Thus, by the end of the episode Abram has been removed from a fruitful land, only to be reunited with a barren woman and returned to a barren land.

Gen 13:3-17

This episode records the separation of Lot from Abram, and can be divided into two main parts (vv. 3-5; vv. 6-17). The first part is expositional and reports the return of Lot and Abram to the mountain between Ai and Bethel. As noted above, most of the language used to describe Abram's arrival at the mountain recalls his first visit to this place (12:8), thereby binding this episode to the wider journey.

Only v. 5 adds information that goes beyond what is stated in 12:8. It states that Lot, who was going with Abram, was also wealthy in flocks, herds, and tents.

As the use of "also" (gam) indicates, v. 5 refers to the description of Abram's wealth in 13:2, thus connecting this opening scene (13:3-5) to the previous stage in Abram's journey (13:1-2). In addition to the analyptic role of v. 5, it also serves as a prolepsis in conjunction with v. 2. The mention that both Lot and Abram are wealthy anticipates the quarrel that arises in the scenes that follow. This information is one of the features that holds all of Gen 13 together.[10]

The actual separation of Lot from Abram is recounted in the second part (vv. 6-17) of the episode. This event can be divided into three scenes, each of which begins with the verb *nś². The first begins with a clause in which the verb is negated: weló²-nāśā² ²ōtām hā²āreṣ (v. 6). The next two scenes, on the other hand, begin with clauses that uses the verb positively. The second opens with the expression: wayyiśśā²-lōt ²et-ēnāyw wayyar² ²et-kol-kikkar hayyardēn (v. 10). The third scene opens with a similar clause: wayhwh ²āmar ²el-²abrām ²aḥārē hippāred-lōt mēꜥimmō śā² nā² ꜥēneyka ûreꜥēh (v. 14).

Although the first occurrence of *nś² has a different meaning than the second and third, they all refer to the land. In the first scene it describes the state of the land: it is unable to support (weló²-nāśā²) the combined flocks of Abram and Lot. In the second and third scenes, on the other hand, it refers to the examination of the

land. In the second Lot lifts (wayyiśśā⁾) his eyes to see all the plain of the Jordan, while in the third Yahweh commands Abram to lift (śā⁾) his eyes to see all the land that he will receive.

The use of *nś⁾ is augmented by the text's use of *kōl. This word occurs four times, all with reference to the land. The word first appears in Abram's proposal to Lot. Just prior to suggesting that he and Lot separate, he asks his nephew the following question: "Is not all (kol) the land before you?" (v. 9).

The key-word *kōl occurs twice in the second scene. The first (v. 10) occurrence describes Lot's examination of the Jordan valley. He looks at all (kol) the kikkar of the Jordan. The second (v. 11) describes his choice of lands: Lot chose for himself all (kol) the kikkar of the Jordan.

In the final scene Yahweh uses *kōl to describe the land he promises Abram. After commanding him to look in all four directions, Yahweh promises to give him and his descendants "all (kol) the land that you see."

The use of *nś⁾ and *kōl marks the advance each scene makes in the story-line. The first scene (vv. 6-9) contains the episode's initial point of tension and a proposal to resolve it. The land's inability to support the combined flocks of Abram and Lot leads to quarrelling between their respective herdsmen. In an effort to avoid further squabbles, Abram suggests to Lot that they divide the land between them and go their separate ways. Perhaps to encourage his nephew's acceptance of the plan, Abram offers Lot first choice of

territory.

The second scene (vv. 10-13) records the execution of Abram's plan. After perusing the land Lot chooses the fertile plain of the Jordan, leaving Abram with the land of Canaan. The text adds that the separation occurred before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, and that the men of Sodom were evil.

In the final scene (vv. 14-17) Yahweh appears to Abram with a statement of intent concerning the issues of land and posterity. This statement can be divided into three parts. First, Yahweh commands Abram to look in the four directions of the compass and states that he will give him and his descendants all the land that he sees (vv. 14-15). He then adds that Abram's descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth (v. 16). In the third part of the address (v. 17) he returns to the issue of the land, this time commanding Abram to walk its the length and breadth, "for unto you I will give it."

In contrast to Abram's Egyptian sojourn, the account of the separation of Lot and Abram has not engendered much scholarly discussion. In the few studies that exist there is a disagreement over the issue that is at stake in this episode. Whether the interpretation treats the episode in its context, or as an independent anecdote, two main positions have emerged. According to the first view the main issue is land. This position has been championed by W. Vogels (1974/75; 1975:142-145; 1979). According to the second view, reflected in the recent work of G. W. Coats (1983:116-118) and L. R. Helyer (1983), the episode focuses on the relationship between Abram and Lot.

The above analysis suggests that while there are implications for both, the question of land is the more fundamental. It is the inability of the land to support the combined herds of Abram and Lot that leads to the quarrelling and eventual separation. The fundamental aspect of the land is reflected in Abram's proposal to deal with the squabbling. While he decides that he and Lot should separate, he describes that separation in terms of a division of land. He puts his plan to Lot: "Is not all the land before you? . . . If you will take the left hand I will take the right; or if you take the right hand I will take the left" (v. 9). By wording his proposal in these terms Abram shows that he understands that the principal problem is the land or, more precisely, its poverty. Similarly, in the final scene, Yahweh focuses on the issue of land. Instead of a divided land he promises Abram a whole land. Yahweh does not mention the squabble that compelled Abram to separate from Lot.

According to most critics, in its present form the episode has undergone significant expansion. They often claim, for example, that vv. 6, 11b-12a stem from a different source (P), and therefore remove them from their present context (e.g. J. Skinner 1930:242, A. Dillmann 1897:II:22, O. Procksch 1913:470-471, H. Gunkel 1910:263). Most also agree that vv. 3-4 were added by a later redactor who used the form of the itinerary to link this episode to the traditions in 12:6-9 (e.g. J. Skinner 1930:243, 251, H. Gunkel 1910:168, 172). R. Kilian (1966:20-23) also removes vv. 10b, 12b, and 13 because they anticipate the events of Gen 19. It is also common to remove the entire final

scene as the work of a later redactor who wanted to link the once independent story to the theme of the promise (e.g. J. Hoftijzer 1956:15, C. Westermann 1980:25, J. A. Emerton 1982:18-20, cf. Gunkel 1910:175-176, Skinner 1930:253-254).

The reasons for removing these verses, however, are inconclusive. It is circular reasoning to remove vv. 3-4, 10b, 12b, and 13 because they refer to other sections of the narrative. On the contrary, these connections might indicate that the account of Lot's separation is not independent, but part of a larger narrative complex.

The itinerary in 13:3-4, for example, plays a more specific role than to connect this episode to the traditions of Abram's wanderings in 12:6-9. The language of 13:3-4 refers specifically to 12:8, Abram's first stop at the mountain between Ai and Bethel. 12:8 states that upon his arrival at the mountain he "pitched his tent . . . built a cairn (mizbeah), unto Yahweh, and proclaimed the name of Yahweh." 13:3-4 states that he went "unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai; unto the place of the cairn (mizbeah), which he had made there at the first; and Abram proclaimed there the name of Yahweh." These parallels contribute to the chiasmus that spans and unites all of 12:5-13:18. Only 13:5 goes beyond the information in 12:8. Yet, as described above, this verse also binds 13:3-17 to other stages of the journey. By removing vv. 3-4 the role of this episode in the journey is lost.

In addition to binding this episode to its wider context, 13:4-5 have a role in their present context. As van Seters points

out, vv. 3-4 "are quite necessary, as they indicate from what place the Jordan valley was viewed" (1975:223).

The references to Sodom also play an important role in the episode. As van Seters (1975:222) remarks, v. 10a implies that the Jordan valley is fertile, which is not the case. V. 10b is necessary to explain that the separation of Lot and Abram occurred at a time before it was barren, that is, prior to the time that Yahweh destroyed it.

Once the first reference to Sodom is accepted, van Seters reasons, there is no longer any reason to remove the others. The mention of the Sodomites' evil nature, however, also plays an important role in the story. Lot chose the Jordan valley because it was well watered everywhere. Apparently he wanted a place that was not infertile like Canaan. V. 10, however, indicates that he got more than what he was hoping for. While the <u>kikkār</u> may look fertile, it has no future because Yahweh will destroy it. By noting that the valley was populated by evil men, v. 13 takes the irony one step further: if the valley has no future, neither does it offer much of a present. If Lot sought to escape confrontation by fleeing to the valley he failed, as Gen 14 and 19:4-11 demonstrate.

Source critics assign vv. 6, 11b-12a to a separate source because they claim these verses contain unnecessary repetition. According to them, v. 6 records one account of the reason Abram and Lot separated, while v. 7 records a second version. Similarly, the account of the separation of Abram and Lot in vv. 11b-12a is thought to

duplicate the account given in v. 11a and disturb the natural continuation of 11a in 12b (e.g. Skinner 1930:253).

Neither of these judgments, however, is conclusive. Vv. 6 and 7 are not true duplicates. While both verses give reasons that lead to the separation, those in v. 7 are the concrete result of the situation described in v. 6. V. 7 states that the herdsmen of Abram and Lot quarrelled; v. 6 gives a two-fold reason for the contention. First, the land is unable to support them, and second, they have too much wealth. Both of these claims are qualified by the statement that they could not dwell together, suggesting that the two elements contributed equally to the situation that resulted in the quarrelling reported in v. 7. Still, the first of these is the more fundamental. Wealth by itself might not lead to quarrelling, but wealth in a land that is unable to support it will.

Nor are vv. 11b-12a a repetition of v. 11a. V. 11a states that Lot chose and then journeyed to the Jordan valley. V. 11b, on the other hand, states that Abram and Lot separated from one another. V. 12a then adds that Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan while Lot dwelt in the cities of the kikkār.

There is thus a progression through these half-verses. V. 11a refers to v. 9b where Abram offers Lot first choice of territory. By stating that Lot has now made his choice, v. 11a indicates that Lot had finished the process of examination recorded in v. 10, and had decided to accept Abram's offer. V. 11b, on the other hand, refers to v. 9a, and confirms that Abram's plan to deal with the quarrelling by

separating from Lot was realised. Unlike vv. 11a and 11b, v. 12a does not refer to the formulation of Abram's plan. Having noted the successful execution of Abram's plan in v. 11b, v. 12a reports the situation as it existed after the separation: Abram lived in the land of Canaan while Lot lived in the cities of the Jordan valley. Each part of these verses focuses on a different element of the separation.

There remains the problem of the last scene. Recent critics cite two reasons for removing vv. 14-17. The first is generic: vv. 14-17 are thought to contain a different genre than the main part of the episode. According to Westermann vv. 5-13 are an example of "territorial conflict" (1980:65-66), a special category of a wider genre he calls "family narrative."[11] Vv. 14-17, on the other hand, are "not a narrative, but an address by God to Abraham" (Westermann 1980:25).

The second reason critics remove vv. 14-17 from the text is the sense of discontinuity they detect between them and the preceding material. Westermann describes the break in terms of narrative tension. According to him, vv. 14-17 do not emerge out of the tension developed in vv. 5-13. Coats makes a similar evaluation: "Rather than developing the renewed tension, vv. 14-17 shift the pace of the unit to a traditional piece, a promise to Abram for possession of the land and for multiplication of descendants. . . . Its narrative line is incomplete" (1983:117; so Hoftijzer 1956:15). J. A. Emerton describes the caesura in terms of a discrepancy: "In v. 9 Lot is allowed to choose any part of the land, and in vv. 10-11 he sees and chooses the

Plain of the Jordan; that comes awkwardly before vv. 14-15, which say that all that Abraham can see will be given to him" (1982:19).

Neither reason is incontrovertible. The first assumes that a unified story cannot contain more than one genre. The second assumes that a narrative cannot contain scenes that are discontinuous. This thesis does not share these presuppositions (see above respectively, pp. 33-37, pp. 19-22). While an address may not be a narrative, it is not uncommon for narratives to contain addresses (e.g. 2 Kgs 18:19-25, 28-35; 22:15-20 Neh 9:6-38). Similarly, texts can use discontinuity to contrast the opposing views of characters, to nullify or discredit the actions of a particular character, or to change the direction of the plot, to list only a few possibilities.

There are a number of elements that link vv. 14-17 to the preceding scenes. In the opening clause of v. 14, the narrator introduces Yahweh's speech to Abram with the clause: wayhwh ʾāmar ʾel-ʾabrām ʾaḥărê hippāred-lôṭ mēʿimmô. This clause binds vv. 14ff. to the preceding material by both grammar and temporal coordination. As B. Jacob (1974:364) points out, the inverted syntax, wayhwh ʾāmar, indicates that v. 14ff. are a continuation of the preceding material (so A. Dillmann 1897:II:27). The use of ʾaḥărê defines the sequence as temporal: Yahweh speaks to Abram after the separation of Lot.[12]

As a number of scholars (R. Kilian 1966:24, W. Vogels 1974/75:52-54, B. Jacob 1974:364) have observed, there are also formal parallels between these two scenes. In the opening line of his address Yahweh uses the same language to command Abram to examine the

land that the narrator used to describe Lot's choice of territory. V. 10a describes Lot's examination of the territory: wayyiśśāʾ-lôt ʾet-ʾ ̂enāyw wayyarʾ ʾet-kol-kikkar hayyardēn. V. 11a then describes his selection of that territory: wayyibḥar-lô lôt ʾet kol-kikkar hayyardēn. Using the same language, Yahweh commands Abram: śāʾ nāʾ ʾ ̂eneykā ûrᵉʾēh . . . kî ʾet-kol-hāʾāreṣ ʾăšer-ʾattā rōʾeh lᵉkā ʾetᵉnennā ûlᵉzarᶜăkā ᶜad-ᶜôlām (vv. 14, 15).[13]

These parallels contrast Lot's selection of territory with the promise of land Yahweh makes Abram. Lot, however, does not act on his own volition but on the suggestion of Abram. According to W. Vogels, Yahweh's address can thus be read as a response to the outcome of Abram's plan. Using the language of structuralism Vogels describes the shift that occurs at v. 14 as follows:

> . . . .it [vv. 14-18] is a promise and presents Yahweh as the sender, who promises to give the whole land to Abraham. The first narrative program (vv. 8-12) is at the pragmatic-somatic level, and presents Abraham as the sender for the purpose of dividing the land between himself and Lot. The second program seems to destroy the solution of the first program. The second is therefore the real narrative program, while the first becomes the anti-program (1979:9).

This reading is supported by the way the episode uses the expression kol hāʾāreṣ. It occurs once in the first scene where Abram says to Lot: "Is not the whole land (kol-hāʾāreṣ) you? Separate, then, from me. If you will take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left" (v. 9). In the second scene the expression occurs twice, but with reference to a specific land. Here, however, the expression is altered to refer to the specific land Lot selects. Lot looks at and then chooses the "entire

Jordan valley" (kol kikkar hayyardēn; vv. 10, 11). In the final scene Yahweh uses the general form to promise Abram "all the land" (kol-hāʔāreṣ) that he sees (v. 15).

The shift from the general expression to the specific expression and back to the general expression corresponds to the advance each scene makes in the plot. In the first Abram makes the proposal to divide the land between himself and Lot. As v. 8 indicates, Abram is primarily concerned with the effects of quarrelling on kin (kî-ʔănāšîm ʔahîm ʔănăḥnû). His use of the general expression, kol hāʔāreṣ, reflects this concern. He is not interested in the issue of who gets what territory, as long as the division prevents the quarrelling.

The second scene records the separation of the two men. Having accepted Abram's proposal, Lot is not concerned with the division of land as a solution to quarrelling, but with the specific territory he will now inhabit. The use of the specific formulation, kol kikkar hayyardēn, reflects this shift in purpose.

The third scene records Yahweh's promise to give Abram all the land that he sees. By moving back to the general formula the third scene recalls the first and Abram's original use of that formula. Abram's plan calls for the division of "all the land," while Yahweh's intention is to give Abram the "entire land." The results of Abram's plan appear unacceptable to Yahweh.

The rejection of Abram's plan corresponds to another shift in concerns. Abram divided the land because he wanted to avoid quarrelling.[14] Yahweh, however, wants Abram to have numerous

descendants (v. 16). The need for the entire land is expressed in the metaphor Yahweh uses to describe the size of Abram's posterity: it will be as abundant as the dust of the land.

Vogels (1979:10-11) adds that the topographical language used by and of the different characters reflects the differences between Abram's and Yahweh's plans. The first use of geographical language appears in the proposal of separation Abram makes to Lot: "if you take the left hand then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand I will go to the left." It occurs next in the description of Lot's move to his chosen land: "And Lot journeyed east." In the final scene Yahweh uses topographical language to command Abram: "look northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward, for the whole land which you see I will give you."

The topographical language used to describe Abram's plan and Lot's implementation of it reflects a division between the land on the right and the land on the left. Yahweh's use of topographical language, on the other hand, is inclusive or circular. While Lot journeys to the east, leaving the west behind, Yahweh commands Abram to examine all four points of the compass. Rather than a division between east and west, Yahweh's promise includes a unity of all directions. Enhancing the sense of wholeness Yahweh commands Abram to "walk through the land in its length and breadth." Rather than moving from one point to another, as Lot did, Abram is to move throughout all points.

As Vogels (1974/75:52-54) has recognised, the parallels

between vv. 10-13 and vv. 14-17 also contrast the basis upon which each patriarch inhabits his respective land. Lot makes his choice according to his own volition and capacities. He examines the Jordan valley, chooses it "for himself," and moves to the land of his choice. In contrast Abram receives his land from Yahweh. Yahweh commands Abram to examine the land, promises to give it to him and his descendants, and then commands him to travel through it.

The significance of this contrast lies in the quality of the lands each patriarch inhabits. Lot chooses the Jordan valley because it is fertile: it is well watered, and looks like both Egypt and the garden of Yahweh (13:10). However, while the kikkār may appear promising, it has no future; Yahweh plans to destroy it. It is in this context that the promise takes on its meaning. Although the land that Lot leaves for Abram is unable to support much, it has a future. After commanding Abram to look about, Yahweh promises to give the land that he sees to Abram and his descendants forever. Thus, while Lot may appear to make the best choice, he actually makes the worst choice. Divine promises offer more than human perceptions.

Thus, while vv. 14-17 may not emerge out of the tensions upon which the preceding scenes advance, they nonetheless address them. The discrepancy Emerton detects, moreover, defines the relationship of Yahweh's speech to the preceding events. Yahweh does not accept the division of the land that results from Abram's proposal. His plan, on the contrary, includes a gift of the entire land. Whether kol-hā'āres includes kol kikkar hayyarden is not clear, but there is nothing to

15

imply that it does not.

Unlike Abram's proposal, however, Yahweh's plan is not put into immediate effect. Abram does not yet possess any land, and he does not have any children. In 13:14-17 Yahewh's project exists only as an anticipation of the future. As such, despite its discernible plot, the account of the separation of Lot and Abram is incomplete. The episode is not self-contained and, therefore, should not be isolated from its context.

This final scene, moreover, brings the episode under the umbrella of the divine promise. Abram was originally promised that he would be blessed if he would go to the land Yahweh would show him. However, despite continuing revelations from the deity, he finds himself in a land which hardly appears blessed. The kikkār, on the other hand, does appear blessed; it even looks like the garden of Yahweh. Abram cannot occupy that land because of his agreement with Lot. Although Yahweh again appears to Abram and promises land and posterity, it is still not clear how he will gain either.

The role of Lot, however, is not just to supply the occasion for this promise. As both L. H. Silberman (1983:18-19) and Helyer (1983:82-83) note, the text presents Lot as Abram's most likely heir. By initiating the separation of Lot and himself, Abram appears to have removed his only heir. The full force of this development emerges from Yahweh's promise that Abram will have a great posterity. With his only prospective heir gone, the fulfilment of that promise is jeopardised.

There is another level at which 12:1-3 bears on this episode.

In order to receive the blessing Yahweh commanded more than just Abram's departure. He also commanded him to leave his kin behind. Abram may have taken Lot in order to secure an heir, but in doing so he contravened one of the conditions of the blessing. Thus, Lot's presence may have impeded Abram's acquisition of the blessing. By the end of Gen 13, however, Lot is finally removed from Abram, and Abram has finally separated from his kin, as Yahweh had commanded. It is only then, and in response to this separation, that Yahweh reappears to Abram to reaffirm his promise of land and posterity.

Taken together, then, the accounts of the Egyptian sojourn and the separation of Abram and Lot make the fulfilment of Yahweh's promise appear even more unlikely than when Yahweh first commissioned Abram in 12:1-3. These two episodes restrict Abram to a barren land with only a barren wife. Together they confine Abram to the land of Canaan, a land of famine which cannot support many flocks or herds. Egypt and the kikkār, on the other hand, are fertile. It is in Egypt that Abram gains so much wealth, and Lot chooses the kikkār because it is well-watered everywhere, and looks like both Egypt and the garden of Yahweh. These places would certainly appear blessed, while in contrast Canaan must seem cursed. [16]

Similarly, both episodes raise doubts about the realisation of the promise of posterity. The Egyptian episode gives divine sanction to the union of Abram and Sarai, although Sarai remains barren. In this context Lot, whom the text already presented as a possible heir for Abram, takes on an even greater importance. The account of the

separation of Abram and Lot, however, removes Lot as Abram's likely heir. At the end of the journey, consequently, Abram is restricted to a barren land and a barren wife, with no apparent possibility of escaping either.

It is in this context that Yahweh's promise in 13:14-17 takes on its importance. Westermann removes it because he does not perceive its narrative function. In fact, however, it is a divine reassertion of the promise at the point where its realisation appears entirely impossible. Whether Abram actually believes Yahweh or concludes that he is the victim of a powerful yet whimsical being the text does not say. The fact that he travels only to Hebron might indicate that Abram has reservations about Yahweh's purpose.

The journey thus functions to define the posterity and land which Yahweh had promised Abram in 12:1-3, 7. It achieves this end in a negative rather than a positive way. That is to say, rather than having Yahweh identify these elements, the journey defines them by a process of elimination. Abram is removed from Egypt and prevented from inhabiting the kikkār of the Jordan. He has nowhere to go but Canaan. Similarly, his marriage with Sarai is confirmed, while Lot's status is clarified by his removal. Lot is not to be Abram's heir, nor, evidently, the one through whom Abram will become a great and famous nation. The barrenness of Canaan and Sarai seem, for the moment, to put the divine promise in grave jeopardy.

Notes to Chapter Five

1

Resumptive repetition is a literary technique used to resume
a particular story-line after a break. The resumption is marked by a
repetition of the material at which the story originally broke off.
S. Talmon has examined the device as a means of splicing together
synchronous events. "By_ cutting the thread of a ·story at a
convenient, or even not quite so convenient, juncture, then
interweaving other matter of a different narrative character, and
again resuming the first account by means of repeating the verse,
phrase, or even the word, at which the cut-off had occurred, the
author safeguards the linear continuity of the narration, and at the
same time permits the listener or the reader to become aware of the
synchroneity of the events related" (1978:17).

2

As noted in chapter three (see above, pp. 67), while Shechem
and Hebron are not the same place, the chiasmus is maintained by the
word play between the expressions ᵓēlôn mōreh and ᵓēlonê mamrēᵓ.
Changing the basis of the chiasmus from geographical notation to
assonance, moreover, shifts its focus from the actual places to the
literary dimensions of the journey.

3

Differences of opinion exist over the main thrust of the
story. According to Gunkel (1910:173), the episode praises the
patriarch's cunning in his ability to acquire much wealth from
Pharaoh. Coats (1983:112) feels the episode is an aetiology which
explains Israel's relationship to Egypt. Most agree that the episode
makes an ethical statement, although there is no agreement on the
precise point. Those who feel Abram is culpable focus either on his
lie (e.g. H. Holzinger 1898:139, J. Skinner 1930:248-249) or his
apparent lack of faith in Yahweh to protect him (U. Cassuto
1964:I:351, W. Brueggemann 1982a:125-126). For E. A. Speiser (1961:91-
94) the principal fault lies with Pharaoh for taking another man's
wife. Referring to the Hurrian custom of granting a woman the dual
status of wife and sister, Speiser absolves Abram of the charge of
lying.

4

This reading is reflected in the title most critics assign
the episode. R. Polzin (1975), for example, calls it "The Ancestress
of Israel in Danger." C. A. Keller (1954) refers to it as "Die
Gefährdung der Ahnfrau," while Coats (1983:109) calls it a "Tale of a
Threat to the Ancestress."

5

Westermann defines the arch of tension as follows: "A
narrative gives literary form to a series of events in which tension
is resolved. . . . to find the totality of, a narrative, one must look
first for this arch that binds a sequence of events together,

resolving some tension" (1980:29).
        6

        Some (e.g. Gunkel 1910:168, Petersen 1973:34) include 13:1 in the conclusion to the Egyptian sojourn. However, as discussed above, this marks the beginning of a subsequent stage in Abram's journey.
        7

        As the above citation indicates, the distinction Pratt posits implies that Abram received his wealth from the active intervention of Yahweh just as it was the deity that sent the plague against Pharaoh. The text, however, makes no such claim. It states only that "he [Abram] got (way^ehî-lô) sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and she-asses, and camels." The verse remains frustratingly quiet about the wealth's source, if that source is to be interpreted as someone who actively gave it to Abram. (Most interpret the giver as Pharaoh.) In an attractive interpretation, Petersen suggests that the verse is silent on this matter because it means to make a statement about the nature of Egypt: "Acquiring wealth is part and parcel of being in Egypt" (1973:36). Mentioning the one who gave Abram the wealth, if indeed Abram did not just acquire it because of the land's fertility, would only detract from this purpose.
        8

        It is Gunkel (1910:173) who stresses the fact that the episode never notes that the famine had come to an end.
        9

        One of the first difficulties the recent studies of Vogels and Coats comment upon is the limits of this episode. Both agree that the episode encompasses all of Gen 13, although they locate the main body in 13:2-17. 13:1 and 18 are itineraries which frame the episode. Nonetheless they see them as extrinsic to the episode. Of v. 18 Coats states, "the relationship is superficial and does not contribute substantially to the unity of the text. This itinerary notes simply departure and arrival without fundamental connection with the substance of the unit. The disunity is apparent even though the arrival site is marked as the oaks of Mamre and opens the unit to 18:1. Even the reference to an altar built at Mamre does not contribute to narrative tradition and thus remains somewhat on the periphery of the unit. The itinerary framework thus contiues in form and tradition the pattern established by 12:6-9" (1983:116).

        Coats's understanding of the position of 13:1 and 13:18 stems from his prior conviction that the episodes in Gen 12-13 are independent of one another. However, as described above, once it is realised that the itineraries that span all of Gen 12:5-13:18 form a record of a single continuous account of a journey that contains seven stages, it becomes clear that they are not extrinsic notations artificially added to the text. Furthermore, once the text is delineated according to the stages of the journey, the account of the separation of Lot and Abram does not contain vv. 1-2 and 18, but is resticted to vv. 3-17. Vv. 1-2 describe his passage from Egypt to the Negeb, while v. 18 describes his move to Mamre. Vv. 3-17 describe those events that transpire during his second stay at the mountain

between Ai and Bethel.

10

As many have noted, the mention of Abram's and Lot's wealth in vv. 2 and 5 also binds the first two stages of Abram's return to Canaan to the Egyptian sojourn.

11

Similarly Coats, who states that the episode "depicts family strife leading to separation of family members" (1983:117).

12

According to B. Jacob (1974:364), ɔaḥărɛ̆ should be interpreted causally.

13

Those who argue that vv. 14-17 are an addition have not failed to notice these links. However, convinced that these verses are not an integral part of the episode, they assign them to a redactor. J. A. Emerton, for example, writes, "This argument overlooks the possibility that v. 14 was written by a redactor who had v. 10 in front of him and was influenced by its wording . . ." (1982:20, so Westermann 1980:123). This decision, however, stems from the form-critical categories described above, and fails to examine the possibility that the discontinuity is part of the narrative strategy.

14

Ironically, Abram's plan does not achieve its desired effect. On the contrary, it leads Abram into a war (Gen 14).

15

As it turns out it will include the Jordan. But Abram will look to the Jordan only after Lot has left it and only after Yahweh destroys it and thereby robs it of its fertility. When Abram looks at the Jordan valley it is even more barren than the rest of Canaan.

16

Looming in the background is Noah's cursing of his grandson, Canaan (9:25). Even though Noah curses a man and not a land, Abram chooses a land already associated with a curse.

CHAPTER SIX

COVENANT I: DEFINING THE LAND

This segment of the story is composed of two main episodes (Gen 14 and 15), each of which is itself composed of more than one scene. Gen 14 recounts an invasion of the Trans-Jordan by a coalition of four eastern kings, and the subsequent encounter between Abram and the kings of Salem and Sodom. Gen 15, on the other hand, recounts a series of events that lead up to a covenant ceremony in which Yahweh takes an oath to give Abram and his descendants the land of Canaan.

Most scholars see little connection between these two chapters, and even less between them and their wider literary context. Of chap. 14, for example, G. von Rad states: "It is substantially, generically, and literarily completely isolated and was apparently first incorporated into its present context by a redactor" (1972:175). In his recent form-critical analysis of the book of Genesis, G. W. Coats makes similar remarks about chap. 15: "Genesis 15 is distinct from the narrative context that surrounds it. The chapter . . . does not represent the continuation of the narrative in Genesis 14, not even the narratives in Genesis 12-13. The governing structure in this unit is quite distinct" (1983:123).

Links between chaps. 14 and 15, however, are not as sparse as these remarks suggest. Gen 15:1 opens with the temporal connector, "After these things . . .," indicating that the text understands the

events of Gen 15 to be subsequent to and not independent from some prior event(s). According to the story-line of the received text the most immediate and natural antecedent is the events in chap. 14 (so A. Dillmann 1897:II:56, cf. A. Caquot 1962:64). While the majority of critics recognise the linking function of this phrase, they argue either that it is a later addition to the text (Westermann 1981:257), or that it does not refer to Gen 14 (O. Procksch 1913:102, J. Skinner 1930:278). Neither suggestion is conclusive. There is nothing in the episode itself that demands that 15:1a be excised, as indicated by those who maintain it but claim that it refers to some other event. The argument that it does not refer to Gen 14 is based on the prior conclusion that one or both of these chapters does not belong in its present context, which is precisely the issue in question.

Surprisingly, it is Coats who, immediately after stating that Gen 15 is not connected to chap. 14, lists several "key terms" which connect the two chapters. These include rkš (Gen 14:11, 12, 16, 21; 15:14), the verb *yṣ² (14:17, 18; 15:4, 5, 7, 14), and the rare root mgn (14:20; 15:10). According to M. Kessler (1964) and N. Sarna (1966:121-122), the use of this last term is especially important not only because it is rare, but because both instances refer to Yahweh in his capacity to protect Abram. Lending exegetical force to his formal observations, Coats even suggests that "the vague 'reward' of v. 1 refers to the spoil of 14:20-24" (1983:123; so Caquot 1962:64, N. Sarna 1966:121-122). It is peculiar that Coats can maintain that the chapters are unlinked and at the same time describe

a number of connections, some of which have important exegetical implications. In addition to those listed by Coats, N. Sarna notes that both chapters mention Damascus, the Amorites, and a covenant. While these links are of a formal nature, and prove little of themselves, they point to a more fundamental link between these two chapters.

There are also a number of connections between chap. 14 and the events preceding it. The most obvious of these is the fact that this episode assumes that Abram and Lot have already been introduced. The mention of "Abram the Hebrew" in 14:13 is not an independent introduction, as some have thought (H. Gunkel 1910:283, Skinner 1930:265, W. Zimmerli 1976:39-40, Westermann 1981:235) but, as C. F. Keil (1878:205) long ago suggested, a way of distinguishing him from his covenant partner, "Mamre the Amorite" (so B. Jacob 1974:374). The fact that 14:12 mentions Abram without any further identification favours the argument that v. 13 is not meant to be an introduction to the character.

Coats also notes a number of connections between chaps. 13 and 14. Not only does chap. 14 presuppose the separation of Abram and Lot, it also locates them in the places to which they moved upon their separation. At the time of the invasion Lot is living in Sodom, one of the cities in the kikkār, and Abram is still at the oaks of Mamre (13:18; 14:13). That 14:13 identifies Mamre as a person does not invalidate this link. It need only suggest that the oaks were known by the name of the owner. Noting the irony of Lot's fate when viewed

in the context of his decision to move to the kikkār, Coats sees chap. 14 as the "counterpart" of chap. 13. "In ch. 13, Lot separated from Abram in order to lay claim to the good land in the Jordan Valley. Lot is now separated from his land as a prisoner of war and must depend on Abram's heroic intervention to restore him to his rightful place" (1983:119). These remarks suggest that these two chapters are not as isolated from their contexts as is sometimes claimed. What is needed to complement these details is an understanding of the role of the two chapters in their present context. Since they do record two different episodes, this chapter will first analyse the structure of each separately, and then comment on the links between them and on the way in which they advance the story together.

Gen 14

This episode advances through three main scenes. The first (vv. 1-12) records the invasion of five cities in the Jordan river basin or kikkār by a coalition of four eastern monarchs. The second scene (vv. 13-16) describes Abram's successful campaign against the invaders, and the third (vv. 17-24) reports an encounter in which Abram and the kings of Sodom and Salem celebrate the victory and discuss the division of the spoils.

There is some question concerning the unity of this episode. While the encounter between Abram and the king of Sodom logically follows his victory over the invaders, many scholars argue that the encounter between Abram and Melchizedek interrupts that meeting and that vv. 21-24 should follow immediately upon v. 17. Vv. 18-20,

according to the present consensus, are a later addition to the text
and should therefore be removed (in addition to the commentaries see
J. R. Kirkland 1977, J. G. Gammie 1971, W. Zimmerli 1967, R. H. Smith
1965, J. A. Emerton 1971b:407-426).[1]

Westermann (1981:227) sees a similar problem in the opening
scene. According to 14:1-5a the reason the eastern kings set out on
their invasion is to quell a revolt by the five cities of the Jordan
river basin. Yet it is only in vv. 8ff. that the battle between these
two groups is described. Vv. 5b-7, on the other hand, describe the
destruction of a number of peoples to the east and south of the
Jordan. Since they are not the targets listed in v. 3, and since the
route is strangely circuitous in view of the invaders' goal,
Westermann concludes that vv. 5b-7 are an intrusion and removes them
from their present context.

Westermann (1981:223) also questions the relationship between
the account of the invasion of the eastern coalition and the
subsequent material. According to him vv. 1-11 belong to a genre he
calls "Feldzugsbericht," while vv. 12ff. is an example of a
"spätjüdische Legende."[2] Again applying his form-critical criterion
that a unified narrative would not contain a mixture of genres, he
maintains that vv. 1-11 must be separated from what follows.

The arguments for the division of the episode into discrete
units, however, are not conclusive. An argument against the removal of
vv. 5b-7 is the fact that they name no attacker. These verses refer
to the attacking force exclusively with verbs that have third person

plural pronominal suffixes, the antecedent of which can only be the four kings named in v. 5a. The fact that the coalition follows a circuitous route in itself proves little. It is perfectly understandable that the invading kings would use their attack on the Trans-Jordan as an opportunity to subjugate others in the region. As will be elaborated below, moreover, their route of attack functions proleptically with respect to the land Yahweh promises Abram in Gen 15:18-21. Its importance thus lies with its literary role rather than its soundness as military strategy.

Neither are the reasons for the separation of vv. 1-11 from that which follows acceptable. As stated above (pp. 33-37), single narratives often do contain more than one genre. Here there is a specific function in the use of the annalistic style in vv. 1-12. By employing a style usually reserved for the self-aggrandisement of ancient monarchs, the text creates the image that these are great and powerful kings. The purpose of this portrayal is to emphasise their defeat at the hands of Abram and his small force of 318 men. The meaning of that defeat is expressed in the blessing Melchizedek bestows upon Abram and El Elyon, in which he recognises that the defeat of the kings is actually the result of divine, not human powers.

There are also concrete links between the first two scenes. In vv. 11-12 the kings loot Sodom and take Lot captive. According to v. 14 it is precisely on Lot's behalf that Abram gets involved in the battle. V. 12 thus supplies the reason that Abram becomes involved in

the battle. Realising its role, Westermann (1981:234) claims that v.

12 and all other references to Lot were added to the text at a later

time (so J. A. Emerton 1971b:406-407). However, as van Seters

(1975:298) has rightly seen, if the mention of Lot is removed from the

story, there is no longer a motivation for Abram to get involved in

the war. It cannot be the desire for personal profit, since, as van

Seters observes, Abram explicitly rejects any booty in vv. 22ff.

The two scenes, moreover, end in formally identical ways.

After the account of Sodom's defeat at the hands of the eastern kings

vv. 11-12 read: "And they took (*lqḥ) all the possessions (r^ekuš) of

Sodom and Gomorrah, and all all their food, and departed (*hlk). And

they took (*lqḥ) Lot, son of Abram's brother, who dwelt in Sodom, and

his possessions (r^ekušô), and went (*hlk)." Some critics remove v. 12

because it repeats v. 11, or because v. 11 already records the

departure of the kings, rendering the report of their departure in v.

12 superfluous. However, neither criticism carries any weight. V. 12

does not simply repeat v. 11, but narrows the focus to the one person,

Lot. By using the same language the text indicates that the capture

of Lot was part of the more general looting of Sodom. The move to the

narrower focus, as van Seters (1975:298) has recognised, is to

facilitate the transition to the next scene. It is, then, not an

indication of a redactional joint, but of the demands of the story

line.

Balancing these verses is the end of the second scene. After

the rout of the invading kings v. 16 reads: "And he brought back

(*šwb) all the possessions (haŕᵉkuš), and also brought back (*šwb) Lot his brother and his possessions (rᵉkuš), and also the women and the people." The parallelism between this report and that in vv. 11-12 is clear. The double use of *šwb in v. 16 clearly refers to the dual use of *lqh in vv. 11-12. Thus the first two scenes balance each other perfectly. What the invaders did, Abram successfully undoes.

There remains the question of the relationship of vv. 18-20 to the remainder of the episode. Despite the connection that the mention of "El Elyon, Creator of Heaven and Earth" in v. 19 and v. 22 establishes between vv. 18-20 and their present literary context, most modern critics, as noted above, maintain that they are secondary. More than any other reason this conclusion is based on the fact that these verses interupt the encounter between Abram and the king of Sodom (vv. 17, 21-24).

The interruption, however, is not an indication of a spliced narrative, but is part of the literary structure. Based on the order in which the three men in this scene speak, and certain verbal tags, this scene forms a chiasmus which implies a comparison between the way the two indigenous monarchs respond to Abram and his victory over the eastern coalition. The chiasmus can be illustrated as follows:

a   The king of Sodom goes out (*yṣ⊃) to meet Abram

b   Melchizedek, king of Salem, brings out (*yṣ⊃) bread and wine

b⁻ (i) And he [Melchizedek] blessed him and said (*⊃mr) . . .

   (ii) And he [Abram] gave him a tenth (maᶜǎśēr) of all

a⁻ (i) And the king of Sodom said (*⊃mr) . . .

   (ii) Abram refuses to allow the king of Sodom to make him rich (heᶜěśartî). ·

Sections (a) and (b) record the meeting of the two kings with Abram.   In both cases it is the kings who take the initiative to meet the patriarch, and in both cases this initiative is described by the verb *yṣ⊃.   In both, moreover, the monarchs are referred to by their title, "king of . . . ."

Sections (a⁻) and (b⁻) also have a parallel structure, although it is somewhat more complicated.   Each begins with a speech by the kings (i), and each concludes with Abram's response to that speech (ii).   Both speeches not only refer to Abram's role in the battle, but pertain to his well-being.   In the first Melchizedek blesses Abram and then El Elyon for delivering the enemy into Abram's hand.   In the second the king of Sodom offers Abram a deal by which he and Abram would divide the booty between them.   By offering Melchizedek a tenth of all, Abram signals his acceptance of the king's blessing.   In contrast, Abram swears by Yahweh, El Elyon, Creator of Heaven and Earth, that he will not take a thing from the king of Sodom.   The two responses are formally brought into contrast by the word play between maᶜǎśēr and heᶜěśartî.   Both terms refer to the way

,the booty is allocated, and each encapsulates Abram's response to the respective king.

This parallelism serves to contrast the attitudes of the two kings to Abram and his success over the invading kings. The contrast lies in their respective responses to the source of wealth and well-being. Melchizedek recognises the power of El Elyon in the battle: as the Creator, the deity is the source of blessing. In contrast, the king of Sodom makes no mention of the divine. He apparently sees this event only as an opportunity to become wealthy, and he apparently believes that the acquisition of that wealth depends on his own capacity to bargain. In accepting Melchizedek's blessing Abram acknowledges the role of Yahweh. He makes this plain when he scolds the king of Sodom and swears by Yahweh that he will not allow the king to make him rich.

This encounter forms the climax of the episode. The invasion is recounted in order to demonstrate something of the nature of possessions and their acquisition. This is suggested not only by the discussion between Abram and the kings of Salem and Sodom, but also by the importance the text assigns to the taking and recovery of "possessions" (rkš) in the construction of the parallels between vv. 11-12 and 16. The point of the episode is that the goodness of the earth cannot be obtained by man's own powers. The attempt by the four eastern kings to gain Sodom's possessions is futile, as is the king of Sodom's attempt to cajole them from Abram. Rather, as Melchizedek and Abram agree, possessions are received from Yahweh, the Creator, and it

is only he who can bestow a blessing upon man and the world.

The full significance of the links with Gen 13 now emerge.
Lot had chosen the kikkār because it was well watered everywhere, and
looked like both Egypt and the garden of Yahweh. Like the four
invading kings, and like the king of Sodom, Lot was apparently under
the delusion that wealth and well-being were inherent in the earth and
that men could gain these boons by their own resources. However,
rather than offering the fruits of the earth, the kikkār ultimately
offered only destruction and slavery. All three parties who attempted
to exploit the land -- Lot, the four eastern kings, and the king of
Sodom -- were denied the wealth they sought.

Gen 15

This episode records an extended dialogue between Abram and
Yahweh. As most critics recognise, the dialogue falls naturally into
two parts, according to Yahweh's two promises to Abram. In vv. 1-6
the discussion concerns Yahweh's promise that Abram will have progeny,
while the discussion in vv. 7-21 concerns Yahweh's covenant to grant
Abram and his descendants the land of Canaan.

The modern study of the text of this passage focuses on two
related issues. The first concerns the relationship between these two
conversations. For many the fact that each records a different promise
suggests that vv. 1-6 and 7-21 constitute two independent accounts.
Complicating this issue is the question of the integrity of each
conversation. Most critics believe that both conversations have
undergone a certain amount of redactional enlargement, although there

is little agreement on the identity of the additions.

In the first conversation the problem surrounds the issue of repetition. Starting with the premise that the promise of a single son represents a different and earlier tradition than the promise of multiple descendants, O. Kaiser (1958:117) removes v. 5 as a late expansion of v. 4. While maintaining both vv. 4 and 5, Lohfink (1967:39) removes v. 3 as a late explanatory gloss on the difficult v. 2. Clements (1967:19), on the other hand, removes both v. 3 and v. 5, and also v. 6. Perhaps the most rigorous application of the principle that repetition is a sign of textual conflation is R. Kilian (1966:36-73). In addition to certain redactional glosses, he identifies two independent yet parallel accounts not only within vv. 1-6, but throughout the entire chapter. He assigns these parallel stories to the classical sources, J and E (cf. A. Dillmann 1897:II:53ff., S. R. Driver 1909:174, O. Procksch 1913:101ff., 284ff.).

The present work presupposes that repetition is not necessarily a sign of multiple sources. A closer look at vv. 1-6, moreover, reveals that repetition is fundamental to the structure and import of the conversation. In response to Yahweh's intention to reward Abram greatly the patriarch twice expresses his concern over his childless state. Addressing the patriarch's concern Yahweh makes him a dual promise of posterity. The narrator brings this section to an end by twice describing Abram's response to these promises.

None of these instances is a case of pure repetition. In each case the second serves in some way to qualify or advance the first. In

the case of Abram's response to Yahweh's promise of a great reward this shift is marked by a change in the use of the expression *ntn-lî. In the first part of his response Abram uses the expression to question the value of such a reward: mah-titten-lî weʔānōkî hōlēk ᶜărîrî. In the second part of his response he uses it not with reference to the value of the reward, but to describe his state of childlessness: lî lōʔ nātattâ zāraᶜ. This shift stresses the importance Abram assigns to the problem of posterity. For him progeny is more basic than the divine reward, for without offspring the reward would eventually fall into the hands of others (vv. 2b?, 3b).

The discussion of Abram's dual response has focussed on the first half of each (vv. 2a and 3a), with little attention given to vv. 2b and 3b. Although the difficulties of v. 2b are well-known, the occurrence of ûben-mešeq bětî in v. 2b and ben-bětî in v. 3b suggests that these two half verses are also part of the parallelism of vv. 2a and 3a, and of the entire chapter. Although a precise translation of v. 2b is impossible, the use of ben-bětî[4] as a parallel expression supports those who argue that v. 2b refers to Abram's fears that someone other than his own offspring will inherit his household.[5]

Kaiser is certainly right that the promise of numerous descendants is an enlargement upon the promise of a single son. The conclusion that it must therefore be a later addition need not follow. The augmenting of a promise of a son with a promise of numerous descendants, as van Seters points out, is a natural extension. More importantly, in this case the widening of the promise is demanded by

Abram's response to Yahweh's promise of a reward. Abram does not ask Yahweh about a single son, but about descendants (*zrᶜ) and an inheritance (*yrš). Without the expansion in v. 5 Yahweh would not have truly answered Abram's question, only delayed it a generation. By answering the way he does Yahweh addresses both the immediate problem of Abram's childlessness, and the continuity of his family throughout the generations.

In the second half of Abram's response, moreover, the two key terms are seed (*zrᶜ) and inherit (*yrš). Abram uses the first to explain his status -- he has no seed -- and the second to explain the consequences of this status -- someone of his household (ben-bêtî) will be his heir (yôrēš ᵓōtî). In his response Yahweh addresses each of these complaints, but in reverse order. Employing the root *yrš Yahweh assures Abram that the householder will not be his heir (yîrāšᵉkā), but one of his own loins (mimmēᶜeykā) will be his heir (yîrāšekā; v. 4). Then, after reassuring the patriarch of the line of inheritance, Yahweh turns to Abram's first complaint. Again drawing on the language used by Abram, Yahweh promises Abram numerous seed (*zrᶜ), using the stars of heaven as a metaphor for their numbers.

The first conversation ends with the narrator's description of Abram's response to these promises: "And he believed Yahweh, and he credited it to him as righteousness." In a widely accepted study of 15:6, von Rad (1966b) argues that the subject of the second clause is Yahweh, and that Yahweh is accrediting Abram's belief as righteousness (see more recently H. H. Schmid 1980). However, recent articles by L.

Gaston (1980) and M. Oeming (1983) seriously question that position. The evidence they bring to bear on the problem is theological and structural. These two authors argue that the concept of justification by faith is foreign to the Old Testament, and they maintain that the two clauses that make up this verse are an example of _parallelismus membrorum._ From this perspective v. 6 states that Abram believed what Yahweh told him, and that Abram understood the giving of these promises as a manifestation of Yahweh's righteousness. This reading of v. 6 both supports and is supported by the use of parallelism throughout vv. 1-6.

Critics also question the integrity of the second conversation. While a general consensus does not exist, many critics remove vv. 13-16 as a late gloss. N. Lohfink (1967:39-40) cites two reasons for their removal: (1) they interrupt the ritual described in vv. 9-12, 17ff. and (2) they presuppose the promise of the land in vv. 18-21. (O. Kaiser 1958:118, R. Clements 1967:20-21, H. Seebass 1963:136, 138ff., C. Westermann 1981:265, 268-269, G. W. Coats 1983:125).

Neither of these reasons is compelling. The promise of land does not appear only in vv. 18-21. It also occurs in v. 7, is assumed in v. 8, and is anticipated in v. 1. Vv. 18-21 go beyond v. 7 in that they define precisely the extent of the land Yahweh intends to give Abram's descendants. The promise in vv. 13-16, however, does not betray a knowledge of the full extent of the land, only of the fact that Yahweh makes such a promise. Even if it did anticipate the full

description of the land Lohfink's argument would not gain in strength. Anticipation is a common means of increasing the drama of a narrative situation.

The allusion to the promise of land in vv. 13-16 is required by the structure of the dialogue. As highlighted by the use of the verb *yd^c, these verses record Yahweh's response to Abram's request for certainty regarding that promise. After Yahweh announces his intentions to give him this land as an inheritance, Abram asks him: "How can I know (*yd^c) that I will inherit it?" Then, after Abram complies with an initial request to gather a certain collection of animals (vv. 9-11), and enters what appears to be some sort of trance (v. 12), Yahweh responds to Abram with a speech that begins "Know for sure (yādō^{c}a tēda^c) . . . ." In this speech Yahweh informs Abram that his descendants will be slaves in a foreign land, but will eventually return to this land. Furthermore, in anticipation of two questions that would naturally arise from such a course of events, Yahweh explains the reason for the delay in occupation (v. 16b), and informs Abram that he will be long and peacefully dead before these events transpire (v. 15). Yahweh thus answers Abram's request for certainty with regard to his inheritance of the land by describing the circumstances by which Abram's descendants will come to occupy the land. What could be more reassuring than a glimpse of the future?

Lohfink's other objection to vv. 13-16 is no more convincing. Both the divine speech in vv. 13-16 and the passing of the smoking furnace and flaming torch between the divided animals in vv. 17bff.

begin with temporal indicators that link these to the same ceremony in proper sequence.   V. 12 introduces the divine speech with the clause, "And it came to pass as the sun was going down," while v. 17a opens with, "And it came to pass when the sun had gone down." If vv. 13-16 are removed from the text the one indicator of time will follow directly upon the other, rendering one or the other redundant. Realising this problem and the introductory role v. 12 has for the speech that follows, Westermann also removes it from the narrative. However, there is nothing in the text to warrant such surgery, and Westermann's view has persuaded few.

Both positions fail to recognise the structural role these two time indicators play in advancing the conversation Yahweh has with Abram.   As v. 18 suggests, the goal of the ceremony is the covenant Yahweh makes with Abram to give him the land described in vv. 18-21. When Yahweh announces that he brought Abram to this land to give it to him (v. 7), however, Abram interrupts with a request for certainty of knowledge (v. 8). Appropriately, before the flaming torch and smoking pot bring the covenant ceremony to a close by passing through the divided pieces of animals, Yahweh addresses Abram's request for certainty with a glimpse of the future. Only after this excursus does Yahweh complete the covenant and define the precise extent of the land he will give Abram and his descendants.

Some critics also remove vv. 18-21 from the text. Clements (1967:21), for example, excises them because the names of the peoples in them reflects the boundaries of the Davidic empire. Such reasoning,

however, must be rejected. As van Seters (1975:259-260) rightly points out, it is based on a preconceived notion of the history of the text, not on its literary qualities. In its literary presentation there is no reason to omit these verses from the text. Indeed, the names in this list play an important literary role in defining the relationship of Gen 15 to Gen 14 (see pp. 190-191). They also help to relate the covenant of land to its wider literary context.

The issue that has dominated the recent study of Gen 15 is the relationship between vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-21. Are these passages two parts of an extended dialogue between Abram and Yahweh, or are they independent units of tradition? In early studies the discussion centred on the chapter's consistency. Those who supported the position that vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-21 represent two independent units of tradition pointed to certain incongruences between the two parts. G. von Rad, for example, writes, "There are too many contradictions in the chapter for one to think of it as an organic narrative unit (v. 5, night, v. 12, evening, v. 6, Abraham's faith, v. 8 his doubt which God helps to dispel with a real guarantee, etc.)" (1972:182; so M. Anbar 1982, R. E. Clements 1967:17, J. Skinner 1930:276, C. A. Simpson 1952b:598-599, S. R. Driver 1909:174, 176). Those who hold that the chapter is a unity point to certain key terms that appear in both conversations. Those most often cited are *yrš, "to inherit," vv. 3, 4, 7, and 8; and *zrʿ, "seed," vv. 3, 5, 13, and 18 (Snijders 1958:267-269, Lohfink 1967:45-46, van Seters 1975:261, Rendtorff 1980:75-77).

With Lohfink's study structure becomes the most important element in the discussion. Lohfink (1967:45-50), followed by van Seters (1975:260-261), argues that the common structure of the two conversations indicates that vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-21 are two parts of a single dialogue. Both open with a divine self-introduction in which Yahweh promises Abram favour (vv. 1, 7). On both occasions Abram uses the vocative, ꜣădōnāy yhwh, to express certain concerns about Yahweh's promised favour (vv. 4-5, 8). To both concerns Yahweh replies with the reassurances appropriate to the question (vv. 4-5, 9-21). According to Lohfink and van Seters, v. 6 constitutes a transition from the first to the second half of the dialogue (cf. Coats 1983:122-124).

While agreeing that vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-21 have similar structures, Westermann (1981:255-256) questions the conclusion that these parallels demonstrate the unity of the chapter. For Westermann the fact that each conversation has an introduction, a middle that raises a complication, and an ending that resolves the complication suggests that vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-21 are separate dialogues that some redactor juxtaposed at a time subsequent to their composition. According to Westermann, v. 6 is not a transition from one part of a dialogue to another, but an ending. By recording Abram's acceptance of Yahweh's reassurance that he will have offspring this verse resolves the complication introduced by Abram's question in vv. 2-3, and thereby brings the conversation to a successful conclusion. The appearance of another self-introductory formula in v. 7 suggests that

it is the beginning of a new conversation. According to Westermann, if v. 7 were a continuation of vv. 1-6 there would be no need for a second introductory formula.

There are several difficulties with Westermann's position. The first is a point of grammar. As van Seters (1975:257) points out, both the subject and direct object of v. 7 are in the form of personal pronouns, the antecedents of which are in vv. 1-6. Realising this fact a number of critics (e.g. H. Gunkel 1910:180, O. Kaiser 1958:118-119, H. Seebass 1963:133, 142-143) remove v. 7 as a transitional clause added at the time vv. 9ff. were joined to vv. 1-6. As others have pointed out (e.g. van Seters 1975:257, Hoftijzer 1956:21-23, Lohfink 1967:37), however, v. 8 presumes v. 7, and in turn leads to the ceremony in vv. 9ff. As an alternative Westermann (1981:255, 265) suggests that v. 7 originally contained the appropriate proper names, which some redactor subsequently removed in favour of the pronouns. As with Gunkel's suggestion, however, there is no evidence to support this alteration.

The appearance of the self-introductory formula in v. 7 does not vitiate this reasoning. As Hoftijzer (1956:21-23) points out it is not uncommon for this formula to occur in the middle of an episode. It does not function to introduce a character for the first time, but to express a particular aspect or quality of that character. In v. 7 Yahweh stresses his role as the one who gives land, and by implication its fruits. It also implies that Yahweh has been with Abram from Ur and, presumably, will remain with him and his descendants (Lohfink

1967:38).

In his evaluation of Lohfink's analysis of the chapter's structure, Westermann overlooks the important structural role of the repeated vocative, ꜣădōnāy yhwh (vv. 2, 8). This expression is not incidental to the dialogue. As Rendtorff (1980:75) has stated, the questions with which Abram responds to Yahweh's favour supply the means by which the dialogue advances, and determine the direction the conversation takes. On both occasions Abram begins his enquiry with the above-mentioned vocative. This expression thus forms the structural basis upon which the dialogue advances. It indicates that the conversation is composed of two main parts, and that they are part of a single dialogue. Thus, if v. 6 marks an end and v. 7 a beginning, as most agree, they do not mark the end and beginning of self-contained narratives, but of sections within a larger literary unit.

As mentioned above, those who are of the opinion that Gen 15 is a unity usually point out that the root yrš appears in both parts of the conversation. More than just a formal device, the importance of this root lies in the fact that it describes both promises (esp. Snijders 1958:265-269; Rendtorff 1980:75-77). In response to Yahweh's promise to give Abram a great reward, the patriarch complains to Yahweh that because he has no seed someone else will inherit (*yrš) him. Yahweh responds that this man will not inherit (*yrš) Abram, and promises the patriarch that someone of his own loins will inherit (*yrš) him. In v. 7 Yahweh identifies that inheritance as the land:

"I am Yahweh who brought you from Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to inherit it (l^{e}ri$\check{s}$t$\bar{a}$h)." In response Abram asks, ". . . . how can I know that I will inherit it ($\supset$ira$\check{s}$enn$\hat{a}$)?" The remainder of the chapter is devoted to Yahweh's answer. Thus, contrary to Westermann, the promises of posterity and land do not constitute independent issues, but are aspects of the theme of Abram's inheritance. This naturally has two dimension: who will inherit and what will be inherited.

The logic of the discussion indicates that the two aspects of the inheritance are not on an equal footing. As Lohfink (1967:47-48) has noticed, the issue of posterity arises as an aside, and is subordinate to the promise of land. When Yahweh first addresses Abram he informs the patriarch that he will be his shield and that he will acquire a great reward. Abram does not doubt Yahweh's intentions, as so many have interpreted v. 2, but asks about the value of such a reward if he has no descendants to inherit it from him (C. F. Keil 1878:211). Yahweh then addresses this concern and reassures Abram that he will not only be the father of an heir, but that he will have numerous descendants. Only after Abram is satisfied with the response about an heir (v. 6) does Yahweh return to the issue of the reward, and explain that he brought Abram from Ur in order to give him "this land" (v. 7). Again Abram interrupts Yahweh, but this time for certainty concerning his possession of the land. After a mysterious ceremony which successfully convinces Abram that his descendants will eventually take possession of the land, Yahweh finally describes the

full extent of the land Abram's descendants will occupy.

Based on this reading Lohfink argues that the reward Yahweh promises Abram in 15:2 is in fact the land. However, while the text will eventually make this identification, it is only after vv. 7, 18-21 that the reader, and probably Abram also, can make the connection between these two things. Initially the promise of a reward acquires its meaning from the military campaign in Gen 14. Having just refused the booty offered to him by the king of Sodom (14:22-24), Yahweh would appear to be offering Abram a replacement. Abram, however, is already wealthy (12:5, 16b; 13:2). For him a more important issue is his lack of descendants, and so this is the question he puts to Yahweh. Only after Yahweh reassures Abram about this question does Yahweh indicate that he has a reward of a different nature in mind. It is not more wealth that Yahweh offers Abram, but a land for those descendants Abram was so concerned about.[8]

This shift from a reward to the issue of descendants, and then to the land, is marked by the use of the expression, *ntn l-. Its first appearance is in v. 2 where Abram uses it in his response to Yahweh's promise to reward him greatly: "What can you give me (titten-lî) since I go childless." By wording the question in such a way Abram indicates that for him offspring is the more fundamental problem. Yet while the issue of childlessness is present in v. 2, the reward Yahweh promises in v. 1 cannot refer to offspring (contra von Rad 1972:183); for Abram childlessness seems to vitiate any reward Yahweh would give him.

In v. 3 Abram again employs the expression, but on this occasion it does refer to his state of childlessness: "you have given me no seed ($l\bar{1}$ $l\bar{o}^{\jmath}$ $n\bar{a}tatt\hat{a}$)," he complains to the deity. Here the issue of the reward has disappeared altogether. By developing his response in this way Abram successfully moves the subject of the conversation from the reward to his lack of posterity. In so doing he forces Yahweh to address the issue of childlessness before continuing with his own agenda.

The expression appears next in v. 7, but in the mouth of Yahweh rather than Abram. Yahweh takes over the expression to inform Abram that he brought him from Ur to give him ($l\bar{a}tet$ $l^e k\bar{a}$) this land. Thus, the same expression that Abram uses to move the dialogue from the issue of a reward to that of his posterity, Yahweh uses to move the conversation back to the matter of the reward he will grant Abram, which he now identifies as the land. Abram is not the only character capable of using language to control the direction of the conversation. To answer Abram's question, "What can you give me" (v. 2), Yahweh answers, "I . . . will give you this land" (v. 7). In v. 18 Yahweh returns to the verb *ntn to encompass both the descendants and the land he has promised Abram: ". . . . to your seed I give (*ntn) this land."

While there is an internal logic to the dialogue in Gen 15, then, it cannot be an independent episode. Abram's question concerning his posterity assumes that the reader knows of his childless state, and that Yahweh had previously addresssed the issue. Without such

knowledge the interruption in vv. 2-3 would be unmotivated. This information, moreover, is not found in Gen 15, but in the episodes that precede it (11:30; 12:1-4; 13:14-17; cf. E. A. Speiser 1964:115, H. Gross 1977:30-31). 11:30 states that he has no children and his wife is barren. In 12:1-4 Yahweh commands Abram to leave his home and family in order that he might bless him with numerous descendants. In this context the interruption makes perfect sense: Abram had arrived in the new land (12:7; 13:15-17) but had yet to acquire any offspring. Thus when Yahweh appears to him in 15:1 to offer him a reward (which he will later identify as the land), Abram understandably asks about the children he was supposed to have.

This reading lends a new dimension to Abram's complaint to be "going childless" (hôlēk ʿărîrî; 15:2). Refering to Ps 39:14, scholars often assign the meaning of "dying" to this use of *hlk (e.g. Skinner 1930:279; Westermann 1981:260; Driver 1909:175). According to this rendering in Gen 15:2 Abram is concerned that he will die childless. While this interpretation is attractive, the expression should also be read in the light of Yahweh's earlier promises, where the promise of posterity is linked to the verb *hlk. According to 12:1-3 Abram is to receive posterity contingent upon his move to a new land, which Yahweh commands with an imperative of *hlk. In 13:14-17 Yahweh again promises Abram offspring, and again uses an imperative of *hlk to command Abram to walk through the length and breadth of the land Yahweh will give him. In this context Abram's complaint is particularly poignant. By using *hlk to describe his lack of children Abram claims to have

fulfilled his part of the arrangement -- he went (cf. 12:4) -- while at the same time accuses Yahweh of failing to fulfill his promise -- he remains childless.

As argued in chapter three, Gen 14 and 15 function together to define the land Abram and his descendants will possess. They thereby clarify one of the uncertainties inherent in the initial formulation of the promise (12:2-3), which was dramatised by Abram's migrations through the lands of Canaan and Egypt (12:5-13:18). This function is most explicit in 15;18-21 where Yahweh identifies the land he covenants to give Abram's descendants as that "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite, and the Kenizzite, and the Kadmonite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Rephaim, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Girgashite, and the Jebusite."

The contribution Gen 14 makes to the land's identity emerges from a comparison between this description and the route the four eastern monarchs follow when they invade the five cities of the Salt Sea. Prior to their attack on these cities they "smote the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveth-kiriathim, and the Horites in their mount Seir, unto El-paran, which is by the wilderness; then they turned back and came to En-mishpat -- that is Kadesh -- and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites that dwelt in Hazazon-tamar" (14:5-7). In other words, they attack from north to south straight down the eastern side of the Jordan river, and then make a looping move across the bottom of

the Negeb from its southeastern to its southwestern corners. Although the identities of all the peoples listed in Gen 15:18-21 are not certain, it is clear enough that the route followed by the eastern kings circumscribes the territory there promised to Abram. The argument is clinched by 14:15 which notes that Abram pursued the kings "as far as Hobah, which lies to the north of Damascus." The path of their attack on and retreat from the region thus describes the eastern, southern, and northern borders of the land Yahweh covenants to give Abram and his descendants. The western boundary is, of course, formed by the sea.

Thus together Gen 14 and 15 define the promised land positively by what it includes, and negatively by what it does not. The significance of the negative definition lies in the origin of the four kings. They, like Abram, come from the east. One, Amraphel, even comes from Shinar, the land in which Ur (Gen 10:10; Dan 1:1-2), Abram's original homeland (Gen 11:28; 15:7), is found. The land Yahweh promises Abram is thus the area not controlled by the rulers of the place from which he came, which is precisely the import of Yahweh's stated purpose in Gen 15:7: "I am Yahweh who brought you from Ur of the Chaldees to give to you this land." By defining the land in such a way the text stresses the separation between the old way of Abram's past and the new way of his future, a distinction inaugurated by Yahweh in 12:1-3. Here the deity commands Abram to leave his homeland for a new land in order that he might bless him with posterity. The blessing, it would appear, can take effect only

outside Abram's homeland. If the eastern kings were to conquer

Canaan, however, it would no longer be a land separate from Ur, and

the blessing would presumably be in jeopardy. Abram's success against

the four kings, which Melchizedek credits to divine activity (14:20),

illustrates in a dramatic way what Yahweh covenants to do in 15:1, 7-

21, _viz_., preserve the distinctions instituted in 12:1.

The theme of a divinely preserved separation sheds light on

several features of the text. · As noted above, a number of scholars

have . suggested that the use of *mgn in 14:20 and 15:1 indicates that

the two episodes are in some way linked to one another. Few, however,

have drawn any exegetical conclusions from the occurrences. Both

describe Yahweh's resolve to protect Abram.   In \14:20 Melchizedek

praises El Elyon for delivering (*mgn) Abram's enemies into his hands,

which, the context indicates, refers to his victory over the four

eastern kings. In 15:1 Yahweh proclaims himself Abram's shield (*mgn)

and promises that his reward will be exceedingly great. The shield, as

many scholars have stressed, is an instrument of protection. The

reward, as Yahweh will reveal in 15:7ff., is specifically the land of

Canaan.   Thus on both occasions the root is used to describe the

divine activity of guaranteeing the land that will become the

possession of Abram's descendants.

This theme also sheds some light on .15:2b.   Although the text

is notoriously difficult, many have recognised that ben-mešeq is a pun

on the name dammešeq.   If ben-mešeq means something like "the

inheritor of my house," as v. 3b suggests, then Abram fears that

without a son his house will fall to _dammeśeq_. The significance of this fear, as R. Sacks has suggested, lies in 14:15. Damascus is the place to which Abram chases the invading kings. Damascus thus represents the front line between the new way Abram is to establish in Canaan, and the old way from which he has departed. If Damascus were to overrun Canaan, the blessing would also be overrun, and Yahweh's plan defeated.

In addition to defining the land, these two chapters illustrate the conditions by which Abram and his descendants can possess it, and the benefits land has to offer. The four kings attack the Jordanian cities in order to secure its possessions (vv. 11-12), which is apparently the same reason Lot originally went there (13:10). Neither group is successful. Lot is taken captive by the kings, while the kings in turn fall to Abram. The significance of Abram's success, however, lies in his realisation that it comes from Yahweh, El Elyon, Creator of Heaven and Earth. Abram demonstrates his understanding of the source of wealth by refusing the king of Sodom's offer of riches, and swearing an oath to Yahweh, El Elyon, Creator of Heaven and Earth. The significance of this epithet lies in its recognition that it is Yahweh, and not men, be they eastern kings or local kings, who has the power to grant a blessing.

This last point raises the question of the place of these two chapters in the wider narrative. As described in the last chapter, Abram's journey (12:5-13:18) through the lands of Canaan and Egypt contains a paradox. While Yahweh had promised to bless Abram if he

would go to his designated land, Abram's journey serves to restrict him to Canaan. Pharaoh had expelled him from Egypt and he was prohibited from occupying the Jordan valley by an agreement with Lot. The paradox lies in the fact that Canaan is described as a land of famine and unable to support much wealth, while both Egypt and the Jordan valley are compared with the garden of Yahweh. Thus; when Yahweh actually identifies Canaan as the land that he will give Abram, and guarantees the gift through a covenant, it might appear that Yahweh has duped Abram.

It is at this point that Gen 14 plays an important role in clarifying the issue. The point of this chapter is to demonstrate that those places that appear blessed may not actually be blessed. Lot had chosen the Jordan valley because it appeared well watered everywhere. Yet, as it turns out, the valley is prone to invasion. Rather than offering Lot success, Lot loses all his possessions and ends up in slavery. The place that appears so promising from the mountain between Ai and Bethel turns out to be misleading. The force of this point, however, lies in its converse: those places that do not appear blessed might, by the power of Yahweh, become blessed. It is in his discussion with the kings of Salem and Sodom that Abram realises that Yahweh is the source of true blessing. He demonstrates this understanding when he swears by Yahweh, El Elyon, Creator of Heaven and Earth that he will not accept the booty offered by the king of Sodom. If Yahweh is truly the Creator of Heaven and Earth, it is he who makes lands barren or fertile. The wealth offered by the king

of Sodom, as the invasion of the valley illustrates, is fleeting.

Notes to Chapter Six

1

Reversing the view held by most, M. C. Astour (1966:67-68) suggests that vv. 18-20 are the original ending to the story and that vv. 17, 21-13 are the addition.

2

In this Westermann follows Gunkel 1910:289, cf. J. van Seters 1975:304-305.

3

This verse is notoriously clumsy, making an English translation difficult. The one presented here is a modification of the Soncino translation, edited by J. H. Hertz.

4

The expression ben-bêtî is rare and has caused some controversy. Most place it in the same semantic field as yᵉlîd bayit (Gen 14:14, 17:27), and ᵓansê bayit (17:27), and interpret it as a non-blood member of the household (e.g. A. Dillman 1897:II:58, J. Skinner 1930:279, J. Alexandre 1972:6). The only other place it occurs in the Old Testament is Eccl. 2:7 where it is used in conjunction with ᶜăbādîm and šᵉpahôt.

5

F. Pomponio (1983) claims that a new text discovered at Ebla offers linguistic support to the traditional reading. In one of the bilingual texts that archaeologists discovered at Ebla, Pomponio observes that the eblaite igi-he-du , which, he argues, means a "future gift" or "inheritance," is rendered by the Sumerian word, mu-sa-qù-um. Pomponio then suggests that mešeq is the Hebrew equivalent of this word -- both stemming from the root mšq -- and that ben-mešeq refers to the one to receive the future gift, or the inheritor.

6

These criteria, however, were never sufficiently convincing to establish a consensus. Many critics felt that they could not support the weight put upon them, and that some were simply incorrect. Even S. R. Driver, who accepts the atomistic interpretation of these features, cautions, "the criteria are (in part) indecisive, so that no generally-accepted analysis has been effected . . ." (1909:174).

One of the earliest to reevaluate systematically this evidence was J. Hoftijzer (1956:17:ff.). According to him v. 8 is not an expression of doubt, but, as F. Delitzsch (1888:II:8) noted long ago, a request for certainty (so Lohfink 1967:38-39). It can be added that since vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-21 record different promises, as so many stress, there is no reason to expect that Abram should react to both in the same way.

According to Hoftijzer critics have placed too much weight on the difference between v. 5 and the temporal indicators of vv. 12 and 17. V. 5 does not explicitly state the time at which Yahweh took Abram outdoors to see the stars. All it implies is that the stars were visible, which they can be in the evening. As Hoftijzer points

out, moreover, the temporal indicators have a specific narrative function. V. 5 is a metaphor designed to stress the number of Abram's descendants, while vv. 12 and 17 function to structure the ceremony by which Yahweh covenants to give Abram land. It can be added that, the text is not a meteorological report, but an encounter between Abram and the divine, the peculiar psychology of which is stressed by v. 1, where Yahweh appears to Abram in a mahăzeh, and by v. 12, where Abram falls into some trance described as tardēmā and as ʾēmā hăšēkā gᵉdōlā. Given such conditions there is no reason to expect the text to correspond to one's normal experience of the passing of the day. In the words of N. Wagner, ". . . the detection of apparent inconsistency in the night/dusk scenes (vss. 5, 12, 17) is simply an example of hypercriticism. . If there is a discrepancy in the time-setting of the two incidents, it is due to the requirements of the promises. Mention of seed as numerous as the stars requires that the stars be visible. It is doubtful if the writer was conscious of this discrepancy" (1965:99).

7

Similarly through the use of mgn 15:1 links Yahweh's character explicitly to 14:20. Yahweh is not introducing himself for the first time, but identifying himself as the one who protected Abram from the eastern kings, and the one who will supply Abram with a reward in lieu of the goods he refused from the king of Sodom.

8

Indeed, Abram may have even feared gaining more wealth. It was his wealth that led to the quarrelling between his and Lot's herdsmen (13:6-7), and their eventual separation. It is this separation, moreover, that resulted in Abram being at war with the four eastern kings. Rather than being a benefit for Abram, the acquisition of wealth seems only to bring him into conflicts of ever increasing magnitude.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COVENANT II: DEFINING POSTERITY

The next stage in the story also contains two episodes. The first (Gen 16) records the results of Sarai's plan to be "built up" by giving Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant, to Abram as a second wife. The second (Gen 17) records a divine appearance in which Yahweh covenants to give Abram numerous descendants, and elaborates the conditions and effects of that covenant.

As with the episodes thus far examined, most critics believe that these two episodes constitute discrete stories that have no integral relationship to one another, or to their wider narrative context. Commenting on the three units he detects in 16:1-18:15 (16:1-16, 17:1-27 and 18:1-15), for example, W. Brueggemann states: "While the three units focus on the same theme, they have no natural connection with each other. They are of different sources . . ." (1982a:151).

However, as the first part of Brueggemann's comment indicates, links exist between chaps. 16 and 17, as well as with their wider narrative context. In addition to the thematic continuity which Brueggemann detects (the promise of posterity), there are several verbal and structural features. S. McEvenue (1971:161), for example, notes that the mention of Abram's age in 17:1, and again in 17:24-25, "echoes" the conclusion of 16:16, which also mentions the patriarch's

age (so G. W. Coats 1983:130). This is not simply a formal device, but, as described in chap. 2, the story's way of marking the growth or tōl^e dōt of a family.

An important point of contact between Gen 16 and 17 is the person of Ishmael. In 17:18-20 Abram argues on Ishmael's behalf, thereby assuming the account of his birth in Gen 16. These two points of contact, moreover, are not independent of one another. According to 16:16 Abram is 86 years old when Ishmael is born; 17:24 states that he is 99 when he is circumcised. The report of Ishmael's age in 17:25 is thus consistent with the chronology of chaps. 16 and 17.

Links between these two chapters and their wider narrative context are also evident. Scholars have long recognised that 16:1 refers to 11:30, where Sarai's barrenness is first recorded. Indeed, this repetition led early source critics to conclude that the two verses stemmed from different yet parallel sources (usually 11:30 was assigned to J and 16:1 to P). However, as F. Delitzsch long ago pointed out, the contexts of the two verses indicate that 16:1 and 11:30 are not really parallels. The purpose of 16:1, according to Delitzsch, is to indicate that "the barrenness of Sarai continued in Canaan also" (1888:II:15).

The higher-critical reading, moreover, does not take seriously the grammar of 16:1. Rather than the usual word order of verb-subject, the opening clause of 16:1 uses the inverse order of subject-verb. According to Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, "the position of the subject at the beginning of a verbal-clause is to be explained from

the fact that the clause is not intended to introduce a new fact carrying on the narrative, but rather to describe a state." "The particular state represented in the verb may consist," the grammar adds, "of an act completed long before, to which reference is made only because it is necessary for understanding the sequel of the principal action" (# 142a and b; cf. Anderson 1974:80). The grammar of 16:1 thus demands that Sarai's barrenness be mentioned at some earlier point in the story, indicating that it cannot be the introduction to an independent tale, and supporting Delitzsch's position that the purpose of 16:1 is precisely to recall 11:30.

There are also a number of links between Gen 17 and its wider narrative context. As many critics note, 17:15-22 contains certain thematic and structural parallels with 18:9-15 (esp. McEvenue 1971:153-154). McEvenue and Westermann interpret these points of contact as evidence that chap. 17 depends on chap. 18 as a source, and is therefore a later addition to the text. Such parallels, however, need not be interpreted historically. It is a common literary phenomenon for one part of a narrative to anticipate another. Some refer to this trope as foreshadowing, while G. Genette (1980:39-40) prefers the term prolepsis.

Gen 16

As most critics recognise, this episode falls naturally into two parts marked by changes in venue and in content. Vv. 1-6 occur in Abram's household - presumably at Mamre - and describe a rift between

Sarai and Hagar. Vv. 7-16, on the other hand, take place in the wilderness and record the announcement by Yahweh's messenger that Hagar will have progeny.

Vv. 1-6 can be divided further into three parts: an introduction and two scenes. In the introduction (v. 1) the narrator supplies the expository information necessary for understanding that which follows. Each of the two scenes, on the other hand, records the outcome of an initiative taken by Sarai (McEvenue 1975:68-69). The first describes Sarai's plan to give Hagar to Abram as a second wife, and the second describes her complaint against Hagar's belittlement of her. These two scenes, moreover, share a common pattern. Each opens with the clause, "And Sarai said unto Abram . . . ." Each then records Abram's compliance with her suggestion, and the outcome of her plan. The first introduces this compliance with the statement: "And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai . . . ." The second begins his response with the clause, "And Abram said unto Sarai . . . ."

The plot thus advances according to the implementation of Sarai's initiatives. Each initiative, as McEvenue notes (1975:68-69), results from Sarai's internalisation of an external event that the narrator reports in the preceding scene. Sarai's first initiative is a plan to overcome her barrenness, which the narrator reports in the introduction. She decides to act a second time because upon conceiving Hagar had belittled her. The narrator had already reported this attitude to the reader at the end of the second scene.

These advances, moreover, are marked by the language both

parties use to describe the situation. The narrator and Sarai both use the root yld to describe her barrenness. Yet while the narrator reports simply, "Now Sarai had not borne," Sarai gives her predicament a theological interpretation: "Yahweh has prevented me from bearing."

Sarai and the narrator are in closer agreement in their understanding of Hagar's attitude. At the end of the first scene the narrator reports, "when Hagar had conceived she belittled her mistress." With the exception of the change of pronouns required by the change of person, Sarai uses identical language in her complaint to Abram: "When Hagar saw she had conceived she belittled me." Sarai then threatens to take her complaint before Yahweh if Abram will not act.

While McEvenue agrees that the plot of these verses advances according to Sarai's two initiatives, he accepts the source-critical conclusion that vv. 1 and 3 belong to P, and therefore removes them from the text. Source critics base this excision on stylistic criteria. The concern with dates and genealogy, they maintain, is a mark of the priestly tradition. Some also claim that v. 3 is a repetition of v. 2 (S. R. Driver 1909:180-181, J. Skinner 1930:285-286).

As a number of recent studies point out, however, v. 1 sets the scene for the squabble that ensues between Sarai and Hagar. Sarai's plan in vv. 2ff. assumes the information it supplies: Sarai gives Hagar to Abram as a second wife precisely to overcome her inability to bear children. As van Seters recognises (1975:193), by

removing this verse ône removes the episode's <u>raison d'être</u> (cf. M. Tsevat 1980:53 n. 2, 54-55, P. Trible 1984:10). More than a genealogical note, it is an integral part of the narrative that follows.

McEvenue realises the importance of the information in v. 1, but argues that v. 1a is not necessary because 11:30 is J's account of Sarai's barrenness, and it is to that verse that Sarai refers in v. 2. He then suggests that "The J account may have begun with an introductory verse similar to 1b, or else it began in verse 2 emended as follows: `. . .; go into my maid, <u>Hagar</u>; it may be . . .'." However, as remarked above, 16:1a is not a duplicate of 11:30. If 16:1a repeats much of the information of 11:30 it is precisely to recall this earlier verse. After dealing with the issue of land for so many chapters, the narrative returns to the issue of posterity by restating the problem. There is surely no reason to remove v. 1b and replace it with another verse that says the same thing.

Nor is there any reason to remove 16:3. As van Seters (1975:193-194) has recognised, v. 3 is not a repetition of v. 2. In v. 2 Sarai only announces her plan to give Hagar to Abram as a second wife. V. 3, on the other hand, records the actualisation of that plan (so Tsevat 1980:53, n. 2). The note that this occurred after they had lived in Canaan for ten years indicates that it was only after a long time that the couple decided to try a desperate method in order to have children. In conjunction with Sarai's exclamation that "Yahweh had prevented her from bearing," v. 3 creates a sense of desperation.

The second half (vv. 7-16) can also be divided into two main parts. The first (vv. 7-14) contains an extended conversation between the messenger of Yahweh and Hagar. Like Sarai's address to Abram in vv. 1-6, this conversation falls into two parts (v. 8; vv. 9-13), each containing an address by Yahweh's messenger (v. 8a; vv. 9-12) and Hagar's response to that address (v. 8b; vv. 13). Surrounding this conversation are two narratorial comments (v. 7; v. 14), each referring to the well to which Hagar fled. In the first the narrator reports that the messenger of Yahweh found Hagar by a fountain of water in the wilderness. In v. 14 he notes that because of the events that transpired there the well is called Beer-Lahai-Roi. These comments frame the conversation that Hagar has with the divine messenger, and allow the reader to identify vv. 7-14 as a sub-unit within the larger story. The second part (vv. 15-16) constitutes the episode's conclusion.

Vv. 7-16 have proven much more difficult than vv. 1-6. Particularly problematic have been the angel's second address to Hagar (vv. 9-12), the status of the etymologies spoken by Hagar (El Roi in v. 13 and Beer Lahai Roi in v. 14), and the integrity of vv. 15-16. These issues have been complicated by uncertainty regarding the relationship between vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-16.

The first problem surrounds the three-fold use of the expression "And the messenger of Yahweh said unto her . . ." Many see this repetition as awkward (e.g. van Seters 1975:194), and attempt to smooth things over by deleting vv. 9 and/or 10. V. 9, it is argued,

is a later addition that links this episode with chap. 21. To
facilitate the account of the expulsion of Hagar from Abram's home a
redactor added this verse so that Hagar would be back in Abram's
household (H. C. White 1975:300; C. Westermann 1981:292). V. 10 is
omitted because it is thought to be out of place in a promise that
concerns Hagar's son (Tsevat 1980:58; C. Westermann 1981:292-293).

Neither omission is necessary. First, there is nothing
particularly difficult with the three-fold repetition of the
introductory clause, "And the messenger of Yahweh said unto her. . ."
This is a literary technique designed to punctuate each part of the
messenger's address, giving each part its proper stress. This way of
punctuating a story is found elsewhere in Old Testament narrative (cf.
2 Kgs 1:9-16).

The supporting rationale is no more certain. The reason for
the omission of v. 9, for example, is based on the prior assumption
that chaps. 16 and 21 do not belong to the same narrative, an issue
here in question. It is equally possible to interpret the links
between these two chapters as indications that they do indeed belong
to the same story.

McEvenue (1975:67) supports the removal of v. 9 by arguing
that its use of *ᶜnh contradicts that in v. 11. The strength of this
argument is that it is based on internal, literary evidence, not a
presupposed theory about the text's history. In a recent article,
however, M. Tsevat argues that in reality there is no contradiction.
"Hers [Hagar's] is the story of what God may do for man in adverse

circumstances. She is told to return and submit to maltreatment by her mistress, but, this said, the narrative goes on to affirm that God is aware of her maltreatment and will compensate her. . . . maltreatment, divine awareness, and promised compensation are narrative elements whose interaction creates a narrative tension which is dramatically acceptable and probably so designed" (1980:60, so P. Trible 1984:16).

This interpretation is supported by the use of the terms pny and yd in the description of Ishmael's fate. According to v. 12 Ishmael's "hand (yādô) will be against every one and everyone's hand (weyad kōl) will be against him, and he will dwell in the face (penê) of all his brethren." The strength of this description lies in the use of these two terms in the account of Hagar's flight from Sarai. yd first appears in the description of Hagar's return to Sarai (v. 6). After Sarai complains about her maid's attitude, Abram delivers Hagar into Sarai's hand (beyādēk). pny, on the other hand, is used to describe Hagar's departure from her mistress, which the narrator describes as fleeing from "her face" (mippāneyhā; v. 6). As the use of the same expression in v. 8 indicates, Hagar agrees with this description of her actions. In response to the angel's question about her excursion, Hagar responds, "I am fleeing from the face (mippenê) of Sarai my mistress." Both terms take on their meaning in relation to Sarai's action against Hagar. yd describes the action that leads up to and permits Sarai to afflict Hagar, while pny describes the results of such treatment. By drawing on these terms

to describe Ishmael's character, the text indicates that he will be a living memorial to his mother's plight (cf. R. Neff 1972:58-59). As she must submit (*ᶜnh) to Sarai's hand (yd), so Ishmael's hand will be against all his brethren. V. 9 does not contradict vv. 6 and 11. On the contrary, it supplies the necessary conditions that make Ishmael's name and character meaningful.

Nor is v. 10 necessarily out of place simply because the general promise of a numerous posterity precedes the specific and more immediate promise of Ishmael. In his study of Gen 17, for example, McEvenue (1971:156) finds that Yahweh's promise moves from the general to the specific. Yahweh announces that Abraham will have a son before he indicates that the mother will be Sarah, and that before he informs the patriarch that the name of his son will be Isaac. Indeed, as argued in chapter three of this thesis, the entire Abraham narrative moves from the general and vague to the specific. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to discover the same movement in 16:10-12.

One of the reasons van Seters removes v. 10 is because "it is quite different from what follows in vv. 11-12. In fact it is a reiteration of the theme of numerous progeny to an eponymous ancestor, which is part of the J framework of the patriarchal stories" (1975:194). Van Seters's remarks, however, make the prior assumption that the individual episodes in the Abraham narrative are independent from their framework, an hypothesis here in question. Indeed, the meaning of Gen 16 is derived precisely from those connections (cf. G. von Rad 1972:196). The effect of the "reiteration of the theme of

numerous progeny" is to include Hagar's descendants under Yahweh's promise, and to indicate that Ishmael is to be understood as a son of the blessing. Yahweh had promised Abram sons, and now he has one.

This reading goes against current interpretation of the chapter, which usually views Sarai's plan to give Hagar to Abram as a lack of faith in Yahweh's capacity to fulfill his promise (W. Brueggemann 1982a:151, W. Berg 1982). This interpretation assumes that Abram knew that Sarai was the way that the promise of posterity would be realised. Yahweh, however, has not yet specified the woman with whom Abram would have children; he has only promised that they will be numerous. Abram may very well have undertood Hagar has an acceptable means of acquiring the promise.

This is the force of v. 3. Many critics separate this verse from its context and assign it to another source, usually P. The rationale behind this move is the verse's interest in chronology. However, the verse stresses the length of time that Abram had lived without obtaining the posterity that Yahweh had promised in the new land (12:1). Ten years he had been in Canaan, and still Sarai remained barren. Perhaps he concluded that she simply was not the one through whom the blessing would be realised.

Nor can Sarai's attitude be interpreted as a lack of faith in Yahweh to fulfill his promise. Yahweh had only given the promise to Abram, and that was after Sarai was barren (11:30). While it might be reasonable to assume that Sarai knew of the promise, there is nothing thus far in the text to indicate that Sarai thought she was to be the

mother of offspring Yahweh had promised Abram. It is only in 18:10-12 that Sarai learns of Yahweh's plans concerning her, and doubts the possibility of becoming a mother. Indeed, her claim that Yahweh had prevented her from bearing (16:2) can be interpreted as an understanding on her part that she is not to be the way by which Abram will experience the blessing of posterity. Thus in giving Hagar to Abram her concern is not with the promise Yahweh gave her husband, but with her own status. She gives Hagar to Abram so that she might be "built up" through her.

The interpretation of the etymologies in vv. 13-14 has changed over the years. The consensus accepts the conclusion that these are ancient explanations of the names involved. Earlier critics believed that the episode was built up around these aetiologies in order to give them a fuller explanation (e.g. H. Gunkel 1910:190-192, J. Skinner 1930:284-285). Since B. O. Long's (1968) study of aetiological narratives, however, tradition historians are more inclined to see these verses as additions to a story about the annunciation and birth of Ishmael. Although Long did not include Gen 16 in his study, his general conclusions about aetiological narratives have been applied by others to this chapter (e.g. H. C. White 1975:292, 298-299, J. van Seters 1975:193, G. W. Coats 1983:131). In his study Long concludes that most aetiologies do not emerge from the concerns of the story in which they appear, and seem to have been tacked on at a later date. Long supports this position by the way in which the aetiologies are introduced. Most begin with one of two

formulas: (1) "And she called the name of . . .," or (2) "therefore it is called . . . ." According to Long these stereotypical clauses indicate that the aetiologies were added in a mechanical way to already extant narratives.

Long's reasoning, however, is inconclusive. The appearance of the expressions, "And she called the name of . . .," and, "therefore it is called . . .," prove little. If these are traditional expressions, as Long maintains, it is precisely for this reason that their appearance in any given narrative should cause no trouble. They should be expected. If it sounds mechanical to the modern ear, this may indicate little more than the literary prejudices of the modern reader.

In the specific case of Genesis 16, the namings of Beer-Lahai-Roi and El Roi do emerge from the concerns of the episode. Structurally, as indicated above, some response to the divine messenger's second speech is to be expected. According to Tsevat, by affixing the epithet El Roi to Yahweh, Hagar "conveys a context of excitement, thanksgiving, and overcoming of incredulity" (1980:63). Complementing this interpretation, Trible links the epithet to the use of the verb *r$\supset$h to 16:4-5. "The maid who, after seeing (r$\supset$h) her conception of a child, had a new vision of her mistress Sarai (16:4), now, after receiving a divine announcement of the forthcoming birth, sees (r$\supset$h) God with a new vision" (1984:18).

The use of "therefore" to begin v. 14 joins the naming of the well to the preceding events. Because of the epithet with which Hagar

names Yahweh the well is called Beer-Lahai-Roi. The well thus serves as a memorial to these events. While the encounter between Hagar and the divine can exist for only a moment, the well can be a perpetual witness to that encounter through its name. The unnamed fountain (ᶜayin) to which she fled (v. 7) is now the well at which Yahweh responded to her plight and promised her posterity.

Finally there is the question of vv. 15-16. Along with vv. 1 and 3 these verses are usually assigned to P and removed from the main story. The evidence that these verses stem from a separate source includes the three-fold repetition of the fact that Hagar bore Abram a son, and the concern with the age at which Abram fathered the boy. The recording of Abram's age ties the birth of Ishmael to the overall tôlᵉdôt schema. This schema, as remarked above, is the text's way of keeping account of the growth of the various families that emerge throughout the course of the narrative.

These verses, moreover, form the conclusion to the story (Trible 1984:18-19). Everything in the episode anticipates the birth of Ishmael. Realising this, yet accepting the source-critical position, McEvenue suggests that "a sentence has to be added to the conclusion (16:14) to the effect that Ishmael was born . . . (1975:67). Yet this is precisely what vv. 15-16 describe. Why remove a verse and then posit an original conclusion that says the same thing?

In contrast to McEvenue, Van Seters argues that the story comes to a conclusion in v. 12 (cf. Neff 1972:59-60), thereby

supporting those who would remove vv. 13-16 from the text. However, while v. 12 concludes the promise that Hagar will bear a son, it does not resolve the problem of v. 1, which is that Sarai had not borne any offspring to Abram. V. 12 only anticipates the resolution, which actually comes in vv. 15-16. (so H. C. White 1975:277, M. Tsevat 1980:66-67, P. Trible 1984:18-19).

Each of the three statements that makes up the conclusion, moreover, refers to a different part of the text. V. 15a states the conclusion in its simplest form: "And Hagar bore Abram a son." This refers directly to v. 1 which tells the reader that Sarai did not bear. The second clause (v. 15b) states that Abram named that son Ishmael. This statement refers to v. 11 where the divine messenger informed Hagar that she would call her son Ishmael. What the messenger had promised had come to pass. V. 16, which gives Abram's age at the time of Ishmael's birth, situates the birth within the tôl^{e}dôt schema of the book of Genesis. This schema, as outlined in chap. 2, is the text's way of keeping account of the various family groups that emerge throughout the book.

According to recent form-critical analyses, vv. 1-6 and 7-16 represent originally independent units of tradition that are only redactionally linked (C. Westermann 1981:281, G. W. Coats 1983:131-132, cf. H. C. White 1975:299-300). Form critics base this conclusion on three types of evidence. The first is the change of venue mentioned above. According to Coats, "Such changes in locale typically represent major structural divisions in OT narrative"

(1983:131). In addition to the change of locale, Coats and Westermann
note that a structural change occurs between vv. 6 and 7. The quarrel
in vv. 1-6 ends with v. 6. While both critics admit that Hagar's
flight does not resolve the quarrel, they agree that her departure
nonetheless brings the conflict to a conclusion. V. 7, on the other
hand, introduces a new situation and new characters. These verses deal
not with the relationship between two women, but with the divine
announcement of a son for Hagar. The third type of evidence is
generic. According to Coats vv. 1-6 constitute a tale, while vv. 7-16
are an annunciation. Coats concludes, "A story of conflict has been
combined with the annunciation of Ishmael" (1983:132).

As many others have recognised, however, there are numerous
connections between vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-16. The first is grammatical:
v. 7 uses the personal pronoun, "her," to refer to Hagar, assuming
that the reader already knows to whom the text is referring.

There are further points of contact between the content of vv.
1-6 and vv. 7ff. The messenger's command ordering Hagar to "return"
(*šwb) and submit to her mistress (v. 9) assumes that Hagar was at one
time in the home of Sarai and Abram, which is precisely the setting of
vv. 1-6. This link is enhanced by the use of the verb "afflict"
(*ʿnh) in vv. 6, 9, and 11 to describe Sarai's treatment of Hagar, as
well as the verb "to flee" (*brḥ) to describe Hagar's response to that
treatment (vv. 6, 8). Many eliminate v. 9 as a later addition,
thereby removing one of these points of contact. As discussed above,
however, there is no compelling literary reason to extract it from the

text, and both thematic and structural reasons argue for retaining it.

Even if v. 9 were removed there would remain the force of the other points of contact. The divine messenger tells Hagar to name the baby Ishmael because Yahweh has heard her affliction. As all recognise, the significance of this divine annunciation emerges from the word play between the name, "Ishmael," and the verb "to hear," both of which derive from the root šmʕ. More important for the issue at hand, however, is the fact that Yahweh's hearing is not arbitrary, but motivated by the affliction Hagar has suffered. The annunciation of Ishmael is thus tied to the hardship with which Sarai afflicted Hagar, which is described in the first half of the episode.

The verb "to flee" constitutes another point of contact between vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-16. In response to the messenger's questions, Hagar answers: "I am fleeing from the face of my mistress." This answer assumes v. 6, where the narrator first informs the reader that, "she [Hagar] fled from her [Sarai's] face." This link is particularly significant because it employs the same technique that marks the advance of the plot through the first three segments of the episode. A character expresses her personal understanding of an external event described by the narrator in the previous scene. As described above, the introduction and first two scenes advance according to Sarai's understanding of events described in the preceding segment.

There are also links between the episode's introduction and conclusion. In his analysis of this chapter S. McEvenue (1975:66)

found that if isolated vv. 1, 3 and 15-16 form the following chiasmus:

    A.   [Sarai] has [no] child for Abram (1a)

        B.   Indication of the year (3a)

            C.   HAGAR HAS A SON FOR ABRAM (15a)

        B.   Indication of the year (16a)

    A.   [Hagar] has a child for Abram (16b).

McEvenue treats these verses separately because he believes they are from a different source (P) than the remainder of. the story (J). However, as McEvenue himself notes, by themselves these verses hardly consititute a narrative: they form little more than a genealogical notation. Yet the change from Sarai's barrenness in v. 1 to the birth of a son for Abram by Hagar in vv. 15-16 demands some explanation.

What McEvenue has in fact identified is an inclusio that surrounds all of chap. 16 and unites its two scenes into a single episode. The inclusio is not based just on a correspondence of theme, as McEvenue's outline suggests, but by precise verbal tags -- specifically the root yld and the attachment of the preposition l- to Abram's name or a personal pronoun that refers to him. Thus v. 1a reads, "Now Sarai, wife of Abram, did not bear (lō yāl^edâ) for him (lō) . . . ." Vv. 15-16 employ the same verbs to record the birth of Ishmael: "And Hagar bore (wattēled) for Abram (l^eabrām) a son; and Abram called the name of the son whom Hagar bore (yāl^edâ) Ishmael; and Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore (b^eledet) Ishmael for

Abram (1^{e_j}abrām)."

As remarked above, one of the reasons Coats separates the two scenes is that he feels there is a lack of logic between them. He believes that vv. 1-6 are primarily a tale about a squabble between two women, while vv. 7-21 are primarily about the announcement of a birth. This inclusio suggests that while Coats may be right about the emphasis of the second scene, he has essentially misconstrued the first.

An exploration of the development of the plot of vv. 1-6 indicates that these verses are also about the issue of producing offspring. V. 1a, which Coats accepts as "crucial for the story, not to be broken away as a part of another source" (1983:130), identifies the problem as Sarai's inability to bear children. It is in an effort to overcome this problem that in v. 2 Sarai suggests to Abram that he "go into" her handmaiden, whom v. 1b identifies as Hagar. The plan appears destined for success when, after Abram agrees to it (v. 3), Hagar becomes pregnant (v. 4a). However, by fleeing Hagar leaves Abram in the same childless state described in v. 1a. Hagar's departure does not just bring the squabble between her and Sarai to and end, it threatens the success of Sarai's plan to be "built up by her" and, at the same time, to obtain the posterity for Abram she herself is unable to bear. The squabble, which appropriately emerges from Hagar's pregnancy, thus arises out of the effort to obtain children. As a theme it is subordinate to the major issue of Sarai's barrenness and her attempt to circumvent her infertile state.

The second part of the episode is thus an appropriate sequel to this first half. The divine messenger appears to Hagar and commands her to return to her mistress, promising that she will bear a son and have numerous descendants. In so doing the messenger guarantees Abram a son.

The break that occurs between vv. 6 and 7 is thus not the seam between two separate stories, but the major structural joint in the episode. It marks the point where Sarai's plan to be "built up" requires divine intervention in order to succeed. As McEvenue writes: "At this point the story is wound up as tight as it can go: a problem of barrenness, an attempted solution, a complication due to human cussedness, the flight of Hagar apparently nullifying everything. Now God must intervene" (1975:69).

Although McEvenue is right that the chapter portrays the problem of barrenness as a personal one, in its wider context it bears heavily on the promise that Abram will have sons. This role is stressed especially by the opening verses, which allude to 11:30. That verse, as noted in chapter four, already contrasts Abram's and Sarai's situation with the divine promise. By the end of Gen 16 the promise seems on its way to fulfilment. Abram, through the help of Yahweh's messenger, has finally had his son by Hagar. Nothing earlier in the story has suggested that he would realise the blessing by Sarai. There are, nonetheless, some indications of tension. Part of Yahweh's initial commission (12:1-3) indicates that he means to spread the blessing through Abram to all the families of the earth. One wonders

how such a feat can be accomplished by a son who will be a wild ass of a man, and whose hand will be against the hand of all others. The story, therefore, must continue to resolve this question. At this point, however, there is no indication of what that resolution will be. Will Ishmael's character somehow change, will the blessing be dispersed by some other means, or will Yahweh somehow be able to employ such character traits to spread the blessing?

Gen 17

In this episode Yahweh announces and describes the covenant into which he enters with Abram. As described by McEvenue (1971:145-178), the episode is composed of a series of five divine speeches. Each speech can be identified by a narratorial comment that introduces it, and distinguishes it from the other speeches. The first one opens with, "and he [Yahweh] said to him. . ." (v. 1), the second with, "And Elohim spoke to him saying . . ." (v. 3b), the third with, "And Elohim said unto Abraham. . ." (v. 9a), the fourth with, "And Elohim said unto Abraham. . ." (v. 15a), and the fifth with, "And Elohim said. . ." (v. 19a). These speeches are broken up by the two occasions on which Abram responds to Yahweh, both of which involve him falling on his face. The first time he falls on his face is in response to Yahweh's initial announcement. The second time occurs after the fourth speech. These speeches and Abram's responses are framed by the announcement of Yahweh's appearance to Abram (v. 1a) and the report that Yahweh stopped speaking to him and went up from him (v. 22). V. 22 serves as a transition to the account of

Abraham's compliance with Yahweh's command to circumcise himself and all the males of his household.

In his study of this chapter McEvenue identifies two different structural patterns spanning the entire chapter. The first is a palistrophe which he outlines as follows:

A   Abram 99 years of age (1a)

B.   Yahweh appears to Abram (1b)

C   God speaks (1b)

D   First speech (1b -2)

E   Abram falls on his face (3a)

F   Second speech (name-change, nations, kings) (4-8)

G   THIRD SPEECH

F´   Fourth speech (name-change, nations, kings) (15-16)

E´   Abraham falls on his face (etc.) (17-18)

D´   Fifth speech (19-21)

C´   God ceases speaking (22a)

B´   God goes up from him (22b)

A´   Abraham 99 years of age (and Ishmael 13) (24-25)

Interlocking with the palistrophe McEvenue identifies two parallel panels, which he illustrates as follows:

A   Yahweh's intention to make an oath about progeny (1-2)

B   Abram falls on his face (3a)

C   Abraham father of nations (4b-6)

D   God will carry out his oath for ever (7)

E   The sign of the oath (9-14)

A⁻ God's intention to bless Sarah with a progeny (16)

B⁻   Abraham falls on his face (etc.) (17-18)

C⁻   Sarah mother of a son, Isaac (19)

D⁻   God will carry out his oath forever (18b.21a)

E⁻   The sign of the oath (23-27).

While McEvenue has identified many important structural features of the text, and these dual interlocking schemas appear for the most part convincing, there are certain problems with both. They are based on different types of information reflecting different levels of generalisation. In the palistrophe, for example, the correspondence between A and A⁻, and E and E⁻, is based on an observable feature of the text. Both v. 1a and vv. 24-25 note that Abraham is ninty-nine years old. Similarly, E and E⁻ state that Abraham fell on his face. The correspondence between D and D⁻, and F and F⁻, on the other hand, is based on the fact that they record divine speeches. For F and F⁻ McEvenue indicates in brackets that there are some verbal parallels between them, but such is not the case for D and D⁻. The relationship between C and C⁻ is peculiar. C is identified as "God speaks," and balanced with C⁻, which McEvenue labels, "God ceases speaking." While God is certainly speaking in v. 1b, so is he speaking throughout the bulk of this chapter. V. 1b, moreover, is actually part of Yahweh's first speech. Yet McEvenue gives no reason why this speech should be divided, while others are not.

Similar problems exist with the two-panel structure. C,

"Abraham father of nations" is parallelled with C´, "Sarah mother of
a son, Isaac." While there is some degree of overlap between these
two concepts, it is not as clear as that between B and B´. But the
more important difficulty lies in the fact that in v. 15 Sarai is
also told that she will be the mother of nations. It is difficult to
see how v. 19 can be considered a parallel to vv. 4b-6, given the
obvious echo of these verses in v. 15. Furthermore, in order to
establish the correspondence between D and D´ McEvenue identifies D´
as vv 18b, 21a. Yet C´ is identified as v. 19. Since this type of
parallel ordering depends entirely on the sequence of the narrative,
this arrangement appears forced.

The purpose of outlining a narrative in such a manner is to
highlight its structural contours in order to divide a story up into
manageable units. To avoid what Alonso-Schökel (1975:1, cf. J. Kugel
1981:224-225) refers to as a sterile formalism, this division must
proceed according to the development of the plot or advancement of
the main ideas in the narrative. In a speech, such as the one in
Gen 17, the division should follow the logic of the speech. In this
case the narrator has given the reader the necessary structural
clues by his use of the five introductory clauses indicated above.

McEvenue's suggestion that this chapter forms a chiasmus is
essentially correct, because it is based on the content of each of
the five speeches. In the first Yahweh announces his covenant to
"multiply you [Abram] exceedingly." In the fifth speech Yahweh
identifies the son through whom the covenant will pass. It will go

to Isaac and his descendants, not through Ishmael. The first and fifth speeches are thus concerned with the participants in the covenant. The first defines its present participants and the fifth its future participants.

The second and fourth speeches define the change of the patriarch's and matriarch's names in terms of covenant. Abram's name will henceforth be Abraham, and Sarai's, Sarah. In both instances the name change signifies that Yahweh is the one who gives Abraham and Sarah their posterity. McEvenue has rightly seen that these two speeches share a common vocabulary in describing the nature of Abraham's and Sarah's posterity. They will be parents of nations and kings.

In the middle lies Yahweh's explanation of the sign of the covenant. To participate in the covenant all males in Abram's household must be circumcised. Any who are not will be cut off from the people of God.

As McEvenue has elaborated, there is also a linear progression to Yahweh's speech. As the speech progresses through its five parts Yahweh clarifies issues concerning the patriarch's posterity. In the first address Yahweh announces his intention to enter into a covenant so that he might give the patriarch numerous offspring. In the second he elaborates upon this theme. Abram will be the father of many nations, and Yahweh changes his name to Abraham as a sign of this promise. Yahweh also indicates that he will extend the covenant beyond Abram to these later generations. The covenant

will not extend just to Abram, but will be eternal.

Yahweh then reaffirms his earlier promise to give Abram's descendants "the land of their sojourning, the land of Canaan." In this speech he also defines what it means to belong to this covenant: "I will establish my covenant . . . to be a God unto you and unto your seed after you." In the third address Yahweh informs Abram that to signify their participation in the covenant all members of his household, and of the households of his descendants, must be circumcised. This will be the sign of the covenant.

Thus far Yahweh has addressed Abram's role in this covenant. Descendants, however, require mothers as well as fathers, and in the second half of the speech Yahweh addresses this issue. In the fourth section of the speech Yahweh informs Abraham that the descendants who will carry the covenant forth will come from Sarai, now to be called Sarah. To stress her role Yahweh employs the same language to describe her offspring that he used in the second address to describe Abram's offspring. She will be the mother of kings and nations.

For Abraham there are two difficulties with this arrangement. He does not believe that he and Sarah are capable of bearing children, and he already has a son from his first wife. Yahweh responds to these concerns in his last address. He first reasserts his plan that Sarah will be the mother of the child to inherit the covenant. In order to reassure Abraham, he informs him that Sarah's son will be called Isaac, and promises his birth within a year. The importance of this specific prediction stems from the fact that the

patriarchal couple had long been frustrated in their attempts to have children (Gen 16:3). To reassure Abraham of Ishmael's fate Yahweh indicates that while his oldest son may not be the vehicle for the covenant, he will be blessed and become a great nation.

At the conclusion of this speech the narrator once again addresses the reader. He first notes that Abraham circumcised himself, Ishmael, and all the males in his household. In this way the text indicates that Abraham has accepted the covenant and its terms. He then adds the age at which Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised, thereby tying this episode firmly to the tōl^{e}dōt schema of the book of Genesis. In so doing the text indicates the importance of this event in the growth of the tōl^{e}dōt of Terah, and especially Abraham's branch of the family.

Like Gen 15, this covenant plays a fundamental role in defining Yahweh's plan. While Gen 15 defines the land Yahweh covenants to give Abram in relation to Mesopotamia and Egypt, Gen 17 defines the people with whom God will enter into covenant in terms of others who might lay claim to it (i.e., Ishmael). As Abram's eldest son, recipient of a promise that sounds exactly like the one Yahweh gives Abram (16:10), Ishmael might appear to be the heir to the special relationship Yahweh had been cultivating with Abram. From Gen 17:18 it appears that Abram had come to this conclusion. However, in this chapter Yahweh states without equivocation that Ishmael will not play that role. Sarah's son Isaac will be the one through whom the special covenantal relationship will pass.

Although Yahweh does not state why Ishmael is not acceptable for this role, the use of the expression "live/walk before" in chaps. 16 and 17 may provide a hint. In response to God's plan to give Abraham a son by Sarah (17:16), Abraham pleads with God that Ishmael might "live before you" (l^{e}pāneykā; 17:18). In chapter 16, however, the divine messenger had already described Ishmael's fate. Employing this same expression, the messenger tells Hagar that Ishmael will live "in the face" (w^e^{c}al-p^{e}nê) of all his brethern.

The fate of these two sons, moreover, is a reflection of the circumstances of their birth. As the use of *ntn in chap. 17 demonstrates, Isaac is the gift of God.. This fact, as described in chapter three, is embodied in the names Abraham and Sarah. Yahweh changes their names as a sign that he has given (*ntn) them offspring (17:5-6, 16). Ishmael, on the other hand, is the result of Sarai's efforts to overcome Yahweh's plan (16:2). He is not given by God, but the result of Sarai giving (*ntn) Hagar to Abram.

Westermann has noticed certain structural parallels between Gen 12:1-3 and the opening of chap. 17. He illustrates these parallels as follows:

12:1-4a	17:1-3a
Yahweh said unto Abram	Yahweh appeared to Abraham said unto him
Go from your . . .	Walk before me . . .
I will make you a great nation	I will greatly increase you
And Abram went	And Abraham fell down

According to Westermann these parallels indicate that the author of Gen 17 used Gen 12:1-4a as a source. However, the comments on

McEvenue's position that Gen 17 used chaps. 15 and 18 as a source are equally applicable here. More in accord with the normal reading experience is the conclusion that the two chapters are from the same narrative, and that in paralleling chap. 12, chap. 17 is referring to it.

Important in this regard is the fact that the same Hebrew word (*hlk) lies behind the English words "Go" and "Walk." The importance of this term to the story has already been discussed. In Gen 12:1-4 Yahweh promises to bless Abram with posterity if he will "go" to a new land. In 15:2 Abram complains that he is "going" (*hlk) childless. In the context of the promise of Gen 12:1-4 Abram's words take on an accusatory tone. In Gen 17 Yahweh once again employs the verb in the context of a promise of descendants. On this occasion, however, it does not refer to geographical displacement, but to an attitude. Abram is not simply "to go," but to "walk before Yahweh and be whole." Through the careful use of language Yahweh complicates the conditions surrounding the acquisition of the blessing.

The parallels between Gen 12:1-3 and Gen 17 invite a comparison of the different ways Yahweh formulates the posterity he promises Abram/Abraham on these two occasions. In Gen 12:1-3 Yahweh states his intentions to make him a great and famous nation if he would "go." He does not, however, define what it means to be great and famous. In Gen 17:4-9 he not only confirms this promise, but enlarges upon it. Abraham, through his wife Sarah, will be the progenitor of many nations and of kings.

These developments raise the question of the role of Gen 16-17 in their wider narrative setting. In 12:1-3 Yahweh stated his intention to making Abram a great and famous nation if he would go to a divinely designated land. Yet while he travels to the new land, Abram does not acquire any offspring. Indeed, through the removal of Lot the journey appears to make the promise of posterity seem impossible. Since Sarai was barren, Lot seemed to be Abram's only possible heir. When Yahweh identifies Sarah as the mother of the son through whom the covenant will pass, and through whom the promise of nationhood and greatness will be realised, Yahweh seems to speak a contradiction and Abraham undertandably questions Yahweh.

It is at this point that Gen 16 takes on its importance. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that fertility and destiny cannot be controlled by human power. Sarai realises that Yahweh is responsible for her barren state (16:2), but evidently feels she can circumvent the situation by obtaining offspring through another woman. While she is successful, this effort results in family disharmony, and a son whose disposition embodies that condition. Furthermore, the fruit of this human contrivance is unacceptable to Yahweh's plan for Abraham. While Yahweh will bless Ishmael, because he is Abram's son, Ishmael will be excluded from the covenant. The full force of these events lies in their implications for Sarai. Since fertility and destiny are in the hands of Yahweh, it is only Yahweh who can properly control fertility. Since it is Yahweh who prevents Sarai from bearing, it is only Yahweh who can rectify the situation.

With Gen 17 the first half of the Abraham narrative comes to a close. By this point in the narrative the ambiguities concerning the land and posterity Yahweh had promised Abram in 12:1-3 have been clarified. Abram and his descendants will possess the land of Canaan, and he will obtain his posterity through Sarah's son who will be named Isaac.

Yahweh's delay in identifying these elements, however, is not without purpose. Through the intervening material Abram and the reader learn something of what the blessing means. Specifically, it is not something that is inherent in the world, nor is it something men can obtain by their own powers or initiative. Only Yahweh can truly determine what is or is not blessed.

The question of the fulfilment of these promises, however, remains unanswered. After establishing the covenant with Abraham, the patriarch immediately circumcises himself and all the males in his household. There is as yet no indication that Yahweh has fulfilled the obligations he placed upon himself in 17:4-9. The land of Canaan remains in the hands of the Canaanites (cf. 12:6b, 13:7b), and there is not yet any indication that it can support a blessing. Similarly, in Gen -17 Sarah remains barren. Gen 17 thus anticipates further story. The account of Yahweh's compliance with his covenant obligations follows in Gen 18ff.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

This thesis set out to explore the possibility that the Abraham narrative could be read as a unified narrative. Obviously, in the opinion of the author this goal has been achieved, at least in part.

The starting point of the story is Yahweh's intent to bless Abraham, and through him all the families of the earth (12:1-3). Although the blessing may have an elusive dimension, it contains two concrete elements: posterity and land. Yahweh promises Abram both, although in his initial statement he defines neither. It is the ambiguity surrounding these elements that propels the plot forward. The events that Abram encounters serve variously to qualify, define, jeopardise, and finally secure the success of what Yahweh has promised.

The delays in defining and then fulfilling the promises have more of a role than the building of suspense, although they do contibute to the narrative tension. Through the threats, ironies, and ambiguities Abram and the reader learn something of the nature of the blessing. That is, well-being is the gift of God. Yahweh is the "Creator of Heaven and Earth," as Melchizedek proclaims, and he can make a land that appears blessed fail, and a land that appears infertile productive. The earth does not exude blessing on its own, nor can men acquire it by their own powers. Only after Abraham

recognises that "God provides/chooses" (22:8) does the text confirm that Yahweh had blessed the patriarch (24:1).

It is also hoped that this thesis can make a contribution to the study of Hebrew narratology. Through the course of the study, and particularly in chapters 4-7, many features that contribute to and control the meaning of the text were noted. In addition to the elements contained within the broader thematic category of the blessing, the story uses many formal features to define the nature of the links between the different episodes. These features include the use of key terms, such as hlk, r h, and ntn, and patterns such as the chiasmus and inclusio. The study, however, in no way constitutes a systematic narratology of the Abraham narrative. The narratological study of Hebrew prose is in its infancy and much work remains to be done.

This thesis has certain implications for the higher-critical approach to the text. The features higher-critics believe are indications of the text's composite nature can equally well support an holistic interpretation. The shifts in the story-line, the changes in style, the episodic plot, and the repetition can all be read as structural devices, serving the story's purpose and controlling its outcome. It is, consequently, difficult to say absolutely that these features are or are not signs of editorial activity. It seems reasonable, however, that if these features can be interpreted holistically, then the onus of proof lies with those who would maintain that the text is a composite. In any case, the thesis that

the text <u>can</u> be read as a unified narrative is not affected.

Another question the thesis raises pertains to the higher-critical tendency to view the stories as records of social norms and institutions. It is common, for example, to regard the account of the journey in Gen 12:5-13:18 as a record of an actual journey, if not by Abram then by wandering semi-nomads. This study, however, shows that the journey plays an important literary function. By it Abram is restricted to the land of Canaan. Through the word play on <u>r h</u>, moreover, the journey serves to define the land that I will show you. The word plays remove the journey from the realm of geography and put it in the realm of the symbolic and literary.

There remains much unanswered. The most immediate need is a detailed analysis of Gen 18:1-25:11. Although chapter three suggests that it is part of the same story as Gen 11:27-17:27, there are many issues in these chapters that need explanation. Beyond that, future work must take the Abraham narrative's context into account. Since Gunkel it has been common to view the Abraham narrative as a collection of stories which is independent of both Gen 1-11 and the collections about the other patriarchs. This position, however, is based upon the same type of evidence that has been disputed here. The text itself clearly portrays the Abraham story as a continuation of Gen 1-11, and the stories of the other patriarchs as a continuation of it. The precise nature of the breaks that occur between these large segments of the book of Genesis will have to be examined in any holistic study of the entire book.

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