

# THE ROLE OF GENESIS 22:1-19 IN THE ABRAHAM CYCLE: A COMPUTER- ASSISTED TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

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## O. Introduction

The story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac as recorded in Gen 22:1-19 has caught the interest of countless students and scholars in a rainbow of disciplines. Philosophers, historians, and biblical expositors have all exhibited an abiding interest in the pericope.<sup>1</sup> Recent advances in the areas of linguistics and technology now give occasion for a new generation of researchers to discover the passage as well. The following study is an interdisciplinary one, bringing together insights from the areas of discourse linguistics and information science in an examination of the text.

### 1. *The Prominence of Gen 22:1-19 in the Abraham Cycle*

Gen 22:1-19 is a crown jewel in the treasure box of OT narrative. Expositors have garnished it with accolades, calling it "one of the most beautiful narratives in the Old Testament,"<sup>2</sup> "the most perfectly

<sup>1</sup> One can find such comments in the writings of such diverse personalities as I. Kant (*Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* [New York: Harper & Row, 1960] 175), and A. Toynbee (*An Historian's Approach to Religion* [Oxford: University Press, 1979] 26, 39), not to mention all the individuals more directly connected with OT and NT studies.

<sup>2</sup> C. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 355.

formed and polished of the patriarchal stories,"<sup>3</sup> "consummate storytelling,"<sup>4</sup> and "the literary masterpiece of the Elohist collection."<sup>5</sup>

But what is it, the reader may ask, that sets this episode in Abraham's story apart from all the others? What grammatical, lexical, literary, structural, and sociolinguistic devices (if any) has the author employed so artfully to gain this acclaim? The answers to these questions are explored in the present section.

### 1.1 *Conclusions from a Computer-Assisted Study*

Help is first sought from a piece of artificial intelligence software entitled DC,<sup>6</sup> developed over the past four years by the present writer. This program is designed to read and evaluate sizeable blocks of linguistic data. It produces summary reports of relevant text-based statistics and attempts to identify thematic centers present within the data.

#### 1.1.1 *Background of the Computer-Assisted Study*

Studies coming out of the recently developed discipline of discourse linguistics have demonstrated that communicators constantly manipulate three variables in the language code so as to express their intentions. These variables are unit size, arrangement of information within a given communication unit, and type of information within a unit. An author may designate a certain section of a text as thematic in at least three ways: 1) through the placement of language-specific "marked" features within that portion, 2) through the employment of statistically infrequent features within that portion, and 3) through increasing the structural and semantic complexity of a given portion. Based on the premise that authors drop objective, recoverable hints regarding their communicative intentions within a text, DC was developed in an effort to assist text analysts in the process of identifying and interpreting those hints. In its present form, DC is designed to

<sup>3</sup> G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 238.

<sup>4</sup> D. Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale, 1967) 144.

<sup>5</sup> J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1917) 329. The praise is justified, even if the authorial assignment is not

<sup>6</sup> An abbreviated acronym for the Discourse Critical Text Analysis Program. The program is currently being "beta tested," and should be ready for interested individuals within the next year. Individuals interested in obtaining the latest version of this and related programs may contact the author at the address listed at the front of the article.

perform high-speed analysis of Hebrew narrative framework materials. By monitoring changes in the language code of the nonquotational aspects of Hebrew narrative text and then comparing the data with normal Hebrew narrative patterns, the program is able to make intelligent judgments about a variety of textual features. Factors that are considered in making decisions include clause length, information order, subject type, subject frequency, verb type, verb frequency, length of quotation associated with a given clause, as well as relative location within the text.

In performing the present study, DC analyzed a prepared data file based on the BHS Hebrew text extending from Gen 11:27 to 25:11. The program was instructed to divide the Abraham cycle into twenty-one subsections, and then to analyze and compare each of the divisions among themselves. The divisions, along with an indication of their essential content, are listed in table 1.

### 1.1.2 *Results of the Computer-Assisted Study*

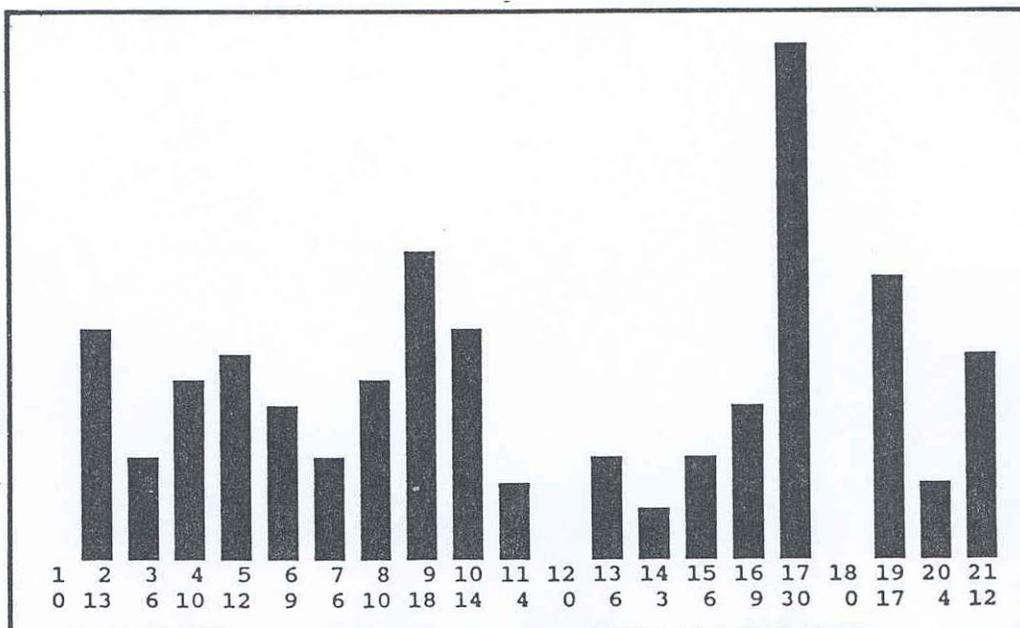
After the data had been read and evaluated by DC (a process taking about three minutes), the results were displayed. The conclusion of DC's analysis was that division 17, Gen 22:1-19, was the portion of the Abraham cycle encoded by the author as the thematic peak. Abraham was, incidentally, identified as the thematically central character. DC rated its degree of confidence associated with these decisions as high.

Three primary evidences pointing to Gen 22:1-19 as peak were identified by the program. First and most significant, in this section of the cycle, the thematically central character occurred as the subject of a narrative framework verb more times than any other. Thirty times throughout these 19 verses Abraham functioned in this manner, twelve more than in any other section. The assumption behind this test is that the author of a text will normally employ the key character most significantly at the most crucial portion of the story.

Furthermore, the combined number of occasions in which either Abraham or God served as narrative framework verb subjects (40) also exceeded that of any other portion of the text. The closest competitor was division 10 (Gen 18:16-33), which had a total of 25 such occurrences. The operative assumption behind this criterion is that the author of OT narrative will normally have God, the divine protagonist, on stage during the portion of the story reckoned by the author as most important. God's ten employments in the subject role (in some instances identified as the theophanic *מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה*) mark him as particularly significant in the section, especially when it is noted that

Table 1: Divisions in the Abraham Cycle

Division No.	Location	Essential Content
1	11:27-32	Introduction
2	12: 1-9	Call & Move to Canaan
3	12:10-20	Abram in Egypt
4	13:1-8	Abram & Lot Separate
5	14:1-24	Abram Rescues Lot
6	15:1-21	God's Covenant with Abram
7	16:1-16	Hagar & Ishmael
8	17:1-27	Circumcision
9	18:1-15	Three Visitors
10	18:16-33	Abram Pleads for Sodom
11	19:1-30	Sodom & Gomorah Destroyed
12	19:31-38	Lot & His Daughters
13	20:1-18	Abraham & Abimelech
14	21:1-7	Isaac's Birth
15	21:8-21	Hagar & Ishmael Sent Away
16	21:22-34	Treaty at Beersheba
17	22:1-19	Abraham Tested
18	22:20-24	Nahor's Sons
19	23:1-20	Abraham Buries Sarah
20	24:1-66	Isaac Gets a Wife
21	25:1-11	Abraham Dies

Table 2: Narrative Framework Subject Occurrences of Abraham  
(Listed by Division)

in six of the 21 divisions he never has a subject role, and in four others he is so used no more than two times.<sup>7</sup>

A final reason germane to DC's decision to select Gen 22:1-19 as the thematic center was the location of this pericope within the overall expanse of text. A tendency of narrators in all cultures is to place the section of story being encoded as most significant in the latter 50 percent of the overall text. Clearly division 17 fits this criterion. Incidentally, it should be pointed out that DC identified Gen 22:1-19 as possessing the highest connectivity among the sections of text occurring in the final half of the Abraham cycle. The high connectivity value is significant because it indicates that this pericope repeats verbs and subjects used elsewhere in the text to a higher degree than any other episodes in the likely peak region. The reuse here of verbs and subjects used elsewhere in the Abraham cycle suggests that division 17 contains a number of motifs used elsewhere in the Abraham cycle.

### *1.2 Observations from Discourse Linguistics*

Beyond the observations that can presently be made on the basis of the computer program, numerous other features within the grammatical and semantic code of the text suggest that the author intended the story of Abraham's divine test to be the centerpiece of his story.

#### *1.2.1 Semantic Prominence Markers*

##### *Employment of a Prominent Geographical Setting--a Mountain*

One of the more subtle means by which an author sets apart an episode intended to be taken as central is through the staging of the event. Quite often the event will occur in marked settings. The setting may be highlighted through unusual weather conditions (e.g., storms-Noah [Genesis 7-8], Ezra [Ezra 10], Job [Job 38], Jonah [Jonah 1]) or through usage of unusual places, especially mountains (e.g., Moses at Sinai; Elijah at Carmel; Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration, and Calvary).

According to the story, God directed Abraham to go to a mountain. The key events in Abraham's test actually occurred on that mountain. The fact that this is the only story in the Abraham cycle with such a "marked" setting possessing a positive connotation increases the conviction that Gen 22:1-19 is literally to be understood as

<sup>7</sup> The six divisions in which God is not employed as subject of a narrative framework verb are: 1, 5, 12, 16, 18, and 19. The four divisions in which God is employed only one to two times are: 3, 4, 20, and 21.

the high point of the overall series. The fact that the mountain chosen for this event later became Jerusalem's temple mount (cf. 2 Chron 3:1) would have given added religious prominence, and therefore significance, to the site for later Israelite audiences.<sup>8</sup>

*Employment of a Sociolinguistically Significant Temporal Setting—the Third Day*

Not only may an author manipulate the geographical and meteorological setting, he/she may also bring prominence to an episode by its temporal setting. This may involve placing it at an unusual time of day (e.g., night [Ruth 3]) or on a sociologically significant day (e.g., Jesus' Last Supper and crucifixion during the feast of Passover festivities).

As noted by numerous commentators, “three days is the period of preparation for more important events in the Old Testament.”<sup>9</sup> Its presence, used elsewhere throughout the Book of Genesis in connection with significant events,<sup>10</sup> is found in the Abraham cycle only here. Though this feature is a subtle one and would have probably communicated only on the subliminal level to the original audience, its presence in Gen 22:1-19 is telltale.

<sup>8</sup> The identification of Mount Moriah with the site of the Solomonic temple invites extended speculation concerning the date of composition and historical precision of the Pentateuch. A common technique in narrative composition is to use a location considered especially important by the intended audience as the setting of the most important event in a story. With the temple mount in Jerusalem surely being the most important site in monarchic and Judahistic Yahwism, a writer creating the composition from the general time period of 950-450 B.C. could conceivably have borrowed the prestige of the Jerusalem temple complex and retrojected it back into the Abraham narrative. If this were so, the narrator could then have either modified a tale originally associated with another site in Palestine, or simply created a new one. Though I have never read this line of reasoning in Genesis commentaries, I suspect it would find favor from many. Consistent with this suspicion is the fact that the majority of 20th-century commentators understand the story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son to be primarily the product of the “Elohists,” with minor additions (vv 15-18) coming from a “Jehovistic Redactor” (cf., e.g., Skinner, 327, 331, and Westermann, 363).

My personal opinion in this matter differs from the preceding line of reasoning. I believe that the events of Gen 22:1-19 happened exactly as stated and were written down prior to the period of Israelite monarchy. The fact that Moriah was later identified with the site of the Solomonic temple and, at a still later time, with the general area of Calvary is a testimony to God's oversight of history, not the creative genius of an OT narrator.

<sup>9</sup> Westermann, 358. Cf. also G. M. Landes, “The ‘Three Days and Three Nights’ Motif in Jonah 2:1,” *JBL* 86 (1967) 446-50.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Gen 31:22; 34:25; 40:20; 42:18.

*Heightened Vividness through Extended Repartee*

When a narrator wishes to bring additional prominence to a particular episode, he or she will often do so by increasing the amount of dialogue at that point in the story. Quotations, the content of which was too trivial to include elsewhere in the narrative, may be present in force in the highlighted section, achieving at times the effect of drama rather than simple narrative.

Lively, if brief, dialogic exchanges are in evidence in three sections of the Abraham test: 22:1-2 (three quotations: two by God; one by Abraham), 22:7-8 (four quotations: two by Isaac; two by Abraham), and 22:11-12 (three quotations: two by יהוה יִצְחָק; one by Abraham). These three occurrences of the phenomenon suggest that the author intended the audience to participate in this episode more intimately than in any of the others in Abraham's life.

*Employment of a Sociologically Significant Speech Act—an Oath*

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, perhaps the most solemn and significant genre of speech in Israelite communication was the oath. The taking of an oath was always serious business, but never more serious than when God himself was the one doing so. The usage of this ultimately significant speech act within Gen 22:1-19 serves as one additional indication that the author was intending this section to be taken as the climax of the Abraham cycle. Confirmation of this opinion—should any be necessary is found in the fact that reference is evidently made to Yahweh's oath of 22:15-18 five times in later Scriptures; three times in the Pentateuch (Exod 13:11; 32:13; 33:1); and twice in the NT (Luke 1:73; Heb 6:13). Throughout the entirety of the Pentateuch, God never again swears by himself that he will do something.<sup>11</sup>

*Employment of Dilemma and Paradox*

A common manner of focusing the audience's attention on a given section of text is through presenting confrontations between contradictory values, ideals, or concepts. The delicious tensions created by such conflicts heighten interest levels and thus aid an author in controlling audience focus. Abraham finds himself in dilemmas more than once within the Genesis stories—e.g., when he is forced to choose between preservation of his life and loss of his wife, and when

<sup>11</sup> Outside of the Pentateuch he is recorded as having done so in the following locations: Isa 45:23; 62:8 (swearing by his right hand and mighty arm); Jer 22:5; 44:26 (swearing by his name); 49:13; 51:14.

he is promised a land for his descendants though he has fathered nary a son. However, no conflict is more dynamic, no dilemma more wrenching than that experienced in 22:1-19. The choices were simple for Abraham, yet excruciating. He could refuse God and preserve his son's life, thereby jeopardizing the divine legacy. Or he could obey God and preserve his right to a divine inheritance, yet lose his beloved heir. This superlative example of dilemma indicates that the author intended the story of Abraham's testing to be the climax of the Abraham cycle.

Paradox is evident in the fact that the very God who promised that Isaac would be the heir of promise (Gen 17:16, 19, 21) was now the one who required the death of childless Isaac at the hands of Abraham (22:2). The curve of human logic trails off into an asymptote as the gracious giver of the promise becomes the supreme threat to the promise.

#### *Employment of Paronomasia*

Memorable-and thus highlighted-sections of text are also created through the utilization of paronomasia. The artful employment here of the verb פִּרַח in both the Qal (vv 4, 8, 13, 14) and Niphal stems (v 14) serves as one of the most significant examples of this in all of OT literature. The pun is sharpened especially because of the semantic ambivalence of the final employment of the word translated "appear provide." Translators and exegetes alike have found grist for footnote mills here.

#### *Inclusion of God's Final Activities Relative to the Abraham Cycle*

God or the Angel of Yahweh occurs as the subject of a narrative framework construction ten times during the "testing of Abraham" pericope. However, in the remainder of the Abraham cycle, he never again functions as the subject of an event-line verb. This relatively dense concentration followed by a dearth of appearances suggests that this episode contains God's final and, predictably, most memorable actions.

The final event-line verb of which a divine being is the subject is the theophanic utterance of 22:15-18. A tendency in narrative is to make a major character's final sizeable speech his or her most important one. The quotation in vv 15-18 stands as the last in a series of 35 speeches delivered by God or the Angel of Yahweh throughout the Abraham cycle and ranks sixth in length. As last in the series, it possesses a natural prominence that tends to make it particularly memorable. The fact that it is contained in the 22:1-19 pericope serves additionally to confirm the intended centrality of this section.

### 1.2.2 Lexical Prominence Markers

#### *Employment of a Hapax Legomenon*

A favored means by which communicators draw attention to particular language units is through the employment of unusual vocabulary. The narrator's usage of a *hapax legomenon* in v 9, עֵקֶד, has certainly accomplished that. In fact, the common Jewish name for the entire temptation pericope is 'aqedah.

#### *Employment of a Unique Narrative Clause Structure*

Information may also be made to stand out by expressing it in a clause whose structure differs significantly from the norm. Gen 22:13 contains a construction that contains no parallels anywhere in the narrative framework of the Pentateuch. A woodenly literal gloss of the clause reads "And-behold ram behind being-caught in-the-bush by-his-horns." Though exclamatory clauses are relatively rare in their own right, no other וְהִנֵּה clause in the corpus of Pentateuchal data contains an adverb in the preverb field. This information order was apparently problematic enough to translators to warrant a textual emendation, replacing אַחֲרָיִם with אֶחָד; the LXX, Samaritan Pentateuch, and Aramaic targums all accept this modification. The majority of popular modern English versions follow this emendation as well.<sup>12</sup>

Yet on the basis of modern linguistics and textual criticism's principle of *lectio difficilior*, the awkward reading of the MT seems preferable. Discourse linguists recognize that natural human language patterns predictably contain grammatical abnormalities in zones of high thematic interest. In 22:13 it can be argued that the conveyance of a once-in-a-universe event, i.e., a ram being caught in a thicket behind a man who is just about to sacrifice his favorite son, required a once-in-a-grammatical-universe kind of clause.

#### *Employment of Lexical Variety in Divine References*

Within Hebrew narrative, characters are made more prominent through increasing the number of means used in referring to them. Within this section of the Abraham cycle, three different words or phrases are used to refer to God: אֱלֹהִים, מְלֶאךָ, and יְהוָה. The

<sup>12</sup> Included among the popular versions which base their translation on an emended Hebrew text are the New English Bible, the New American Bible, the Jerusalem Bible, the Good News Bible, the Living Bible, and the New International Version. Popular English versions accepting the MT's reading include the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Version, and the New King James Version.

diverse referencing of God in 22:1-19 suggests that the author was deliberately increasing the thematic centrality of God, the ultimately significant divine character, at this point in the story.

## 2. *The Role of Gen 22:1-19 in the Abraham Cycle*

In spite of the generous praises accorded Gen 22:1-19, no consensus exists as to its function within the Abraham cycle. The majority of 19th and 20th century scholars have preferred instead to interpret the story as though its essential message was derivable apart from any consideration of its immediate literary context.<sup>13</sup> Thus it has been variously perceived as an explanation for the absence of human sacrifice in Israelite religion, an etiological legend, and an edificatory tale depicting model obedience.<sup>14</sup> By most accounts, its "true" purpose cannot be known anyway, since the story was supposedly repeatedly transformed by the OT community of faith to meet her changing spiritual needs.

The recent expansion of the biblical scholar's role to include that of literary critic promises to bring with it a reevaluation of prevailing conclusions, or at least a redirecting of efforts. With the advent of canonical criticism, reader-response criticism, and the like, the biblical scholar is free to examine a text as it now stands. The following conclusions are based on an evaluation of the story as it is found in the MT.

The thesis of this paper is that Gen 22:1-19 functions as the thematic crux of the Abraham story, bringing together in climactic fashion seven different motifs developed throughout the whole. Each of these motifs is discussed below.

### 2.1 *The Climax of the "Abraham Tested" Motif*

The unambiguous intention of the biblical narrator is that the 19 verse pericope of Genesis 22 be understood as a divine testing of Abraham. If it is valid to say that the events of this chapter are the only ones in Abraham's life explicitly called a "test" (Heb. **נִסָּה**), it is equally valid to note that this is not the only test within Abraham's life. In fact, at several points in his life Abraham faces significant tests. The testing motif begins with God's call for Abraham to leave country, nation, and family (12:1). It continues with the test of famine in

<sup>13</sup> Impetus and justification for this surgical removal of text from context comes, arguably, from biblical scholarship's preoccupation with source identification.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Westermann, 354; Skinner, 3.32.

the promised land (12:10). His years in Palestine are dogged by the continuing test of faith in God's promise of an heir (15:4-6). But the concluding and obviously climactic test of Abraham's life was God's call to take a final journey, one parallel in some ways to his journey of chap. 12. As in his first expedition, Abraham did not know his destination when he set out; as in the original journey so many years before, Abraham was called to separate himself from his people in this case his only son. As the last test in the series, the journey of 22:1-19 holds the position of natural prominence.

### *2.2 The Climax of the Abrahamic "Heir Denied" Motif*

That concern for a proper heir for Abraham would be a central issue in the story of Abraham is implied in the genealogical note of 11:30. Even before the readers learn of Abraham's promises they are informed of his problem: Sarai is barren. The thread of Abraham's concern for a proper heir is woven more consistently into the fabric of his story than is any other. Would nephew Lot substitute in some way for his own lack of offspring (cf. 13:14-16)? What about Eliezer of Damascus (15:2-5, 13, 16, 18)? If not him, then perhaps Ishmael (16:2-10; 17:8, 18). Do not make me laugh, God! You mean Sarah is going to bear the child that will be Abraham's proper heir (17:15-21; 18:10-14)?

One questions whether Abraham himself believed God's promise. No sooner had the Lord given the astounding assurance of effete Sarah's impending motherhood than Abraham imperiled it all by giving Sarah in marriage to another man (20:2-13). Nevertheless, God rescued Sarah and delivered on his promise (21:1-7). Now in chap. 22 the child whose birth was hinted at twelve chapters previously (11:30), the one for whom Abraham had waited a lifetime and whom he loved above all others, was to be given up to God as a childless burnt offering (22:2). This most prominent theme--that of Abraham's search for a proper heir--ties the diverse stories of the Abraham cycle together more securely than any other.

### *2.3 The Climax of the "Abraham the Altar Builder" Motif*

Abraham's pious devotion to the Lord is evidenced by the altars he built and the sacrifices he offered. On three occasions throughout his story the narrator depicts Abraham as constructing an altar dedicated to Yahweh (12:8; 13:18; 22:9). Only in the third instance does the narrator note the actual offering of a sacrifice. In the previous instances Abraham merely "called on the name of the Lord" (12:8; 13:4, 18).

The extra detail provided in the altar sequence of 22:1-19 clearly sets this event above the others.

#### *2.4 The Climax of the Abrahamic "Separation from Family" Motif<sup>15</sup>*

Abraham's life is the story of a series of familial schisms. In addition to the events of Genesis 22, Abraham is pulled away from his Mesopotamian ancestral roots (12:1); he parts company with his beloved wife Sarah on two occasions (12:15; 20:3), and twice more with Hagar (16:6; 21:14); he breaks ties with nephew Lot (13:11); and also separates from his firstborn son Ishmael (21:14).

Each of these previous experiences, however, pales in comparison with Abraham's divinely appointed separation from his favorite son Isaac. Here Abraham is called to break the deepest of genetic and psychological bonds, that of father and son, father and future. The barrier being erected between them is not, as in the other cases, one of altered marital status or geography--it is the wall of death.

#### *2.5 The Climax of the Abrahamic Faith Motif*

The majority judgment of 20th-century biblical scholarship is that the speech of 22:15-18 is a late and loosely connected addition to the story of Abraham's test.<sup>16</sup> However, a literary and thematic analysis suggests that far from being an awkward appendage to the story, it is in fact the keystone. In this four-verse section, three themes of fundamental significance not only to the story of Abraham, but also to the Pentateuch are brought to a climax. The first of these is the theme of Abraham's sacrificial, obedient faith.

Abraham's obedient faith was demonstrated at crucial moments throughout his life: in his movement from Haran at age 75 (12:4); in his trust in God's promise of countless offspring (15:6); in his joyous acceptance of God's assurance of a son from Sarah's womb (17:15-22; 18:10); and in his remarkable willingness to offer Isaac on the altar (22:3-14). But only in the last-mentioned event is the Lord actually quoted as commending Abraham for his faithful obedience. With this added touch at the climactic moment in Abraham's life, the narrator sets the final act of obedience on a pedestal above the others, giving it

<sup>15</sup> My appreciation is expressed to Prof. J. H. Walton for the suggestion to include this section.

<sup>16</sup> Westermann, 355, 363; Skinner, 331; von Rad, 242-43. But see W. Brueggemann (*Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1982] 186), for an alternative position.

a prominence that was apparent even to the NT writers centuries later (Heb 11:17-19; Jas 4:21).

### *2.6 The Climax of the Abrahamic Blessing Motif*

In his speeches to Abraham, God used a form of the word "bless" seven times.<sup>17</sup> The first five were utilized in God's first recorded statement to Abraham; the sixth and seventh occurrences were found in God's last words to Abraham. The concluding theophany affirmed the essential twofold thrust of the blessing statements of 12:2-4: Abraham would be blessed by God, and all nations on earth would derive a blessing from him. The promise, so bright in the beginning, had been preserved untarnished through Abraham's incredible obedience.

### *2.7 The Climax of the Abrahamic "Possess the Land" Motif*

A pivotal theme in the story of Abraham, and certainly in the Pentateuch as well, is that God would give the promised land to Abraham's descendants. The concept first appeared in 12:7 and was repeated by God on four additional occasions within the Abraham cycle (13:14-17; 15:7-21; 17:8; 22:17). The most militant and triumphant of these passages is the final one. Though brief, the reference is clear and pointed: reception of God's gift of the land would require the use of force on Israel's part. Israel would have to fight the battles, but God had already settled the outcome of the war.

## *3. Implications of the Study*

Results of the previous study suggest two truths: first, that narrators have at their disposal a number of means by which they may guide the attention of their audiences. Skillful employment of these means permits writers to maintain a significant degree of control over the messages which their audiences receive from the texts. Incumbent upon a writer is the responsibility to drop hints in the text sufficient to permit a literate audience to retrieve the intended messages being deposited by the author. A primary responsibility of the audience is to identify and correctly interpret the lexical, grammatical, and semantic clues left by the creator of the text.

Second it is clear that the use of artificial intelligence resources presently available today can yield contributions to the science and art of interpreting the Bible. While the role that artificial intelligence

<sup>17</sup> Gen 12:2, two times; 12:3, three times; 22:11, one time; 22:18, one time.

plays is at present small and supportive, the potential within the foreseeable future looms large indeed. As the fields of language, philosophy, and psychology continue to clarify the marvelous mechanics of human communication, computer programs utilizing these insights can be written that efficiently read and interpret language. And we need not fear these probable inevitabilities. Rather, let us eagerly await these hearing aids, await them as a race of hearing-impaired sinners desperately needing to hear the voice of God in his Word.

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