

THE THEME OF "BLESSING FOR THE NATIONS" IN THE  
PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES OF GENESIS

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SYNOPSIS

1. The universalistic promise expressed by a formula with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the Old Testament is primarily found in the patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35). This aspect of the patriarchal narratives, however, has not been adequately studied. Previous discussions of the theme, based primarily on 12:1-3, and conducted within the framework of the Yahwist's work, are shown to be inadequate in our survey in shedding light on the positioning and significance of the theme in the overall patriarchal narratives. The survey indicates a literary analysis of these narratives could probably yield more positive results.
2. A formulaic analysis shows that the niph'al form ( יִצְוֶה ) is used at the beginning of a patriarch's career to express a probationary, and the hithpa'el form ( יִצְוֶהוּ ) to express a reaffirmatory, relationship of the patriarch to the promised universal destiny. Strikingly, the 'seed' plays a prominent role in the destiny. The formula also serves to link the patriarchs' calling to the primeval history and the history of the early formative period of the Israelite people.
3. The Abraham story (Gen.12-22) is encased by the theme. A double-chiastic arrangement of the narratives (in two groups) shows a movement of horizon from the particularistic to the universalistic. The universal horizon of Abraham's initial call (12:1-3), displaced in the first half of the structure, is reaffirmed in the latter half. Gen.16 stands out as the nadir and turning-point of the overall story. The notices of Isaac's birth are instructively 'positioned' in the universalistic sector of the double-chiasmus. Moreover, the formula is pronounced in narratives which portray Abraham as reversing the negative results of the key events in the primeval history.
4. The Isaac narrative (Gen.26) is shown to be "demonstration-material" of the initial actualisation of the theme. The narrative is coherently structured around an emphatic divine command, a unique twin-promise, and Isaac's response in a series of movements, climaxing in Abimelech's sudden visit to and significant confession of Isaac's status. Gen.26 is also shown to be a "quintessence" of the Abraham story and forms a critique of and model for Jacob's understanding and actualisation of his destiny.
5. The theme is shown to underline the Jacob story (Gen.25-35), especially in the Jacob-Esau cycles. Jacob's character transformation and reconciliation with Esau are necessary pre-requisites before the reaffirmation of the universal destiny to him at Bethel. Significantly, the creation mandate is re-issued to Jacob-Israel, the seed of Abraham and Isaac, when a formula pronouncement is expected. Finally, Jacob-Israel is shown to form a parallel with Abraham, whose call also expresses Yahweh's re-affirmation of his creational intentions for mankind.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
AnBibl	Analecta Biblica
ATh.ANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools for Oriental Research
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
<u>BDB</u>	Brown, F., Driver, S.R., Briggs, C.A. <u>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).
Bib. Res.	Biblical Research
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CB	Coniectanea Biblica
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
Ev. Th.	Evangelische Theologie
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<u>IDB</u>	<u>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Four Volumes, ed. G.A. Buttrick et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962).</u>
<u>IDB</u> Suppl.	<u>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume, ed. K. Crim et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).</u>
Int	Interpretation
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JR	Journal of Religion
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JSOR	Journal of the Society for Oriental Research
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOT Suppl.	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Massoretic Text
Or	Orientalia
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oudtestamentische Stüdien

SBL	Society for Biblical Literature
SBS	Stuttgarten Bibel-Studien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
St. Th.	Studia Theologica
SVT	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
TB	Tyndale Bulletin
<u>TDOT</u>	<u>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vols. I-IV,</u> ed. G.J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974—).
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WC	Westminster Commentaries
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

Abbreviations for biblical references used:

Gen.=Genesis, Ex.=Exodus, Lev.=Leviticus, Num.=Numbers,  
Deut.=Deuteronomy, Josh.=Joshua, Jdg.=Judges, 1 Sam.=1 Samuel,  
2 Sam.=2 Samuel, 1 Kgs=1 Kings, 2 Kgs=2 Kings, 1 Chron.=1 Chronicles,  
2 Chron.=2 Chronicles, Neh.=Nehemiah, Ps.=Psalms, Isa.=Isaiah,  
Jer.=Jeremiah, Ezek.=Ezekiel, Hos.=Hosea, Am.=Amos, Mic.=Micah,  
Zech.=Zechariah, Mal.=Malachi.

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## INTRODUCTION

The patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35) in the Book of Genesis contain a host of promises to the patriarchs by God, such as those of numerous descendants, land, a promised heir, special relationship, blessing, prosperity and fertility.<sup>1</sup> Other than these, there is one other promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the patriarchal narratives, though this is numerically not as frequent as most of the above promises. This promise is expressed through a formula and its variants, pronouncing or predicting a universal significance and destiny for the patriarchs that "in you all the families of the earth shall find blessing" (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).<sup>2</sup> All the five occurrences of the formula are placed as what could be described as strategic junctures of the patriarchal narratives. The formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations" occurs only six times in the whole of the Old Testament. It is therefore noteworthy that five of its six occurrences appear in the patriarchal narratives, and elsewhere only in Jer.4:2.<sup>3</sup> Allusions to the theme, however, do appear to be found in Isa.19:24; Zech.8:13 (cf. Num.24:9; Ps.47:9; 72:17; Isa.2:1-4; 61:16; Mic.4:1-4; Mal.3:12), but in other formulations.

The patriarchal promises mentioned above are by nature quite specific and particularistic in relation to the recipient or recipients. On the other hand, the promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" is by definition more outward-looking and universalistic. Thus, in the patriarchal promises, there seems to be embedded these two different, potentially but not necessarily exclusive, perspectives.

The patriarchal narratives as a whole have been well recognised as occupying a 'bridging' position between the primeval history (Gen.1-11) and the formative beginning of the Israelite people and nation as presented in the rest of the Book of Genesis (Gen.36-50) through the Books of Exodus to Deuteronomy. In other words, the Pentateuch provides the broader context for the patriarchal narratives. By virtue of its subject, the primeval history has throughout a universalistic perspective, while the subject of the Israelite people is inevitably more specific and particularistic. Thus, the patriarchal narratives, as do the patriarchal promises, have a double perspective in their wider context. In fact, without the universalistic perspective of the promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as expressed by the formula, the patriarchal narratives, left only with the particularistic promises, would then not be such an appropriate 'bridge' between the primeval history and the narratives of the formative beginning of the Israelite nation.

In view of the double perspective noted in the patriarchal promises and narratives, it is very striking that the preoccupation of the majority of the discussions of the patriarchal narratives revolves chiefly around the more particularistic promises, and are conducted under the framework of promise-fulfilment in which these promises find their eventual fulfilment in the history of the Israelite nation.<sup>4</sup> The universalistic promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations", on the other hand, has not attracted the same degree of interest.<sup>5</sup> It appears that the universalistic nature of the latter is not easily accommodated in the dominant framework of promise-fulfilment under which the majority of studies on the patriarchal narratives are approached. This one-sided emphasis, however, is not

in keeping with the double perspective of the patriarchal narratives both themselves and in their wider Pentateuchal context, not to mention the apparent significance of the promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in its own right in the patriarchal narratives. Thus, we believe a study of the theme as expressed by the formula is necessary and it might even help to shed some further light on the significance of the patriarchal narratives in the Pentateuchal context.

Despite the preoccupation with the more particularistic promises in the patriarchal narratives, there have also been some discussions of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as well. Thus far, these discussions have been chiefly twofold. First, to decide on the meaning and correct translation of the word  $\text{בְּרֵכָה}$ , which occurs only in the formula in the patriarchal narratives (12:3; 18:18; 28:14) in the whole of the Old Testament. Secondly, studies of the theme have been generally set in a wider context, namely the framework of the Yahwist's epic and theology, taken by most to be reflecting the ideology of the Davidic-Solomonic united monarchy era.

In our study of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the patriarchal narratives below, in Chapter One, we shall briefly survey, and then evaluate, the discussions of some commentators with regard to the two areas of emphasis just mentioned. We shall try to draw some conclusions from the survey which would then provide a working premise for our approach to the study of the theme.

In Chapter Two, an attempt will be made to analyse the literary characteristics of the different formulations of the theme in their respective contexts. We believe the variations which the

formulaic analysis would seek to show could provide some light on how the formula and the theme are used in the patriarchal narratives.

Following that, we shall finally study the occurrences of the formula of the theme against the narratives of each patriarch: Abraham (Chapters Three and Four), Isaac (Chapter Five), and Jacob (Chapter Six). Our concern in these chapters would not be limited only to the immediate narratives in which the formula of the theme appears, but also to the overall cycle of the story of each patriarch in Gen.12-35, so as to know whether the theme under study has any further function or significance in each of the three patriarchal stories.

CHAPTER ONE - PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS OF THE THEME "BLESSING FOR  
THE NATIONS"

Our survey of previous discussions of the theme will be in two parts. First, we shall discuss the attempts to decide on the meaning and translation of  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$ . Secondly, the views of commentators who have analysed the theme at length or have made some significant comments on the theme will be surveyed and analysed.

A)  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  - Passive, Reflexive or Otherwise?

It is well known that the task of deciding whether  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  in 12:3; 18:18; 28:14, should be taken as passive or reflexive in meaning is not altogether easy, as is shown by the lack of agreement among commentators. We would merely outline the main positions taken by commentators below.

1) Passive

The more traditional position amongst commentators is to take  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  in a passive sense. It is well recognised that the niph'al in many cases is best represented by the passive voice in English.<sup>1</sup> Some advocates of a passive as against a reflexive meaning for  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  have gone further and tried to show that even the hithpa'el in the case of  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  ought to be translated by the passive voice as well.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the passive sense of  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  is also the understanding of early traditions as can be seen in the Septuagint's translation of Gen.12:3,  $\text{καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς}$ , and the New Testament's reference to it in Gal.3:8,  $\text{Ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη}$ .

This is also in line with Ecclesiasticus 44:21, where we have:

ἐνευλογηθηναὶ ἐν σπέρματι αὐτοῦ. In fact, it is noteworthy that Acts 3:25, which is quite likely to be looking back to Gen.22:18; 26:4, where the normally reflexive hithpael of

is used, takes the hithpael as passive and translates it as:

καὶ ἐν τῷ σπέρματι σου ἐνευλογηθῆσονται πασαὶ αἱ πατρίδι της γῆς.<sup>3</sup> Finally, many commentators have also argued

from the context of Gen.12:1-4, as a 'climax' of the primeval history, that any other sense than a passive for יִבְרַךְ would be inappropriate. For if the meaning were that Abraham's name would be taken merely as an example of blessing to be wished for by others, it would be less in harmony with the prominent role of Abraham in God's plan to bless mankind after the series of judgements in the primeval history.<sup>4</sup>

## 2) Reflexive

Those who hold to a reflexive meaning for יִבְרַךְ argue, against the interpreters above, that the niph'al is primarily a reflexive conjugation.<sup>5</sup> More important, if the passive sense is intended for יִבְרַךְ in 12:3; 18:18; 28:14, the pual of בָּרַךְ should have been used. In fact, examples of the latter are found quite frequently in the Old Testament (Num.22:6; Deut.33:13; Pss.37:22; 112:2; 128:2ff). Furthermore, in similar contexts to the three occurrences of יִבְרַךְ where the purpose and meaning are essentially the same, the clearly reflexive hithpael form יִבְרַךְנָא is used (22:18 and 26:4). Therefore, these advocates have claimed that the most likely meaning of the formula in 12:3b is that "may God bless us as he blessed Abraham", with the latter being named only as the

exemplar of the divine blessing for all mankind.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, they have claimed support for this interpretation by appealing to the manner in which Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh in Gen.48:20: "By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh'" (cf. Ruth 4:11). Thus, Albrektson concluded that "it is appropriate that the sense of the disputed niph'al ... be explained from the hithpa'el, of which the meaning is certain."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Rowley argued that "since this reflexive-hithpa'el is a possible translation of all the five passages, and since it is probable that they are all to be understood alike, this is the meaning given to them all in most modern works."<sup>8</sup> In line with this reflexive understanding of  $\text{׀׀׀׀׀}$ , it is understandable that Gunkel, followed by Skinner, argues that  $\text{׀׀׀׀׀ ׀׀׀׀׀}$  (12:2d) should be revocalised as  $\text{׀׀׀׀׀׀ ׀׀׀׀׀׀}$  which he translates: "dass er [der Name] ein Segenwort werden soll."<sup>9</sup>

The following comments can be made regarding the two arguments above. On the one hand, the grammatical arguments for a passive sense to  $\text{׀׀׀׀׀}$  are ultimately inconclusive; at best, they only show that the passive sense is not a priori to be ruled out. The witness of the LXX and the New Testament, while reflecting the important understanding of early traditions of the issue, are no sure argument that that was the 'original' understanding of 12:3 etc. The main obstacle, however, is the fact that the pual of  $\text{׀׀׀׀׀}$ , with a distinctly passive sense, is consistently avoided if such was the unambiguous intention of  $\text{׀׀׀׀׀}$  in 12:3 etc.

On the other hand, the arguments for a reflexive sense to  $\text{׀׀׀׀׀}$  are probably even weaker. The argument that the pual of  $\text{׀׀׀׀׀}$  is consistently avoided is double-edged. For it could also be

asked why, if the reflexive is clearly intended in 12:3 etc., is the normally reflexive  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  not used there instead?<sup>10</sup> After all,  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  is used within the patriarchal narratives in similar contexts in 22:18; 26:4, while the pual of  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  does not appear once in the Book of Genesis. More serious, however, is the methodological error committed by those who argue in this way. To interpret  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  by the reflexive  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  is to assume that the two conjugations of  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  can be equated, which is not proven, and that the same 'author' is responsible for the different forms in the patriarchal narratives.<sup>11</sup> It is generally agreed, even by those who take  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  as reflexive, that 12:3; 18:18; 28:14, belong to J, while 22:18; 26:4, belong to D. It is striking that Skinner, who argues for a reflexive sense to  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$ , noted that "these passages 22:18; 26:4, however, belong to the secondary strata of J (as does 18:18, and perhaps 28:14), and are not necessarily decisive of the sense of 12:3."<sup>12</sup> As the methodology of these advocates is inconclusive in the first place, their appeal to Gen.48:20 for an explanation of how the formula in 12:3 is to be taken is of not much contribution to the debate.

In fact, it is arguable, as  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  occurs only in the patriarchal narratives, the proper context to look for a possible meaning of it ought to be there, and not Gen.48:20 or elsewhere. Of the three occurrences, it seems that the context of 18:18 offers some light on how  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  operates. In the Sodom-Gomorrah narrative (Gen.18-19), it is instructive that it was not the foreign peoples who prayed to be blessed as Abraham, but rather that Abraham interceded for them on his own initiative.

The other basic weakness of the argument for a reflexive meaning to  $\text{ׁוּבְרַחֲמֵי}$  is the disregard for the contexts of the use of

the prepositional phrase  $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$  (12:3; 28:14;  $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$  18:18) in the formulation of the theme. Coats commented that "The key ... is the prepositional phrase  $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$  'in you'. Abraham functions as a mediator for the blessing, a catalyst. His blessing makes possible a blessing for the families of the earth. And his blessing changes the broken intimacy between the nations of the earth and God."<sup>13</sup> The prominence of Abraham's role in God's plan to bless humankind brought about by the juxtaposition of 12:1-9 with the primeval history as a series of broken relationships and curses also lends support to the comment of Coats. In other words, the reflexive understanding of 12:3b in the sense that "may God bless us as he blessed Abraham" is not favoured by the broader context.<sup>14</sup> The need to revocalise  $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$   $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$  (12:2d) to  $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$   $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$  by some advocates for a reflexive meaning to  $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$  only goes to show the weakness of the argument.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, most of the commentators who regard  $\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}\text{ךְ}$  as reflexive frequently supplement their conclusion by conceding the significance of the patriarchs' and Israel's role in the blessing of other nations as going beyond the name of the patriarchs or Israel being used as mere formulae of divine blessing which one wished for oneself. Thus Jacob commented:

"The Yahwist presents Abraham's election as an episode which, standing out against the plan of universal history, is to pour forth as a blessing upon it. Yet it could be that the promise, several times repeated ... (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), is not so definite concerning the missionary duty as it seems at first sight, for, according to the similar grammatical constructions of Gen. 48:20; Jer. 29:22 and Zech 8:13, the blessing of Abraham is to be understood in an exemplary sense as being among the peoples the prototype of blessing. But the solemnity of the formula and especially the general plan of the Yahwist's book provoke us rather to see the general plan of the Yahwist's book between Abraham and the peoples a relationship of cause and effect ..."<sup>16</sup>

In view of the debate and our comments outlined above, it is not easy to arrive at a decisive solution. We believe there is some merit in the proposed "middle" meaning for  $\text{בְּרַכְתֶּם}$  advanced by Schreiner, and adopted by a few others.<sup>17</sup> Recognising that  $\text{בְּרַכְתֶּם}$  is not an outright passive or reflexive, and taking into account the undoubted significant role of Abraham in the series of divine promises in 12:1-3 against the background of the domination of curse in the primeval history, Schreiner proposed the translation for 12:3b: "so dass in dir sich Segen erwerben (können) all Geschlechter der Erde."<sup>18</sup> But beyond the attempts to understand the meaning of  $\text{בְּרַכְתֶּם}$ , it needs to be stressed also that the divine speech in 12:1-3, where  $\text{בְּרַכְתֶּם}$  occurs for the first time in the formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations", actually points to the primary role of God as the one who ultimately blesses the nations through Abraham.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, any attempt to understand the meaning of  $\text{בְּרַכְתֶּם}$  should not be done in a rigid grammatical sense as the advocates for a reflexive meaning are prone to emphasise. Other elements in the formula in which  $\text{בְּרַכְתֶּם}$  is found and the immediate, as well as the wider, narrative contexts must be considered. It is therefore interesting that Scharbert, who argues for a reflexive, exemplary meaning for  $\text{בְּרַכְתֶּם}$ , concluded:

"These interpretations [passive, middle, or reflexive] do not contradict each other, when it is considered that in each case brk in the niph'al denotes a declaration of solidarity with So-and-so, and on this basis the nations can depend on the blessing of Yahweh. On analogy with the hithpael construction [namely  $\text{בְּרַכְתֶּם}$  followed by denoting a declaration of solidarity], it is possible to capture the meaning of all three interpretations by translating the expression something like this: '... then all the nations of the earth shall confer on themselves blessing under your name/with reference to you.'<sup>20</sup>

Following the above discussions, even if one can arrive at

an understanding and a translation that comes nearest to the possible sense of  $\text{בְּרֵכָה}$ , to which we believe the "middle" voice seems most suited, we are still faced with a host of questions to be answered before a better understanding of how the promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as expressed by the formula is integrated or functions in the patriarchal narratives. How do we account for the variations within the formula itself in the patriarchal narratives? Why do the particular formulations of the theme abruptly disappear after the patriarchal narratives?

#### B) The Theme in the Framework of the Yahwist's Epic

The passage in which the formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations" appears for the first time, Gen.12:1-3, is a significant programmatic speech of Yahweh. The passage is regarded by most commentators as a free composition of the Yahwist. Until recently, the Yahwist's work, its theology and provenance, has been quite unquestioningly taken to be derived from the Davidic-Solomonic era of the 10th or 9th century B.C. As such, the theme has quite naturally been studied against the background and ideology of the international horizon of the united monarchy. Some commentators adopting this framework of interpretation, nevertheless, also see some later Deuteronomistic influence on the theme under discussions as well. With the recent works of N. Wagner, J. van Seters, R. Rendtorff, and H. Schmid, the dating, composition, and theology of the Yahwist's work has been quite seriously called into question.<sup>21</sup> We shall below make a survey of the major works touching on the theme and evaluate their results in illuminating an understanding of it.

1) Gerhard von Rad

In his epochal essay "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch" (1938), von Rad incidentally accorded the theme under study a "normative" function in the Yahwist's work.<sup>22</sup> He recognised that the present form of J begins with the early history of the world, and is of the view that the drawing together of the widely separated elements (he listed nine, following Gunkel) in the history reveals the motive of the J writer.<sup>23</sup> He noted that in the primeval history,

"it is a ... well accepted fact that the J writer postulates a hidden growth of grace alongside the ever-widening gulf between God and man. The story of the Fall, the Cain narrative, and the Flood story all show God's redemptive activity, forgiving and sustaining at the same time as he punishes. Only in the story of the building of the Tower does the divine judgement appears to be the last word, when the nations are scattered and the unity of the human race is lost."<sup>24</sup>

In another place, von Rad describes the situation thus:

"The story about the Tower of Babel concludes with God's judgement on mankind; there is no word of grace. The whole primeval history, therefore, seems to break off in shrill dissonance, and the question ... now arises even more urgently: Is God's relationship to the nations now finally broken; is God's gracious forbearance now exhausted; has God rejected the nations in wrath forever? That is the burdensome question which no thoughtful reader of ch.11 can avoid; indeed, one can say that our narrator intended by means of the whole plan of his primeval history to raise precisely this question and to pose it in all its severity."<sup>25</sup>

It is at this point of 'despair', von Rad went on, that the primeval history dovetails with sacred history:

"Abraham is called out of all the nations and he is promised the blessing 'that all the races on earth will be blessed in him.' Thus the opening words of the story of redemption provide the answer to the problem posed by the early history of the world, that of the relationship of God to the nations as a whole. The beginning of the story of redemption in Gen XII.1-3, however, not only brings to an end the early history, ... but actually provides the key to it. ...

In thus welding together the early history of the world and the history of redemption, the J writer submits his account of the meaning and purpose of the redemptive relationship which Yahweh has vouchsafed to Israel. He provides the aetiology of all Israelite aetiology, ... He proclaims ... that the ultimate purpose of the redemption which God will bring about in Israel is that of bridging the gulf between God and the entire human race."<sup>26</sup>

Following Gunkel, von Rad takes Gen.12:1-3 as "a free composition of the J writer", a specially composed link-passage which has become by its very nature a declaration of fundamental beliefs. The passage, he claims, contains three promises: (a) Abraham will become a great nation, (b) Yahweh will give land to Abraham's progeny, and (c) in Abraham all the races of the earth will be blessed.<sup>27</sup> The significance of the theme under study, the promise (c), is made quite explicit by von Rad when he continues:

"The Yahwist found the first two promises in the tradition of the patriarchal sagas; but the third and most important came from none of the more ancient traditions. It is therefore not surprising that this unique notion finds few echoes in the later parts of the Yahwist's work. The tradition which the writer is following was of immense import in its own right ... The untenable nature of the traditions precluded any further infiltration of his own fundamental concept. It sufficed that it was proclaimed at one point of the work in a way which made it normative for the whole" (all emphases ours).<sup>28</sup>

Thus, according to von Rad's interpretation, the promises of a great nation and land are brought into contact with the primeval history, dealing with mankind in its universal scope, by the "normative" function of the third promise: "in [Abraham] all the races of the earth will be blessed." In other words, the first two promises, on their own, by virtue of their particularistic nature in relation only to Abraham and his progeny, would not be able to answer the problems posed by the primeval history. Without the third promise, it would not be possible for the Yahwist to provide "the aetiology of all Israelite aetiology."

While von Rad regarded the third promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as the most important, unique notion, and fundamental concept of the Yahwist's own, he also concluded that the theme was precluded from any further infiltration into the Yahwist's work because of the unadaptability of the received traditions. No matter how significant the link passage of Gen.12:1-3 is between the primeval history and the history of redemption, could a promise or theme such as the one under discussion, being found only once (as von Rad did not even discuss its significance, if any, in 18:18 and 28:14) in a work of considerable length be considered as fundamental and normative for the whole?<sup>29</sup> In fact, if the received traditions of the Yahwist are as unadaptable as von Rad claims, then the further occurrences of the theme in at least two places (18:18; 28:14) which von Rad regards as belonging to J, surely merits further analysis. Moreover, even leaving aside the question of the source(s) of Gen.22:1-19, how does one account for the occurrence of this fundamental concept of the Yahwist (26:4) in the context of the Isaac narrative (Gen.26), which von Rad also regards as J, by a later hand as alleged by most commentators, if ever it were, when it was apparently not present in the first instance? While it might be true that this unique notion of the Yahwist finds few echoes in the later parts of the Yahwist's work, it could not be said of it within the context of the patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35). In fact, we shall be arguing later that the theme is very much integrated into the stories of all three patriarchs, even where the formula expressing the theme is not present.

Thus, while von Rad has correctly highlighted the significance of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the Yahwist's work,

specifically in the connection between the primeval history and the beginning of the redemption history, his discussion of the theme is undoubtedly too narrowly based and has not taken into account the respective functions and significance, if any, of the other occurrences of the theme in the patriarchal narratives.

## 2) Josef Schreiner

The first major article dealing solely with the theme under study is by Schreiner entitled "Segen für die Völker in der Verheissung an die Väter" (1962). We have already noted above Schreiner's contribution to the debate concerning the meaning and translation of  $\text{בְּרֵכָה}$  in 12:3b. As for the theme "Blessing for the Nations", Schreiner takes 12:1-3 (J), the call of Abraham, as the basic passage, which he considered to be the "älteste Stelle". With it, he says:

"Gott beginnt seine Heilsgeschichte wiederum mit einem einzigen Menschen ... Die Spannung, die in diesem Ruf ausschliesslich an Abraham angesichts der übrigen Menschheit aufsteht, ist gross. Der Sammler der Vätergeschichten, der uns in dem Bericht über die Berufung des Erzväters die Brücke zwischen Ur- und Patriarchengeschichte gebaut hat, lässt sie bewusst bestehen. Es ist seine Absicht, dass in sie hineinfalle, was Jahwe verheissen habe."<sup>30</sup>

However, Schreiner went on to note that the promises to Abraham in Gen.12 do not end at v.3 but are followed by the promise of the possession of land by Abraham's descendants (v.7). He argued that the land promise was made after Abraham's obedience to the divine command in v.1, and its separation from the rest of the other promises (vv.2f) served to underline its significance. He noted:

"Im Hexateuch steht bei der Weitergabe und bei der Rückverweisung auf die Väterverheissung ab Ex 6,2ff und besonders ausgeprägt im DT die Gabe des Landes im Vordergrund, so dass die anderen Elemente stark überlagert werden, ein Zeichen

dafür, welches Gewicht die Landnahmentradition von Israels Frühzeit an hatte."<sup>31</sup>

With the prominence laid on the possession of land, Schreiner's attention is thereby directed to the early epoch of Israel's history when the promise was realised and possession taken of the land. He found in the early epoch of Israel's history the provenance for the theme "Blessing for the Nations" when he concluded:

"Es ist nicht zufällig, dass der J einen solchen Heilsverleih an die Völker in die Abrahamverheissung, die auch bei ihm in der Zusage des Landes gipfelt, hineinstellt. Denn für ihm ist gewiss 'judäische Herkunft' und eine 'Entstehungszeit zwischen 950 und 900 v. Chr.' anzunehmen, ja vielleicht, wie seine Geisteshaltung verrät, näherin 'die davidisch-salomonische Ära'. Das Grossreich Davids, welches nicht nur den Verband der zwölf Stämme umfasste, mit Jerusalem als religiösem Zentrum und Sitz des 'Königs Jahwe' war der natürliche Nährboden für eine Auffassung, welche auch die anderen Völker mit in das Israel gewährte Heil einbezog. Es ist möglich, dass J nicht nur auf die Theologie des Jerusalemer Heiligtums zurückgriff, sondern direkt ein dort formuliertes Kultwort verwendete."<sup>32</sup>

While Schreiner sees the provenance of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the great empire of David, it is noteworthy that he mentioned as contributing factors to the emergence of the theme under study the relationship of the union of the twelve tribes before the Monarchy, and the Kingship of Yahweh rather than solely on the figure of the Israelite king, David or Solomon. In the experience of the Israelite people from the Exodus to the setting up of the Monarchy, undoubtedly there were examples of foreign groups being incorporated into the Israelite community and receiving benefits from the latter (Ex.12:38; 22:21; 23:9; Num.10:29; Josh.9:1-27). By emphasising the kingship of Yahweh rather than the actual king as the source of blessing to others, the early dating of the universalistic perspective of the theme argued by Schreiner is more readily retained because of the apparent ancient belief that Yahweh's dominion is universal

(Gen.14:18f; 24:1,7; Num.14:21; Ps.47:1-9). In other words, the contributing background to such a concept as "Blessing for the Nations" could well be pre-monarchic, although the great empire of David with its internationalism no doubt would have furthered this concept.

Schreiner then turns his attention to the other four occurrences of the theme in the patriarchal narratives, of which he says:

"Nicht an allen Stellen, an denen die Abrahamverheissung als das Hauptthema durch die Vätergeschichte der Gn weitergetragen wird, ist vom Segen für die Völker die Rede. Dass er aber viermal nur eben zufällig hier und da in Erscheinung trete oder lediglich deshalb in grösseren Abständen wiederholt werde, um nicht in Vergessenheit zu fallen, dürfte bei dem kunstvollen Gefüge der Erzählung doch wohl kaum anzunehmen sein. ...

Aber damit nicht genug. Es sind immer entscheidende Punkte im Leben der Väter, wenn die Segenszusage Jahwes in ihrer unverkürzten Fülle auf sie zukommt."<sup>33</sup>

However, his main attention on the four passages (18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14) where the theme appears lies primarily in a traditional historical explanation of the variations of the formulations of the theme when compared with the basic passage of 12:1-3.

It is clear, according to Schreiner, that 22:18 and 26:4 with emphasis on obedience to the voice of God, and also the mention of commandments, statutes and laws in the latter, "sprechen den nämlichen Gedanken aus ... Hierbei wird die Verwandtschaft mit dem Gedankengut des Dt, die in dem weiter ausladenden V. 26,5 besonders kräftig hervortritt deutlich."<sup>34</sup> While taking the formulation in 28:14, which is closest to that of 12:3, as belonging to J, Schreiner also noted here a later (Deut.!) touch. He said that this can be seen in the appending of the phrase "in your seed" to "in you families of the earth shall find blessing for themselves." The appending of the former phrase is undoubtedly influenced by its presence in the Deuteronomistic thinking in 22:18 and 26:4, so Schreiner claimed.<sup>35</sup>

On the formulation of the theme in 18:18, Schreiner believes that here we may already have the first sign of an early attempt to reinterpret the theme according to Deuteronomistic thinking. He said:

"Möglich ist aber immerhin, dass auch hier der Einsatzpunkt schon von jenem ersten Sammler markiert wurde. Dass sich 18,18 die Terminologie von J mit der eines anderen überschneide (Ni.; 'aller Völker der Erde'), könnte dafür ein Zeichen sein. Ein späterer hat sicherlich an den erwähnten Stellen gearbeitet, ganz abgesehen von dem, was an dt Gedankengut beigegeben wurde."<sup>36</sup>

It would go beyond the scope of our study to discuss the traditio-historical issues raised by Schreiner's analysis of the variations of the formulations of the theme "Blessing for the Nations". However, it would be appropriate to make a few remarks here. First, on the linguistic criteria used to determine Deuteronomistic influence on the formulations of the theme in the passages mentioned above, there are equally strong arguments raised against such procedures. G. Coats has argued quite persuasively against the uncritical connecting of the motif of the fear of God, and we might add the obedience to the voice of God, to one source or another. He said:

"The emphasis on obedience is characteristic of a particular genre ... And source analysis is on weak ground if it attributes an example of any particular genre to one source simply by definition of the sources ... would we not have to ask whether the fear of God motif in this context is characteristic of the E source [or D source for that matter], or ... it is characteristic of a story, of any story, or ... any other genre developed around a text. Cf. Exod. 20:20; Deut. 13:3f; Job 2:3."<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, M. Weinfeld, while discussing 22:16-18 generally, and commenting on 26:4f specifically, made the following observations:

"There is nothing Deuteronomistic in this verse. שָׂאָ בְּקוֹל along with other terms expressing obedience is very frequent in the deuteronomistic literature which stresses loyalty to the covenant, but ... this does not mean that the terms as such were coined by the deuteronomic movement. The combination of תּוֹרָה וְחֻקִּים 'laws and teachings' is never found

in the Deuteronomic literature. (Deuteronomy always uses Torah in singular and usually with the definite article (  $\text{הַטּוֹרָה}$  ).) On the other hand, the combination is attested in JE (Ex.18:16 and 20)."<sup>38</sup>

As for the use of the phrase "all the nations of the earth", though it is true that it is frequently found in later periods of Israelite history,<sup>39</sup> there is also evidence even in its early traditions, that Israel was already aware of its own position "as a people dwelling alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations" (Num.23:9; see also 24:15-24). But more than that, we would want to argue that the mention of 'nations' instead of 'families' in the formulations of 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 is equally capable of a literary and contextual explanation — as we shall try to show later. Briefly, the juxtaposition of Abraham's call with the universalistic primeval history seems to be more natural with the phrase "all the families of  $\text{כָּל־בְּרִיֹתֶיךָ}$ " (12:3b). The specific and localised mention of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.18-19), of "the gates of their enemies" (22:17), and of Gerar and the Philistines (Gen.26) would make the use of the phrase "all the nations of  $\text{כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם}$ " in 18:18; 22:18; 26:4, more natural.

To sum up our survey of Schreiner's approach to the theme "Blessing for the Nations", it has to be said that his attempt has established the theme as of considerable significance in the patriarchal narratives as a whole, not just in the call of Abraham in 12:1-3. This is so whether one agrees or not with his traditio-historical suggestion of the provenance of the theme and subsequent Deuteronomistic influence on the re-formulations of the theme. However, Schreiner, like von Rad, did not go further than his detailed discussion of the significance of the theme in the context of Abraham's call in 12:1-3. Most probably due to his preoccupation with traditio-historical issues, the theme was not analysed for its significance in the other four

narratives where it appears, although Schreiner recognised the theme is always repeated or reaffirmed in "entscheidende Punkte im Leben der Väter." Clearly, the function of the theme in 12:1-3 is not necessarily the same in the other narratives.

### 3) H.W. Wolff

Probably the most significant contribution to establish the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as a significant element in the Pentateuchal or patriarchal materials is by Wolff in his article "Das Kerygma des Jahwisten" (1964). In his article, Wolff takes the Balaam narratives, including the passage about Israel's apostasy to Baal Peor (Num.25:1-5), as the end of the Yahwist's work, on the grounds that the "real intent of the Yahwist's proclamation ... demonstrate[s] ... a striking decline of interest in the conquest."<sup>40</sup> Working further on a number of allusions, as he regarded them, Wolff concluded that the provenance of the Yahwist's work,

"is in the vicinity of the Solomonic capital in times when, perhaps, the first crises of the empire were already appearing on the horizon; but as a whole, the feeling of security and superiority is even stronger than in David's days, being sustained by the growth of wealth through peaceful trade and cultural acquisitions ... What does the Yahwist have to say to Israel at this time?"<sup>41</sup>

In addition, Wolff went on to affirm that,

"the Yahwist, with his compiling, ordering, selecting, and enlarging of the traditions, means to proclaim a message first becomes undoubtedly clear in a few freely formulated insertions. He has inserted them at decisive transitions ... 6:5-8; 8:21f; 12:1-4a; and 18:17-18, 22b-33. ... 12:1-3 is prominent among these ... because it forms the transition from the history of man to the patriarchal history."<sup>42</sup>

Having isolated 12:1-4a as basic for the kerygma of the Yahwist, Wolff then analysed its syntax and concluded:

"its [the kerygma's] most exact form is presumably in 12:3b. ... if verse 2 sets the goal of the Abrahamic blessing in that he himself will become a blessing, and if verse 3a adds that in this blessing the destiny of his contemporaries is decided by Yahweh, then the conclusio of verse 3b can do no more than formulate the great prospect that, in Abraham, all the families of the earth can gain blessing."<sup>43</sup>

The Yahwist, so Wolff believes, arrived at this formulation by taking up and developing the promise of descendants, instead of the promise of land, in the received patriarchal traditions. The principal catchword of the passage 12:1-3, viz., blessing, with its fivefold variations, is understandable only against this traditional promise of descendants. Originally understood as of immediate effect and realisation, the concept of blessing is here being modified and promised to future ages. As such, "Blessing becomes the interpretative word (Deutewort) of the great history of Israel from Abraham's departure to David's empire."<sup>44</sup> Wolff went on further to suggest that the original concept of blessing, which has already undergone a 'historical' modification, underwent a further modification, and this latter with a significant purpose:

"On the one hand, the one who is blessed is now, himself, to effect blessing; on the other, he is placed in relation to all the families of the earth. This means, in sum, that the received catchword becomes the key word for Israel's relation to the peoples of the earth and for their relation to Israel.

With this, the Yahwist expresses his views on a problem which first becomes pressing in its full extent with the formation of the empire. ... The crises which begin in Solomon's days show the continuation of unrest among the subject people. From the Yahwist's key passage comes this question: Have the peoples of Abraham as yet brought about the blessing for them? Have the peoples found blessing in Israel? Does the 'great nation,' then, with its 'great name,' correspond to the proclaimed will of Yahweh?"<sup>45</sup>

Wolff believes the Yahwist got his authority for the "double modifications" of the catchword "blessing" in 12:2d and 3b in a formula from the cult — "Those who curse you, let them be cursed. But those who

bless you, let them be blessed!" (Gen.27:29b; Num.24:9b).<sup>46</sup>

To demonstrate that 12:3b is the "decisive word" of the Yahwist's kerygma, Wolff studied the key passage 12:1-3 against the background of chaos, conflict, and hopeless disunion occasioned by anxiety and arrogance in the primeval history. He believes the so-called primeval history explains in advance why all the families of the earth need the blessing.<sup>47</sup> Wolff noted that while  $\uparrow 72$  is used in five distinct variations in 12:1-3, it is not once used in the Yahwist's history of man. In fact, there is a fivefold use of  $\uparrow 77$  in Gen.3:14,17; 4:11; 5:29; and 9:25, as well as once of  $\uparrow 77$  in 8:21.<sup>48</sup> From this he drew the conclusion:

"These brief reminders ... may suffice to show how the narratives which precede 12:1-3 confirm that the real message of the Yahwist may be seen only in 12:3b [emphases ours]."<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, Wolff went on to assert that "it must be possible to read everything which the Yahwist compiles and presents" not only against the question of have the peoples of Abraham brought blessing to others as yet, but also against the Yahwist's thematic question of how all peoples are to find blessing or aid for life in Israel.<sup>50</sup>

In the next section of his article, Wolff turned his attention to the way in which the Yahwist develops his theme in three complexes of narratives: i) the patriarchal; ii) the Egyptian, which includes for him the Joseph story and the Exodus; iii) the Sinai theme and the conquest tradition, around the perspective of the double thematic questions just mentioned above.

In the complex of the patriarchal narratives, the theme appears, Wolff points out, in a stressed position in the Yahwist's shaping of the Mamre-Sodom narrative (Gen.18-19). The narrative discloses for the first time how in Abraham-Israel blessing can come

to those in need. However, Abraham's intercession on behalf of the people in Sodom did not succeed then; thus the task before Israel of Solomon's time is all the clearer:

"Israel's commission does not consist in agreeing with the well-deserved judgement on her subjects, or even in its execution, but in unabating, intercessory activity she should be intent on forgiveness and forbearance."<sup>51</sup>

Following this, Wolff then made the striking statement that "all the other Abraham pericopes are probably meant to be seen in the brilliant light of this Yahwistic passage 12:1-3 ..."<sup>52</sup> In Gen.13, Abraham, the one blessed, becomes a blessing by leaving the good land to the other (Lot) in freedom. As a negative example, the Yahwist warns by the episode 12:10-20, that, by lying, Abraham brings evil upon the Egyptians instead of blessing. Moreover, it is interesting that Wolff went on to maintain that "the broad significance of the Yahwist's theme was understood in later times as shown by the redactional expansion of the narrative concerning the sacrifice of Isaac in 22:15ff."<sup>53</sup> For Wolff, "... because you have obeyed my voice" is the Deuteronomistic manner in which the blessing will be transmitted to the peoples.

As Wolff regards the formulation of the theme in 26:4f as a postscript, it is natural for him to say that the Isaac narrative (Gen. 26) is not capped with it, as in 12:3b. However, he asserts that the Yahwist has interpreted the narrative with much more originality. The narrative is tied in with the theme by the catchwords, 'blessing' and 'great' (26:12f especially, but also vv.24,29), recalling 12:2. Initially, Isaac-Israel neglects his commission among the nations, and out of his fear, guilt is brought upon them (v.10). But later "the nations necessarily move into relation to Isaac as one blessed by Yahweh." Isaac effected blessing to others

by concluding a solemn covenant with the Philistines in spite of their former hostility (v.27) and shalom is established in the promise to do no evil to one another. Thus, "the Yahwist, with the model of the Philistines, submits a second interpretation of his sermon on the Solomonic kingdom."<sup>54</sup>

As for the Jacob cycle, it is striking that Wolff is of the opinion that "the Jacob-Esau cycle deserves only passing interest."<sup>55</sup> Isaac's blessing of Jacob (27:27-29) is only a distinct remembrance of 12:2-3 through the catchwords "peoples" and "nations". Nevertheless, Wolff sees the appearance of the theme in 28:14, Jacob's Bethel theophany, as answering the question 'how' the nations are to be blessed — "in Israel's multiplying and expanding to the West, East, North and South ...". Israel intermingles with the nations: this is the manner by which Yahweh himself brings about fulfilment of the blessing, even in the empire.<sup>56</sup> In the Jacob story, however, Wolff seems to assert that Laban's confession in 30:27 that Yahweh has blessed him because of Jacob, demonstrated that "the blessing comes to the nations in the abundance of herds; with his skill as a shepherd Jacob effects a blessing among the Arameans."<sup>57</sup>

Wolff concluded his observations on the Yahwist's kerygma in the patriarchal narratives in the following words:

"To summarize: the Yahwist expounds his kerygma in the patriarchal narratives. He deals with 'all the families of the earth' through the examples of the Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, and Arameans. How are they to find blessing in Israel? By Israel's intercession ...; by readiness for peaceful agreement ...; by economic aid ... Yahweh created the prerequisite by fulfilling the promise of increase and expansion. In what way is blessing found through all this? By its bringing annulment of guilt and punishment, community life without strife, effective material aid for life."<sup>58</sup>

In the next complex of the Yahwist work, the Joseph story and the Exodus, Wolff conceded that no direct use is made of 12:3b in the present Joseph story. However, he asserts that it may have been sacrificed to the Elohist passages due to editing (cf. Gen.46:3, "great nation").<sup>59</sup> The reference to "many people" in Gen.50:20 (E), "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive ..." would, for the Yahwist, so Wolff claims, unconditionally have included the Egyptians (see Gen.47:13-26!).<sup>60</sup> A significant clue about the transmission of blessing to others is, nevertheless, found in Gen.39:5 concerning Joseph's effect on Potiphar's household, "From the time he made him overseer ... Yahweh blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of Yahweh was upon all that he had, in house and field." From these examples, Wolff concluded:

"Perhaps in the political wisdom of Joseph the Yahwist wishes to hold a mirror before even the 'wise' Solomon and his advisors. Even the distant empires, therefore, are not excluded when all the families of the earth shall find blessing in Israel."<sup>61</sup>

Although the Exodus tradition was connected with the conquest account in the received tradition, so Wolff claims, it has now been given "an entirely new purpose" under the Yahwist's kerygma.<sup>62</sup> Wolff pointed out that at the climax of the plague narratives, the killing of the Egyptian first-born, Pharaoh finally said to Moses, "Rise up, go forth from among my people ... and go, serve Yahweh, ... and bless me also!" (Ex.12:31f; cf. also 8:4,24; 9:28; 10:17). Thus, he concluded that,

"the manner of transmitting the blessing is Israel's worship ... similar to Genesis 18 — intercession and forgiveness! ... Only in one respect does the Yahwist become even clearer for his contemporaries ...: in spite of all the suffering which Israel has experienced on the part of the world power, she is appointed to bring even Egypt under blessing."<sup>63</sup>

Turning to the last complex of narratives in the Yahwist's work, the Sinai and conquest traditions, Wolff explains that in it the Sinai tradition is briefly dealt with because its exclusive relationship between Israel and Yahweh allows no place for the peoples at large.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, the Yahwist could not do away completely with the Sinai tradition because "Israel can be a blessing ... only as Yahweh's people." Moreover, Ex.12:32 (noted above) had already designated Israel's worship as the 'place' where the blessing is transmitted. Thus, the Covenant at Sinai documents Israel's appointment to the Abrahamic blessing.<sup>65</sup>

While the Yahwist shows a "striking decline of interest in the conquest" tradition, Wolff asserts the former was not as resolutely against it as against the Sinai material because in it Israel encountered the nations. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Balaam narrative, in which the Moabites appear once more, comes at the end of the Yahwist work.<sup>66</sup> For the Yahwist, the Balaam narrative has two significances. First, in it, Israel is the blessed of Yahweh, and therefore could not be cursed nor harmed (Num.24:5-9). Secondly, probably with more emphasis, Moab's blessing has not yet come through Israel at the end of the narrative (Num.24:17,25). This, Wolff suggests, "corresponds to the first interpretative passage of the patriarchal history, where, in spite of Abraham's intercession, Sodom is destroyed, and to the Exodus narrative, where Pharaoh and the Egyptians succumb in the sea."<sup>67</sup> And to cap it all, Wolff noted that the Balaam narrative, and therefore the Yahwist's work, ends with the report of Israel's apostasy to Baal Peor (Num.25:1-5) which means that "not only did Moab lose its share in the blessing of Israel, but Israel herself, in her apostasy from Yahweh, missed the

purpose which was shown her in the promise to Abraham. This concluding passage has a warning function similar to that of Gen.12:10ff, which follows upon 12:3."<sup>68</sup>

Summing up his study on the kerygmatic application of the Yahwist's basic concern, Wolff draws the conclusion:

"These [non-blessing and also warning] texts indicate to us that the Yahwist does not yet wish to write the history of the fulfilment of the promise ... [That] all the families of the earth [should] find blessing in Israel is something the Yahwist must still put before Israel as a kerygma. To be sure, fulfilment flares up here and there ... Even the Yahwist preaches to a situation 'between promise and fulfilment.'"<sup>69</sup>

We believe that Wolff's analysis of the Yahwist work has undoubtedly shown that the theme "Blessing for the Nations" is not only an integral element of it, but also a highly significant one as well. In general, one would concede that Wolff was able, by extending the application of the theme through catchwords found in the key passage, 12:1-3, to reason quite persuasively that the Yahwist theme is developed beyond the patriarchal narratives into the Joseph, Exodus and Balaam narratives, though not, it appears into the Sinai material. Even without taking into consideration the Yahwist's purpose in suppressing the conquest tradition, as alleged by Wolff, his illustrations of examples of the realisation or non-realisation of blessing coming to other peoples through Israel as kerygmatic models and challenges put by the Yahwist contain many fresh insights. If the apostasy to Baal-Peor at Shittim in Num.25:1-5, coming after the "enforced" blessing of Israel by Balaam, concludes the Yahwist epic and shows Israel missing the purpose which was shown her in the promise to Abraham, then Wolff's thesis: the Yahwist does not yet wish to write the history of the fulfilment of the promise — all the

families of the earth shall find blessing in (Abraham-Israel) — for kerygmatic purposes, is in general well argued.

Wolff's analysis and conclusions about the kerygma of the Yahwist has received quite widespread support by commentators. Our comments on Wolff's analysis will concentrate on his working premises on the one hand, and his interpretation of the Yahwist kerygma and its development in the narratives concerned on the other.

The working premise of leaving out the conquest account in the Yahwist epic adopted by Wolff on the ground that it was suppressed by the Yahwist is not without question. While it is true that Wolff did argue that the theme of the Promised Land, which was in all probability known to the Yahwist, and was moreover a significant one to him, has now to be accounted for in its "almost unrecognizable form" in 12:1, it has also been interpreted, as Schreiner noted, that by leaving the promise of land apart from 12:1-3 until 12:7, only after Abraham has responded to the divine command to depart, the Yahwist in fact emphasises its significance. Moreover, we might also add, the reaffirmation of the land promise in the equally programmatic speech and promises of Yahweh to Isaac and Jacob in 26:3f and 28:13f respectively, both of which also contain the formulation of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" would argue against Wolff's working premise. On the other hand, Clines has noted that it is quite impossible to decide with any certainty whether the Yahwist originally concluded his work with the conquest tradition or not, or whether its foreshortening, if such there was, was due to accident or the design of others (editors or redactors) in the course of the composition of the Pentateuch.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, Wolff's basic premise that the Yahwist work in its present form concludes without

the conquest could be generally conceded, as indeed the Pentateuch in its present form also ends without the conquest account.<sup>71</sup>

The various allusions on which Wolff based his argument for a Davidic-Solomonic provenance of the Yahwist work, and therefore the kerygmatic theme as well, have been strongly criticised.<sup>72</sup>

Without going into details, one would have to say against Wolff that whatever the allusions, which are quite vague and general, short of being explicit and unambiguous, it is not the type of evidence one would use for dating purposes. Wagner has pointed out that the one concrete allusion Wolff referred to for a Solomonic provenance is not as clear as Wolff claimed. Isaac's 'broken' blessing of Esau in Gen.27:40, "... but when you break loose you shall break his yoke from your neck", is referring, Wolff claims, to the Edomite prince, Hadad, who rebelled against Solomon (1 Kgs.11:14-22,25b). However, Edom broke Israel's control on more than one occasion.<sup>73</sup>

The fact also that the Abraham traditions are never used explicitly in the historical traditions of the United Monarchy period must remain a necessary caution against Wolff's assumption. In any case, the validity of the insights of Wolff regarding the kerygma of the Yahwist, obviously with modifications of his conclusions, remains even without the need to identify the provenance of the theme.

A further criticism that may be made of Wolff's thesis concerns his extending of the theme beyond the patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35) into the rest of the Yahwist epic. On the one hand, he argued that "the real message of the Yahwist may be seen only [emphasis ours] in 12:3b", yet, on the other hand, the pericopes in the rest of the Yahwist epic with the theme are detected by Wolff through what he described as catchwords such as "blessing", "great",

"peoples", or "nations". Admittedly, these catchwords are found in the key passage, 12:1-3. But then, they are at most words of fairly general nature unlike the distinctive formula "in you all the families of the earth shall find blessing." That is why Rendtorff commented that the very narratives which Wolff mentioned to argue his case, the request of Pharaoh to Moses for blessing (Ex.12:32) and Balaam's 'enforced' blessing of Israel (Num.24:19), actually avoided the mention of the Yahwist's kerygmatic theme of 12:3b.<sup>74</sup> In Num.24:19, the formula of Gen.12:3a is used instead. Rendtorff's criticism of Wolff is valid insofar as the latter has probably over-emphasised the importance of 12:3b in isolation from the other parts of the programmatic speech in 12:1-3. However, Rendtorff is also over-rigid in his criticism because it is clearly arguable (as Wolff also saw to a certain extent) that the elements or catchwords in 12:2-3a are all leading up to 12:3b as the ultimate conclusio. It remains the case that the formula most clearly expressing the Yahwist theme "Blessing for the Nations" does not extend beyond the patriarchal narratives, and what Wolff sees as references to the theme in the rest of the Yahwist epic have to be distinguished from it. There seems to be, therefore, a difference in the way the theme is formulated in the patriarchal narratives and the application, if we may so call it, of the theme in the rest of the Yahwist epic.

If the first criticism above of Wolff's handling and interpretation of the promise of land and the conquest tradition stands, then his kerygmatic application of the Yahwist message as a challenge and 'rebuke' to the Israel of Solomonic times would be considerably weakened. In any case, as we have commented, whether the provenance of the theme is shown to be Solomonic or not is not of absolute

importance for the significance of the theme.

Our next area of comment concerns Wolff's application of the theme in the Yahwist materials. First, at three significant junctures, the test of Abraham (22:15-18), the Isaac narrative (26:4f), and the Joseph story (46:3; 50:20), Wolff conceded that the Yahwist kerygmatic theme is also taken up either by the Elohist or by the Deuteronomistic editor (or redactor). Even on Wolff's own basis, it is therefore arguable that the theme is not restricted only to the Yahwist. If the Isaac narrative (Gen.26), which provided Wolff with very fruitful material for expounding the theme, is from the Yahwist, it is all the more striking that the formula expressing the theme is not present in the first place but has to be left to a Deuteronomistic hand to insert it in the significant oracle of Yahweh in vv.3-5. Moreover, the Deuteronomic view is generally taken to be 'hostile' towards the nations.<sup>75</sup> While not denying or questioning Wolff's choice to restrict his study only to the Yahwist material, we believe it is also proper, or even more fruitful, to study the theme not only in J, but in passages not assigned to J. It is also interesting why Wolff did not extend his discussion of the theme into Gen.17; 28:3f; 35:9-12, where the catchwords such as "bless", "great", "name", "nations", which he used quite frequently as references to the key passage of 12:1-3, are clearly very prominent.

It is true that Wolff discussed at some length the application of the theme in the Abraham cycle, especially the Mamre-Sodom episode, the double perspective of realisation and non-realisation of blessing to others in Abraham's encounter with Pharaoh (12:10-20) and 'gift' to Lot (13:1-13). Nevertheless, it must be quite striking, considering the significance of Gen.15, Yahweh's promises and covenant

to Abraham, in the Yahwist epic, that he has not been able to reinterpret it in light of his kerygma.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, we would want to argue later that Gen.16, the narrative about Sarai's conflict with Hagar, is not without significance in relation to the theme. If, as we have argued earlier 22:15-18, where the formulation of the theme appears for the third time in the Abraham narratives, is not from the Elohist or the Deuteronomist but belongs integrally with the whole narrative of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in 22:1-14, then, in fact, the significance and permeation of the theme through the Abraham story is far wider than Wolff's analysis has shown.

While Wolff noted the appearance of the formulation of the theme in the Bethel theophany (28:14), which is generally regarded as a pivotal juncture in the Jacob story, he commented only briefly on it. In fact, he judged that the Jacob-Esau cycle deserves only passing interest as far as the theme is concerned. It is arguable that Wolff has not taken serious account of the whole dynamics of the Jacob story. We would suggest that the significance of Jacob's struggle at Jabbok and his reconciliation with Esau in Gen.32-33 should be seen in relation to the theme. Moreover, Jacob's reconciliation with Esau also fulfils God's oath and promise to bring Jacob back to the land of Canaan in peace (28:13ff), where the formulation of the theme appears in v.14. Gen.32 and 33 also appear to be ironically reversing earlier predictions and blessing (or non-blessing) regarding the two brothers (Gen.25:23; 27:27-29, 39-40).

Contrary to Wolff's view, the Jacob-Laban cycle, in fact, appears to be of secondary importance compared to the Jacob-Esau cycle in relation to the theme. The so-called "economic aid" of

Jacob to Laban, we would suggest, is not as positive to the theme as Wolff made it out to be. Laban appears to be more concerned at losing the service of Jacob for his own benefits than anything else in his acknowledgement of receiving blessing from Yahweh because of Jacob.<sup>77</sup> Laban's real interest in Jacob was already revealed in his deceit over the giving of Leah and Rachel to Jacob earlier on (29:15-30, especially v.27). Jacob's offer of further service after Laban's confession of Yahweh's blessing to him is also far from being honest, straightforward and positive "economic aid".

One last comment will suffice. Wolff's interpretation of the kerygmatic challenge of the Balaam narrative and the Israelites' apostasy to Baal Peor (Num.22-25;5) is also not very convincing. He asserts that its significance for the theme lies in the fact that Israel's blessing has not yet come to the Moabites in the end. However, in the whole of the Balaam narrative (Num.22-24), Balaam, on behalf of the Moabites, was dealing only with the God of Israel, and at no time directly with the Israelites. In other words, it was not so much Israel's failure to bring blessing to the Moabites in this case (Wolff seems to want to imply that it was due to Israel's apostasy to Baal Peor, which, in any case, came only after the Balaam narrative proper), but rather Yahweh's dealing with them. Nevertheless, Wolff is surely correct when he went on to say that "Israel herself, in her apostasy from Yahweh, missed the purpose which was shown her in the promise to Abraham." In fact, the kerygmatic challenge of the Yahwist, if it ever existed, is not lacking when this last statement of Wolff's is seen against the inability of the Moabites to curse and harm Israel, the blessed and protected of God.

4) J. Muilenburg

The theme "Blessing for the Nations" was taken up by Muilenburg in an article entitled "Abraham and the Nations: Blessing and World History" (1965).<sup>78</sup> Reflective of the title, Muilenburg gave greater emphasis than other commentators to Abraham as a 'universal' figure parallel to Adam and Noah.

Abraham's call was not merely God's response to the judgment of scattering humankind in the Babel incident, but was also a positive new beginning as with the call of Adam and of Noah. The life of all three begins with a divine command (Gen.2:16; 6:14-17; 12:1-3).<sup>79</sup> With his call, "Abraham becomes the universal man, the man not only for the new people [Israel], for he is in reality the corporate personality of the people, but more than that, for the nations of the world."<sup>80</sup> In fact, Muilenburg went further in his assessment of Abraham, when he later says: "Abraham becomes the embodiment of divine grace, and it is a grace qualitatively other than the deeds of grace in the primeval history."<sup>81</sup> Another aspect of Abraham in relation to the theme brought out by Muilenburg is the element of obedience. Although Abraham "is called ... to time and destiny ... he meets his time by listening to the words that are addressed to him."<sup>82</sup>

The other main concern of Muilenburg's article lies in his attempt to link the present formulations of the Abraham traditions, especially his call in 12:1-3, to the "fashioning of the Yahwist", which he takes to be in the context of the United Monarchy, at the height of the nation's prestige, the expansive age of David and Solomon. Furthermore, the Yahwist makes the major motif of Abraham's call, the summons to history, persist throughout the whole epic as

a dominant theme.<sup>83</sup> Thus Muilenburg concluded:

"The Yahwist is grounding and establishing the Davidic Age in the antecedents of the first man, Abram, and finding in him the fountain springs for Israel's authentic 'history'."<sup>84</sup>

To comment on Muilenburg's analysis, first, it has to be said that he has quite correctly laid proper emphasis on the figure of Abraham as paralleled by the Yahwist with that of Adam and Noah, which not many commentators have done. Abraham is to be seen as the new 'universal' (first!) man in place of Adam and Noah. However, by limiting his study only to the figure of Abraham, Muilenburg inevitably missed out the universal significance of the other patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, especially the latter, in relation to the theme. One significant implication of Abraham as the new universal man and his obedience in relation to his destiny as a blessing for others has not, however, been noticed by Muilenburg. It appears that Jacob as Israel (32:28; 35:10), the seed of Abraham, is probably being portrayed, in the context of the patriarchal narratives, as a parallel figure to Abraham in terms of the latter's universal call and destiny. We shall try to demonstrate this later. Moreover, in his discussion of Abraham, Muilenburg concentrates only on 12:1-3. It is questionable to assume that the theme in 12:3b has the same function and significance as the other occurrences of the theme in the Abraham narratives (18:18; 22:18), not to mention the quite different contexts of the Isaac and Jacob stories (26:4; 28:14).

Secondly, Muilenburg's claim that the motif of Abraham's call persists as a dominant theme throughout the Yahwist epic is also open to question. What he meant by the "motif of Abraham's call" is most probably referring to the theme "Blessing for the Nations".

For, besides 12:1-3, he picked out the passages Gen.18:16-19; 22:15-18; 26:1-5; and 28:13-16, for discussion, the only places where the formula expressing the theme appears, whereas passages in which other patriarchal promises appear, but without the formula of the theme, were merely noted for comparison (Gen.17:5-9 (P); 35:11 (P); Exod.32:10 (E); Num.14:12 (JE); Deut.9:17).<sup>85</sup> In other words, Muilenburg has inadvertently confirmed our observations (noted against Wolff above) that all five passages in which the theme as expressed by the formula are concentrated only in the patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35), and hardly persists in the same form through the Yahwist epic.

Finally, the linking of the formulation of Abraham's call specifically, and the Yahwist work generally, to a Davidic-Solomonic provenance by Muilenburg, meets with the same criticism which has been registered in our discussion of previous commentators above. In fact, Muilenburg himself expressed his surprise when he says:

"That such words [12:1-3] should be composed in David's time, in a time of nationalism and national power and prestige, is indeed surprising. Nowhere do we encounter a single reference to Abram in all the traditions of the United Monarchy, ... One wonders what David would have thought of such a programmatic writing."<sup>86</sup>

Muilenburg's remarks need not necessarily imply that the theme was not in existence during the stipulated period of Israelite history. In fact, it probably shows that this particular theme under study is not the work of 'official' ideology. Indeed, history is full of examples which do not give much encouragement that any nation would place its own national interests in the service of other nations in the way spelt out by 12:1-3 and parallel passages.

5) R.E. Clements

Clements' discussion of the theme is really incidental to his traditio-historical investigation of the covenant and promises of Abraham in Gen.15 in his monograph entitled: Abraham and David. Genesis XV and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition (1967).<sup>87</sup> However, in his attempt to spell out the provenance and significance of the Yahwist's tria of promises, namely the promises of land, of numerous descendants, and of the blessing for the nations, Clements commented on the third element of the tria, which is of relevance to our survey. He says:

"It is ... by recognizing the political situation of the Davidic state as the background to the Yahwist's work that we gain an insight into the significance of the third of the great tria of promises. Through the descendants of Abraham the nations would acquire blessing for themselves. This must certainly be a pointer to the political situation in which, under David, Israel exercised hegemony over a number of surrounding vassal states. Through his anointed king Yahweh exercised his dominion over the nations of the earth. Thus the promise found its fulfilment in the birth of the Israelite empire, and it provided an interpretation of the political situation in which Israel enforced its rule over the surrounding vassal states, claiming to confer the benefits of its own blessedness upon them. It is clear that the Davidic court contributed to the emergence of a more universalist outlook in Israel, with a claim to Israel's unique status, and the belief that through it Yahweh exercised his rule over the nations. It is this belief that comes to expression in the third of the promises to Abraham."<sup>88</sup>

Despite his assertion that the Davidic court is the provenance for the Yahwist work, Clements also conceded that the Yahwist did not continue his story up to the time of David.<sup>89</sup> This weakens considerably his assertion of the very specific links of the Abrahamic promises to the political climate of the Davidic empire.<sup>90</sup> It is indeed true, or at least arguable, that the international horizon of the Davidic-Solomonic empire is a quite likely background for the

universalistic theme of 12:3b. Nevertheless, the scenario of international vassalage painted by Clements as actually the means whereby the nations come into the blessing of Abraham and his seed is not very convincing.

In 12:1-3, Abraham is called to be a blessing in whom the families of the earth could find blessing. This is firmly set against the background of humankind in the primeval history, with its need of blessing to overcome the deep-seated roots of alienation, self-interest, hybris, and unfettered grasping for power, greatness and fame. One of the purposes of the narratives in the primeval history is most probably speaking against these 'negative' aspects of men's relationships with one another. By juxtaposing Abraham's call with these narratives, the narrative (12:1-3) is expressing the view that only by forgoing these 'negative' characteristics could Abraham become a blessing for others.

On the other hand, the military conquests and expansion of the Davidic-Solomonic empire, as with other empires, inevitably benefit chiefly the victors at the expense of the conquered vassal peoples. This is why Muilenburg, as we noted earlier, expressed surprise that "such words [12:1-3] should be composed ... in a time of nationalism and national power and prestige." Moreover, one could hardly 'reconcile', let alone equate as Clements seems to do, the blessing which the families of the earth would seek with the royal policies, especially of Solomon, in forced labour and slavery (1 Kgs. 4:6; 5:13; 9:15, 22; 12:4), high taxation (1 Kgs. 4:7ff), 'punitive' tribute from vassal states (1 Kgs. 4:21), racial discrimination (1 Kgs. 9:22; 12:4), aristocratic affluence and decadence (1 Kgs. 4:22; 7:1-12), and heavy armament programme (1 Kgs. 4:26f).

One wonders also how the Yahwist would have regarded Solomon's corrupted lifestyle and religious apostasy as matching the portrayal of Abraham as agent of God's blessing for the nations.<sup>91</sup>

Clements' thesis of the international vassalage during the great empire of the Davidic-Solomonic period as the background for the understanding of the theme is most likely due to his discussions based solely on the passage Gen.12:1-3. If the narrative contexts of 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14, are taken into consideration, then a very different suggestion of provenance for the theme from that proposed by Clements could very well emerge. In 18:18, the theme is related to Abraham's intercessory function for the deliverance of the people of Sodom from God's imminent judgement of their wickedness on the basis of righteousness and justice. In 22:18, the theme is reaffirmed only after Abraham had practically sacrificed the chosen seed, Isaac, jeopardizing the promised great destiny for him by God. In 26:4, Isaac proved himself to be a blessing for others only when he sacrificed his rights and effected peace (at a loss!) with his erstwhile antagonist. Finally, in 28:14, the promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" was pronounced to Jacob, as we shall argue later, as a "correcting" perspective to his hitherto self-interested understanding and unscrupulous attempts at actualising his promised destiny.

#### 6) G. Wehmeier

In his article "The Theme 'Blessing for the Nations' in the Promises to the Patriarchs and in Prophetic Literature" (1974), Wehmeier's main concern was to address himself to the debate as to the translation of  $\text{בְּרֵכָה}$  and  $\text{בְּרֵכָה לְכָל הָעַמִּים}$  and their significance.

We have already noted above his reasons for a translation of

יִצְרָח similar to the Greek middle voice. What is of relevance to our survey here is his attempt to provide an explanation for the use of the two different formulations of the theme in the patriarchal narratives.

Taking יִצְרָח in 12:3; 18:18; 28:14 to be of different meaning from יִצְרָחָה in 22:18; 26:4, Wehmeier believes that the latter two come from the hand of a relatively late redactor.<sup>92</sup>

More specifically, in view of the qualifying statements — "because you have obeyed my voice" (22:18), and "because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (26:5) — attached to the formulation of the theme in 22:18 and 26:4 respectively, which, Wehmeier claims, are in the language of the Deuteronomic circles, it is hardly surprising that he went on to conclude that יִצְרָחָה is also Deuteronomic. From this premise, he went on to explicate the significance of the different formulations of the theme in the patriarchal narratives:

"Deuteronomy's major concern is to prevent Israel from worshipping foreign gods. Therefore Israel should not have any intercourse with members of the non-Israelite peoples (Deut. 7:16; 10:14; cf. 14:2) ... It is quite evident that along this line of thinking there is no room for the promises concerning the nations. Thus the assumption is rather obvious that the Deuteronomic redactor has deliberately weakened the statements regarding the nations which were associated with the promises to the Patriarchs. Apparently, these promises were so deeply rooted ... that they could not simply be left out ... They could, however, ... be reinterpreted by means of substituting the Hitpa'el of brk for the original Nif'al. While the Yahwist had emphasised that the nations participated in the blessing of Israel, and that this was the focal point of God's plans, the later redactor holds that the nations only wished to be blessed like Israel, but that they are not actually included in the intended scope of Yahweh's history with his people."<sup>93</sup>

Wehmeier's thesis is based on two arguments, namely

Deuteronomic language, and Deuteronomic theology of the nations as against Israel as Yahweh's chosen "above all nations". On the first aspect of his argument, we have already questioned the identification of Deuteronomic language with the two passages (22:18 and 26:4) earlier. The arguments put forth by Weinfeld and Driver on the issue apply against Wehmeier's premise as well.<sup>94</sup>

The second aspect of Wehmeier's argument that יִצְחָק is a particularistic reinterpretation of the Deuteronomic redactor against the more universalistic use of יִצְחָק by the Yahwist is not without its problems either. While the context of Gen.22 does not enable one to say much on the issue, the context of Gen.26 shows the very opposite of the religious exclusiveness of the Israelites against foreigners (the Philistines in this case) as claimed by Wehmeier. The climax of Gen.26, as we shall argue later, lies in the delegation of Abimelech confessing Isaac's significant status and making a request (not only wishing!): "We have seen plainly that Yahweh is with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, ... You are now the blessed of Yahweh" (26:28f). It clearly runs against Wehmeier's thesis when Isaac agreed to Abimelech's request, and in fact "made them a feast, and they ate and drank ... and swore, each to his brother (יִצְחָק וְאֵלְיָצָר וְאֵלְרֵבֶקָה); RSV: "they took oath with one another"); ... and they departed from him in peace" (26:30f). It is difficult to be convinced that the Deuteronomic redactor would be merely content to reinterpret יִצְחָק by the particularistic יִצְחָק, and left the climactic report about Abimelech's visit and covenant-making with Isaac totally untouched, if such were his concern as Wehmeier claimed.

7) R. Rendtorff

We shall complete our survey by noting two observations made by Rendtorff regarding the theme under study. First, in his article "Der 'Jahwist als Theologe?' Zum Dilemma der Pentateuchkritik" (1975), Rendtorff made the following remarks:

"... die Zusage der Segenswirkung für alle Völker. Sie wird aber am Schluss der Abrahamgeschichte noch einmal aufgegriffen: 'In dir sollen Segen finden alle Geschlechter der Erde' (xxii 18), nachdem sie schon ganz betont am Anfang stand (xii 3). Sie findet sich aber auch in der Isaakgeschichte und in der Jakongeschichte — und zwar jeweils nur einmal, betont am Anfang (xxvi 4; xxviii 14). Damit ist also offenbar eine zusammenfassende und übergreifende theologische Bearbeitung aller drei Vätergeschichten erfolgt."<sup>95</sup>

Later, in his monograph, Das Überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Problem des Pentateuch (1976), Rendtorff was more specific when he said:

"An diesem Verheissungselement wird die rahmende und interpretierende Funktion der Gottesreden noch einmal ganz deutlich erkennbar. ... Mit dieser Verheissung, dass sie Segen für die ganz Menschheit sein sollen, sind also die Überlieferungen von den drei Erzvätern zu einer grossen Einheit zusammengeschlossen."<sup>96</sup>

As far as we are aware, this is the first time the view has been suggested that the theme "Blessing for the Nations" could be a binding element for the Patriarchal narratives. Compared to von Rad and Noth on the one hand, who argued that the theme is emphasised only in 12:1-3, and Wolff and others on the other hand, who argued that the theme persists through the Yahwist epic as its kerygma or dominant motif, Rendtorff is quite correct to link the theme with the patriarchal narratives only, as the occurrences of the particular formula expressing the theme are found there in the whole of the Pentateuch. However, Rendtorff made no attempt to analyse the patriarchal narratives in the perspective of the theme.

The other observation of Rendtorff concerns the growth of

of the traditions of the promise with theme "Blessing for the Nations". He divided the passages with the theme into two groups, one where the niphāl is used (12:3; 18:18; 28:14), and the other where the hithpael is used (22:18; 26:4).<sup>97</sup> In the former, the promise is made to the patriarch (  $\text{ך} \text{ך}$  12:3; (28:14),  $\text{ך} \text{ך}$  18:18), whereas in the latter, the promise is made to the 'seed' (22:18; 26:14; (28:14);  $\text{ך} \text{ך} \text{ך} \text{ך}$ ). On the basis of his analysis of the development of the tradition of other promise formulations, especially that of land, where he claims the same variations in the recipient of the promises occurred, Rendtorff concluded that the niphāl group in the promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" is the earliest stage and the hithpael group the latest. On the formulation in 28:14, Rendtorff commented: "nimmt hierbei eine Zwischenstellung ein."<sup>98</sup>

Rendtorff's schema of growth for the promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" has been criticised for making too much out of the variations in the formula to carry the traditio-historical weight he argued for. It is quite reasonable to argue against Rendtorff that the nature of the promise in the patriarchal narratives is such that continued or future possession by or through one's descendants is quite natural and inherent.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the mention of seed in the formula in 22:18; 26:4; 28:14, is quite appropriate to the contexts because seed is already mentioned earlier in all three cases (22:17; 26:3f; 28:13f). In any case, to group the passages concerned according to the use of niphāl or hithpael alone is questionable because 18:18 could equally be grouped with 22:18 and 26:4 (the former niphāl and the latter two hithpael) if the phrase "all the nations of the earth", which is in the formula, is used as

criterion.<sup>100</sup> In other words, Rendtorff's criterion for identifying the growth of the tradition of the promise are too selective.

### C) Conclusion

From our above survey, we are now able to draw some conclusions regarding previous studies of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as expressed in the formulations in Gen.12:3b and parallels.

1. On the translation of  $\text{בִּרְכָּה}$ , it appears the least likely is the reflexive sense. The passive or middle voice translation is more in line with the contexts. Nevertheless, we have seen that to agree on the translation, even if it were possible, brings one no nearer to understanding the function and significance of the theme in its narrative contexts. Moreover, the attempts to distinguish a later Deuteronomistic ideological influence on the theme is also shown to be unsuccessful. As suggested, an alternative literary and contextual explanation could possibly shed some light on the variations in the formulations of the theme.

2. Giving emphasis to the theme only in its first occurrence in Gen.12:1-3, whatever the importance of that passage in the work of the Yahwist or the Pentateuch, is also inadequate. On the other hand, to discern the theme in the whole of the Yahwist epic without giving due consideration to the striking absence of the theme as formulated in Gen.12:3b and parallels after the patriarchal narratives would lead to over-generalisation.

3. To restrict study of the theme only to the Yahwist epic or extend its application whenever or only when catchwords such as 'blessing', 'great', 'nations', and 'peoples' appear, even in significant pericopes, is also to be argued against. We have seen

how by such procedures some narratives in the patriarchal stories which are of importance to the study of the theme are left out, while certain narratives which are of questionable relevance to the theme are brought into account. Rendtorff's suggestion of the theme as a possible binding element of the patriarchal narratives as a whole, we believe, is worth pursuing further.

4. While the traditio-historical investigation of the theme for its provenance is useful and illuminating, our survey has also shown the restrictive effect of studying the theme from the perspective of one particular Sitz-im-Leben. Most seriously, it has almost consistently focussed attention only on Gen.12:1-3 and has not given enough attention to the variety of narrative contexts in which the theme is found.

5. A question is also raised as to the connection of the patriarchal narratives with what went before and after. If the call of Abraham is purposefully integrated with the primeval history, placing him as a parallel figure to Adam and Noah, and with a universal task and destiny, especially by the striking formulation of the theme "in you all the families of the earth shall find blessing" (12:3b), could it then also be that the occurrences of the formula expressing the same theme at crucial junctures in the rest of the Abraham narratives, as well as in the Isaac and Jacob narratives, are also meant to express connections with the primeval history. Furthermore, the striking absence of the formulation of the theme after the patriarchal narratives in the rest of the Pentateuch, the formative beginning of the Israelite people and nation, has not hitherto been mentioned nor given an attempted answer.

Thus, in view of the above conclusions, we believe a study of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as expressed by the formula in Gen.12:3b and parallels in the context of the patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35) would be justified and might prove to shed further light on some aspects of the overall composition of the narratives themselves, as well as their function in the Pentateuchal context. We shall take the patriarchal narratives in their present, final form. A traditio-historical investigation of the theme will not be attempted in our study as it has already been quite adequately done by other writers. Rather, we shall approach our study of the theme by a literary analysis, which we believe is more appropriate for a fuller appreciation of the function and significance of the theme in the patriarchal narratives.

CHAPTER TWO - FORMULAIC ANALYSIS OF THE THEME "BLESSING FOR  
THE NATIONS"

A) General Observations

The five occurrences of the formula and its variants expressing the theme under study in the patriarchal narratives are as below:

כל	אשפחת	האדמה	בך	ונברכו	(12:3)
כל	גויי	הארץ	בו	ונברכו	(18:18)
כל	גויי	הארץ	בשרעך	וזתברכו	(22:18)
כל	גויי	הארץ	בשרעך	וזתברכו	(26:4)
כל-אשפחת	האדמה	(בשרעך)	בך	ונברכו	(28:14)

A quick glance at the formulations above reveals some interesting variations. We believe a formulaic analysis of the variations would be necessary to assess whether there is any particular function or significance arising from them when the theme is discussed in the context of the patriarchal narratives. The analysis could also serve to verify our earlier conclusion, based on the survey of previous discussions of the theme, that an understanding of the theme based solely or mainly on its occurrence in 12:3b does not do justice to the variations of the formula just noted.

A distinction needs to be made in the pronouncement of the formula. On the one hand, the formula is always pronounced over a patriarch. On the other hand, the agent of blessing named in the formula might or might not be the same as the patriarch over whom the formula is pronounced. Of the five occurrences of the formula listed above, the niph'al form, where  $\text{ונברכו}$  is used, is pronounced over Abraham twice (12:3; 18:18), and once over Jacob together with

his seed (28:14). It is never used in the case of Isaac. On the other hand, the hithpael form, with  $\gamma\text{ׇ}\gamma\text{ׇ}\text{ׇ}\text{ׇ}$ , is pronounced once over Abraham (22:18) and once over Isaac (26:4). It is never used over Jacob.

As for the naming of the agent of blessing, Abraham is mentioned twice (12:3; 18:18) and Jacob, together with his seed, once (28:14). On these three occasions, the patriarch over whom the formula is pronounced or related coincides with the agent of blessing named. Moreover, the formula used on the three occasions is always the niph'al form. It is striking that on the other two occasions, when the hithpael form of the formula is used over the patriarchs, once each of Abraham and of Isaac, it is never the patriarch concerned who is named as agent of blessing, but the seed of the respective patriarch. In other words, while Isaac has the formula once, and only in the hithpael form, pronounced over him, he is never directly named as agent of blessing, like Abraham and Jacob.

From this brief survey, the prominence of Abraham among the three patriarchs, in relation to the universal destiny as agent of blessing for the nations is clearly shown in that three out of five formula pronouncements, and in both its forms, are made over him. However, one has to note that only in the niph'al form is he named as the agent of blessing, while in the hithpael form his seed is named instead. Strikingly, Isaac appears not to have any 'direct' role at all as agent of blessing, even though the hithpael form of the formula is used of him once. Jacob, in some contrast to Isaac, has only the niph'al form of the formula pronounced over him once and is named as the agent of blessing as well. However, Jacob is not named as agent on his own, but his seed together with him.

When we consider the patriarchs' roles in the universal destiny of being a blessing for the nations, the comparable prominence of the involvement of the seed, especially that of Abraham, is quite striking, this, despite the fact, that the formula is never pronounced over the seed at all. The seed is named as the agent of blessing in both forms of the formula, but not any of the patriarchs. In the hithpael form (22:18; 26:4), only the seed is named as agent of blessing. It is interesting also that the only occasion when the seed is named as agent of blessing in the niph'al form of the formula (28:14), it is named together with Jacob, the last of the patriarchs, and never with Abraham, or Isaac for that matter. These observations of the seed's prominence in the universal destiny of the patriarchs would gain significance when the nature or identity of the seed is known.

It is possible to argue from the contexts of 22:18 and 26:4 that the seed in each instance refers to Isaac and to Jacob respectively. But the reference to the seed as recipient in other patriarchal promises such as land, prosperity, greatness, and special relationship with God etc. has generally more than just a single individual in view. This can be seen from the use of the plural noun or pronoun to describe the recipient of the patriarchal promises in places where the antecedent is the seed.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the contexts of the divine speeches (22:15-18; 26:2-5; 28:13f), in which the formula with the seed named as the agent of blessing is found, make it quite clear that the seed is to be taken as a collective entity, the descendants of the patriarchs.<sup>2</sup> While in basic agreement with most commentators who take the seed to be Israel, we shall leave the explanation of the developing prominence of the seed in the patriarchal

destiny of being a blessing for the nations until later, when we analyse the theme in the respective patriarchal narratives. Nevertheless, the implication of this observation is noteworthy. Israel, the seed of the patriarchs, as promised recipient of the promise with the theme "Blessing for the Nations", receives, from the very beginning of its formative history, this universalistic destiny and mission of the patriarchs into its own constitution.

Thus, even this brief survey already indicates that some purpose and significance underlies the variations of the formula and their usage in the patriarchal narratives.

#### B) The Theme as Final Intent

All five occurrences of the formula in the patriarchal narratives are made in the context of a divine speech or soliloquy. Generally, the speech or soliloquy also contains other elements such as divine command, promises, and response from the patriarchs. In all, the pronouncement of the formula is made only by Yahweh (cf. Jer. 4:2), and never by any of the patriarchs. It is the sole prerogative of Yahweh so to speak. This is noteworthy because the promises of land, prosperity, greatness, and fertility made by God to the patriarchs as a whole have been taken by Isaac and Jacob respectively, who in turn blessed and transmitted them to their respective son or sons (Gen. 27:4,27; 28:1; 48:9,15,20; 49:28). Abraham, however, is never said to have blessed Isaac or anyone else, although he "gave all he had to Isaac" (25:5). It is Yahweh himself who blessed Isaac, and only after Abraham's death (25:11; see also 26:3,12,24).<sup>3</sup>

The singling out of the formula pronouncement as the sole

prerogative of Yahweh in the patriarchal narratives appears also to be reflected in the positioning of the formula in the divine speeches or soliloquy where it occurs. This is quite clear, at least, in 12:1-3; 22:15-18; 26:2-5. Wolff's analysis of the syntactical structure of the divine speech in 12:1-3 has been generally accepted by most commentators. He concluded that the structure points towards v.3b as the ultimate intent or conclusio of the divine speech.<sup>4</sup> The speech begins with an imperative (v.1) and is followed immediately by three imperfect cohortative clauses of promises (vv.2a-c), reaching its initial climax in another imperative "Be a blessing" (v.2d). With this, the purpose of Abraham's call is spelt out. The preceding promises are given so that Abraham could fulfil the command or purpose of being a blessing.<sup>5</sup> Following this initial climax, a following statement, again in the imperfect tense, is made that in the purpose of being a blessing, the destiny of Abraham's contemporaries will be decided by Yahweh according to their attitude towards Abraham (v.3a). Then the final clause of the divine speech, noted by a change from the hitherto imperfect to a perfect tense, is declared in the formula "in you all the families of the earth shall find blessing" (v.3b).

In 22:15-18, there appears to be a progressive widening of the subject of action from "I" (Yahweh) to "your seed" and finally "all the nations of the earth". Here again we see the series of promises in the divine speech leading in the end to the formula pronouncement (v.18). In 26:2-5, the framing effect of the promise "I will give to you and to your seed all these lands" (vv.3b,4b) around Yahweh's promise "I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven"

(vv.3c,4a) marks off the formula "in your seed all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves" (v.4c) on its own as the final promise of the speech.<sup>6</sup> Thus, all the three speeches just noted consistently have the formula pronouncement placed in the final, stressed, position.

Admittedly, the formula does not stand as the final statement in 18:17-19 and 28:13-15. However, in the former, vv.17f which is in the form of a question could be taken as a unit on its own. In it, the statement that "Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall find blessing in him" (v.18), which is most likely to be a reference to the promises and formula in 12:2f, appears to be the reason for the divine self-questioning "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do" in the first place (v.17). Furthermore, the promises and universal destiny of Abraham also provided the basis for the self-answer of Yahweh himself in v.19 "No", even though a further reason was given for the self-answer as well (v.19). The latter reason "for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice", in any case, is in order that "Yahweh may bring to Abraham what he has promised him" (v.19c), which, in turn, is most likely to be referring back to v.18. As such, it is with good reason that we take the formula pronouncement in 18:18b to be the final intent of the divine soliloquy as well. Wolff commented that "the gradient [of the soliloquy] corresponds exactly to 12:2-3."<sup>7</sup>

As for 28:13ff, while the promise of Yahweh to bring Jacob safely back to "this land" stands as the final statement of the speech (v.15), nevertheless, the structure also shows that this particular

promise was but the necessary condition for the realisation of the promises and the universal destiny of Abraham made immediately before in vv.13f. It is unlikely that the promise to be with Jacob and to bring him back safely to the land is the ultimate purpose of Yahweh's dealings with him. In fact, it is arguable that the purpose of Yahweh's promise to be with Jacob, "until I have done that of which I have spoken to you" (v.15b), is referring to the promises and universal destiny given to Jacob in vv.13f. At least that is the way Jacob seems to have taken it when he reminded Yahweh later of the latter's promise to do him good on his return to the land (32:9,12). Thus, in 28:13ff, we also have a similar pattern in the divine speech, as in the other four already discussed, in which the giving of promises is followed by the formula pronouncement as the final intent of the speech. Fokkelmann commented: "In 14c, a climax is reached. Jacob becomes the ferment of the people on all sides, bringing blessing to them. From the mišpaḥat Ya'qob our gaze is led to kol mišp'eḥot ha'ādāmā."<sup>8</sup>

### C) Positioning of the Theme in the Patriarchal Narratives

It is well recognised that the formula with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" is repeated in important junctures of the patriarchal narratives. The first occurrence of the formula (12:3b) is set in the programmatic divine speech which prefaces the patriarchal narratives in general, and the Abraham story in particular, at the very beginning.<sup>9</sup> The next occurrence of the formula in 18:18 is also very instructive. It comes in the Sodom-Gomorra narrative (Gen.18-19), the first narrative immediately after the life and destiny of Abraham was given a new and expanded perspective

by the transformation of his name in Gen.17. To be more exact, the soliloquy in which the formula pronouncement was recalled (18:18) is placed immediately before Abraham's first involvement with foreigners outside the covenant community after the events in Gen.17. In other words, Abraham was again standing at the beginning of a new phase in his career. As for Gen.22, God's test of Abraham, it constitutes the climax of the Abraham story. Moreover, the divine speech which ends the narrative (22:15-18) is also the last speech of God to Abraham, thus providing some sort of conclusion to the story (12:1-22:19).<sup>10</sup> As such, the formula pronouncement appearing as the final intent of the last divine speech has added significance.

The position of the Isaac narrative (Gen.26) is somewhat ambiguous in the patriarchal narratives. Strictly speaking, while Gen.25:12-35:29 comes under the story (אִשְׁרָאֵל) of Isaac, the content is almost wholly given over to events with Jacob as the focus. As such, it is not easy to ascertain the positioning of Gen.26 in the Isaac story whether it stands at the beginning or a later phase in his career. While Rendtorff's observation that the formula is made at the beginning of the Isaac narrative (Gen.26) is quite correct, it needs to be qualified in view of the overall Isaac story.<sup>11</sup> When the formula pronouncement was first made to Abraham (12:3; cf. 18:18) and to Jacob (28:14), both patriarchs were without children as yet. On the other hand, when the formula was pronounced over Isaac in 26:4, he was already with children, granted by Yahweh (25:20-26; cf. 17:20f). Moreover, his children were also old enough for the birthright of the first born to become an issue (25:27-34). Finally, immediately after Gen.26, Isaac is pictured as already "old and his eyes were dim ..." and is on the verge of death (27:1-4).

From another perspective, one constant feature of the Isaac narrative is the stress that the promises and universal destiny Yahweh made to Isaac are reaffirmed on the basis of Yahweh's commitment to Abraham (26:3ff,24; cf. 22:16ff). Even the wells which Isaac dug in the valley of Gerar are stated as belonging to Abraham in the first place (26:15,18). Isaac is, in many ways, portrayed as the seed of Abraham, receiving from the previous generation what had already been reaffirmed or accomplished. This portrayal of Isaac seems to be reflected in the command he received, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land ... Sojourn in this land" (vv.2f). He is to continue in the land where Abraham had arrived, which he had been promised and had symbolically possessed (12:5-9; 13:14-18; 23:17-20; 24:1-9,62-67). In fact, Isaac had already previously *accepted this necessity, at least implicitly* (Gen.24).<sup>12</sup> Thus, while the formula is made at the beginning of Gen.26, it is arguable that in the context of the overall Isaac story, it should be taken as pronounced over Isaac at a late phase of his career in consolidation of Abraham's destiny. Isaac was not called to be an innovator but a continuing link in Abraham's calling.

The formula pronouncement to Jacob at 28:14 appears to be placed at the start of his own independent career. He was actually fleeing from home at that time after the conflicts he caused in his family. It was the first occasion when Yahweh appears to him and lays out the destiny he was called to. Emerging from the shadow of his brother who is the father's favourite, and also from the manipulative directives of his mother, Jacob, still in his egotistical perception of destiny, is faced with the pronouncement (challenge!) of the universal responsibility of Abraham for the first time.

If the above analysis of the positioning of the divine

speeches of soliloquy in which the formula is embedded is acceptable, then we can see a pattern emerging in the usage of the formula in the patriarchal narratives. In 12:1-3; 18:17-19; 28:13-15, where the narrative contexts show the beginning or early phase of the patriarch's career, the formula used is the niph'al form, with the agent of blessing named coinciding with the patriarch over whom the formula is pronounced.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, in 22:18 and 26:4, where the narrative contexts have been shown to be a climactic end or the later phase of the patriarch's career, the formula used in the divine speech is the hithpa'el form. In the latter cases, while the formula is pronounced over a patriarch, the agent of blessing named is the seed.

#### D) Structure of Elements

We briefly noted that in the divine speeches or soliloquy where the formula occurs, there are also present other elements of command, promises and response of the patriarch concerned.<sup>14</sup> An analysis will be made to see whether any pattern in the structuring of the elements exists. The observations from our analysis of the positioning of the formula in the patriarchal narratives above would be considered as well.

1) 12:1-4 A distinct structure is discernible in the order of command (v.1) — promises (vv. 2-3a) — formula pronouncement (v.3b) — response (v.4). The niph'al form of the formula is used over Abraham, and with him named as the agent of blessing as well.

2) 18:17-19 As the soliloquy is not a direct speech to Abraham, it should not be surprising if the elements of command or response are missing. Here, we have only the elements of promise

and formula pronouncement, "Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall find blessing in him" (18:18). Even then, these two latter elements are not totally unrelated to the elements of command and response.

On the one hand, Yahweh's intention to involve Abraham in the pending judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah is based, first of all, on the promises and universal destiny of Abraham, first given to Abraham in 12:2f. On the other hand, Abraham's involvement is now also related to some obligations, "for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice" (18:19). This obligation which Abraham is required to observe is intelligible only when the covenantal obligations of Abraham in 17:1,9f are taken into account. Abraham was there commanded by God to "walk before me, and be blameless ... As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations."

As for the response element, it is hardly likely that Yahweh's deliberate recalling of the promises and universal task previously given to Abraham, the reiterating of the covenantal obligations of Abraham, as the basis for letting Abraham into the divine mind of the pending judgement is without any purpose at all. As a matter of fact, after Abraham was eventually let into Yahweh's mind (18:20ff), Yahweh stood before Abraham as if waiting for, and expecting, the latter to decide what ought to be done in the circumstances. In line with his calling, destiny and responsibility (now as the father of nations, 17:4f), Abraham responded by interceding for the deliverance of the people in Sodom.

Thus, even the divine soliloquy (18:17ff) in its context

could arguably yield a relationship of command/obligation (17:1, 9f) -- promises (18:18a, cf. 12:2-3a, 17:2-8) -- formula pronouncement (18:18b) -- response (18:22-33). While too much weight probably should not be put on the results emerging from this particular passage 18:17ff, it is nevertheless noteworthy that in recalling the formula first pronounced in 12:3 with all the characteristics of that form (niph'al), the soliloquy at least reveals a structure of elements not against that in 12:1-4. Moreover, it is also interesting to recall that the soliloquy 18:17ff and the divine speech 12:1-4, with the formula embedded in both passages, stands respectively at the beginning or a new phase in Abraham's career.

3) 22:1-19 The structure of elements in this narrative shows a different order from the above two passages. It appears that we have here an order: command (vv.1f) -- response (vv.3-14) -- promises (vv.15-17) -- formula pronouncement (v.18). Moreover, there are other significant differences as well. The hithpa'el form of the formula is used for the first time here in the patriarchal narratives, and the agent of blessing named is now the seed though the formula was pronounced over Abraham (cf. 12:3; 18:18). Also for the first time, a reason is given, "because you have obeyed my voice" (v.18b), for the reaffirmation of promises and the universal destiny as expressed by the formula previously made and reiterated. In contrast to the previous two passages discussed, the present narrative and the divine speech in it stands at the conclusion of the main body of the Abraham story.

4) 26:2-6 It appears that there is a mixture of the forms of the formula, as well as the structure of elements, in the divine speech here. On the one hand, the structure of elements

yields an order: command (vv.2-3a) — promise (vv.3b-4b) — formula pronouncement (v.4c) — response (v.6). As such, in line with 12:1-4 and 18:17ff, one would therefore expect the use of the niphal form of the formula with Isaac named as the agent of blessing. However, the hithpael form of the formula is used instead, and, consistent with form, the seed is named as the agent of blessing. Moreover, following the characteristics of the use of the hithpael form in 22:18, the same reason is given for the renewal of the promises and universal destiny of Abraham to Isaac (vv.3f), "because Abraham obeyed my voice ..." (v.5). Not only that, the same reason given in 26:5 and 22:18 is also introduced similarly by  $\gamma\omega\kappa \text{ זָרָךְ}$ .<sup>15</sup> We have also argued earlier that the Isaac narrative, Gen.26, as does Gen.22:1-19, both stand at the end or later phase of the patriarch's career concerned.

With such a mixture of forms, one can only be cautious in drawing any possible conclusion. Nevertheless, we have earlier shown that all the five divine speeches or soliloquy under study always have the formula pronouncement in the final, stressed, position. If so, then it would be instructive to ask the reason why in 26:4, when the structure of elements in the divine speech (26:2-6) with the response after the promises and formula pronouncement ought to have occasioned the use of the niphal form of the formula, the hithpael form is used instead? The answer appears to be in the divine speech. The promises and formula pronouncement are renewed to Isaac on the basis of Abraham's obedience, and Yahweh's oath because of it (cf. 22:15-18), and not primarily on Isaac's response (v.6) to the divine command (v.2f).<sup>16</sup> Rather, Isaac's response, when it comes,

would only provide the condition for the actualisation of the promises and universal destiny already reaffirmed to Abraham. Thus, even with the mixed forms in the divine speech (26:2-6), the thinking underlying it also maintains the requisite of a prior response before the reaffirmation of the promises and the formula in its hithpael form with the seed named as the agent of blessing.

5) 28:13-15 The divine speech here containing the formula (v.14) is set in the context of Jacob's dream at Bethel (28:10-22). In the speech, only the elements of promises and formula pronouncement are present. The absence of the elements of command and response, however, have to be seen in the light of the overall Jacob story. At the point of the divine speech, Jacob was already well under way in leaving home, partly under the death threat of Esau (27:41-44). A command to return or remain in the land of Canaan would be quite out of place then in view of the total plot of the Jacob story. Nevertheless, the importance of being in the land, where Abraham had arrived and Isaac had remained, and the need for Jacob to return to it is already implicit in the speech, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you" (v.15; see also 28:20ff).<sup>17</sup> In other words, the story of Jacob's leaving home has not ended but awaits a final resolution. Indeed, it finally took a divine command, strongly reminiscent of the command to Abraham and Isaac in 12:1 and 26:2f respectively, only in reverse direction, to start Jacob on his journey back to Canaan (31:3,13).

We have already noted above that the command for Jacob to return is understood by him in 32:9,12 to be referring back to the promises

given to Jacob in 28:13ff. Thus, in response to the command to return, Jacob returned to the land of Canaan (31:17-21). Returning to the land in itself could hardly be the final intent of Yahweh's promise to bring Jacob safely back. The land, rather, is to be seen mainly as the place for the realisation of Yahweh's promises and the universal destiny given to Abraham initially, now bequeathed to Jacob. Thus, even though the elements of command and response are absent from the speech in 28:13ff, it could be properly said that the underlying thought of the Jacob story also allows us to see a structure of response after the promises and formula pronouncement.

In line with the structure of the elements in 12:1-4 (and 18:17ff), the formula used in 28:14 is in the niph'al form with Jacob and his seed named as co-agent of blessing. We will discuss the issue of the seed as co-agent of blessing after this section. It is noteworthy that the formula used is the same as in 12:3 and 18:18, because on the two occasions (22:18; 26:4) when the formula is used immediately before 28:14, the hithpa'el form, with all the characteristics belonging to it, is used. This would lend support to the emerging conclusion of our present analysis that the niph'al form of the formula is used when the positioning of the divine speech or soliloquy containing the formula stands at the beginning of or in a new phase of a patriarch's career, and that the structure of elements in the speech yields an order: command -- promise -- formula pronouncement -- response, if not explicitly, at least implicitly.

Before we summarise the observations in our formulaic analysis of the theme and draw some conclusions, however tentative, there are two other features in the formula which need to be discussed. First, the change from the patriarchs to the seed as agent of blessing.

Secondly, the variations between " אֲנִי אֵל אֱלֹהִים שׁוֹ" and " אֲנִי אֵל שׁוֹ".

#### E) Agent of Blessing

We have already noted the general critique of Rendtorff's interpretation that the recipient of the promise under study changes from the patriarch to the seed as reflective of a growth in its tradition. However, we also suggested that the variation might reveal some function in the patriarchal narratives.

In 12:3; 18:18, the seed is not yet named as recipient of the promise thereby making it the agent of blessing. It first assumed that function only in 22:18. It could be argued that Abraham was without any heir of his own until the birth of Isaac (21:1-7). Moreover, only in 21:12 is Abraham promised that his seed shall be named through Isaac (21:12). Thus, that the seed is the recipient of the promise of universal destiny only in 22:18 and not before should not be a total surprise. However, before Isaac's birth, the seed has already been frequently named as recipient, either on its own or together with Abraham, of other patriarchal promises (12:7; 13:15f; 15:5,13-16,18; 17:7ff,19; cf. 16:10; 17:20; 21:13,18). It is therefore striking the seed is named as recipient of the promise of universal destiny and agent of blessing only in 22:18. There appear to be some differences between this particular promise and the other patriarchal promises. In fact, the promise as expressed by the formula is always the sole prerogative of Yahweh to pronounce, and is universalistic in perspective by definition, unlike the other promises.

The significance of the switch from the patriarch to the seed as agent of blessing in 22:18 for the first time, as far as our

analysis is concerned, is that it coincides with other formulaic variations which occur for the first time in 22:1-19 as well. First, the divine speech containing the formula stands at the conclusion to the main structure of the Abraham story as some sort of reaffirmation.<sup>18</sup> The structure of elements is also reversed. Instead of having the response after the command, promises and formula pronouncement (12:1-4; cf. 18:17ff), the order now yields a response to the command before the promises and formula pronouncement. Moreover, a reason introduced by  $\gamma\omega\lambda\ \text{זקן}$ , following the emphatic oath " $\text{אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם}$ " (22:16,18), also appears for the first time in connection with the formula pronouncement. The form of the formula used is now the hithpael instead of the niph'al. It therefore appears that this particular universal destiny and responsibility (bearing in mind mankind's disobedience, the basic reason for the series of alienations and judgements in the primeval history, and Abraham's call to reverse them) is not to be transmitted to Abraham's seed, until the patriarch proved himself to be a suitable agent, as "a fearer of God" (22:12) would be, to bring about blessing for others.

The role of Isaac in the context of the patriarchal narratives, as we have already argued above, is not so much to pioneer as to consolidate and transmit the received promises and universal destiny of Abraham. Moreover, as the seed has already been named as recipient of these promises and universal destiny, in reaffirmation and under oath, by Yahweh (22:17f), it is only natural that it continued to be named as agent of blessing in the same hithpael form with all the characteristics pertaining to it (26:4).

Finally, it still needs to be asked, how would one account

for the naming of the seed together with a patriarch (in this case, Jacob) as co-agent of blessing, for the first time in the niphal form of the formula (28:14). It seems at least two explanations could be given. First, as the seed has already been bound up with this universal destiny of Abraham thus far (22:18; 26:4), it should not be surprising that it is also mentioned in subsequent pronouncement of the formula in the patriarchal narratives, namely 28:14. Secondly, the narrative context of the divine speech 28:13ff has to be taken into account as well. Just prior to Jacob's 'departure' from home, he was blessed by Isaac with the words: "May he [God Almighty] give the blessing of Abraham to you and your seed with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham" (28:4). In addition, in the divine speech itself (28:13ff), immediately prior to the formula pronouncement in v.14, Jacob was promised by Yahweh: "the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your seed, and your seed shall spread abroad like the dust of the earth ..." (vv.13-14a). As far as Gen. 28 is concerned, Jacob is very much linked together with his seed in the received promises and universal destiny of Abraham. Thus, from a literary point of view of the overall patriarchal narratives discussed so far, the naming of the seed as agent of blessing in 28:14, as well as 22:18; 26:4, in place of or together with the patriarch concerned can be contextually explained.<sup>19</sup>

However, it has to be recognised also that there is a basic difference in the naming of the seed as agent of blessing in the formula pronouncement, as well as the making of other promises, in 28:14 as in 22:18; 26:4. In the latter two, as we noted, the stress on reaffirmation because of Abraham's supreme obedience was very explicit.

On the other hand, in 28:3f, Isaac could only wish for Jacob to be given the blessing of Abraham, and Jacob was himself leaving the land, in an "unblessed" relationship, where the promises of Abraham are meant to be actualised. This could well be connected with the character of Jacob at that point of the story, when he is far from being a tested and suitable agent of blessing for others, as Abraham was in 22:18. For the moment, we would just suggest that this seeming lack of the reaffirmatory aspect of the received promises and universal destiny of Abraham in the Jacob story, as well as the naming of the seed as co-agent of blessing in the niph'al form of the formula for the first time in 28:14, is reflective of some function in the development of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the patriarchal narratives. We will further explicate this suggestion in our analysis of the Jacob story later.

F) אֲרָצוֹת - מִשְׁפָּחוֹת and אֲרָצוֹת - מִלְּוֵי

In the formula pronouncements, two phrases are used to describe the subject seeking the blessing of God through the patriarchs. In 12:3; 28:14, the phrase "אֲרָצוֹת מִשְׁפָּחוֹת" is used, while in 18:18; 26:4; 28:18, the phrase used is "אֲרָצוֹת מִלְּוֵי". It has been asserted that the change from the use of "families" to "nations" is reflective of Deuteronomistic "negative and exclusive attitude towards the nations."<sup>20</sup> Some have gone further and suggested that the use of "families" is more universalistic, while the use of "nations" is more impersonal and, in fact, could even be pejorative and contemptuous.<sup>21</sup>

It might well be true that "families" could be a more relational and personal concept than "nations". There is, however,

no unambiguous reason that the use of "nations" is necessarily pejorative or contemptuous.<sup>22</sup> In addition, there is also a problem faced by advocates of the view stated above. In the three passages where "כָּל־גְּוֵי הָאָרֶץ" is used, 22:18 and 26:4 are generally taken by these commentators to be Deuteronomistic, while 18:18 is considered as belonging to J.<sup>23</sup> An appeal to different ideology based on different sources or traditions does not settle the usage of "families" and "nations" in the formula. In fact, as we have argued above (see pp. 8, 41), especially against Wehmeier, the contexts of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (Gen. 18-19) and the Isaac narrative (Gen. 26) appear to give a positive portrayal of Abraham's intercession for and Isaac's covenant-making with foreigners.

On the other hand, if we take Gen. 1-11 as the prelude to the patriarchal narratives, and Abraham's call in 12:1-4a as God's answer to the plight of universal mankind under curse, as reflected in the alienations of man from the ground (אֲרֶץ נִדְּחָה), and man from man, as well as nation from nation, it is quite natural for the narratives concerned to be linked by some common motif, or theme, or key words. Delitzsch aptly commented:

"The expression 'all the families of the ground' points to the division of the one family into many (10:5, 20, 31), and the word אֲרֶץ נִדְּחָה to the curse pronounced upon the ground (3:17, cf. 4:11f). The blessing of Abraham was once more to unite divided families, and change the curse, pronounced upon the ground on account of sin, into a blessing for the whole human race."<sup>24</sup>

This is quite likely when one considers that "nations" is used five times (10:5, 20, 31, 32, 32), and the phrase "all the earth" three times (11:4, 8, 9; cf. 10:32) in the narrative immediately before 12:1-3. It would have been more natural to use the combination to form "all the nations of the earth" in the formula in 12:3. However,

if the formula in 12:3 were to use the suggested conflation, then the focus or referent of Abraham's call would probably be less effective immediately to achieve the farther retrojection to encompass all the key events, prior to the Babel incident and the decisive separation of mankind (11:1-9), causing the various forms of alienation of mankind as portrayed in the primeval history. Rather, the phrase "  $\chi\gamma\lambda\pi\ \prime\prime\gamma\ \zeta\omega$  " could very well be restricted in its horizon to the separation of nations in its negative aspects, after the Babel incident, and not to the more positive view of the multiplying of families into nations (Gen.10) related by their derivation from the one same progenitor, Noah. The use of  $\pi\lambda\sigma\tau\lambda\pi$  is clearly more effective in linking the blessing God intends to bring through Abraham (12:3b) to reverse the curse upon the earth ( $\pi\lambda\sigma\tau\lambda\pi$ ; 3:17,19,23), the unyielding strength of the earth ( $\pi\lambda\sigma\tau\lambda\pi$ ) to man's labour on it (4:11f,14), and God's blotting mankind from the face of the earth ( $\pi\lambda\sigma\tau\lambda\pi$ ; 6:7; 7:4; 8:8f,13,21).

The use of "  $\chi\gamma\lambda\pi\ \prime\prime\gamma\ \zeta\omega$  " for the first time in 18:18; 22:18; 26:4, is also probably to be explained by the respective narrative contexts. In 18:18 and 26:4, we find Abraham and Isaac dealing with specific people in a specific land, namely Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Philistines in Gerar respectively. The mention of "nations" in 22:18 is quite likely to have been influenced by the political and military references in the statement immediately before, "and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies" (22:17). Moreover, these three passages are at quite a 'distance' away from the primeval history, compared to 12:3, for "  $\pi\lambda\sigma\tau\lambda\pi\ \pi\lambda\pi\omega\sigma\ \zeta\omega$  " to be used as naturally. However, the use of the phrase "  $\prime\prime\gamma\ \zeta\omega\ \chi\gamma\lambda\pi$  " in 18:18; 22:18; 26:4, does not necessarily curtail

the universal perspective of the destiny to be a blessing for others.

Fokkelmann believes that  $\text{אֲרָצוֹת}$  is used instead of  $\text{אֶרֶץ}$  in 28:14 because "the word ereš has already been used in the clearly outlined sense of a certain country, namely the country of Canaan, another word, ʿādamā, is chosen to denote unambiguously the world-wide range of the blessing."<sup>25</sup> This could well be correct. However, he did not explain the use of  $\text{אֲרָצוֹת}$  in place of  $\text{אֶרֶץ}$ . Two possible reasons could be given for the latter. First, the prominence of the family setting in the Jacob story up to the point of 28:14, especially the manipulations, strife, threat of death, separation, is quite likely to be a factor. Secondly, but more important, we believe it is the narrative intention to portray Jacob as a parallel figure to Abraham, in the latter's call and destiny.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the choice of the phrase " $\text{אֲרָצוֹת}$   $\text{אֶרֶץ}$   $\text{אֲרָצוֹת}$ " instead of " $\text{אֶרֶץ}$   $\text{אֲרָצוֹת}$ " in 28:14, when the latter phrase has been used all three times immediately before in the formula in 18:18; 22:18; 26:4, could hardly be accidental. Moreover, the former phrase is used only three times in the Old Testament (Gen.12:3; 28:14; Am.3:2).<sup>27</sup>

In fact, when one takes all the five occurrences of the formula together, there might even be an attempt to form some sort of inclusio effect in the formula pronouncement of the universal destiny of the patriarchs by the use of " $\text{אֲרָצוֹת}$   $\text{אֲרָצוֹת}$ " (12:3; 28:14) around the use of " $\text{אֶרֶץ}$   $\text{אֲרָצוֹת}$ " (18:18; 22:18; 26:4). If this last observation is correct, then it could be said that even the use of the different phrases in the formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations" also serves to orientate the patriarchal narratives around the universalistic perspective

of Abraham's initial call and destiny (12:3), juxtaposed most immediately with the plight, and therefore need of blessing, of mankind as portrayed in the primeval history.

G) Conclusion

The formulaic analysis above reveals some patterns in the ways the formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations" is used in the patriarchal narratives. The observations can be summarised as below:

(a) Unlike other patriarchal promises, the promise of a universal destiny is the sole prerogative of Yahweh to pronounce. It is always expressed through a formula which is either in the niph'al form with the patriarch named as agent of blessing or in the hithpa'el form with the seed named as agent of blessing. The agent of blessing named is not always the same as the patriarch over whom the formula is pronounced or referred to. While Abraham and the seed appeared in connection with both forms of the formula, Isaac is involved only once in the hithpa'el form and Jacob once in the niph'al form. While Abraham and Jacob are named as agent of blessing only in the niph'al form, and the seed as agent of blessing in both forms, Isaac is never directly named as agent of blessing in either form. These features and their implications can only be pursued in our analysis of the theme and formula in the respective patriarchal narratives below. The variations in the formulations of the theme are significant enough to rule out a uniform understanding of the function and significance of the theme in the patriarchal narratives based solely or mainly on a single occurrence of the formula.

(b) The five occurrences of the formula in the patriarchal

narratives are always made in the contexts of a divine speech or soliloquy. In 12:1-3; 22:15-18; 26:2-5, the formula quite clearly appears as the final statement or intent of the divine speeches. While the position of the formula in 18:17ff and 28:13ff is not as clear as the former three passages, our analysis, nevertheless, shows that it is arguably meant to be taken as the final intent of the two passages as well.

(c) In the divine speeches or soliloquy where the formula appears, other elements such as command, promises, response are identified as well. All the four elements are found together in 12:1-4; 22:1-19; 26:2-6. In 18:17ff and 28:13ff, only the elements of promises and formula are present. The absence of the elements of command and response in the latter passages can be explained by the overall structure of the respective patriarchal stories. In general, there appear to be two structures in the ordering of the elements: i) command — promises — formula pronouncement — response; ii) command — response — promises — formula pronouncement.

The formula used in structure (i) is usually in the niphal form with the patriarch named as agent of blessing (except 28:14 where the seed is named as co-agent as well). Structure (ii) occurs only in 22:1-19 where the formula used is in the hithpael form with the seed named as the agent of blessing. The passage in 26:2-6 is unique in that it combines structure (i) with the hithpael form of the formula where the seed is named as the agent of blessing. Nevertheless, our analysis shows that the use of the hithpael form of the formula in 26:2-6 does not invalidate structure (ii) because the pronouncement is dependent on a prior response. The striking feature in 26:2-6 will be explored further in our analysis of the

Isaac narrative later.

(d) While the general recognition that the formula is set in significant junctures of the patriarchal narratives is quite correct, our analysis shows that there is a further significance in the positioning of the formula. The formula in 12:3; 18:18; 28:14, is found in narratives depicting the patriarch concerned either at the beginning or in a new phase of his career, while in 22:18 and 26:4, the patriarch concerned is at the end, or a later phase, of his career. It is noteworthy that the niph'al form of the formula appears in the former group of passages while the hithpa'el form appears in the latter group.

(e) Taking all the above observations together, a general pattern of the use of the formula seems to emerge. First, in 12:1-4; 18:17ff; 28:13ff, when the patriarch concerned stands at the beginning or a new phase of his career, the divine speech or soliloquy there in which the theme "Blessing for the Nations" appears has a structure: command -- promise -- formula pronouncement -- response, and the formula used is in the niph'al form with the patriarchal named as the agent of blessing. Secondly, in 22:1-19 and 26:2-6, when the patriarch concerned stands at the end or later phase of his career, the divine speech there in which the theme "Blessing for the Nations" appears yields the structure: command -- response -- promises -- formula pronouncement, and the formula used is in the hithpa'el form with the seed named as the agent of blessing. Furthermore, on both occasions, the obedience of Abraham to the voice of Yahweh, is given as the same reason for the reaffirmation of the promises and universal destiny. Gen.22:1-19 seems to have special significance in that all the formulaic variations connected with the different

forms of the formula appear there when the hithpael form is used for the first time. A corollary of the general pattern just mentioned is that the niphal form of the formula is used to express a probationary state of the patriarch's involvement in the universal destiny and the hithpael form of the formula is used to express a reaffirmatory nature of the patriarch's, or more specifically, the seed's, role in the universal destiny.

Thus, the emerging pattern just mentioned appears to support our proposal after the survey in the previous chapter which shows the limitations of previous approaches to the theme that a literary analysis of the particular narratives where the theme expressed by the formula occurs, as well as of the overall structure of the respective patriarchal narratives, is necessary for a fuller appreciation of the function and significance of the theme in the patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35) as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE - THE THEME "BLESSING FOR THE NATIONS" AND THE  
ABRAHAM NARRATIVES (GEN.12-22)

I) The Structure of the Abraham Story and the Formula of the Theme

The formulaic analysis above warns against a uniform understanding of the use of the niph'al and hithpa'el forms of the formula, as well as of the naming of the agent of blessing. Since almost all the characteristics of the formula appear in the Abraham narratives, it is natural to begin our study there for a fuller understanding of the theme expressed by the formula in the patriarchal narratives.

Three general observations concerning the formula in the Abraham story provide the guide for our analysis. First, it is striking that the formula appears in the divine speeches which begin and end the Abraham story, forming some sort of encasing framework around it. Secondly, the formula is reiterated in a soliloquy in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (Gen.18-19) which requires an explanation. All the other occurrences of the formula in the patriarchal narratives are pronounced directly over the patriarch concerned. Thirdly, the formula in 12:3 is set in a divine speech, whose content and narrative context (12:1-9) appear to be closely juxtaposed with the final event in the primeval history, the Babel incident (11:1-9). Moreover, we have already seen earlier how the striking phrase "all the families of the earth (כָּל־בְּרִיּוֹת־הָאָרֶץ)" links the call of Abraham to the primeval history in general.<sup>1</sup>

In view of these general observations, we propose to study the use, the function and the significance of the formula in the Abraham story along two lines. First, we shall study the structure and arrangement of the Abraham story and see whether there are any

substantial links with the use of the formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations". Secondly, we shall study the three occurrences of the formula in their respective contexts (12:3; 18:18; 22:18) and see what are the function and significance of the usage of the formula in the contexts. The study of the formula in 12:3 and 22:18 will inevitably be related very much to our first line of study. Under the second line of study, we shall also be analysing whether the use of the formula in the respective narratives in the Abraham story serves to link the latter more specifically to the primeval history than what we have just noted for 12:3?

A) C. Westermann

Commentators who approach the Abraham narratives from the traditional source divisions are frequently beset by the problem of parallel narratives (e.g. Gen.15 and 17) or so-called doublets (Gen.12:10-20 and 20:1-18; 16:1-16 with 21:1-21). It is therefore hardly surprising that very few attempts have been made to see a coherent structure or arrangement of the cycle of Abraham narratives in its present form.<sup>2</sup> The traditio-historical approach by its very nature is not conducive to reading the Abraham story as a literary whole.<sup>3</sup>

It is to Westermann's credit, despite his thorough form-critical and traditio-historical analysis of the patriarchal narratives under the rubric of "promises to the fathers", that he observed that "an initial attempt to survey the various types of presentation [in the Abraham cycle of stories] reveals a surprising organisation that cannot simply be written off as accidental."<sup>4</sup> He noted that the most conspicuous form of presentation of the Abraham stories are: narratives,

promises, accounts of journeys, and genealogies.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, developing the observation of Gunkel especially, Westermann also noted a second arrangement which "cuts across [the former] ... and [it] can be easily seen in the structure of the Abraham/Lot narratives."<sup>6</sup> Gunkel regards this cycle, Gen.12:1-8; 13; 18:1-16a; 19:1-28,30-38, as the earliest connected narratives in the whole structure. The Sodom-Lot saga was later worked into the Abraham-Lot saga. Gunkel's discussion focussed on the etiological explanation of how the peoples who are named after Abraham and Lot originated and came to live where they do.<sup>7</sup> It is beyond our intention to examine Gunkel's analysis as such but only to our point that the connection of the Abraham-Lot saga with the Sodom-Lot saga in the Abraham narratives provides a useful working basis to discern whether a literary structure exists there.

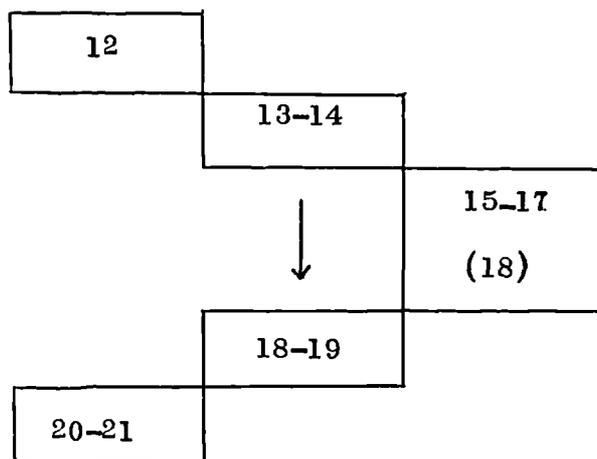


DIAGRAM A

Westermann illustrated in his monograph The Promises to the Fathers the view that the Abraham-Lot narratives "surround the promise narratives (Gen.15-17 (18)) and interrupt the narratives that run from the peril of the mother (Gen.12) to the birth of the son (Gen.20-21)," and that "this second arrangement further confirms

the fact that the promise narratives in 15-17 (18) constitute a group" (see Diagram A).<sup>8</sup> In other words, Westermann is claiming that the types of presentation and the types of narrative play a part as such in the development of the Abraham cycle as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

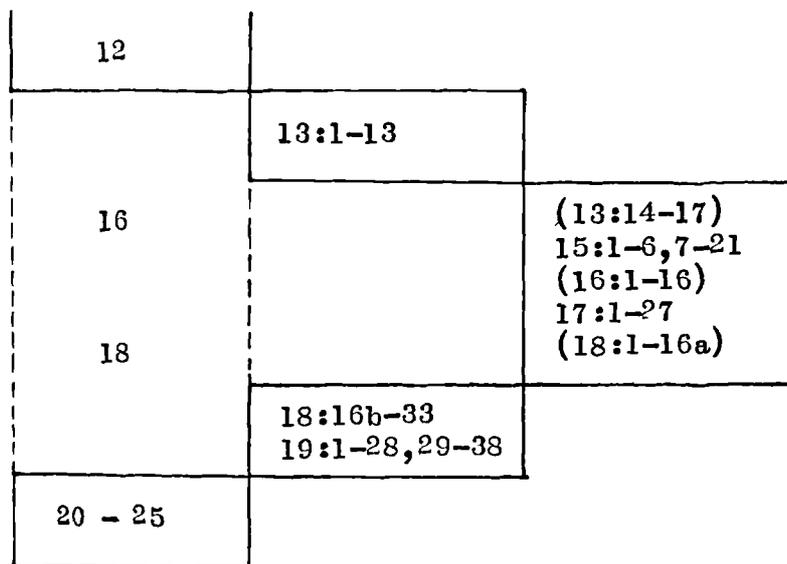


DIAGRAM B

Subsequently, in his commentary Genesis, Westermann further refined his views of the structure of the Abraham narratives (see Diagram B).<sup>10</sup> The promise theme now plays a more obvious and far-reaching role in the structure of the Abraham narratives as a whole, compared to his previous views. In general, he continues the three basic strands of narratives he earlier observed which structured the Abraham story. The promise narratives ((13:14-17); 15:1-6, 7-21; (16:1-15); 17:1-27; (18:1-16a)) stand at the centre of the whole structure. The Abraham-Lot saga (13:1-13; 18:16b-33; 19:1-28, 29-38) surrounds the former and interrupts the third strand, the life and preservation of the family, which leads from the childlessness of the patriarchal couple to the birth and marriage of the son (11:27-30; 12:10-20; (16:1-15); (18:1-16a); 20:1-21:7; 22:1-19; 22:20-24; 23; 24; 25:1-6; 25:7-10). Of the passages outside those mentioned above,

12:1-3,7 are elements of promises to Abraham distributed about in the cycle. 12:1-3 is really the prologue to the patriarchal history which has a deliberate programmatic character. He regarded 21:22-34, a doublet, as not belonging to either of the three basic strands of narratives in the Abraham cycle but as really belonging to the Isaac tradition (Gen.26:15-23).<sup>11</sup>

Some interesting observations emerge when the two diagrams are viewed together with regard to the development in Westermann's views. 1) In Diagram A, Westermann follows Gunkel more closely by placing emphasis on the Abraham-Lot saga — as seen in the marked arrow. However, Westermann wavers on the locale of Gen.18 (presumably 18:1-16a), and he begins and ends the structure with Gen.12 and Gen.20-21 respectively). 2) Significant changes have taken place in Diagram B. Clearly, the emphases now are the strand of family stories and the centre block of promise narratives. Westermann regards 18:1-16a and 16:1-15 as the only two original promise narratives (in the context of the family stories) and also the oldest Abraham narratives.<sup>12</sup> The strand of family stories begins from Gen.11:27 and originally ends at 21:1-7, which the account of Abraham's death, 25:7-10, follows quite naturally, according to Westermann. Within this, 20:1-18 and 21:8-21 are really doublets of 12:10-20 and 16:1-15 respectively.<sup>13</sup> 3) The Abraham-Lot sagas are practically retained except that 13:14-17 is now given over to the centre block of promise narratives. Westermann regards Gen.14 as a 'parenthesis' and a late insertion in all probability. These reasons probably caused him to remove it from the structure altogether in Diagram B.<sup>14</sup> 4) The centre block of promise narratives are the youngest of the narratives in the whole cycle. Significantly,

16:1-15 and 18:1-16a, originally part of the strand of the family story, the oldest in the Abraham narratives, are now included here on the basis of the promise theme (of a son). 5) Finally, Westermann argues that between the earlier conclusion of the family story, 21:1-7, and the now final conclusion, 25:7-10, the Redactor constructed another group of narratives, further expansions of the Abraham traditions, namely Chs. 22-24.<sup>15</sup> He asserts that these three extended narratives standing together at the conclusion of the Abraham cycle could hardly be accidental. Of these three, Gen.22 is clearly a theological narrative (vv.15-18 are secondary), while Gen.23 and 24 together constitute a group which have been developed out of genealogical notices, although they differ in style. However, even these three chapters are linked to each other and the group of narratives in this particular strand by the motif of the life and preservation of the family.<sup>16</sup>

First of all, it must be said in Westermann's favour that his analysis has provided a substantial basis for the possibility of seeing a coherent literary structure and arrangement of the whole cycle of the Abraham story by the identification of the three strands of narratives in it, each with its own distinctive theme or motif. Below, we will analyse the "three-strand" structure of the Abraham narratives Westermann arrived at by his form-critical and tradition-historical analysis. One general comment on Westermann's analysis, especially represented in Diagram B, needs to be made. One is not absolutely clear at what level of tradition he is viewing the Abraham narratives. This ambiguity is most acute in the centre block of promise narratives as our discussions below will show.

1) Promise Narratives While the promise elements clearly are present in the centre block of narratives (13:14-17; 15-18:16a), is it proper to use the promise theme as the main, or sole, criterion for grouping these narratives together? This is possible only if it can be shown that the promise theme and not another theme or motif is the primary factor in the present narratives.<sup>17</sup>

Westermann argued that a 'true' promise narrative, which he termed a promise genre, is one in which the promise element is the necessary part of the whole narrative. This he found only in the two narratives just mentioned. Both contained the promise of a son, although a secondary promise of many descendants has been added to Gen.16.<sup>18</sup> On Gen.18:1-16a, Westermann says,

"The promise of a son in response to the exigency of childlessness is a motif frequently encountered in the realm of family narratives. Here -- and only here -- does the circle of the promise narrative coincide completely with the circle of the family narratives. Here, therefore, we have a crucial starting point for the transformation of a cycle of family saga into a saga cycle defined by the promise to Abraham."<sup>19</sup>

On Gen.16:1-15, he says,

"The announcement of a child together with a prediction of his future is a frequently attested form (especially in the tribal sayings). We can therefore safely say that the narrative in Genesis 16 originally contained only the promise of the birth of a son, and that the promise of many descendants was added [later] ... It is certainly true in any case that the promise of a son is a necessary part of the Hagar narratives, but the promise of many descendants is not absolutely necessary."<sup>20</sup>

In fact, as Westermann has argued that 18:1-16a and 16:1-15 originally belonged to the family story strand, there is the possibility that these two narratives are now placed in the centre block of narratives on a basis other than the promise theme.

Even if Westermann is correct in saying that 18:1-16a and 16:1-15 are originally 'true' promise narratives, the question still

remains whether the 'promise' element is responsible for their being in the present position? On Gen.16:11, the question has been raised whether the words of the angel of Yahweh to Hagar should be taken as a promise, "Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son ..."<sup>21</sup> In 16:4f, it is said that Hagar has already conceived, a fact which she used to spite Sarai. When Abraham and Sarah were promised a son (17:16; 18:10,14), Sarah was apparently not yet pregnant. Furthermore, when one reads Gen.16, the words of the angel regarding Hagar's pregnancy are strongly overshadowed by the picture of Sarai's grave anxiety over her barrenness, and the measures she took brought strife and conflict in the house of Abraham, the man whom God called to be a blessing for others.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, if one is speaking in terms of the final form of the Abraham narratives, which Westermann seems to be doing in a way as shown in his discussion on the Redactor's extended narratives of Gen.22-24 between the original conclusion and final conclusion of the strand of family stories, then it is questionable whether he is right to continue to group Gen.18:1-16a in the centre block of promise narratives. Most commentators, even Westermann himself, agree that Gen.18 and 19 now constitute an integrated whole.<sup>23</sup> Von Rad sums it up for most when he says, "Even though a critical survey reveals at once that in it [Chs.18-19] many traditions are collected which were originally independent of each other, yet the inner unity here is such that the seams, which can still be recognised, seem to be integral paragraphs of the whole."<sup>24</sup>

On the other end of the centre block of narratives, Westermann has to 'discard' Gen.14 as a late inserted parenthesis so as to relate 13:14-17, by virtue of its promise elements, to the centre

block of narratives. But by doing so, the position of Abraham at the end of 13:1-13, vis-à-vis Lot and his choice of the good land, would be left unresolved. Lot has received what he wanted but Abraham has not. The promises in 13:14-17 would not negate the disinterested magnanimity of Abraham to his younger nephew in order to maintain a proper kinship relationship (13:8) because it comes only after he had made the sacrifice without expecting any reward. Van Seters rightly argues that "there would certainly be no storytelling interest in recounting a separation of two groups and no more."<sup>25</sup> In fact, Westermann himself conceded that "the addition of this promise passage to the narrative of Lot's separation from Abraham is secondary but highly appropriate."<sup>26</sup>

The effect of Westermann's separation of 13:14-17 and 18:1-16a from their respectively more 'natural' contexts in the final form of the Abraham narratives, is to leave the Abraham-Lot sagas on both ends of the centre block of promise narratives without any significant promise element. As a result, with the depleted Abraham-Lot sagas (13:1-13; 18:16b-19:38) surrounding the now expanded and continuous group of promise narratives (13:14-17; 15-18:16a; since Gen. 14 has been omitted by Westermann), the way is opened for him to conclude, "This ... organisation furthermore confirms the fact that the promise narratives in 15-17 (18) constitute a group. This much at least we can safely say in the light of these observations: the types of presentation and the types of narrative play a part as such in the development of the Abraham cycle."<sup>27</sup> The circularity of his analysis is quite obvious.

2) Abraham-Lot Sagas As we have discussed the relationships of 13:14-17 to 13:1-13 and 18:1-16a to 18:16b-19:38 above, we are left only with the relationship of Gen. 14 in the Abraham-Lot sagas. Despite the views of many commentators that Gen. 14 belongs to an independent source quite unrelated to the normal Pentateuchal sources,<sup>28</sup> it is questionable whether Westermann is justified to discard it in a discussion of the structure of the Abraham narratives in its final form. Accepting for the sake of discussion, as most commentators do, that Gen. 14 has nothing originally to do with Abraham or Lot, then its very incorporation into the Abraham narratives must have a certain purpose or be related to some motif. Sarna conceded that the narrative about the wars of the kings could very well have nothing whatsoever to do with the Abraham story, but "the capture of Lot, however, altered the complexion of the entire episode."<sup>29</sup> After all, Lot is the son of Abraham's brother (14:12), Abraham's kinsman (14:14), who has followed Abraham from Haran to Canaan since the death of his father (11:28). Abraham must have felt a deep sense of kinship responsibility for Lot to offer the first choice of good land to prevent any further strife between them (13:9ff). Even though Lot deserved the fate he met by his own choice to dwell amongst the Sodomites, he was still a member of the family and clan. The blood ties imposed a sense of solidarity and responsibility upon Abraham. Van Seters who argues strongly for the originality of the references to Lot in 14:12,14,16, maintains that otherwise a radical emendation of the entire story would be necessary. He asserts the references "provide the whole motivation for Abraham's ... action."<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the mention of Abraham's flat refusal to have anything to do with the king of Sodom, while accepting the blessing of

Melchizedek, king of Salem, makes more sense when viewed against the notice that the Sodomites are "evil and sinned greatly before Yahweh" (13:13). Abraham's magnanimous gesture to Lot in Gen.13 is nicely matched by his magnanimous rescue of Lot for no personal gain of his own. Overall, Abraham's sense of kinship solidarity and responsibility stands out in the two chapters. Gen.13 does not depend on Gen.14 for a purposeful existence, but the latter appears to be integrated with the former for its present position in the Abraham narratives to be necessary and intelligible. As such, in our study of the Abraham story there are good reasons for taking the two chapters together. Moreover, there are also strong grounds for seeing some parallel between the events of Gen.13-14 and Gen.18-19 as we shall see later. If our arguments for retaining Gen.14 and its relation with Gen.13 are valid, then Westermann's attempt to 'discard' Gen.14 thereby linking 13:14-17 directly to 15-18:16a to form the centre block of promise narratives is quite unnecessary and, in fact, unjustified.

3) Family Stories Probably more basic than the centre block of promise narratives in Westermann's analysis is the strand of family story which leads from the barrenness of the couple (11:30) to the birth and marriage of the son (21:1-7; 24:1ff). He states, "The basic corpus of narratives in the Abraham cycle comprises family stories. The most important group of these deals with the fate of the matriarch and her child."<sup>31</sup> He believes that in the family stories, "we have probably hit upon a very ancient usage of the family narrative."<sup>32</sup> Westermann listed the following as the primary line of family stories, the fate of the matriarch and her child: 15:1-6; (17:1-27); 18:1-16a and 21:1-7; 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 16:1-16; 21:8-21.

He also listed a secondary line of the family stories: 19:30-38; 24; 23. In his discussions under this rubric, Westermann also took into consideration Gen.22.<sup>33</sup> In other words, under "family stories", the great majority of the Abraham narratives, except for Gen.13 (Gen.14 being omitted), are included. It is interesting that these include the centre block of promise narratives, as well as part of the Abraham-Lot saga in Gen.19. The question which immediately raises itself is whether Westermann's classification "family stories" has not become too general and all-inclusive here so that it has lost any form-critical value and control that he has put on it.

In fact, Westermann's inclusion of 16:1-16; 21:1-7 with 21:8-21 shows that the quarrel or conflict motif among family members also comes under "family stories" in general. That being the case, even though the issue of land or territorial conflict is involved, 13:1-13 is also very much a 'conflict' story of family members which involves the question of 'survival' (13:6). Furthermore, if the motif of deliverance or preservation of the matriarch and child, 16:1-16 and 21:8-21 (about Hagar and Ishmael), is also within the boundary of this group, then 19:1-29, the preservation of Lot and his family, would also qualify to be labelled "family story".

The all-inclusiveness of this category can further be seen in Westermann's treatment of Gen.22-24. While he recognises that all three chapters belong to other groups, he went on immediately to say, "But one clearly independent strand links each of them with this group: they, too deal with the life and survival of the family."<sup>34</sup> On Gen.22, he describes it as "narrative theology", which has taken on a new and different function: the framing of theological questions and statements. But he continues, "The nucleus of the earlier form

of the narrative, however, seems to me to have been the deliverance of the son who was destined to be sacrificed."<sup>35</sup> He describes Gen. 23 and 24 as "accounts of success", which have been developed out of genealogical notices.<sup>36</sup>

But a more fundamental criticism is Westermann's handling of "family stories" vis-à-vis the promise narratives in the patriarchal stories in general. Westermann appeals to the work of A. Jolles on Icelandic sagas to demonstrate that the "family stories" in the patriarchal narratives are the basic and earliest materials. Essentially, Jolles' conclusion is that of the three main categories of sagas he identified — family sagas, royal sagas, and sagas of long ago — the family sagas are the most original and most indigenous, and have considerably influenced the shaping of the others.<sup>37</sup> Westermann claims that the patriarchal stories do not deal with a private or circumscribed domain. They deal rather with the way of life in family and clan that constituted the total existence of those who lived then. The patriarchal stories tell of a prehistorical way of life, and are to be understood in this sense. Westermann believed Jolles has provided the fundamental description of the narrative form of the patriarchal family stories. The two primary groups in the Icelandic sagas, family sagas and sagas of long ago, Westermann maintained, "have, in my opinion, precise counterparts to the patriarchal history and primal history in Genesis."<sup>38</sup>

On the question of chronological priority, Westermann appeals to A. Heusler's treatment of the Icelandic sagas, on which Jolles is also dependent. Westermann believes Heusler has demonstrated convincingly that family sagas constitute the point of departure for the other categories of sagas.<sup>39</sup> Applying this to Genesis, Westermann

concluded, "this would mean that the patriarchal narratives came first, and that the narratives of the so-called primal history were formed after the patriarchal stories. This would explain their similarities."<sup>40</sup> This premise about the originality and influence of the family stories upon other forms of narratives is clearly decisive for Westermann's views of the three strands of narratives in the Abraham cycle of stories, especially in his conclusions about the priority of the promise of a son over other promises such as many descendants, fertility, blessing, and land.

However, Jolles' work on the Icelandic sagas has been criticised quite stringently, and so has Westermann's appeal to it to base his analysis of the patriarchal narratives.<sup>41</sup> It has also been pointed out that the date of the Icelandic sagas under study make it questionable to apply the conclusions to Israel's traditions. Van Seter's comment is worth quoting at length, since it reinforces our questioning of the form-critical value of the category "family stories" as used by Westermann,

"Furthermore, even the name 'family saga' is freely acknowledged as a complete misnomer because, although they deal with family units, they are hardly domestic in content. Virtually all have the same basic structure, which has to do with the development of a conflict between two individuals or families leading to a violent confrontation ... death ... revenge... reconciliation ... often by means of action by the larger political unit, the assembly. It has also been recently argued that this basic framework is an adaptation of heroic epic models for the presentation of the 'traditional' Icelandic saga material. Nor are the family sagas any less national in their political, social, or religious character than the king sagas. ... These sagas are not small episodic units, but very complex literary works that often run several hundred pages in translation!"<sup>42</sup>

To sum up our discussion so far; that the Abraham narratives are greatly concerned with family affairs there can be no doubt and that they also contain many promises there can also be no disagreement.

At least, Westermann's study has more than convincingly demonstrated that. However, as we have tried to argue, the promise theme and the family stories in the Abraham narratives are distributed across the whole cycle without any particular intentional grouping of the two strands in the way Westermann argued for. Nevertheless, the observations of Gunkel, developed in Westermann's analysis, have shown that the Abraham-Lot saga, Gen. 13-14 and 18-19, does indeed cut across the Abraham cycle of stories which "cannot simply be written off as accidental" as Westermann said. With this basic observation about the Abraham-Lot saga, and without prejudicing the Abraham narratives under the categories and organisation of family stories and promise narratives, we believe the present form of the cycle of the Abraham narratives does yield a meaningful literary arrangement.

#### B) Parameters of Analysis

Glancing at the Abraham narratives, Gen. 11:27 to 25:11, for the reasons below, it seems that 12:1 to 22:19 is marked out from the rest of the narratives.

First, a programmatic divine speech in 12:1-3 and 22:15-18 begins and ends Yahweh's direct dealings with Abraham in the whole cycle. We noted earlier that both speeches involved a divine command to Abraham, a series of promises, and above all, are followed by the pronouncement of the formula in which Abraham and his seed are to be agents of blessing for the nations. Both before and after these two speeches, there is no account of Yahweh speaking directly to Abraham.<sup>43</sup>

Secondly, the 'active' journeying of Abraham which began

with Yahweh's call to him in 12:1 ends in 22:19, when he returns to Beersheba after the ultimate climax in his life, the test of total commitment and his readiness to sacrifice Isaac as commanded by Yahweh. Earlier, even though he arrived in the land of Canaan (12:4-6) as Yahweh told him to, Abraham continues to be constantly on the move (12:8f; 12:10; 13:1-4,18; 20:1). After, 22:19, there is no more travel account of Abraham.

Thirdly, without any great dislocation, the notices about Sarah's death (Gen.23), Abraham's concern for Isaac's marriage (Gen.24), as well as Abraham's own death (25:1-11), could have quite naturally followed the notices of Haran's and Terah's death (11:28,32) and so may be distinguished from 12:1-22:19. Sarna made the point that "the genealogical data actually constitute a kind of literary and ideational consummation of the narrative that began with God's call at Haran."<sup>44</sup> Westermann also recognises that Gen.23 and 24 "are both accounts that have developed out of genealogical notices."<sup>45</sup>

Finally, when we compare the notice of Abraham's death, and the form of the genealogies and the notices of life-spans of mankind in the primeval history, a fundamental change can be noticed. This change is of great significance in view of Abraham's call as God's act of grace to reverse the 'chaos' brought about by the spread of sin in Gen.1-11 and to reaffirm God's purpose of creation. Clines argued that the genealogy in Gen.5, by its recurrent phrase "and he died," shows that "the whole movement of the regular form of these notices is toward death," and that "their function is to emphasize a finality about each of these lives; ... these men also die."<sup>46</sup> Noah, the second universal figure after Adam, was called and preserved by divine grace to continue the growth of mankind under blessing after

the Deluge. However, it is noteworthy that the notice about Noah's death: "And Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years. And he died" (9:28f), continues the same note of finality about man — death — as before the Deluge. The diminishing life-spans between the antediluvians and postdiluvians, from 800 or 900 to 600 (11:10), and within the postdiluvians, from 600 to 205 years (11:32), could also very well provide a hint of "progression toward death."<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Clines went on to make the point that "what immediately follows the story of Noah's drunkenness is not blessing but curse — the curse of Canaan" (9:25ff).<sup>48</sup> In other words, even with and after Noah, blessing is still not used to describe man's existence.

On the other hand, while Abraham's life-span is considerably shorter, 175 years (25:7), the significant difference is that he is said to have "breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man full of years and was gathered to his people" (25:8). In fact, Yahweh promised Abraham well before his death, "You, however, will go to your fathers in peace, and be buried at a good old age" (15:15). Furthermore, it is also very significant that at the very end of the Abraham narratives, after his death, it is said, "God blessed (בֵּרַךְ) Isaac his son" (25:11). This latter point is more marked when we take into account the fact that Abraham, the man called to be a blessing for the nations, is never said to have blessed anyone, including his own son, Isaac.<sup>49</sup> Beginning with Abraham, and his seed, death and curse are not the final words of man's existence but blessing.

As Abraham is the third universal figure after Adam and Noah, the significance of the notices about his death, in contrast to Noah especially, could not be totally accidental. It is very likely we

Have here the first notice of a positive and qualitative 'reversal' of the finality of mankind's movement towards death. The diminishing life-span which is probably to be seen "as a deterioration of man's original wonderful vitality, a deterioration corresponding to his increasing distance from his starting point at creation"<sup>50</sup> is now more than compensated for by the quality of life lived by Abraham before Yahweh. Furthermore, the result of Abraham's death on Isaac stands in contrast to the result of Noah's drunkenness upon his sons.

What then could have caused the fundamental change in the way Abraham's death is recorded from the deaths of mankind in general in the primeval history if death in the latter is already so 'final' so to speak? We believe the intervening narratives about Abraham between the genealogical notices, namely 12:1 to 22:19, provide the answer. It should not be totally surprising because as we noted the formula pronouncing a universal destiny of Abraham being a blessing for the nations occurs just at those two points. Hence the reasons for setting the parameters of our analysis of the Abraham story at those narratives in the first place.

For our analysis of the Abraham narratives (Gen.12:1-22:19), the following divisions are adopted. Most of the unit divisions are recognised by the great majority of commentators.<sup>51</sup>

- 1) 12:1-9 ... God's call of Abraham
- 2) 12:10-20 ... Abraham in Egypt
- 3) 13:1-14:24 ... Abraham's Relationship with Lot (I)
- 4) 15:1-21 ... God's Promise and Covenant with Abraham
- 5) 16:1-16 ... Sarai's Voice and Abraham's Response
- 6) 17:1-27 ... God's Command, Promises, Covenant and Abraham's Circumcision (17:15-21)
- 7) 18:1-19:38 ... Abraham's Relationship with Lot (II) (18:9-16)
- 8) 20:1-21:34 ... Abraham and Abimelech (21:1-21)
- 9) 22:1-19 ... God's Test of Abraham

The focus of our attention on the narratives will be centered around

Abraham. Basically, there are two perspectives involved in the narratives, God's initiatives to Abraham and Abraham's initiatives to other people. As our main purpose is to have a grasp of the general orientation of the Abraham narratives with reference to the destiny of being a blessing for the nations, we shall not discuss other themes or motifs in the analysis on their own.

Before we begin, a few explanatory remarks would be in order regarding the basis of the division of certain units which we shall be adopting. In unit (3), Gen.13 and 14 are taken together on the grounds we have already given above (see pp.82f). The relationship of Abraham and Lot, before and after their separation, runs through the unit. While Abraham's contacts with foreigners in Gen.14 are not without importance in their own right, in the present context, these came about only because of Abraham's relationship to Lot, the focus of Gen.13. The function of Gen.14 being related to Gen.13 in the overall framework of the Abraham narratives will be elaborated further later.

Gen.16 has usually been taken by commentators to focus around Hagar's flight and the birth of Ishmael. While these two aspects are clearly in the narrative, we would want to argue that in the context of the whole story of Abraham, they are now subordinated to the anxiety and desire of Sarai to have a child of her own and the effect of this on Abraham, which in turn led to Hagar's plight.<sup>52</sup> It is to be noted that this is the only narrative in the Abraham story in which neither God nor Abraham is the prime mover of events as in the other narratives but Sarai.

The relationship of Abraham and Abimelech runs from 20:1-18 and 21:22-34.<sup>53</sup> The movement of Abraham to Abimelech which was

followed by some sort of deception and reconciliation in Gen.20 is matched by a reverse movement of Abimelech going to Abraham which was also followed by a complaint (hinting at deception, 21:25f) and reconciliation. Thus, in our analysis, the two chapters are also taken together as a unit.

One feature in our unit divisions above is the three bracketed sections, 17:15-21; 18:9-16; 21:1-21, which seems to be placed within their respective units. These sections all concerned notices about the promise, reaffirmation and birth of Abraham's son, Isaac, and related matters of his immediate family. We shall attempt explanation for these sections after our analysis of the overall structure of the Abraham story.

### C) Development of Horizons in the Abraham Narratives

#### 1) God's Dealings with Abraham

##### (a) General Observations

In the narratives delineated for analysis, there are four narratives which begin with a divine speech and command by God to Abraham and set the respective narratives in motion (12:1-9; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; 22:1-19). In 12:1-9, the command begins Yahweh's overall direct dealings with Abraham and initiates the vital departure and movement of Abraham. All these are given an emphatic universal perspective by the syntactical structure of the divine speech which we have already seen in our formulaic analysis earlier. The content of 15:1-21, on the other hand, focusses attention on Yahweh's promise of great reward to Abraham. At first, the latter expressed his discontent at the lack of an heir of his own. Yahweh then promised Abraham an heir and also assured him by asking him to count the stars of

the heavens which he obviously could not. This apparently prompted Abraham to believe in Yahweh's ability and intention. The attention then turned to the promise of land, the realisation of which was also difficult for Abraham to accept without further assurance. This Yahweh did by a most solemn act of oath-taking on his own part. The universalistic perspective of 12:1-9 appears to be absent in the whole of Gen. 15.

he main focus of 17:1-27, on the one hand, lies on the offer and promise of God to establish a covenantal relationship with Abraham and his seed forever, "to be your God and the God of your descendants after you", and Abraham's acceptance of it by subscribing himself and his household to the rite of circumcision. Yet, on the other hand, a new phase in the Abraham narratives is also unmistakably marked by the transformation of Abraham's name as the "father of a multitude of nations." The particular relationship of God and Abraham is therefore set in the context of a 'restored' universalistic horizon. Furthermore, Sarah's name was also changed, and God promised Abraham that "she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her" (17:16f). Finally, in 22:1-19, we see a highly personal and intimate concern of an aged father and his only (remaining) beloved son. That Isaac has become the sole attention of Abraham is shown by the poignant remark of God to Abraham, "your son, your only son Isaac, whom you loved" (22:2). It is inevitable that with Isaac as the promised heir (21:12), given by God to Abraham at his old age, and at the 'expense' of Ishmael whom Abraham also had very deep feelings for (17:18; 21:11), Abraham's concern and horizon is introverted and narrowed. The significant development of the narrative is that were it not for the second divine speech after Abraham had obediently

undergone the test of sacrificing his son, Isaac, this concluding narrative in our analysis would have closed on a very narrow and particularistic note, both from God's and from Abraham's point of view — totally preoccupied with the issue of the promised heir. The universalistic note is salvaged at the very end with the reaffirmation of the formula which expresses Abraham's destiny, now through his seed, as being called to be a blessing for the nations. From our brief survey, it appears that there is some sort of movement from a universalistic horizon (12:1-9; 17:1-27) to a narrow and introverted concern (15:1-21; 22:1-14) in the narratives under study, except for the final divine speech (22:15-19) which re-broadens the horizon of the narrative at its very end.

This movement of horizons is nothing important in itself unless some sort of relationship can be established between the four narratives concerned. Whether one takes the view of the traditional source critics that Gen.15 and Gen.17 are parallel accounts of God's covenant with Abraham belonging to J and P respectively,<sup>54</sup> or that Gen.17 is some sort of reaffirmation of the promises (bound by oath) of Gen.15 in view of Sarai's 'impatience' over the birth of a son in Gen.16,<sup>55</sup> or the view that Gen.15 and Gen.17 are two stages of covenant-making,<sup>56</sup> the relationships of the two narratives are quite clear: both centring around the covenant between God and Abraham and include common elements of promises, even though Gen.17 is much more developed and extensive.<sup>57</sup> We have already noted the clear links between the divine speech which begins 12:1-9 and the divine speech which ends 22:1-19. Furthermore, the two speeches also have the function of a frame around the narratives under analysis. It has also been noted that Abraham, the man called by God to be a

blessing for the nations, is left isolated in relationship to God's calling and purpose by the command in the two speeches.<sup>58</sup> In 12:1, Abraham, the son, is called to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house, while in 22:2, Abraham, now the father, is commanded to give up his son, Isaac. All these are in relation to Yahweh who has called him to a universal destiny. Thus, we have established that there is some sort of relationship between the four narratives and it is therefore legitimate to analyse the narratives with reference to the movement of horizons we noted above.

b) Gen.15 and Gen.17

We shall begin with a study of the relationship of Gen.15 and Gen.17. The former stands in contrast to the universalistic perspective of Gen.12:1-9 with its introverted and narrow concern for a son which Abraham deeply desired. In Gen.17, quite unexpectedly and for no apparent reason, God appears to Abraham with a command and promise, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly" (vv.1f). When Abraham falls on his face, indicating his obeisance and acceptance of the apparently particularistic command and promise addressed to him, a new element is introduced when he is further told by God, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you" (vv.4ff).

The whole ethos of Gen.17 and Gen.15 is basically quite

different. In the former, even before the promised heir was born, Abraham's destiny was already extended and expanded well beyond the highly personal and introverted concern of his in Gen.15. He is not only to father a son of his own to inherit his house, but he will now be a father of a multitude of nations and kings shall come forth from him. The domestic horizon of Gen.15 is unexpectedly broadened to the widest possible horizon. This is quite noteworthy because Gen.15 has usually been seen as a high point in God's relationship with and promises to Abraham.<sup>59</sup>

What causes this abrupt and fundamental change between the two narratives? Why the broadening and extending of horizon, even before the promise of an heir to Abraham is realised? The answer is not to be found directly in the two narratives concerned. However, when we take into consideration the movement of horizons we noted earlier from the universalistic call of Abraham in 12:1-3 to the narrowing of horizon in Gen.15, a possible explanation is available.

c) Gen.17 and Gen.12

While the universalistic horizon of Gen.12:1-9 is narrowed by the introverted concern of Abraham for an heir to inherit his house in Gen.15, the serious implication of this horizon narrowing is that Abraham's universal destiny to be a blessing for "all the families of the earth" could very easily be neglected, forgotten or displaced. If such were to be the case, then Yahweh's answer to the "shrill dissonance" left at the end of the primeval history, and his purpose for mankind and reaffirmation of his creation, would suffer a serious setback. Hence, the effect and function of Gen.17 as a

re-expansion and re-focussing of the narrow interest of Gen.15 is to hold in check the narrowing of horizon by reaffirming or reiterating the initial universalistic horizon of Gen.12:1-9. This is done by the transformation of Abraham's name as well as by taking up the issue of the promised heir in a new light -- as we shall see later.

When Abraham was called by Yahweh to depart in 12:1-3, he was promised that Yahweh will "make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and be a blessing! ... and by you all the families of the earth shall find blessing." If it is right that Gen.17:1-27 does indeed serve to "correct" the narrow concern of Gen.15 in favour of the initial universalistic horizon of 12:1-9, then it is very striking, but by no means surprising, that Abraham's name was changed from Abram. Significantly, the change of name is followed immediately by the statement "for ( 7 > ) I have made you the father of a multitude of nations" and by the promises that "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you" (vv.5f). Not only that, Sarah, Abraham's wife, also has her name changed from Sarai, so that "she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come forth from her" (v.16). Even Ishmael, though he is displaced by the promise of Isaac's birth, is also the subject of a promise that he "will be the father of twelve tribes, and ... will ... [be made] into a great nation" (vv.15f,19f). The promise to make of Abraham a great nation and to make his name great (12:2) is undoubtedly taken up here in Gen.17.<sup>60</sup> This is done to re-focus Abraham's narrowing concern in Gen.15 which could have been at the expense of his universal destiny first pronounced in Gen.12.

While the pronouncement of the formula to be a blessing for

for the families of the earth is absent in Gen.17, we shall argue later that it is not lost sight of but "held over", and that the reference to the formula in 18:18 is in fact closely connected to the expansion and transformation of Abraham's destiny in Gen. 17. The main point to be noted for the moment is that the universal destiny of Abraham's call in 12:1-3 which could have been easily lost sight of by his deep anxiety for an heir of his own (15:1-6) is restored by the development in Gen. 17.

d) Gen.15 and Gen.22

If the transformation and development of Gen.17 restored the universalistic horizon of 12:1-9 over against the narrow concern of Gen.15, the movement of horizons, however, leads finally not to the maintenance of the restored universalistic perspective but rather to a narrowing horizon once again in Gen.22 — in fact, a more explicit and acute one. We shall leave the discussion of the second divine speech in 22:15-19 for the moment. The reason for the narrowing of horizon in Gen.22 has been noted already.<sup>61</sup> The question is whether the particularistic concern of Gen.15 is reasserting itself in Gen.22 after what seems to be its refutation in Gen.17 and is to be taken as the final and ultimate frame of thought of the Abraham narratives in particular, and the patriarchal narratives in general. Their 'link' position between the primeval history and the history of the early formation of the Israelite nation is clearly of utmost importance. To answer the question properly, an analysis has to be made of Gen.15 and Gen.22:1-19 as well.

The particularistic concern of Abraham for a promised heir in Gen.15 clearly dominates the narrative of Gen.22 as well. This

element of the promised heir in Gen.15 and not the element of the promised land is taken up in Gen.22 as a 'limitation' set by the development of the patriarchal narratives, and in fact the whole of the rest of Genesis. As the realisation of the promise of the possession of land would not be for quite some time as yet (15:13f, 16), until the descendants of Abraham returned to the land of Canaan after being sojourners and slaves in a land (Egypt!) for four hundred years, the issue of this promise becomes less urgent in contrast to the issue of the promised heir in the Abraham narratives especially. The issue of the promised heir has become an immediate concern in the Abraham narratives lest the universal destiny of being a blessing for the nations is displaced.

When the passages concerning the promised heir in Gen.15 and 22 are compared with one another, some interesting features can be observed. In 15:2f, it was Abraham who lamented the fact of his childlessness to Yahweh, in actual fact asking for a son from Yahweh, while in 22:2, it was the other way round when God asked Abraham for his son as a burnt offering. In 15:4ff, to satisfy Abraham of his promise that he is able and willing, Yahweh directed Abraham to count the stars in the heavens. It was not so much a test of Abraham in the first place as Yahweh allowing his own promise to be put to the 'test', so to speak.<sup>62</sup> Conversely, God's command to Abraham in 22:1f was described as a test. Interestingly, Abraham was addressed directly by name only on these two occasions by God (15:1; 22:1,11). The mention of Abram/Abraham in 17:5 and 18:17ff are not direct address. In clear contrast to his questioning attitude towards Yahweh in Gen.15, Abraham did not resist or argue in Gen.22 at God's command but obeyed instantly. Whereas he ascribed his childlessness

to Yahweh's not having given him any child (15:2f), later, even without knowing, Abraham could quite confidently answer Isaac's question of the whereabouts of the lamb (Isaac, the son) for the burnt offering by saying: "God himself will provide ..." (22:8).

In addition, the issue of knowing (יָדַע) seems also to be contrasted in the two narratives. Abraham was doubtful about possessing the land of Canaan when he asked: "My Lord Yahweh, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" (15:8). Again, Yahweh had to resort to a solemn oath-taking on his own part to assure Abraham to "know for certain ..." (15:13). In Gen.22, however, Abraham did not ask to know the purpose of the test, or the fate of Isaac. Yet, after Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, it was God's turn to "know" that Abraham feared God with a total commitment (22:12). Crenshaw likewise commented, "The purpose of the test from God's perspective is epistemological, from Abraham's volitional. The successful completion of the test communicates knowledge to God, specifically, Abraham's willingness to give up his beloved son, indeed, he has already done so."<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, while Abraham's lament over his childlessness was answered by his own believing in the words of Yahweh (15:6) after he was told to "look up at the heavens and count the stars", his own answer to Isaac's question about the whereabouts of the lamb for the burnt offering was actually made before he "looked up and behold, a lamb behind him was caught in a thicket" (22:13). The difference in the two occasions is that he looked before he believed in Gen.15, whereas he obeyed and confided in God first, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (22:8), before seeing the ram in Gen.22. Thus, it is also not an insignificant comment on Abraham's

character growth in his relationship with God that the commending statement in 15:5f, "and he (Yahweh) reckoned it to him as righteousness" when Abraham believed Yahweh, comes after he was told to look at what appears to be irrefutable proof (the stars) that Yahweh is able and willing to fulfil his promise of an heir to Abraham. In 22:12, on the other hand, God's commendation, "Now I know that you fear God" (cf. 18:19), came before Abraham had anything to ground his faith on.

One final element in the two narratives needs to be studied. At the end of both narratives, there is an oath-taking by Yahweh himself, and Abraham has no actual part in either. But the significant difference between the two is that in Gen.15, Yahweh's taking of the oath was 'instigated' by Abraham's questioning and doubtful attitude towards Yahweh's statement, "I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it" (v.7). Probably Abraham's already sceptical attitude earlier about the promise of an heir required a more solemn and assuring gesture from Yahweh than only the invitation to gaze at the stars (cf. 15:13 "know for certain ..."). On the other hand, Yahweh's oath-taking in 22:16 was prompted by Abraham's prior disinterested and absolute commitment, "By myself I have sworn, says Yahweh, because you have done this, and have not withheld ... your only son." Vawter commented that the oath "this time [is] not the oath of covenant ritual (15:18) but the oath of one who must swear by himself since there is none other by whom he may swear (cf. Amos 4:2)."<sup>64</sup>

Thus, a comparison of 15:1-21 and 22:1-19, though both are preoccupied with similar issues which could inevitably result in a particularistic, narrow, and introverted concern, shows a basic and

significant difference in the two narratives. If so, then how do we explain the seemingly particularistic horizon of 22:1-14? This is answered by the content of the second divine speech (22:15-19) which we have left out of discussion so far.

While the promises in 22:17, "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven ... and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies", pick up similar promises in 15:5,18, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars ... So shall your descendants be ... To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates",<sup>65</sup> the particularistic concern of Abraham for the promises in Gen.15 is turned inside out by the ultimate reaffirmatory pronouncement of the formula, "through your seed all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice" (22:18). In other words, underlying the two narratives is Abraham's trust in Yahweh which is fundamental to his suitability as Yahweh's agent of blessing to the nations. Thus the tension of the significant difference between the two narratives is not without its importance in the development of horizons in the Abraham narratives. Gen.22 is taking the very particularistic concern of Abraham in Gen.15 which could prove to be an obstacle to his fulfilling his universal destiny, and is transforming and restoring it to Yahweh's universal purpose. The restored universal perspective in Gen.17 is reaffirmed by Gen.22.

Thus the question we posed earlier whether the particularistic concern of Abraham in Gen.15 after its refutation in Gen.17, is reasserting itself again in 22:1-14, and is to be taken as the final and ultimate frame of thought for the Abraham narratives can now be answered with an emphatic no on the basis of Yahweh's oath, swearing

by himself, reaffirming the universal destiny of Abraham which was first pronounced in the formula in 12:3b. We shall attempt to show later that this 'reversing' function in the Abraham narratives of taking an issue which could prove to be an obstacle to Abraham's fulfilling his universal destiny and transforming and refocussing it to its proper universalistic framework, instead of rejecting it outright, is a significant feature. What could have been thought of as a particularistic concern overcoming a universalistic destiny in 22:1-19 proved in the end to be the very means of reaffirming the universalistic destiny of Abraham. Our analysis leads us to study finally the relationship between the two narratives, 12:1-9 and 22:1-19, encasing the Abraham narratives with the formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations".

e) Gen.12:1-9 and Gen.22:1-19

While stating the reasons for taking 12:1-22:19 as the parameters of our analysis, we have already briefly noted the link between the two divine speeches in 12:1-3 and 22:16-18, which act as a frame around the narratives concerned. Furthermore, the link between them is also confirmed by the movement of horizons observed in our analysis of the four narratives above.

Interestingly, not many commentators have exploited adequately the implications of the inclusio function of the two divine speeches around the Abraham narratives.<sup>66</sup> Both narratives begin with a similar command  $\text{Ⓢ} - \text{Ⓢ}$ , the only two occasions when this rare phrasing is used in the whole of the Pentateuch,<sup>67</sup> at the start and the end of Abraham's career so to speak. Each command is then heightened by the accumulation of a three-fold description, which at the same time

deepens considerably the nature of the command. In 12:1 Abraham is told to leave "your country, your people, and your father's house" at the beginning of his career, and in 22:2, at the end of his career, to take "your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love." The effect of these two commands combined is to make Abraham bereft of both past and future. The immediate objective of the commands also bears similarity in that the destination of Abraham's journey is not mentioned specifically. In 12:2 he is called to go "to the land that I will show you", and in 22:2, "go to the land of Moriah ... on one of the mountains which I will tell you." Then follows a series of promises and the pronouncement of the formula (12:2f; 22:17f), which we shall discuss below. Both commands are met by an immediate response from Abraham (12:4a; 22:3). It is quite clear therefore that the two speeches encasing the Abraham narratives constitute a literary frame.

That is as far as the similarities in the two speeches go. The differences between them are probably more significant with regard to Abraham's destiny to be a blessing for the nations. We have already noted some of these in our study of the formal characteristics of the divine speeches in the patriarchal narratives containing the formula earlier. First, there is a structural difference. In 12:1-4, we have a structure: command (v.1) — promises (vv.2-3a) — formula (v.3b) — response (v.4), but in Gen.22, the structure is command (v.2) — response (vv.3-14) — promises (vv.15ff) — formula (v.18). The former has a chain of promises following immediately after the command but before the response, whereas the latter held out no such expectations at first. In fact, the latter meant nothing less than the complete nullification of the covenant, promises, and hope of a posterity.<sup>68</sup> Ishmael had gone, and now Isaac is also to

go. It is not just a son who is in danger but God's instrument of bringing blessing to the nations. This difference also shows the measure of Abraham's progress in his relations with God.

Secondly, the difference between the two speeches is also reflected in the development of the promises. The promise of a great nation and a great name has been taken up and explicated in Gen.17 and other allusions to it (13:16; 15:5; 18:18f; cf. 17:16,20) but not the promise that "I will bless (ברך) you". This fact is more remarkable because Abraham's call was that he should be a blessing, and yet in the narratives, though people related to Abraham are said to be blessed by God (17:16,20; 20:13), Abraham himself was not. In fact, Abraham was on a number of occasions not even much of a blessing to others. His deception for self-preservation brought near fatal trouble to the Egyptians (12:17f) and later the Philistines (20:7ff,18). Even his strained relationship with Lot, though not entirely his fault, can also be attributed to the initial cause of his deceiving the Egyptians, by which Abraham is enriched greatly in material terms (12:16; 13:2,5ff). While it is true that Abraham shows his magnanimity when conflict arises between his herdsmen and Lot's, and performs his disinterested obligations to a kinsman in need even at the risk of his own safety (Gen.14), one cannot but suspect that Lot's self-choice to dwell among the Sodomites and his subsequent plight casts a shadow over Abraham's life — as is probably reflected in his restlessness by rising up "early the next morning ... and returned to the place where he had stood before Yahweh" (19:27) after Yahweh had destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>69</sup> As it is, Abraham is no nearer any assurance that the cities or Lot and his family will be delivered when he finishes his intercession for the cities with Yahweh (18:33).

This trait of Abraham can also be seen in his feelings for Hagar and Ishmael (16:6; 17:18; 21:11f) and the dilemma he feels in their expulsion. After all, the expulsions, and the conflict which preceded, in short, curse, are ultimately brought about because Abraham "hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (16:2).

Thus, it is not without significance that after Abraham's total response to God's test, he is commended: "now I know that you are a fearer of God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (22:12). Abraham is no more the man who strives or deceives to protect, to ensure, the realisation of God's promises and the continuation of his life and future in the person of Isaac. Abraham has come a long way to arrive at this level of total commitment in his relationship with God. It is therefore not surprising that the first words of promise in the concluding divine speech in the Abraham narratives are in fact an emphatic reaffirmation of what we noted has been lacking since 12:2, "I will indeed bless you (  $\text{ךךלללל כךלללל}$  )" (22:17). Strikingly, the synonymous promise of blessing, "I will multiply you exceedingly" (17:2; cf. 15:5) is also given an emphatic reaffirmation in 22:17, "And I will indeed multiply (  $\text{לללללל לללללל}$  ) your seed."<sup>70</sup>

This is probably the most likely reason why Abraham is not said to have blessed anyone, not even Isaac; he can not give something to others which he does not possess.<sup>71</sup> Only after God's approval of Abraham's character (22:14) is the latter actually ready to receive God's reaffirmation of the initial promise of blessing. As a result, the candidature of Abraham to be a blessing for the nations is now made possible and also reaffirmed by the pronouncement of the formula over him at the very last occasion on which Yahweh speaks to Abraham.

Crenshaw aptly commented:

"Having successfully withstood the test, Abraham hears the blessing affirmed anew. His victory over an inordinate love for Isaac equips Abraham once again to become an instrument of blessing to the nations. In the language of myth, the qualifying test has resulted in a restoration of the original position."<sup>72</sup>

Thirdly, there are also significant differences in the use of the formula in 22:18 from 12:3. The hithpael form is now used for the first time and the agent named to be the blessing for the nations is not Abraham but rather his seed. If our arguments above that the narrative and divine speech in Gen.22 serve to round off the Abraham story as well as to reaffirm Yahweh's call and promises to Abraham in 12:1-3, which is at most probative initially (since theoretically Abraham could still prove to be an unsuitable candidate -- like Adam!), then we may argue that the use of the hithpael form of the formula to pronounce Abraham's universal destiny is the form the narratives adopted to reaffirm that destiny as contrasted to the niphal form which is to be taken as initially probative. Our analysis of the relationship of the four narratives above in the development of the horizons from universal (12:1-9) -- particularistic (15:1-21) -- universal (17:1-27) -- particularistic (22:1-14)/universal (22:15-19), serves to reinforce this conclusion.

Furthermore, the reaffirmatory function of the hithpael form of the formula is also shown by the fact that in it the agent of blessing is not Abraham but his seed. In fact, in the only other use of the hithpael form in the patriarchal narratives, 26:4, it is also the seed which is named as agent of blessing. In other words, only what is reaffirmed for Abraham can be 'transmitted' in continuation to his seed, w'ic' is to be named through Isaac (21:12), as the reason for the pronouncement of the formula over Isaac shows: "and by

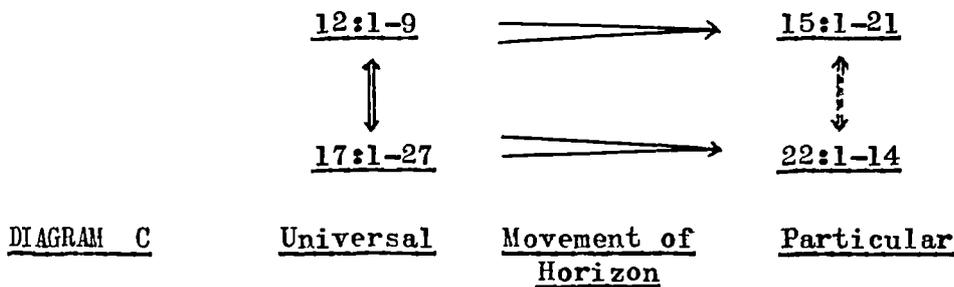
your seed all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves; because Abraham obeyed my voice ..." (26:4f). These are the same words as are used of Abraham in 22:18: "and by your seed shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." To underwrite the reaffirmatory function of the use of the hithpael form of the formula is the solemn oath sworn by Yahweh himself prefacing the second divine speech (22:15), which is also referred to in 26:3. It is striking that the word  $\text{ׁוּשַׁבַּח}$  is never used in 12:3; 18:18; 28:14, where the formula used is in the niph'al (probationary!) form.

In conclusion, while the narrative in 22:1-19 with its dual particularistic/universalistic horizons ultimately reaffirms the initial universal destiny of Abraham first stated in 12:1-9, as well as reaffirming the universal horizon of 17:1-27 in its refutation of the particularistic concern of 15:1-21, it also gives further enrichment to the universal destiny of Abraham by setting in motion a new phase with the seed named as the agent of blessing for the nations. It appears from our conclusion about the narrative function of the niph'al and hithpael forms of the formula, the previous debate about the meaning and translation of  $\text{ׁוּשַׁבַּח}$  vis-à-vis  $\text{ׁוּשַׁבַּח}$  has not taken into account the dynamics of the structure and arrangement of Abraham story.

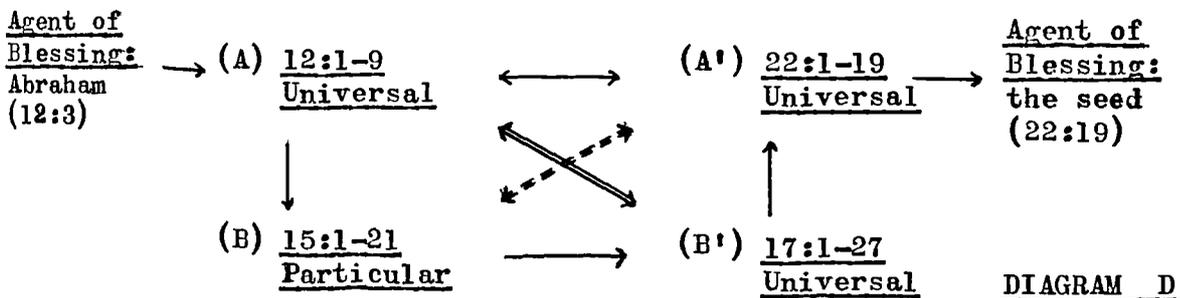
#### f) Summary

We shall now sum up our discussion of the four narratives thus far. First, leaving the function of the second divine speech in 22:15-19 aside for the moment, we see the four narratives revealing a movement of horizons from universal to particular in a parallel sort

of pattern. At the same time, the second pair of narratives Gen.17 and 22 take up elements in the first pair, Gen.12 and 15, and further explicate or intensify them. While Gen.17 is more positively paralleled to Gen.12, we note a significant tension between Gen.15 and 22 even though the issue of the promised heir is a main preoccupation of both. The parallel relationship of the two sets of narratives are shown by the double-lined and broken double-lined arrows in Diagram C below.



Secondly, when we take into account the second divine speech in 22:15-19, we see that the four narratives ultimately reveal a chiastic relationship. Gen.15 and 17 centre around the covenant, while Gen.12 and 22 begins and ends the whole structure with a corresponding divine speech which includes the pronouncement of the formula that Abraham and his seed shall be a blessing for the nations. The parallel relationships between the four narratives just noted above are also incorporated into the ultimate chiastic structure as in Diagram D below:



If it were not for the "ultimate reversal" by the second divine speech, restoring the universal horizon, the Abraham narratives would have ended in an emphatically particularistic and introverted perspective, as in Diagram C. Not only is the universal horizon of 12:1-9 replaced by the particularistic concern of 15:1-21, even the universal horizon re-established by 17:1-27 against that of 15:1-21 is finally displaced by the more acutely particular preoccupation of 22:1-14.

However, as the relationship now stands in the more developed chiasmic arrangement, not only is the particular concern of 15:1-21 refuted by the universal horizon of 17:1-21, its refutation is further reinforced by the significant reversal of perspective of 22:1-19, which itself stood in a parallel relation but noticeably with opposing tension to 15:1-21. In the end, by virtue of the final universal horizon of 22:1-19, the conclusion of the Abraham narratives is related in a corresponding and reaffirmatory way to the original call of Abraham in 12:1-9 with its universal horizon. Moreover, with the universal destiny reaffirmed for Abraham, it is now transferred to his seed as a blessing for the nations.

## 2) Abraham's Dealings with Men

There are four other narratives in the Abraham story, 12:10-20; 13:1-14:24; 18:1-19:38; 20:1-21:34, which focus attention on Abraham's dealings with other people and issues in life.<sup>73</sup> Unlike the previous four narratives above, they do not begin with a divine speech or command setting in motion the respective events in the narratives. Furthermore, the previous four narratives are concerned only with God and Abraham (and his immediate family).

On a closer reading of the present four narratives, there also appears to be a symmetrical arrangement of them in the whole structure of the Abraham story.

a) Abraham and Foreign Ruler

We have earlier argued that 20:1-18 and 21:22-34 should be taken together on literary grounds. The relationship between 12:10-20 and 20:1-18 has of course been widely recognised in the numerous studies of the motif of danger to the ancestress.<sup>74</sup> There are many elements common to the two narratives. Abraham journeyed to Egypt and to Gerar and sojourned there (12:10; 20:1). On both occasions, we see Sarai/Sarah being passed off as Abraham's sister and taken in by the ruler of the land (12:15; 20:3). The foreign ruler then falls foul of Abraham's God because of the deception of Abraham (12:17; 20:3-7, 9ff, 17f). Abraham receives from the foreign ruler on both occasions material reward because of the treatment meted out to Sarai/Sarah (12:16; 20:16).

However, there are some significant differences between the two narratives. Abraham's relationship with Pharaoh in 12:10-20 is very limited. There is only a statement of rebuke from Pharaoh to Abraham, after Yahweh has afflicted Pharaoh and his house. It is not said that Pharaoh was aware of the source of his affliction. Abraham and his wife are finally expelled by the Pharaoh. Abraham's relationship with a foreigner, the first after his call in 12:1-3, turns out to be a very negative encounter. Instead of blessing, 'curse' was brought about because of his fear for his survival and security.<sup>75</sup>

In 20:1-21:34, the other pole of the symmetry, the contact

between Abraham and Abimelech is developed in a fairly extended narrative. This time, God comes into the picture very prominently, by appearing to Abimelech and preventing the latter from any further action on Sarah. Abimelech is also told that Abraham is a prophet who can pray for restoration of life in the Abimelech's household. (20:7,18). It is a more positive picture of a foreign ruler, in which even God appears to be concerned for his welfare.

Quite unlike the brisk and negative monologue of the Pharaoh in 12:18, Gen.20 presents a lengthy dialogue between Abraham and Abimelech which even touched on the issue of the fear of God (20:11), and Abraham's sense of insecurity because of his call, "when God caused me to wander from my father's house" (20:13). Interestingly, immediately after this dialogue, Abimelech enriches Abraham with sheep, oxen and slaves, as well as a thousand pieces of silver as vindication of Sarah (20:14,16). Furthermore, the near fatal encounter appears to have brought the two men closer together — as can be seen in Abimelech's generous and much-needed offer to Abraham, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you" (20:15).

Abraham's praying for the restoration of life to Abimelech's household is significant in two respects. First, it was foretold by God to Abimelech, and it was linked to Abraham's being described as a prophet by God himself. It is the first time the description appears in the Old Testament and, it is noteworthy that it is introduced for the benefit of an outsider. Secondly, Abraham's praying for Abimelech in 20:17, followed by God's healing Abimelech, is noted in such a way to affirm the importance of the intercessory function in Abraham's relationship with foreigners. It is also to be noted that Abraham acted entirely on his own initiative in praying and was

not told to do so by God. Abraham has grown in stature to be able to discern the mind of God and to take the appropriate action on his own assessment -- as befits a prophet (cf. God's confident knowledge of him in 18:19).<sup>76</sup>

The relationship between Abraham and Abimelech in 20:1-18 is continued in 21:22-34, as noted earlier. The notice that Abraham journeys to and sojourns in Gerar (20:1,15) is picked up at 21:34, "And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines." It is Abraham who first goes to Abimelech in 20:1. On the other hand, in 21:22, it appears that Abimelech and Phicol go to Abraham (at Beersheba!) as it is said that they return to the land of the Philistines after their oath-making with Abraham in 21:32. What actually brings Abimelech to Abraham asking that Abraham swear to him by God not to deal falsely but loyally with him, with his offspring/posterity, and with the land of Abraham's sojourning is not clear, except for the statement of recognition, "God is with you in all that you do" (21:22). It could very well be referring to Abimelech's dream and the power behind Abraham's effective intercession (20:3-7,17f). Abraham then agrees to Abimelech's request (21:24).<sup>77</sup>

There appear to be difficulties in the relationship of 21:25-34 with 21:22-24, which we need not go into here.<sup>78</sup> As it stands, Abraham files a complaint against Abimelech's servants seizing a well belonging to Abraham. Abraham's complaint implies false dealing on Abimelech's part (coming immediately after Abimelech's request in 21:22-24 and his declaration "I have dealt loyally with you") -- as can be seen in his evasive reply, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it

until today" (22:26). The role of the deceiver here is a reversal of 20:9f. Nevertheless, Abraham takes upon himself to conclude a covenantal relationship with Abimelech with seven ewe lambs acting as witness regarding the ownership of the well (21:29f).<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Abraham has already taken sheep and oxen and given them to Abimelech (21:27; cf. 20:14 where Abraham is the recipient of Abimelech's gift).

Thus, the narrative in 20:1-21:34 not only portrays a much more positive relationship between Abraham and Abimelech, the foreign ruler, but also God is involved in the preservation of Abimelech's welfare in a preventive and restorative way, whereas Abraham's fear for his own safety clearly has negative results in 12:10-20. When the differences between the latter and former narratives are studied in more detail (the dialogues, reconciliations, exchange of gifts, frankness, offering of land for sojourning) the latter part of the symmetrical narratives is clearly taking up a similar issue in Abraham's life from the earlier part, and turning it inside out from a wholly particularistic, self-centered orientation to a broadening, and inter-relational horizon of Abraham with people outside his immediate concern. Earlier, we also saw a similar orientation reversal in 22:1-19 vis-à-vis 15:1-21 on the same key issue of the promised heir.

#### b) Abraham and Lot/Sodom

We have already argued that in the present structure of the Abraham narratives, Gen. 13 and 14 ought to be taken together. The Lot strand in the Abraham narratives is continued from 13:1-14:24 into 18:1-19:38, as noted by Westermann and others.<sup>80</sup> Not only are the main characters of the two pairs of narratives the same, Abraham,

Lot, and the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah, but 18:1 also picks up the notice of Abraham's stay by the oaks of Mamre in 13:18. Furthermore, the notices that Lot looked toward the direction of Zoar (13:10) and that he finally came to Zoar (19:22f), before and after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah respectively, as well as the comment that the Sodomites were wicked and great sinners against Yahweh (13:13; 18:20; 19:13), all serve to strengthen the links between the two pairs of narratives. Lot was also rescued, once in each pole of the symmetry when the city of Sodom was 'destroyed', by Abraham and by Yahweh's angels respectively (14:16; 19:29). To cap it all, there is even a certain irony about Lot's choice of Sodom, which is basically reflective of his attitude towards Abraham, and the results.

Lot quite happily chooses the Jordan valley because it is "well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar ..." (13:10) and he "dwelt among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom" (13:12). Apparently, Lot must have made his survey of the cities of the valley from higher ground.<sup>81</sup> However, in Gen.19, when Lot was forced by the destruction of the city of his own choice to give up his desire, he had to reverse his movement by fleeing Sodom to a nearby city called Zoar (𐤀𐤃𐤓𐤕 "little", 19:23). His reverse movement was not completed until he "went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the hills ... for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar, so he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters" (19:30). Lot has come round a full circle which hinges on his being with or separated from Abraham. He left the high grounds for the cities in the valley but ends up living in a cave in the hills because of fear. Not even Zoar, the 'little' city near Sodom, can provide him with a sense of security.<sup>82</sup>

In view of the relationship between the two pairs of narratives just discussed, and in line with our purpose, we shall compare the orientation of Abraham's involvement with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In 13:1-14:24, Abraham comes into contact with 'foreigners' only because of his own familial obligations towards Lot. Even then the contact is portrayed in a negative light, involving conflict. Though he was blessed by Melchizedek, king of Salem, Abraham rejected outright the offer of reward from the king of Sodom, and thereby the opportunity for a more positive future relationship (14:19,22ff).

On the other hand, in 18:1-19:38, Abraham goes along with the divine visitors when they set out toward Sodom. When he is informed of God's intention for the city, Abraham, on his own initiative, takes up the cause of interceding for the city even though he knows quite well about the immorality of the city and its sin against God (13:13; 18:20f). Even if it could be argued that Abraham's intercession for the deliverance of the city is really concerned mainly with the survival of Lot and his family (which, however, is not totally explicit<sup>83</sup>), the question still remains why Abraham did not pray only for the deliverance of Lot and his family and leave the rest of the city to God's judgement (cf. his attitude in refusing relations with the king of Sodom in 14:22ff). We shall leave discussion of this till later. As it stands, the deliverance of Lot in Gen.19 is set in the context of Abraham's intercession which has the welfare of the whole city at heart.

Thus, when we take the two pairs of narratives in their relationship shown above, the issue in 13:1-14:24 of Abraham's attitude to others, where Abraham shows concern only for his kinship obligations to Lot with only a limited and negative attitude towards outsiders,

is in 18:1-19:38, raised again in a form in which Abraham's focus has widened considerably beyond the concern for his immediate relatives. Not only that, Abraham's obligations to Lot are now not the main reason for his contact with foreigners but rather are subsumed within the latter. This is another example of the narrative in the latter symmetrical pole taking an issue which initially had a particularistic interest in the narrative of the earlier part, and turning it inside out by transforming the horizon by a more universalistic dimension.<sup>84</sup>

c) Summary

To sum up our discussion of the two sets of narratives in which Abraham is portrayed as taking the initiative in the movement of events, our analysis shows a common pattern, moving from a narrow and particularistic interest in Abraham's contacts with foreigners to a wider and more universalistic focus. More significantly, the events or issues which have taken on the wider, universalistic horizon are similar if not parallel to those in the earlier parts of the symmetry which have a narrow, particularistic interest only. This relationship can be shown in the diagram below, which incidentally also reveals that these narratives in the whole structure of the Abraham story are chiastically arranged:

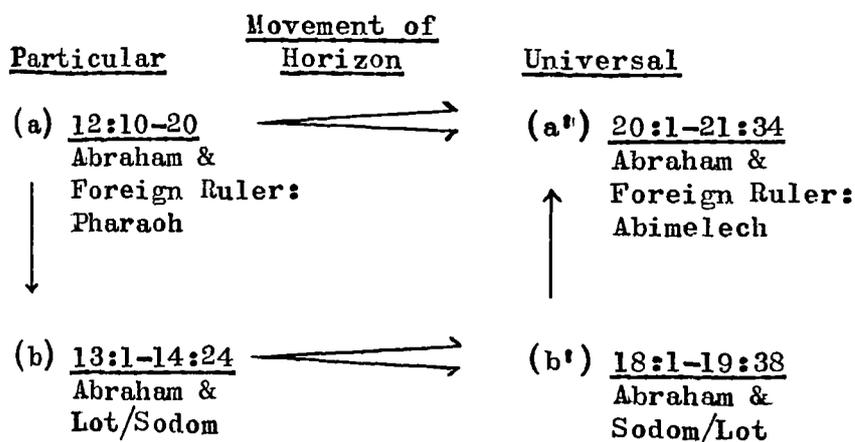


DIAGRAM E



The following points may be noted:

i) In the first half of the symmetry, the narratives begin with the universalistic call and destiny of Abraham (A) which was subsequently displaced by the introverted concern of Abraham for self-preservation (a); the strife and separation of Lot arising out of material gains (unethically possessed), and the subsequent conflict with foreigners in his attempt to fulfil his kinship responsibility towards Lot (b); and the 'obsessive' desire for a son and demand of assurance for his possession of land (B). This introverted and particularistic concern is 'refuted' by the restoration of the displaced, initially universal destiny and horizon in the second half of the symmetry by the change of Abraham's name (B'); and continued in his intercession for (b') and positive interaction with (a') foreigners outside his immediate concern. This restored universalistic perspective, however, takes an abrupt turn in the final narrative (A') towards a more acutely particularistic preoccupation with the issue of the promised heir than previously in (B). But as our analysis has shown, the whole purpose of the extreme test of Abraham was to confirm his commitment to God, and thereby his suitability for the universalistic task given him by God initially in (A).

ii) The effect of the double chiastic structure: A-a-b-B ... B'-b'-a'-A' interestingly sets the two halves of the symmetry in which Abraham had dealings with men on his own initiative within the two halves of the other symmetry in which Yahweh deals with Abraham directly. In other words, the narratives (a) and (b), (b') and (a') are probably meant to take their orientations from the narratives (A) and (B), (B') and (A') respectively. Even though the particularistic concern of Abraham in (B) stands out only to be 'refuted'

ultimately, the narrative, nevertheless, contains positive promises and reassurances from Yahweh to Abraham regarding his concern for security, reward, heirship, and possession of land (not forgetting Abraham's faith which was reckoned as righteous, and his readiness to accept the assurance given concerning the possession of land). This together with the call to a universal destiny in (A) serve to provide the proper perspective of handling the issues Abraham was confronted with in (a) and (b). Likewise, Abraham's intercession for (b') and interaction with (a') foreigners are to be regarded as correct and befitting the universalistic responsibility and concern of his call encased in the narratives (B') and (A').

iii) Within the narratives A-B-B'-A' themselves, some sort of parallel relationship is also to be discerned. The issues and the universal horizon in (A) are taken up in (B'), while the particularistic perspective of the concern of the issue in (B) is also likewise taken up in (A'). The significant difference is that while (B') reaffirms and in fact expands the universalistic horizon of (A), the particularistic horizon occasioned by the over-anxiety with the issue of heirship in (B) is taken up in similar perspective by (A') but only in order to be dramatically refuted at the very last moment by the second divine speech. It is refuted by the narrative (A') ending with the final pronouncement of the formula in the Abraham narratives that Abraham's seed shall now be the agent of blessing for the nations, thereby reaffirming explicitly and ultimately the universalistic horizon of Abraham's call first given in (A) and restored and expanded in (B'). This set of parallel relationship is expressed by the double lines in Diagram F above.

iv) There is another very striking feature of the structure

of the Abraham narratives when viewed in another perspective:

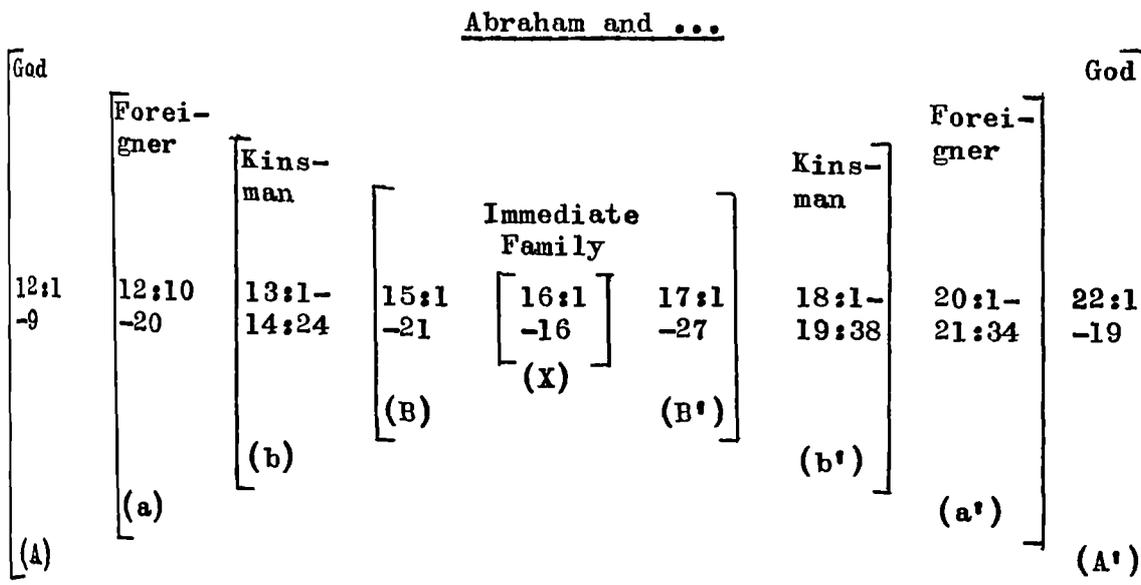


DIAGRAM G

If we take the Abraham narratives in sets: A and A' (Abraham and God); a and a' (Abraham and foreigners); b and b' (Abraham and relative, Lot, via Sodom); B and B' (Abraham and his immediate family matters), then there seems to be a movement inwards to the centre from the outer pair of narratives, a movement from the widest horizon, narrowing all the time until Abraham's concern is centred around his own immediate family matters.

v) One of the features of the structure of the Abraham narratives as viewed from the above two perspectives (Diagrams F and G) is the striking isolation of Gen.16 as the 'odd' narrative without any parallel. This structural observation regarding Gen.16 is in line with three significant characteristics of the Abraham narratives which emerged in the course of our analysis. First, there is an as yet unexplained and sudden change, with Gen.16 as the mid-point, in the perspective and horizon of the same issues in the first half of the double-chiasmus from the second half of the double-chiasmus.

Secondly, Gen.16 is the only narrative in the whole structure in which neither Yahweh nor Abraham is the main initiator of the events in the narrative. Thirdly, only after Gen.16 do we see the repeated notices about the promise and birth of the heir, Isaac, in the structure of the Abraham narratives (17:16-21; 18:9-15; 21:1-15). In this way, an issue which was first prompted by the particularistic concern of Abraham in 15:2, is now taken up and begins to run through the second half of the symmetry (with its universalistic horizon) like an anti-theme until it takes on such a dominant proportion in the final narrative (A'). It would not be an over-exaggeration to say that if Abraham were to fail the test of 'obeying' the voice of God on the issue of the promised heir, his call to a universal destiny first given in 12:3 (A) and reaffirmed in Gen.17 (B') would be 'permanently' jeopardised. What then is the significance of Gen.16 in the Abraham narratives? To this, we shall turn immediately.

D) The Voice of Sarai/Sarah

1) The Relationship of Gen.16 with Gen.15 and 17

Gen.16 has usually been discussed in relation to 21:8-21 (or including vv.1-7) either under the theme of the conflict between Sarah and Hagar, or the exile of Hagar, or the birth of Ishmael.<sup>85</sup> However, in our analysis of the structure of the Abraham narratives as shown in Diagrams F and G, Gen.16 stands at the mid-point of the whole structure. By itself, this would not necessarily accord it with any significance, unless it can be shown that the narrative is functionally integrated into the whole Abraham story, especially in its immediate context of 15:1-21 and 17:1-27. On the other hand, whether Gen.16 should be discussed only with 21:8-21 (or including

vv.1-7) without taking into consideration the other notices about the promise of the birth of a son by Sarah in 17:15-21; 18:9-15, and indeed 22:1-19, is left to be seen. Van Seters makes a similar point, though slightly more limited than ours, when he says, "... we are confronted with the problem of whether or not this [i.e. taking 16:1-16 with 21:8-21 only] constitutes the true limits of the discussion," and added, "... the birth story of Isaac, in 18:1-15; and 22:1-7, must also be taken into consideration."<sup>86</sup>

Gen.16 is mainly concerned with the desperate anxiety on the part of Sarai about not being able to bear children and build a 'house' on her own (16:1f), when she is convinced her barrenness was probably 'permanent', and is due to Yahweh's doing. In Gen.15, the focus on the assurance and promise Yahweh gave to Abraham (v.1) is very quickly turned by the latter to the possibility of his permanently remaining childless, and the one who is to be his heir is not to be of his own offspring (15:2f). The issue of childlessness comes up again in 17:15f. When Abraham is promised by God, "I will give you a son by her [Sarah]", he still insists on his plight, as an established fact by now as far as he is concerned, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

On the level of action, in 15:2f, Abraham is adamant in stressing that his heir will not be of his own offspring but a slave born in his house. This is rejected by Yahweh who promises that it shall be of his own offspring (v.4). In 16:16, Abraham indeed has an heir, albeit not by Sarai, but by the slave girl, Hagar. This is just what Abraham was so adamant about earlier. However, the question is not settled as far as God is concerned. In 17:15-21,

not only does God reaffirm his promise to Abraham about an heir of his own, he even punned a name for the promised son yet to be born, Isaac, because of Abraham's laughter. The apparent heir, Ishmael, was categorically rejected by God (17:20f), thus overruling Sarai's directed effort (16:2f).

Since Gen.16 is thematically integrated into its immediate context, we believe it is correct to take it in the light of the overall Abraham story, with specific reference to Gen.15 and 17, even when the conflict between Sarai and Hagar, and the birth of Ishmael, are prominent elements in the narrative. Skinner commented: "In the carefully constructed biographical plans of the editors the episode [Gen.16] finds an appropriate place between the promise of a bodily heir in 15 and the promise of a son through Sarai in 18 (J) or 17 (P)."<sup>87</sup>

Having established the link between the narratives in Gen.15 to 17, we still have to understand the significance of the 'juxtaposition' of the two parallel narratives of Gen.15 and 17, with the 'intrusion' of Gen.16 between them. It is not enough merely to say with Vawter: "This little interlude about Hagar and Ishmael serves the additional purpose of separating the J and P versions of the covenant with Abraham, thus putting them in sequence."<sup>88</sup> This is more so especially when we bear in mind that there is a sudden development from an introverted, particularistic concern in Gen.15 to an outward-looking, universal horizon in Gen.17 and the narratives following. What function, if any, does the intruding Gen.16 have in the development?

It goes beyond the scope of our study to account for the two covenants in Gen.15 and 17 being placed in such close proximity.

We shall concentrate only on the issue of Abraham's state of childlessness and its effect on his call to a universal destiny. Earlier, in our analysis of the relationships of the narratives, 12:1-9; 15:1-21; 17:1-28; 22:1-19, we merely noted the varying developments of horizons in them without taking into account the role of Gen.16, which we shall do below.

In Gen.15 when Yahweh appears to Abraham with words of assurance and promise of great reward, Abraham's answer clearly reveals his deep anxiety whether he is going to have a son of his own at all. The promise of great reward in the circumstance only accentuates Abraham's anxiety and therefore reaction to Yahweh's promise.

Abraham had previously been faced with critical moments for the safety of his own life (12:10-20), the handling of possessions which have become a source of conflict (13:1-18), and the accepting of rewards obligating him in a way which would compromise his relation with his God (14:21-24). Even though he subsequently handles himself quite correctly in the last two incidents, the fact remains, as our analysis has shown, that the outcome of all these incidents had always resulted in Abraham adopting a negative, restrictive, and particularistic attitude in his contacts with foreigners with reference to his universal destiny. The question therefore continues to be posed whether Abraham's deep anxiety over the state of his childlessness (permanently!) in Gen.15 would again cause him to become introverted and particularistic in his concern, and subsequently prove to be an obstacle in the fulfilment of his universal destiny.

As the narrative Gen.15 now stands, it is 'providential', so to speak, that this potential danger to Abraham is 'neutralised'

by Yahweh's insistence that he will stand by his promise, and allow his words to be put to the 'test' for Abraham's sake (15:4f).<sup>89</sup> And Abraham does well to redeem the situation by believing in Yahweh -- which is "reckoned ... to him as righteousness" (15:5). Thus, it can be said that, on the one hand, the narrative ends in a positive assessment as far as Abraham's relationship with Yahweh is concerned. On the other hand, however, the danger still remains a very real one, since Abraham has not been actually tested on the issue in life as yet, and the particular promise is yet to be realised.

In view of this 'ambiguity' at the end of Gen.15, which began with Abraham's anxiety over his continuing childlessness and growing age, one's attention is inevitably attracted by the beginning of Gen.17: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old Yahweh appeared to Abram." Then follows the solemn declaration: "I am God Almighty." Commentators are not in full agreement in their understanding of the meaning of this divine epithet.<sup>90</sup> However, a study of its use in Genesis shows that "it tends to be matched to situations where God's servants are hard pressed and needing reassurance" (see Gen.28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25).<sup>91</sup> The declaration is then followed by a command and promise, "walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly" (17:1f). The question is, Why this sudden declaration and demand?

Furthermore, after Abraham falls on his face, indicating his acceptance of the approach of God, a most radical transformation is declared concerning him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly



apparently was a socially acceptable means of procuring a child for herself and Abraham over against God's promise and declared will to Abraham.<sup>93</sup> It is she who instructed Abraham to go in to Hagar, and it is she who took Hagar and gave her to Abraham (v.3). When she is looked at with contempt by the pregnant Hagar, she blames Abraham for it and asks for a judgement from Yahweh. And it is she who dealt so harshly with Hagar that the latter had to flee from her (v.6).

It is true that Gen.16 does not explicitly pass any negative judgement on Sarai's actions. However, as a result of them, her subsequent act and charges of contempt, and the harsh treatment which led to Hagar, who was already carrying Abraham's child, fleeing from the house could hardly be the narrative's way of commending Sarai's initiative.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, the irony surrounding Sarai probably strengthens this view. Despite all her efforts to have children through Hagar, in the end, it is through her own action that Hagar flees, and with her, the child also which could have been Sarai's. Sarai cannot even have what is in her power to have. If it were not for the intervention of the angel of Yahweh, sending Hagar and thus the child (not born as yet) back to Sarai, the latter would not have any child for Abraham.

Our main focus, however, is on Abraham. It is true that the narrative contains no explicit hint of judgement against Abraham that by going in to Hagar he was trying to forestall the fulfilment of the promise of a son in 15:4, or that it was a test of his faith.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, what is stated is that "Abram listened to the voice of Sarai" (16:2). The content of "her voice" is clearly to be seen against the promise of God (15:4f), which Abraham was then given cause

to believe. Abraham's action in 16:2 is the only 'active' action of his in the whole narrative. Von Rad commented that throughout "Abraham was passive and without any opinion of his own up to the limit of his dignity."<sup>96</sup> To say that Abraham's behaviour was excusable is inadequate since he could show his grave displeasure at Sarah's 'voice' later in a parallel situation (21:11). This passivity of Abraham is more striking when viewed against the earlier commendable trust in Yahweh's words in 15:6 (cf. 12:4).

There might even be an irony about Abraham's listening to Sarai's 'voice' in the narrative. Abraham listened ( שָׁמַע ) to Sarai's 'voice', the oppressor, in her predicament to relieve her of her childlessness, but failed eventually (because the pregnant Hagar was forced away). Yet, Yahweh gave heed ( שָׁמַע ) to Hagar, the oppressed, in her predicament in the wilderness and promised her: "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude" (16:10). The play on שָׁמַע is quite clear. The pregnant Hagar is told: "You are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael ( שִׁמְעָאֵל ); because Yahweh has given heed ( שָׁמַע ) to your affliction" (16:11). Abraham's listening ( שָׁמַע ) to Sarai's voice brings no life but only conflict and curse, while Yahweh's heeding ( שָׁמַע ) of Hagar's affliction (cf. 21:17) brings life and blessing to all concerned in the end.

Von Rad is possibly correct when he says: "the narrative here is very specious ... how uncannily complicated the circumstances now become, ending finally in a cul-de-sac! Everything is now complicated ... The question of guilt is also complicated ... But the narrator's great reticence in this respect shows that he does not want the reader to judge or condemn but rather simply to see and

and hear."<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, we believe our analysis has shown that in the overall context of the Abraham story, the 'voice' of Sarai has taken on an unusually decisive and central role at the mid-point, and Abraham's listening to it has fundamental implications for the whole structure of the Abraham narratives subsequent to it.

It is in this negative assessment of the 'voice' of Sarai that the notice at the end of Gen.16 should be viewed: "And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram" (vv.15f). We have already noted the significant difference in this notice compared with other similar notices in the Abraham narratives. Probably the more significant thing is the 'bare' notice about Abraham's age in 17:1, "when Abram was ninety-nine years old ..." Except for 12:4, when Abraham left Haran, at the beginning of his career, his age is merely noted without any comment. All notices of his age are linked to God's promise to give him a son by Sarah or to the realisation of the promise (17:15-21; 18:9-15; see also 16:16; 21:1-7). Therefore the bare notice in 17:1 coming right after 16:16 is rather instructive.<sup>98</sup> As far as God is concerned, even at ninety-nine years of age, and with an 'heir' in Ishmael, Abraham is still only at the beginning of God's dealings with him with regard to his universal destiny and mission, and he is still without an heir of his own by Sarai, as the narrative in Gen.17 (especially vv.15-21) shows.

Now that Sarai has concluded that Yahweh has closed her womb, and now that the pregnant Hagar, who has meanwhile received an announcement and a name for the child in her womb from the angel of Yahweh, has returned to Sarai after her forced exile, and now that

Ishmael has been born and named according to the promise of Yahweh to Hagar, it is not unnatural for Abraham and Sarah to conclude that this may after all be the fulfilment of God's original promise.

The effect of the birth of Ishmael on Abraham's feelings and attention would then be understandable. It is touchingly revealed in 17:18 when God reaffirms to Abraham that he is indeed going to have a son by Sarah, which effectively means the displacing of Ishmael as heir. Abraham, while not rejecting God's promise and ability outright, is quite content to "direct God's interest to what is already a certainty, i.e., to Ishmael" by praying "O that Ishmael might live in thy sight."<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, Abraham's feelings for Ishmael probably even grow stronger -- as can be seen in his grave distress when Sarah demands the expulsion of Hagar and the lad after Isaac is born (21:11-14).

Calvin is therefore probably right to comment that the purpose of the notice that thirteen years had elapsed from the birth of Ishmael to the period when Isaac was promised, was "for the purpose of teaching ... that [Abraham] long remained satisfied with that son who would, at length, be rejected, and that he was as one deluded by a fallacious appearance." He went on to say, "Abram being contented with his only son, ceased to desire any other seed ... [But] again the wonderful goodness of God shows itself, in that Abram is raised, beyond his own expectation and desire, to a new hope ..."<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, one should observe also that the notice of the thirteen years lapse is explicitly connected to the solemn declaration of God as Almighty and the demand that Abraham should walk before him and be perfect, implying that some question or doubt seems to reside in Abraham's attitude towards the power of God and towards their relationship (17:1). Calvin also seems to suggest that the new hope by which

Abraham is raised beyond his own expectation and desire is referring to the birth of Isaac, a son of his own by Sarah, when he shall be a hundred years old (17:17). However, if any raising of Abraham's expectation is intended by the notice in 17:1, we rather believe it is directed first and foremost against Abraham's introverted and particularistic understanding of the promise of his seed as seen in the birth of Ishmael, hence his re-naming as Abraham, the father of a multitude of nations, as a 'corrective' measure (17:4f). As such, the specific promise of Isaac's birth later (17:19) is set within the framework of Abraham's expanded and transformed destiny.

In other words, with the birth of Ishmael, Abraham's concern and vision has been seriously impaired and narrowed to such an extent that it needs a radical action on God's part to re-establish for Abraham the universal horizon of his destiny of 12:1-3. By the radical expansion and transformation of name, Abraham would then have to put in the forefront of his concern the horizon of his universal destiny and responsibility. Our analysis shows that the "neutralisation" of the potential but real danger of Abraham becoming preoccupied and turned in to a concern which is introverted and particularistic by the issue of his heir in Gen.15 has now been undone in Gen.16. In the process, the trusting attitude of faith and obedience in God's words or promise has also been displaced. As a result, God's purpose in calling Abraham to a universal destiny to be a blessing for the nations in 12:1-3, after its potential but real threat in 15:2 has been "neutralised", is actually being threatened and jeopardised again by the event of Gen.16.

It is against this background, we believe, that the sudden appearance and declaration as well as demand in 17:1f, and Abraham's

obedience and subsequent transformation of name in 17:3-7 is understandable and necessary. Thereafter, God's universal purpose in bringing blessing to the nations can only continue once more through Abraham as the agent of blessing. This, we would want to argue, really amounts to a reaffirmation of the initial call in 12:1-3, if not a new beginning altogether. Hence, the bare notice about Abraham's age in 17:1 appears only elsewhere in 12:4, where he is just embarking on his destiny in response to his call. It is therefore not surprising that Abraham, even with the transformation of name, has still to prove his suitability as the God-chosen agent to be a blessing for the nations, as we can see in the subsequent narratives of the story. Gen.16, which stands somewhat on its own in the mid-point of the whole structure, has now come to adopt a 'negative' function with the 'voice' of Sarai, and Abraham's listening to it, playing such a decisive role.

With this conclusion drawn about the 'negative' function of Gen.16, we are now able to see better the reason for the sudden change of horizon in the two halves of the narrative structure, as our analysis has shown earlier, from an introverted, particularistic concern in 12:10 to 15:21 (displacing the initial universal destiny of 12:1-9) to an expanded, universal horizon in 17:1 to 22:19.

## 2) The Voice of Sarai/Sarah in the Abraham Story

We have just studied the relationships of Gen.16 with Gen.15 and 17. However, the full significance of the 'voice' of Sarai is more fully spelt out only when we take into consideration the total context of the Abraham story. More than that, as we shall see later, the motifs of voice and obeying or listening play a

very significant role in the Abraham story with particular reference to Abraham's calling to be a blessing for the nations.

The relation between Gen.16 and 21 is well recognised by commentators. It is therefore not surprising that the 'voice' of Sarah appears again, and only, in Gen.21, where a similar situation to that of Gen.16 takes place after the birth of Isaac. When Isaac was weaned, Sarah saw the son of Hagar playing (mockingly!) with her son and she told Abraham to have "the slave woman and her son" cast out (21:10). Sarah's demand was considered as very evil in Abraham's eyes (21:11). But God directed Abraham, "Do not consider it evil in your eyes because of the lad and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her voice (וְשָׁמַעְתָּ אֶת־קוֹלֵהּ), for through Isaac shall your seed be called. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your seed" (21:12f). At this, Abraham obeys God. It seems that Sarah's 'voice' is vindicated by God's directive to Abraham. With the birth of Isaac, the promised heir, and the expulsion of Hagar and her son, the conclusion of the family story which began with the notice: "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child" (11:30; 16:1; 18:11), appears to have been reached as Westermann maintained.<sup>101</sup> For this, Abraham had listened (וְשָׁמַעְתָּ) to the 'voice' of Sarah on two occasions (16:2; 21:12). However, significantly, the story does not end here but continues.

First of all, it would be instructive to look at the use of the words וְשָׁמַעְתָּ and וְשָׁמַעְתָּ in 21:1-21 which we believe to be quite intentional. The two explicit 'voices' in the narrative are those of Sarah (v.12) and of the lad (v.16). The 'voice' of the lad is heard only because of the 'voice' of Sarah in the first place. Interestingly, while God's directive to Abraham actually plays the

decisive role in the narrative it is not described by the same term.

At the level of action, we have two subjects as well, God and Abraham. It appears that there is a certain irony on God's part, for behind the 'voice' of Sarah, the ultimate cause of the 'voice' of the lad is really God. It is God who directs the initially resistant Abraham to listen to Sarah's 'voice', thus appearing to support her. But in the end we have "And God heard (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים}$ ) the voice of the lad ... for God has heard (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים}$ ) the voice of the lad ..." (21:17). Undoubtedly, "Here the narrator alludes to the name, Ishmael."<sup>102</sup> It is interesting that Ishmael is not named throughout in the narrative, which only serves to draw attention to the play of words here.<sup>103</sup> We have already noted the ironical outcome of Abraham's listening (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$ ) to Sarai's 'voice', and Yahweh's heeding (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$ ) of Hagar's affliction and naming her child Ishmael (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$ ) in Gen.16. Another interesting juxtaposition of  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$  with Abraham is also found in 17:18ff, when Abraham pleads to God, "O that Ishmael (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$ ) might live in your sight!" and God replied, "As for Ishmael (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$ ), I have heard you (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$ ); behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly ... and will make him a great nation." It is therefore not without intention that when God heard (  $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע}$ ), the voice of the lad crying in the wilderness in 21:17, he comforts Hagar and promises her that "I will make him a great nation" (cf. 21:13). Thus, God's directive (behind Sarah's 'voice'), which on the surface appears to give support to Sarah's demand to cast the lad and her mother into the unknown, really turns out to be the very means of preserving life and reaffirming an earlier promise for Abraham's sake. Sarah's 'voice' was subtly overturned and transformed

according to God's ultimate intention for Abraham, the father of a multitude of nations. As in Gen.16, Abraham's listening to Sarai's 'voice' brought no life but conflict and curse to the pregnant Hagar, but God's heeding of Hagar's affliction brought life to all in the end, so here in Gen.21, Abraham's listening to Sarah's 'voice' again brought separation and non-life to Hagar and the lad, but God's hearing of the lad's voice brought life.

As for Abraham, while it was not his desire by any means to listen to Sarah's 'voice' in 21:10f, neither was it easy for him to listen to God's directive (cf. 17:18; 21:11,14), if it were not for the declaration and promise in 21:12f. Abraham's non-resisting compliance with Sarai's 'voice' in Gen.16 was very different.

"Here he not only resisted Sarah's demand but yielded to it only upon God's express directive. His compliance here was not the result of weakness but of obedience to God's plan for history. This plan, to be sure, only appears to coincide with Sarah's thought."<sup>104</sup>

On the one hand, if Abraham were to ignore Sarah's 'voice', he would also in fact be disobeying God. In this way, of course, Ishmael's life would probably be preserved, but under Sarah's constant shadow, and more importantly, against God's 'voice'. On the other hand, if he listens, even if it would not be a probable death, it would still have to be a painful separation for Abraham as good as 'death' because Hagar and the lad would be sent into the unknown. However, in his dilemma, Abraham still has his consolation in Isaac, the promised heir, alive and with him. It is not difficult to understand in the circumstances how Isaac developed into "your son ... whom you love" (22:2).

For Sarah, the outcome would most probably be felt with

triumphant relief in view of her rather strong language used in 21:10, which even Abraham considered very wrong. It reflected, first of all, a narrow spirit and particularistic understanding of what Abraham's call or being the promised heir of Abraham entails. Secondly, her possessiveness is also revealed in her redundant description of Isaac when speaking to Abraham, "my son Isaac" (21:10; cf. 21:9, "her son Isaac"). Moreover, on the two crucial occasions she has Abraham submitting to her 'voice' over the question of the heir-son (16:2; 21:10).

When compared to the situation in Gen.16, Sarah's 'voice' seems to have grown stronger (albeit with behind the scene help from God without knowing) and more decisive in Abraham's life. The issue of heir-son, while resolved to a certain extent, is still questionable when viewed against the qualities required to demonstrate that Abraham is a suitable agent of blessing for others. Abraham has progressed somewhat in that the 'voice' of Sarah is now not the only single 'voice' that he listens to, but the 'directive' of God as well. Nevertheless, God's 'voice' is still not as singular as in 12:1-4a.

Finally, the vital question still remains to be asked. The effect of the birth of Ishmael on Abraham's life needed the solemn declaration and moral demand as well as the radical expansion and transformation of Abraham's name and destiny to salvage the already threatened and jeopardised universal destiny of Abraham in Gen.17. Would the birth of Isaac, the real heir-son, together with the expulsion of any would be contender, as well as the more aged state of Abraham and Sarah, make any difference to Abraham's initial calling and subsequent transformed nature (12:3; 17:5)?

We believe the question posed is valid because the family story of the childless couple, for all intents and purposes, which has come to a meaningful conclusion, significantly does not end in 21:1-21 but continues into 22:1-19. The thematic and literary links between 21:1-21 and 22:1-19 can be seen in a series of comparisons and contrasts, centring around the motif of a son in 'danger', Ishmael in the former, and Isaac in the latter.<sup>105</sup> When one turns to 22:1-19, we find the issue of the heir-son has suddenly taken on such fundamental importance that a whole narrative is devoted to it.

It is very striking that after the growing and decisive influence of Sarah's 'voice' on the issue of heir-son over Abraham, it drops away completely, and as suddenly as it first appeared in 16:2. In fact, on looking back, Sarah's 'voice' has only real authority over Ishmael, but only indirectly and consequentially upon Isaac. Quite rightly so because Hagar is her slave-maid. But Isaac is promised and named by Yahweh (17:16), as well as reaffirmed (18:10) and given as he promised (21:1f).

Abraham now has only one 'voice' to listen to which ought to be less confusing for him. But it is not to be easier by any means. The issue for Abraham now is not Sarah's voice but a conflict between his natural will to preserve his future (in Isaac) and submission to God's voice. To intensify the conflict for Abraham (unlike the situation in Gen.21) he now has only 'one' son and there is no more consolation if Isaac is taken away. Furthermore, when he was directed by God to listen to Sarah's voice, he was told of God's promise and intention for both Isaac and Ishmael, but now nothing whatsoever is mentioned about the purpose of God's 'bare' demand in 22:1f, at least initially. Crenshaw commented thus on

Abraham's dilemma and struggle:

"Bereft of both past and future, Abraham possesses the present alone, ... past and present merge in a single word, the only apposition in the entire story ... Isaac, whom you love. Either way Abraham loses, whether he sacrifices his son or abandons his God."<sup>106</sup>

Will Abraham obey? Poignantly reflecting the nature of the encounter, the narrative describes it as a 'test' (22:1).<sup>107</sup> Conscious of the demand, the very rare use of the particle of entreaty in a divine command (elsewhere only in Isa.7:3) is adopted in the narrative to present the 'test', "Take your son, I beg of you (כי־אֶפְדֶּה), your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there ... upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (22:2).<sup>108</sup> It is quite likely that an intentional parallel with 16:2 is meant, where the voice of Sarai is expressed in similar petitionary language, "Behold now (כי־אֶפְדֶּה), Yahweh has prevented me from bearing children; go in please (כי־אֶפְדֶּה) to my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her."<sup>109</sup> The contrast in the action Abraham was asked to take on both occasions involving the asking for a son/children by God and Sarai respectively could not be more striking.

On the surface of the precatory-command of God, it seems the issue at stake is about the heir-son. It is perfectly natural for a father to love his own son, especially after the event of 21:1-21. However, Isaac is not just any son, but the child of promise. In Gen.21, there is an almost incessant stress on the 'belonging' of the promised son: Abraham — his son, 21:3,4,5,11 (cf. his/my son, 22:3,6,7,8,9,10,13); Sarah — her/my son, 21:9,10. In actual fact, the son was promised more directly to Abraham than to Sarah (17:16,19,21). This fact apparently is recognised clearly in God's request of Abraham, "your son, your only son ..." (22:2,12,16).

Nevertheless, the giving role of God prefaced the narrative of Isaac's birth, "Yahweh visited ... as he had said, and Yahweh did ... as he had promised ... at the time of which God had spoken ..." (21:1f; cf. also 17:16; 18:10,14). Since God is the ultimate giver, he also has the right to ask as shown by Abraham's response (worship!, 22:5). This relationship of the giver and recipient over the promised son is strikingly brought out by the narrative after Abraham offered up the ram instead of Isaac. When Abraham returns to his lads after the sacrifice, the text apparently leaves Isaac on the mountain and not a word is heard about his return. Crenshaw describes this as Isaac's walk "toward some undeclared destiny ... a journey into oblivion."<sup>110</sup> The promised child is offered back to the ultimate giver by the recipient. However, we are not sure that Isaac was walking to some undeclared, unknown destiny in the end. On Abraham's recognition of the ultimate place of belonging of the promised son, von Rad aptly commented:

"in this test God confronts Abraham with the question whether he could give up God's gift of promise. He had to be able (and he was able), for it is not a good that may be retained by virtue of any legal title or with the help of a human demand. God therefore poses before Abraham the question whether he really understands the gift of promise as a pure gift."<sup>111</sup>

Interestingly, throughout the Abraham story, God has not spoken to Sarah at all, except for the indirect rebuke to her in 18:15. Even though the 'negative' and dominant 'voice' on the issue of the heir-son has been Sarah's, it is Abraham who is pulled up short so to speak in 17:1f and tested by God in 22:1. It therefore implies that the basic issue over the heir-son is really between Abraham and God, and is not about Isaac at all. This is brought out by the narrative in the words of God's commendation of Abraham after

the near-sacrifice of Isaac, "for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me ..." (22:2, emphases ours). When contrasted with the original precatory-command, the omission is significant, "... your son, your only son Issac, whom you love ..." (22:2). The continuing fact that Isaac is still the son of Abraham is not overruled, but the love of son when it displaces Abraham's unreserved obedience and fear of God is unacceptable, because it has taken on a proportion out of perspective and jeopardises the universal destiny and concern of Abraham's initial calling.

Even with Abraham's recognition of the ultimate belonging of the promised son, and with a clarification of his proper relationship with God, it still remains that these issues by themselves can be of a narrow and individualistic horizon. However, if the similar situation which took place in Gen.16 and 17, with and after the birth of Ishmael is a guide, as we have argued, then we could expect a similar transformation of Abraham to take place. We recall in Gen.17 that after the birth of Ishmael has had an introverted and particularistic effect on Abraham's vision, God appears to him as El Shaddai, demands a blameless walk of him, transforms his name and destiny, as well as establishing a covenantal relationship with him and his descendants for ever. Thus, the real issue is much more fundamental and far-reaching than only the questions of real belonging of the promised child and undivided loyalty to God. Appropriately though unexpectedly, after Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac, the second divine speech (22:15-18) emphatically reaffirms God's promises to bless and to multiply Abraham and his descendants respectively, and the climactic pronouncement of the formula first issued in 12:3, "in your seed all

the nations of the earth shall bless themselves." Crenshaw sums up the purpose of Abraham's climactic experience thus:

"In a sense the story bears the character of a qualifying test. The fulfilment of the promise articulated in Genesis 12 and reaffirmed at crucial stages during Abraham's journey through alien territory actualises the divine intention to bless all nations by means of one man. Abraham's excessive love for the son of promise comes dangerously close to idolatry and frustrate the larger mission."<sup>112</sup>

However, when we compare God's way of dealing with Abraham's introverted concern in Gen.17 and 22, there is a significant difference. Instead of another declaration of God as El Shaddai (in power!), a command for a blameless walk, and the expansion and transformation of name, Abraham is put to a test which he will lose either way. In the end, Abraham is back to the state when he was without child and worse because he and Sarah had aged more meanwhile. Abraham is therefore brought back to the point as he was, childless, in Gen.15. But he no longer fights against the outcome of the test. His commitment to God is so absolute now that in the end he is given reaffirmation of all the promises bound up with Isaac and also his role in the ultimate blessing of the nations. The parallel and tension between Gen.15 and 22 have already been demonstrated in our analysis earlier. The whole question of the heir-son we saw developing from Gen.16-17 through to Gen.21-22 all began with that initial, introverted and particularistic complaint ('demand'!) of the lack of an heir by Abraham to God in 15:2f. It is only with the test of Gen.22 and all its implications that the potentially real danger to his universal mission entailed in Abraham's asking of an heir is fundamentally recognised and dealt with. In view of this, it is right to say that the "neutralisation" of the danger in 15:4ff by Abraham's belief upon God allowing his own words to be put to the

test was only probationary in the first place. Abraham needed to continue to hold to his faith in God's promise in total trust if the "neutralisation" was to be transformed into a positive state of relationship. Thus, God's dealing with Abraham in Gen.22 is unlike that in Gen.17 and is much more fundamental and far-reaching in going back to Abraham's state of childlessness in 15:1-6. It is only when that fundamental relationship between God and Abraham, and all the promises, in particular the issue of the heir-son, are put in the right perspective, that Abraham, and his seed which shall be named through Isaac, can fulfil the command to be a blessing (12:2) and be the suitable agent for a universal destiny and mission. If Abraham's seed is to continue in his destiny, then clearly it should not be the source of conflict, non-blessing, and of introverted and particularistic concern at the expense of that universal destiny. Thus, the story has come round to a full circle, via the 'negative' mid-point of Gen.16 where Sarai's 'voice' was listened to by Abraham, but finally resolved in the climactic test of Gen.22; the universal destiny of Gen.12:1-3 is reaffirmed and more, because now it is not Abraham but his seed is named as the agent of blessing to be (22:18).

It is therefore not without significance that the climactic narrative of the whole structure (Gen.22) finally ends not actually in the reaffirmatory pronouncement of the formula expressing Abraham's and his seed's universal destiny, but rather on the reason for the reaffirmation of the destiny, "because you have obeyed my voice (  $\gamma\delta\rho\alpha\ \text{אשר שמעתי}$  )" (22:18). When Abraham listened to the 'voice' of Sarai in Gen.16, the potentially real danger of 15:2 was actualised and accounted for the subsequent development of the 'problems' raised

by the issue over the heir-son. But when Abraham obeys the 'voice' of Yahweh in Gen.22, not only is the potentially real danger of 15:2 fundamentally resolved, but the universal destiny of Abraham (12:3; 18:18) was reaffirmed as well. As such, we believe the motifs of voice, listening or obeying, and the related issues analysed in the narratives are of fundamental significance in the whole Abraham story with particular reference to his call to be a blessing for the nations.

Last but not least, when we take Abraham, the man called to be a blessing and to reverse the curse and broken relationships as set forth in the primeval history, together with Adam, of whom these words were pronounced over him by Yahweh: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you" (Gen.3:17), then the significance of the pronouncement over Abraham "in your seed all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice" (22:18) in the wider Pentateuchal context is quite obvious coming after the earlier statement: "And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai" (16:2). The implications of the observation just made will be further explicated later (pp.193-206).

#### E) Notices of the Birth of the Promised Heir

One final issue in our analysis of the narrative structure of the Abraham story which has not been discussed on its own is the notices about the promise and birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah and related immediate family matters. Strictly speaking, the specific promise of Isaac's birth first appeared in 17:16, was reaffirmed in 18:10,14, and was finally fulfilled in 21:1-7 just as and when God promised. The first two notices are each set in a dialogue between

God and Abraham, and the final notice in connection with the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael (17:15-21; 18:9-15; 21:1-21). It is striking to note that all three episodes appear to be 'inserted' into their respective wider contexts.

After the lengthy divine speech which begins Gen.17 in which God made a series of promises to Abraham, one of which is to establish a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, Abraham is commanded in 17:9-14 by God to circumcise himself and his household as a sign of the covenant, and Abraham's compliance is reported in 17:22-27. The first specific mention of the birth of Isaac, as a promise, 'abruptly' appears in between God's command to Abraham to circumcise and Abraham's compliance (17:15-21).

Next, the subject of 18:9-15 is abruptly changed from 18:1-8, Abraham's entertaining of the heavenly visitors. The beginning of 18:16, "Then the men set out from there ..." could have followed quite naturally from 18:8, "and he [Abraham] stood by them under the tree while they ate," without much strain or dislocation. It has been quite usual for commentators to see the theme of 18:1-15 as a promise of a son to the childless couple as reward for their hospitality to gods travelling incognito.<sup>113</sup> However, there is no explicit suggestion of any reward in the context of Gen.18. Furthermore, with the birth of Ishmael, it is likely that Abraham and Sarah no longer thought of themselves as childless since no notice of barrenness (cf. 11:30; 15:1f; 16:1) is mentioned in the episode 18:1-8. In fact, it has been argued that the "theme of gods travelling incognito to examine the deeds of men in order to reward the righteous and hospitable and punish the wicked is much more common ... The theme of a gift of children may [emphasis ours] come into these

stories as a reward for hospitality, [but] is clearly stated as such."<sup>114</sup>

As for 20:1-18, it is quite clear, as most commentators recognise, that it is quite natural to see its continuation in 21:22-34, centring around the two main characters of Abraham and Abimelech, without the interruption of 21:1-21.<sup>115</sup>

Why then is there the repeated pattern of 'insertion' of the three notices of the promise and birth of Isaac and related family matters in narratives in which the notices are not naturally relevant? These 'insertions' appear to be quite intentional when we take into consideration that the three narratives into which the notices are inserted: 17:1-14(15-21)22-28; 18:1-8(9-15)16-19:38; 20:1-18(21:1-21)21:22-34, have their counterparts in 15:1-21; 13:1-14:24; 12:10-20, respectively. Our earlier analysis has shown that the latter three narratives all portray an introverted, particularistic horizon as contrasted with the outward-looking, universal horizon of the former three narratives with reference to Abraham's universal destiny.

By this literary technique and arrangement, the narrative is emphasising that not only Abraham, but also his family matters, in particular the issue of the promised seed, Isaac, is ultimately also involved in, and therefore is to be constantly set within the perspective of, Abraham's universal calling and mission. This is most clearly brought out in Gen.22, where the issue of the promised heir-son is taken up with an acutely particularistic preoccupation, both on God's and on Abraham's side, but is dramatically reversed at the last moment by the pronouncement of the formula reaffirming Abraham's universal call, and having his seed named as the agent of blessing after the test. The promised heir-son is now firmly set within Abraham's universal destiny.

Thus the introverted, particular concern reflected by the initial anxious asking for children by Abraham, which is answered by Yahweh's promise that Abraham's own son shall be his heir and is qualified by the further promise that his descendants shall be as the stars of the heaven (15:2-5), is taken up and developed in the second half of the narrative symmetry and 're-established' in its proper universal perspective by the literary arrangement we have observed. This is necessary, as our analysis of Gen.15 to 17 shows, because Ishmael's birth (Gen.16) has brought to the surface again the potentially real danger of Abraham's introverted and particular concern over the issue of the heir-son first revealed in 15:2.

E) Residual Remarks

It remains for us just to make a few residual remarks of the rest of the Abraham narratives not analysed above in the light of the theme of our study.

First, it has been quite usual for commentators to regard the purchase of the field with the cave of Ephron in Machpelah, east of Mamre (Hebron), by Abraham to bury Sarah, as a symbolic possession of the land of Canaan (Gen.23). Since his departure from his homeland for Canaan, Abraham has been a sojourner and has been promised on a few occasions by God that he and his descendants shall possess the land of their sojourning (12:7; 13:17; 15:7,18; 17:8; 22:17). However, he has not actually possessed any land there until the purchase from Ephron. Whether the purchase is a symbolic fulfilment of earlier promises of the land or not is not made explicit in the text.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, Good has pointed out a possible irony in the fact that though the land is Abraham's by promise "he must bargain

with a Hittite over the purchase of a piece of it for a burial ground,"<sup>117</sup> Whatever the case may be, it is interesting that only after the test of Abraham in 22:1-19, where the promises and universal destiny are reaffirmed over Abraham and his seed because of what he has not withheld from God and his obedience to the voice of God, that we have a narrative about Abraham actually possessing a piece of land in the land which he has been promised. In fact, all the notices just mentioned about promises of or possession of land to Abraham and his seed consistently come after an act of obedience or proper response to a divine command or event by Abraham. In other words, already in the Abraham narratives the possession of land is placed under the condition of obedience and subscription to God's purpose of calling, and it is not to be an end in itself.<sup>118</sup>

Secondly, we have already noted the striking fact that  $\aleph$  is not used of Abraham in the story after its emphatic five-fold use in 12:2f until 22:17, again only after an act of obedience. Even then, it is still in the form of a promise, "I will indeed bless you." Only when we come to 24:1, we find the first notice that "Yahweh had blessed Abraham in all things." Later on in the same narrative, Abraham's prosperity and its effect on his status are described positively for the first time when his servant said to Laban: "Yahweh has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great; he has given him flocks and herds, ... and Sarah ... born a son to my master when she was old ..." (24:35; cf. the implicitly negative and non-positive assessments of Abraham's wealth in 12:16 and 20:14 respectively, where the word  $\aleph$  is not used).

Finally, probably more important for the theme under study is Abraham's strict instructions regarding Isaac's future wife to his

chief servant. There are two aspects to them. On the one hand, the servant is "not [to] take a wife for [Isaac] ... from the daughters of the Canaanite" but from Abraham's own kinsfolk. This has usually been taken as "a natural concern for the purity of stock" or a warning against "the risk of mixing religions."<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, if no woman is willing to follow the servant to come to Canaan to marry Isaac, then he is not to take Isaac back to Abraham's father's house to seek a wife under any circumstances. The main reason is quite likely that Abraham is so mindful "of the Providence that has guided his steps to the land of Canaan and of the oath by which the Lord confirmed this land to be the possession of his descendants (15:18) that there must be no slightest turning back."<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, despite the restrictions imposed by himself, Abraham expressed his confidence that God "will send his angel before [the servant], and [he] shall take a wife for [Isaac] from there" (24:7).

The striking thing in this narrative is the submission and acquiescence of Isaac throughout the whole arrangement, not unlike his acceptance of his 'fate' when his father bound him and laid him on the altar to be the sacrificial 'lamb' for a burnt offering to God (Gen.22). In other words, Isaac is being portrayed as one who is quite prepared to accept his father's mind and faith over his own future as his own. Here (and in Gen.22) we might even have an allusion to Yahweh's own confidence in the soliloquy which appears in a striking position in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative: "for I have known [or chosen] him [Abraham], that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice; so that Yahweh may bring to Abraham what he has promised him" (18:19; cf. 22:12, "for now I know that you are

a fearer of God"). If the allusion is correct, then it is striking, but not surprising, that the formula pronouncing the universal destiny of Abraham and his seed (18:18; 22:18) occurs precisely in the immediate contexts of these two passages just mentioned.

Calvin commented that "the kind of discipline which prevailed in Abraham's house is here apparent ... It here appears what great veneration [Isaac] cherished towards his father; because Abraham relying on Isaac's obedience, confidently calls his servant to him."<sup>121</sup> If our assessment of the portrayal of Isaac in the narratives is acceptable, then it is appropriate that Isaac receive his blessing not from his own father even but directly from God himself, and, furthermore, as early as Abraham's death, before he made any decision or act on his own (25:11). Indeed, he has the basic hallmark of a suitable and tested agent of God to carry on Abraham's universal destiny, to be a blessing for the nations (quite unlike Jacob before his Jabbok experience).

Isaac's obedience and acquiescence to Abraham (and therefore Yahweh) in the matters of his 'binding' (Gen.22), his marriage with all its ramifications (Gen.24), as well as his trust in Yahweh when Rebekah was barren (25:21; cf. Abraham in 16:1f and Jacob in 30:1ff especially), together imply strongly that even before Isaac came on his own so to speak he is already well established in a proper relationship with Yahweh, which Abraham (and Jacob for that matter) proved only at the 'end' of his career. Thus, we believe it is probably not accidental that when the formula expressing the universal destiny of Abraham is pronounced over Isaac (26:4), even before he had responded in any way to the emphatic command to "dwell in the land of which I shall tell you", it is made in reaffirmation. Not only is Yahweh's

oath to and the obedience of Abraham mentioned as the basis for the formula pronouncement, the agent of blessing named is already Isaac's seed (in transmission!), and the formula used is in the hithpael form as in 22:18 and not the niph'al form in 12:3; 18:18. These observations just noted would strengthen the tentative conclusion made in our formulaic analysis earlier that the use of the hithpael form of the formula in the context of the patriarchal narratives could very well be intended to have a reaffirmatory function, as contrasted with the niph'al form having an initial and probationary function.

The significance of Isaac in relation to the theme "Blessing for the Nations" will be further explicated later in our study of the Isaac narrative (Gen.26). In the meantime, we will further analyse the theme under study in the Abraham narratives in the narrative contexts where the formula specifically occurs.

## II) Narrative Contexts of the Formula

Having analysed the significance of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the structure and arrangement of the overall Abraham story, we will now study the theme as expressed by the formula in its narrative contexts. We have earlier shown that not only are the Abraham narratives juxtaposed with the primeval history in the Book of Genesis, the use of the striking phrase "all the families of the earth (כָּל־בְּרִיּוֹת־הָאָרֶץ)" in the climactic statement of Abraham's call in 12:3b is also intended to link the Abraham narratives in particular, and the patriarchal narratives in general, to the primeval history. Whatever function other elements in the divine speech in 12:1-3, such as the key words -- blessing, curse, great name, serve in linking the two cycles of narratives together, the formula pronouncement of the ultimate purpose of Abraham's call to be a blessing for "all the families of the earth (כָּל־בְּרִיּוֹת־הָאָרֶץ)" undoubtedly serves to underline the particular nature of that relationship.

In addition to the formula occurring in 12:3, it also appears in 18:18 and 22:18 in the Abraham narratives. Does the formula appearing in these two cases also serve to link, as its occurrence in 12:3b does, the respective narratives in which it is embedded to the primeval history, as well as emphasising the nature of that relationship? To spell out the relationship of the Abraham narratives in which the formula occurs is the objective of our analysis below.

A) Gen.12:1-91) General Observations

While 12:1-3 is linked generally to Gen.1-11, the primeval history, it is in other ways more directly connected to the immediately preceding narrative of the Babel incident (11:1-9).<sup>122</sup> In the primeval history, it has been noted that after each human act which breaches the human-divine boundary, a divine act of corresponding judgement or punishment follows (3:1-24; 4:8-16; 6:1-7:24; 11:1-9). However, in the first three incidents, there is also a mitigating act of grace from God tempering the effect of the punishment. There is no such mitigating act of grace after the scattering of the tower builders at Babel, marking it out as striking in the primeval history.<sup>123</sup>

The absence of the mitigating element in the Babel incident apparently caused von Rad to stress the grave crisis at the end of the primeval history. It is only with the call of Abraham that there is any mitigating act of God to temper the punishment of the scattering of humankind. On the other hand, Clines has argued against the sharp disjunction drawn by von Rad between the primeval history and the beginning of the patriarchal narratives. He argues that "it is most significant that there is no clear-cut break at the end of the Babel story" because the genealogy of Shem, which clearly points to Abraham as its goal (11:26-30), is firmly linked into the primeval history.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, the  $\text{נִי־טֵיבָה}$  framework of ten generations each linking Adam to Noah, and Noah to Abraham in the narratives also supports Clines' argument.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, bearing in mind the links between Abraham and the primeval history, it is also obvious some contrast between the narrative of Abraham's call and the narrative of the Babel incident could be intended.

2) 12:1-9 and 11:1-9: Comparisons and Contrasts

When 12:1-9 and 11:1-9 are taken together, some very striking comparisons and contrasts can be noted which are unlikely to be accidental. For convenience, we shall use the symmetrical structure of 11:1-9, well recognised by commentators, as a basis.

Babel Story (11:1-9)

(Presupposed nations spread abroad, 10:32). Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated (  $\text{D}\text{S}\text{D}\text{I}\text{B}$  ) from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there (  $\text{D}\text{W}$  ). (1f)

And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks ... Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower (  $\text{S}\text{T}\text{I}$  ) with its top in the heavens (  $\text{D}'\text{I}\text{W}\text{Z}$  ) and let us make a name (  $\text{D}\text{W}$  ) for ourselves,

Lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth (  $\text{V}\text{T}\text{A}\text{H}-\text{S}$  )." (3f)

(Presumed building activities according to men's own decision and purpose.) (3f)

And Yahweh came down to see (  $\text{I}\text{A}\text{T}$  ) the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. (5)

Abraham's Call (12:1-9)

(Presupposed sons of men scattered abroad, 11:8f, but confusion of language, 11:9).

Now Yahweh said to Abram, "Go from your country, and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great (  $\text{S}\text{T}\text{I}$  ) nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great (  $\text{T}\text{I}\text{W}\text{H}\text{S}\text{T}\text{I}\text{A}$  );

Be a blessing! I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth ( ...  $\text{S}$   $\text{I}\text{V}\text{T}\text{A}\text{H}$  ) shall find blessing." (2f)

So Abram went, as Yahweh had told him ... and they set forth for the land of Canaan ... Abram passed through the land of the place of Shechem (  $\text{D}\text{S}\text{W}$  ). (4ff)

Then Yahweh appeared (  $\text{X}\text{T}'$  ) to Abram. (7a)

And Yahweh said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have one language ... Come, let us go down, and there (𐤀𐤓) confuse (𐤀𐤔𐤁) their language that they may not understand one another's speech." (6f)

So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there (𐤀𐤓) over the face of all the earth, (7a)

and they left off building (𐤀𐤔𐤁) the city (𐤀𐤓𐤁). (7b)

Therefore its name was called (𐤀𐤓𐤁) Babel (𐤔𐤁), because there (𐤀𐤓) Yahweh confused (𐤔𐤁) the language of all the earth; (9a)

and from there (𐤀𐤓) Yahweh scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (9)

and said, "to your descendants I will give this land." (7a)

(No equivalent judgement because Abraham's call is contrasted with the scattering in 11:1-9.)

So he built there (𐤀𐤓 𐤀𐤔𐤁) an altar to Yahweh, who had appeared to him. (7b)

Thence he moved from there (𐤀𐤓) to a mountain on the east of Bethel (𐤔𐤁-𐤀𐤓), and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai (𐤀𐤓) on the east; and there (𐤀𐤓) he built an altar to Yahweh and called upon the name (𐤀𐤓𐤁) of Yahweh. (8)

And Abram journeyed on (𐤀𐤓) still going toward the Negeb. (9)

A brief glance at the table shows that there are significant elements of comparison and contrast to argue for an intentional juxtaposition of the two narratives. This fact should not come as a surprise considering the structural links we observed earlier.

While recognising different sources underlie the two narratives respectively, commentators have frequently regarded 11:1-9 as a piece of high artistic and literary skill with its symmetrical structure, inclusio effect, paranomasia and alliterations,<sup>126</sup> but 12:1-9 is less seriously taken as a literary coherent narrative of its own. However, we believe Kikawada has demonstrated that the latter in its present form is also a "beautifully constructed literary unity [which] can provide a fitting introduction to the equally well composed Patriarchal History of the background of

of Genesis."<sup>127</sup>

The two narratives begin with different presupposed backgrounds. In 11:1-9, the nations were spread abroad, which is seen as a 'positive' fulfilment of the renewed creation mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (9:1). Having one language, the whole earth could communicate. But when men continued their migration, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and they decided to settle there. On the other hand, the narrative 12:1-9 presupposes mankind as already scattered in judgement (with the confusion of language dividing them permanently) — in contrast to the 'positive' spreading abroad in 10:32-11:2 at the beginning of the Babel incident. It is out of this judgemental context, that Abraham is commanded to go out instead of settling down in the security of his country, his kindred and his father's house (12:1). Presumably this settling down in the security of one's own is the "normal" phenomenon after mankind's scattering by Yahweh. In contrast to men's deciding their own destiny, Abraham is to go to the land which Yahweh will show to him. Thus the basic orientation of the two narratives are already set off as different and in opposition at the very beginning.

The decision of men to build a city and a tower, and make a name for themselves (11:3f) is clearly contrasted with Yahweh's intention to make Abraham into a great nation with a great name (12:2). Commentators are not in total agreement as to what the judgement in 11:1-9 is against. Some would see the narrative as merely a negative critique of human urban civilisation and culture, of men's wanting to make a name for themselves or to control their own destiny by leaving God out of their considerations.<sup>128</sup> They

argue that the coming together of mankind, the building of a great civilisation symbolised by a tower with its top reaching towards heaven, and the seeking of a great name are in themselves not unequivocally speaking of a godless attempt by men to storm the gates of heaven. It is possible to see these efforts as the natural development of human civilisation, albeit without God. In other words, there is nothing as heinous as the crime some commentators find, taking the judgement of 11:1-9 as directed against human *hybris* against God.

However, when the Babel incident is seen in the light of its intentional comparisons and contrasts with the narrative of Abraham's call in 12:1-9, one wonders whether the question of *hybris* in the former is altogether absent. The decision of mankind is to build a city with a tower (גִּבְרֵת) with its top towards the heavens, as well as to make for themselves a name (וְשֵׁם, 11:3f). Fokkelmann commented that "it must have been but a short step from migdal to gādol 'great'"<sup>129</sup> and that "the concrete context activates the meaning of great in the word migdal ... the point of the tower ... is ... that the men want to be great ... to make a name for themselves by reaching out for the heavens and thus be like God."<sup>130</sup> In addition, he also asserts that "a maximizing reading for ... the heavens must be retained for the sake of contrast to 'the earth, the whole earth', ... the narrator, if he should want to make the statement that a tower is high, simply has the word גִּבְרֵת at his command."<sup>131</sup> Thus, Fokkelmann concluded that the very function of the word גִּבְרֵת is to reveal the action and intention of the people as hybris. When the towered city with its top towards the heavens in 11:4 is taken together with the great name and great nation God is going to make

for Abraham (12:2), the comparison is very interesting. The former is, in the context, tantamount to a representation of a world-nation, brought about by men's effort in opposition to the creation command of God to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth. On the other hand, Abraham's greatness is given by, and is to be in obedience to, God.

From another perspective, Clines argues that "the sin of the tower-builders may not be so insignificant as at first sight appears."<sup>132</sup> In terms of the punishment of the scattering of mankind in 11:1-9, he argues that it is a more severe one than the Flood. First, the scattering of mankind is of lasting effect because there are no survivors, whereas mankind was preserved and continued to grow in the family of Noah. Secondly, at Babel, the destruction is the community of mankind as a family. "The punishment of Babel divides men irrevocably from one another ... [and] mankind is no longer one 'people' or 'kin-group' (𐤁), 11:6), but 'nations' (𐤁'𐤁) 10:32)."<sup>133</sup> Thus, mankind's sin at Babel "may be seen not as a mere expression of human self-importance and self-defiance, but as an act of hybris, matched in its defiance of God only by the first sin in the garden; like the eating of the forbidden fruit the tower-building may be an assault on heaven, an attempt at self-divinisation."<sup>134</sup> Finally, Clines concluded that "such an interpretation is confirmed by the fact that, so understood, the primeval history would exhibit the common literary technique of inclusio, with the final episode in the story of human sin repeating and balancing the first."<sup>135</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to note the comments of von Rad, who cautioned that "the statement that the tower should reach to heaven must not be pressed ... That men wanted to storm heaven ... is not

said. ...[the ] combination of their energies ... and a naive desire to be great ... are therefore the basic forces of what we call culture."<sup>136</sup> If so, then his comment that at the end of the Babel incident, "the whole primeval history ... seems to break off in shrill dissonance, and the question ... now arises even more urgently: Is God's relationship to the nations now finally broken?"<sup>137</sup> must be judged as unnecessarily alarming. It is interesting von Rad went on to say, "But in them [men's efforts in 11:1-9], in the penetrating judgement of our narrator, is rebellion against God, a concealed Titanism, or at least, as v.6 will show, the first step in that direction."<sup>138</sup> The fact that there is no mitigating word or act of grace from God in the narrative would also suggest the severe nature of the sin of the tower builders. If the arguments for taking the nature of the sin of the tower-builders which called forth the severe judgment of God as hybris are correct, then the call of Abraham in 12:1-9 is all the more significant.

In the Babel episode, the motive for the men's decision to remain settled and build the towered city to achieve a great name was either the fear of being scattered or their self-willed decision not to be scattered over the face of the whole earth (cf. 4:13-16).<sup>139</sup> The emphasis on the 'self' is very prominent in 11:4, "Come, let us build ourselves ... let us make ... for ourselves, lest we be scattered ..." It is a self-interested avoidance of being scattered away from community, from life, from security, and from 'God'; a situation of 'curse', so to speak (cf. 3:23; 4:12,14,16). Abraham's departure, in contrast, is in reverse direction and purpose, under God's command, "Go ... Be thou a blessing! ... [so that] all the families of the earth shall find blessing in you" (12:1-3). The fear or 'curse' of

being scattered and divided (nations!) is replaced by the possibility of the 'blessing' of separated entities (families!) being somehow brought together in Abraham. The extent of the fear or 'curse', viz. the face of the whole earth, is matched by the scope of the blessing, all the families of the earth. In fact, the scope of the blessing probably has more far-reaching effect (3:17; 4:11; 6:7). The fear of insecurity, a reason for men's refusal to continue to "fill the earth" (11:4), is overcome for Abraham by God in the promise, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse" (12:3a, cf. 4:15).

After the respective actions of the tower-builders and Abraham, it is interesting that both narratives have Yahweh involved in an action of seeing (יָרָא). In 11:5, there is probably an irony involved in that the men want to build a tower which reaches into heaven, where God is, but their effort is so inadequate that Yahweh has to come down to see them at work.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, the context also portrays Yahweh's action as a move to judge (cf. 18:21). In 12:7, however, Yahweh appears himself to Abraham. His action of coming down to see and judge stands in the middle of 11:1-9.<sup>141</sup> In 12:1-9, Kikawada has noted the significance of 12:7ab, where Yahweh appeared favourably to Abraham and promised to give to his descendants "this land".<sup>142</sup>

Yahweh's decision to confuse the language of the men so that they could not understand each other is in effect to undo the continuing possibility of community in spite of their 'differences' (10:5,20,31f). Moreover, by scattering the men from the land which they found, Yahweh is dispossessing them of the very physical basis for their arrogant attempt to storm the gates of heaven. Thus

Yahweh's seeing and the subsequent judgemental confusing of language and scattering of mankind reverses exactly the ambition and fear of the tower builders.

In contrast, Yahweh's promise to give the land to Abraham's descendants is given in order to make possible his promise that he will make of Abraham a great nation, and a great name.<sup>143</sup> Abraham, to all intents and purposes, does not possess any of the condition necessary to become great. But Yahweh's promise of the land would ultimately make that a possibility. Just as Yahweh's seeing in 11:5 involved judgement, confusion, scattering and dispossessing (of land) exactly reverses the ambition and fear of the tower builders, so Yahweh's appearing to Abraham, in contrast, with the promise of possession of land also matches the purpose of the divine speech, "Go ... to the land that I will show you. And I will make ... you ... great" (12:1f). Abraham's 'uprooting' by Yahweh is also reversed as a result.

The result of Yahweh's judgement in 11:8 is that the men being scattered "from there ... left off building (בניו) the city." The contrast in their earlier intention, "Come, let us build" (11:4) and their later action, "and they left off building the city" (11:8) could not be more striking. In 12:1-9, on the other hand, initially it was Yahweh's intention to make (build! cf. 16:1) Abraham into a great nation, but after the theophany and promise in 17:7ab, it was Abraham who "built (בנה) there an altar to Yahweh." If the building of the tower was to force the closing of the human-divine divide so that men can be like God, then the altar-building of Abraham is also an act of bridging that gap, but in a creaturely response of gratitude and consecration to an initiation of God.<sup>144</sup> The irony

is plain to see. Men wanted to build a tower with its top to the heavens by their own efforts, to storm the gates of heaven, but failed. Yet, Abraham was able to achieve that communication even when it was not his ambition at first. It was Yahweh who accomplished it for him.

The last section of our comparison is also full of irony, together with paranomasia and alliteration. The name (  $\text{בבל}$  ) of the uncompleted city (  $\text{בבל}$  ) was called (  $\text{בבל}$  ) Babel (  $\text{בבל}$ , the gate of heaven! v.9). A further explanation of the name was given: because there Yahweh confused (  $\text{בבל}$  ) the language of all the earth. When Abraham moved from there (  $\text{בבל}$  ), Shechem (  $\text{בבל}$  ), to a mountain near Bethel, he built another altar (12:8). While it is not in strict parallel, the double mention of Bethel (  $\text{בבל}$  ) quite redundant in the context as it is mentioned immediately with Ai (  $\text{בבל}$  ), could be taken as an intentional alliteration and word play with the 'double' mention of  $\text{בבל}$  /  $\text{בבל}$ . Not only do  $\text{בבל}$  and  $\text{בבל}$  sound alike, but the meaning of the former, house of God, and the meaning of Babel, gate of heaven, are close enough to be of striking contrast.<sup>145</sup> In addition, the unfinished city (  $\text{בבל}$  ), and most probably its tower (ziggurat!) as well, soon to become an inevitable ruin, is ironically matched in the unnecessary mention of the 'infamous' city in Israelite history, Ai (  $\text{בבל}$ , ruin, heap).<sup>146</sup>

In 11:1-9, it is interesting to note the repeated use of  $\text{בבל}$  to indicate at first that men settled there (  $\text{בבל}$  ), to build a towered city with its top in the heavens (  $\text{בבל}$  ) and to make a great name (  $\text{בבל}$  ), and then later used again ironically to record that it was there their language was confused by Yahweh, from there they were scattered abroad by Yahweh, and by implication, it was there they left off building the city. In contrast, Abraham

moved from there, Shechem (𐤃𐤑𐤏), to a mountain near Bethel, and there he built another altar to Yahweh.

Furthermore, 𐤃𐤏 is also linked to another wordplay in the two narratives. In 11:1-9, the men at first wanted to make a name (𐤃𐤏) for their own by building a towered city. In 11:9, after the judgement, it is stated: the name of the city was called (𐤍𐤅𐤏) Babel, the gate of heaven. On the other hand, Yahweh promised initially to make a great name (𐤃𐤏) for Abraham. In the end, it is said that Abraham called on the name (𐤃𐤏𐤅𐤏 𐤍𐤅𐤏) of Yahweh after building a second altar near Bethel, the house of God. It is striking, in this respect, that Abraham did not call on the name of Yahweh at Shechem, where he built the first altar. While the great name and great city mankind wanted to build for themselves turned out to be confusion (𐤑𐤑) and scattering, Abraham's given greatness begins to take shape in receiving the land promised and being associated with the "great name" (Yahweh!) he now proclaims. Abraham's building of the second altar on a mountain near Bethel, the house of God, is most likely to conjure up a contrasting image of the sacred staged-mountain abode of God to that of the tower at Babel, the gate of heaven.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, the notices of movement in both narratives also make an interesting contrast. In 11:1-9, the men set out (𐤏𐤏) in migration, a purposeful and directional movement.<sup>148</sup> But in the end, their language was confused and they were scattered. The negative fear of being scattered and the judgement of actual scattering runs right through the narrative. It has been noted, especially by Kikawada, that the verbs of movement in 12:1-9 provide some sort of framework.<sup>149</sup> While the verb 𐤏𐤏 is the main verb linking the

narrative as a whole (vv.1,4,4,5,9), it is interesting that the root  $\text{בָּנָה}$  which appeared at the beginning of 11:2 is used twice of Abraham's continuing journeying, after he built an altar near Bethel and called on Yahweh's name (v.9). Another feature worth noting is that at the one time when the men of Gen.11 settled down after their migration (v.2), they deliberated the grandiose plan of building the towered city and a name for themselves, lest they be scattered. On the other hand, in 12:1-9, the only time when Abraham was said to have stopped his movement (v.8), he not only built an altar but significantly called on the name of Yahweh.<sup>150</sup>

### 3) Altar-building and Calling on Yahweh's Name

Although Abraham built an altar at Shechem, it is interesting he did not also call on the name of Yahweh there nor pitch his tent. The reason apparently is because the Canaanites were then in the land with strong religious influence there ("the oak of Moreh" 12:6). Not even the appearance of Yahweh and the promise of the land, signifying to Abraham his arrival in "the land that I will show you" (12:1), caused Abraham to settle and to call on Yahweh's name there (cf. 33:18ff). We are not told that Abraham received a theophany or promise when he built the second altar at Bethel, which is also known to be a religious center of worship. It could therefore be natural or intentional that Abraham moved (up!) to a mountain, land unclaimed by any deity so to speak, to build an altar and call on the name of Yahweh there finally.

While Cassuto is most likely to be correct when he commented that Abraham's building of the altars at Shechem and Bethel is "a token of the sanctification of the land to the Lord and His worship for generations to come," he did not mention, however, the fact that

Abraham called on Yahweh's name only at Bethel.<sup>151</sup> While Abraham is said to have built altars at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron (13:18), Beersheba (21:33), and on one of the mountains in the land of Moriah (22:14), he called on the name of Yahweh only at Bethel and Beersheba. The absence of such action by Abraham at Hebron, as at Shechem, is probably due to the over-dominating territorial hold of the non-Yahwistic religions of the Canaanites there ("oak of Moreh" 12:6; "oaks of Mamre" 13:18).

The building of altars and the proclamation of Yahweh's name has also been connected by some commentators to Abraham's travelling the land of Canaan on his entry from north (Shechem) to south (Bethel), as though to symbolise the ideal conquest. Vawter sees it entirely in the context of the Israelite possession when he says, "Not only must Abraham be associated with these sacred places, however, he must also be shown to have, as it were, claimed them for Israel, having both at Shechem and Bethel built an altar there to the Lord and invoked the Lord by name (emphases author's)."<sup>152</sup>

Cassuto also sees Abraham's travel from north to south, with Shechem and Bethel named, as a symbolic conquest forecasting what would happen to his descendants later.<sup>153</sup> He, however, we believe, made the necessary observation by noting also that the two places are religious centres of the Canaanite population, besides their being key points geographically, and concluded: "the proclamation of the name of Yahweh at these places signifies the proclamation of the supremacy of Yahweh, the God of Abram, over the gods of Canaan."<sup>154</sup> In the context of Gen.12:1-9 as juxtaposed with the Babel incident in 11:1-9, it is arguable that Abraham's claiming of the land by proclamation of Yahweh's name over it is more for Yahweh

than for the future possession of his descendants, although this could not be ruled out altogether. Vawter's interpretation noted above is obviously over-influenced by his acceptance of the premise that J, which underlies the narrative of 12:1-9, reflects the Davidic-Solomonic ideology of the patriarchal promises as being fulfilled in the United Monarchy. From a literary point of view, it is not necessary to bring in this aspect here. Moreover, the proclaiming of the deity's name over some object in many places in the Old Testament does support the basic view expressed above that symbolic or actual ownership by the deity named is involved.<sup>155</sup>

To sum up our discussion of the two narratives, 12:1-9 and 11:1-9, thus far, the analysis above shows that both are significantly and identically matched to warrant the conclusion that the former is to be seen as God's positive mitigating response to men's undiminished hybris to storm the gates of heaven on a much wider and organised scale than portrayed previously in the primeval history. Abraham is thus seen not only as a representative man but also by his obedient response to the divine command and purpose, and the initiatives he took upon himself to sanctify and claim the land for Yahweh, has begun the initial, but crucial, reversal of the process of the spread of sin and the spread of 'uncreation' in Gen.3-11. The movement of men away from God in Eden and at Babel is now also representatively reversed for a start. In Abraham, mankind's journeying is no more to be considered as necessarily a judgemental scattering into the unknown or away from God and life (east of Eden, so to speak) but the beginning of a new, purposeful journeying — even though Abraham is to be a sojourner without any ownership of

land of his own, only the repeated promises of it, till his death. Moreover, man will now indeed acquire not only a name but a great name, a great nation, as well as being able to reach into the divine realm, but only as God's gift. It is against this background as shown in our analysis of the two narratives, we are able to see better the function and significance of the positioning and the pronouncement of the formula expressing the ultimate universal destiny of Abraham's calling that "in you all the families of the earth shall find blessing" (12:3b).

#### 4) "Be a Blessing!"

One further issue in the narrative of Abraham's call remains to be discussed. With the episode of Babel, men's rebellion against Yahweh is now not only of one couple, Adam and Eve, but of the entire race of mankind corporately. The fact that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21) has grown to a much graver and dangerous dimension. It is in such a situation of mankind's self-willed refusal to obey the creation mandate to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth ..." (1:28; 8:17; 9:1,7) that Abraham is called. As such, to reverse the arrogant intention of men: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered upon the face of the whole earth" (11:5), it should come as no surprise that the MT has the double imperative: Go for yourself (ךָ-ךָ) ... Be a blessing! ( בָּרַךְ לְךָ בְּרַךְ לְךָ ) ... [so that] all the families of the earth shall find blessing in you" in the divine speech to Abraham in 12:1-3.<sup>156</sup> We have already argued against the attempts of some commentators to revocalise בָּרַךְ לְךָ to

יְבַרְכֶנּוּ). However, there are also many commentators who translate the imperative in the sense of a result or intention, "in order that you shall be a blessing."<sup>157</sup> While the latter translation is probably much closer to the 'extended' sense of the imperative in 12:2 than the proposed revocalisation, in view of our analysis of the 'reversal' relationship of 12:1-9 to 11:1-9, we believe Terrien is quite right in insisting that the imperative has every "valid reason to stand as it is, ... this is the mission of Abraham and of Israel: 'Be a blessing!'" Such a rhetorical innovation fits the revolutionary character of the thought."<sup>158</sup>

If such was the earth-wide significance and purpose of Abraham's call, and, as we have already noted, Abraham's call is to be seen as parallel to Adam's (1:28) and Noah's (9:1), then it is noteworthy that the command Abraham received differs somewhat from the creation mandate Adam and Noah received: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth ...". Moreover, Adam and Noah were each first blessed before receiving the command, and after God had given a 'positive' verdict on the state of creation or re-creation and of the divine-human relationship (1:26-28,31; 8:20-22; 9:1).<sup>159</sup> But Abraham received only the promise of blessing and the command to be a blessing out of and in the context of the earth-wide 'curse' after the Babel incident, apparently before any restoration of the state of creation or reconciliation of the divine-human breach. Thus, while Abraham stands as some sort of parallel figure to Adam and Noah, he apparently is called to a different task. Muilenburg's comment brings out this observation very well: "Abraham becomes the embodiment of divine grace, and it is a grace qualitatively other than the deeds of grace in the primeval history."<sup>160</sup>

How are we to understand this distinction of Abraham's call from that of the other two universal figures? Wolff has probably touched on a correct clue although he was addressing himself to another issue. He comments: "the so-called primal history explains beforehand why all the families of the earth need the blessing. This is disclosed in retrospect by 12:3b as its hidden, leading question (Leitfrage) ... The word for blessing ... does not occur in the Yahwist's history of men ... Instead, the root 77N appears five times: 3:14,;7; 4:11; 9:25 and 5:29 (in a reference back to 3:17)." <sup>161</sup> However, we have already noted that the Babel incident is the only event in the primeval history in which there is no accompanying grace of mitigation after God's judgement. We would therefore suggest, in answer to the question just posed above, that in the aftermath of the Babel event, mankind is not yet in the position to receive and to fulfil once again the creation mandate in the way intended by God and to bring blessing to all mankind in the end. <sup>162</sup> Mankind has to be at the position of being in 'harmony' with God and with men before the creation mandate can be reissued and be received. We believe this is the reason why Abraham's call and destiny is therefore in the first instance not so much to continue the creation mandate but rather to bring about or to be the prior condition (blessing!) before that command can be reissued for the blessing of creation. As to whether the creation mandate has been 'displaced' permanently, it would then not be an exaggeration to say that in the dovetailing of the primeval history with the patriarchal narratives, in particular the call of Abraham, a lot depends on whether Abraham would heed the divine imperative to "Go for yourself ... [and] Be thou a blessing!" (12:1f contra 11:2ff).

In this respect, we believe the third and final issue of the creation command in the Old Testament in Gen.35:10f, to Jacob as Israel, has great significance for the patriarchal narratives as a whole. We shall leave this tentative suggestion for later analysis.

While Abraham has been promised the necessary conditions for his task (12:2a-3c), it is no assurance that he will be himself a blessing as commanded (cf. Adam in Gen.2-3), and therefore that the ultimate intent of his calling that "all the families of the earth shall find blessing in [him]" could be realised. This observation seems to find support in our formulaic analysis earlier when we noted a significant change from an initially probational pronouncement of the formula expressing Abraham's universal destiny (12:1-4; 18:17ff) to a final, reaffirmatory pronouncement of the same formula but with the agency of the universal destiny transmitted to Abraham's seed, after Abraham finally proved himself to be a "fearer of God" (Gen.22:1-19).

In other words, only when Abraham has obeyed the command not only to "Go" but probably more importantly to "be a blessing" also is the ultimate purpose of his call that "all the families of the earth shall find blessing in you" possible. The first step to restore the breach in divine-human relationship, and the alienation of nations, after the Babel incident, is not a 'leap' to receive and to fulfil the creation mandate but rather a fundamental retracing of steps in the divine-human relationship beginning from 11:1-9 (through Gen.6-9 and finally to Gen.3 as we shall try to demonstrate below), so that the state of creation or re-creation and the divine-human relationship can once again be declared as 'good' and be 'blessed' before mankind, in its representative -- Abraham and his seed, can

be reissued with the creation mandate in the end. While most commentators would agree that the call of Abraham and the promises given in 12:1-3a are made by Yahweh in the first place to serve the ultimate purpose as expressed in the formula in 12:3b, our analysis thus far has also shown that the neglect of the pivotal significance and pre-requisite of Abraham meeting the imperative "Be thou a blessing!" toward the ultimate intent of 12:3b in the first place is a fundamental oversight.

Moreover, this conclusion of ours is also borne out by our analysis of the structure and arrangement of the main body of the Abraham narratives. With his introverted and particularistic concern over security, wealth, and especially the issue of his heir-son, Abraham's relationships with foreigners (represented in their ruler), with his own kinsman, and in his own family matters, all proved to be the very opposite of the command to "be a blessing" in the first instance. Only subsequently did Abraham 'redeem' himself by responding positively to the negative situation or relationship brought about by him. Not only is there a change and widening of horizons in the latter half of the double-chiastic narrative structure, but the key word  $\text{בֵּרַךְ}$  which capped Abraham's call (12:2d) and the ultimate intent of that call (12:3b) has been significantly absent in applying to Abraham throughout the whole story after its initial use until he finally submitted to the test in Gen.22. Only when he proved himself to be a "fearer of God" (22:12), was the promise of blessing reaffirmed to Abraham, "I will indeed bless you" (22:17), and the reaffirmatory pronouncement of the formula in the hithpael form expressing Abraham's universal destiny made. And his seed was named as the agent of blessing. In other words, Abraham proves

himself suitable at the end, not the beginning, of his relationship with God, to be God's agent of mitigating grace to meet mankind's plight after the Babel incident.

B) Gen.18-19

1) General Observations

The second occurrence of the formula appears in 18:18 and is set in a very instructive position in the context of the Sodom narrative (Gen.18-19). The first part of the narrative shows Abraham entertaining the heavenly visitors and their reaffirmation of Sarah's imminent birth of a son to Abraham (18:1-16). Then the focus of the narrative switches to the mission of the heavenly visitors to see and judge the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This is followed by Abraham's intercession for the deliverance of the cities (18:20-33). Between these two sections of the narrative strikingly stands a divine soliloquy reiterating the significance of Abraham:

Yahweh said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall find blessing in him? No, for I have chosen him that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice; so that Yahweh may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." (18:17ff)

We have earlier argued that the narratives of Gen.18 and 19 are now integrated into an extended story. Of the unit 18:17ff, von Rad could well be right when he said that this short soliloquy "can never have been an independent unit, for it presupposes what precedes and what follows."<sup>163</sup> Whatever the traditio-historical relationship of the soliloquy to the whole story, as it stands in the Abraham narratives, it clearly has a programmatic significance. Von Rad went on to comment that God does not wish Abraham to learn

of the frightful event at Sodom, as it were, from the outside only.

A host of questions arise from the above observations.

Why is the divine soliloquy with its particular content placed in a narrative about God's judgement of the sinful cities, which are outside of the covenant community, of no immediate concern to Abraham so to speak? Why the different attitude and response of Abraham to the city with which he refused to have any obligating contact earlier in 14:22ff (cf. 13:13)? What has Abraham's destiny of becoming a great and mighty nation to do with Yahweh's self-questioning whether he ought to let Abraham into his intention to judge the cities?

What have all these questions and the possible answers to them, which we shall seek to provide below, to do with the theme of our study — the universal destiny of Abraham as expressed by the formula that "all the nations of the earth shall find blessing in you". We shall answer these questions by first trying to establish a proper perspective for understanding the content of the soliloquy.

## 2) 'Developed' Context of the Formula: Gen.12 and 17

In 18:17ff, other than the mention of the formula, we are first led to seek a wider context by the statement that Abraham "shall surely become a great and mighty nation." On first appearance, it seems only natural to regard it as referring back to the promise in 12:2: "And I will make of you a great nation ... and make your name great", in particular, and probably also to 13:14-17; 14:19; 15:1,5, 17-21, in general. However, with the development in the Abraham narratives, especially the transformation of Abraham's name and destiny in Gen.17, the soliloquy undoubtedly has also to be seen in this new perspective. More than that, not only is Abraham's name

changed to mean the father of nations, but he is also promised that nations and kings shall come forth from him, and that God shall be God to him and his descendants for ever. All these are formalised by the covenantal rite of circumcision. We have already argued earlier, the promises and covenant in Gen.17 stand as more than a mere reaffirmation or reapplication of the promises in 12:2. The significance of the development in Gen.17 from that of Gen.12 is reflected in the fact that in the former we have the first occasion in the Old Testament where God himself is said to bestow or change the name of a person.<sup>164</sup> All these are necessary because the narratives (12:10-16:16) have shown Abraham to be so introverted and particularistic that the ultimate purpose of his call to be a blessing for the nations is actually being displaced.

But from Gen.17 to 22, as we have also already seen, Abraham's actions, while still centring around similar issues before his transformation are now all significantly set in the context of his dealings and contacts with peoples outside the covenant community. However, the contacts are now described in much more positive light by comparison. As such, it is arguable that the reiteration of the promise that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation (18:17) is not only in reference back to the promise in 12:2, but is now to be understood properly only in the 'developed' context of Gen.17.

Another reason for Yahweh's decision to divulge his intention to Abraham is because: "I have known him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh ..." (18:19). To "know" frequently signifies an intimate knowledge and relationship between two parties -- it has been argued that it is a technical term used to express a covenantal relationship as well as election.<sup>165</sup> This is precisely the new development in the relation-

ship between Yahweh and Abraham in Gen.17. Moreover, this "knowledge" of God regarding Abraham is also possibly related to the renaming of Abraham. In the Pentateuch, "to know" is frequently linked to renaming, where the character and destiny of the person so named is explicated (Gen.2:19f,23; 3:20; 5:29; Ex.2:10; 33:12; Deut.28:10). It is the prerogative of the superior to name the inferior, indicative of sovereignty and ownership. The renaming of Abraham as the father of nations is intimately linked to the covenantal demands and promises in Gen.17. Such being the new relationship of God and Abraham (and his descendants after him), one is in a better position to understand the mention of Yahweh's "knowledge" or expectation of Abraham in his covenantal obligations in 18:19. As Vawter commented: "The soliloquy celebrates the initial Yahwistic blessing of Abraham that constituted him the friend of God (cf. 12:2-3) and also (in v.19) brings out the moral and ethical demands imposed by this friendship which were previously stressed by P (cf. 17:1)."166

### 3) Significance of the 'Developed' Context and the Use of the Formula

We are now in the position to answer the question of the significance of the use of the formula expressing Abraham's universal destiny in the 'developed' context of the Abraham narratives. It is quite striking that the formula is referred to in the soliloquy set in the context of Yahweh's judgement of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which are outside the covenantal community and Abraham's concern, and not somewhere in the divine speech to Abraham in Gen.17, especially vv.4ff, where the context is surely more natural and logical to express Abraham's universal destiny and mission. Whatever the

reason, as it stands in the Abraham narratives, this "holding over" of the formula enhances the significance of Abraham's universal destiny because the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is the first event in which Abraham is involved after his transformation. Considering the introverted and narrow horizon of Abraham's concern in the first half of the Abraham story and his refusal to have anything constructive to do with the people of Sodom in Gen.14, it is at least a theoretical possibility that he would do the same in Gen.18-19 and merely consider his kinship responsibility to Lot and his family only. It is also necessary to recall that Gen.18-19 is one of the four narratives we analysed in which Abraham did not receive any command or instruction from God what to do in the situation. In fact, after divulging to Abraham of his intention, Yahweh strikingly stood before Abraham as if waiting to see what he would do in the grave situation.<sup>167</sup> Would Abraham revert to his introverted and narrow horizon or act as the father of a multitude of nations ought to in the circumstance? Recognising his limitations, "I have taken upon myself to speak to Yahweh, I who am but dust and ashes" (18:27), Abraham, nevertheless, proceeded to intercede for the people and cities. In other words, Abraham is for the first time in the story as a whole working out on his own his 'new' capacity as the father of a multitude of nations who is called to be a blessing for the nations of the earth. On this, Sarna quite aptly commented:

"With the alteration of his name and the performance of circumcision, the transformation of the patriarch is all but complete. Three times he had spoken with God and on each occasion his personal weal and woe had been the sole substance of his discourse. Now, however, a revolutionary change is about to take place. The very next dialogue with God involves a concern for the welfare of others, a plea for the lives of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah."<sup>168</sup>

While in basic agreement with Sarna's comment, it is quite obvious he has not taken into account the wider implications of Abraham's transformation with reference to the dynamics of the structure and arrangement of the overall story and the calling of Abraham to be a blessing for the nations.

It has been argued by some commentators that Abraham's involvement with the fate of the cities is only secondary to his concern for Lot and his family. It is beyond our scope to discuss this aspect of the overall story, but three points can be briefly mentioned. First, in the present form of the story, there is no clear hint that Abraham's concern was primarily for Lot, as in 14:13-16. Lot's deliverance is more likely due to his hospitality and protection for the angels in contrast to the treatment they received from the inhabitants of the city (19:4-11). Undoubtedly, Lot's own heeding of the angels' warning to flee is also decisive. While it is true that the statement in 19:29, "when God destroyed the cities ... God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow", means that Lot's deliverance is related to God's regard for Abraham, it does not necessarily show that Abraham's intercession was primarily for Lot.<sup>169</sup>

Secondly, despite his deliverance by Abraham in 14:16, and the known wickedness of the Sodomites against God (13:13; 18:20), Lot persisted in dwelling amongst them. It is hardly conceivable that Abraham would assume that Lot and his family would justifiably constitute the ten righteous in the city on the basis of whom God might spare the city from destruction.<sup>170</sup> The two sons-in-law would certainly not be included among the righteous considering their mocking reaction to Lot's request (19:14). Finally, Abraham's

concern for the local inhabitants need not be considered secondary to that for Lot in the present story, irrespective of the fact that they stood outside the covenant community; for Lot and his family also were presumably not circumcised into Abraham's covenant with God. In fact, Abraham's concern for the Sodomites is only befitting of his 'new' status and responsibility as "the father of nations".

#### 4) Abraham and Noah

As a result of his transformation in Gen.17, Abraham now stands in Gen.18-19 as "the father of nations". Along with the transformation, two further characteristics can also be ascribed to him. Abraham has already been described in 15:6 as "righteous" by Yahweh. In 17:1, he is further commanded by God to "walk before me, and be blameless." He also received the promise: "I ... will multiply you exceedingly ... I will make you exceedingly fruitful" (17:2b,6a). With these characteristics, Abraham's newly transformed status gains wider significance when it is recalled that the second universal figure, Noah, was also described in practically the same terms.

(a) Noah is the only other person, besides Abraham, in the Old Testament, to whom the same three "religio-moral" epithets are attached. Before the flood, Noah was described as a "righteous man, blameless in his generation" and that he "walked with God" (6:9). The difference between Abraham and Noah is only that, with the latter, these attributes were his character as God found him, while in the case of the former, they describe his (future) deeds in response to God's challenge or command. As Buber commented: "what matters in the Abraham narratives, in contrast to Noah, is not his character as

God finds it, so to speak, but what he does, and what he becomes."<sup>171</sup>

(b) Commentators have noted the apparent "dischronologization" of the Table of Nations (Gen.10) being placed before the Babel story (Gen.11) which explains the scattering of men over the earth and the division of language. As it stands, Gen.10 now functions as the fulfilment of the divine command in 9:1,7 to Noah: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Gen.10 made it clear that the fruitfulness and multiplying of mankind is to be seen as stemming from Noah: "These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood." (v.32; cf. v.1). In other words, Noah stood as the father of nations after the flood, at least in the primeval history. This is precisely Abraham's newly transformed status as described in 17:5f.

(c) The two key words in the promise to Abraham making him fruitful and multiply exceedingly (17:2b,6a) were first addressed to Adam and Noah in the creation mandate "Be fruitful and multiply" in their respective roles as representative man at the two points of the beginning of a new epoch in the primeval history (1:28; 9:1,7). After the first issue of the creation mandate to Adam, it was apparently lost with the judgement of the flood and needed to be reissued to Noah as mankind's representative after the flood. It is therefore striking that the same key words appear in Gen.17, again a new epoch so to speak with Abraham's transformation. The Babel event in Gen.11 with the self-willed decision of the men to settle down "lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" has apparently

nullified the creation mandate Noah received. The subsequent scattering of mankind in the Babel incident, while in a way it can be taken as a continuation of the creation command to "fill the earth", can hardly be taken as a positive fulfilment of or obedience by men to the creation mandate under blessing from God (1:28; 9:17).<sup>172</sup>

However, one has to distinguish the use of the key words in the cases of Adam and Noah on the one hand, and in the case of Abraham on the other. To the former two, the key words were used in the form of a command, whereas in the latter, they appeared as a promise to Abraham. This is striking because it seems to imply that Abraham, despite his newly transformed status, is as yet not ready to be reissued with the creation mandate. Before the issue and reissue of the creation mandate to Adam and Noah respectively, it appears that the conditions of the earth and man's relationship with God are in a 'harmonious' state in that they were both blessed by God first (1:26-31; 8:20ff). But, with the scattering of mankind because of their hybris against God and the break down in communication of mankind with each other (Gen.11), mankind, it seems, is not in a state to receive the mandate once again.<sup>173</sup> In view of this, it is therefore striking that the commands to Abraham in 12:2, "Be thou a blessing!" and in 17:1, "walk before me and be blameless" probably reflect the necessity of bringing about a restoration of that 'harmonious' or 'blessed' state of relationship in the first place before it is possible for the creation mandate to be reissued to mankind again. This suggestion appears to be supported by our analysis of the structure of the Abraham narratives since the key words "bless" (12:2) and "multiply" (17:2b,6a) appear again in the Abraham narratives only after he has won the commendation from

God, "for now I know that you are a fearer of God" (22:16). Thus, we believe Abraham's primary task is that of creating an environment of blessing and harmony so that the creation mandate can be properly reissued to mankind once again. We have already discussed earlier the relationship between the command Abraham received to "be a blessing" and the ultimate purpose of his call: "in you all the families of the earth shall find blessing" (see pp.167-172).

(d) That the parallel characteristics ascribed to Abraham and Noah are not unintentional when the similarities of the structure and motifs of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (Gen.18-19) and the Flood story are taken into consideration. God's judgement of the cities in the former is portrayed as "a complete destruction by [an]...event of cosmic and cataclysmic nature" which is paralleled by the Flood in Gen.6-9.<sup>174</sup> Westermann in his study of the patriarchal narratives and the primeval stories asserts that Gen.18-19 "in some of its features ... resembles the narrative of the deluge. By genre it belongs more with the narrative of the primal history than with the patriarchal stories."<sup>175</sup> The features Westermann has in mind are the annihilation of humankind by a single catastrophe; the sparing of individuals; the prior announcement of judgement to the one who will not (italics author's) be subject to judgement. One need not agree with Westermann when he goes into the question of the chronological priority of the different genres of the Abraham narratives to accept in general his form-critical observations of the similarities between the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative and the flood story.

Clark, who has criticised Westermann for equating the Sodom story and the flood story as the same type on the basis of Jolles'

ancient saga type, nevertheless also argued that "certain coincidental similarities between individual elements provided the opportunity for a similar structuring of the materials and thereby also for the reinterpretation of the flood story."<sup>176</sup> He listed the similarities between the two stories as:

- 1) Both concern non-Israelites;
- 2) Both contain a complete destruction by a natural event of a cosmic and cataclysmic nature;
- 3) One man is saved with his family;
- 4) Both imply a repopulation from the single hero;
- 5) An ultimate disgraceful outcome involves drunkenness and a breach of sexual mores;
- 6) The question of righteousness is central to both;
- 7) A statement occurs in both concerning "finding favour in the eyes of Yahweh" (6:8; 19:19);
- 8) God is judge (18:25) and the basis of the punishment being a moral-religious nature (cf. 6:5-7; 18:20f).

Clark then went on to make the suggestion:

"Whether or not all of these comparisons are valid and recognising that they appear in different layers of the traditions, still they collectively suggest more than a coincidental similarity between the Sodom story and the Noah cycle in J. As the motif of sin and God's judgement, conceived literally, is fundamental to the Sodom story, and as the Sodom story seems to have provided a model for the structuring of the Noah materials as a whole, we may suggest that ... in the reinterpretation the Sodom story provided the native type to which the flood story was assimilated as part of a larger Noah cycle."<sup>177</sup>

It is beyond our scope to discuss the form-critical and traditio-historical issues raised by the analyses of Westermann and Clark on the stories in question. Whatever views one holds, the two stories as they stand do present a meaningful and even intentional parallel in theme and motifs. Furthermore, our analysis above of the parallel characteristics between Abraham and Noah would strengthen this conclusion. As such, it is then possible to say that a further significance has been attached to the formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations" by its being placed quite intentionally

in the context of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative, a cataclysmic divine judgement parallel to the flood story, instead of in the more natural context of Gen.17, where Abraham's transformation was more akin to the characteristics of Noah.

However, if our conclusion regarding Abraham's primary task in the reversing of the curse mankind is subjected to in the primeval history by being a blessing himself first and foremost is anything to go by (unlike the creation mandate received by Noah, or for that matter Adam), then the significance of Abraham being portrayed in Gen.18-19 as a universal and representative figure parallel to Noah is probably to be seen in their dissimilarity, rather than their similarity.

While Clark has corrected and supplemented Westermann's view of the similarities of the stories of the flood and of Sodom and Gomorrah to quite an extent, we believe he, however, has missed the main element in the comparison. In the elements listed by Clark, other than the elements 1,2,6,8, which are not related to any particular figure in the stories, it appears that elements 3,4,5,7, are comparing Noah and Lot in the main. It is true that the latter group of elements does allow one to take Lot as being compared to Noah. We believe this to be only incidental as the stories stand. The differences between Lot and Noah are too great for such a comparison to be considered the serious intention of the two stories. Lot could hardly be described as a hero preserved to repopulate mankind in comparison to Noah (element 4). Clark suggested that the two stories involved a repopulation from the hero. However, there are some basic differences. While Noah is usually considered the father of the nations according to the Table

of Nations (Gen.10), it is actually his three sons who were involved in the procreation of mankind after the flood, unlike Lot (19:30-38). More striking is that Noah's preservation was with a specific purpose commissioned by God to "be fruitful and multiply", whereas no such purpose was explicitly involved in Lot's preservation. In fact, it was Lot's daughters who took the initiative in the procreation. The question of drunkenness and breach of sexual mores (element 5) do not carry the same weight in the two stories. While there is a specific curse in the case of Noah's son, Canaan (9:25ff), there is no such equivalent in the case of Lot's daughters. In fact, whether in the latter it is to be taken as a breach of sexual mores is open to question. Moreover, the basis of their finding favour with Yahweh respectively is quite different from each other (6:8; 8:6f cf. with 19:19,29).

In this, we believe Westermann's observation that the judgement is announced in advance to the one who will not be subject to it, viz. Noah and Abraham, is much more to the point of the comparison in the two stories, although he did not see the intentional parallel and its significance between Abraham and Noah in the way we have described. Nevertheless, Westermann did make the important observation that "the distinct element here (18:17-32) in contrast to [Gen.] 6-9 is the 'intercession' of Abraham. Its great importance must go back to an early date: the motif appears several times in the patriarchal history in quite different contexts."<sup>178</sup>

This distinction between Abraham and Noah is significant for understanding the role of Abraham to be a blessing for others. While both Abraham and Noah were let into the mind of God regarding his intended judgement (18:20f; 6:13), there is no parallel in the

flood story portraying God standing before Noah, as with Abraham, waiting for him to decide what to do in the circumstance (6:13-7:5; cf. 18:22). Abraham did not undergo the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah whereas Noah, although he was preserved, had to go through the flood. Noah was told by God what to do in the circumstance preparing the ark etc. (6:13-7:5) but was not told to be involved in delivering the people under judgement. On the other hand, Abraham's intercession was on his own initiative and he was therefore actively involved in the attempt to halt the judgement of God on the peoples of the cities. The main point here is not so much that Abraham's attempt at intercession failed to prevent God from carrying out his judgement but that he did what he did on his own initiative and within the characteristics of his newly transformed status.

The significance of this intercession of Abraham for the 'deliverance' of foreigners is further confirmed by God's description of him to Abimelech: "for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live" (20:7) and also by the effective result of his prayer (20:17f).<sup>179</sup> It is also interesting to note that Abraham's intercession for Abimelech, an "offender" outside the covenant community, is again on his own initiative, as in 18:22-33, without any instruction from God.

(e) The next significant contrast between Abraham and Noah lies in their responsibility to their children respectively. Some commentators have raised the question whether Noah has any mission at all, beyond "his generation" to be more exact. Buber is of the opinion that the clause "in his generation" attached to the religious-moral epithets describing Noah's righteousness and

character (6:9; 7:1) limited the scope of Noah's mission. In other words, Noah received no call that goes beyond his generation and no historical task.<sup>180</sup> While it is true that the phrase "in his generations" seems to qualify Noah's religio-moral epithets, it is another matter to say that he received no specific call nor historical task. When God revealed his intention of judgement to Noah and commanded him to build an ark, Noah also received the promise and 'mission': "I [God] will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you ..." (6:18ff; italics-ours). The purpose of this 'mission' of Noah was realised and reaffirmed, after the flood, when God said to Noah: "Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh ... that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth" (8:16f). Moreover, Noah also received the creation mandate (on behalf of mankind!): "Be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it" (9:7; cf. 9:1).<sup>181</sup> The command against the eating of flesh with its life (blood) and the taking of man's life (9:4ff) surely also must involve Noah in handing these religious-moral commands to his sons and descendants. Thus, the 'mission' of Noah does go beyond his generation.

Clark has made an interesting suggestion on Noah's 'mission':

"J has reinterpreted the righteousness of Noah (7:1b) from the perspective of the election ideology of the early monarchy, emphasizing the prospective (future) nature of this election ... Noah's election is based on the grace of Yahweh and is for service. J's theological concern is the realisation

of Yahweh's purpose for the world and nation when their actions, including those of its leaders, demand judgement. Noah is to be a saddîq for the world and thus guarantee its salvation."<sup>182</sup>

It is interesting to note that while Clark argues for "similarities in the portrayal of Noah and of Abraham" he sees them almost solely on the basis of 7:1 and 12:1-3, both being J passages structured according to the election ideology of the early monarchy.<sup>183</sup> While this could well be correct at a certain level of the traditions, we believed, as argued earlier, that the narrative of Abraham's call as it stands should be seen in 12:1-9 and not only 12:1-3. 12:1-9 has been demonstrated to be a counter narrative to the Babel incident. In any case, Clark's suggestion that the parallel of Abraham's and Noah's election can be seen in the similar structure of command-promise-obligation (12:1-3 and 7:1) is too general to be wholly convincing.

On the other hand, the similarities in the portrayal of Noah and Abraham are much more substantial and evident on the basis of Gen.6-9 (not merely 7:1-5) and the total picture of Abraham in Gen.17 with 18-19. The similarities can be compared as below:

Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. (6:9)

(Abraham reckoned by Yahweh to be righteous, 15:6). I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless. (17:1)

I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. (6:18)

I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you. (17:7)

Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me ... Take ... animals to keep them alive upon the face of all the earth. For ... every living thing ... I will blot out from the face of the ground. (7:1-4)

Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall find blessing in him. No, for I have known him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice ... (18:17ff)

Surprisingly, Clark did not even consider the above passages concerning Abraham, despite their close parallel with the passages on Noah, in his discussion of the functions of the two universal figures.

While we are not entirely convinced of his argument that the purpose of Noah's election is based primarily on the parallel call of Abraham in 12:1-3, his suggestion that 7:1 constitutes (for the Yahwist at least) the election of Noah for service in Yahweh's universal purpose is not entirely without validity. If indeed Abraham and Noah had a parallel mission, on the broader base we tried to show above than Clark's suggestion, then the significance is not that they both have one but that the outcome of them is different.

Almost as soon as Noah had brought some relief out of the ground to alleviate the toil of man's labour by discovering winemaking (9:20; cf. 5:29), the narrative mentioned Noah's drunkenness and the tragic outcome of the curse of Canaan (9:21-27).<sup>184</sup> While Vawter argues that Noah's drunkenness was not a moral judgement in the narrative, he nevertheless conceded that "the nakedness was an abdication of the right of human respect, a shameful thing in itself, brought about by Noah's drunkenness."<sup>185</sup> This state of affairs is already happening even in the very first generation of the family preserved from the Deluge to be, as Clark describes, "a saddiq for the world and thus guarantee its salvation." The 'tragedy' of Noah's mission is acutely felt when the earth-wide judgement in the primeval history, the scattering of the tower-builders in Gen.11, took place later, there was no one among Noah's descendants (if one can put it that way) to plead for the deliverance of the 'city' of Babel.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21). Interestingly, Clark, who argues strongly for the election-mission

of Noah, as well as supporting Rendtorff's thesis that the primeval history (of the Yahwist) ends in 8:21, also concedes that:

"J intends that we see in the vineyard and tower narratives a recapitulation of the events prior to the flood, albeit somewhat condensed. First occurs a story of sin on the individual level followed by a story in which sin threatens to reach cosmic dimension again."<sup>187</sup>

Thus, from the above, it appears that in the primeval history, Noah is being portrayed as 'failing' eventually in his election-mission, as Adam 'failed' also in his own way.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, the notice of Noah's death which we discussed earlier seems to support this view (see pp.88ff).

Where Noah had apparently 'failed' with his own sons, Abraham is given the task to charge his children to walk in the way of Yahweh, by doing righteousness and justice (18:19). Speiser aptly describes Abraham as God's chosen agent for implementing his will, and "as the spearhead in the quest for a worthy way of life."<sup>189</sup> Likewise, Driver commented that Abraham is chosen by God "in order that he may be the founder of a house or family, and ultimately of a people, in which the knowledge of God may be perpetuated, and in which the principle of true religion may be known and obeyed."<sup>190</sup> We have earlier suggested that Isaac's surprisingly submissive acquiescence to the decision of and the reasons behind Abraham's actions concerning his marriage (Gen.24) and his binding (Gen.22) could very well be meant to be allusions to Abraham fulfilling the charge he received from Yahweh in 18:17ff (see pp.148-151).

But, as far as our study is concerned, the significance of the charge Abraham received concerning the way his household and his children should walk in is that it is not an end by itself. By placing the charge to Abraham immediately after the initial statements

in the soliloquy (18:17f), Abraham's children and household is thereby drawn into Abraham's ultimate mission to be a blessing for the nations in their plight. The promise that Abraham (and therefore his descendants) would become a great and mighty nation (18:17) is to be seen as enabling the task and calling of Abraham to be fulfilled.<sup>191</sup> Moreover, as we have shown earlier, the 'insertion' of the notice reaffirming the birth of Isaac, the promised heir, in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (18:9-15) also serves to set the universal horizon of Abraham's concern for peoples outside the covenant community as the ultimate framework for understanding the purpose of the giving of the promise by God to Abraham in the first place. Terrien made a similar observation when he says:

"By such a work of juxtaposition, the Yahwist's theologian deliberately inserted the promise of Abraham's posterity within the universal vision of the Heilsgeschichte. The nation of Abraham is viewed, once again, for ... 'all the nations of the earth' ... Promise and election may never be separated from the salvation of the entire world."<sup>192</sup>

##### 5) Summary

Our analysis of the immediate and 'developed' contexts of the divine soliloquy (18:17ff), in which the formula expressing the theme under study is strikingly embedded, has shown, we believe, that there are strong grounds for Abraham and Noah to be taken as parallel universal figures with similar missions against the background of God's judgement of mankind (though more in a representative sense in the case of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative). However, we have also shown that the differences between the two universal figures are probably more significant. While Noah is more a passive agent in God's judgement, Abraham is not only more active, but the latter took the initiative to intercede for deliverance.

Where Noah has apparently "failed" in his task to teach his sons to continue in his "religio-moral" task, Abraham is charged with the responsibility of instructing his children and household in the way of Yahweh and apparently succeeded with Isaac, in whom Abraham's seed shall be named, 21:12. In all these involvements of Abraham in God's plan to bless mankind once again, it is probably not without intention that the second occurrence of the formula expressing Abraham's universal destiny to be a blessing for the nations is reiterated in the divine soliloquy in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (Gen.18-19), being "held over" from what is arguably its more natural context in Gen.17.

C) Gen.22:1-19

1) General Observations

The third and final use of the formula in the Abraham narratives appears in 22:18, the context of which is Abraham's binding and near-sacrifice of Isaac at the command of God, the climactic end to the main body of the Abraham story. In our analysis of the structure and arrangement of the Abraham narratives in the previous chapter, we have shown how an inclusio design is effected by the two narratives, 12:1-9 and 22:1-9, which begins and ends the Abraham story respectively. What is of significance for our purpose is that the inclusio design is effected within the framework of the theme of Abraham being called to be a blessing for others. Moreover, we have also just seen the links 12:1-9 and Gen.18-19, Abraham's call and the Sodom and Gomorrah narratives respectively, have with the Babel incident (11:1-9) and the Flood story (Gen.6-9) respectively. The former two narratives, with the theme "Blessing

for the Nations" embedded, appear to be structured to parallel the latter two narratives in the primeval history with the 'function' of reversing the breaking of bounds by mankind against God and the consequential judgement and curse. With the two general observations just mentioned, it is therefore natural to pursue the links and ask whether or not the narrative of 22:1-19, where the formula and theme appears for the third and final time in the Abraham story, also has the same function and significance in linking the Abraham story to the wider Pentateuchal context, in particular the primeval history.

Earlier, we already had occasion to note Muilenburg's observation that Adam, Noah, and Abraham are portrayed as parallel universal figures in the Book of Genesis. In the primeval history, there are four key events recording men's sin or wickedness and subsequent divine judgements. They are: the Eden story (Gen.2-3); Cain's murder of Abel (Gen.4); the Flood story (Gen.6-9); and the Babel incident (Gen.11). As 12:1-9 and Gen.18-19, the two narratives in the Abraham story containing the formula expressing the theme "Blessing for the Nations", have been shown to be paralleled in the Babel incident and the Flood story respectively, it is reasonable therefore to adopt as a working basis that the climactic event in the Abraham story, 22:1-9, could well be related to the Eden story, Gen.2-3, the first climactic breach in the divine-human relationship. The Eden story and its consequences, in all intents and purposes, is probably to be seen in the context of the primeval history as the basic event which causes the ensuing breaching of the divine-human relationships therein. The working basis we just adopted can be demonstrated one way or other only after a comparison of the two narratives is made. The narrative of Cain's murder of Abel is not

considered in the links between the Abraham story and the primeval history on two accounts. First, there is no parallel event in which Abraham has a brother. Abraham belongs to the first generation of characters like Adam, while Cain and Abel belong to the second generation. Secondly, the Cain-Abel incident is initially seen as a breach in man's responsibility to his brother before it is seen as a specific challenge directed to God, unlike the other three key events in the primeval history.<sup>193</sup>

Before we can properly analyse the possible links between the final narrative in the Abraham story, 22:1-19, and the Eden story, Gen.2-3, in view of our observations about the structure of the Abraham story earlier, the issue of the promised heir and the pivotal influence of the 'voice' of Sarai/Sarah in the matter has to be considered in our present discussion as well. It will go beyond our scope to analyse the Eden story in detail. We will compare and contrast only the main elements pertaining to the portrayal of Adam in his response to God's command (2:15ff) and the consequential judgement with that of Abraham's response to God's command regarding the sacrifice of Isaac and the outcome of his action.

## 2) Abraham and Adam

(a) First, the command to Abraham (22:1f) and to Adam (2:16f) already shows a different orientation. Abraham is commanded to "take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and ... offer him ... as a burnt offering." On the other hand, Adam is given a command (prohibition) after a permission, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (2:16f). Abraham is asked to give up life, Isaac's.

It inevitably involves putting Abraham's own life (future) at risk as well for all the promises he received from God are now bound up in Isaac, his only son. The demand and urgency of the command can be seen in the three-fold descriptions: take - go - offer; and of Isaac: your son, your only son, whom you love. Unlike 12:1-3, there is no accompanying promise or reason given with the command. By contrast, Adam is exhorted to keep life and not to choose death. A reason is given for the prohibitive command: "for in that day you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:17).

(b) Secondly, the responses of Abraham and Adam to God's command respectively also show some striking contrasts. Taking Adam first, he dropped out of sight abruptly and completely in the dialogue which went on between the serpent and Eve (3:1-5). In the dialogue, doubts were cast over Eve's mind by the serpent about God's ulterior motive as well as the outcome of the command to Adam. It was insinuated by the serpent that she and Adam will not die after eating the fruit. In fact, the reason for God's prohibition is that he "knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:4f). This different interpretation of God's command to Adam raises the issue of doubt about the good intention of God, his trustworthiness, his power or sovereignty on the one hand, but more importantly, of hybris against God to be like him on the other.

Various interpretations have been forwarded to explain what the knowledge of good and evil really entails. Attempts to identify it with moral or aesthetic discernment, a Hebraism for 'everything', or sexual awakening, do not seem to be very convincing in the context.

The emphasis of the command in 2:16f appears to lie not so much on the naming of the properties of the tree, but rather on the prohibitive command of God.<sup>194</sup> The obeying or disobeying of the command involves man's recognition of God's prerogative and sovereignty to issue such command and the corresponding response from his creatures. The point at issue in the command as we suggested appears to be reflected in the serpent's insinuation to Eve the 'real' possibility of her (and Adam) to be like God. Clark, in his analysis of the use of "good" and "evil" in Gen.2-3, commented:

"the J emphasis is not on the content of knowledge but on man's moral autonomy. Man takes upon himself the responsibility of trying apart from God to determine whether something is good for himself or not ... man declares himself what is good. He does what is good in his own eyes rather than what is good in the eyes of God. ... J's emphasis is on the commandment, whether man will indeed listen to the voice of Yahweh."<sup>195</sup>

With the insinuation of the serpent, Eve began the process of reassessing God's command and purpose. When the process of reassessment reached the point where apparently a conclusion has been formed, Eve made the decision and "took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate" (3:6de; emphases ours). The 'fatal' action of Adam comes only at the end of the woman's entertaining of the serpent's insinuation, reassessment, and conclusion. Walsh commented that "at the centre of the narrative stands the account of the human's sin. More precisely, the concentric structure of the [Eden story] ... reveals that the man's sin -- the single word wayyō'kal -- is the turning point of the entire Eden account."<sup>196</sup> This is so only when we take into account the decisive role of Eve. Adam is portrayed as a totally submissive character quite contrary to the picture of him in the 'directing' role of naming the animals and birds, and of declaring the woman God created

as the "helper fit for him" (2:18-23). Indeed, in 3:6, Adam is described in a subordinating position to Eve as "her husband".<sup>197</sup>

Strikingly, the only other occasion in the Book of Genesis when a man is described by the phrase "her husband" in relation to a decision and action initiated by the wife is in Gen.16. The context of Gen.16 is Sarai's decision to take into her own hands the question of the future of her own 'house' when she was still barren after God's promise of an heir to Abraham of his own (16:1; 15:4). A similar process of reassessment of God's word or promise, like Eve's, took place with Sarai. She finally concluded: "Behold now, Yahweh has prevented me from bearing children" (16:2). We are not told when the process of reassessment began with Sarai after the promise in 15:4f, and how long it took before she reached her conclusion in 16:2. The striking thing, however, is when the conclusion is reached that God's word is not what she thought it to be, Sarai made the decision and "took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived ..." (16:3). The same sequence expressed by similar verbs: took, gave, ate/went in, occur in 3:6de and 16:3.

In the whole process of reassessment of God's word by the two wives respectively, the husbands, Adam and Abraham respectively, was completely out of the picture. In both narratives, the wives were not ready to accept the status quo as it were and they were determined to take action to subvert or to bring about God's promise, which involved putting their husband under directive. As Adam is described as "her husband" in relation to Eve's action, so is Abraham called "her husband" in relation to Sarai's. As the action of Eve brought about the fatal action of Adam and caused the negative turning

point in the Eden story, so did the action of Sarai on Abraham in Gen.16 turned out to be the negative mid-point in the overall structure of the Abraham story as we argued earlier in the chapter. The corollary of the comparison above is that in Gen.16, Abraham failed just as Adam failed in Gen.3 in relation to the word of God. But it is striking in the case of Abraham, his calling and mission in God's plan to bless mankind once again is reaffirmed. In fact, his nature and destiny was expanded by his transformation (re-creation!) in Gen.17, as we have analysed earlier. Nevertheless, Abraham's transformation in Gen.17 was set in a framework of covenantal demands and obligations (17:1f) which are yet to be proved at that point. The question at Gen.22 is therefore whether Abraham, now the 'new' man, would prove otherwise when the word of God comes to him again. Just as Adam and Abram were tested by God previously, so the new Abraham ought also to meet his test with regard to the quality and nature of his relationship with God. This he meets in the present narrative, Gen.22:1-19.<sup>198</sup>

The situation for Abraham in Gen.22 is acutely different from that for Adam in Gen.2-3. Abraham is already in possession of Isaac, with all the promises and destiny of Abraham bound up in him. This made the test required of him to give up Isaac that much more radical and difficult. Moreover, no reason was given for the test. It is not so much to stop Abraham from grabbing something which he has not or should not have, but rather to give up something of vital importance which is already his. On the other hand, the picture one has of Adam is that he was not yet in possession of what Eve desired, to be like God (3:5f; cf. 3:22). Moreover, he was forewarned beforehand not to 'have' what does not belong to him.

While Adam failed, the question in Gen.22 revolves around Abraham whether he would make himself the final arbitrator, and by extension the 'voice' of Sarah considering the pivotal influence of it in the the whole issue of the promised heir in the Abraham story, to decide what he does with Isaac, his son, or whether he would be able to recognise the real nature of Isaac as a gift (for the ultimate purpose of being a blessing for the nations, 18:17ff) and thereby to submit that God has the ultimate prerogative over it?

The contrast between Abraham in 22:1-19 and Adam in 3:6f, or for that matter Abram in 16:2f, is expressed by the decisive action of the former in 22:9f, "When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there ... Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." In 22:1-19, the decisive action of Abraham is also the pivotal turning point which brought about the intervention of the angel of Yahweh to prohibit Abraham from taking the life of Isaac (or losing the life from another point of view).<sup>199</sup> In the short space of eight verses (22:1-8), except v.7, Abraham was prominently described as the subject, decision maker, and initiator, after the initial command of God (vv 1f), of the step by step actions leading to the climax of vv.9f. Sarai's/Sarah's 'voice' in 16:1ff and 21:9f respectively, as Eve's in 3:4f, is strikingly absent in Gen.22 especially after its pivotal influence in Abraham's relationship to the word of God. In contrast to that in the Eden story and Gen.16, there is not even mention of any reassessment of God's word by Abraham when he set out "early in the morning ... to the place of which God had told him" (22:3).

(c) The antithetical parallel between Abraham and Adam is

continued in the respective descriptions of the consequences after their fatal actions, and the ensuing dialogues between God and Abraham on the one hand, and between God and Adam on the other. It is interesting that the description of the consequences of Adam's action comes before the dialogue in 3:7-11, while the dialogue comes before the description of the consequences of Abraham's action in 22:11-14, as if to reflect the different emphasis of the two passages concerned. If our thesis that Gen. 22:1-19 is intended in some way to show Abraham as an antithetical, though parallel, universal figure to Adam reversing the breach in the divine-human relationship caused by Adam's disobedience in the Eden story, then this inversion of order in the two passages is also an interesting way of showing it. For comparison, we will set 22:11-14 in reverse order against 3:7-11:

Gen. 3:7-11

Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew [יָדָעוּ], saw! that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves apron. (7)

And they heard the sound of the Lord God ... and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God ... (8)

But the Lord God called (יָקָרָא) to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" and he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid (יָרָא), because (כִּי) I [knew! 3:7] was naked; and I hid myself. (9f)

"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? (11)

Gen. 22:11-14

And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, ... a ram ... and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh will provide; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of Yahweh it shall be provided." (13f)

(No equivalent negative reaction by Abraham on hearing the angel of Yahweh calling!)

But the angel of Yahweh called (יָקָרָא) from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" and he said, "Here am I." "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for (כִּי) now I know (יָדָעוּ) you are a fearer of God (יָרָא אֱלֹהִים). (11-12b)

seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (12c)

Immediately after Adam and Eve ate of the tree, their eyes were opened as told by the serpent, and "they knew [or saw!] that they were naked." On knowing this, they took upon themselves to look for fig leaves as covering presumably because they were ashamed (cf. 2:25). Thus, two significant changes took place when their eyes were opened. They now see something about their nakedness which they did not previously. Moreover, they now have to make provision for their own need themselves, whereas, previously, their needs were provided for by God (2:8f,15f).

On the other hand, after his near 'fatal' action, Abraham lifted his eyes and also saw something, which was in all probability already there, but not noticed by him before. In further contrast to the self-provision of Adam and Eve, Abraham was provided with a ram for the offering instead of his own son, hence the name-calling of that place "Yahweh will provide". In his absolute obedience and trust, Abraham's eyes were 'opened' only to the sacrifice -- Isaac, that he was totally 'blinded' to something there which was ultimately to be the provision for his very need. On the other hand, Eve's vision (3:6, 'saw') and presumably Adam's as well were so attracted by the possibility of being like God that she entertained it as potentially real when it was not the case.<sup>200</sup> Instead, she 'closed' herself unwittingly to the real possibility of what was forewarned in 2:17, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

The dialogue which follows after each fatal action in the two passages contains some very striking parallels. In the whole of Genesis, only twice (3:9; 22:11) is Yahweh (or his angel) the subject of the verb אָמַר with expectation of a response from the hearer to give an account or to action.<sup>201</sup> In 3:9, the calling was

to draw him out of his guilt-fear and hiding in order to give an account for his action. Adam related what he knew (  $\text{ׁוּׁוּׁוּ}$  ) after his fatal action. With Abraham, in 22:11, it was an urgent call to prevent him from following through in his resolute obedience and strikingly evoked the confession from God, as if he did not know before, "for now I know (  $\text{ׁוּׁוּׁוּׁוּ}$  ) that you are a fearer of God."

The immediate result of Adam hearing Yahweh's voice calling is fear (  $\text{ׁוּׁוּׁוּ}$  ) and his attempt to hide. Good commented that "the fruit, touted as the source of divine power, produces not the Godlike knowledge of good and evil but only the perception of helplessness. Having grasped after the divine knowledge, man now ludicrously hides from the God he sought to displace."<sup>202</sup> In striking contrast, on hearing the angel of God's call, Abraham was able to answer without any hesitation or fear as a 'servant' who has fulfilled his task and is ready to give an account of himself.<sup>203</sup> More importantly, Abraham received what is probably one of the most commendable verdicts to be passed on man's relationship with God in the Old Testament: "for now I know that you are a fearer (  $\text{ׁוּׁוּׁוּׁוּ}$  ) of God" (22:11). Adam's disobedience, thinking that it would bring him knowledge to be like God, indeed brought him knowledge but only of his own shameful nakedness,<sup>204</sup> and caused consequential guilty fear in him of God. On the other hand, after Abraham's obedience, God's confession or knowledge of Abraham as a fearer of God seems to imply, as Crenshaw commented: "the successful completion of the test communicates knowledge to God" (cf. 18:19).<sup>205</sup> Whatever the case may be, it was the result of Abraham's obedience. The two fundamentally different kinds of fear shown by Adam and Abraham respectively stem from two fundamentally different human assessments and responses to the word

or voice of God.

The contrasting reaction of Adam and of Abraham to the voice of God calling for an account is reflected in the respective answers given. To Adam, God asked, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I command you not to eat?" (3:11), and Adam had to answer for himself, albeit blaming the woman and God in the process (3:12). On the other hand, Abraham did not even have to answer except to exclaim: "Here I am!" In fact, it was God himself who provided the answer for his calling and commendation of Abraham in the first place: "seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (22:12).

(d) Finally, the antithetical parallel between the two universal figures can be seen in the verdict of God on both men (3:17-24 and 22:15-19). Both verdicts centre around the issue of obedience to the voice of God. Of Adam, it is said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife", which is contrasted in the narrative to his not listening to the command of God (3:11,17). There is undoubtedly a play on the use of the words "שָׁמַע" and "שָׁמַע" in the narrative. In 3:10, Adam said to God: "I heard (שָׁמַעְתִּי) the sound (שִׁמְעָה) of thee ... and I was afraid", whereas in 3:17, God said to Adam: "Because you have listened (שָׁמַעְתָּ) to the voice (שִׁמְעָה) of your wife ...". Clark noted that:

"J's emphasis is on the commandment, whether man will indeed listen to the voice of Yahweh. The theme of command is not dropped in 2:17 [also 3:11,17], and 3:8 speaks of man's hearing the 'voice of Yahweh Elohim.' This seemingly innocent comment is taken up in vs.10 when Adam says, 'Your voice I heard in the garden, and I was afraid ...' Man has not 'heard the voice of Yahweh,' with all that phrase means in terms of obedience. In saying that he has heard and feared Yahweh, man shows how little he recognises what he has done."<sup>206</sup>

On the other hand, it is said of Abraham: "because you have obeyed (שָׁמַעְתָּ) my voice (קוֹלִי)" (22:18), which undoubtedly is also related to the earlier commendation that Abraham is known to be a fearer of God. We have already shown earlier in the chapter that, in the context of the Abraham story, Abraham's listening to God's voice is intended to contrast with and to reverse his previous listening to the voice of Sarai/Sarah (16:2; 21:11). In the whole of Genesis, only in these narratives of Adam and Abraham do we find the voice of God and the voice of the wife presented as alternatives which involve the issue of God's prerogative to command with expectation of an appropriate response from the listener and the trustworthiness of his words.<sup>207</sup>

The function and significance of the antithetical parallel between Adam and Abraham in the context of the primeval history and the Abraham (and patriarchal) narratives is probably best summed up in the respective outcome of the verdicts given by God to each universal figure.

3:17c-19 - Adam

"Cursed (אָרֻרָה) is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken;

Dust you are and to dust you shall return" (3:17c-19).

22:16ff - Abraham

"By myself I have sworn, says Yahweh, because you have done this ... I will surely bless you (בְּרַךְ אֲבִרְכֶךָ), I will surely multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your seed shall possess the gates of their enemies,

and by your seed shall all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves ..." (22:16ff).

From the comparison, it is immediately striking that the key word "curse" in the negative verdict of God after Adam's disobedience in the Eden story finds a positive reversal in the emphatic oath of God reaffirming his promise to "bless" Abraham after his God-fearing obedience. If indeed Abraham's response to the voice of God in Gen.22 is to be seen as the antithetical parallel to Adam's response to the voice of God in Gen.3, as we have argued, then the use of  $\text{ברך}$  in Gen.22 is more emphatic because after its initial five-fold use in 12:2f, the word is not used again of Abraham personally until after he proved his character as a God-fearer.

The life of hard toiling without the active cooperating fertility of the ground which mankind is henceforth destined to after Adam's disobedience also symbolises the loss of men's dominion or control over creation given to him by God (3:17-19; cf. 1:28). In contrast, the destiny reaffirmed to Abraham for his seed: promises of blessing, fertility, growth, and dominion (over enemies and their land; see 12:2,7; 13:14-17; 15:5,12-21; 17:1-8); stands as the concluding speech of Yahweh to Abraham.<sup>208</sup> Interestingly, these promises to Abraham, meant eventually for his seed, were fulfilled, at least initially, in the last narrative of the overall Abraham story, Gen.24, before his death. It is stated in 24:1, "Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and Yahweh had blessed Abraham in all things." This is further confirmed in his servant's elaboration to Laban in 24:35f.<sup>209</sup>

No matter how one takes the meaning and significance of the final words in God's judgement to Adam: "Dust you are and to dust you shall return" (3:17), it is undoubtedly a note of final hopelessness, futility, and lifelessness. The stark contrast with

the dynamic expectancy in 2:7 when "the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" could not be more striking. Man in trying to be like God is now ironically declared that he is but dust by the very God he tries to displace.<sup>210</sup> With this final (negative) note, the incongruity of man's destiny as it now stands (3:17) with what could have been his dignity and destiny is emphatically and ironically struck; "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion ...'" (1:27).

Interestingly, even the movements of the two universal figures after God's respective verdict seem to play a role in the contrasting of them. Adam was sent away from the garden, the presence of God, the source of life and blessing.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, now being dust and therefore having nothing to do with life by himself, Adam was prevented from re-entering the garden of God. In fact, God himself acts as the 'antagonist' by placing the cherubim with a flaming sword guarding the way to the tree of life.<sup>212</sup> On the other hand, Abraham, earlier prevented by the angel of God from using the knife (and fire) to actualise the offering, taking life, was given life (destiny) back by God providing a ram for the sacrifice instead of Isaac. Although Abraham was called out of mankind's scattering (11:8f; 12:1), he was still very much a man on the move even after arriving in the land of which God showed him (12:8f; 12:10,19f; 13:1,3f,18; 20:1; 21:34). It was only after the test when God approved of Abraham's relationship to him that there are no more accounts of Abraham's travel. "So Abraham returned ... to Beersheba,

and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba" (22:19). Moreover, it is noteworthy that subsequent to Abraham's obedience and 'final' settling in the land, his seed, Isaac and later Jacob, both received a similar command, as Abraham did in 12:1; 22:1f, to either remain in (26:2f) or return to (31:3,13; cf.28:15) the land promised to and claimed by Abraham. What is interesting for our purpose is that of these four passages just mentioned, three of them are related to the land promised to Abraham, and the formula expressing the universal destiny of Abraham and his seed (Isaac and Jacob) to be a blessing for the nations is pronounced or related to in a stressed position (12:1-4,7; 26:2-5; 31:3,13 and 28:13ff).

One other feature in the comparison of the verdicts of God after the disobedience of Adam and the obedience of Abraham respectively will be briefly noted but not discussed in detail. After Adam's disobedience, in God's judgement over the serpent, the motif of the seed, apparently of some significance in the context, is suddenly mentioned for the first time in the future destiny of mankind. It is stated: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (3:15). Interestingly, after Abraham's obedience, the seed is also mentioned for the first time in the formula pronouncing Abraham's universal destiny to be a blessing for the nations as the 'new' agent of blessing (22:18). In our formulaic analysis earlier, we have already argued that the first mention of the seed in Abraham's universal destiny is not without significance as it has been mentioned quite frequently as recipient of other promises made to Abraham by God before that in the Abraham story.

### 3) Summary

To sum up our discussion of 22:1-19 and 2:4b-3:24, the comparison of the two narratives shows substantial parallels between the two universal figures, Abraham and Adam respectively, to warrant the conclusion that they are indeed being contrasted, with particular reference to God's purpose of creation and bringing blessing to mankind.

Important for the purpose of our study is the contrasting portrayals of the characteristics of the man who fears God because of hybris and the man who is a fearer of God by his absolute obedience, and the different ramifications of the contrast for mankind at large. Adam was called to bring blessing and life but failed. Instead, he brought curse and the finality of death. Abraham, who was called to restore blessing, though he failed initially, succeeded in the end, and begins at least potentially the restoration of the breach in the divine-human relationship caused by Adam's disobedience. With Abraham, a fundamental change in the direction of man's relationship to God is finally effected. Instead of moving away from the presence of God and from life (east of Eden!), mankind is now able to move towards God. In Adam, God lost his man who carries his image and likeness, his representative in his own world with the creation mandate. But in Abraham, God has regained a worthy representative, a prophet and servant, to continue God's intention of blessing and life for mankind.

Moreover, the significance of Abraham's obedience in reversing the negative consequences of Adam's disobedience is also seen in the fact that Abraham's universal destiny, which was only initially probational at most in 12:1-3, is now transmitted to his seed, Isaac,

in reaffirmation. The contrast in the relationship of the next generation of the two universal figures to God's purpose of blessing and necessity of judgement as portrayed in the Isaac narrative (Gen.26) and in Cain's murder of Abel and his banishment is quite instructive.

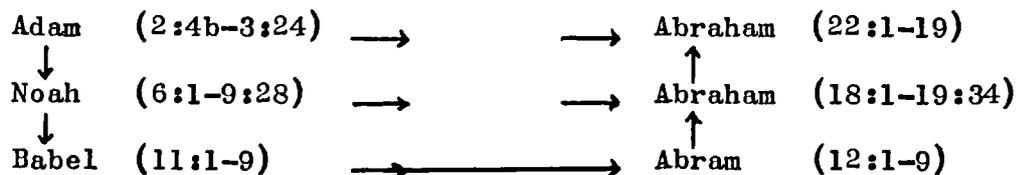
#### D) Conclusion

We began this chapter with the observation that the formula appears on three occasions in the Abraham story and asked the question whether there is any particular function or significance in its positioning. In addition, earlier in the chapter, we also commented that the function and significance of the occurrences of the formula in 12:3 and 22:18 is more readily seen by virtue of its being placed as the climactic statement in the opening and closing speech of Yahweh to Abraham. However, we did not analyse the occurrence of the formula in 18:18 then because we were concerned only to study the relationship of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" and the overall structure of the Abraham story. This we have now done and we are able to summarise our discussions as below.

(a) The use of the formula within the Abraham narratives themselves serves to set the whole story under the framework of the ultimate purpose of Abraham's initial and reaffirmed calling (12:3; 22:18) in order that "all the nations of the earth shall find blessing in him [and his seed]." The formula not only encased the Abraham story, but its 'instructive' juxtaposition in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (18:18), the first event after Abraham's re-naming as the father of nations, instead of somewhere more appropriate in 17:1-8, further confirms the function and significance of the theme in the

overall Abraham narratives.

(b) Our analysis also reveals a further significance intended by the positioning of the formula in the Abraham story. The three particular narratives in which the formula is positioned have been shown to parallel, by contrast, the three key figures or events in the primeval history.



In other words, there is a structural and functional reversal in the relationships of the three pairs of narratives. The three occurrences of the formula in the Abraham narratives are significantly placed in just those three episodes. The structure serves to retrace the steps of the movement of mankind away from God and to restore the breaches in the divine-human relationship, brought about first of all by man's hybris against God in Eden, in the primeval history. The diagram above need not be taken to mean that Noah stands at the same level as Adam and the tower-builders, who were judged by God. Nevertheless, in view of the overall structure of the primeval history, even with and after Noah, "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21).

In view of the structural and functional reversal of the three key events in the primeval history by the Abraham narratives as our analysis has revealed, it is interesting to note Fishbane's comment on the patriarchal narratives in his analysis of the Jacob story:

"In Eden, a sacred centre, there was all manner of blessing and life. These primary life values of fertile womb and fertile earth, of life and blessing, were all lost through the action of Eve and Adam: the womb was cursed, the earth was cursed, and humankind was exiled from sacred space. These values are momentarily retrieved by Noah (Gen.9); as noted, they also form the nucleus of the patriarchal blessing. Their reachievement is always the object of hope, fear and strife. It is this fracture of the unity of earthly life, even while these fragments are counterpointed by the divine promise, that underpins the anxiety and turmoil of the patriarchal texts as a whole."<sup>213</sup>

However, to attain this "reachievement" as Fishbane describes it, our analysis shows that it is necessary for Abraham to "be a blessing" in himself first as commanded in 12:2d before the ultimate purpose of God that "all the nations of the earth shall find blessing" can be realised again. The motif of obedience vis-à-vis hybris of men against God is central throughout the whole Abraham story as has been clearly shown in our analysis of the arrangement and structure of the Abraham story. It is only after Abraham has met the test and is pronounced a fearer of God who obeys the voice of God that the promises and universal destiny first given to him in 12:2f were emphatically reaffirmed to him under oath. Moreover, while Noah only momentarily retrieved the primary values of life, according to Fishbane's description, Abraham is portrayed as continuing his universal mission with his seed after him.

(c) Finally, taking the conclusions reached earlier (Chapter Three, I) together, it can thus be concluded that the theme of being a blessing for the nations in the Abraham narratives is not an isolated feature restricted only to 12:3b, nor narrowly based on the use of key terms such as "blessing", "families of the earth", "great name", linking the Abraham story to the negative aspects of the primeval history. It is also not even based on the use of the

formula alone, significant though it is. In fact, as our analysis has shown, the whole structure of the Abraham story itself, and the symmetrical folding back relationships of the three narratives in the Abraham story where the formula is strategically positioned and the three corresponding key events in the primeval history, all serve to demonstrate that the theme "Blessing for the Nations" is of considerable significance in the Abraham narratives. To base a study of the theme in the Abraham narratives solely on 12:1-4a as has usually been done is certainly not unjustified, but, as our analysis shows, it is far from satisfactory.

CHAPTER FOUR - THE THEME "BLESSING FOR THE NATIONS" AND THE  
ISAAC NARRATIVE (GEN.26)

A) Introduction

The fourth occurrence of the formula in the patriarchal narratives is in 26:4. It comes at the end of the divine speech which stands as a programmatic preface to the Isaac narrative. This fact is noteworthy because Gen.26 is the only narrative given over fully to traditions about Isaac. Of these traditions, Noth states:

"Here [Gen.26] we find a concatenation of various units of traditions which in part are merely sketched and are not really complete in themselves ... With the aid of a narrative thread [of the theme 'Isaac and the people of Gerar'] running through the whole, J has gathered up here in a compendium-like fashion everything that the oral tradition known to him had to say about Isaac. In so doing, he has made clear for his part what little weight he attached to the Isaac story in comparison to the stories of Jacob and Abraham. Nevertheless, the essential elements of the Isaac tradition did find their way into the dominantly literary recension of Gen 26 and therefore ... the sequence of the particulars ... is of no importance to the substantive analysis."<sup>1</sup>

In a similar vein, von Rad also notes of Gen.26, that

"it is not a narrative but a mosaic of Isaac stories ... [of] no less than seven traditional units ... On the other hand, one can easily see that an attempt was made subsequently to weld these brief traditional units more or less into a continued event. ... [Nevertheless] these traditions were written down essentially in their ancient versions, without being harmonised with the subsequent large composition of the patriarchal stories."<sup>2</sup>

Whatever traditio-historical views one holds of the Isaac traditions in Gen.26, it is pertinent to our study that the final selection of the Isaac traditions not only preserved the formula expressing the universal destiny of the patriarchs, here of Isaac, but also contained significant key-words, promises, and motifs linking the Isaac narrative closely with the Abraham narratives. As we are concerned mainly with the study of the function and significance of

the use of the formula in the present form of the Isaac narrative, we shall not involve ourselves with questions of a traditional-historical nature.

Despite their negative assessments of the Isaac narrative, Noth and von Rad at least recognise that the Isaac traditions as they now stand in Gen.26 have been given some sort of narrative form. However, it is hardly likely that they would see any literary or structural significance in the arrangement of the traditions. This scepticism of Noth and von Rad is also shared by most other commentators, of whom we shall quote the view of B. Vawter:

"The Yahwist ... has done his best to supply for the lacuna i.e. the paucity of information on the Isaac traditions by assembling a series of vignettes that might equally well apply, at least for the most part, to any other patriarchal figure. ... Perhaps in recompense for the prevailing anonymity of the second of the patriarchs in this passage, twice within its short compass Isaac is made the recipient of Yahweh's revelation (vv. 2-5 and 24)."<sup>3</sup>

In view of the almost universal negative assessments of the function and significance of the Isaac traditions in the patriarchal narratives, it is interesting to note one different interpretation of it, that of J.P. Fokkelmann. He describes Gen.26 as "demonstration-material" of blessing being worked out. He asks:

"What is a blessing, how does it work? The answer we find in some exemplar texts, in a sort of covenant-form such as Deut 28, which has been enclosed in a homiletic framework. But a real report of the working of a blessing, thus in narrative form, we find (apart from Num 22-24) here in Gen 26."<sup>4</sup>

He then listed at random an abundance of concrete examples in the narrative explaining what being blessed by God means.<sup>5</sup>

As to the question of the position and function of Gen.26 in the overall patriarchal narratives, Fokkelmann's views are both like and yet unlike the negative assessments of most commentators.

His is like them in that he regarded Gen.26 as showing "Isaac not for his sake, as someone with merits of his own. ... Nowhere is he worth a narration for his own sake, and his experiences are not individual but typical ... to any generations."<sup>6</sup> To be exact, this aspect of his comments applies only to the relationship of the Isaac traditions with that of the Abraham story (cf. 26:1-4 with 12:10-20 and 20:1-18; 26:15-22 with 21:25f; 26:23-33 with 21:22-34). So much is Fokkelmann influenced by the relationship of the Isaac and Abraham traditions that he sees the material of Gen.26 as arranged in three parts, vv.1-11, 15-22, and 23-33, all evidencing the dependence of the Isaac traditions on the Abraham traditions.<sup>7</sup> This is most clearly seen, he argues, in the specific reference to Abraham in vv.3 and 5, 15 and 18, 24, either as reasons for the promises or protection now given to Isaac or linking Isaac's well-digging efforts with the activity of his predecessor.

On the other hand, Fokkelmann is unlike the others in that while he continues to regard Isaac as insignificant in his own right, "only a link between two generations, the transmitter (no more) of the blessing of Abraham", he also argues that without the stories about blessing in Gen.26 one cannot understand Gen.27 in which the father (Isaac) solemnly transmits the blessing.<sup>8</sup> We might also add our earlier observation that Abraham is never said to have blessed Isaac even after 24:1,35f, which therefore makes Isaac's blessing of Jacob in Gen.27 more striking. Thus Fokkelmann comments:

"read[ing] the story of Ch.27 after Ch.26. Are we surprised that Isaac acts quite naturally with the blessing and that he speaks with authority? He was a life behind him rich with the repeated experience of being rescued by God from difficult situations when he was a stranger (ger) among the inhabitants of Canaan ... What Isaac is going to transmit in Gen.27 is, as it were, a life saturated with blessing."<sup>9</sup>

In view of the generally negative assessments of the Isaac narrative, its structure as well as its function in the overall patriarchal narratives, our study of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" and the Isaac narrative will initially be an attempt to determine whether there is any coherent literary structure to the narrative. Following this, we will ask what relevance or significance for the theme "Blessing for the Nations" has the literary structure, theme and motifs of the Isaac narrative? Finally, can it be shown that a relationship links the Isaac narrative to the patriarchal stories as a whole, viz. the Abraham and the Jacob cycle respectively, and that the Isaac narrative has something of significance to contribute to the overall patriarchal stories, especially where the theme under study is concerned. Moreover, we shall also have occasion to assess whether Fokkelmann's more positive understanding of Gen.26 as "demonstration-material" of blessing and as an explanation for the authoritative manner of Isaac's imparting of blessing to Jacob in Gen.27 is appropriate or adequate.

#### B) Structure and Arrangement

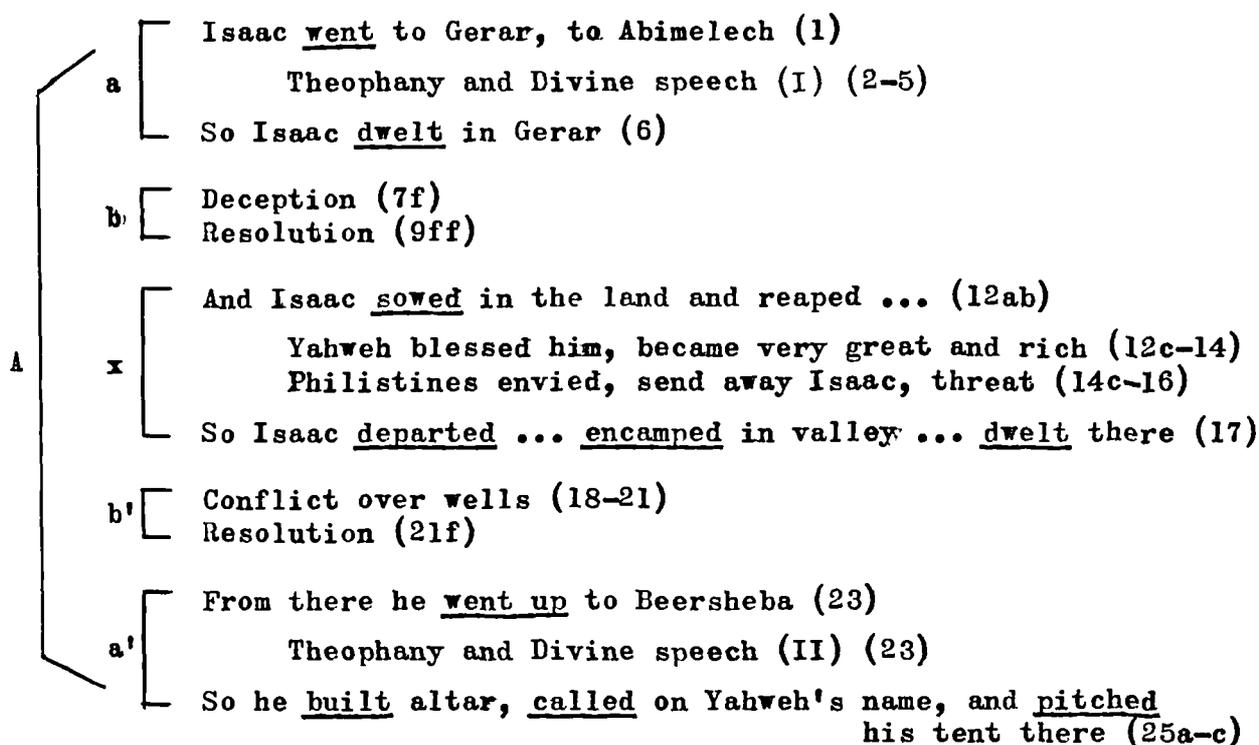
Despite the negative assessments of most commentators of the literary and structural coherence of Gen.26, two basic features of the narrative itself stand out quite prominently that merit further analysis. First, in the short space of thirty-three verses, in a total of ten verses, thirteen verbs of movement related to the purpose of settling down are used. When these are taken together with another seven such verbs used in direct speeches in a further five verses, one cannot but be struck by the almost repetitive use of verbs of movement in the narrative.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, using the words of von Rad,

this feature could be described as "an attempt ... to weld these brief traditional units more or less into a compact continued event." However, we believe a study of the arrangement of the verbs will reveal something much more substantial about the structure and arrangement of the narrative. After all, the verbs of movement are quite in line with the urgency and emphasis of the divine command to Isaac in the first divine speech, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land ..." (vv.2f), which has everything to do with the movements of Isaac in the narrative.<sup>11</sup>

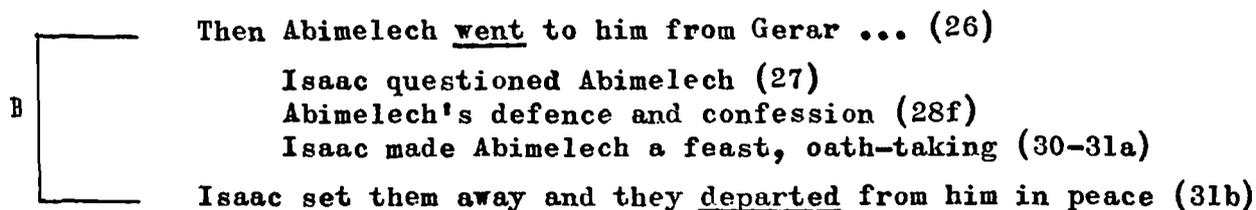
Secondly, there are three significant speeches in the narrative, two by Yahweh and one by Abimelech. The former two (vv.2-5, 24) appear to be very similar in content and also to be providing some sort of frame in the narrative. These are the only two occasions where Yahweh is said to speak to Isaac with programmatic promises. The content of the speech by Abimelech (vv.28f) shows it to be a very striking confession of an outsider of the significance of Isaac. The confession significantly employs the key words and promises (see vv.3,23) used by Yahweh in both the former speeches. These two basic observations lead us to ask whether there is not after all a coherent or intentional arrangement of the whole narrative in Gen.26. There are other details which we shall touch on at the appropriate places later. For the present, we shall only analyse the narrative for any possible coherent structure or arrangement. Only when this can be demonstrated shall we attempt a more detailed analysis of the various units of the narrative.

It appears that there are two sections to the narrative, vv. 1-25ab and 26-31. We shall leave vv.25c and 32f out of the

discussion for the moment. The transition from one section to the other can be seen in the change in the subject of the verbs of movement. From vv.1-25ab Isaac is constantly the subject of movement (vv.1,6,8,12,17,22,23,25), whereas from vv.26-31 it is Abimelech and his men who are the subjects. Moreover, as we mentioned above, the two speeches of Yahweh to Isaac, both in the context of a theophany, appear to form some sort of frame around the section where Isaac is the subject of the verbs of movement, thereby giving support to the division observed on the basis of the change in subjects of the verbs of movement in the narrative. The structure<sup>12</sup> is best seen in the arrangement below:



\*Isaac's servants dug a well (25d)



\* Isaac's servants report water find and naming (32f)

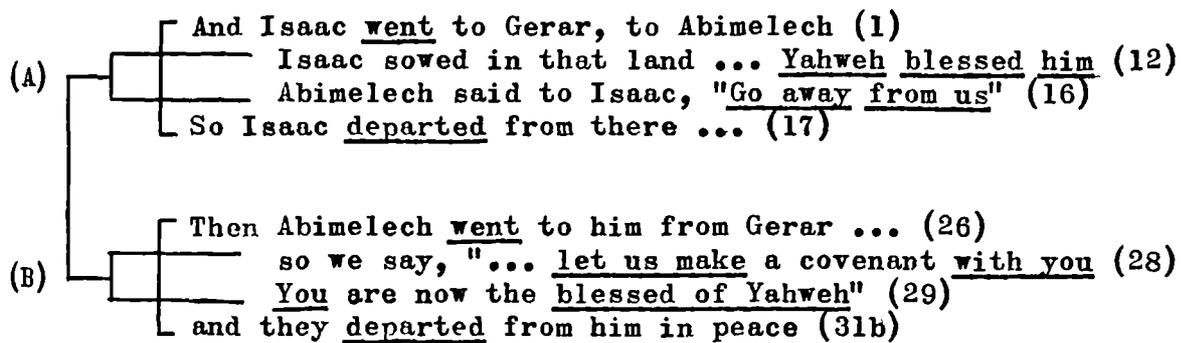
In (A), five units in symmetrical arrangement are structured by verbs of movement; vv.1-6 (a) is matched by vv.23-25c (a') with a theophany and divine speech in both units; vv.7-11 (b) with the motif of deception followed by a resolution is matched by vv.18-22 (b') with the motif of conflict also followed by a resolution. Both resolutions concerned the question of co-existence for the benefit of each other. vv.12-17 (x) therefore stand out as the middle of the section, the content of which, especially the results of Isaac's activities on the land is unique only to the Isaac narrative in the whole of the patriarchal narratives. It is also very striking because of the unexpected and paradoxical outcome of Isaac's blessings from Yahweh (vv.12c-14). This unit (x) is also the turning midpoint in the whole section as the direction of Isaac's movements after this is the opposite of what went before (cf. vv.1 with 17).

In section (B) (vv.26-31), we also find a frame structured by verbs of movement around the dialogue, confession and oath-taking between Isaac and Abimelech and his men (vv.26,31b; 27-31a). Only now the main subjects of the verbs of movement are Abimelech and his men. The subject/object of the verbs of movement, in fact, are arranged chiastically in the frame (vv.26,31b), as well as in the latter half of the frame itself.

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| a) | [ | Then <u>Abimelech</u> went to <u>him</u> from Gerar with Ahuzzah ... and Phicol ... (26)              |
| b) | ] | and <u>Isaac</u> set <u>them</u> on their way and <u>they</u> departed from <u>him</u> in peace (31b) |

Moreover, we have already noted above that Abimelech, a foreigner, in his confession of Isaac's significance, uses the very same key words of the unique twin-promise specific to Isaac in the two divine

speeches, "I will be with you" and "I will bless you" (vv.3,24), thereby linking section (A) and (B) closely together.<sup>13</sup> This link is further supported by the two sets of movements in opposite direction in sections (A) and (B), as can be seen in the arrangement below:



Moreover, even the descriptions of Isaac (vv.12,29) and the expulsion order and request for a covenant (vv.12,28) by Abimelech appear to be chiastically arranged.

Finally we can now take up the two notices about the renewed efforts of Isaac's servants at well-digging (vv.25c,31f). The two notices form a unit in that the latter reports the positive result of the efforts begun in the former. In the narrative, this latest effort at well-digging is in line with earlier efforts of Isaac and his servants (vv.15,18-22) after he was forced out of Gerar. Thus, the notice in v.25c, "And there Isaac's servants dug a well," after he had pitched his tent in Beersheba, could belong quite naturally in the unit (a'). However, in the present form of the Isaac narrative, it is noteworthy that the notice of the positive result of that renewed effort at well-digging is "held over" to effect a frame around the significant confession of Abimelech about Isaac's status and the oath-taking, therefore linking section (B) to section (A) as well. On this particular function of the notices in vv.25c

and 31f, van Seters commented, "here [Gen.26] the story about the well of Beersheba ... is used as a framework for both the theophany and the covenant-making episode."<sup>14</sup>

Having identified a coherent structure of the Isaac traditions in Gen.26, and significant links between the two major sections within the whole narrative, we shall further attempt to analyse the narrative in more detail below following the divisions we observed. In the final analysis we shall have to ask what light is shed by the Isaac narrative on the use of the formula in its hithpael form and thus on the theme of the patriarchal destiny and purpose of being a blessing for the nations.

### C) Analysis of Narrative

As we have seen, Gen.26 is closely structured by a series of verbs of movement; so it is appropriate that we should take an overview of the whole narrative from this perspective of movement before we begin a more detailed analysis of the unit divisions.

#### 1) Overview

##### a) "... the land of which I shall tell you"

Our attempt at an overview of Gen.26 is immediately faced with the problem of understanding the relationship of v.2c, "dwell in the land of which I shall tell you," and v.3a, "sojourn in this land." The relationship, we believe, is closely connected in the text to one of the key notes in the narrative, namely being blessed by God and its effect on the Philistine's assessment of the status of Isaac, the seed of Abraham. The great majority of commentators hold the view that v.2c is incompatible with vv.3a and 1b, "and Isaac

went to Gerar." The appeal to source theory for a solution is the most common. Skinner regards vv.2b-c, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you", as a gloss.<sup>15</sup> Others like Driver would regard v.2c as a variant or fragment of E.<sup>16</sup> An alternative explanation has been advanced by Speiser who reasoned that "since Gerar has its own ruler, Isaac can only have the status of sojourner; cf. xx 1; accordingly, 2b and 3a are not redundant, but in perfectly logical sequence."<sup>17</sup>

Whether Speiser's alternative is acceptable or not, the merit of it is that he did not resort to source theory to solve the 'difficulty', although he regards vv.1-33 as from J. However, is Speiser's explanation appropriate to the text? He assumes that "the land of which I shall tell you" in v.2c is the same as "this land" in v.3a, which he interprets as "that land [Gerar]."<sup>18</sup> But there is no textual warrant for Speiser to deviate from the MT: "this land (אֶרֶץ גֵּרָר)." While it is true that Isaac would be described as a sojourner in Gerar, the point of the command in v.3, "sojourn in this land", could also be taken as pointing to the nature and duration of Isaac's sojourning, to "remain temporarily"<sup>19</sup> and not to make the stay into a permanent one.

The difficulty over the identity of the land under discussion arises, we believe, because vv.2c and 3a have frequently been taken to be referring to the same land, Gerar. When this identification is made and taken with v.1, "and Isaac went to Gerar," then the incompatibility of v.2c, "dwell in the land of which I shall tell you," is clear because Isaac is presumably already at (or on the way to) Gerar.<sup>20</sup> However, if the lands referred to both in vv.2c and 3a are not identical, then the incompatibility of v.2c with vv.1 and 3a

does not arise. In other words, when Isaac is in (or going to) Gerar, Yahweh appears to him and commands him a) not to go down to Egypt, b) to dwell in the land (unspecified as yet) of which I shall tell you, and c) for the moment, sojourn (temporarily) in this land of Gerar. Thus taken, the ultimate destination of Isaac's dwelling is the yet unspecified land of v.3c, and it is not in conflict with the fact that he is already in (or going to) Gerar. In fact, the Isaac story in Gen.26 is thereby provided with a dynamic connected with the series of verbs of movements pointing towards the unspecified destination which we observed earlier.

The three-fold command of Yahweh to Isaac (vv.2f) is clearly not an easy one to obey especially when a famine is going on in the land. Isaac is not only prohibited from going down to Egypt, which presumably is normally "unaffected by lack of rainfall in Palestine" (cf. 12:10),<sup>21</sup> and from making his stay in Gerar a settled existence instead of only a sojourning, he is, most demanding of all, commanded to go and dwell in a land which is as yet unknown to him. In other words, Isaac is asked to put the question of his survival totally in Yahweh's hands with only future promises and no immediate, concrete assurance. The three-fold command, extreme as it is, however, is still only a prelude to the programmatic content of the divine speech in vv.3b-5, which contains a promise unique to Isaac, a renewal of the oath-promises made to Abraham, and the climactic pronouncement of the formula expressing the ultimate purpose of the destiny of the seed of Abraham (v.4c) as being a blessing for the nations. The two references to Abraham (vv.3,5; see also v.24f) make it clear that the programmatic content of the divine speech linked to the extreme demand of Isaac's trust in Yahweh by the three-fold command

is to be seen in the light of Yahweh's dealings with Abraham, the father of Isaac.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, it is striking, and yet not totally surprising, that a similar command to go to a land which shall be shown and to a mountain which shall be told on arrival was made to Abraham on two similarly significant occasions (12:1; 22:1f), the importance of which in the Abraham narratives we have already discussed. Furthermore, the command to Abraham on both occasions, also in a similar three-fold formulation, is prelude to a programmatic statement of divine intent with regard to blessing, promises and the formula pronouncement.<sup>23</sup>

The importance for our purpose of the command to Abraham on both occasions is the light it sheds on the understanding of 26:2c, "dwell in the land of which I shall tell you." Neither Abraham nor the reader is told where the land/mountain is. Nevertheless, Abraham leaves his home country in 12:4a and arrives in the land of Canaan, where Yahweh then appears to him and promises: "to your seed I will give this land" (12:7). By this literary technique, the narrative affirms for us that the unspecified land of 12:1 is the land of Canaan. Abraham then builds there an altar to Yahweh. Although the example in Gen.22 is not as straightforward as Gen.12, the narrative leaves one without any doubt that the place where Abraham sees from afar (v.4) and the place where he builds an altar to sacrifice Isaac (vv.9f) is indeed "the mountain of which I shall tell you" in v.2. It is told to and known by Abraham only after he has departed and arrived as commanded, and not before.

If it is correct to use this example as a parallel, then it strengthens our argument that "the land of which I shall tell you" in

26:2c is not Gerar as such.<sup>24</sup> It is surely very striking, in addition, that when Isaac finally goes up to Beersheba, the same sequence of events which happened to Abraham in 12:6f after he arrived in the land takes place (26:23ff). On arrival at Beersheba, Yahweh reappears to Isaac with an oracle of assurance and reaffirmation of promises similar to the first divine speech in vv.3b-5, clearly indicating divine approval that the three-fold command in vv.2b-3a had been followed finally. Having been assured of Yahweh's relationship with him (after his shattering experiences with the Philistines) and of his arrival at the appointed destination, Isaac builds an altar and calls upon the name of Yahweh, and pitches his tent there.<sup>25</sup>

As soon as Isaac reenters the limits of the promised land, he receives a renewal of the promises.<sup>26</sup> It is quite appropriate that after the second encounter between Yahweh and Isaac, Isaac, who has been the subject of all previous verbs of movements in the narrative (26:1,6,8,12,17,22,23,25) is no more said to be on the move. Thereby the narrative is affirming for its reader that the unspecified "land of which I shall tell you" in 26:2c is, in the final analysis, Beersheba.

Whatever traditio-historical views one holds as to the association of Isaac with Beersheba, *Isaac is not connected with it until 26:23 in the present form of the patriarchal narratives.*<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, despite his building altars to God on many occasions and calling on his name there (12:7,8; 13:14; 13:18; 22:9,14), Beersheba is the only place where Abraham called on the name of God with an epithet, the Everlasting God (21:33). Moreover, it was the place where Abraham departed from and returned to (but not Isaac!) after his near sacrifice of Isaac in 22:1,19. Despite all the significance attached to Beersheba in the Abraham narratives, Isaac

is not associated with it until 26:23ff. Instead, he is more often found at Beer-lahai-roi after the death of Sarah (24:62) and of Abraham (25:11). The place, however, has more significance for Hagar and Ishmael (16:14). Presumably, it was also from there that Isaac left for Gerar.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, the unexpected delegation made by Abimelech and his men from Gerar to Isaac at Beersheba seeking a covenant of peaceful co-existence, the reason being Isaac's significant status before God and men (vv.26-29), also in effect serves to support the view that Beersheba is "the land of which I shall tell you." The delegation from Abimelech brought the first change of subject in the verbs of movement which hitherto (vv.1-25) have been consistently applied to Isaac. We noted earlier that this movement of Abimelech from Gerar to Isaac at Beersheba and his subsequent sending away by Isaac in peace is a (chiastic) reversal of Isaac's going to Abimelech at Gerar and being sent away by Abimelech in broken relationship and ending up quite unexpectedly at Beersheba. Significantly, Abimelech comes to Isaac at Beersheba only after Isaac finally moved there, built an altar and called on Yahweh's name there (i.e. proclaiming the sovereignty of Yahweh over it) and not before (cf. 21:33). The significance of this delegation in relation to the ultimate purpose of the patriarchal destiny of being a blessing for others will be further spelt out later.

b) "Dwell in the land ...": Theme of Obedience and Trust

If indeed Beersheba is "the land of which I shall tell you", then the question of trust and obedience, also a central element in Yahweh's dealings with Abraham in his call to be a blessing for

others, has to be taken more seriously in the Isaac narrative.<sup>29</sup> The first part of the three-fold command, "Do not go down to Egypt", is not an issue because it is observed by Isaac throughout, although the fact that the command was given in the first place suggests that the temptation was there. The issue rather lies with the second and third parts of the command, "dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land." We believe the maintenance of the distinction of "the land" and "this land" is not only necessitated by the verbs of movement in the narrative (as we have demonstrated). But it is also crucial to explain the paradoxical nature of Isaac's being blessed by Yahweh, and its relationship to Abimelech's equally paradoxical attitudes and assessments of Isaac (vv.14,16 and 28f). Moreover, the distinction would also help to explain the change in Isaac's persisting attachment to the valley of Gerar and the wells as well as the unexplained reason for his final move to Beersheba from Rehoboth (vv.17-22). Thus, by taking the command in v.2c as indicating the appointed destination, and that in v.3a as being a temporary concession on Yahweh's part to Isaac's urgent need of the moment, we believe we are in a better position to understand the relation of the various units in the narrative in which Isaac is the subject of the verbs of movement (vv.7-11; 12-17; 18-22; 23-25).

(i) vv.7-11 In this section, Isaac's trouble with the Philistines over the identity of Rebekah, a cover for the concern of his own safety, begins not soon after his arrival at Gerar but "when he had been there a long time" (v.8a; cf. 12:14f; 20:1f). Furthermore, the trouble he has is also not what he had feared in the first place but rather the possible guilt his effort at deception might bring upon the Philistines (vv.9f). Kidner sagely commented

that "the force of 'a long time' is that Isaac's fears have proved groundless; yet he persists in them."<sup>30</sup>

However, it is not obvious that fear is the main issue of the time notice. It appears that Isaac's ruse about Rebekah's identity was successful for quite some time. His fondling of her gives the impression that it was apparently quite normal and 'open', which he could ill-afford if fear had gripped him continuously, and presumably therefore Isaac more or less felt secure enough to settle down in Gerar. Of course, such a degree of security need not exclude Isaac's continuing to have a lingering fear that his ruse would be exposed in the end. One has to bear in mind, however, behind all these things, the ultimate intention of Isaac's going to Gerar was to survive the famine. In times of famine, even when one's safety, not to mention settling down, is only marginally secured, it is still quite 'normal' for one to risk the chance for the sake of survival. When there is good reason to believe that the fragile basis is quite unfounded after all, there would be all the greater encouragement to be more bold in putting one's roots deeper down. Moreover, for Isaac, Gerar probably offers the best alternative for survival — short of Egypt. Vawter commented that "from v.8 it appears that his 'settling' in Gerar (v.6) entailed a bit of city dwelling (which would not have precluded the farming activity attributed to him in v.12)."<sup>31</sup> As such, we believe the force of the time notice in v.8 serves to highlight the fact that the duration of Isaac's 'sojourning' in Gerar was longer and more settled than necessary.

The time notice should then be taken in the light of the three-fold command in vv.2b-3a and the ensuing programmatic promises and the formula pronouncement (vv.3b-5). The question of Isaac's

obedience to God's command (to sojourn only but not to dwell) and confidence in God's promises (for survival) is therefore raised by the time notice. Furthermore, by his deception, even though it was not discovered prior to v.8, Isaac has already negatively compromised his suitability as the seed of Abraham to be a blessing for others as can be seen in Abimelech's fear and rebuke in v.10, "you have brought guilt upon us." As such, the time notice and the 'belated' exposure of Isaac's deception by Abimelech, when Isaac was apparently feeling secure enough to settle down to a 'normal' life, combined to highlight the fragility of Isaac's sense of security and his obligations to the divine command which are related to the promises and universal destiny of being a blessing for others.

However, the exposure of Isaac's deception and Abimelech's unexpected decree for the protection of Isaac and Rebekah only serves to strengthen any reason Isaac might already have (famine) for remaining in Gerar. Moreover, while no explicit mention is made of any promise of God's protective presence (v.3b), v.11 could be taken as evidence of its being operational, even in a critical and adverse situation brought about by Isaac's own making. Van Seters has pointed out how the "rather ingenious double entendre of  $\text{לָרַחֵם}$ " used in 12:17 and 20:6, where the patriarchal couple is given divine protection directly or indirectly, and serious affliction or death can be the possible outcome for the offender, is also used in 26:11.<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that after a similar incident in 20:15, Abraham was offered by Abimelech anywhere in the land (of Gerar) to dwell as he pleased, and yet we next find him in Beersheba, where Abimelech went to seek a covenant of peace with him (21:22f,32). On the other hand, Isaac is not explicitly offered any land to settle

in Gerar by Abimelech in Gen.26. With the threat to his safety averted — which is presumably interpreted by Isaac as a sign of God's protective presence and blessing, but which could also be seen as a 'divine' reminder to him of his overdue sojourning— will Isaac now decide to stay or to go and dwell in the land of which he shall be told?

(ii) vv.12-17 With the fear averted and, most probably, with the famine passed by now (vv.11f), Isaac's decision is to sow in "that" land, and he "reaped in the same year a hundredfold." More strikingly, "Yahweh blessed him, and the man went on, going on, and becoming great, until he became very great. He had possessions ... and many servants." The irony of the section vv.12-17, with reference to the divine command (vv.2b-3a), is that Yahweh's protection and now his blessings only reinforce Isaac's resolution to remain more settled in the land of Gerar, thereby hindering and delaying his total response to the command in v.2c, to dwell in the land where he shall be told. In addition, the blessing and greatness Isaac receives in abundance from Yahweh in such a short time, which are in the first place promises to Isaac because of, and in order that he may fulfil, the received destiny of Abraham (26:3b-5; 12:2f and 22:16ff) to be a blessing for others, also paradoxically become the very source or reason of the Philistines' envy of Isaac, and cause him to be viewed as a threat to be feared (cf. also the near evil (curse!) Isaac brought in v.10). Finally, it leads to the request (high-handed expulsion) of Abimelech to Isaac, "Go away from us ..." (vv.14,16). This negative state of Isaac's relation with the Philistines is made very striking because the unit stands as the mid-point of section (A) in the narrative.

This paradoxical situation can hardly be in Isaac's mind the type of universal destiny Yahweh's promises and blessings were designed to bring (26:3b,5). It must also be perplexing to him coming right after Abimelech's positive attitude in v.11. Furthermore, this inexplicable turn of Yahweh's blessings on Isaac is compounded when one compares his 'correct' acquirement of wealth and prosperity with the 'questionable' accumulation of wealth and prosperity by Abraham at the expense of Sarah's chastity in similar situations in 12:16; 13:2; 20:14. The reaction of the people of Gerar towards Isaac's blessed state is the very opposite of what one would expect, for the non-blessed to desire the blessings of or to befriend the blessed one.<sup>33</sup> To put it the other way round, it is quite natural for the blessed to be a blessing to the less or non-blessed. In other words, we are being sharply reminded in vv.12-17 that for Isaac to be greatly blessed in all things is far from being the same as being a blessing for others.<sup>34</sup> We submit that this state of affairs, which is the opposite of the ultimate purpose of the blessings and promises given to Isaac by Yahweh (as in 12:1-3; 22:16ff with Abraham's call), is most plausibly explained only in relation to the theme of trust and obedience (inherent in the command and promises in vv.2c-3b) in the overall Isaac story.

By sowing, reaping, and acquiring the quantity and quality of blessings as Isaac did in vv.12ff, it is now almost impossible for Isaac to leave Gerar voluntarily and to continue journeying until he comes to and dwell in the land of which he shall be told. In the final analysis, therefore, the forced expulsion of Isaac by Abimelech, undoubtedly depriving him of much wealth and possessions,

as well as the land for sowing — which is the basis of Isaac's security against future famine — is in one sense a divine intervention, albeit an extremely paradoxical one, in the interest of Abraham's universal destiny now bequeathed to his seed (vv.3b-5). Appropriately, this most difficult decision, forced upon Isaac, stands as the turning-point of this section of the Isaac narrative, beginning a reverse movement, forcing him to take the first vital step away from Gerar and thereby that much nearer towards "the land of which I shall tell you." As if to reflect the radical and difficult break Isaac is forced to make to leave Gerar, we have a cluster of three verbs of movement together in a single verse to describe his departure, "So Isaac departed from there, and encamped in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there" (v.17). Interestingly, Yahweh's command to Isaac in the first divine speech is the first occasion in the narrative where a cluster of three verbs of movements also occurs together forming the three-fold command, "Do not go down ... dwell ... sojourn" (vv.2b-3a). The concentration of verbs in v.17 suggest that Isaac apparently does not leave very willingly — as can be seen that he moved only as far as the valley of Gerar and dwelt there, "only by stages" as van Seters commented.<sup>35</sup>

(iii) vv.18-22 In this unit, we see the persistency of Isaac at re-opening and opening of wells. Driver commented that "in a region so near the desert wells would be prized: hence their prominence in the narrative, and the disputes to which they gave rise", springing water (v.19) would of course be doubly valuable.<sup>36</sup> In other words, Isaac's continued sojourning around Gerar is ultimately still a reflection of the sense of security the land and wells offers to him, especially in a region where drought and famine is not

unknown.

This aspect of Isaac's fear and insecurity is interestingly reflected in his relationship with the herdsmen of Gerar, and his own handling of the conflicts. The dilemma Isaac faces is that his efforts at well-digging, vital to his existence and survival, prove to be the very source of harassments and conflict pushing him constantly on the move (retreat!) against his desire; and yet, because of the necessity for survival he cannot curtail his efforts altogether. This is another example in the Isaac narrative of divine intervention in favour of the command, promises and universal destiny in vv.2-5. Isaac is probably considerably weakened by the deprivation of his wealth earlier, and conscious of his sojourner status in a foreign-influenced land unable to put up any resistance against the encroachments of the Gerar herdsmen even when the wells belonged to Abraham in the first place (vv.15,18). The naming of the wells Esek ( עֶשֶׂק ) and Sitnah ( סִטְנָה ) is probably the best he can do in any form of protest (moral!) under the circumstances. Yet he continues to persist in the valley of Gerar.

Even then, Isaac is not totally unaware of Yahweh's presence in his adversity -- as can be seen in the reason for his naming of the well Rehoboth ( רְהוֹבוֹת ), saying, "For now Yahweh has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (v.22). Up to this point, Isaac's search for security still continues. It seems that Isaac can now finally settle down at Rehoboth and be fruitful. His initial objective in going to Gerar -- to escape famine -- may now be met to some extent here (though not under the most ideal conditions). However, just when Isaac appears to be finally settling down and rebuilding in a safe and peaceful environment, against all expectations

he abruptly throws all caution for his security and survival to the wind by going up to Beersheba. He leaves Rehoboth almost as abruptly as he has arrived, and with no reason whatsoever. It has taken the repeated harassments of the Gerar herdsmen to push Isaac constantly on the move further away from Gerar (retreat towards Beersheba!) before even arriving at the point of Rehoboth; there Isaac can finally make (or perhaps is driven to make) the ultimate decision on his own, despite the room to be fruitful in Rehoboth, and go up to Beersheba, a "new place" to him.

(iv) vv.23-25 Of course, Isaac's decision to leave Rehoboth, although voluntarily, need not imply buoyant expectancy. In fact, Isaac is under tremendous strain -- as can be seen in the urgent theophanic appearance of Yahweh (probably long overdue as far as Isaac is concerned) with an oracle of reassurance and reaffirmation to Isaac on "the same night" of his arrival at Beersheba: "I am the God of Abraham your father; fear not, for I am with you and I will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake" (v.24).<sup>37</sup> Clines commented that "the assurance that the God who speaks is the God who has pledged himself to one's father and his descendants is a reassurance of the hearer's own relationship to God."<sup>38</sup>

We have already discussed the significant turn of events in the Isaac narrative with his final arrival at Beersheba. To all intents and purposes, the three-fold command of vv.2b-3a, especially the part "dwell in the land of which I shall tell you" is now finally complied with. With the theophany and the divine speech affirming and renewing the programmatic content of vv.2b-5, "the land" of v.2c is undoubtedly shown to Isaac to be Beersheba. In response, Isaac

"built an altar there and called upon the name of Yahweh, and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well" (v.25).

We have here another cluster of three verbs connected with settling down, the last occasion of such concentration of verbs in the narrative. We saw above two other sets of three verbs of movements in vv.2b-3a and v.17, at the beginning and mid-point (turning-point) respectively in section (A) of the narrative. The only place and time Isaac is said to have built an altar to Yahweh and called upon his name is here at Beersheba. The triple refrain of "there" in v.25 no doubt also serves to underline the final arrival of Isaac at "the land of which I shall tell you."

#### c) Summary

The overview above of section (A) has undoubtedly shown that the outworking of the theme of obedience and trust in relation to the command, promises, and universal destiny given to Isaac initially in the programmatic divine speech (vv.2-5) is very prominent. Concomitantly, it has also been shown that integral to the outworking of the theme of obedience and trust, the suitability of the agent (Isaac) in continuation of the reaffirmed universal destiny of Abraham as a blessing for others is also being tested. It is therefore quite striking for our study of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" the Isaac narrative does not end at vv.23-25, undoubtedly a very appropriate place in the narrative, but in section (B), vv.26-33. We have already earlier noted briefly the thematic and structural links between sections (A) and (B). If so, then what function and significance does the final pericope, section (B), have for the overall Isaac narrative (Gen.26)?

2) Further Analysis

We have attempted above an overview of the Isaac narrative by trying to determine the identity of the appointed destination for Isaac and its relationship with the outworking of the theme of obedience and trust in the context of the movements of Isaac in section (A) of the narrative. We shall continue the observations made above into the analysis below of the overall Isaac narrative with particular reference to the promises and universal destiny as pronounced in the formula in the first divine speech (vv.3-5).

a) First Theophany and Divine Speech (vv.1-6)

Standing in the forefront of the Isaac narrative is a programmatic divine speech as a sort of preface not unlike that of 12:1-3 before the overall Abraham narratives. The content of the divine speech (26:2-5) is as below:

"Do not go down to Egypt,  dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.  Sojourn in this land, (2b-3a)

\* and I will be with you, and I will bless you; (3b,c)

for

[ to you and your seed I will give  all these lands, (3d)  
and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to  
Abraham your father (3e)  
I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, (4a)  
and I will give to your seed  all these lands, (4b)

\* and by your seed shall all the nations of the earth  
bless themselves (4c)

because  
Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my  
commandments, my statutes, and my laws." (5)

So Isaac  dwelt in Gerar. (6)

In our formulaic analysis earlier (Ch. Two), we have already noted that the divine speech, vv.2-6, in the Isaac narrative interestingly

combines the niphal form structure (of elements in the divine speech) with the use of the hithpael form of the formula in its pronouncement of the universal destiny of the patriarch. We also suggested in our conclusion then that the niphal form structure apparently stresses to the hearer the imperative to response to the divine command made in relation to the call, promises and universal destiny of the patriarchs. In other words, the relationship of the patriarch, over whom the formula is pronounced, to the call to a universal destiny could only be probational initially. Indeed, the probational state of Isaac's relationship to the universal destiny of Abraham whereby he is obligated to respond to the command in the divine speech has been amply demonstrated in our analysis of the Isaac narrative thus far.

On the other hand, the use of the hithpael form of the formula, with the seed already named as the agent of blessing even before Isaac had responded to the command, as well as the reason given for the making of the promises and the formula pronouncement (vv.3e,5), makes it quite clear that Isaac's response, important as it is, would bring about nothing new as far as the promises and universal destiny of Abraham are concerned. It is more a matter of the realisation and outworking of what had been promised and reaffirmed to Abraham on oath because of his obedience and trust (cf. 22:15ff). In other words, as the promises and universal destiny were reaffirmed to Abraham, so they are also reaffirmed to Isaac. This is evidently reflected in the abundant and great blessings Isaac received 'directly' from Yahweh even before he had fully responded to the divine command.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Isaac's prolonged stay in Gerar was the very opposite of the command. Isaac and his seed, then, in receiving the promises and universal destiny of Abraham to be a blessing for others, was called

"not so much to pioneer as to consolidate" what has been achieved by God for Abraham.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, the first promise given to Isaac in the divine speech is a rare combination of two elements "I will be with you" and "I will bless you" — unique to the Isaac narrative.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, of these two elements, the former is not explicitly spoken as a promise in the Abraham narratives, although it is arguable that it is essentially the same as the promise in 12:3a, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse" (cf. 12:7; 20:6f).<sup>42</sup> However, of all the other promises made to Abraham by God, only the promise "I will bless you" (12:2b; 22:17a), so crucial after the repeated pronouncements of curse and judgements in the primeval history, is made specifically to Isaac. In 26:3, the promise of divine presence for protection is closely related to the promise of blessing. In its outworking in the narrative, the former appears to form the necessary condition for the realisation of the latter, even in adverse conditions which Isaac experienced (cf. vv.11,12ff,22,23ff). Thus, the unique combination of the twin elements of promise with the emphasis on the latter (blessing) stands out as a key note at the very outset of the narrative.

This twin-element promise is said to be made to Isaac on the basis of the promises (vv.3d-4b) and destiny (4c) of Abraham which are now to be reaffirmed and given to Isaac, thereby putting them in close relationship. The twin-element promise is given so that the promises and universal destiny of Abraham can be realised in Isaac and his seed. The references to God's intention to fulfil his oath sworn to Abraham, and the latter's obedience as the ultimate basis for the reaffirmation of the promises and universal destiny,

on the other hand, obligates God to be with and to bless Isaac.<sup>43</sup>

Thirdly, in stating the intention of God to renew Abraham's promises and destiny to Isaac, a significant new development emerges in the structuring of the promises, namely the striking emphasis being put on the promise of land. While the land promise has been made to Abraham on its own (12:7; 15:7-21), and in conjunction with other promises, especially progeny (13:14-17; 15:1-6; 17:1-8; cf. 22:17f), only once has it assumed a significance above other promises (13:14-17) by functioning as some sort of frame (vv.15,17) around the promises of progeny (v.16). The emphasis on the promise of land there is understandable in view of Abraham's offer to Lot to have the first (best!) choice of land (13:10ff).

The significant development of the land promise in the Isaac narrative, apart from performing the same function of a frame (vv.3d,4b) around other promises (vv.3e,4a) as in 13:14-17, can be seen in two respects. On the one hand, a unique phrase in the Pentateuch is used to describe the land promised: "all these lands (לְאֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׂדֵה-אֵלֶּיךָ)" (vv.3d,4b).<sup>44</sup> It is very likely that the narrative has in mind the list of lands mentioned in 15:17-21 which Yahweh covenanted to give to Abraham's seed, and the promise of the possession of the gates of their enemies by Abraham's seed in 22:17 (cf. also 13:14f; 17:8).<sup>45</sup> The framing structure of 26:3d-4c seems to imply that Yahweh's oath to Abraham and the promise of progeny will be realised in "all these lands." The emphasis on the land for the realisation of the reaffirmed promises of Abraham to Isaac is also corroborated by the orientation of the three-fold command (vv.2b-3a) which emphatically stresses the vital importance of Isaac's remaining in the land of Canaan.

On the other hand, more noteworthy is that the promise of land is for the first time explicitly made in a divine speech in the patriarchal narratives together with a formula pronouncement that the ultimate purpose of the patriarchal destiny is to be a blessing for others (26:4c). Moreover, as noted above, the significance of the formula is marked out by its being apart from the rest of the other promises as a result of the frame formed by the land promise. The land promise is not made in the divine speech in 12:1-3 but only after Abraham had obeyed the divine command to depart (v.4) and arrived in the land of Canaan (v.7). Although in the divine speech in 22:16-18, together with the formula pronouncement there is mentioned the promise that "your seed shall possess the gates of their enemies," the latter is at most an allusion to the land promise.<sup>46</sup> And even so, it comes only after Abraham has responded to the divine command to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. In the case of 26:2-6, the link of the land promise and the formula pronouncement is forged even before Isaac has responded in any way to the divine command. This marked difference between the Isaac and Abraham narratives is very likely to be reflective of what we have described as the pioneering stage begun with Abraham in God's dealings with mankind after the primeval history, and the consolidating phase continued in Isaac. With this, not only is the land promised in order that other promises of God to the patriarchs can be realised, but the ultimate purpose of the destiny of the patriarchs to be a blessing for the nations is also now linked with "all these lands" for its outworking.

The question to be asked in the Isaac narrative now is how can the promises and universal destiny of the patriarchs be realised in the land in a time of famine? What has their outworking to do

with the three-fold command to Isaac in vv.2b-3a, especially the part "dwell in the land of which I shall tell you"?

b) Isaac's Deception of the Philistines (vv.7-11)

In view of our analysis above of this unit (pp.226-229), we shall merely reiterate here our observations concerning the content of the programmatic divine speech with reference to Isaac's received destiny. We noted the twin-promise of divine presence for protection and blessing was operational in the form of Abimelech's unexpected and gracious decree of protection for the safety of Isaac and Rebekah even when Isaac was the offending party. But more important was the near fatal result brought upon the people of Gerar by Isaac's deception as expressed by Abimelech, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us" (v.10). By this deception, and the more 'correct' behaviour of the people of Gerar with regard to the chastity of Rebekah and Isaac's life, clearly Isaac was in no position whatsoever to be an appropriate agent of blessing for others. It was, in fact, the very reverse in this segment of the narrative.

c) The Paradox of Blessing (vv.12-17)

Despite Isaac's negative standing with regard to his received destiny, and his longer than necessary sojourning in Gerar, the promise of blessing given to Isaac for the sake of Abraham nevertheless continues to prove itself effectual. "And Isaac sowed in the land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. Yahweh blessed him, and the man became great, and he went on, going on, and becoming great, until he became very great. He had possession of flocks and herds,

and many servants" (vv.12f). The actualisation of the promise of blessing is possible only because the promise of God's protective presence is operational first (v.11). Hence, the twin-promise particular to Isaac in the divine speech is being realised, even in Isaac's negative situation.

The motif of the blessed of Yahweh becoming great first appears in the promise to Abraham in 12:2, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great." Abraham indeed became "very rich" with flocks and herds, servants, silver and gold (12:16; 13:2) but at the expense of his own integrity as the chosen agent of Yahweh to bring blessing to others. A similar enriching of Abraham also took place in 20:14. Significantly, in Gen.26, Isaac was blessed and became very great solely because of the workings of Yahweh.<sup>47</sup> The narrative merely accords the decreeing of protection for the life of Isaac and Rebekah to Abimelech.<sup>48</sup> Again, the contrast between Isaac and Abraham with regard to greatness as a result of Yahweh's blessing is striking. Abraham is said to have been blessed by Yahweh and become great as a result after his act of supreme obedience in Gen.22 (also 24:1,35f). Thus, Isaac's being blessed and becoming very great even before his total obedience is not only a continual working out of the promises first made to Abraham in 12:2, but also shows some significant development in its actualisation.

More significant perhaps is the effect of Yahweh's blessing on Isaac and the consequences of his agricultural activity on the land. We have already seen the prominent significance being given to the relationship of Isaac and the actualisation of the divine promises in the land above. Whether the yield reaped by Isaac is

a result of the fertility of the land or an intentionally glowing description to highlight the effect of Yahweh's blessing is open to question.<sup>49</sup> The fact remains that this is the first notice of any patriarch is being involved in any substantial agricultural activity, and with great success at that.<sup>50</sup> When this report is taken against the backdrop of the pronouncement of curse on the ground at the sin of Adam, "cursed is the ground because of you ... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you" (Gen.3:18), and at the murder of Abel by Cain, "when you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength" (Gen.4:12), its importance in terms of the vocation of Abraham and his seed to reverse the curse of the primeval history is clear. The time notice "in the same year" and the description "a hundredfold" serve to highlight the effect of the effort of Isaac as one being blessed by Yahweh, and the 'strength' of the land. Thus, Isaac is not only a recipient of the promises to Abraham and his destiny to be a blessing so that "all the families of the earth shall find blessing" (12:3); Isaac's fruitfulness in the land has gone one significant step beyond Abraham in that destiny.

However, as we have argued above, not all blessings and greatness bring positive consequences. Envious of his great wealth and threatened by his might, the king and people of Gerar tell Isaac, the blessed of Yahweh, "Go away from us; for you are much mightier than we" (v.16). The people do not see in Isaac's more than normal blessings a sign of a man who is blessed by Yahweh, and whom it is therefore in their interest to befriend.<sup>51</sup> They saw Isaac instead in the 'normal' terms of power and might which only threatens in the end. Thus, while the episode showed the realisation of the twin-promise of protecting presence and blessing in Isaac's life, the

Philistines are far from seeking for themselves the blessings of or from Isaac.

This paradoxical state of Yahweh's blessing and its effect on the relationship of Abimelech and Isaac, as we have argued above, is to be seen as a means of divine intervention or directing of affairs in the interest of the universal destiny of Abraham now bequeathed to his seed, which is being jeopardised (in fact already has been, as is expressed by Abimelech in v.11) by Isaac's now essentially 'permanent' settling in the land of Gerar. On the one hand, Isaac is being forced to uproot himself from Gerar, which has become the basis of his security and survival, and to begin the first vital step away from it, reversing the direction of his movements hitherto. We noted that vv.12-17 stands as the mid-point (turning point) in section (A) of the narrative. On the other hand, by forcing Isaac out of Gerar, and therefore all that Gerar represents for Isaac, without justifiable basis other than envy and a subjective assessment of Isaac's becoming a threat, Abimelech's moral rectitude over Isaac's earlier 'disgrace' (vv.7-11) is subtly overturned. The parenthetical note of v.15 coming after v.14 "so that the Philistines envied him," and before the expulsion order of v.16, also serves to indict Abimelech's action. At the point of Isaac's expulsion in the narrative (v.17), Isaac is now the 'innocent' victim.

Forbidden to go down to Egypt, and now forced out of Gerar, the crucial and more acute question now is how can the twin-promise and the received universal destiny be actualised for Isaac?

d) Harassments and Retreat of Isaac (vv.18-22)

Again, in view of our analysis of this unit above, we shall

reiterate only some relevant observations pertaining to Isaac's received destiny. God's promise of his presence with Isaac is much more felt by Isaac in the shattering experiences of the constant harassments of the Gerar herdsmen over wells and water. The finding of "springing water" in the desert no doubt would be considered as a sign of divine favour. Moreover, Isaac's reason for naming the well over which there was no more quarrel Rehoboth, "for now Yahweh has made room for us" (v.22), clearly reflects Isaac's awareness of Yahweh's presence. Not only that, the operation of the promise of Yahweh's protective presence is also seen by Isaac to be actualising the promise to bless as well: "and we shall be fruitful in the land." The confident linking of blessing with fruitfulness in the land by Isaac himself is again reflective of the significant development on the emphasis of the land in the working out of Abraham's destiny in Isaac, which we saw as a key note in the first divine speech (vv.2-5) and its initial realisation in vv.12ff.

But more important for our purpose is the fact that Isaac's responses to the infringing of his hereditary rights over the wells (v.18) by the Gerar herdsmen strengthen the 'moral' position and credentials of Isaac vis-à-vis the Philistines.<sup>52</sup> Isaac voluntarily retreats away from direct confrontation (probably due to weakness). He is therefore surrendering his effectual control over the wells in the process. Taking this unit as parallel to the unit vv.7-11 in which Isaac's deception and Abimelech's gracious protection placed Isaac in a negative light vis-à-vis the Philistines (see diagram in p.217), Isaac's 'moral' credentials are now being more than vindicated. While Isaac's deception of the people of Gerar brought near fatal results, the repeated harassments of the herdsmen of Gerar against

Isaac actually infringed hereditary rights of Isaac covenanted between Abraham and Abimelech in 21:25-34 (see also 20:15; 21:34). Moreover, the depriving of wells, the source of life and survival, especially in a desert region is tantamount to taking of life. The 'moral' vindication of Isaac is furthered by the mutual commitments between Abraham and Abimelech in 21:23 that they will not deal falsely with each other and also with their offspring or posterity. Isaac has fully recovered from his disability as the agent of blessing for others while the Philistines are put in an extremely negative light in the process.<sup>53</sup> But the question remains: what of the twin-promise and how could Isaac in his deprivation and harassment fulfil the received destiny of Abraham?

e) Second Theophany and Divine Speech (vv.23-25)

We have already analysed the significant development with Isaac's arrival at "the land of which I shall tell you." We shall here make a further study of the second theophany and divine speech against the first theophany and divine speech, both of which are arranged as symmetrical units (see diagram in p.217), and acting as a frame to section (A) of the whole narrative.

First, the oracle of reassurance (v.24) reveals interesting links with the first divine speech. The first part of the twin-promise in vv.3b,3c, "I will be with you and I will bless you," which we have argued has been actualising in a very striking way throughout the episodes in vv.7-11, 12-17, 18-22, is taken up in the present oracle and now made the basis of assurance for Isaac not to fear, "for (7D) I am with you" — as an accomplished and present fact.<sup>54</sup> The promises to bless and to multiply the seed of Isaac are

also reiterated. The actualisation of the promise to bless is most likely to be seen in Isaac's servants starting their well-digging effort again and the positive outcome which has been "held over", as we argued above, to form a frame around the climactic visit of Abimelech to Isaac at Beersheba as well as to link both sections (A) and (B) in the narrative together (vv.25d and 32f).

Secondly, we saw in vv.3b-5 that the promises specifically made, and the reaffirmation of the promises and destiny of Abraham, to Isaac were linked to Yahweh's intention to fulfil the oath he made to Abraham because of his obedience. In view of Isaac's shattering experiences and the urgent need to reassure him of the continued validity of his relationship with Yahweh, the references to Abraham (like the significant change of the futurity of the promise of protective presence into a present, accomplished assurance) are now taken up and restructured in a highly striking way:

"I am the God of your father Abraham.  
Fear not, for I am with you.  
I will bless you and multiply your seed,  
For my servant Abraham's sake" (v.24).

The references to Abraham twice in the short oracle are made so as to effect a frame around the reason for Isaac not to fear and the renewal of promises. The references also serve to link this divine oracle with that in vv.2-5. The reference to Abraham as "your father" in 26:24 finds its counterpart in 26:3, which is undoubtedly connected with the promises Yahweh now makes to Isaac on the basis of the oath to Abraham. Moreover, the reference to Yahweh's oath to Abraham in 26:3 most probably has in mind the equivalent in 22:16, "By myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh ( אֲנִי יְהוָה - אֲנִי אֲשָׁר נִשְׁבַּח אֲנִי אֲשָׁר אֲבָרְכְךָ וְאֲנִי אֲשָׁר אֲרַבְּךָ) ... I will indeed bless you and I will

multiply your seed ..." While in Gen.26, Abraham is described as "your father" to Isaac by God, Isaac is described as "your son" to Abraham by God in Gen.22.

That being the link between the two divine speeches in the Isaac narrative and the second divine speech in Gen.22:15-18, then it is also highly plausible that the parallel reference of Abraham as "my servant" in 26:24 looks back to the statement of Abraham's obeying the voice of Yahweh and keeping his charge in 26:5. In the whole of the Abraham narratives, probably the one event that most fittingly qualified Abraham for the epithet "my servant" is when he obeyed the voice of God to offer up his son Isaac, as an offering, thereby also earning the commendation from God himself as a "fearer of God" (22:12). Hence, it is with good reason, we believe, that the reference to Abraham's obedience in 26:5 and of him as "my servant" in 26:24 could very well be referring back to Gen.22, especially the statement in v.18, "... because you have obeyed my voice."

But what is more significant for our purpose is that the oracle in 26:24 is addressed to Isaac in his harassed and deprived state probably with an intentional play on the dual capacity of Abraham as "your father" but "my servant". While the oracle with the mention of "your father" is meant to reassure Isaac of his relationship with God and the continuing validity of the promises made to Abraham, what about the sudden mention of Abraham as the "servant" of Yahweh. It is not without significance that this is the first occasion in the Old Testament on which the epithet "my servant" is exclaimed by Yahweh himself. In addition, it is exclaimed in a narrative not concerning the person himself, but concerning his

son/seed (cf. 21:12; 22:18). Surprisingly, Abraham was never described by that epithet throughout the whole Abraham story although he was described as "a prophet" in 20:7, and was given tasks essentially belonging to a servant of God (17:1; 18:19; cf. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 22:1-19).

Interestingly, there is a similar costly sacrifice or loss by both patriarchs due to their obedience to God's command (22:1f; 26:2b-3a), which is given in connection with the call, promises, and universal destiny of Abraham (22:15-18; 26:3b-5; cf. 12:1-3). In Gen.22, Abraham has to give up the right to his son, and therefore to the promises and his own future as well, while in Gen.26, Isaac also has to give up his own efforts at settling down and his rights to the wells for security and survival (though reluctantly). Moreover, we have already shown earlier that Gen.22 has the function and significance in the Abraham story to repudiate, on the one hand, the self-centered and particularistic concerns of Abraham in various areas of his life, and to reaffirm, on the other hand, that the promises and blessings (especially the promised heir) he received are for him to fulfil the ultimate purpose of his calling, viz. to be a blessing for the nations. Thus, in view of our analysis of the relationship of the obedience and servanthood of Abraham which has been shown to be ultimately connected with the calling to a universal destiny and responsibility, we strongly suggest that that relationship is also to be taken as the referent of the use of the significant epithet "my servant" by Yahweh to describe Abraham to Isaac so as to set his chequered and harassed experiences in connection with the theme of obedience and trust under the framework of the "servant" of Yahweh as well. Be that as it may, the declaratory use of the

epithet instead of the reaffirmatory pronouncement of the formula expressing the universal destiny of Abraham now bequeathed to his seed remains very striking and calls for an explanation.

The necessity for an explanation can be seen in the reasons summarised below. First, while the promises or blessing, progeny and land to Abraham in 22:17 are renewed and reaffirmed to Isaac in both the oracles of 26:3f and 26:24, the formula pronouncement of Abraham's universal destiny (22:18) is reaffirmed to Isaac only in 26:4c but not in 26:24. Secondly, the formula pronouncement in 26:4 is marked out standing on its own by the framing effect of the land promise, thereby making it a climactic statement in the first divine speech (26:2-5). Thirdly, we have already shown that the two divine oracles in Gen.26 are structured to form a symmetrical frame around section (A), vv.1-25, of the Isaac narrative. Finally, we also suggested in our formulaic analysis earlier that the hithpael form of the formula is used in the patriarchal narratives to signify the reaffirmation of the universal destiny and task of Abraham and his seed (22:18; 26:4).

In addition, at the point of the second theophany and divine speech in the narrative (vv.23-25), the following narrative features can also be mentioned: a) the divine command in its three-fold formulation is finally complied with fully by Isaac; b) the twin-promise of divine protective presence and blessing have been actualising throughout the narrative so far; c) Isaac's 'moral' credential is fully restored vis-à-vis the negative behaviour of the Philistines; d) the symbolical reaffirmation of Yahweh's sovereignty over the land (Beersheba) is also effected by Isaac's altar building and proclamation of Yahweh's name over it.

Notwithstanding all these "achievements" just mentioned, ironically, it is precisely because of Isaac's final arrival at Beersheba in total obedience to the three-fold command, which is connected to the call, promises, and universal destiny of Abraham now bequeathed to Isaac, the following questions are in fact urgently and acutely raised rather than resolved. First, if to be blessed by Yahweh includes prominently good fortune, wealth, livestock, servants, and power (26:12ff,16; cf. 24:1,35f), then how is Isaac to be considered as blessed by Yahweh now that he has been deprived of his accumulated wealth and rights, to all intents and purposes? If Abimelech, and even the herdsmen of Gerar, could disregard and harass Isaac defiantly when he is clearly a man blessed of Yahweh (in the normal understanding of wealth and power), then how could one expect Abimelech, or for that matter any one, to hold the now 'battered' Isaac in any esteem? Secondly, how could the universal destiny of being a blessing for others (as it is already strikingly replaced by the concept of servanthood in v.24) be achieved through Isaac, the seed of Abraham, in all his deprivations and weaknesses (humiliations!)? The two questions are of course related. Therein, as we will try to show below, lies the function and significance of the sudden delegation of Abimelech to Isaac at Beersheba in 26:26-33 (section (B)), the climactic end of the Isaac narrative.

f) Abimelech's Confession at Beersheba (vv.26-31)

In our analysis above of the structure of the Isaac narrative, we have already noted the significant changes, reversals and developments which take place when Isaac finally arrives at Beersheba,

"the land of which I shall tell you." For the purpose of the present section, we shall merely mention that our analysis then reveals a striking arrangement of the verbs of movement with Abimelech and his men now as the subjects within section (B), vv.26-33, as well as two sets of movements in the narrative structure (vv.1-17; 26-31b), the latter reversing the direction of movement and subject of the verbs in the former (see diagram in p.219). We also noted some other significant links between sections (A) and (B) in the narrative structure.

(i) The overall reversal of movements in the two sections of the narrative also reveals qualitative reversals. Isaac, the one who first went to Abimelech but was later sent away, is now the one who sends, in peace. Abimelech, the one who sends Isaac away, is now the one who comes to request, and who is being sent away in peace. Though Isaac goes to Abimelech in time of famine obviously for food and survival, the narrative portrays him in receiving all his blessings entirely from Yahweh and not from the people of the land. Abimelech and the people of Gerar have nothing to give to Isaac. Instead, they deprive Isaac of his hereditary rights over the wells. On the other hand, Abimelech and his men come to Isaac desiring to have covenantal relationship with Isaac because of the presence of Yahweh with Isaac and his status as the blessed of Yahweh. The giver-receiver relationship between Isaac and Abimelech is more than reversed. Isaac departed from Abimelech in a "broken" (unblessed) relationship, but the latter now leaves Isaac in peace (blessed) after a covenantal meal as a concrete sign of friendship and reconciliation.<sup>55</sup>

(ii) The dialogue between Isaac and Abimelech in vv.26-29

is also tightly knit through the repetitive and balancing use of pronouns, as can be seen in the arrangement below:

- v.27 - Isaac said to them,  
 "Why have you come to me,  
 seeing that you hate me  
 and have sent me away from you?"
- v.28f - They said,  
 "We have indeed seen  
 that Yahweh has been with you  
 so we say,  
 let there be an oath between us, between us and you,  
 and let us make a covenant with you,  
 that you will do us no harm,  
 just as we have not touched you  
 and just as we have done with you nothing but good  
 and we have sent you away in *peace*.  
You are now the blessed of Yahweh."

Clearly, there is an attempt in the rebuking question of Isaac (v.27) and the defence-confession of Abimelech (vv.28f) to balance the dialogue. While there are some ten pairs of balancing pronouns in the dialogue, significantly, there is no equivalent to the "we", Abimelech and his men, in what they "have indeed seen", and to the two confessional statements of Abimelech concerning Isaac's status: "Yahweh has been with you" and "You are now the blessed of Yahweh". By this technique of pairing of the pronouns, the imbalances of what we have just mentioned are emphasised. Abimelech's self-effacing confession of Isaac's status is quite striking when seen against the light of Yahweh's promise to Abraham in 12:3a, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse." Incidentally, the promise is closely connected with the formula pronouncement of the universal destiny of Abraham's call in 12:3b.

Another interesting detail of the confessional statements of Abimelech concerning Isaac's status is the way the two key ideas specific to the twin-promise made to Isaac initially in 26:3b are used by Abimelech. Not only does the use of them link Abimelech's



Abimelech will recognise in his state of weakness and fear the "normal" hallmarks of a man blessed by God. As such, it is unlikely that Abimelech comes to Isaac at Beersheba (v.26) because he sees in him a powerful person blessed by God whom it is in his interest to befriend — if by blessing we mean all the "normal" criteria of power, wealth, good fortune, etc., as most commentators usually hold.<sup>56</sup>

We would suggest, rather, that what causes the change in Abimelech's assessment of Isaac's status is the latter's handling of the conflict and harassments over his 'sojourning' in Gerar and the hereditary rights over the wells.<sup>57</sup> In fact, when Isaac is being forced out of Gerar, he is undoubtedly still in a position of strength to put up some credible resistance if he had wanted to, as Abimelech says: "Go away from us, for you are much stronger than we are" (v.16). Even when Isaac had the capacity, and the right, to defend himself, he inexplicably chose to be the underdog. Furthermore, the harassments of the herdsmen of Gerar over Isaac and the latter's non-retaliation, even if not directed by Abimelech, would undoubtedly be known by him.<sup>58</sup> Thus, it is quite appropriate that, in Isaac's deprived and harassed state due to his obedience to the three-fold command (but which at the same time puts him in a credible position to be a blessing to Abimelech and the Philistines now that he is the innocent victim), the concept of the servant of Yahweh is declared to him to underline his 'ordeal'. In view of this, Abimelech's changing attitude towards Isaac and his confession that not only God has been with Isaac (26:16!) but also that he is now the blessed of Yahweh appears to be a 'natural' conclusion that the whole narrative has been leading up to.<sup>59</sup>

In this respect, it is interesting to note that in a similar

situation when Abimelech went to Abraham seeking an oath of fairplay and loyalty, Abimelech acknowledged of Abraham only that "God is with you in all you do" (21:22), without "You are now the blessed of Yahweh." On that occasion, Abraham in fact had previously benefited not a little from Abimelech in terms of material compensation and land to dwell in. Even if Abraham's complaint about the infringements of his rights to his own wells by Abimelech's servants is substantiated, it is not explicit that Abimelech was knowingly responsible (21:26) — for Abraham did not question him on his involvement as Isaac questions Abimelech later (26:27). In any case, the wells were apparently restored to Abraham after his complaint, while we are not told whether Isaac even raises the issue of recovering his losses and rights with Abimelech at all. The difference between Abraham's relation with Abimelech in Gen.20-21 and Isaac's relation with Abimelech in Gen.26 on a similar issue probably accounts for the additional, but significant, recognition of Isaac over Abraham that he is "now the blessed of Yahweh."

The fact that the question of hereditary rights of the wells and the covenantal rights to live anywhere in the land (20:15; 21:22ff, 34) are not raised by Isaac in the dialogue with Abimelech is undoubtedly crucial for the eventual covenant-making possible.<sup>60</sup> On Isaac's part, he could have rightly refused the covenant request until some settlement (cf. 21:25-31). As befits his status as now confessed by Abimelech, Isaac chooses the path of reconciliation, 'brotherhood', (וְיָצָא אִשָּׁךְ וְיָצָא אִשָּׁךְ וְיָצָא אִשָּׁךְ), and peace instead of insisting on his own rights before any settlement (even though he seems reluctant at first, v.27). The motif of reconciliation by Isaac's costly sacrifice in Abimelech's favour is very striking when viewed against

the Cain-Abel incident (Gen.4:1-16; cf. 4:23f). The two pairs of characters just mentioned are seen as second generation descendants of the key figures in the primeval history and the patriarchal narratives, Adam and Abraham (and Abimelech) respectively.<sup>61</sup> The discipline of the eventual willingness to forego rights in responding to the three-fold command (under the perspective of "the servant of Yahweh") before and after Isaac arrives at Beersheba is thus an integral element of the Isaac narrative (cf. the 'necessity' of Abraham to forego his right — Isaac — in Gen.22). In other words, Isaac has actualised his 'suitability' as the chosen seed of Abraham and agent of Yahweh to effect the universal destiny of being a blessing to others.<sup>62</sup>

(iv) With the confession that Isaac is accompanied by the presence of Yahweh and is the blessed of Yahweh, the visit of Abimelech, a foreign ruler, to Isaac at Beersheba, symbolically claimed for Yahweh's name earlier, takes on a very significant meaning in relation to the received destiny of Isaac, as the seed of Abraham, to be a blessing for others. The questions raised at the end of our discussion of the unit vv.23-25 as to how to account for the striking omission of the formula pronouncement as well as the urgent question as to how the promises and universal destiny reaffirmed to Isaac in the two divine oracles are to be realised in Isaac's 'battered' state are answered satisfactorily by the final pericope of the Isaac narrative, vv.26-31. What has been revealed in vv.26-31 is in fact the initial actualisation of the universal destiny first pronounced to Abraham, and later bequeathed to his seed through Isaac.

This actualisation of destiny in narrative form shows that the destiny of being a blessing for others depends not on the

mere pronouncement of the formula (for it will not inevitably be actualised), nor on the abundant possession of the conditions of greatness and blessings (for they could also have a negative effect). Ultimately, as Gen.26 shows, it depends more on the total obedience of the chosen agent ('servant'!) to the command of God, and the correct and sacrificial handling of the conditions of greatness and blessedness, even in adverse circumstances, so that others (even erstwhile antagonists) can indeed see and confess the reality of the presence of Yahweh and the chosen agent as the blessed of Yahweh and come to seek to participate in it. Hence the unique significance of the Isaac narrative as a concrete demonstration not only of blessing as Fokkelmann suggested, but more significantly of the patriarchal destiny of being a blessing for the nations. One might even suggest that the omission of the formula pronouncement in v.24 is quite intentional, as the significance of its actualisation is now made much more striking by Abimelech's visit to Isaac at Beersheba to confess Isaac's status as a foreign ruler using the key word of the patriarchal narratives, "blessing", which is set against the domination of "curse" in the primeval history. In fact, Abimelech's confession of Isaac's status gives final prominence to the initiatives of Yahweh (v.28f). We have earlier argued that the prime mover and subject in blessing mankind against the backdrop of the primeval history in Gen.12:1-3 is Yahweh and Abraham is but the agent involved.

g) Water-finding and Well-naming (vv.32-33)

In view of the sacrificial losses of wells Isaac suffered to effect the reconciliation with Abimelech, it is most appropriate that the Isaac narrative ends with the notice about the finding of

water by Isaac's servants, a sign of blessing (vv.32f). We have already seen how the two notices of well-digging by Isaac's servants (vv.25,32f) are structured to link the covenant-making episode to the episode of the second theophany, as well as to form a frame around the former episode. It is instructive that the positive results of Isaac's servants' effort is reported only after Isaac, the blessed of Yahweh, has effected peace with his adversary by blessing him with the covenant he desires, whereby they become 'brothers', as a sign of divine approval and blessing.

It has been common for commentators to take Isaac's naming of the well Shibah (שִׁבַּח) as a witness of his oath-taking with Abimelech. It is hardly deniable that the two are most probably related. A similar naming of Beersheba (city!) after Abraham's complaint and subsequent oath-taking with Abimelech witnessing to Abraham's rights over the well in Gen.21 has possibly influenced this interpretation of 26:32f. However, in the present context of the Isaac narrative, it is arguable that the purpose of the naming is not exhausted by this interpretation. There are significant differences between the two episodes which require attention.

In Abraham's case, the naming is more explicitly linked to Abraham's complaint (vv.29f) rather than to the initial request of Abimelech for a covenant (vv.22ff).<sup>63</sup> In any case, the naming of Beersheba has its function as a binding witness to both parties concerned. Hence the necessity of the presence and acknowledgement by both parties at the naming. In the case of Isaac, it is not explicit that the conflict over wells is raised at all in the dialogue between Isaac and Abimelech (26:26-31).<sup>64</sup> Isaac's charge in v.27 is more specifically linked to his expulsion from Gerar (vv.12-17).

Moreover, Abimelech and his men are not present when Isaac names the well, so the act can hardly have any binding effect as a witness upon Abimelech and his men, if ever that is the intention in the first place. Thus, we would suggest that the report of the finding of the well and of Isaac's naming it does not necessarily refer only, or even primarily, to the oath-taking with Abimelech.

In fact, the motif of the well-digging in vv.31f is explicitly linked to the notice in v.25, namely section (A) of the Isaac narrative. These two notices are in turn parts of a series of such notices about well-digging in the narrative (vv.15, 17-22), reflecting Isaac's search for and efforts at survival in the face of famine and harassments. However, as our analysis of the narrative has shown, Isaac's experiences are consequent upon his halting responses to the three-fold command in vv.2b-3a. In other words, Yahweh's promises of protective presence and blessing to Isaac in his efforts to respond to the three-fold command is an important element to be considered. Yahweh is obligated to Isaac for protection and blessing (vv.3-5,24). It is only on being reassured of the promises when he arrives at the appointed destination, Beersheba, that Isaac renews his well-digging effort in v.25, to which the notice in vv.32f looks back. The naming of the well Shibah (שִׁבַּח) is thus not a witness to the covenant between Isaac and Abimelech, but more a reaffirmation of Yahweh's keeping faith with his oath (שָׁמַר) to Abraham now renewed to Isaac.

With this understanding of the primary reference of Isaac's naming of the well, a coherent understanding of the Isaac narrative emerges! The fulfilment of God's promises and the received destiny of being a blessing for others is first put into question when Isaac is faced with a famine but is forbidden to go down to Egypt to seek relief. Subsequently, the fulfilment of the promises and the destiny

receives a sharp blow when despite all the signs of their being fulfilled in Isaac during his stay in Gerar, he is forcibly deprived of his rights, and wealth, and expelled from Gerar. Not only does the fulfillment of the promises look quite remote, but worse still, Isaac now has to fight for his very survival under harassments in the desert region of Gerar.

The promise of protective presence is at least realised when Isaac finally arrives at Beersheba. Despite Yahweh's oracle of reassurance, however, it is hardly likely that Isaac in his deprived and battered state would consider himself being blessed and he looks anything but Yahweh's agent of blessing for others. It must therefore be to his total surprise that Abimelech and his men came to him at Beersheba and seek from him a covenant of peace, thereby acknowledging Isaac's 'superior' status and quality. Significantly, Abimelech even twice refers to Yahweh by name and repeats the very words used by Yahweh in the divine speech made to Isaac which started the whole sequence of events in the Isaac narrative: "We have indeed seen that Yahweh has been with you ... You are now the blessed of Yahweh" (vv.28f; cf. vv.3ff,24). To cap it all, Isaac's servants report their find of water at the wells, which they begin digging after Isaac is reassured by Yahweh's appearance and reaffirmation of his promises and oath to Abraham. Thus, while the covenant with Abimelech and their oath-taking provided the occasion, we believe Isaac's naming of the well Shibah (שִׁבַּח) is a recognition of the unexpected blessings (peace and finding of water) he received as well as actually being a blessing to Abimelech in his deprived state as an affirmation of Yahweh keeping faith.<sup>65</sup>

### 3) Summary

To sum up, our analysis of the Isaac narrative has demonstrated that there is indeed a coherent structure perceptible mainly from the verbs of movements, whether with Isaac or Abimelech as the subject of the verbs. Moreover, the three-fold command of Yahweh to Isaac with its concomitant theme of obedience and trust, and the unique twin-promise of protecting presence and blessing to Isaac also play a significant part in linking the whole narrative together. But probably the more important feature arising out of our analysis is how the above elements function together to demonstrate the initial actualisation (against all visible odds) of the ultimate purpose of Abraham's universal destiny, now bequeathed to his seed, Isaac, namely that "in your seed all the nations shall bless themselves." Thus, the generally negative assessments of the structure of the Isaac narrative by most commentators noted at the beginning of the present chapter are clearly in need of revision. Moreover, while Fokkelmann's description of the Isaac narrative as "demonstration-material" of the concept of blessing in general is correct to a certain extent, it is quite far from being specific enough or adequate.

We may now turn to the question of the relationship of the Isaac narrative to the patriarchal narratives as a whole.

### D) The Isaac Narrative in the Patriarchal Narratives

We will consider separately the relationship of Gen.26 to the Abraham narratives and to the Jacob narratives.

#### 1) Gen.26 and the Abraham Narratives

In our analysis of Gen.26, we have on quite a number of

occasions noted specific references, key-words, elements, motifs, and themes in it which look back to the Abraham narratives. For examples, the specific references to Abraham in 26:1,3d,5,15,18,24; the renewal to Isaac of promises first made to Abraham in 26:3b-5, 24; and the basic actualisation in 26:12ff of the promises of greatness and blessing in 12:2. Most significant of all is the delegation of Abimelech to Isaac at Beersheba seeking to have a share in Isaac's blessed status as actualising the destiny of Abraham expressed in the formula pronouncements in 12:3; 18:18 and 22:18, the ultimate purpose of Abraham's call. All these links amount to something fairly substantial, and one might even add, probably intentional. This linking of the two patriarchal figures in the narratives concerned ought not to be surprising when one recalls the significance the birth and destiny of Isaac plays in the whole Abraham story from Gen.15 onwards, especially the specific references in 15:4; 17:19,21; 18:19; 21:12 and 22:18. However, the relationships between the Abraham and Isaac narratives go further than the observations already made.

It is almost unanimously agreed by commentators that the three episodes, 12:10-20, 20:1-18 and 21:22-34, and 26:1-33 are strikingly similar in many aspects. The two basic motifs of deception of foreign ruler (or danger of the ancestress, wife-sister motif) and conflict over wells and reconciliation link them together. It goes beyond the scope of our study to enter into the debate concerning their traditio-historical relationship here, yet there is no doubt as to the explicit intention of placing the two patriarchal figures closely alongside through these three narratives. Without having to agree entirely with van Seters in his analysis of the relationship

of the narratives concerned, most would nevertheless agree with the main thrust of his observation that "the intention of the author is ... [to] directly parallel Isaac's life with that of Abraham."<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, after his analysis of the parallel motif of conflict between the herdsmen/servants of the patriarch and the local inhabitants, he further concluded that "it cannot be fortuitous that in this account [Gen.26] various motifs and elements are present from both the previous episodes in the life of Abraham in the same sequence of events [italics author's] and with a closer literary unity ... Consequently, 26:17 and 19-22 represent a literary conflation of themes from the two Abraham stories into a new episode in the life of Isaac."<sup>67</sup>

This intention to parallel the two patriarchal figures or to "conflate" the two Abraham episodes into a new episode in the Isaac narrative, however, is still only a surface observation which could be further deepened. A brief review of our earlier analysis of the structure of the Abraham story at this point is relevant. We recall that the Abraham narratives are structured in a double chiasmic arrangement, which also reveals a concomitant concentric movement as well (see diagrams in pp.118 and 121 respectively). The concentric movement shows the narratives moving inwards from the widest horizon (Abraham's relation with God) to the innermost struggles of matters of his own immediate family. The double chiasmic perspective, on the other hand, reveals that the same issues in the narrative of the first half of the symmetry (except for 12:1-9) with their introverted and particularistic horizons are transformed in the narratives of the second half to a outward-looking and universalistic horizon in accordance with the theme as expressed by the formula

that the ultimate purpose of Abraham's calling and destiny is to be a blessing for the nations.

Gen.26, being paralleled to 12:10-20 and 20:1-21:34 in the Abraham narratives then takes on a further significance in its relationship with the Abraham narratives. For the two episodes (12:10-20 and 20:1-21:34) are the penultimate set of narratives in the structure of the Abraham story thereby constituting some sort of inclusio design, and the combination of the two opposing perspectives in the story forming some sort of totality effect in Abraham's dealings with foreigners represented through their ruler, Pharaoh and Abimelech. This inclusio and the totality designs of the two Abraham narratives are synthesised into one narrative in the Isaac traditions. In other words, Gen.26 is telescoping the structure and material of the two Abraham narratives into a concentrated or miniature quintessence.<sup>68</sup> This telescoping effect of two symmetrical narratives of the Abraham story in the Isaac narrative is not limited only to the above single example.

What many commentators have not observed is the close relationship between the opening and closing narratives of the Abraham story, 12:1-9 and 22:1-19 respectively, with the Isaac narrative as well. We have already noted the three narratives concerned, 12:1-9; 22:1-19; 26:1-33, have the same striking three-fold descriptions in the formulation of the divine command (12:1; 22:2; 26:2f). Moreover, the destination to which the patriarchs were commanded to go are all unstipulated before their arrivals. But more striking than these similarities is that the overall structure of the divine speech in the Isaac narrative (26:2b-6), combines a mixture of forms and elements of the overall structures of the two Abraham narratives.

In 12:1-4a, we have a structure: command (v.1) -- promises (vv.2-3a) -- formula pronouncement (v.3b) -- response (v.4a). The formula used is the niphal form with Abraham named as the agent of blessing. On the other hand, in 22:1-19, the overall structure is: command (vv.1f) -- response (vv.3-14) -- promises (vv.15ff) -- formula pronouncement (v.18). The formula in this case is the hithpael form with the seed named as the agent of blessing. Earlier, we suggested in our formulaic analysis (Chapter Two) that the use of the niphal and of the hithpael forms of the formula respectively in the patriarchal narratives could very well be intended to express a probationary and reaffirmatory state of relationship of the patriarch's (in the present two cases, Abraham's) involvement and suitability as agent in the destiny of being a blessing for the nations. While the divine speech in the Isaac narrative has, on the one hand, a structure similar to 12:1-4a: command (vv.2b-3a) -- promises (vv.3b-4b) -- formula pronouncement (v.4c) -- response (v.6), it uses, on the other hand, the hithpael form of the formula as in 22:18. Furthermore, a reason is given for the renewal of promises and the formula pronouncement to Isaac in 26:5 as in 22:18. No reason is given for the making of the promises and formula in the divine speech in 12:1-3.

The two narratives, 12:1-9 and 22:1-9, also constitute an inclusio design in the structure of the Abraham story, as do 12:10-20 with 20:1-21:34. However, there is the added significance in the former set of symmetrical narratives in that being the ultimate pair of narratives in the structure they also act as the encasing framework for the whole of the main body of the Abraham narratives under the theme "Blessing for the Nations". The Isaac narrative (Gen.26) now also significantly combines the structures,

elements, and the total effect of the niphah-probationary and hithpael-reaffirmatory significance of the two divine speeches which begin and end the Abraham story, thereby telescoping the dual poles of the Abraham narratives' conception of Abraham as a blessing for the nations itself to be viewed against the backdrop of the breaches in the divine-human relationships and the series of curses and judgements in the primeval history. This combination of the significance of 12:1-9 and 22:1-19 is now made to preface the Isaac narrative.

The absence in Gen.26 of parallels to the narratives in the inner sets of the concentric arrangement of the Abraham story, namely Abraham's dealings with Lot-Sodom and matters pertaining to his immediate family raised in Gen.15-17, does not rule out the validity of our analysis above. First, for the obvious reason that one would not in all reasonableness expect a single narrative, Gen.26, to contain all elements of the Abraham story in Gen.12:1-22:19, even by drastic telescoping. Secondly, Isaac does not have a relative as Abraham had in Lot for the narratives of their relationship to be relevant in Gen.26. Thirdly, Abraham's immediate family matters in Gen.15-17 arise primarily because of the anxiety of Abraham and Sarah for an heir of their own. The matter is not of direct relevance for the Isaac narrative is in fact a credit to Isaac in his relationship with God because the issue is positively handled by Isaac and Rebekah when "Isaac prayed to Yahweh for his wife, because she was barren, and Yahweh granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived" (25:21).

## 2) Gen.26 and the Jacob Narratives

While the links between Gen.26 and the Abraham narratives have been more readily seen by commentators, the relation of Gen.26 to the Jacob story has not been given much attention other than the general observation that it breaks the continuity of the extended narrative of the struggle/conflict between Jacob and Esau for the birthright and blessing of the first-born in Gen.25:19-34 and 27:1-28:9. Skinner describes Gen.26 as "a misplaced appendix to the history of Abraham."<sup>69</sup> Does that exhaust all there is to be said about Gen.26 in relation to the Jacob story?

Fishbane has attempted an analysis of the position of Gen.26 (and Gen.34 as well) in the context of the Jacob story which has yielded something more substantial about the placement of Gen.26.<sup>70</sup> His observations can be briefly mentioned as follow: (i) Gen.26 is anomalous in its context. (ii) Gen.26 is "subtly integrated into the wider thematics of the [Jacob] Cycle by the employment of both theme and key-word." He identified the leitmotifs of deception and the promise of blessing as the links between the chapters. (iii) Moving from an observational to a functional-evaluative standpoint, Fishbane observes that Gen.26 serves as a narrative interlude between the opening tensions and the development in the Jacob-Esau struggle. In other words, without the 'emplacement' of Gen.26, chapters 25 and 27 would stand in a more direct and integrated relationship with each other.

Fishbane's analysis is an advance in the recognition of the functional placement of Gen.26 in the Jacob story and he has demonstrated that it is integrated in its context. On the other hand, he has not demonstrated that the primary function of Gen.26

in the context is to act as a narrative interlude to break what he observed as the two etymologies of Jacob. He has also not explicated any significance of what he describes as the "subtle" integration of Gen.26 into the wider thematics of the Jacob Cycle. We would also want to ask whether the motif and theme he identified as linking the narratives are the most important ones. In fact, when the narratives in 25:1 to 28:9 are taken together, other significant motifs emerge.

(i) First, the motif of eating and drinking appears in 25:34, 27:25 and 26:30. All three occasions are paralleled by a desire or an attempt to obtain something ultimately connected with blessing or birthright. In 25:34, Jacob wants the birthright of Esau and causes Esau to give it up by giving him bread and pottage of lentils to eat and drink. In 27:25, when he wants the blessing of Isaac which was meant to be given to Esau, Jacob causes Isaac to eat and drink the game he (and Rebekah, his mother) have prepared. The two occasions involve some sort of questionable manipulation of Esau's hunger and of Isaac's desire for food. The resentment emerges openly only when Esau is later bitterly provoked by Jacob's further treachery in taking away the blessing. The two actions of Jacob lead finally to the threat of the murder of Jacob by Esau (27:41). On the other hand, the motif of drinking and eating in Gen.26 is the occasion for reconciliation and consolidation of covenantal friendship between Isaac and Abimelech after the latter's treacherous infringements of the former's hereditary rights to the wells and prosperity as a result of Yahweh's blessings. Furthermore, the covenantal feast given by Isaac is preceded by Abimelech's denial of any evil intent to touch (וַיִּלֹּא, 'kill!') Isaac (26:29).

(ii) It is interesting that the connection between hate

( $\lambda\iota\omega$ ) and blessing appears in both narratives. In 27:41, we have the statement, "Now Esau hated ( $\tau\iota\omega\omega$ ) Jacob because of the blessing ( $\eta\beta\epsilon\beta$ ) with which his father had blessed him ..." Similarly, in Gen.26:12ff, it is stated that Isaac was forced out of Gerar by Abimelech because the people envied the blessings of Yahweh bestowed upon Isaac and his efforts. However, when Isaac reminded Abimelech of the incident he understood it as hate ( $\lambda\iota\omega$ , synonymous with  $\tau\iota\omega\omega$ )<sup>71</sup> which caused his expulsion (26:27). The significance of the contrast between the narratives is that Jacob was very much responsible for the extreme reaction of Esau while Isaac was very much the innocent victim of the high-handed harassments and encroachments of the Philistines.

(iii) The acuteness of the conflict between Jacob and Esau is that it is between two brothers, whose father and ancestor has been chosen by Yahweh to be the agent of blessing for the nations. More poignantly, the seed of Abraham and of Isaac has been reaffirmed as the agent of blessing in Abraham's universal destiny in 22:18 and 26:4. In 27:41, Esau says to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob." While the motivations might be different, the parallel intention of Esau towards Jacob, his brother, and of Cain to Abel, also his brother (Gen.4:8f), is very striking. Moreover, both pairs of brothers are second generation descendants of the two key universal figures, Abraham and Adam respectively.

On the other hand, it is not without significance that on the occasion when Isaac is reconciled with Abimelech, it is said, "In the morning they rose early and swore, each to his brother" (26:31). On a similar, previous, occasion when Abraham entered into a covenant

with Abimelech, it is only said that the "place was called Beersheba; because there both of them swore an oath" (21:31). The emphasis put on the 'brotherly' relationship between the two erstwhile enemies when reconciliation was effected between Isaac and Abimelech in Gen.26 in the wider context of the Jacob story is therefore most probably intentional.

(iv) The outcome of the motif of drinking and eating as expressed in the direction and nature of movements of the principal characters of the three narratives also reveals interesting comparisons. In 25:34, after Esau gives in to his own unfettered appetite, and therefore to Jacob's capitalisation on the situation as well, it is stated only that he "rose and went his way" without any hint of resentment or hatred on Esau's part. It is only in 27:36 later that we see Esau expressing his feelings towards Jacob: "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and behold, now ... my blessing." In other words, in Gen.25, only the seed of conflict and struggle between Jacob and Esau is planted. But it takes Jacob's treacherous deception of Isaac over the blessings meant for Esau in Gen.27 to cause the fundamental rift with threat to life between the brothers. The tragedy of the event in 27:41 is not inevitable if it were not for Jacob, whose responsibility is therefore more prominent.

However, in 27:1-28:9, the ultimate outcome of Isaac's drinking and eating the game prepared by Jacob results in a complicating series of movements. First, Esau's plea for a blessing from Isaac is answered in the words, "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on earth" (27:39). Secondly, when Rebekah learns of Esau's threat

on Jacob's life, she says to Jacob, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself by planning to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran ..." (27:44f). Finally, at the instigation of Rebekah, Isaac calls Jacob, and blesses him, and charges him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram ..." (28:2). Thus Isaac sends Jacob away. While Isaac's intention of sending Jacob away is in line with what Abraham insisted on for Isaac previously (24:3f), the leaving (fleeing!) from the promised land of Canaan is not (cf. 26:2b-3a; 28:15; 31:3,13).

The Jacob story, nevertheless, is quite explicit as to the basic reason for Jacob's infamous escape from his brother. In other words, the direction of movement away from the family and the promised land of Canaan, the basic nature of the departure of Jacob and the movement of Esau are all under the shadow of non-blessing or even the opposite of blessing, curse. This is corroborated by the use of the motif of curse in 27:1-28:9. After Rebekah urges Jacob to deceive Isaac, Jacob expressed the fear that "Perhaps ... I shall seem to be mocking [my father], and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing" (27:12). Strikingly, when Isaac blesses Jacob, he uses the same formula that is declared by Yahweh to Abraham in 12:3a, but in reverse order: "Cursed be every one who curses you, and blessed be every one who blesses you!" (27:29) — as though to signify the different emphasis in the two usages (cf. Num.24:9; see also Gen.4:15).

On the other hand, while Isaac is forced away from Gerar by Abimelech in what can be described as a hostile and broken relationship (26:12-17), it is striking that the unblessed situation is radically

reversed with the reconciliation effected by the later oath-taking of the two men. More importantly, when Abimelech is set on his way by Isaac, he and his men depart in peace ( $\square\zeta\psi$ ) — a blessed relationship. Not only are the reason for and nature of movements (curse and blessing) between the Jacob and the Isaac narratives contrasted, but also the fact that the reconciliation and meeting again between the two erstwhile antagonists in Gen.26 finds no such equivalent in the Jacob-Esau conflict (not until Gen.33 at least). In other words, the placement of Gen.26 in its context of the Jacob-Esau conflict serves to highlight the unresolved tension of blessing-curse therein.

Furthermore, the reconciliation and restoration of the blessed situation in Gen.26 in "the land of which I shall tell you", the place appointed by Yahweh so to speak, the 'incongruity' of a relationship of curse, especially between brothers, in the promised land and the forcing away of the chosen agent of blessing (Jacob) from the land where the blessings of Yahweh are to be actualised, is undoubtedly a striking contrast. Herein lies another of the unresolved tensions in the Jacob-Esau conflict which awaits a blessed resolution.

(v) One final link will be briefly mentioned, namely the motif of 'service' ( $\square\zeta\psi$ ). We shall leave detailed discussion of the motif which appears to have a significant function in the overall Jacob story till later. Before the birth of her twins, Rebekah received a divine oracle concerning them, saying: "... the elder shall serve ( $\square\zeta\psi$ ) the younger" (25:23). The motif is more or less repeated in Isaac's blessing of 'Esau' (Jacob!), the elder in 27:29, "Let peoples serve you ( $\square\zeta\psi$ ), and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow

down to you." However, subsequent to his blessing of Jacob (as Esau), Isaac also said of Esau in a "broken-blessing": "By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve (ַרְבִּיב) your brother" (27:40). There seems to be a deliberate ambiguity as to who is the 'elder' receiving the blessing, as well as to the manner and nature of the 'serving'. On the one hand, it appears that Esau is the elder and that is also the understanding of the parents. On the other hand, Jacob received the blessing from the father as the 'elder' who will receive service and homage from others. Who is to serve whom? The answer is found only at Gen.33 later. In the immediate context, however, the motif of service in the two Jacob narratives (25:19-34; 27:1-28:9) is not entirely left unexplained.

In Gen.26, we have already seen the sudden but significant use of the motif of the servant of Yahweh to describe Isaac's 'ordeal' in perspective. Isaac indeed is the blessed (elder!) of Yahweh, but it turns out in the narrative that he eventually serves the cause of reconciliation by making a feast for Abimelech (the younger in terms of blessing!) thereby becoming a blessing for the latter. Gen.26 demonstrates the 'different' concept and quality of what the servanthood of Yahweh would mean in action. While as far as Jacob is portrayed the motif of service brought conflict and non-blessing, the opposite is true of Isaac's 'service' to Yahweh, for in serving Abimelech, he brought blessing to others.

To sum up, from our analysis above of some of the other motifs common to Gen.26 and the two Jacob narratives not discussed by Fishbane, a very striking contrast emerges. The former can be described as positive and reflective of blessing, the latter is

negative and showing the ambiguities and unresolved tension of curse and blessing. If Gen.26, the Isaac narrative, is to be seen as a "misplaced appendix" in the Jacob story, or more appropriately an "anomalous interlude", then one can only conclude that it is an intentional and highly purposeful one. In fact, Gen.26 now appears to accumulate a commentary function in its immediate context of the Jacob-Esau conflict. On the one hand, it acts as a negative commentary on the tragic and cursed relationship of two brothers, especially that of Jacob, the one chosen to receive and to continue the blessing, promises and universal destiny of his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac. Despite this, more importantly, it serves at the same time, on the other hand, to provide the positive model and direction of how a broken relationship between "brothers" could be and should be reconciled so as to bring about blessing, the ultimate purpose of Abraham's calling. It therefore also highlights the unresolved tensions in the Jacob-Esau conflict which await resolution and thus provide a basis for hope. The Isaac narrative provides the perspective for Jacob of how blessing (destiny!) is to be acquired correctly, and the fulfilling of the mission and destiny of being chosen to be a blessing for others. Viewed against the above analysis, Fishbane's identification of the leitmotif of deception in the narratives and the promise of blessing does not touch on the specific and contextually significant contrasts when applied to Jacob and Esau on the one hand, and to Isaac on the other.

In fact, when one takes the whole of the Jacob story (25:19-35:29) into consideration, other than Gen.26 and 34, virtually the whole story is introverted and particularistic in horizon, concerned almost only with the struggles and deceptions for birthright, blessing,

material rewards, and family matters. Of the two symmetrically anomalous interludes in the Jacob story as Fishbane describes them, Gen.34 is a narrative of negative value where Jacob's destiny to be a blessing for others is concerned (v.30). Only Gen.26, placed in between the Jacob-Esau conflict in Gen.25:19-34 and 27:1-28:9, provides the one substantially positive narrative in the whole of the Jacob story before the beginning of the resolution of strife created by the initial struggles and deception for blessing, destiny, and lordship in the Jacob-Esau relationship. The significance of Gen.26 is further enhanced in the Jacob-Esau story when we recall that it has been shown to be "demonstration-material" not only of the general concept of blessing, but more specifically as the first actualisation in the patriarchal narratives of the universal destiny of Abraham's calling to be a blessing for the nations through the agency of the seed. That being the case, it is surely reasonable to conclude that by this ultimate intention of the narrative, Gen.26 is negatively commenting on and positively prescribing for the Jacob story in its initial narratives of tragic conflicts and non-blessing what the ultimate purpose of and attitude towards the destiny of Jacob ought to be.<sup>72</sup>

CHAPTER FIVE - THE THEME "BLESSING FOR THE NATIONS" AND THE  
JACOB NARRATIVES (GEN.25-35)

A) General Introduction

The Jacob story, on first reading, does not appear to have much function or significance for the theme "Blessing for the Nations". The whole story is threaded by the narrative theme of strife, conflict and deception.<sup>1</sup> While the issues of blessing, promises, and destiny are very much part of the story, they appear to be considered by the main characters in the story from a strongly self-centered and particularistic perspective, hence the series of conflicts and deceptions. Nevertheless, we shall give the reasons for studying the theme against the Jacob story below. As we are primarily concerned to study whether the theme has any function or significance in the Jacob story as a whole, it would go beyond our scope to study the story in great detail and to discuss issues which could be important in the story in themselves.

Our basis for taking the theme into the Jacob story is twofold. First, the theme is pronounced in a stressed position in the divine oracle in Jacob's theophanic experience (28:10-22).<sup>2</sup> Secondly, placed between the first part of the Jacob-Esau cycle which saw the unblessed and broken relationship of the two brothers is the "anomalous interlude" of the Isaac narrative, Gen.26. The latter is a narrative of "demonstration-material" of the outworking of the theme "Blessing for the Nations". In its context, it has the function of negatively commenting on Jacob's manipulative methods of acquiring the birthright and blessing with its adverse consequences on the one hand, and of positively providing the model

for the appropriate handling of relationships and of promises by God's servant and agent called to be a blessing for others on the other hand. In other words, the question of Jacob's destined lordship over and conflict with Esau is to be resolved against the perspective provided by the Isaac model. Thus, the theme under study assumes a considerable importance in the Jacob narratives, at least in the initial episodes which set the scene for the development of the rest of the story in Gen.29-35.

From another perspective, the Jacob story might not be as remote from the theme under study as a first reading of it might have suggested. In our earlier discussions of the Abraham and Isaac narratives, we have already seen the recurrent stress on acts of obedient trust in response to a divine command, which is related ultimately to the universal destiny as pronounced in the formula. Through their responses, the characters and qualities of the patriarchs were tested and their 'suitability' as Yahweh's agent of blessing for others is expressed. What has just been mentioned finds strong resonance in the Jacob story as well and this will be kept in focus in our analysis below.

#### B) The First Bethel Encounter (Gen.28)

To study the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the Jacob story, the starting point would undoubtedly be 28:10-22, where the formula expressing it is apparently embedded as the final intent of the divine oracle in vv.13ff, "in you and your seed shall all the families of the earth find blessing." In view of the fact that the theme as expressed by the formula appears only once in the Jacob story, and it cannot therefore be assumed that the theme plays

a prominent role in it, before we can discuss further the relationship of the theme and the Jacob story, it is necessary to ascertain initially the position and function of the Bethel encounter (28:10-22) in the overall story. This, we believe, would have important bearing on our discussion of the theme against the Jacob story.

1) Gen.28 and 32

In discussions of the Jacob story, considerable significance has been given by most commentators to the Bethel (Gen.28) and the Jabbok (Gen.32) encounters between Jacob and Yahweh. So much so that it has been quite usual to regard the two narratives as the two poles in the structure of the Jacob story. The first encounter is a vision Jacob has at Bethel when he is about to go into 'exile' from the promised land, from his brother Esau, and the latter encounter when he is returning from 'exile' and on the point of re-entering the promised land just prior to his meeting with Esau again. Both the departure and the return are crisis points in Jacob's life when the encounters with God provided him with the necessary assurance. Von Rad commented that "the way in which [the Yahvist] ... made the Bethel story and the Peniel story landmarks corresponding to each other in the story of Jacob with God — betrays a conscious theological composition."<sup>3</sup> He went on to say that "the Jacob story in its 'Jehovistic' form is ... a bridge supported from within by two pillars: by the Bethel story ... and the Peniel story."<sup>4</sup> Von Rad is followed by many others in this view.<sup>5</sup>

There is hardly any dissenting voice regarding the importance of the two narratives in the Jacob story. However, despite the views of von Rad and others on the correspondence of Gen.28

and 32, we believe there are important features in the two narratives which require us to ask specifically how they correspond, if indeed they do, and in what sense could they be considered as "two pillars" in the overall Jacob story?

The divine oracle in 28:13ff has a programmatic nature very similar to that in 12:1-3, 18:17ff, 22:15-18, and 26:2-5. It contains promises of land, progeny and greatness, special relationship and protecting presence of God for the patriarchs, and the pronouncement of the formula expressing the patriarch's universal destiny of being a blessing for others. However, there is no such equivalent of promises and destiny in 32:22ff, only the granting of a new name to Jacob after he is blessed by God. In fact, the dialogue in 32:26-29 could hardly be called a divine oracle, and it was not explicit to Jacob (before v.30) that he was encountering God at all.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Jacob's demand for a blessing (v.26) is not even directly answered, and his request to know the name of his 'adversary' (v.27) is not met either. In other words, the Peniel episode does not seem to carry as much theological weight or at least is not concerned immediately with the same theological issues as the Bethel episode.<sup>7</sup> There is no struggle between Jacob and (the angels of) God at the Bethel encounter, unlike the Peniel episode, where the wrestling between Jacob and the 'adversary' clearly has a very central role. From a structural point of view, 28:10-22 seems to be more independent as an unit in its immediate context, unlike 32:22-32 which is now more purposefully integrated into the complex of episodes in Gen.32-33.<sup>8</sup> Thus, our brief glance at the content of the two episodes seems to indicate that they probably do not correspond in the sense that one is referring to the other.

It is interesting to note that in this respect, Wolff in his discussion of the kerygma of the Yahwist did not even consider the Jabbok-Peniel episode while 28:14 was touched upon.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, for Fretheim, the Peniel encounter is the climax of the Yahwistic Jacob story, whereas the Bethel encounter becomes decisive in the Jacob story only in the context of the Elohist.<sup>10</sup> He concluded from a study of the theology of the final, canonical shape of the Jacob story that

"It would appear that the suggestion of Von Rad .. that the Yahwist structured his narrative around the two pillars of Bethel and Peniel cannot be maintained. It is more probably JE. Bethel achieves the importance of Peniel in the story only with the addition of the E material."<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Fretheim's conclusion about the Bethel episode achieving the importance of the Peniel story in JE is essentially the same as von Rad's views about the relationship of the two narratives, albeit in J only. Thus, it needs more specific clarification if the two narratives are not to be taken as mirroring one another, or as two symmetrical poles. In his critique of von Rad's, and to a certain extent Fretheim's, understanding of the Yahwistic kerygma of the Jacob narratives being built around the two theological pillars of the Bethel and Peniel stories, Lewis argued that the central point of the Jabbok struggle was the establishing of Jacob's true identity as Israel and not as Jacob the trickster. He suggested that "if one can speak of two pillars in the Jacob narratives, they must be chapters 27 and 32: the deception culminating in Esau's cry that Jacob is rightly named (27:36), and the reversal of that judgement [32:29]."<sup>12</sup> It is possible to accord agreement with Lewis' thesis about the vindication of Jacob's true identity in the Jabbok struggle, but to take it as the central point of the struggle is not entirely convincing.

By vindication, Lewis seems to argue that moral or character transformation is not an issue in the struggle. The change of name, and therefore of character or personality, as reflected in Jacob's state of mind and attitude towards Esau both before and after the struggle surely argues against Lewis' interpretation. However, one need not agree with all of Lewis' thesis in order to agree with the linkage of Gen.32 and 27 as he has observed.

2) Gen.28 and 35

If 28:10-22 is not to be taken as finding its symmetrical and corresponding significance in 32:22-32, then is there any other referent in the Jacob story corresponding to the former? The question is important for our purpose because Gen.32 on its own could hardly have contributed much directly or explicitly to a study of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the Jacob story. Having 'loosened' the links between Gen.28 and 32, our analysis thus far now allows us to search for a new 'link' for Gen.28 which could well contribute to the study of the theme.

While Jacob's return to Canaan results in the resolution (Gen.33) of the tension caused by the broken relationship with Esau (Gen.27),<sup>13</sup> in the context of the overall story, however, the resolution of tension is not the primary and ultimate purpose of the return, important as it is. In the first place, Jacob's return is in response to the divine command in 31:13, "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth." The command therefore links Jacob's response to return to his vows made in 28:20ff when he had the theophanic experience of God with the divine

oracle at Bethel (28:13ff).

As far as our study is concerned, the fact that Jacob's return is ultimately linked to 28:10-22 is significant because the formula expressing the universal destiny of Jacob and his seed as a blessing for the families of the earth is embedded as the final intent of the divine oracle (v.14) which prompts Jacob's vow in the first place.

If the narrative at 28:10-22 is the preceding 'link' of God's command for Jacob's return (31:13), and not for the Jabbok-Peniel struggle in 32:22-32 as we have argued, then it is more correct to find the 'fulfilment' of the mutual vows mentioned in 28:10-22 somewhere else. Appropriately, we find it at the end of the over-all cycle of the Jacob story at 35:1-15, when Jacob finally goes up (return!) to Bethel with his family. There he fulfils his vow by committing them and himself totally to God by putting away other gods and purifying them all (vv.2ff; cf. 28:21). He also sets up a pillar of stone and pouring out oil and a drink offering on it (v.14; cf. 28:18,22), and calls the place Bethel in reaffirmation (v.15; cf. 28:19). More significantly, a divine oracle giving the patriarchal promises echoing and renewing that made in 28:13ff, which ought to have been reiterated in 32:22-32 if the Jabbok-Peniel encounter was to be taken as having symmetrical significance to 28:10-22, is found in 35:9-12 instead.<sup>14</sup> We shall leave the discussion of the two divine oracles and their relationship to the theme under study until later. Thus, the Bethel episode of 28:10-22 finds its correspondent, not so much in Gen.32:22-32 as argued by von Rad and others, but in the second Bethel episode of 35:1-15.<sup>15</sup>

If 35:1-15 is taken as the 'fulfilment' of Jacob's vows

in 28:10-22, and the divine oracle in 35:10ff a reaffirmation or renewal of that in 28:13ff, then it is possible to regard the promises and the pronouncement of the formula in 28:13ff as initial and probationary.<sup>16</sup> This is corroborated by the fact that in 28:10-22 God appears to Jacob and makes the promises and destiny to him more on the basis of his relation to Abraham and Isaac, whereas in 35:1-15, God is in addition the God of Jacob, and the promises made earlier in 28:13ff are now reaffirmed on the latter basis as well. Jacob's fleeing the promised land (Gen.28) is in the 'reverse' direction from the destination of God's call to Abraham (12:1-3,7) and the instruction concerning Isaac (24:3f,7f; 26:2f) to remain in the land, where God would actualise his promises. Therefore it is appropriate (necessary!) that Jacob should be back in the promised land of his fathers for the promises and destiny to be reaffirmed and worked out.

This initial and probationary state of the relation of Jacob to God and to the content of the oracle in 28:13ff and 35:9-13 seems to be reflected in the sudden reversion to the use of the niph'al form of the formula in 28:14, after the use of the hithpa'el form of the formula twice before this in 22:18 and 26:4. In our earlier formulaic analysis (Chapter Two), we concluded that the niph'al form of the formula is probably used where the suitability of the patriarch concerned in relation to his agency in the universal destiny, for various reasons, has not been satisfactorily proven. In other words, the niph'al form indicates the probationary nature of the relation of the agent to the universal destiny expressed by the formula.

Strikingly, this different and developing state of Jacob's relation to God and to the content of the oracle in 28:13ff is set

in a very instructive position in the two halves of the Jacob-Esau story. A quick glance shows that 28:10-22 is placed immediately after the narratives 25:29-34 and 27:1-28:9, showing the broken and unblessed relationship of Jacob and Esau, and the portrayal of the dubious and manipulative personality of Jacob in pursuit of his destiny fleeing from home, the promised land; whereas 35:1-15, the 'fulfilment' of the first Bethel encounter, comes only after the radical transformation of Jacob's character and name, and his 'humbling' reconciliation and service to Esau (Gen.32-33). Thus, the correlation between the different and developing state of Jacob's relation to God and to the content of the oracles in 28:10-22 and 35:1-15 with the development of his character and its relationship with Esau has an important bearing on our theme; we shall further analyse it in due course. We will now turn to the strife between Jacob and Esau and the implication of its resolution for the universal destiny of being a blessing for others.

### C) The Jacob-Esau Strife and Its Resolution

#### 1) Jacob's 'Exile' and Its Implications

When Jacob leaves Beersheba, two portrayals of him are given.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, Jacob's fleeing from Esau is under the shadow of a broken and unblessed relationship after his devious schemes to acquire for himself the birthright and the blessing. As a result, Isaac's "shattered blessing" for Esau really amounts to some sort of curse, not unlike that of Cain (Gen.4:11f).<sup>18</sup> Jacob not only possesses the birthright of his brother but also now acquires the vital blessing of his father which gives him lordship over his brother(s) and the fertility of nature. But behind the prominent

status of Jacob over Esau, the conflict essentially shows Jacob's 'particularistic' understanding of the destiny (25:23) of being lord over his brothers. He will manipulate the weakness of Esau (25:29-34) and the 'blindness' of Isaac (27:1-29), take the risk of being cursed (27:11f), and exercise no independent view of his own but submit to the 'voice' of his mother, all to ensure his own status and destiny (cf. 16:1f).<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, Jacob's departure is also seen as a charge to be observed, since he is the son of Isaac, the chosen seed, who is to further the blessing of Abraham (28:1-5). Reflecting the conditions placed on Isaac's marriage by Abraham in Gen.24, Jacob is also charged not to be entangled with a local marriage (28:2; 27:46; cf. 26:34f). Together with this charge concerning marriage to Jacob, Isaac also blessed Jacob: "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your seed with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham!" (28:3f). It appears that Isaac's blessing is essentially a 'wish' or 'prayer' that Jacob too "may share in God's promises of land and fertility."<sup>20</sup> The actual making of the promises and destiny of Abraham to Jacob comes only later in 28:13f when he himself has to hear what God has to say about Abraham's and Isaac's destiny. In this respect, it is perhaps noteworthy that in 27:27ff when Isaac blessed Jacob with the father's blessing, as Coats commented: "The occasion offers an opportunity for the promises to be passed down, for here Jacob receives approval as the heir to his father's estate. But nothing of the promise appears."<sup>21</sup>

It is against this 'dual' portrayal of Jacob's departure

that we immediately have the theophanic encounter at Bethel in 28:10-22. The divine oracle 28:13ff meets Jacob at precisely his two points of need just mentioned, but in reverse order. First, as Isaac wished for Jacob to receive the blessing of Abraham, so Jacob is promised by God the patriarchal promises of progeny and land, thereby confirming Jacob's standing as the 'first-born' in this respect. Secondly, Jacob in his fear, insecurity and loneliness, is promised divine presence for protection until he returns to the land. While it is true that there appears no explicit hint of divine judgement on the less than honourable reason for Jacob's departure, one should not read the absence of rebuke as God's condoning Jacob's manipulations. Hence the prominence of the motif of strife and retribution, of travel (wandering!), escape and fear, as expressed in the narratives during his stay with Laban, and the 'necessity' of the Jabbok-Peniel struggle between his meeting up with Esau again.<sup>22</sup>

But more relevant to our purpose is that the giving of the patriarchal promises in 28:13ff is capped by the first pronouncement of the formula expressing the ultimate purpose of the patriarchs' destiny of being a blessing for others (v.14). The formula when used over Abraham and Isaac, especially the former, clearly has in mind the reversals of the curse and broken relationships portrayed in the primeval history. It is therefore noteworthy that the formula used in 28:14 over Jacob is in the niphal form, expressing Jacob's agency as blessing for others as only initial and probationary. Significantly, neither in 27:27ff when Isaac blesses Jacob with a father's blessing, nor in 28:3f when Isaac 'wishes' for Jacob the blessing and promises of Abraham, is there any indication that

the blessing or wish is to be seen against the perspective of the universal responsibility of Abraham. The formula pronouncement of 28:14 could therefore be a 'correction' or 'reminder' emphasising the proper perspective under which Jacob is to receive and exercise the blessing and promises of Abraham.<sup>23</sup> This seems to be corroborated by our analysis of the function and the manner of the "anomalous interlude" of the Isaac narrative, Gen.26, with its outworking of the theme of being a blessing for others, being inserted in the conflict of Jacob and Esau.

If the emphasis of the first pronouncement of the formula over Jacob in 28:14 is as we have delineated, then it is legitimate to ask how Jacob, in his present state of personality, of his particularistic understanding of his destiny, and of his relationship to God and the call to be a blessing for others, could be the agent in whom curse and broken relationships could be overcome, and in whom the families of the earth could find blessing? In fact, Jacob's very 'exile' is the tragic opposite of what is pronounced over him at this point. Abraham and Isaac, especially the former, both have had to demonstrate their respective suitability as God's agent in such a universal destiny before it could be reaffirmed to or realised in them. It appears from this that one should not be surprised if Jacob also needs, more so in fact, to undergo a radical character transformation and perspective-widening 'test' before he can be found suitable as God's agent of blessing. The patriarchal promises of progeny, greatness, blessing, and land by themselves can quite naturally and easily lead to a particularistic and self-interested understanding working against the very universalistic and service-oriented destiny intended by God for the patriarchs against

the background of the primeval history. Hence, we believe the pronouncement of the formula over Jacob at this point, capping the giving of the patriarchal promises, serves precisely this 'corrective' function.<sup>24</sup> As such, the universal destiny expressed by the formula is still at best initial and probationary as far as Jacob's agency is concerned.

Moreover, the promises of land and the multiplying of descendants, as well as the mutual vows of God and Jacob, are still in the future; thus the narratives create a tension yet to be resolved, corresponding to the state of Jacob's initial and probationary agency of being a blessing for others. In addition, it is striking that while the promises and the formula are pronounced over Jacob (28:13ff), he is yet to be blessed (ברך) by God himself (as the promise to bless Abraham in 12:2b did not happen until after the test in 22:17f; see also 24:1;35)<sup>25</sup> — which is probably only appropriate under the circumstances of Jacob's departure.

Jacob's stay at Paddan-aram with his uncle Laban (Gen.29-31) has been well recognised as constituting a separate cycle of story on its own but which is also well integrated with the Jacob-Esau cycle of story preceding and following it in the wider structure of the Jacob story as a whole. It would go beyond the scope of our study to discuss their relationships.<sup>26</sup> For our purpose, it would be quite adequate to make the following brief comments in the light of the theme "Blessing for the Nations".

First, we have earlier commented on Wolff's discussion of the kerygma of the Yahwist in the Jacob narratives. Our critique of Wolff's interpretation arises mainly from his conclusion that the Jacob-Esau cycle deserves only passing interest where the

kerygma of the Yahwist (our theme under study) is concerned, and that the 'confession' of Laban: "I have learned by divination that Yahweh has blessed me because of you" (30:27) to Jacob is more significant as a demonstration of the actualisation of the theme. Wolff describes Laban's being blessed because of Jacob as a form of economic aid being put up as a model for the Yahwist audience. We have argued then that Jacob's so-called blessing of Laban can at most be described as a 'negative' example of the actualisation of the universal destiny because of the questionable motives of the two parties concerned. Nevertheless, the example, albeit being a negative one, does serve to link Jacob's stay with Laban with our theme under study.

Secondly, while not as explicit as the above example, Jacob's dealings with Laban, in the context of the overall Jacob story, could be seen as part of the character building and reforming process necessary to prepare Jacob for his return to the promised land for the receiving of the patriarchal blessing and destiny, which started with the 'corrective' function of the formula pronouncement as the perspective for Jacob's understanding of the destiny given him in 28:13ff. Away from home and as a foreigner, Jacob is made more aware of the protecting presence of Yahweh in his troubles thereby making him more dependent on God instead of entirely on his own wits (31:1-16,36-54; cf. 32:9-12). He is also made to realise that wealth and prosperity are not the ultimate good as can be seen in the troubles and fears they brought him (31:2,17-21,31). While it is true that Jacob eventually outwitted Laban of wealth, livestock, and daughters, it was not before Jacob himself had tasted what it means to be deceived and outwitted in the areas of marriage, wages,

and wealth (29:15-30; 30:25-43; 31:1-16,36-42).

Thirdly, Jacob's stay at Paddan-aram, the region where Abraham comes from, probably has a narrative function of patterning Jacob's departure at the command of God (31:3,13) and arrival at the promised land (32:31; 33:18ff; 35:6,9-15) to receive the promises and destiny intended for him by God as similar to that of Abraham in 12:1-9 (cf. 26:1-25).<sup>27</sup>

## 2) God's Command to Return

Whatever the real motivation for Jacob's return to the land of Canaan (30:25; 31:1f)<sup>28</sup> after a prolonged stay in Haran (cf. 32:4), it is clearly not Rebekah, his mother, who sent for him as promised in 27:42-45. This is striking considering the decisive influence of Rebekah's voice in Jacob's life in 27:13,43. Instead, Jacob emphatically stresses to his wives that it is God who has commanded him in a dream to do so (31:3,13).<sup>29</sup>

From a formal point of view, we note that the command to Jacob to return with its three-fold imperatives, "Arise, go forth ... and return" (31:13), is reminiscent of the three-fold command to Abraham (12:1; cf. 22:2) and to Isaac (26:2f). In these three instances, the three-fold command is always used by God to the patriarchs in relation to a divine oracle of programmatic nature making promises to the patriarchs and pronouncing the formula with the universal destiny of the patriarch as agent of blessing for the nations (12:1-3; 22:15-18; 26:2-5; 28:13f). The three-fold command also always involves a response of obedience and trust in God from the patriarch concerned as it requires of them a fundamental decision affecting their present circumstances, and therefore their future,

and the destiny they are called to. Moreover, the destination in the command to Jacob: "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred ... the land of your birth" (31:3,13), is undoubtedly meant to link God's purpose in commanding, and Jacob's decision, to God's initial call of Abraham in 12:1, "Depart from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (cf. 26:2f). Abraham was commanded to depart, Isaac to remain, and now Jacob to return.

Moreover, the form of address and answer in 31:11, "'Jacob' ... 'Here I am!'" is exactly that in 22:1 when God tested Abraham, "'Abraham!' ... 'Here I am.'"<sup>30</sup> Incidentally, the latter led to the reaffirmatory pronouncement of God's blessings and promises to Abraham, and the formula in the hithpael form. Thus, it can be concluded that God's three-fold command to Jacob to return in 31:13, whatever other purpose is involved, from a formal point of view in relation to the relevant patriarchal narratives, is some sort of 'test' in which the obedient trust in God would put Jacob's future vis-à-vis Esau, and therefore the destiny of continuing the patriarchal promises and the universal destiny of being a blessing for others, at risk. However, the question remains to be asked: if Jacob's character rendered him questionable for the universal destiny of Abraham and Isaac when he 'fled' from the land, would he on his return to the appointed destination be inevitably suitable as the agent of blessing for others? To answer this question is the task of the next section below.

### 3) Jacob's Transformation before Bethel

#### (a) Jacob's Detour of Necessity

Following God's solemn command to Jacob to return to fulfil his vows at Bethel, and Jacob's resolute (more than ready!) response in 31:1-16, it would be natural to expect the episode of his return to Bethel, to describe his fulfilment of his vows, and a final theophanic encounter with a divine oracle to give approval of the arrival by renewing the promises and universal destiny of Abraham and Isaac to Jacob. This we find in 35:1-15, but, however, not before the episode of Jacob's preparations for reunion with Esau first. It is to be noted that the divine command for Jacob to return does not even mention the question of Jacob's relationship with Esau as a necessary first step before going up to Bethel to fulfil his vows.

One could probably surmise from this that it is Jacob's own decision, for whatever reason (conscience!), to meet Esau first.<sup>31</sup> The fact that this comes before Jacob's final arrival at Bethel to fulfil his vows to God is instructive. Kidner aptly commented that "Geographically, the call to Beth-el would take [Jacob] nowhere near Esau, ensconced in the far south at Mount Seir; spiritually, he could reach Beth-el no other way ... to meet God he must 'first be reconciled' with his brother. The sequence of chapters 32,33, culminating in 35:1-15 ..." <sup>32</sup>

In fact, one can even argue that Jacob's sending of messengers to Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom (32:3-21), is probably meant to be regarded as an "afterthought" considering that he was unexpectedly met on his way back into the promised land by God's messengers first. However, the vision is not unambiguously positive in Jacob's favour in the first instance as some would argue, for it could also mean two opposing camps, one against Jacob.<sup>33</sup> In

view of the ambiguity of the vision, it is noteworthy that Jacob nevertheless initiated the contact with Esau even knowing full well the earlier threat made by Esau on his life (27:41). Herein lies the opening (unconsciously) initiated by Jacob which led to the series of struggles of Jacob in Gen.32-33, with the Jabbok episode standing out prominently. To better understand the significance of Jacob's "detour of necessity" and its relation to his fulfilling his vows at Bethel, as well as receiving the renewal of the patriarchal promises, it is necessary for us to understand the relationship of the various episodes in Gen.32-33.

(b) Gen.32-33 as a Narrative Complex

The understanding of the relationship of the episodes in Gen.32-33 is necessary partly because of the undue prominence given to the Jabbok struggle in 32:22-32 in isolation from its narrative context. Whatever the tradition history behind the episode,<sup>34</sup> it is now properly integrated into its immediate context of Gen.32-33 and thus to be understood accordingly. There appears now to be a purposeful arrangement of the materials in Gen.32-33 showing structural and thematic 'unity', alternating between Jacob's interactions with God, and Jacob's preparations for his meeting with Esau.<sup>35</sup>

32:1-2	Jacob met by God's messengers
32:3-8	Jacob sent messengers to meet Esau
32:9-12	Jacob prays to God for favour and deliverance
32:13-21	Jacob revised strategy to seek Esau's favour
32:22-32	Jacob's struggle and transformation by 'God'
33:1-20	Jacob reversed strategy and met Esau

There is some sort of progressive change in Jacob's strategy to meet Esau which is reflected by the use of key words or motifs of the

immediately preceding episode of Jacob's interactions with God in the episode following.<sup>36</sup>

Westermann commented that this section (Gen.32-33) "is a single narrative, interrupted only by the encounter with God at Peniel. ... Chapters 32-33 are a complex and imposing composition. They constitute a narrative in the strict sense, because the structure is clearly determined by a single tension: as Jacob returns, he learns that his brother is approaching with four hundred men. What will be the outcome?"<sup>37</sup> While Westermann essentially holds the same view as ours, his 'reservation' about the Peniel encounter in the complex of Gen.32-33 is unnecessary if the observation made by Fokkelmann on the episode is taken into account: "Almost all Jacob's words, v.31b, are vital key words, so that even v.31 by itself is powerful enough to integrate the Peniel scene firmly into the context, Gen.32f."<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the key words or concepts of serve/servant (T2Y) in 32:3,5,18,20; 33:3,5,8,13ff; and pass or cross over (72Y) in 32:10,17,21,22f,31; 33:3,14, also serve to tie the episodes in Gen.32-33 closely together.<sup>39</sup>

Commentators have made the observation that the tension in the Jacob story created by Jacob's strife and struggle with Esau in the first half of the Jacob-Esau cycle finds its resolution and denouement in 33:1-11.<sup>40</sup> More than this, having established that Gen.32-33 is now to be taken as a structural and thematic whole, there are very striking connections between Gen.32-33 and 25:19-34, 27:1-28:9. The connections are expressed, amongst other ways, through ironic reversals and also positive changes. These pertain to Jacob's relations with God and with Isaac on the one hand, and with Esau on the other. This observation is significant for our

study because we raised the question earlier: how could Jacob fulfil his destiny to be an agent of blessing for the families of the earth (28:14) when he had to flee from Esau's wrath, and under the unblessed consequences of his manipulations to assure for himself the blessing of the father as seen in the first half of the Jacob-Esau cycle? If the connections of ironic reversals and positive changes in Jacob in Gen.32-33 are directed to the unblessed legacy caused by Jacob in 25:19-34 and 27:1-28:9, then the narratives of Gen.32-33 might be preparing us for some positive development in Jacob's character and his suitability as agent of blessing for others, which we argued earlier as being only initial and probational at 28:14. We have already noted Westermann's observation that Gen.32-33 is "closely associated with 25-28 (especially chapter 27)." Coats also argued that "The framework story [32:4-33:17] itself develops entirely on the theme, strife without reconciliation. This pericope comprises three major structural elements, an extension of the narrative introduced in 27:41-28:9."<sup>41</sup> We shall draw out the more significant connections between the two halves of the Jacob-Esau cycle before relating them to Jacob's return to Bethel (35:1-15) to fulfil his vows of 28:10-22.

(c) Gen.32-33: Reversal and Transformation of Jacob

(i) First, after Jacob has prayed to God in 32:9-13, he is caused by his prayer to revise his strategy of meeting Esau by sending a substantial present to go before him to seek appeasement so that Esau will give up his previous threat to Jacob's life (27:40). On this, Fokkelmann commented that Jacob's plan of finding mercy by means of a present "is to fall flat" because "in

the final analysis, the present is self-seeking; ... He does not yet see that this gift is no solution to the problem of a relationship broken by him."<sup>42</sup> While the comment is correct, what is not stressed is the function of this portrayal of Jacob in the story. In the first place, this attitude of Jacob should not be surprising seeing that the Jabbok struggle and transformation only comes later. With his previous experience of Esau's nature, quite ready to despise his birthright for the sake of bread and pottage of lentils (25:29-34), Jacob has good reason to believe (and hope) that his tactic of buying Esau off will still be effective. While Esau, who initiates the deal in 25:29-34, is pictured as despising and therefore not worthy of his birthright, Jacob, here the initiator, is portrayed as an unchanged, calculative and manipulative character, dependent more on material power and human wit to bring about his desire instead of facing up to the real issue of his fear of meeting Esau. Moreover, this is on the 'eve' of his return to the promised land, to Bethel to fulfil his vows to God, which is linked to the bearing of the patriarchal promises and destiny of being a blessing for others. Even at this point, the issue of Jacob's suitability as God's agent of blessing is being raised. As such, precisely because of the incongruity of Jacob's character and the patriarchal destiny he is probationally called to, the following struggle at Jabbok is all the more significant and necessary!

(ii) As far as the Jabbok struggle is concerned, we have already noted Lewis' suggestion, against von Rad and others, that "if one can speak of two pillars in the Jacob narratives, they must be chapters 27 and 32: the deception culminating in Esau's cry that Jacob is rightly named (27:36), and the reversal of that

judgement (32:29)." While concurring with Lewis' suggestion, we noted our disagreement with his interpretation that a moral transformation of Jacob's character was not in view in 32:22-32. More than that, the motif of naming has a wider function in the story. In 27:18f when Isaac asked Jacob, who was asking for a blessing, "Who are you, my son?" Jacob did not reveal his identity/name and answered instead, "I am Esau your first-born." In Gen.32, at his wit's end and fearful of death (32:11, "Deliver me!"), Jacob likewise seeks desperately for a blessing from his adversary (32:26). At this time, he is again asked, "What is your name?" (v.27). Jacob has no choice but to reveal his name and real identity, "Jacob!" (trickster, supplanter, heel catcher).<sup>43</sup>

It is also instructive to compare the blessing Jacob receives on both occasions. On the former, he was given the father's blessing involving fertility of the field and lordship over his brothers (27:27ff). But in 32:29, it appears the blessing he seeks so tenaciously (struggling till day break) and desperately is only a name: "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed" (v.29). But what a name it is, with its transformation of Jacob's character and destiny; it is the very blessing which Jacob needed all the time.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, it can be said that Jacob's name and character were eventually 'vindicated' (as argued by Lewis) — but not before a radical change. Jacob is Israel only after Jabbok. With this, Esau's definition of Jacob's name (27:36) is finally overturned.

The ironic thrust of the motif of naming Jacob continues. After Jacob is renamed, he goes on to ask for the name of his 'adversary' (v.29). It is not easy to determine whether Jacob is

trying to gain control over his 'adversary' by knowing his name or to be reassured further in his difficult circumstances by knowing who his 'adversary' is.<sup>45</sup> The counter-question he received in reply is intriguing, "Why is it that you ask my name?" (v.29). The ways Jacob used the name of God previously certainly do not encourage the revelation of the adversary's identity now.<sup>46</sup> To ensure the validity of the birthright he had bought, Jacob demanded that Esau swear, taking the name of God, to him first (25:33). More seriously, in his resolute attempt to acquire the blessing of Isaac for himself, Jacob even abused the name of God by answering Isaac's query about the speed of his return with game, "Because Yahweh your God granted me success" (27:20).

So with the Jabbok struggle, Jacob, who has outwitted all who stood in his way hitherto and prevailed, is finally brought to his wit's end, a maimed and marked man, on the one hand, but also a victorious and new man with a new name and character, blessed by his adversary on the other. Hence, in the ambiguity of victory through defeat, Jacob can have the insight to interpret his experience: "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (v.30).<sup>47</sup> But ironically, when he has received the birthright and blessing previously, and has used the name of God at will, Jacob is afraid for his life and does not dare to see the face of Esau, or for that matter, Isaac without disguising himself (27:30-28:9; 27:23).

Another link which connects Gen.32-33 with the first half of the Jacob-Esau cycle is the acquiring of blessing. At first, Jacob acquired the blessing from Isaac the father; now he acquires or is given blessing by the 'adversary', understood as God. But the manner of acquiring is radically different in both. Hence Westermann

commented that:

"It is a highly strange and unusual feature that the blessing in this narrative (Gen.32) is won in personal combat with a divine being. This contradicts Genesis 27, and in fact everything else that is said about blessing in Genesis. Equally striking and unusual is the observation that this is the only narrative of personal combat in Genesis."<sup>48</sup>

What Westermann regarded as a highly strange and unusual feature, and contradiction, is fully understandable when the character of Jacob in both parts of the story is taken into consideration. Not only is the manner of acquiring blessing different, Jacob's previous understanding of 'valid' blessing (*viz. only its possession and not the manner of its acquisition matters*) is now radically displaced and corrected by his 'adversary'.<sup>49</sup>

After his struggle and acquiring of blessing, with a negative explication of his nature and name, in 27:1-28:9, "Jacob left Beersheba, and went toward Haran" (28:10). But now, after his struggle and acquiring of blessing, with a new name and a positive explication as well, Jacob passes over Penuel (32:31) and into the promised land to meet the brother whom he evaded before. On his first arrival at Bethel, "the sun had set" (28:11). After the Jabbok struggle and transformation, "the sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel" (32:31) as if symbolising the positive state of Jacob's relationship with God and with himself, and consequently with Esau as well.<sup>50</sup>

(iii) In 27:29 (cf. 25:23), Isaac blesses Jacob in the words, "Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you." Later, knowing the blessing has been supplanted by Jacob, Isaac told Esau, "Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants" (27:37). So it must be imagined as a great surprise to Esau when Jacob, blessed and

powerful (32:4f), going forward to meet him after all these years, bows himself to the ground seven times before coming near to his brother (33:3), thereby acknowledging the superior position of Esau despite the blessing of Isaac.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Jacob addresses Esau as "my lord" (33:8,13,14,15; cf. 32:4,5,18) and refers to himself as "your servant" (33:5; cf. 32:4,18,20), even describing Esau in the words "for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God" (33:10; cf. 32:30). It is ironical that Esau, despite the divine oracle (25:23) and Jacob's destined lordship over him, is never said to have bowed down to Jacob nor served him -- it was Jacob himself who bows to Esau as a servant to his master.<sup>52</sup> While the change on Jacob's part is ironic, there is also a change in Esau -- which is portrayed in a positive light. In 27:41, after knowing he has lost the father's blessing, Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob." But in 33:4, when Esau sees Jacob bowing down to the ground, "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept."

It is striking, in terms of Jacob's character development, that he did what he did first on seeing Esau coming. For it amounts to an admission of his responsibility for the broken relationship and he is now making up for it. Even on the eve of his return and meeting with Esau, before the Jabbok struggle, Jacob continued to view his brother's character in an outmoded perspective: Esau's anger (or favour!) can be bought off or brought with material gifts. But after the Jabbok experience, the presents do not enter into their meeting until much later (33:8). And here, the presents are merely a token of thanksgiving, not a mercenary transaction. Jacob says,

"... I pray you, if I have found favour in your sight, then accept my present ( 7J1115) from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me" (33:10). But more significantly, Jacob goes on to insist that Esau should accept the present, saying, "Accept, I pray you, my blessing ( 7J1172) that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me" (33:11). On this, Folkkelmann commented that,

"A purified relationship to God necessarily goes with a purified relationship to his fellow-man; Jacob has spoilt and broken the relationship to God by spoiling the relationship with Esau. He had wanted to achieve the destiny assigned to him by God, but his deception of Esau had impeded this.

By his actions Jacob admits to all this, as has become visible in his seven-fold prostration. He now also admits to this in so many words; the narrator introduces a variant in the strict parallelism C-C' ("accept my present from my hand" v.10a and "accept my blessing that is brought to you" v.11), where minhati is changed into birkati ... with a rhyme. Jacob's present is a 'blessing'! Jacob, who once stole the blessing from Esau with complete self-assurance, now tries to make up for this, as far as possible, by returning a blessing. Now we understand even better why he does insist on Esau's accepting it."<sup>53</sup>

Whatever the intent of the use of "blessing" instead of "present" by Jacob may be, his insistence and words to Esau cannot but remind one of Esau's desperate pleas to his father on hearing of his loss: "Esau cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me, even me also, O my father!'" (v.34); "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" (v.36); "Esau said to his father, 'Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept" (v.38). Esau was indeed given a 'blessing' by Isaac which was as good as a 'curse' (27:39f).<sup>54</sup> It is therefore striking that Esau is himself given (returned!) a real blessing here. His plea for a blessing from his father was indeed answered positively, but with an ironic

twist on Jacob's part. Thus Fretheim aptly commented on the implications of Jacob's actions to Esau, "The possessor of the blessing thus places himself at the service of the unblessed. He recognises his servant role — 'Through you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'"<sup>55</sup>

With Esau's acceptance of the blessing from Jacob (v.11), the tension of 27:1-28:9 is finally resolved in peace. But more significantly for our purpose, Gen.32-33, with all its importance for the Jacob story, is not the final note, but only a necessary step (detour!) before the real climax of 35:1-15. After all, as we noted earlier, Jacob's return was first and foremost in response to the three-fold command of 31:3,13, which is linked to the divine oracle and vows of Jacob in 28:13ff,20ff, and not to the meeting and reconciliation with Esau. On this, Fokkelmann commented that "Jacob is not 'Jacob' anymore, but Israel. At the end of ch.33 the narrator proceeds to his last subject, how the patriarch enters and takes possession of the Promised Land."<sup>56</sup> However, there is no indication in Gen.32-33 that when Jacob returns he is returning to claim the land as promised (cf. 32:12).<sup>57</sup> Fishbane is probably more correct when he says:

"With this resolution, Jacob can now receive the full blessing of the tribal father and use the name Israel (35:10). To be sure Jacob had won the name of Israel earlier (32:29). But perhaps the narrative seeks to indicate that it was only after the resolution of his conflict with Esau (Gen.33) that Jacob was, indeed, Israel."<sup>58</sup>

(iv) Concluding our analysis of Gen.32-33 with reference to the relationship of Jacob to Esau and to his father in 25:29-34, 27:1-28:9, the following could be said. Taking Gen.32-33 as a whole, we have been able to see how together they resolve the tension

caused by the broken relationship of Jacob and Esau, and, by confrontations, ironic retribution and reversals, and positive transformations, reverse Jacob's personality and character as shown hitherto, reflecting his grasp and appreciation of his destiny as bearer of the patriarchal promises and destiny. Indeed, the enigmatic oracle of 25:23, "the elder shall serve the younger", is now fulfilled in that Jacob, the 'younger' by birth but the 'elder' by birthright and blessing (through deception), eventually bows down and serves the unblessed Esau, the 'elder' by birth but the 'younger' by (his despising and selling of) birthright, by giving the latter the 'blessing'. By grasping and manipulating for blessing, Jacob became a curse to others as well as to himself. But now by humble service and returning of blessing, Jacob the blessed brings blessing to the unblessed as well as for himself.

But more important for our purpose than this is what the literary correlation is between this development and transformation of Jacob's character and the developing state of Jacob's relationship with God and the content of the oracle in 28:13ff and 35:9-12. At the beginning of our analysis we asked how Jacob could be the appropriate agent of God to be a blessing for others (Gen.28) when he was the very cause of strife and curse to his family members (25:29-34; 27:1-28:9)? Now, however, with the developments in Gen.32-33, with the subjective and objective obstacles to Jacob fulfilling his vows and appropriating what had been promised him (Gen.28) removed, we are encouraged to expect some positive development or answer to the initial reservation about Jacob's suitability as God's agent of blessing for others. Indeed, Jacob has already proved himself suitable in his struggle with his 'adversary' (32:22-32) and his

initiatives in being reconciled with Esau; but we have yet to see the divine approval of it.

Nevertheless, even before that is given, the final resolution in peace and blessing and restoration of the Jacob-Esau relationship is already what the Isaac narrative, Gen.26, with its central theme of the patriarch being the agent of blessing to his erstwhile adversary, proleptically signifies by its position and function as an "anomalous interlude" in the Jacob story. As argued earlier, Gen.26 functions as a negative critique of, as well as a positive model for, settling the Jacob-Esau feud portrayed in 25:29-34 and 27:1-28:9. As Isaac, by deception, brought near curse to Abimelech, so Jacob, by deception, did to Esau. But later by his correct behaviour and obedient trust in God, Isaac, blessed by God, but victim of circumstances, was prepared to accept the servant role (26:23) and forego his rights for the sake of reconciliation, thus bringing blessing and peace to Abimelech in the end. If Isaac the blessed and the victim was prepared to do what he did, how much more must Jacob, the victimiser of Esau and the seed of Isaac, be humble, taking the servant role and foregoing his blessing to effect a peaceful reconciliation and blessing to Esau. This, appropriately, Jacob does in Gen.33. Thus, the story of the Jacob-Esau conflict, as the Isaac narrative, demonstrates that the theme "Blessing for the Nations" is integral to it.

#### D) Jacob as Israel at Bethel (Gen.35:1-15)

With Gen.35:1-15, we come to the end and the climax of the Jacob story. Here, the patriarchal promises, the themes and motifs at significant moments of the Jacob story are drawn together.

The blessing-wish of Isaac that Jacob might be blessed by God Almighty and receive the blessing of Abraham (28:3f), initially fulfilled in the divine oracle of 28:13f, is finally reaffirmed and renewed in 35:11f. Jacob's vows in 28:20ff to make Yahweh his God, and to build an altar to be the house of God, are also fulfilled in the events in 35:1-15. The divine command in 31:3,13 is adhered to by Jacob going up to Bethel, despite some 'delay' when he appears to be settling down at Succoth and Shechem (33:17,18ff).<sup>59</sup> Finally, the 'bare' blessing and name-changing of Jacob to Israel in 32:29 is reiterated once more in 35:10 but given the content of the patriarchal promises as well (cf. 28:3f,13f). Moreover, the two notices that Jacob is blessed by God appear only in 32:29 and 35:9 in the whole Jacob story.

For the purpose of our study, the variations in the promises made to Jacob in 28:3f; 28:13f; and 35:11f are very instructive. A comparison of the three passages reveals the following:

<u>28:3f</u>	<u>28:13f</u>	<u>35:11f</u>
May God Almighty	I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac	I am God Almighty:
bless you and make you fruitful and mul- tiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.	the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your seed;	be fruitful and multi- ply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you.
May he give the bless- ing of Abraham to you and to your seed with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham!	and your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad ...  and by you and your seed all the families of the earth shall find blessing.	The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give the land to your seed after you.

We have already noted that while the divine oracle in 28:13f acts as an initial fulfilment of Isaac's blessing-wish for Jacob in 28:3f, the formula expressing the universal destiny of the patriarchs, absent in the latter, is present as the final intent of the first divine oracle to Jacob, as well as providing a corrective to the potentially particularistic and self-interested promises of land and of many descendants there. It is therefore striking that 35:11f, the final divine oracle to Jacob, while reaffirming the promises of land and of many descendants made in 28:3f and 28:13f, lacks the universalistic perspective provided by the formula in 28:14. However, there is a significant change in the promise of blessing in multiplying and fruitfulness. The blessing wish of Isaac for Jacob that "God Almighty ... make you fruitful and multiply" (28:3) is now presented as an imperative by God to Jacob as Israel: "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply" (35:11).<sup>60</sup> The question to be asked then is whether the absence of the formula in 35:11f reflects a return to a particularistic and self-interested perspective of the patriarchal promises, thereby losing the patriarchal destiny of being a blessing for others. Why too is there a change from a blessing-wish to an imperative for the creational mandate?

At the time of Jacob's fulfilling his vows at Bethel, he already has a large family (29:31-30:24). Hence, Davidson expressed surprise at the creational command by commenting that "It is odd to command a man who already has a large family to 'Be fruitful and increase'."<sup>61</sup> He, however, did not attempt to answer his own surprise. Gross noted in some detail the difference between the promise of multiplying and fruitfulness and the imperative to be fruitful and multiply, and took the view that the imperative is

traditionally older than the promise.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, he did not attempt any explanation for the difference in forms in 28:3 and 35:11. It is quite surprising that Brueggemann in his study of the kerygma of the Priestly writers did not discuss the distinction and their respective functions.<sup>63</sup> In fact, most commentators do not even consider the distinction or change as noteworthy.<sup>64</sup>

We, however, believe that an explanation emerges when the correlation of God's oracle and promises to Jacob in 28:13f, reaffirmed in 35:11f with the development of Jacob's personality and character as expressed through his relationships with Esau and Isaac in Gen.25-27 and 32-33, is taken into consideration. We asked earlier how Jacob could be appropriately given Abraham's universal destiny to be a blessing for all the families of the earth in view of the curse and broken relationships in the family caused by Jacob's manipulative character. His behaviour is all the more incongruous when we recollect that Abraham's destiny was specifically directed to reverse the curse and broken relationships of the primeval history. But with the events of Gen.32-33 when the objective and subjective factors against Jacob's suitability as God's agent of blessing were essentially removed, Jacob, as Fishbane puts it, "can now receive the full blessing of the tribal father and use the name Israel ... it was only after the resolution of his conflict with Esau, that Jacob was, indeed, Israel."<sup>65</sup>

If so, then it would be natural to expect some reaffirmation of the universalistic destiny, besides the patriarchal promises of land and many descendants, in the final divine oracle in 35:11f. After all, the formula, as mentioned, is placed as the final intent in the divine oracle in 28:13f. Thus, it is striking that the formula

or some form of it is totally absent in 35:11f. Instead the significant element is the sudden appearance of the creational mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply", in 35:11. Could there be any link between the formula, whose ultimate purpose is that in the patriarchs and the seed all the families of the earth shall find blessing, and the creational mandate, which was first issued for the blessing of mankind in 1:28 and reissued in 9:1,7 through mankind's representatives, Adam and Noah respectively?

In this connection, it is interesting to note the views put forward by Clines in his study of the theme of the Pentateuch. He agrees with the observation of Kidner that Gen.1-11 is describing two opposite progressions: God's orderly creation with its climax in man as a responsible and blessed being and the disintegrating work of sin culminating first in the Flood and then in the Babel incident.<sup>66</sup>

Clines carried forward Kidner's observation and suggested that the pattern according to which creation proceeds in Gen.1 is in fact the positive aspect of the sin-judgement motif (in the primeval history) for it is a matter of obedience followed by blessing, not sin followed by curse. The chapter as a whole moves toward "blessing", first upon the living creatures (1:22), then upon man (1:28), and finally upon the seventh day (2:3). Thus, he concluded that Genesis 1 is the positive counterpart to the remainder of the primeval history (though not all unrelieved gloom).<sup>67</sup>

Later, after discussing the function of the developed transitional passage of 12:1-3 against the negative aspects of the primeval history (Gen.2-11), Clines further concluded:

"The patriarchal (or, Pentateuchal) narratives can then function as the 'mitigation' element of the Babel story, and what is more, the divine promise to the patriarchs then demands to be read in conjunction with Genesis 1 -

as a re-affirmation of the divine intentions for man. Alongside the patriarchal promise of descendants, land, and divine-human relationship, the whole promise being categorized as 'blessing', we align Genesis 1:26ff. Here the primal divine utterance consists of these commands and statements: (a) 'be fruitful and multiply'; (b) 'fill the earth (?land) and master it'; (c) 'God created man in his own image'; (d) 'God blessed them'."<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the question we posed whether there is any possible link between the formula expressing the universal destiny of the patriarchs first given to Abraham as the final intent of the developed transitional passage of 12:1-3 and the creational mandate is given positive support by Clines' analysis.

However, Clines also observed a slight distinction in that the "blessing" which once was given to mankind (Adam), and we might add Noah as well, now comes to Abram, an individual. Nevertheless, he went on to make the point that Genesis 12:1-3, however interpreted, envisages some kind of overspill of blessing beyond the Abrahamic family.<sup>69</sup> The distinction observed by Clines is further overcome when our earlier analysis of the function and significance of the formula expressing that the ultimate purpose which Abraham's calling to be a blessing for the families (nations) of the earth has in the structure and arrangement of the overall Abraham story, is taken into consideration. Moreover, our analysis earlier has also shown the strategic positioning of the formula in the three narratives in the Abraham story, which not only portrays Abraham as a parallel universal figure to Adam and Noah, but more than that also reverses the breaches in the divine-human relationship and the failure of Noah with his children in the primeval history.

While Clines has rightly argued for the patriarchal promise in 12:1-3 to be taken as a re-affirmation of the divine intentions for men in Gen.1:26ff, our question still remains why is the creational

mandate suddenly reissued to Jacob at the climactic conclusion to the Jacob story, and in fact, arguably to the patriarchal narratives as well (Gen.12-35), when one would have more naturally expected a reaffirmation of the formula pronouncing the universal destiny of the patriarchs as agents of blessing for the families of the earth first given to Jacob in probation in 28:14?

Taking the issue of the creational mandate first, a comparison of the three occasions when it was issued to mankind in 1:28; 9:1,7; and 35:11 yields the following common features:<sup>70</sup>

- a) Prior chaos
  - earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep (1:2).
  - the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (6:5;11f).
  - strife and broken relationships in family caused by Jacob's 'unpurified' character (25:19-34; 27:1-28:9; also 31:20; 32:3-21)
- b) 'Creational' actions
  - creational process of separation, man made in the image and likeness of God (1:3-27).
  - recreation through flood, preservation of Noah and family and animals; sacrifice and pleasing odour to God (7:1-8:22).
  - transformation of Jacob's name and character; expressed in reconciliation with Esau (Gen.32-33).
- c) Blessing
  - And God blessed them (1:28).
  - And God blessed Noah and his sons (9:1).
  - God appeared to Jacob again ... and blessed him (35:9; also 32:29).
- d) Creational Mandate
  - "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion ..." (1:28).
  - "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon (the creation) ... (9:2; also vv.3-7).
  - "be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land ... I will give to you and ... your seed (35:11f; cf. 28:14, "your seed shall be like dust of the earth, and spread abroad ...").
- e) God Rested
  - God rested from all his work (2:3).
  - "I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth (9:13; also vv.8-17).
  - Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him (35:13).

Some differences in details present in the comparisons are quite natural due mainly to the different contexts which we find Adam and Noah on the one hand, and Jacob on the other. Nevertheless, the features common to all three figures leading up to the issue or re-issue of the creational mandate and God resting after his creational or re-creational activities are quite striking. While Adam and Noah received the creational mandate clearly as representative heads of humankind, it is significant that Jacob received the mandate not as an individual but as Israel, which could arguably be taken as the new 'mankind', the new people of God.

Moreover, we have already argued that the scope of the object of blessing in the formula in 28:14, "all the families of the earth (אֲנֹכְחֵם)", is used intentionally to echo that of 12:3, "all the families of the earth (אֲנֹכְחֵם)". This is noteworthy because after 12:3, the formula uses the more specific and localised phrase "all the nations of the earth" consistently on three occasions, 18:18; 22:18; 26:4. The phrase used in 12:3, being juxtaposed with the primeval history with all its curse and broken relationships, more clearly directs attention to the purpose of the calling of Abraham back to Adam and Noah (see pp.66ff). As such, it is very likely that the use of "all the families of the earth (אֲנֹכְחֵם)" in 28:14 has that intention in mind as well.

Thus, from the use of the formula in 28:14 and the re-issuing of the creational mandate in 35:11, we noted the common tendency to view Jacob-Israel in the light of God's creational dealings with Adam and Noah. Jacob as Israel is being paralleled with Adam and Noah in their representative roles in God's creation as representative heads. As such, the creational mandate in 35:11 is

linked in its own way to the use of the formula in 28:14. But, to be more specific, what is the meaning of the link, the development from the use of the formula as the ultimate purpose of the patriarchal destiny to the issuing of the creational mandate to Jacob-Israel?

In our comparison of the three occasions when the creational mandate was issued, it was always after some positive action on God's part out of the prior chaos and after an act of blessing. It appears that the creational mandate was lost after men sinned (Gen.3-6), and could only be reissued after a positive act of re-creation by God was effected (Gen.6:14-9:19). However, with the Babel incident, it apparently was lost to mankind again. With the calling of Abraham, where one could quite naturally expect the mandate to be reissued, it is very striking that it was not. Instead, Abraham was given an unique command, "Be a blessing!", and was told that the ultimate purpose of his calling with all the promises involved was that "in you all the families of the earth (אֲנִי וְאַתָּה) shall find blessing" (12:2f). Abraham's call was to be a blessing, to create first the condition and environment of blessing, without which God's blessing of men with the creational mandate could not be responsibly given. In fact, Abraham was God's very act of mitigating grace, the element strikingly missing in the final episode of the primeval history. There was no divine act of overcoming the chaos brought about by the Babel incident before the call of Abraham. Abraham's call was primarily first to be a blessing than to continue the creational mandate as such. It is not surprising Muilenburg, as noted, describes Abraham as "the embodiment of divine grace, ... qualitatively other than the deeds of grace in the primeval history."

Thus, Jacob at 28:14, with the formula pronouncement, was only still in the process of becoming what Abraham (with his seed) was called to be, a blessing for others. Moreover, the formula used of Jacob in 28:14 is the probationary niphil form. This probationary state is also correlated with Jacob's 'exile' and dubious character at this point of the story (28:10-22). Jacob was indeed called and promised the patriarchal blessing and destiny, but was as yet an unsuitable candidate (the state of prior chaos!). Hence the necessity of the Jabbok struggle and reconciliation with Esau in the events of Gen.32-33 (the process of positive re-creation!). Only after this, was Jacob indeed Israel as Fishbane puts it, and ready to receive the blessing of the tribal father in full. This he did when he finally went up to Bethel to fulfil his vows to God (35:1-15).

It is therefore striking that when the patriarchal promises are reaffirmed to Jacob in the last divine oracle in 35:11f, there is no mention of the formula of 28:14. In 22:18, the reaffirmatory hithpael form is used to indicate the divine approval and reaffirmation of Abraham's involvement in that destiny after he was proved to be a fearer of God. Instead, in 35:11 we have the sudden appearance of the creational mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply", long missing since 1:28 and 9:1,7. This giving of the mandate is the third and final time to humankind. In other words, the whole purpose of Abraham's calling, to be read in conjunction with Genesis 1 — as a re-affirmation of the divine intentions for man — is finally realised, and therefore the creational mandate could be reissued once again.

Under the circumstances, it would therefore be redundant to repeat the formula of 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14 again. It has served its purpose. In Jacob-Israel, the seed of Abraham,

God has finally found again a representative 'man', as Adam and Noah, to be entrusted with the creational mandate.<sup>71</sup> With the creational mandate, while it is given to a particular entity, the seed of a particular man, Abraham, the universalistic perspective, so consistently emphasised by the positioning of the formula as the final intent in the divine speeches or soliloquy in strategic junctures in the patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35), is safeguarded. This is not to forget that Abraham, being the recipient of the call to be a blessing for others, the first patriarch of the seed Israel, is also called "the father of a multitude of nations" (17:4-7).

Taken in the above light, Davidson's surprise at the creational mandate "Be fruitful and multiply" to one who already has a large family can be answered positively. For the giving of the command to Jacob is to him as Israel the representative man, and not Jacob as such. This, is hardly odd; it is of vital significance vis-à-vis the primeval history.

In view of the above analysis, we can also now understand better the significance of the "seed" being named as co-agent with Jacob in the niphal form of the formula in 28:14.<sup>72</sup> As noted, throughout the patriarchal narratives up to 28:14, the "seed" has accumulated a fluid ambiguity beginning with 21:11; 22:18; 26:4. It took on increasing prominence in 28:4 when Isaac blessed Jacob: "May [God Almighty] give the blessing of Abraham to you and the seed with you [emphases ours]" when Jacob was not even married yet. In 28:13f especially, we have also seen how Jacob is virtually equated with the "seed" with respect to the patriarchal promises of land and of many descendants, and the destiny of being a blessing for the families of the earth.<sup>73</sup> With the name transformation

in 32:29 of Jacob as Israel, the identification of Jacob and his seed, to all intents and purposes, was fixed. Thereafter, the seed of Jacob, the sons of Jacob, were to be known as Israel. This identification of Jacob as Israel was reaffirmed in 35:10. Thus, one can conclude that it was not only Jacob who was placed on probation with regard to the patriarchal promises and destiny in 28:1-4, 13f, but the seed was involved as well. It was not only Jacob who underwent the Jabbok struggle, but the seed was equally present (cf. Hos.12;2-6).<sup>74</sup> Therefore it was also Jacob as Israel who was blessed in 32:29; 35:9, and who was entrusted with the creational mandate in 35:11.

With Israel receiving the creational mandate, God has finally effected his re-creation after the Babel incident and reaffirmed his purpose for his creation. In Israel, the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God has found his agent, a 'man' who has striven with God and with men and has prevailed, to carry out his creational purpose once again. It is therefore significant that, at the very inception of, and built into its very existence, Israel is entrusted with the creational mandate, as representative man. Israel's history is therefore a new stage in mankind's history after the Babel incident, and by definition could not be a particularistic and self-interested history. Israel is under vows to God Almighty for the blessing of the families of the earth (ברכות).  
(ברכות).

#### E) Jacob-Israel and Abraham

We have seen in our analysis above how the purpose of God's calling and command of Abraham to "be a blessing" so that "in

you all the families of the earth shall find blessing" (12:1-3) is structurally realised in the final reissuing of the creational mandate to "be fruitful and multiply" to Jacob-Israel in 35:11f. This is effected through the strategic positionings and significant variations of the formula expressing Abraham's destiny at various junctures of the patriarchal narratives (Gen.12-35) and the giving of the patriarchal promises (28:3f,13; 35:11f; cf. 28:14 with 12:3; 26:4; and 31:3,13 with 12:1). Through these links the Jacob story is brought into close connections not only with the Abraham narratives but also with the primeval history.

These links are not mere coincidences or occasional.

Radday claims that "it was the author's purpose to portrait Jacob as Abraham's counterpart in the series of the three patriarchs."<sup>75</sup> He noted a list of similarities between the two patriarchs; the more convincing ones are as follows. While Isaac was born in Canaan and lived and died there without ever having left it, Abraham and Jacob wandered between Aram and Egypt. Both left their parental homes, sojourned in Shechem, Beth-el, Hebron and Beersheba. The names of both were changed, and their respective wives consented to their husbands fathering sons upon their handmaidens.<sup>76</sup>

But besides these individual elements linking the two patriarchs, Vawter has made a more substantial observation on the intentional parallel of their respective entrance into Canaan. He commented thus:

"Perhaps of even greater importance is it to discern in the Yahwist's account of Abraham's entry into Canaan here (Gen 12) and in the following chapter a pattern that reoccurs later on in a cross-section of all the sources when they tell the story of the patriarch Jacob. These are the significant parallels:

<u>Abraham</u>	<u>Jacob</u>
12:6 the sacred places at Shechem, the terebinth of Moreh, the Canaanites in the land	33:18 Shechem in the land of Canaan
12:7 theophany: promise of the land an altar built	33:20 El, the God of Israel a memorial stone
12:8 Bethel an altar built	28:11 Bethel 28:18 a memorial stone 28:13 theophany: promise of the land
13:4 Bethel again and its altar	35:7 Bethel again and its altar
13:15 promise of the land	35:12 promise of the land
13:18 the terebinth of Mamre an altar built	35:8 the oak below Bethel 35:27 Mamre

The remarkable agreement that we find in both geographical sequence and related details has suggested ... a certain standardization has been imposed on the narrative, even in a preliterate stage, which purported to describe the route of an earliest father of Israel proceeding from the homeland 'beyond the River' into and through the Land of Promise. ... Furthermore, the standardized route also probably brought with it a standardization of patriarchal roles."<sup>77</sup>

The table of comparison drawn up by Vawter undoubtedly shows Abraham and Jacob in striking parallel, at least in details. However, Vawter has probably over-harmonised the travel notices of Jacob in trying to parallel him to Abraham, and has ended up with an adjusted order of Jacob's journey, which is far from being a convincing parallel. Furthermore, to limit the journey of Abraham within the patriarchal narratives only is also to narrow its horizon. We have already seen in our earlier analysis the structural and thematic links between 12:1-9 and 11:1-9 in particular, and the primeval history in general. In other words, the journeying of Abraham in 12:1-9 is a counter-movement against the tower builders of Babel, and rebellious mankind in Gen.3-11.

Moreover, we have also argued that the Jacob story is now to be seen in the light of Abraham's call and destiny vis-à-vis the

primeval history, especially the issue of the creational mandate. In addition, we have also noted the parallels between the motif of the Babel tower, the gate of heaven (Gen.11), and the "stairway" (ramp) in Jacob's dream at Bethel, the house of God and the gate of heaven as well (Gen.28).<sup>78</sup> Thus, when all these links between the Abraham and the Jacob narratives with the primeval history, especially the Babel incident, as well as the links between the portrayals of Abraham and Jacob, are taken into consideration, we have a broader and wider perspective for discerning what Vawter describes as the "standardization of patriarchal roles" between Jacob and Abraham arising from the so-called "standardization of routes" of the two patriarchs into Canaan.

If the juxtaposed narratives of 11:1-9 and 12:1-9 are taken together, then the former could be described as the negative pole and the latter the positive pole. On the other hand, not only does 28:10-22 echo 11:1-9 in theme and motif, it is also the negative pole of the double Bethel arc of tension in the Jacob story, in that Jacob, by fleeing from Esau and home under the shadow of a broken and cursed relationship brought about by his unscrupulous grasp at the promised destiny (cf. 11:4, the grasp for greatness), is reversing the direction of Abraham's purposeful journey away from the scattering of mankind in 11:1-9, and back to where Abraham was called out from.<sup>79</sup> It is only with the divine command in 31:3,13 for Jacob to depart-return, which as noted is formulated in parallel to Abraham's call in 12:1-3, that the movement of Jacob begins its positive aspect. With his departure from Paddan-aram, the route of Abraham's journey in 12:1-9 is 'reproduced' by Jacob, via Shechem (33:18ff), and the final arrival at Bethel (35:1-15).

This comparison between the movements of Abraham and Jacob both before and after the divine command in 12:1 and 31:3,13 respectively would then yield the following pattern:

<u>Babel-Abraham</u>	<u>Bethel-Jacob</u>
11:1ff Babel tower built by men gate of heaven hybris, great name scattering	28:10ff Bethel stairway/ramp placed by God house of God/gate of heaven probational promises/destiny 'exile'
12:1 <u>Go</u> from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you	31:3, 13 <u>Return</u> to the land of your fathers and to your kindred ... Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth
12:2f <u>Promises and destiny:</u> great nation, blessing, great name, be a blessing, special relation, formula of blessing for others	(Return is linked to promises, destiny and vows of 28:10-22, which are renewed and reaffirmed in 35:9-12.)
12:4f Departure	31:17f Departure
12:6f Shechem oak of Moreh, Canaanites in the land theophany of God land promise altar building	33:18f Shechem sons of Hamor, inhabitants of the land, Canaanites (no equivalent theophany) bought land altar building, called it El-Elohe-Israel
12:8f mountain east of Bethel altar building called on God's name  journeyed on	35:1ff arrived (go up) Bethel altar building called place El-bethel <u>Promises and Destiny:</u> blessing, reaffirmed name as Israel, creational mandate, company of nations/kings, land promise journeyed on

The motif of the "stairway" as link between heaven and earth, between God and men, in 28:10-22 is too striking, considering its rarity in the Book of Genesis, to be missed, in the context of the patriarchal narratives and the primeval history, for its parallel to

the Babel tower of 11:1-9. Out of hybris and self-willed decision to carve out their own destiny, the tower builders of Gen.11 believed they could reach to heaven by their own efforts, leaving God out of the picture. Jacob, on the other hand, in his unscrupulous schemes to grab at and to ensure his own destiny, appears to be here reminded of the divine factor in his life and destiny as he is given a dream-vision before receiving the patriarchal promises set against (or corrected by) the ultimate universal purpose of being a blessing for others. The place is called Bethel as a result of the experience Jacob received; but the experience is merely preliminary and the substance of his experience is yet to be confirmed in his life. The scattering as a result of the tower building in 11:1-9 is portrayed as going against the divine intention for humankind and as a judgment; Jacob's journey is also a self-inflicted exile, suspending the realisation of God's design for Abraham and his seed in the land of promise. Jacob is going away from the promised land, reversing Abraham's movement out of the scattering at Babel. Jacob's departure is not at God's initiative (28:1f) as Abraham's was in 12:1. Thus, contrary to Vawter, we believe it is forcing the geographical links to parallel Jacob's initial arrival at the place he called Bethel because of his experience (Gen.28) with Abraham's obedient arrival at (Shechem and) Bethel in 12:8.

It is only when these narratives, 11:1-9 and 28:10-22, are seen against the negative prior 'chaos', humanwide and personal-familial respectively, that we can properly understand the positive aspect of the command of reversal given to Abraham and to Jacob in 12:1 and 31:3,13 respectively. Both commands involve a fundamental decision of obedient trust in God by sacrificing security for unknown

danger and future.<sup>80</sup> Inevitably, some sort of 'test' is also involved in the suitability of the character of the two patriarchs. Both commands are related to the ultimate purpose of being a blessing for the families of the earth (12:3; 28:14). It is only from this point that the journey (or return) of Jacob is being portrayed as a real parallel to Abraham's initial departure in purpose, direction and intensity. On the resolute note of their departures, "So Abram went, ... took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan" (12:4f), compared with "So Jacob arose, and set his sons and his wives on camels, and he drove away all his cattle, all his livestock which he had gained, the cattle in his possession which he had acquired in Paddam-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac" (31:17f), Folkelmann commented that such use of language:

"appears in verses about important journeys in Genesis (and nowhere else in the O.T.) like 12.5, 36.6 and 46.6, ... This use of language indicates that this journey of Jacob's is as definite and important as Abraham's journey in 12.5 (which likewise derives from divine command!), and he takes all his rightful possessions with him."<sup>81</sup>

After Shechem, both Abraham and Jacob move on to Bethel.<sup>82</sup> It is noteworthy that when Jacob finally arrives at Bethel (35:1-15), in the final narrative of the patriarchal narratives so to speak, the divine oracle there in renewing and reaffirming the patriarchal promises and destiny to Jacob strongly echoes that first given to Abraham in 12:2f, which sets Abraham, the first father of Jacob-Israel, out on his purposeful journey of universalistic significance. Abraham was commanded to go to the land, subsequently known to be Canaan, and was promised to be given it by God. Jacob's arrival

was also in response to God's command to return to the land of Canaan promised to Abraham. In 12:2, Abraham was promised that he would receive a great name and to be made a great nation, and be blessed. In 35:10, Jacob's newly transformed and God-given name, Israel, was reaffirmed, and it was also to become the (great) name of the nation, the seed of Abraham and Jacob, thereafter in the Old Testament signifying that unique relationship between God and man.<sup>83</sup> Jacob-Israel was also promised that "a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you" (35:11). Not only is he blessed by God (35:9), Jacob-Israel is now deemed worthy to be entrusted with the creational mandate as representative mankind. Jenkins in his study of the seeking of a 'name' in the Pentateuch commented thus:

"Thus in Gen 12-50 the naming formula with etiology is used to trace the working out of the promise of a great name and blessing for Abraham and his descendants (12:2f) ... The climax of the sequence comes in Jacob's struggle for blessing ... at Peniel. ... focus[sing] attention on the conferring upon Jacob of the new name Israel: ... [but] viewed in relation to earlier attempts by men to usurp the prerogatives of God (Gen 3; 6:1-4; 11:1-9), the narrative strikes a balance between the possibilities of human achievement and man's limitations in relation to God."<sup>84</sup>

Jacob-Israel, the seed of Abraham, has learned that the greatness of a name and of a nation is not so much unlimited power void of the divine dimension, but one which knows its true identity only in relation to God as creature to Creator.<sup>85</sup> With this, the seed of Abraham has potentially reversed the breaking of bounds of men against God in the primeval history, as Abraham did in 12:1-9, thereby also fulfilling the purpose to which Abraham had been called: to "be a blessing" so that "in him all the families of the earth shall find blessing." The re-issuing of the creational mandate

against this background is clearly instructive.

Moreover, the unfettered ambition of the tower builders' attempt to reach into heaven at Babel which was reversed by God is now realised, only in a proper manner. What the tower builders could not achieve is now completed by Jacob's symbolic setting up of a pillar of stone where God spoke with him, and pouring a drink offering and oil on it. The significant difference is that for Jacob it was at the command of God himself (35:1), while for the tower builders it was self-willed decision (11:4). Bethel is now truly the house of God, the gate of heaven in 35:1-15 as against the confusion and ruins of 11:8f.<sup>86</sup> The 'exile' of mankind which began with Adam, Cain, and the Babel tower builders was initially and fundamentally reversed by Abraham's journey of obedience and destiny. This reversal was temporarily suspended when Jacob's 'exile' took him back the way Abraham came. Nevertheless, when Jacob responded to the divine command to return, as Abraham did to set out, along the same route as the journey of Abraham, Jacob's journey was portrayed as reaffirming the universalistic purpose of Abraham's journey to be a blessing so that "in him all the families of the earth shall find blessing". The further significance of Jacob's journey is that when he arrives finally at Bethel, the gate of heaven and the house of God, he arrives not as Jacob the individual but as Israel, and the creational mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply", was reissued to mankind once again.

#### F) Conclusion

To sum up our discussion of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in the Jacob narratives, the following conclusions can be

briefly drawn:

(a) The theme is purposefully integrated into the story and especially reflected through the Jacob-Esau conflict and its resolution. Furthermore, the element of Jacob's obedient trust in God and his proper relationship to others reflecting his grasp of the nature and ultimate purpose of his promised destiny and of God's purpose is closely related to the outworking of the theme in the Jacob story. This correlation is also shown to be integral to the Abraham and the Isaac narratives.

(b) The absence of the reaffirmatory hithpael form of the formula in the Jacob story does not imply the displacing of the destiny and theme as expressed in the formula in the Jacob story, and therefore the patriarchal narratives as a whole too. It is to be seen as being realised by the re-issuing of the creational mandate "Be fruitful and multiply", which as we have argued earlier could well be taken as the ultimate purpose of the unique command received by Abraham, "Be a blessing!"

(c) A close parallel exists between Jacob and Abraham, the two most prominent members among the patriarchal trio, in calling, journey, and role. More significantly than that, in the end, it is Jacob as Israel who is being portrayed as parallel to Abraham, in reversing the curse and movement away from God's presence in the primeval history, and in re-establishing that proper relationship between God and man, and man and man. The goal of all these is that Jacob as Israel, now the representative man, is responsible for the creational mandate once again for mankind, as Adam and Noah were.

## CONCLUSION

Our study above of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as expressed by the formula has shown it to be of far-reaching significance in the patriarchal narratives as a whole. The traditional historical investigation and other studies of the theme, conducted primarily under the framework of the theology and composition of the Yahwist's work, as well as primarily in the context of 12:3b, important and necessary as they are, have been shown to be inadequate and restrictive in comparison with a broader understanding of the theme in the context of the patriarchal narratives, such as the formulaic variations, their function and significance. In addition, no adequate explanation has previously been given for the concentration of the theme primarily in the patriarchal narratives, its function in the patriarchal narratives as the 'link' between the primeval history and the history of Israel's early formative period, and the marked absence of the formula beyond the patriarchal narratives. Following our survey of previous studies of the theme, we suggested that a literary analysis of the theme in the patriarchal narratives could shed some new light on the limitations and questions noted above.

An analysis of the five occurrences of the formula was attempted. The results, first of all, confirmed our initial conclusion regarding the limitations of previous discussions of the theme. Secondly, the formulaic variations of the theme give enough evidence to warrant our initial suggestion of a literary analysis. The positioning, variations, and usages of the formula expressing the theme appear to be closely related to the structure and arrangement

of the patriarchal stories, individually and collectively. We also arrived at the conclusion that the formulaic variations:  $\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל} \text{ שֶׁ}$   $\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל}$  and  $\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל} \text{ יִשְׂרָאֵל} \text{ שֶׁ}$ , as well as the naming of the seed instead of the patriarch as agent of blessing, are reflective of the relationship of the theme with the literary structure and arrangement of the patriarchal stories. In addition, our analysis also reveals that the formula and its variations serve to link the patriarchal narratives to the primeval history, as well as laying a basis for the patriarchal narratives to be linked more effectively with the rest of the Pentateuch through the instructive naming of the 'seed' (Israel) as agent of blessing for the nations.

Studying the theme in the context of the Abraham story, a very striking double-chiastic arrangement of the Abraham narratives was revealed. This stems from our initial observation that the theme and its formula provided an inclusio framework for the story. The double-chiastic structure demonstrates the influence of the theme in moving the Abraham narratives from an introverted, particularistic horizon in their first half to an outward-looking, universalistic horizon in their second half. Thus, the structure serves to reaffirm the universal purpose and destiny of Abraham's initial call in 12:1-3.

This reaffirmation of Abraham's universal destiny against the introverted concern shown in the story is also expressed through the relationship of Gen.16 and Gen.22, two key events in the story. The former is the only narrative in the Abraham story in which it is neither God nor Abraham who takes the initiative but Sarai's anxiety and 'voice' — and this narrative turns out to be the negative turning-point in the story structure at which the universal horizon

of Abraham's calling is jeopardised. Strikingly, the 'voice' of Sarai is displaced when Abraham obeys the 'voice' of God in Gen.22, the climactic event of the story, thereby reaffirming the universal horizon of 12:1-3. Moreover, under the influence of the theme, the issue of the heir-son, Isaac, which has been the cause of Sarai's directive to Abraham in Gen.16, is instructively set in the second half of the story structure, with its universalistic perspective and emphasis.

A further analysis of the positioning and use of the formula in its narrative contexts in the Abraham story also reveals some striking results. The three narratives (12:1-9; 18:1-19:38; 22:1-19) in which the formula is embedded are shown to be contrasted or paralleled with the three key events in the primeval history (the Eden, Flood, Babel incidents) which saw the progressive breaches in the divine-human relationship resulting in the movement of mankind away from God's presence in Eden to the worldwide scattering in the Babel incident. Abraham is not only portrayed in the narratives concerned as a universal parallel figure with Adam and Noah, but he is also presented as reversing the breaches in the divine-human relationship by his eventual submission and obedience to the 'voice' of God. It is therefore not surprising that Abraham received the unique command to "Be a blessing" as God's re-affirmation of his creational intentions for men in 1:26ff. With the re-affirmation of Abraham's role in the universal destiny, it is significant that the task is transmitted to his seed (22:18) which provides an important link and momentum into the rest of the patriarchal narratives. We even saw Isaac already being tested and involved in Abraham's relationship with God, especially in terms

of the universal destiny, and proving himself to be a suitable agent of blessing for others.

The Isaac narrative also shows a strong influence of the theme "Blessing for the Nations" in it. Despite the negative assessment of the majority of commentators, the Isaac narrative is shown to have a literary coherent structure which gives emphatic prominence to the actualisation of the theme at the climactic conclusion of the narrative. In our analysis, we saw the combination of God's blessing of and protective presence for Isaac (sometimes highly paradoxical), Isaac's halting response and his relationship with the Philistines, causing him finally to go up to Beersheba, the appointed destination, where the content of the divine oracle in his first theophanic encounter with God was reaffirmed to him. However, ironically, we also saw that it was precisely through Isaac's obedient arrival at the appointed destination that the realisation of God's promise that others would seek to share in Isaac's blessing was raised and acutely questioned. At that point the narrative itself provided the answer in two significant ways. First, the description of Abraham as the servant of Yahweh was used for the first time, not in address to Abraham, but to Isaac — by way of presenting the proper perspective for understanding his hitherto chequered experiences in relation to his response to the divine command and received universal destiny. Secondly, the visit and confession of Abimelech seeking a covenant of peace from Isaac, the blessed of Yahweh — which is the climactic conclusion to the whole narrative — demonstrated the initial actualisation of the theme "Blessing for the Nations".

The significance and function of the theme in the Isaac

narrative is further seen in the wider patriarchal context. First, the narrative itself is a "synthesis" of the Abraham story with its initial and reaffirmed universal perspective of Abraham's calling and the promises given to him in fulfilment of that calling. Secondly, the narrative with the theme and its positive actualisation in Isaac's movements and his handling of blessings and conditions of greatness in relation to the Philistines, by its position as an "anomalous interlude" significantly functions as a negative critique of and positive model for Jacob's grasping, understanding, and pursuit of his promised destiny vis-à-vis Esau.

The theme "Blessing for the Nations", on first sight, appears to have little significance in the Jacob story, which is dominated by the theme of strife and conflict. While the Jacob-Esau feud and its final resolution following the pivotal Jabbok struggle dominate the overall story, our analysis of the key narratives shows that the movement of the Jacob story is ultimately directed to the reaffirmation and blessing of Jacob as Israel and the receiving of the promises and destiny of the patriarchs at Bethel (Gen.35). At that point, the "long-lost" creational mandate, "Be fruitful and multiply", most abruptly and significantly appears once more. With the final re-issuing of the creational mandate, we concluded that the formula pronouncement with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" which was first made with Abraham's call and was finally reiterated to Jacob on probation in his first Bethel encounter with God reached its ultimate purpose, thereby becoming "redundant".

In fulfilment of the ultimate purpose of Abraham's universal destiny as a blessing for the families of the earth, the significance

of Jacob as Israel arriving finally at Bethel, and receiving once again on behalf of mankind the creational mandate can also be seen in two further areas. First, not only is Jacob-Israel portrayed as parallel with Abraham in terms of his calling, journey, and role, but the reaffirmation of the blessing and the naming of Jacob as Israel, as well as the promises of greatness, land, and domination, are also meant to echo the promises of blessing, great name, great nation, special relationship, and universal destiny made to Abraham. The parallel acts of both patriarchs building an altar and calling on Yahweh's name at or near Bethel, after Shechem, on their initial arrival and final return to the promised land demonstrate an intentional design and arrangement of the patriarchal narratives as a whole that is closely connected with the theme "Blessing for the Nations". Secondly, as Abraham's initial departure for and arrival in the appointed land has been shown to be a counter narrative to the Babel incident as well as containing a positive re-affirmation of God's creational intentions for man (1:26ff), so too the Jacob story as a whole is shown to be a final refutation of men's attempt to achieve a great name for themselves, to storm the gate of heaven, as well as containing a positive re-iteration of the creational mandate first issued to mankind (1:28) but apparently lost following men's disobedience and hybris against God.

Thus, we conclude that the theme "Blessing for the Nations" as expressed by the formula has been demonstrated in our study to have a considerable functional significance in the patriarchal stories, individually and collectively. In fact, it is only from the perspective of this theme that the patriarchal narratives as a whole can function appropriately and effectively as the "bridge"

between the primeval history and history of the early formative period of the Israelite people. The specific and particularistic promises of land, progeny, greatness, dominion, prosperity, etc., — without the universalistic promises — would not have allowed the patriarchal narratives to function effectively as such a "bridge". The functional significance of the theme in the patriarchal narratives lies not only in the use of key words, nor even its particular formulation, but also in the very arrangement and structure of the patriarchal narratives, individually and collectively. The theme is clearly demonstrated to have a far wider significance in the patriarchal narratives and promises than studies in that area hitherto have shown or been concerned with.

FOOTNOTESFootnotes to Introduction

1. For convenience, see C. Westermann, "Promises to the Patriarchs", in IDB Suppl., 690-693; The Promises to the Fathers. Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives (tr. D.E. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).
2. The phrase "Blessing for the Nations" expressing the theme under study is used throughout to represent the variations in the formula: "in you all the families of the earth ( אֲבֹתָם ) shall find blessing ( יִבְרַכְךָ )" or "in your seed all the nations of the earth ( אֲבֹתָם ) shall bless themselves ( יִבְרַכְךָ )." In the present study, the promise as expressed by the formula with the theme "Blessing for the Nations" is meant when mention is made simply to the promise, the formula, the theme, or the universal destiny of the patriarch(s), unless otherwise specified. For convenience, references to the promise/formula/theme will be by chapter and verse without repeating the mention of the Book of Genesis, and Abraham will be used throughout even for Abram, unless necessary and otherwise specified.
3. Jer.4:2 states: "and if you swear, 'As Yahweh lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves ( יִבְרַכְךָ ) in him, and in him they shall glory." As our present study is to be a literary analysis of the function and significance of the theme/formula in the patriarchal narratives and not a traditio-historical investigation of the theme in the Old Testament context, we shall not concern ourselves with the occurrence of the theme in Jer.4:2.
4. J. Hoftijzer, Die Verheissungen an die drei Erzväter (Leiden: Brill, 1956). W. Zimmerli, "Promise and Fulfillment", in Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics, ed. J.L. Mays (London: SCM, 1963), 89-122. G. von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch", in The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays (tr. E.W.T. Dicken; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 1-78. C. Westermann, "The Way of the Promise through the Old Testament", in The Old Testament and Christian Faith, ed. B.W. Anderson (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 200-224. I. Blythin, "The Patriarchs and the Promise", SJT 21 (1968), 56-73. The list is of course far from exhaustive.
5. The theme is frequently discussed under the rubric of mission, election, or universalism. W. Staerk, "Ursprung und Grenzen der Missionskraft der alttestamentlichen Religion", Theologische Blätter 4 (1925), cols. 25-37. E. Sellin, "Der Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament", Neue allgemeine Missionzeitschrift (1925), 33-45, 66-72. H.H. Rowley, The Missionary Message of the Old Testament (London: Carey Press, 1945); The Biblical Doctrine

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of Election (London: Lutterworth, 1950). Th.C. Vriezen, Die Erwählung Israels nach dem Alten Testament (ATHANT 24; Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1953). J. Blauw, The Missionary Nature of the of the Church (London: Lutterworth, 1962). R. Martin-Archard, A Light to the Nations. A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World (tr. J.P. Smith; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962). K. Galling, Die Erwählungstraditionen Israels (BZAW 48; Giessen: Topelmann Verlag, 1928). P. Altman, Erwählungstheologie und Universalismus im Alten Testament (BZAW 92; Berlin: Töpelmann Verlag, 1964).

Footnotes to Chapter One: Previous Discussions

1. E. Kautzsch, Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (tr. & rev. A.E. Cowley; 2nd. English ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 138 sec. 51f; "In consequence of a looseness of thought at an early period of the language, Niph'al comes finally in many cases to represent the passive." P. Rotenberry, "Blessing in the Old Testament: A Study of Genesis 12:3", Restoration Quarterly 2 (1978), 34f.
2. E. Kautzsch, op. cit., 150 sec. 54. See especially the exhaustive treatment by O. Allis, "The Blessing of Abraham", Princeton Theological Review 25 (1927), 263-298.
3. P.B. Payne, "A Critical Note on Ecclesiasticus 44:21's Commentary on the Abrahamic Covenant", Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 15 (1972), 187 n.5.
4. G. von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch", 66 n.107. G. Wehmeier, "The Theme 'Blessing for the Nations' in the Promises to the Patriarchs and in Prophetic Literature", Bangalore Theological Forum 6 (1974), 5f.
5. E. Kautzsch, op. cit., 137 sec. 51c; 138 sec. 51h; 148 sec. 54d.
6. J. Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 244. E.A. Speiser, Genesis, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB; 2nd. ed.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 86. B. Vawter, On Genesis. A New Reading (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 177.
7. B. Albrektson, History and the Gods. An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel (Lund: Gleerup, 1967), 78-81, especially 80 n.39.
8. H.H. Rowley, The Biblical Doctrine of Election, 65f.
9. H. Gunkel, Genesis (HKAT; 2nd. ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902), 145. J. Skinner, op. cit., 244.

10. W. Vogels, God's Universal Covenant: A Biblical Study (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), 43.
11. Ibid. See also O. Allis, art. cit., 269.
12. J. Skinner, op. cit., 244. S.R. Driver, The Book of Genesis (WC; 3rd. ed.; London: Methuen, 1904), 145 n.1.
13. G.W. Coats, "Strife and Reconciliation: Themes of a Biblical Theology in the Book of Genesis", Horizons in Biblical Theology 2 (1980), 25.
14. G. Wehmeier, art. cit., 5f. See also p.6 of same article where he discussed the context of Gen.18:17-19 as against a reflexive meaning for יִצְחָק .
15. See the discussion in J. Schreiner, "Segen für die Völker in der Verheissung an die Väter", BZ 6 (1962), 4f.
16. E. Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament (tr. A.W. Heathcote & P.J. Allcock; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1958), 217. H.H. Rowley, op. cit., 66f. R. Martin-Archard, op. cit., 35.
17. H.W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist", Int 20 (1966), 137 n.31. L. Dequeker, "Noah and Israel. The Everlasting Divine Covenant with Mankind", in Questions disputées d'Ancien Testament, ed. C. Brekelmas (Gembloux: Leuven University Press, 1974), 123 n.29. J. Schreiner, art. cit., 7. W. Vogels, op. cit., 40. G. Wehmeier, art. cit., 6f. See also E. Kautzsch, op. cit., 137 sec. 5lc.
18. J. Schreiner, art. cit., 7.
19. W. Vogels, op. cit., 43.
20. J. Scharbert, "יִצְחָק", in TDOT Vol.II, 297.
21. N.E. Wagner, "Pentateuchal Criticism: No Clear Future?", Canadian Theological Journal 13 (1967), 225-232. J. van Seters, Abraham in History and Tradition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). H.H. Schmid, Der sogenannte Jahwist (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1976). R. Rendtorff, Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch (BZAW 147; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977). Van Seters has sought to apply the arguments for an exilic provenance of the Abrahamic promises to the theme under study. See pp.247f of his book. Following the lead of the above commentators, an exilic provenance for the theme has also been briefly suggested by F. Diedrich, "Zur Literarkritik von Gen. 12,1-4a", Biblische Notizen 8 (1979), 35. These arguments about a later dating for the Yahwist from the usual Davidic-Solomonic era would affect mainly the search for a provenance of the work more than a literary analysis of the function and significance of the theme in the patriarchal narratives. See also the article by F.V. Winnett, "Re-examining the Foundations", JBL 84 (1965), 1-19. On the other

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hand, a pre-monarchical dating for the theme has been argued for in E.J. Hamlin, The Nations in Second Isaiah (Unpublished Th.D. dissertation; Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1960), 207-216.

22. We say 'incidental' because von Rad's main concern in his studies of the Yahwist work can be seen in Old Testament Theology Vol.I (tr. D.M.G. Stalker; London: SCM, 1965), 133f, when he states:
- "The most important item in the covenant with the patriarchs was the promise of the land which ... now ... is precisely the most conspicuous binding factor not only in the work of JE but also in the Hexateuch in its final form -- this colossal arch spanning the time from the promises ... to the fulfilment ... in the days of Joshua."
- See also his "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch", 68-74.
23. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 63.
24. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 65.
25. *Idem*, Genesis, A Commentary (tr. J.H. Marks; OTL; rev. ed.; London: SCM, 1963), 149.
26. *Idem*, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch", 65f.
27. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 67.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Note also the remarks of M. Noth, A History of Pentateuchal Traditions (tr. B.W. Anderson; Englewoods: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 237 n.622: "In the ensuing narratives J hardly ever returned to this exposition which he placed once and for all at the beginning. Only within the 'patriarchal' theme in Gen. 18:18 and 28:17 [misprint? 28:14] did he repeat once again the decisive words of Gen. 12:3."
30. J. Schreiner, *art. cit.*, 2f.
31. *Idem*, *art. cit.*, 8. On the land promise, see also W.M. Clark, The Origin and Development of the Land Promise Theme in the Old Testament (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1964).
32. J. Schreiner, *art. cit.*, 29f. In connection with Schreiner's view on the provenance and contributing factors to the emergence of the theme, see E.J. Hamlin, *op. cit.*; and the discussions of Psalm 47 by L.G. Perdue, "Yahweh is King over All the Earth. An Exegesis of Psalm 47", Restoration Quarterly 17 (1974), 85-97; and J.J.M. Roberts, "The Religio-Political Setting of Psalm 47", BASOR 221 (1976), 129-132. For an exilic setting for the Psalm, see J. Muilenburg, "Psalm 47", JBL 63 (1947), 235-256. While van Seters conceded that the two references to Abraham in Pss. 47:9; 105:6ff. are difficult to date, he, nevertheless,

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finally decided that they are likely to be post-exilic. See his article "Confessional Reformulation in the Exilic Period", VT 22 (1972), 457 n.3.

33. J. Schreiner, art. cit., 8f.
34. Idem, art. cit., 16.
35. Idem, art. cit., 17.
36. Idem, art. cit., 10.
37. G.W. Coats, "Abraham's Sacrifice of Faith", Int 27 (1973), 396 n.7.
38. M. Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 75f. n.4; 335 sec. V.A.15; 338 sec. V.A.21j. See also S.R. Driver, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy (ICC; 2nd. ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), lxxxvf.
39. See Jer.26:6; 33:9; 44:8; Ezra 6:21; Zech.12:3.
40. H.W. Wolff, art. cit., 133. See B.L. Goff, "The Lost Yahwistic Account of the Conquest of Canaan", JBL 53 (1934), 241-249; P.F. Ellis, The Yahwist. The Bible's First Theologian (London: Chapman, 1969), 27-32.
41. H.W. Wolff, art. cit., 136.
42. Ibid. In addition, see especially p.146 n.48 and n.49 for his reasons for rejecting Rendtorff's thesis that with Gen.8:21, the curse in the primeval history is lifted. Rendtorff's thesis is expounded in his article "Genesis 8,21 und die Urgeschichte des Jahwisten", Kerygma und Dogma 7 (1961), 69-78. However, it is interesting that subsequently Rendtorff in "Hermeneutische Problem der biblischen Urgeschichte", in Festschrift für R. Smend zum 70. Geburtstag (Berlin: Merseburger, 1963), 21, nuanced his thesis by conceding that: "Hier [Gen. 12:1-4a] beginnt nun erst wirklich die Geschichte des Segens: in der Erwählung Abraham als Anfang der 'Heilsgeschichte' Gottes mit Israel." I owe the quote to L. Dequeker in his art. cit., 124 n.34. For critique of Rendtorff's thesis, see also O.H. Steck, "Genesis 12.1-3 und Die Urgeschichte des Jahwisten", in Probleme Biblischer Theologie, ed. H.W. Wolff (München: Kaiser, 1971), 527-542; D.J.A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch (JSOT Suppl. Series 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978) 70-72.
43. H.W. Wolff, art. cit., 138f.
44. Idem, art. cit., 141.
45. Idem, art. cit., 142f.
46. Idem, art. cit., 143f.

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47. Idem, art. cit., 145.
48. Idem, art. cit., 145f.
49. Idem, art. cit., 147.
50. Ibid.
51. Idem, art. cit., 148.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Idem, art. cit., 149.
55. Idem, art. cit., 150.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Idem, art. cit., 151.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Idem, art. cit., 152.
64. Idem, art. cit., 152f.
65. Idem, art. cit., 153.
66. Ibid.
67. Idem, art. cit., 154.
68. Ibid.
69. Idem, art. cit., 154f.
70. D.J.A. Clines, op. cit., 94f.
71. Idem, op. cit., 95.
72. N.E. Wagner, "Abraham and David?", in Ancient Palestinian World, ed. J. Wevers & D.B. Redford (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 127-130. See also the general critique of the so-called Solomonic Enlightenment by D.M.G. Gunn, The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation (JSOT Suppl. Series 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 31ff and 124 n.19.

(Footnotes to pp.29-37)

73. N.E. Wagner, art. cit., 129, noted at least two rebellions.
74. R. Rendtorff, Problem des Pentateuch, 154f n.6.
75. As argued above, we do not consider Gen.22:15-18 and 26:4f to be necessarily Deuteronomistic postscripts. In fact, this would enhance Wolff's conclusion about the theme as the Yahwist's kerycma more fully. See also note 94 below.
76. This is so especially if N. Lohfink's thesis that Gen.15 is a constructed "artificial narrative" and C. Westermann's classification of it as a "theological narrative" are acceptable. See N. Lohfink, Die Landverheissung als Eid. Eine Studie zu Gn. 15 (SBS 28; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967), 33; C. Westermann, Promises to the Fathers, 71 and 73.
77. R. Davidson, Genesis 12-50 (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 164. For a contrary view see B. Vawter, op. cit., 331. He, nevertheless, also stresses the reluctance of Laban to lose the service of Jacob.
78. J. Muilenburg, "Abraham and the Nations: Blessing and World History", Int 19 (1965), 387-398.
79. Idem, art. cit., 389.
80. Idem, art. cit., 392.
81. Idem, art. cit., 393.
82. Idem, art. cit., 390.
83. Idem, art. cit., 390, 394.
84. Idem, art. cit., 390.
85. Ibid.
86. Idem, art. cit., 393.
87. R.E. Clements, Abraham and David. Genesis XV and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition (SBT; 2nd Series 5; London: SCM, 1967). See also the articles by E. Ruprecht, "Vorgegebene Tradition und Theologische Gestaltung in Genesis XII 1-3" and "Der Traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund der Einzelnen Elemente von Genesis XII 2-3", VT 29 (1979), 171-188 and 444-464 respectively.
88. R.E. Clements, op. cit., 58f.
89. Idem, op. cit., 16.
90. N.E. Wagner, art. cit., 133, asked: "Is it not strange that there is not even the slightest glimmer of a reference to Abraham in the stories concerning David?"

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91. For purpose of discussion, if one were to accept a Davidic-Solomonic provenance for the theme under study, it appears from our comments against Clements that it is possibly more reasonable to accept Wolff's thesis, with the qualifications already stated earlier, that it was the emerging crises of Solomon's empire which caused the Yahwist to construct his work around the theme "Blessing for the Nations" to be a "cutting word to the hybris" of the ostentatious people in Israel of Solomon's time by stressing the call, the shortcomings, and the non-fulfilled challenges facing the nation and people of Israel as a whole.
92. G. Wehmeier, art. cit., 10.
93. Idem, art. cit., 11.
94. See our discussion on pp.18f and also note 38 above. Interestingly, Muilenburg, in his art. cit., 394, also seems to regard all five occurrences of the formula as belonging to J. In dealing with 12:3; 18:18 and 28:14 in the context of the Yahwist work, he also discussed 22:18 and 26:4, but did not describe the latter as Deuteronomistic. This is also noted by G.W. Coats, art. cit., 396 n.7.
95. R. Rendtorff, "Der 'Jahwist' als Theologe? Zum Dilemma der Pentateuchkritik", SVT 28 (1975), 164.
96. Idem, Problem des Pentateuch, 59.
97. Idem, art. cit., 164.
98. Idem, op. cit., 42-45.
99. Rendtorff's article noted above appeared as "The 'Yahwist' as Theologian? The Dilemma of Pentateuchal Criticism", JSOT 3 (1977), 2-9. R.N. Whybray and N.E. Wagner commented on Rendtorff's interpretation of the seed as the recipient of the promise in their responses to the article of Rendtorff in the same issue, pp. 14 and 23 respectively. See also the review article of W. McKane in VT 28 (1978), 373.
100. J.A. Emerton, "The Origin of the Promises to the Patriarchs in the Older Sources of the Book of Genesis", VT 32 (1982), 24-28. While in basic agreement with the comments of Emerton, we would like to maintain that the use of seed in 22:18; 26:4, but not in earlier occurrences of the formula in the patriarchal narratives appears to serve a literary function, which we shall try to show later.

Footnotes to Chapter Two: Formulaic Analysis

1. Gen.12:7; 13:16; 15:5; 17:9,19; 21:3; 22:17f; 24:7; 26:3f,24; 28:3,13f; 32:12; 35:12; 46:6f. Note especially the use of the plural pronouns "they", "them", "their" when referring to the 'seed' in the antecedent clause or verse (15:13-16; 16:10; 17:7f; 24:60).
2. The collective nature of the 'seed' in the three divine speeches is clearly seen in the following: "I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore" (22:17); "I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven" (26:4a); "your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad ..." (28:14). Note especially the remarks of S. McEvenue, The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer (AB 50; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 165 n.33; J.P. Fokkelmann, Narrative Art in Genesis. Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Meaning (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 58f. See also W. Vogels, God's Universal Covenant, 41, 45.
3. Noted also by C. Westermann, Promises to the Fathers, 77 n.45.
4. H.W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist", 137-140. Von Rad, Genesis, 156. J. Muilenburg, "Abraham and the Nations", 391 n.2. A. Murtonen, "The Use and Meaning of the Words LEBAREK and BERAKAH in the Old Testament", VT 9 (1959), 159f. Murtonen describes the structure of the passage as an example of the so-called "Steigerungsformel", in which the weight of the contents increases toward the end. See also the modifications of Wolff's syntactical analysis by L. Dequeker, "Noah and Israel", 123 n.29.
5. וְיִבְרַכְךָ וְיִשְׂרָאֶלְךָ is usually taken by commentators as meaning: "in order that you shall be a blessing." However, there are good reasons for taking it to be in the imperatival mood. See our discussions on pp.167-172. For the purpose of the promises to Abraham, note the comments of H.W. Wolff, art. cit., 150; G. Wehmeier, "The Theme 'Blessing for the Nations'", 3; S. Terrien, The Elusive Presence. Toward a New Biblical Theology (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1978), 74f.
6. See our discussion on pp. 235, 238f.
7. H.W. Wolff, art. cit., 147.
8. On the point that v.15b, the promises of presence and guidance to Jacob, is most likely to be referring to the promises in vv.13f, see W. Richter, "Das Gelübde als theologische Rahmung der Jakobsüberlieferungen", BZ 11 (1967), 42-48; J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 61; R. Davidson, Genesis 12-50, 147. On the formula pronouncement in 28:14a as the final intent of the divine speech, see J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 60; S. Terrien, op. cit., 85.

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9. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 158. H.W. Wolff, *art. cit.*, 136f. J. Muilenburg, *art. cit.*, 393. W. Zimmerli, "Promise and Fulfillment", 91.
10. See our discussions on pp. 103-108.
11. R. Rendtorff, "Der 'Jahwist' als Theologe?", 164.
12. The suggestive proposal of Mary Streitwieser, in an unpublished paper, "The Bible in Translation", that the Isaac narrative (presumably more than Gen.26 only), though short, should constitute a cycle, is adopted by I.M. Kikawada, "Genesis on Three Levels", Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute, 7 (1981), 6ff. See also our discussion on pp.148-151.
13. For further discussions on the positioning of the formula in 18:18ff and 28:13ff, see pp. 173-178 and 281-287 respectively.
14. H-P. Müller, "Imperativ und Verheissung im Alten Testament", Ev. Th. 28 (1968), 557-561. P.V. Premsagar, "Theology of Promise in the Patriarchal Narratives", Indian Journal of Theology 23 (1974), 112-122.
15. R. Rendtorff, Problem des Pentateuch, 60. On the 'synthesizing' of Abrahamic materials in the Isaac narrative, see further our discussions on pp.262-266.
16. See our discussion on pp.262-266 concerning Isaac's involvement in Abraham's obedience in Gen.22 and his acquiescence in Abraham's instructions to the servant concerning his marriage (Gen.24). In other words, it is not unreasonable to consider these actions of Isaac as performing the element of response prior to any pronouncement of promises or the formula, thereby maintaining the structure of elements when the hithpael form of the formula is used in 26:2-5, despite the mixture of forms.
17. See the literature cited in note 8 above.
18. See our discussion on pp.103-108.
19. See the literature cited in notes 99, 100 of Chapter One.
20. G. Wehmeier, *art. cit.*, 40f.
21. W. Vogels, *op. cit.*, 45.
22. R.E. Clements, "ךָ אֱלֹהִים", in TDOT Vol.II, 431f. See also E.A. Speiser, "'People' and 'Nation' of Israel", JBL 79 (1960), 157-163; A. Cody, "When is the Chosen People Called a Gôy?", VT 14 (1964), 1-6.
23. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, 239 n.627, where he asserts that 18:17f appear to be Yahwistic and only v.19 appears to be an interpolation. On the other hand, P.D. Miller, "Faith and Ideology in the Old Testament", in Magnalia Dei. The Mighty

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Acts of God, ed. F.M. Cross et al. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 470, suggests that 18:19 may after all be a theological reflection on the Yahwist's part.

24. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch. The First Book of Moses, Genesis (tr. J. Martin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 193.
25. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 61 n.35. S. Terrien, op. cit., 100 n.60. P.D. Miller, Genesis 1-11. Studies in Structure and Theme (JSOT Suppl. Series 8; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 37-42. J.G. Ploger, "  $\eta\psi\tau\lambda$  ", in TDOT Vol.I, 88-98. See also W. Brueggemann, "The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers", ZAW 84 (1972), 403 n.24.
26. See our discussions of the Jacob narratives on pp.315-323.
27. P.D. Miller, op. cit., 50 n.63.

Footnotes to Chapter Three: The Theme and the Abraham Narratives

1. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 193.
2. See especially J. Skinner, Genesis; E.A. Speiser, Genesis (AB; 2nd. ed.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964).
3. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions. R. Killian, Die vorpriesterlichen Abrahamsüberlieferung, literarkritisch und traditions-geschichtlich untersucht (BBB 24; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1966).
4. C. Westermann, Promises to the Fathers, 57.
5. Idem, op. cit., 58.
6. Ibid.
7. H. Gunkel, Genesis, 153-156.
8. C. Westermann, op. cit., 58f.
9. Idem, op. cit., 59.
10. Idem, Genesis (BKAT I/12; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1977), 146.
11. Idem, op. cit., 147.
12. Idem, Promises to the Fathers, 10-13, 60-64.
13. Idem, Genesis, 147.
14. Idem, op. cit., 145; Promises to the Fathers, 74.

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15. Idem, Genesis, 147.
16. Idem, Promises to the Fathers, 65, 69-72.
17. See his listing in op. cit., 10-30, 59f. On the 'originality' of the promise of land, see pp. 23, 28, 100, 145 of the same work.
18. Idem, op. cit., 11-13.
19. Idem, op. cit., 60.
20. Idem, op. cit., 13.
21. See in general the discussion by R. Neff, "The Birth and Election of Isaac in the Priestly Tradition", Bib. Res. 15 (1970), 5-18. R. Davidson, Genesis 12-50, 52.
22. See the discussion of S. McEvenue, "A Comparison of Narrative Styles in the Hagar Stories", Semeia 3-4 (1975), 64-80. R. Davidson, op. cit., 50.
23. H. Gunkel, op. cit., 181f. M. Noth, op. cit., 199 n.540. Von Rad, Genesis, 199. E. Speiser, op. cit., 130. B. Vawter, On Genesis, 231. C. Westermann, op. cit., 60f.
24. Von Rad, op. cit., 199.
25. Van Seters, Abraham, 222. In fact, Westermann, op. cit., 25, also considers "the addition of this promise passage to the narrative of Lot's separation from Abraham is secondary but highly appropriate."
26. C. Westermann, op. cit., 25, 123.
27. Idem, op. cit., 59.
28. E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 125. See the discussions of W.F. Albright "The Historical Background of Genesis XIV", JSOR 10 (1926), 231-269; J.A. Emerton, "Some False Clues in the Study of Genesis XIV", VT 21 (1971), 24-47; Idem, "The Riddle of Genesis XIV", VT 21 (1971), 403-439. Van Seters, op. cit., 296-308, has criticised Emerton's interpretation.
29. N.H. Sarna, Understanding Genesis (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 115. See also D. Kidner, Genesis, An Introduction and Commentary (TOTC; London: Tyndale Press, 1967), 118f. Von Rad, op. cit., 173. E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 106. B. Vawter, op. cit., 186, 193.
30. Van Seters, op. cit., 298.
31. C. Westermann, op. cit., 32.
32. Idem, op. cit., 33.
33. Idem, op. cit., 59f.

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34. Idem, op. cit., 65.
35. Idem, op. cit., 72.
36. Idem, op. cit., 69-71.
37. Idem, op. cit., 59-65. The relevant conclusion of A. Jolles is summarised by Westermann in pp.32-35 of his work cited. A. Jolles, Einfache Formen (Halle: Niemeyer, 1958), 62-90. A. Heusler, Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga (Berlin, 1914).
38. C. Westermann, op. cit., 32f.
39. Idem, op. cit., 34.
40. Ibid.
41. Van Seters, op. cit., 131-138, see especially the literature cited in notes 34-39 in pp.134-137. See also W.M. Clark, "The Flood and the Structure of the Pre-patriarchal History", ZAW 83 (1971), 184-211.
42. Van Seters, op. cit., 136f. See also J.P. Fokkelmann, Narrative Art in Genesis, 239. J. Scharbert, "77", 306.
43. N. Sarna, op. cit., 162.
44. Idem, op. cit., 175.
45. C. Westermann, op. cit., 69-71.
46. D.J.A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch, 66f.
47. Idem, op. cit., 67.
48. Idem, op. cit., 72. The point is also made by A.N. Barnard, "Was Noah a Righteous Man?", Theology 84 (1971), 313; W.M. Clark, art. cit., 209; G. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative", VT 28 (1978), 336-348.
49. See our discussion on p.50 above and the literature cited in note 3 of Chapter Two.
50. D.J.A. Clines, op. cit., 67.
51. See the following studies on the structure of the narratives mentioned:
- 12:1-9 I.M. Kikawada, "The Unity of Genesis 12:1-9", Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1973), 229-235.
- 15:1-21 N. Lohfink, Die Landverheissung als Eid. Van Seters, op. cit., 249-269, especially 253-263. L.A. Snijders, "Genesis XV. The Covenant with Abram", OTS 12 (1958), 261-279.
- 17:1-27 S.E. McEvenue, The Priestly Writer, 90-144.
- 18:1-19:38 See most commentaries.

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- 22:1-19 G.W. Coats, "Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac", 389-400. J. Crenshaw, "A Journey into Oblivion: A Structural Analysis of Gen 22:1-19", Soundings 58 (1975), 243-256. J.I. Lawlor, "The Test of Abraham, Genesis 22:1-19", Grace Theological Journal 1 (1980), 19-35.
52. R. Davidson, op. cit., 50.
53. Van Seters, op. cit., 188.
54. J. Skinner, op. cit., 290. E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 126.
55. The views of the following are very close to this. J. Calvin, Genesis, A Commentary on Vol.I (tr. & ed. J. King; London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 441f. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 222. N. Sarna, op. cit., 129.
56. D. Kidner, op. cit., 124, 128.
57. S.E. McEvenue, op. cit., 149-155, argues that Gen.17 is composed of materials from Gen.15 and 18:1-16.
58. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 244f.
59. See the interpretation of 15:6b by L. Gaston, "Abraham and the Righteousness of God", Horizons in Biblical Theology 1 (1980), 36-39.
60. N. Sarna, op. cit., 130f. On the promise of a great nation, C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, op. cit., 194, commented:  
 "This last promise was renewed to Abram on several occasions: ... and lastly, at the two principal turning points of his life, viz. in chap. xvii ... where 'I will make of thee a great nation' was heightened into 'I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee,' ..."
61. See pp.93f above.
62. R. Davidson, op. cit., 44.
63. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 250.
64. B. Vawter, op. cit., 259.
65. It is interesting that when Gen.15 and 22 are taken as some sort of parallel narratives, the otherwise unexplained promise "your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies" (22:17) appears to find illumination in 15:16-21. See the comments of E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 164.
66. Most fully by N. Sarna, op. cit., 160-163. See also G.W. Coats, art. cit., 395f. W. McKane, Studies in Patriarchal Narratives (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1979), 233.

## (Footnotes to pp.103-113)

67. U. Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part II (tr. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 309ff. N. Sarna, op. cit., 160.
68. Idem, op. cit., 163. J.I. Lawlor, art. cit., 23.
69. Ultimately, it was the question of wealth and Abraham's alternatives to Lot which led to the separation in Gen.13. In other words, if Abraham had given up the wealth altogether, the outcome might be different as is the case with Isaac and his relation with Abimelech in Gen.26. See the 'negative' remarks of G.W. Coats, "Strife and Reconciliation", 25f, on this aspect of Abraham's relationship with Lot.
70. J.I. Lawlor, art. cit., 24.
71. See in general G.W. Coats, art. cit., 25f; R. Polzin, "'The Ancestress of Israel in Danger' in Danger", Semeia 3-4 (1975), 81-97.
72. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 250. See also H.C. White, "Word Reception as the Matrix of the Structure of the Genesis Narrative", in The Biblical Mosaic: Changing Perspective, ed. R.M. Polzin & E. Rothman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), especially 80-82.
73. While 18:1-19:38 begins with Yahweh appearing to Abraham, it was the latter who took the initiative to entertain the visitors, and later it was also Abraham who took upon himself to intercede for the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah.
74. See most commentaries. In addition, see K. Koch, The Growth of the Biblical Tradition. The Form-Critical Method (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's, 1969), 111-132; E. Maly, "Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:7-11 and the Pentateuchal Question", CBQ 18 (1956), 255-262; D.L. Petersen, "A Thrice-Told Tale: Genre, Theme and Motif", Bib. Res. 18 (1973), 30-43; R. Polzin, art. cit.; Van Seters, op. cit., 167-191.
75. H.W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist", 148.
76. There seems to be a pattern in the second half of the structure of the Abraham story. What God knew about Abraham in potential, after its actualisation by Abraham, is later acknowledged by God in the following narrative. First, faced with the impending judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah, Yahweh stood before Abraham expecting him to do something about it, to which Abraham responded by interceding for others (18:22-33). Later, Yahweh declared to Abimelech that Abraham is a prophet and will pray for him (20:7). Secondly, Abraham was able to respond positively to God's command to him to give up Ishmael (21:12). Knowing this capacity, God's command then went further and asked for Isaac to be sacrificed, to which again Abraham responded positively. Finally, God commended Abraham in the words: "for now I know you are a fearer of God." Compare also Abraham's obedience to

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God's voice in the test in Gen.22 and was later described as "my servant" by God in the oracle of reassurance to Isaac in 26:23.

77. B. Vawter, op. cit., 252, commented: "The covenant of friendship which Abimelech seeks with Abraham is the rather natural outcome of his experience in chapter 20." See also J. Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture Vol.1-2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 286; C. Westermann, Blessing in the Old Testament and the Church (tr. K. Crim; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), loc. cit.
78. However, see E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 159f, where he argues that the narrative can be interpreted logically as it stands.
79. J. Skinner, op. cit., 326, commented that "the seven ewe lambs are set apart for the purpose explained in v.30 ... Abimelech's question proves that the lambs were not an understood part of the ceremony."
80. See the literatures cited in note 23 above.
81. Van Seters, op. cit., 221.
82. Idem, op. cit., 219-221. E.M. Good, Irony in the Old Testament (2nd. ed.; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1981), 94.
83. R. Davidson, op. cit., 70. E.M. Good, op. cit., 93f.
84. Van Seters, op. cit., 221.
85. See most commentaries. Van Seters, op. cit., 192-208. S.E. McEvenue, "Hagar Stories".
86. Van Seters, op. cit., 192. While van Seters is correct to pose the question for a 'final' understanding of the whole question of the birth of Ishmael and of Isaac, he has unfortunately left out 17:15-21. The motif of laughter runs right through 17:17; 18:12-15; 21:6f (cf. v.9).
87. J. Skinner, op. cit., 284. R. Davidson, op. cit., 43.
88. B. Vawter, op. cit., 214.
89. See the discussion of L. Gaston, art. cit., 39-69.
90. S.R. Driver, Genesis, 404-406. W.F. Albright, "The Names Shaddai and Abram", JBL 54 (1935), 173-204.
91. J.A. Motyer, The Revelation of the Divine Name (London: Tyndale Press, 1959), 29-31. D. Kidner, op. cit., 128f.
92. Note the emphatic double use of the particle of entreaty ( X ) in Gen.16. In Gen.30:3, when Rachel pleaded with Jacob in a similar, if not worse, situation, the particle is interestingly not used.

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93. See E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 119-121. For a different view, see Van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel", JBL 87 (1968), 401-408.
94. Von Rad, op. cit., 191f. G.W. Coats, art. cit., 26.
95. Von Rad, op. cit., 191f. J. Skinner, op. cit., 284. J. Goldingay, "The Patriarchs in Scripture and History", in Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives, ed. A.R. Millard & D.J. Wiseman (Leicester: IVP, 1980), 14.
96. Von Rad, op. cit., 227.
97. Idem, op. cit., 190f.
98. From the traditional source theory point of view, Vawter, op. cit., 218, asserts that "chapter 17 can only be the work of the Priestly author, building off 16:15-16 (cf. 17:18 with 16:16). This is true despite the Yahweh (Lord) of 17:1, which must be attributed to the Redactor of Genesis, who has brought this story into concert with the surrounding J material."
99. Von Rad, op. cit., 198.
100. J. Calvin, op. cit., 442.
101. C. Westermann, Genesis, 147.
102. Von Rad, op. cit., 2<sup>o</sup>8.
103. B. Vawter, op. cit., 249.
104. Von Rad, op. cit., 227.
105. See especially J.I. Lawlor, art. cit., 34f, where he listed six points of contrasts and eight points of comparisons between the two narratives.
106. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 244.
107. J.I. Lawlor, art. cit., 27f. See also the general discussion by M. Greenberg, "אֱלֹהִים in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany", JBL 79 (1960), 273-276.
108. BDB, 609. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 250, 254. J.I. Lawlor, art. cit., 28.
109. See note 9<sup>o</sup> above.
110. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 245.
111. Von Rad, op. cit., 239. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, op. cit., 252.
112. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 249f. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, op. cit., 251.

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113. See H. Gunkel, *op. cit.*, 174ff for references to parallels in other literature. But Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 207, argues against applying this particular motif to Gen.18:1-15.
114. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 207f. F. Kidner, *op. cit.*, 131.
115. Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 188.
116. See the discussions of M.R. Lehman, "Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law", BASOR 129 (1953), 15-18; G.M. Tucker, "The Legal Background of Genesis 23", JBL 85 (1966), 77-84. In this connection, it is interesting to note the remarks of J. Skinner, *op. cit.*, 339, when he commented: "The motive usually assigned is that the purchase was a pledge of the possession of the land by Abraham's descendants; that view is, indeed, supported by nothing in the passage, but it is difficult to imagine any other explanation."
117. E.M. Good, *op. cit.*, 97.
118. H.W. Wolff, *art. cit.*, 141. D.J.A. Clines, *op. cit.*, 46. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 61 n.35. S. Terrien, The Elusive Presence, 72, commented:  
 "Under the promise of posterity and land, which provided the unifying structure of all the patriarchal stories of epiphanic visitation, one may discern a deeper and wholly internal theme of a strictly theological character. The promise of seed and real estate, important as these may be, is subordinated to the search for identity in the context of universal meaning. ... Posterity and land are conditions of historical existence, but they should not be confused with ends in themselves. Israel was animated by the vision of unity for 'all the families of the earth,' ..."
119. J. Skinner, *op. cit.*, 342. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 250.
120. B. Vawter, *op. cit.*, 267.
121. J. Calvin, *op. cit.*, 13f. See also J.I. Lawlor, *art. cit.*, 23. Cf. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, 252.
122. M. Lind, Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1980), 128-132.
123. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 148ff. C. Westermann, Promises to the Fathers, 44-56. See the critique and refinement of Clines, *op. cit.*, 64-69. T.E. Fretheim, Creation, Fall, and Flood: Studies in Genesis 1-11 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 20.
124. D.J.A. Clines, *op. cit.*, 77.
125. U. Cassuto, *op. cit.*, 291. M. Fishbane, Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1979), 28.

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126. U. Cassuto, *op. cit.*, 232-236. I.M. Kikawada, "The Shape of Genesis 11:1-9", in Rhetorical Criticism (Essays in Honour of J. Muilenburg), ed. J.J. Jackson & M. Kessler (Pittwick Monograph Series No.1; Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1974), 18-32. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 11-45.
127. I.M. Kikawada, "The Unity of Genesis 12:1-9". Th.C. Vriezen, "Bemerkungen zu Genesis 12:1-7", in Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae (Festschrift für F.M.T. Böhl) (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 380-392. The latter did not consider taking the narrative (12:1-9) as a coherent unity.
128. N. Sarna, *op. cit.*, 72-77. D.E. Gowan, When Man Becomes God: Humanism and Hybris in the Old Testament (Pittwick Monograph Series No.6; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1975), 25-29. B.W. Anderson, "Unity and Diversity in God's Creation", Currents in Theology and Mission 5 (1978), 72. F.S. Frick, The City in Ancient Israel (SBL Dissertation Series 36; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 207f, 223.
129. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 19.
130. *Ibid.* M. Fishbane, *op. cit.*, 38.
131. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 20.
132. In connection with this, see his arguments that the sin of the "sons of God" in 6:1-4 is not as fundamental as some interpreters has claimed in his *op. cit.*, 69. See also the discussions: E. Kraeling, "The Significance and Origin of Gen 6:1-4", JNES 6 (1947), 193-208. M.G. Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4", Westminster Theological Journal 24 (1962), 187-204. W. Wilfall, "Gen 6:1-4 -- A Royal Davidic Myth?", BTB 5 (1975), 294-301. D.J.A. Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Gen 6:1-4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1-11)", JSOT 13 (1979), 33-46.
133. D.J.A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch, 69.
134. *Ibid.* J. Muilenburg, "Abraham and the Nations", 389. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 16-20.
135. D.J.A. Clines, *op. cit.*, 69f. B. Vawter, *op. cit.*, 156. W. Vogels, God's Universal Covenant, 27.
136. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 144f.
137. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 149.
138. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 145.
139. B. Vawter, *op. cit.*, 156. U. Cassuto, *op. cit.*, 243. D. Kidner, *op. cit.*, 109.
140. D.O. Procksch, Die Genesis (KAT; 2nd. & 3rd. ed.; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung Dr. W. Scholl, 1924), 90.

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141. See literature cited in note 126 above.
142. I.M. Kikawada, art. cit., 234. See also J. Schreiner, "Segen für die Völker", 8.
143. I.M. Kikawada, art. cit., 234. On the relationship of the promises of greatness, blessings and the possession of land see also the literature cited in note 118 above.
144. U. Cassuto, op. cit., 301-306, 329, 332.
145. It is interesting to note that in Gen. 28:10-22, Jacob's first Bethel encounter with God, after Jacob woke up from his dream, he exclaimed: "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (v.17). Commentators have noted the parallel between the tower in Gen. 11 and the ladder/stairway in Gen. 28 on the one hand, and the links between the mention of Bethel and altar building of Abraham and Jacob in Gen. 12 and 28 (35:1-15) respectively on the other hand. However, they have not linked the contrast or reversal of the premature halt of the tower building in 11:6-9 and the altar building of Abraham at a mountain east of Bethel together. This contrast or reversal is quite striking when the altar building of Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 28 and 35) is seen as forming some sort of inclusio design with the altar building and proclamation of Yahweh's name by Abraham near Bethel (Gen. 12), which we shall be arguing for later (see pp. 315-323).

For discussion on the relationship between the tower building (Gen. 11) and Jacob's altar building see: U. Cassuto, op. cit., 324, 328f; B. Vawter, op. cit., 175f, 311ff; J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 53ff, 62-65; C. Houtman, "What did Jacob See in his Dream at Bethel? Some Remarks on Genesis xxviii 10-22", VT 27 (1977), 337-351. For background discussion of the tower-ziggurat and its significance, see: A.L. Oppenheim, "The Significance of the Temple in the Ancient Near East: II. The Mesopotamian Temple", BA 7 (1944), 54-63; A.S. Kapelrud, "Temple Building, a Task for Gods and Kings", Or 32 (1963), 56-62; R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institution (tr. J. McHugh; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 274-294; M. Fishbane, "The Sacred Center: The Symbolic Structure of the Bible" in Text and Responses, 6-27, especially 13; H.G.Q. Wales, "The Sacred Mountain in the Old Asiatic Religions", JRAS (1953), 23-30, especially 23-25; J.Z. Smith, "Earth and Gods", JR 49 (1969), 103-127.

146. See J.A. Callaway, "Ai", IDB Suppl., 14-16.
147. See note 145 above.
148. BDB, 652.
149. I.M. Kikawada, art. cit., 232, 235. See also U. Cassuto, op. cit., 333.

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150. Noted by I.M. Kikawada, art. cit., 235.
151. U. Cassuto, op. cit., 306, 329. J Calvin, op. cit., 353-356.
152. B. Vawter, op. cit., 178.
153. U. Cassuto, op. cit., 305f.
154. Idem, op. cit., 306.
155. M. Buber, "Abraham the Seer (Gen 12-25)", in Biblical Humanism, ed. N.H. Glatzer (London: MacDonald, 1968), 34f. Van Seters, op. cit., 276. See Deut. 28:10; 2 Sam. 6:2; 12:28; Jdg. 6:24; Jer. 25:29; cf. also Ex. 33:19; 34:5; Deut. 12:11,5,21; 2 Chron. 7:14.
156. W.J. Dumbrell, "The Covenant with Abraham", The Reformed Theological Review 61 (1982), 43-50, see especially 43.
157. Almost all commentators, for e.g., H.W. Wolff, art. cit., 137.
158. S. Terrien, op. cit., 74f. W.J. Dumbrell, art. cit., 43. It is interesting that F.D. Keil and F. Delitzsch, op. cit., 193 who also take  $\overline{\text{אֲנִי}}$  as a result clause, nevertheless, made the following observation:
- "The four members of this promise (12:2) are not to be divided into two parallel members, in which case the athnach would stand in the wrong place; ... By placing the athnach under  $\overline{\text{אֲנִי}}$ , the fourth member [  $\overline{\text{אֲנִי}}$  ] is marked as a new and independent feature added to the other three."
159. See our discussion on pp. 304 to 315 as well.
160. J. Muilenburg, art. cit., 393.
161. H.W. Wolff, art. cit., 145.
162. D.L. Petersen, "The Yahwist on the Flood", VT 26 (1976), 445, has pointed out that the flood was ineffectual in restoring the state of men's heart towards sin and in their relationship with God.
163. Von Rad, op. cit., 203f.
164. N. Sarna, op. cit., 130, 176. See also A.K. Jenkins, "A Great Name: Genesis 12:2 and the Editing of the Pentateuch", JSOT 10 (1978), 41-57.
165. N. Sarna, op. cit., 129f. Cf. Isa. 43:1; 44:1; 45:3f; 48:1; 49:1-6. See the discussions: H.B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew Yada", BASOR 181 (1966), 31-37. H.B. Huffmon & S.B. Parker, "A Further Note on the Treaty Background of Hebrew Yada", BASOR 184 (1966), 36-38. W.M. Clark, "The Righteousness of Noah", VT 21 (1971), 277f.

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166. B. Vawter, *op. cit.*, 228.
167. Gen.18:22b in the MT reads:  $\eta\eta\eta? \quad \eta\eta\eta\eta \quad \eta\eta\eta\eta \quad \eta\eta\eta\eta \quad \eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta!$   
It is most likely to be a 'pious' scribal revision. See  
B. Vawter, *op. cit.*, 228; von Rad, *op. cit.*, 206; E.A. Speiser,  
*op. cit.*, 134.
168. N. Sarna, *op. cit.*, 133. See also D. Kidner, *op. cit.*, 131;  
W. Vogels, *op. cit.*, 46.
169. E.M. Good, *op. cit.*, 93f.
170. R. Davidson, *op. cit.*, 70. See also the comment of M. Noth,  
*op. cit.*, 239 notes 626 and 627.
171. Our observations in this paragraph are indebted to M. Buber,  
*art. cit.*, 33. See also I.M. Kikawada, "Genesis on Three  
Levels", 11f.
172. I.M. Kikawada, "The Shape of Genesis 11:1-9", 32, is probably  
slightly over positive in his evaluation of the reason for the  
scattering of mankind in Gen.11. See the more balanced  
remarks of D.J.A. Clines, *op. cit.*, 68f.
173. See our discussion on pp.304-315 below.
174. W.M. Clark, "The Flood and the Structure of the Pre-patriarchal  
History", 195.
175. C. Westermann, *op. cit.*, 54.
176. W.M. Clark, *art. cit.*, 195.
177. *Ibid.*
178. C. Westermann, *op. cit.*, 73. M. Noth, *op. cit.*, 239, commented:  
"The passage 18:22b-33 deserves special and serious attention  
in the analysis of the theology of J."
179. The intercessory function of Abraham is probably foreshadowed  
in his pleading for Ishmael in 17:18, revealing his concern  
on knowing that Ishmael is to be 'rejected' as the promised  
heir. Moreover, Ishmael is to be made the "father of twelve  
princes ... and a great nation" (17:20), presumably outside  
the covenant community.
180. M. Buber, *art. cit.*, 33.
181. G.J. Wenham, *art. cit.*, 338.
182. W.M. Clark, "The Righteousness of Noah", 276. See also  
W. Brueggemann, "David and his Theologian", CBQ 30 (1968),  
156-181, and the critique of his thesis by D.J.A. Clines,  
*op. cit.*, 72f.

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183. W.M. Clark, art. cit., 273.
184. A.N. Barnard, art. cit., 311-314. D.L. Petersen, art. cit., 438-446. D.J.A. Clines, op. cit., 72.
185. B. Vawter, op. cit., 138f.
186. Idem, op. cit., 228, suggests that there might be a verbal link between the Sodom narrative and the Babel incident. In 18:21, God said, "... I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me." In 11:5, it is said, "Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower."
187. W.M. Clark, "The Flood and the Structure of the Pre-patriarchal History", 209.
188. See the comment of M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22)", JJS 26 (1975), 37.
189. E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 135.
190. S.R. Driver, op. cit., 194. J. Skinner, op. cit., 303. J.L. McKenzie, "Divine Sonship of Israel and the Covenant", CBQ 8 (1946), 320-331, see especially p. 328.
191. J. Skinner, op. cit., 303. Von Rad, op. cit., 204-210. See also E.A. Speiser, "'People' and 'Nation' of Israel", 163.
192. S. Terrien, op. cit., 81.
193. P.A. Riemann, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?", Int 24 (1970), 482-491.
194. R. Gordis, "The Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Old Testament and the Qumran Scrolls", JBL 76 (1957), 123-138. M. Buber, "The Tree of Knowledge", in Biblical Humanism, 14-21. I. Engnell, "'Knowledge' and 'Life' in the Creation Story", SVT 3 (1955), 103-119. D. Kidner, op. cit., 63.
195. W.M. Clark, "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'Good and Evil' in Genesis 2-3", JBL 88 (1969), 277.
196. J.T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24: A Synchronic Approach", JBL 96 (1977), 171.
197. Idem, art. cit., 175.
198. T.D. Alexander, "Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision", forthcoming in JSOT. He argues that Abraham's obedience in Gen. 22 is the fulfilment of the covenantal obligations of Gen. 17.
199. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 248. J.I. Lawlor, art. cit., 23f.

200. Note the element "the tree was desired to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6c) is absent from Gen. 2:9. Only the first two elements of Gen. 3:6ab, the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, are found in Gen. 2:9.
201. The use of  $\lambda \gamma \rho$  in Gen. 21:17 to describe Yahweh's calling of Hagar is different from its use in 3:9 and 22:11 because there is no prior command involved and therefore no expectation of Hagar giving an account in response. Otherwise, almost invariably  $\gamma \rho \lambda$  is used of God speaking in Genesis. See Gen. 2:16; 4:9; 6:13; 7:1; 8:16; 9:1,8; 12:1; 13:14; 15:5; 17:1; 21:12; 22:1,15f; 26:2,3; (28:13); 31:3,11; 35:1; 46:2; cf. also Ex. 3:4; 19:3, where interestingly  $\gamma \rho \lambda$  is also used. The significant role of  $\lambda \gamma \rho$  in the overall structure of the Tetrateuch is discussed now by C.J. Labuschagne, "The Pattern of the Divine Speech Formulas in the Pentateuch. The Key to its Literary Structure", VT 32 (1982), 268-296, see especially pp. 269-271.
202. E.M. Good, op. cit., 84.
203. See BDB, 244. Cf. also Ex. 3:4; Deut. 10:12; 31:12f; Josh. 24:4; 1 Sam. 3:4ff,8,16; 15:22; Isa. 6:8.
204. E.M. Good, op. cit., 38.
205. J. Crenshaw, art. cit., 250. Cf. Deut. 13:3f.
206. W.M. Clark, art. cit., 277.
207. While there appears to be a 'replacement' of Rebekah's voice by God's voice in Jacob's life (cf. Gen. 27:8,13,43 with 28:15, 31:3,13, 32:9-12), the posing of the two voices as alternatives as in the narratives of Adam and Abraham is not very obvious.
208. See D.T. Asselin, "The Notion of Dominion in Genesis 1-3", CBQ 16 (1954), 277-294; B.D. Naidoff, "A Man to Work the Soil: A New Interpretation of Genesis 2-3", JSOT 5 (1978), 2-14. Note the fruitful result of Isaac's activity on the 'soil' (Gen. 26:12).
209. J. Skinner, op. cit., 84, commented on the curse as a result of Adam's disobedience in Gen. 3:17: "As exceptional fertility was ascribed to a divine blessing (27:28 etc.), and exceptional barrenness to a curse (Isa 24:6, Jer 23:10), so the relative unproductiveness of the whole earth in comparison with man's expectation and ideals is here regarded as the permanent effect of a curse." Thus, Abraham's blessedness could rightly be taken as some sort of actualisation of the reversal of the 'negative' situation brought about by Adam's disobedience.
210. B. Vawter, op. cit., 85f. See also E. Combs & K. Post, "Historicity and Necessity: Death in Genesis and the Chandogya Upanisad", Studies in Religion 9 (1980), 41-52.

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211. See the discussion of M. Fishbane, "The Sacred Center", in Texts and Responses, 6-27; and also M. Eliade, "The Yearning for Paradise in Primitive Tradition", in Myth and Mythmaking, ed. H.A. Murray (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 61-75.
212. P.D. Miller, "Fire in the Mythology of Canaan and Israel", CBQ 27 (1965), 256-261, see especially p.259.
213. M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle", 37. Fishbane's remarks about Noah retrieving (only) momentarily the primary values of life, lost as a result of the breach in divine-human relationship is very interesting. He also observed that these form the nucleus of the patriarchal narratives. Our analysis and comparison of Abraham and Noah earlier has in fact shown Abraham as taking over in a more positive and participatory way from Noah's more passive, and in fact 'disappointing', agency in God's intention to bless mankind.

Footnotes to Chapter Four: The Theme and the Isaac Narrative

1. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, 104.
2. Von Rad, Genesis, 264f.
3. B. Vawter, Genesis, 290f.
4. J.P. Fokkelmann, Narrative Art in Genesis, 114.
5. Ibid.
6. Idem, op. cit., 113.
7. Idem, op. cit., 113f.
8. Idem, op. cit., 115. M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle", 23-25, 34, also see a literary-structural-functional-thematic links between Gen.26 and Gen.25:19-34; 27:1-28:9. We shall discuss the views of the latter in due course (see pp.267-275).
9. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 115f.
10. Gen.26:1,6,8,12,17(3x),22,23,25(2x),26,31. The following are verbs in direct speeches: Gen.26:2b-3a(3x),16,27(2x),29.
11. This insistence on Isaac remaining in the land of which he shall be told is made more marked when one consider the command to Abraham was to "go to the land that I will show you" (12:1; cf.22:2) and to Jacob was to "return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred. ... Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth" (31:3,13).

12. As we are dealing with Isaac specifically, we leave out of our discussion vv.34f, which deals more with Esau. Most commentators hold the view that the Isaac narrative is made up of seven units. However, they hardly give any credence to a structural unity of the narrative. Our unit division is closest to that of S.R. Driver, op. cit., 249. However, it is more natural to take v.6 with vv.1-5 than with vv.7-11 as Driver does. Van Seters, Abraham, 176, 188, 190f, has argued strongly for the 'unity' of the Isaac narrative. See also D.L. Petersen, "A Thrice-Told Tale", 35.
13. Abraham was never specifically given the promise "I will be with you" by God, although it is found on the lips of Abimelech that "God is with you in all that you do" (21:22; cf. 12:3a). Jacob did receive the promise, "Behold, I am with you" (28:15; see also 31:3 and cf. 46:4a). However, the combination of "I will be with you" and "I will bless you" is promised only to Isaac (26:3,24; cf. v.28f). See the discussion of T.W. Mann, Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions: The Typology of Exaltation (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 106-119.
14. Van Seters, op. cit., 190f.
15. J. Skinner, Genesis, 364.
16. S.R. Driver, op. cit., 250.
17. E.A. Speiser, Genesis, 201.
18. Idem, op. cit., 198. B. Vawter, op. cit., 291, also attempted a similar explanation but interpreted "the land" (v.2c) as "this land" so as to make v.2c in line with v.3a "this land". This requires him to argue that "it is not that 'this land' refers specifically to Gerar." The reason for Vawter's re-interpretation is because he takes "this land" (v.3a) to be referring to "all these lands" (v.3c, and v.4b), which he asserts is "the land of Canaan as distinct from the land of Egypt." While he made the correct point that "whether Gerar ever became part of the Israelite federation is in doubt," Vawter has no ground to interpret v.2c in light of v.3a. Moreover, it is not clear how the switch from the singular (v.2c and v.3a) to the plural (vv.3c,4b) took place.
19. S.R. Driver, op. cit., 250. In fact, E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 148, 201, also takes  $\gamma\lambda\lambda$  to be a temporary stay. J.F. Skinner, op. cit., 315, has noted a paranomasia between  $\gamma\lambda\lambda$  ("and he sojourned", or "was sojourning" as Speiser) and  $\gamma\lambda\lambda$  ("in Gerar").
20. As hold by most commentators, but see B. Vawter, op. cit., 291, for a different view. Van Seters, op. cit., 182, commented that "Isaac is already in Gerar and does not need to be told to go there."
21. Idem, op. cit., 177.

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22. D. Kidner, Genesis, 153. R. Davidson, Genesis 12-50, 127.
23. See our discussion of the relationship of the three narratives, 12:1-4; 22:1-19; 26:2-6, in pp.261-266 below.
24. In fact, Vawter's rather forced identification of the land in v.2c with that in v.3a (see note 18 above), both as not specifically Gerar unintentionally supports our conclusion.
25. E.A. Speiser, op. cit., 201, comments that  $\text{ךָ} \text{שָׁכַן}$  (v.2c) "in J carries the idiomatic nuance of 'to camp'" fits the image of Isaac pitching his tent, implying a settled existence.
26. S.R. Driver, op. cit., 253.
27. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, 102-115. R. Killian, Die vorpriesterlichen Abrahamsüberlieferung, 210-219. Both of them argue the association of Isaac with Beersheba as original while Abraham's association as secondary. On the other hand, J. Skinner, op. cit., 363, is much more cautious on the matter, but appears in the end to think that "the extremely close parallelism [of Gen.26] to ch.20f. suggests that it is a secondary compilation based on JE as a composite work, with the name of Issac substituted for that of Abraham." So does B. Vawter, op. cit., 296; Van Seters, op. cit., 167-192 as well.
28. J. Skinner, op. cit., 364, regards it as Beer-lehai-roi. B. Vawter, op. cit., 291, is undecided between Beer-lehai-roi and Beersheba, while S.R. Driver, op. cit., 250, decides for Beersheba on the basis of the documentary source E. After the deaths of Sarah (Gen.23) and Abraham (Gen.25), Isaac probably found Beer-lehai-roi (with Ishmael and Hagar!) to be a place of security and kinship.
29. See the comment of Kidner mentioned in note 22 above. In fact, the reaffirmation of the formula to Isaac in the divine speech (vv.2-5) is explicitly related to the obedience of Abraham in response to God's voice and charge etc. This would then quite naturally put the element of obedience and trust in the forefront of the Isaac narrative.
30. D. Kidner, op. cit., 153.
31. B. Vawter, op. cit., 293.
32. Van Seters, op. cit., 181.
33. See literature cited in note 77 of Chapter Three.
34. One of the weaknesses of R. Polzin's otherwise insightful article, "The Ancestress of Israel in Danger", is the omission of this 'paradoxical' effect of being blessed by Yahweh but hated by others in his discussions. His posing of questions, "when in fact is a man blessed by God?" or "how does one know that a

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certain man is blessed by God?", and the answers he deduced from his analysis are based on a comparison between the ways wealth and progeny were acquired by Abraham in 12:10-20 and 20:1-18, and by Isaac in 26:1-14. He concluded that the answer of our three stories is, "when a man in fact correctly possesses both progeny and wealth" (p.95). However, if he had taken into account the whole of the Isaac narrative, then his answer would be quite different. See also note 85 of Chapter Five.

35. Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 189. Note Isaac's ill-feelings later when he confronted Abimelech in v.27.
36. S.R. Driver, *op. cit.*, 252.
37. See note 13 above and also H.D. Preuss, "'... ich will mit dir sein!'", ZAW 80 (1968), 139-173, for a general discussion.
38. D.J.A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch, 35. R. Davidson, *op. cit.*, 131.
39. Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 188. H.W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist", 149.
40. D. Kidner, *op. cit.*, 154.
41. See note 13 above.
42. C. Westermann, Promises to the Fathers, 157f. Th.C. Vriezen, "Bemerkungen zu Genesis 12:1-7", 380-392.
43. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 113.
44. J. Skinner, *op. cit.*, 364. S.R. Driver, *op. cit.*, 250.
45. B. Vawter, *op. cit.*, 291. R. Rendtorff, "Genesis 15 im Rahmen der theologischen Bearbeitung der Vätergeschichte" in Werden und Wirken Des Alten Testament (Festschrift für C. Westermann zum 70. Geburtstag), ed. R. Albertz et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 74-81.
46. G.W. Coats, "Abraham's Sacrifice of Faith", 395.
47. Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 188. See also R. Polzin, *art. cit.*
48. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 181, where he noted the wordplay on  $\text{y}^{\text{h}}\text{w}^{\text{h}}$  in Gen.26:11 with 12:17 and 20:6. It is also interesting to note that the same root  $\text{y}^{\text{h}}\text{w}^{\text{h}}$  is not used of any of the plague narratives in Yahweh's (via Moses) conflict with Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus over Israel (Yahweh's first born, Ex.4:22) but only in the last plague, the slaying of the Egyptian first borns (Ex.11:1). See also Ps.105:12-15. All the three occurrences of the root in Gen.12:17; 20:6; 26:11, as well as Ex.11:1, involved the operation of the divine promise

of protective presence on behalf of God's chosen agent (see Gen.12:3a and 26:3).

49. So are most commentators for the former view, but see C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 271, for a contrary view.
50. N. Sarna, Understanding Genesis, 171f.
51. Cf. the literature cited in note 77 of Chapter Three.
52. Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 190, commented:
 

"... the naming of the series of wells ...[has] the function here of claiming legitimate possession by Israel of territory in Philistia but also show that such claims, because of the ancestor's generosity, were not being pressed. Isaac simply withdrew to Rehoboth, some distance away (v.22). All of this is meant to suggest that Israel was 'historically' magnanimous toward its neighbours even in the face of hostility ..."
53. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 188.
54. J. Muilenburg, "The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle ׀ in the Old Testament", HUCA 32 (1961), 154.
55. J. Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture, 285. J.I. Durham, " ׀ and the Presence of God", in Proclamation and Presence (Essays in Honour of G. Henton-Davies), ed. J.I. Durham and J.R. Porter (London: SCM, 1970), 272-293. See also D.J. Wiseman, "Is it Peace? — Covenant and Diplomacy", VT 32 (1982), 311-326, see especially pp.324f.
56. Other than J. Pedersen, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.* and C. Westermann, Blessing in the Bible, *loc. cit.*, see also A. Murtonen, "LEBĀREK and BERĀKĀh", 158-177 and H. Mowley, "The Concept and Content of 'Blessing' in the Old Testament", Bible Translator 16 (1965), 74-80.
57. Abimelech's initiative to protect (v.11) and later reassessment-confession of Isaac's status (vv.28f) is made more significant by the fact that he was not 'pressurised' by any plague or affliction as divine judgement to do so, in contrast to that in Gen.12:17 and 20:7,15. In other words, Isaac's character and quality reflecting his agency to be a blessing for others was recognisable even when he is not visibly blessed.
58. Isaac's sudden and unexpected abandoning of Rehoboth must have been surprising to the Philistines (as to us!). Strikingly, despite all the harsh treatments he received from them and their selfish or greedy attitude towards the wells (v.20, "the water is ours"), when Isaac's servants found water where no quarrel took place finally, in naming the place Rehoboth, Isaac exclaimed, "For now Yahweh had made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (v.22). Isaac could have regarded the new find

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as solely for himself (cf. Gen.41:52) and not be accused of any selfishness, and yet he did not. That the herdsmen of Gerar did not harass Isaac at Rehoboth probably indicated that the place was out of their territorial influence or control.

59. It is interesting to compare this with the "Servant Song" in Isa.52:13-53:12.
60. See note 52 above.
61. When the motif of reconciliation and the fruitful result of Isaac's activity on the 'soil' are taken together with the Cain-Abel incident and the consequential curse on the fruitfulness of the soil and men's efforts on it, the comparison and contrast is very striking. There might even be an intentional allusion to and reversal of the latter by the former.
62. The significance of the Isaac narrative as demonstration of sacrificial reconciliation effected by the aggrieved party has not been properly recognised by commentators. While G.W. Coats, "Strife and Reconciliation", quite rightly assessed Abraham and Jacob as making only a 'limited' contribution to the issue of reconciliation (and therefore blessing), he, however, has no discussion of the Isaac narrative whatsoever.
63. J. Skinner, op. cit., 325f.
64. See note 52 above.
65. R. Davidson, op. cit., 127.
66. Van Seters, op. cit., 183.
67. Idem, op. cit., 189f.
68. We have already noted the observation made by Van Seters of the wordplay on שָׁן in Gen.12:17; 20:6 and 26:11. This would further indicate that even at the key word level, there is an attempt to combine elements of two similar events in the Abraham narratives, albeit with difference, in the Isaac narrative.
69. J. Skinner, op. cit., 355.
70. M. Fishbane, art. cit., 23-25.
71. BDB, 966, 971.
72. On the subject of strife and conflict for blessing, see the discussion of M.R. Hauge, "The Struggles of the Blessed in Estrangement. I & II", St. Th. 29 (1975), 1-30, 113-146.

Footnotes to Chapter Five: The Theme and the Jacob Narratives

1. G.W. Coats, "Strife Without Reconciliation -- A Narrative Theme in the Jacob Traditions", in Werden und Wirken, ed. R. Albertz et al., 82-106.
2. J.P. Fokkelmann, Narrative Art in Genesis, 60. S. Terrien, The Elusive Presence, 84f. W. Eichrodt, Old Testament Theology I, (tr. J.A. Baker; OTL.; London: SCM, 1961), 476. P.D. Miller, "Faith and Ideology in the Old Testament", 469.
3. Von Rad, Genesis, 21.
4. Idem, op. cit., 38.
5. E.M. Good, Irony in the Old Testament, 98. J.L. McKenzie, "Jacob at Peniel: Gen. 32:24-32", CBO 25 (1963), 75. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 214. M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle", 28ff. W.M.W. Roth, "The Text is the Medium: An Interpretation of the Jacob Stories in Genesis", in Encounter with the Text. Form and History in the Hebrew Bible, ed. M.J. Buss (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 106.
6. R. Rendtorff, Problem des Pentateuch, 30, 153.
7. Idem, op. cit., 107f.
8. See our discussion on pp.293-295.
9. H.W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist", 150.
10. T.E. Fretheim, "The Jacob Traditions. Theology and Hermeneutics", Int 26 (1972), 423, 430. A. de Pury argues that interest in the place of Bethel belongs not only to Gen.35:1-15 (primarily P) but also to the older written and oral stages in the J and E traditions (Gen.28:10-22) in his Promesse divine et légende cultuelle dans le cycle de Jacob, I & II; see especially I, 131-135, as noted in J.F. Craghan, "The Elohist in Recent Literature", BTB 7 (1977), 30f.
11. T.E. Fretheim, art. cit., 436 n.25.
12. J.O. Lewis, "Yahwistic Kerygma in the Jacob Narratives", Perspective in Religious Studies 5 (1978), 106. See also J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 99, 217.
13. C. Westermann, Promises to the Fathers, 81.
14. W. Richter, "Das Gélube als theologische Rahmung der Jakobsüberlieferungen", 42, 50. H.W. Wolff, "The Elohist Fragments in the Pentateuch", Int 26 (1972), 168.

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15. E.A. Speiser, Genesis, 219. M. Fishbane, art. cit., 28f, despite his analysis of the symmetrical structure of 28:10-22 and 32:22-32 in the Jacob story. T.E. Fretheim, art. cit., 436 n.25, proposed a three-pillar structure — Bethel/Jabbok/Bethel. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 231: "The circle of salvation initiated by God at Bethel will be closed by Jacob in that place too." R. Martin-Archard, "An Exegete Confronting Genesis 32:23-33", in Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis, ed. R. Barthes et al. (tr. A.M. Johnson Jr.; Pittwick Monograph Series No.3; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1974), 52f.
16. S.R. Driver, Genesis, 309. J. Skinner, Genesis, 425. Von Rad, op. cit., 333f. But cf. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 317, and R. Davidson, Genesis 12-50, 199, 201.
17. It would go beyond our scope to discuss the sources or traditions behind the portrayals of Jacob's departure from home.
18. C. Westermann, op. cit., 78, describes thus: "a blessing is pronounced over Esau, too, but its words give Esau only a shattered blessing, actually reminiscent of the curse on Cain."
19. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 98f.
20. Idem, op. cit., 112.
21. G.W. Coats, art. cit., 98, 234.
22. J.G. Gammie, "Theological Interpretation By Way of Literary and Traditional Analysis: Genesis 25-36", in Encounter with the Text, ed. M.J. Buss, 128, 133 n.l. C. Westermann, A Thousand Years and a Day. Our Time in the Old Testament (tr. S. Rudman; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 35, 40. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 99, 115-121, 128f, 196. See also our discussion of the significance and function of the Isaac narrative in the Jacob story (pp. 267-275 above).
23. See literature cited in note 2 above.
24. S. Terrien, op. cit., 84f.
25. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., see especially pp. 49 n.6, 234.
26. In addition to the works of M. Fishbane, J.P. Fokkelmann, W. Roth, J.G. Gammie, R. Martin-Archard, C. Westermann, mentioned above (loc. cit), see also W.E. Rast, Tradition History and the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 33-56.
27. B. Vawter, Genesis, 175f, 334. Y.T. Radday, "Chiasm in Tora", Linguistica Biblica 19 (1972), 17.
28. G.W. Coats, art. cit., 89. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 155ff.

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29. Cf. the decisive influence of Sarai's/Sarah's voice in Abraham's life in 16:2; 21:10, which led to the conflict in the family and the "necessity" of the test in Gen.22. Strikingly, Sarah's voice also dropped away suddenly in Gen.22.
30. See note 203 of Chapter Three.
31. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 220, comments that "The text had strongly emphasised that it had been Jacob's own intention to meet Esau face to face."
32. D. Kidner, Genesis, 167.
33. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 198f. See D. Kidner, *op. cit.*, 167, for a different view.
34. M. Noth, Pentateuchal Traditions, 95, 100f; J.L. McKenzie, *art. cit.*; W.E. Rast, *op. cit.*, 51ff; R. Martin-Archard, *art. cit.*, 34-56.
35. D. Kidner, *op. cit.*, 168. He, however, did not consider the influence of Jacob being met by God's messengers initially (32:1f) on his subsequent sending of messengers to Esau in 32:3-6.
36. See the persuasive discussions of J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 199-202, 204f, 220.
37. C. Westermann, Promises to the Fathers, 81.
38. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 209f, 220.
39. A.M. Vater, "The Rhythm of Communication in the Hermeneutical Process", in Encounter with the Text, ed. M.J. Buss, 178-182. She noted the use of  $\pi\sigma\psi$  threading through the complex of Gen.32-33 as well.
40. See especially G.W. Coats, *art. cit.*
41. *Idem*, *art. cit.*, 102. J.G. Gammie, *art. cit.*, 120-124.
42. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 206f.
43. R. Martin-Archard, *art. cit.*, 53. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 318. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 215f.
44. J.L. McKenzie, *art. cit.*, 74: "The conferring of the name in the present context is the answer to Jacob's demand, and the name which belongs both to the people and to the land which Jacob enters is a token of the blessing promised." T.E. Fretheim, *art. cit.*, 425. J. Skinner, *op. cit.*, 409. See also especially J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 221ff.
45. J. Skinner, *op. cit.*, 410. R. Davidson, *op. cit.*, 187.

46. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 217.
47. R. Martin-Archard, *art. cit.*, 52.
48. C. Westermann, *op. cit.*, 87.
49. Commentators have noted the presence of mythological motifs at work here. One of which is the theme of the river-god or spirit who must be placated or whose conditions must otherwise be met as the price for crossing the boundaries which he protects. See the parallels mentioned in H. Gunkel, Genesis, 320f. One example in the Old Testament worth mentioning in this connection is the cherubim with a flaming sword placed by God to guard the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden (sacred land/center) after their rebellion. Presumably a struggle would ensue if the man attempts to re-enter Eden for the tree of life. The condition for a peaceful re-entry to Eden in the context would be a restoration of proper divine-human relationship, inevitably involving a change on the man's character vis-à-vis God. Hence the call and mission of Abraham. Taken in this sense, the 'necessity' of the Jabbok struggle before Jacob-Israel could be allowed into the Promised Land might even be alluding to Gen.3. After all, Adam who was driven out of God's presence because of his grasp for 'destiny' is the 'son' of God (Gen.1:26f, 4:1), and now Jacob-Israel, who was driven out of the Promised Land (Bethel!) in his grasp for destiny, is the first-born of Yahweh (Ex.4:22) and is now returning to Bethel, the gate of heaven, the house of God.
50. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 47-49 (see especially notes 4,7,8, there), 213f.
51. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 223.
52. The divine oracle in 25:23 is now ironically fulfilled by Jacob-Israel as 'first-born' of God who bows down and serves the 'younger' Esau.
53. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 227, see also p.233f. M. Fishbane, *art. cit.*, 28.
54. C. Westermann, *op. cit.*, 78.
55. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 82. T.E. Fretheim, *art. cit.*, 425f.
56. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 229. So does T.E. Fretheim, *art. cit.*, 424.
57. J.O. Lewis, *art. cit.*, 106, questions the view that Jacob is returning to claim a land.
58. M. Fishbane, *art. cit.*, 28. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 231, also made the remark that "When his inner division (32:21f) has been purified to integrity, God withdraws. From now on the

restoration of a good relationship is Jacob's task ..." In other words, Jacob-Israel is seen here working out his 'new' nature and destiny as a servant for the blessing of others. Cf. Abraham's interceding for others in Gen.18 on his own initiative after his transformation in Gen.17.

59. D. Kidner, *op. cit.*, 172f. In this connection, see the discussion of J.G. Gammie, *art. cit.*, 124, on the significance of Gen.34 as an ironical 'transferred' fulfilling of the 'shattered' blessing of Isaac on Esau: "By your sword you shall live" in Jacob's conflict with the Amorites (cf. Gen.48:22, the emphasis on sword and bow).
60. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 58, describes it as a "commission". W. Brueggemann, "The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers", 400, commented: "While the verbs are expressed as imperatives, they are not so much commands as authorizations." C. Westermann, Creation (tr. J.J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1971), 49, describes it as "blessing on mankind phrased as an imperative."
61. R. Davidson, *op. cit.*, 199.
62. W. Gross, "Jakob, der Mann des Segens. Zu Traditionsgeschichte und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Jakobsüberlieferungen", Biblica 49 (1968), 327ff. In this, he is of the same view as C. Westermann, Promises to the Fathers, 20: "originally understood, a blessing could not possibly 'promise' ... be announced or predicted for a date in the future. According to the ancient understanding, a blessing takes effect the moment it is pronounced..."
63. W. Brueggemann, *art. cit.*, 397-414.
64. For example, von Rad, *op. cit.*, 57ff, 334. While he commented on the significance of the creation mandate (pp.57ff) he did not attempt to link it with the final re-issuing in Gen.35:11 (p.334).
65. See note 58 above.
66. D. Kidner, *op. cit.*, 13.
67. D.J.A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch, 65f.
68. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 78, see also note 54 of chapter seven on p.128 in work cited.
69. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 78f.
70. C. Westermann, Creation, 24-28, 49.
71. *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 47-60. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 55-58. See also the discussion of D.J.A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man", TB 19 (1968), 53-103, especially pp.80-103.

(Footnotes to pp.314-321)

72. See also our discussion on pp. 62-65.
73. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 58f. W. Vogels, God's Universal Covenant, 41, 45. J.L. McKenzie, "The Divine Sonship of Israel", 320f. The identification of Jacob with Israel is most explicit in the kerygmatic use of the Jacob traditions in T.E. Fretheim, *art. cit.*
74. P. Ackroyd, "Hosea and Jacob", VT 13 (1963), 245-259. E.M. Good, "Hosea and the Jacob Traditions", VT 16 (1966), 137-151. L.M. Eslinger, "Hosea 12:5a and Gen 32:29: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis", JSOT 18 (1980), 91-99. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 235.
75. Y.T. Radday, *art. cit.*, 17. M. Fishbane, *art. cit.*, 36ff and especially note 52. R. Alter, "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Use of Convention", Critical Inquiry 5 (1978-79), 355-368.
76. Y.T. Radday, *art. cit.*, 17. W. Gross, *art. cit.*, 321-344, see especially 329-332 and 341f. Gross noted six points of contrast and similarity between Abraham and Jacob in the P narrative. He claims that Jacob (in P) is an extension and evocation of the treatment of Abraham, but there is a significant shift in that Abraham is presented pre-eminently as the man of God's covenant, Jacob is the man of blessing par excellence.
77. B. Vawter, *op. cit.*, 175f.
78. See note 145 of Chapter Three above.
79. For a general discussion, see M. Fishbane, *art. cit.*, 36f.
80. In Jacob's case, it is probably more desparate in that the attitude of Laban and his sons were becoming more hostile to Jacob and he is also unsure of the outcome of his return to Canaan in view of Esau's earlier threat.
81. J.P. Fokkelmann, *op. cit.*, 162f.
82. See the literature cited in note 59 above. Jacob was going against his forefathers' insistence against marrying the local inhabitants of Canaan (24:1-9; 27:46-28:5; cf. 26:34f; 28:6-9). This came about for Jacob in Gen.34 because of his decision to settle down at Shechem instead of going up to Bethel as commanded. It is interesting to note that when Isaac had been in Gerar for "a long time" (26:8), he nearly "brought evil upon" the local inhabitants. Likewise, Abraham by going where he ought not to have been (12:10-20; 21:1-18), he brought trouble to the local inhabitants as well. Only when Isaac left Gerar, at a cost, in obedience to the divine command, that he eventually became a blessing for Abimelech. Similarly, when Jacob remained in Shechem, because of the conflict, he became "odious to the inhabitants of the land" (34:30). It is only when he finally went up to Bethel to pay his vows could he be blessed, renamed Israel, and received the patriarchal

(Footnotes to pp.322-323)

promises and destiny, as well as entrusted with the creational mandate as mankind's representative. We have already noted the symmetrical position of Gen.26 and 34 in the structure of the Jacob story, and yet both narratives could not have been more contrastive in their respective functions in the immediate narrative contexts of the story.

83. See Gen.46:13f; 48:15f; Ex.1:7,12; 4:22f; 6:7; 15:13-18; 19:3-6; Num.23:8ff,19-24; 24:3-9,15-19; Deut.4:6ff,32-39; 7:1-22; 26:16-19; 28:1-14; 33:26-29, etc.

84. A.K. Jenkins, "A Great Name", 50. In the context of the structure of the Jacob, and the patriarchal, narratives, the significance of the new name given to Jacob — Israel (32:29), is undoubtedly better understood with its reiteration in 35:1-15 and seen against the background of the motif of the great name in the juxtaposed counter narratives of 11:1-9 and 12:1-9.

85. C. Westermann, A Thousand Years and a Day, 40:

"The story of Jacob wants to get across to the children to whom it will be told that they cannot possess God's blessing simply on the ground that they are blessed; God remains the master of his blessing and he can lead his blessed ones along hard and difficult paths."

86. J.P. Fokkelmann, op. cit., 241:

"Opposed to the negation near Shechem God puts the positive sign of Bethel and the revelation in that place (Gen 35). The subsequent consecration by Jacob and the erection of the massebe are final, they are not hit by a negation. Bethel, the gate of heaven, is the true means of entry to acquire the Promised Land."

Despite his insightful discussion of the "stairway" or "ramp" in Jacob's first Bethel encounter with God (Gen.28) and the parallel with the "tower" in the Babel incident (see p.17 especially note 10, pp.50-55 especially p.53 and note 22, in his work cited), Fokkelmann did not take up his observations into the discussion of the altar building and the setting up of the stone pillar by Jacob at his climactic (second) arrival at Bethel in 35:1-15.

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