Understanding Isaac's Authoritative Character as Patriarch

A narrative Reading of Genesis 26,1-33

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Gen. 12–50 is commonly regarded as the patriarchal narratives. Abraham is given a cycle (Gen. 12–25). Jacob is also given a cycle (Gen. 25–35). Gen. 37–50 develops into a kind of novella that tells the story of Joseph. However, Gen. 26,1-33 is the only narrative unit given to Isaac as patriarch. With this unit of only thirty-three verses, which at the same time appears to be composite, can Isaac's authoritative character as patriarch be affirmed? Through a narrative analysis, beginning from an analysis of the text (linguistic benchmarks), and proceeding to analyses of the characters, time, discourses and plot, can the reader come to understand Isaac's patriarchal character better? Can this analysis support the idea about the patriarchal narratives trying to legitimize returnees' claim of the land, reflective of the land problem at that time of restoration? What makes Isaac's character truly authoritative? What could be the theological-pastoral implications of this analysis to our present context, particularly in societies where inequality is widespread and violence has escalated?

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Introduction

The history of ancient Israel is characterized by political turmoil.[1] The region inhabited by the people of ancient Israel was that piece of land connecting Mesopotamia and Egypt. Egypt and Mesopotamia were the two great powers that dominated that part of the world at that time. There had not been longer periods to enjoy peace and prosperity in that strip of land. The second siege in 588-587 BCE by the Babylonians, for example, ended up in the fall of Jerusalem and eventually in the Exile. The return from the Exile was made possible after Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonian forces. For the returning exiles, the task of reconstruction has been a major responsibility that was met with serious difficulty. There has been a conflict with the population who remained in the Land. The issue of land and heir became central. The task of restoration, under Ezra and Nehemiah, needed to be legitimized. This legitimization found a strong support in the Books of the Law of Moses, which is commonly know as the Torah or Pentateuch.

Genesis is the first of the five books of the Torah. The Book of Genesis can generally be divided into two: the primeval (Gen 1–11) and patriarchal (Gen 12–50) narratives. The primeval narratives begin with creation story and ends with the "generation formula" (genealogy) highlighting the descendants of Terah (Abram or Abraham's father). The patriarchal narratives narrate the story of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (and Jacob's sons, with emphasis on the story of Joseph).

Within the patriarchal narratives, however, it is interesting to note that Gen 26,1-33 is the only sustained narrative unit that is devoted to Isaac as a primary character. In Gen 21, 22 and 24 Isaac is depicted as the passive son of Abraham. In Gen 27 he is portrayed as the deceived father of Jacob and Esau, of the twins whose birth and conflict as regards birthright are narrated in Gen

[1] For further reading see J. L. Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN 2006). See Ska, *L'Antico Testamento.* Spiegato a chi sa poco o niente (Milano 2011).

25,19-34. There is the Abraham Cycle (cf. Gen 11,27-25,11). There is the Jacob Cycle (cf. Gen 25,19-35,22). There is only a unit for Isaac, which seems to contain segments reconstructed from the life of Abraham (cf. Gen12,10-20; 13; 21,22-26) and appears as an insertion in the Jacob Cycle. Through a narrative analysis of Gen 26,1-33, can one affirm Isaac's authoritative character as patriarch? What could be the implication of this unit to the issue of land that was central to the conflict between those who returned from the exile and the inhabitants of the land at the time of their return?

Preliminary

Textual Delimitations

The textual limits of Gen 26,1-33 are clearly defined. This narrative unit appears to interrupt the flow of the narratives concerning Jacob and Esau in Gen 25,19-34 and 27,1-28,9. Nonetheless, the placement of this unit within the Jacob Cycle (Gen 25,19-35,22) also helps to mark out its textual boundaries. This unit focuses mainly on Isaac. Jacob and Esau are absent. The narrative of 25,27-34 about Esau despising his birthright is not carried over in 26,1. The unit ends in 26,33 with Isaac's naming of Beersheba. Esau is mentioned again in vv. 34-35 that introduces a topic different from the rest of Gen 26.

Plot Identification

At this juncture, before proceeding further with our analysis, it would be better to identify what type of plot characterizes this unit. Is it a unified or is it an episodic plot?[2] Earlier scholars uphold the mosaic character of this textual unit, recognizing that the

[2] For an explanation about the distinction between a unified and an episodic plot, see J. L. Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*"*. Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives (SubBi 13; Roma 2000) 17-18. On the one hand, in unified plot, all episodes are relevant to the narrative. In episodic plot, on the other hand, every episode is a unit-in-itself.

unit is a collection of originally independent traditions.[3] Neither do those who affirm the coherence of this same unit deny its episodic character.[4] Thus, our initial inclination is to identify this unit as episodic. What we would like to do at this point however is to allow our textual evidence to inform us first-hand in this task of identification.[5]

We first consider the main human characters. The name *yicHäq* "Isaac" appears 14 times (cf. Gen 26,1; 26,6; twice in 26,9; 26,12; 26,16; 26,17; 26,18; 26,19; 26,20; 26,25; 26,27; 26,31; 26,32). The name *´ábîmmelek*] "Abimelech" occurs 7 times (cf. Gen 26,1; 26,8; 26,9; 26,10; 26,11; 26,16; 26,26). The name *ribqâ* "Rebekah" appears only twice (cf. Gen 26,7; 26,8). The name *´abrähäm*; "Abraham" appears 8 times, not as a character but rather as a reference that connects to the character of Isaac (cf. Gen 26,1; 26,3; 26,5; 26,15; twice in 26,18; twice in 26,24). This textual evidence shows that the characters of Isaac and Abimelech dominate the entire narrative. The character of Rebekah is only secondary. The mentioning of Abraham's name connects Isaac's character in Gen 26,1-33 to other narratives about Abraham: to Gen 12,10 (cf. reference to "the first famine" in Gen 26,1), to Gen 21,25-26 (cf. the disputes over the wells in Gen 26,15.18) and to a network of narratives about the promise made to Abraham in Gen 12,2-3.7; 13,14-16; 15,5; 15,18; 17,6-8; 18,8 22,17-18 (cf. the divine oracles in Gen 26,3-4.24).

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[3] See H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, GA 1997) 293-298. See also G. von Rad, *Genesis.* A Commentary (The Old Testament Library; London [3]1972) 269-270.

[4] See G. G. Nicol, "The Narrative Structure and Interpretation of Genesis XXVI 1-33", *VT* 46 (1996), 339-360.

[5] We recognize right away that our text at hand offers no major textual problems. Cf. critical apparatus of K. Elliger – W. Rudolph (ed.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart [5]1997) 39-40. See Gunkel, *Genesis,* 293-297. See also S. Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Chicago 1987) 35-40. Nevertheless, we are now going to raise some significant textual observations on the textual unit under analysis as it appears in the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS).

Some significant verbal words appear to be instructive as well.[6] The verbal root *qärä´* "to call (give name or summon)" appears 7 times (cf. Gen 26,9; twice in 26,18; 26,20; 26,21; 26,22; 26;25; 26,33). Isaac is the subject in six appearances (five *wayyiqṭol* forms and one *qāṭal*)[7] while Abimelech is the subject of this same verb (*wayyiqṭol*) in 26,9. Most of these occurrences are in succession and seemingly concentrated in one part, in verses narrating the disputes and the naming of the wells (cf. 26,17-22). This concentration attests to a peculiar character of vv. 17-22, which also affirms the possibility that these verses can be read clearly

[6] For purpose of brevity, we are not going to treat every verb in this narrative but only the most significant and relevant to our present analysis. This also applies to our treatment of verbal forms in the direct discourses.

[7] For terminology see P. Joüon – T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (SubBi 27; Roma [2]2008) 325-409. Joüon–Muraoka recognize the complexity of the nature of the two Hebrew finite tenses which are the perfect and the future. There are books on Biblical Hebrew grammar that prefer the terms "perfect tense" and "imperfect tense" to refer to these finite tenses respectively. See Lessons Nine and Twenty-two of T. O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (London 1971). The respective meanings of these two finite tenses are not without nuances. According to Lambdin, the translation value of the tenses in Hebrew appears to be dependent on the kind of clause or sentence in which the verb is used. For purpose of clarity, it is better to have the most basic of the working definitions of both perfect tense and imperfect tense. On the one hand, the perfect tense (of an action verb) is to be translated as the English simple past. For example, the Hebrew word *qāṭal* can be translated as either "he killed" or "he has killed." On the other hand, in line with the basic translation value, as suggested also by Joüon–Muraoka, the imperfect is to be translated as in the English future tense (i.e., *yiqṭol,* "he will kill"). The *wāw* commonly has the conjunctive function. It may also be used together with verbal forms. When it is used together with perfect tense or imperfect tense, the perfect (*qāṭal*) becomes an inverted perfect (*w-qāṭal*), which is to be translated as "and he will kill." When the *wāw* is used together with imperfect tense the imperfect tense (*yiqṭol*) becomes an inverted imperfect (*wayyiqṭol*) and which is to be translated as "and he killed." For our purpose, it would be sufficient to explain that the *wayyiqṭol* form (inverted future according to Joüon–Muraoka) is mainly used (like the *qāṭal* form of action verbs) in the sphere of the past for an instantaneous and single action. The *wāw,* which mainly adds the idea of succession and the carrying of the narrative forward, becomes the *wāw* consecutive. A good example of this is found in 2 Sam 12,20, which contains ten *wayyiqṭols* in one verse.

even apart from those that precede them (cf. vv. 7-11[8] and vv.12-14[9]). The verbal root *hälak* "to go or walk" occurs 6 times (cf. 26,1; 26,13; 26,16; 26,17; 26,26; 26,31). Three of these occurrences, all in *wayyiqṭol* form, have Isaac as subject (cf. vv. 1.13.17). The verbal form in v. 16 is an imperative.[10] Abimelech is the subject of a *wāw-x-qāṭal*[11] form in v. 26. Abimelech, Ahuzzath and Phicol are the subject of a *wayyiqṭol* form in v. 31. It is observable that Isaac is on the move elsewhere except at the end part of the narrative. The verbal root *yäšab* "to sit or dwell," twice in *wayyiqṭol* form and with Isaac as subject (cf. vv. 6.17), seems to complete the nature of Isaac's movement: his going (cf. *hälak*) in v. 1 and his dwelling (cf. *yäšab*) in v. 6.

We therefore have reasons to affirm that Gen 26,1-33 is episodic. First, the order of several segments can be changed yet the narrative remains clear. One may place the wife-sister event (cf. vv. 7-11) right after the coming and dwelling of Isaac in Gerar (putting v. 1 and v. 6 together, then vv. 7-11). The divine oracle (cf. vv. 2-5) can be placed right after Abimelech's command that Isaac depart from them (cf. v. 16). Secondly, certain characteristics of the segment found in vv. 17-22 could make it possible to skip vv. 2-5 and vv. 7-11 and yet the rest of narrative may still remain understandable. Thirdly, several other parts of the narrative appear as units in themselves. The non-occurrence of the name of Rebekah outside vv. 7-11 suggests that these verses form a particular unit.

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[8] The verbal root *qärä´* in v. 9 is clearly used in context different from that in vv. 17-22. In v. 9 it takes the meaning of "to summon" and not "to give name" as in vv. 17-22.

[9] This verbal root *qärä´* never appears in vv. 12-14. What connect vv. 12-14 and vv. 17-22 are the wordings in v. 15 that find resemblance with those in v. 18 (i.e. verbal root *sätam* "to stop").

[10] Discussion on verb forms in hortatory or persuasive discourse will be provided in the section that treats discourse analysis. For the meantime, see R. E. Longacre, "Discourse Perspective on the Hebrew Verb: Affirmation and Restatement," *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake, IN 1992) 177-189.

[11] *Wāw-x-qāṭal* is the *wāw*-nominal-*qāṭal* form. It breaks the narrative carried forward by a series of *wayyiqṭol* forms.

Fourthly, there are narrative parts that do not necessarily form units of their own yet nonetheless contain distinctive elements. For example, the use of *šäkan* "to settle" in v. 2, compared with *yäšab* "to dwell" in vv. 6.17,[12] sets apart vv. 2-5 from the rest of the narrative, even from another oracle in v. 24.

Mapping out Connections through Verbal Forms

The verbal forms in narrator's voice[13] primarily highlight the progress of Isaac's actions. Gen 26,1a begins with the root *häyâ* "to be," thus we are in the "frame" of the narration. The real action starts in v. 1b with a *wayyiqṭol* form of the root *hälak* "to go," thus placing us in the "foreground." We are back to "foreground"

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[12] See *Revised Standard Version Bible* (San Francisco [2]2006) 18. Revised Standard Version (RSV) translates the *šäkan* of v. 2 and the *yäšab* of v. 6 with the simple meaning of "to dwell." See also L. Koehler – W. Baumgartner, "שכן" (*šäkan*), *HALOT* II, 1496-1499. HALOT however explains that *šäkan* does not have such a strongly defined local significance compared to *yäšab*, which meaning is more of that to dwell in a precise and clearly demarcated area. On redactional interventions see Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN 2006) 75-95. `

[13] See A. Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (JSOT 86; Sheffield 1990). In this analysis of certain verbal forms concerning the narrator, we are aided by the method proposed by Niccacci. In this discussion we prefer to use the following terminology: "foreground" for punctual actions (*wayyiqṭol* and *qāṭal*); "background" for durative actions (participle) and for repetitive (*yiqṭol*)/ iterative (*wᵉqṭal*); "frame" (nominal phrases, *häyâ* "to be," the verbs of existence *yëš*E "there is" and *ʼênᵉ* "there is no." "Foreground" shows a chain of punctual actions that serve as the backbone of the narration. "Background" describes repetitive or iterative actions that in general do not directly contribute to the progress of the action. "Frame" is constituted by stative elements that do not contribute to the action of the narrative but nonetheless provide necessary information. Further, Niccacci establishes three levels of the narrative text: main narrative line, secondary line (antecedent information or setting of the story) and direct speech. We intend to treat here the direct discourse (voice of the characters) as somehow distinct from the narration (voice of the narrator). See Longacre, "Discourse Perspective on the Hebrew Verb", 177-189. Longacre discusses several types of discourse: narrative, predictive, procedural, hortatory, expository and juridical, within which a verbal form can be placed together with other forms.

in v. 6 with the *wayyiqṭol* form of the root *yäšab* "to dwell." In v. 12 we have *wayyiqṭol* forms of the roots *zära`* "to sow," *mäcä´* "to find" and *Bärak* "to bless." In v. 15 we are placed in the "background" with the *wāw-x-qāṭal* form of the root *Häpar* "to dig." In v. 17 we have another set of *wayyiqṭol* forms of the roots *hälak*, *Hänâ* "to encamp" and *yäšab* "to dwell." We have *wāw-x-qāṭal* form of the root *hälak* in v. 26. In vv. 30-31 there is a set of *wayyiqṭol* forms of the roots *`äSâ* "to make," *´äkal* "to eat," *šätâ* "to drink," *šäKam* "to rise early" *šäba`* "to swear" *šälaH* "to send away" and *hälak*. In v. 33a we are still in the "foreground" with the root *qärä´* "to give name," then followed by a nominal phrase in v. 33b ("background").

Isaac's actions are closely connected, in turn, to the divine oracles or direct discourses of YHWH. In discourses the voice of the characters[14] are rather heard. We begin vv. 2b-5 with *'al* + *yiqṭol* with the root *yärad* "to go down," followed by imperatives of the roots *šäkan* and *Gûr* "to sojourn," then by two forms of *wāw* + cohortative of the roots *häyâ* and *Bärak*. In v. 3b we have a cohortative of the root *nätan* "to give" preceded by the particle *Kî* + indirect object.[15] In v. 4 we have *wᵊqāṭal* of the roots *räBâ* "to multiply," *nätan* and *Bärak*. In v. 5 we have an *x-qāṭal* (*`ëqeb ´ášer-šäma`e*) "because (Abraham) listened…" in a causal clause[16] followed by a *wayyiqṭol* of the root *šämar* "to keep." We can identify three types of discourses in vv. 2b-5. First is a "hortatory" discourse. A negative command opens the oracle that is carried forward by imperatives. Second is a "predictive" discourse. A nominal clause signals the beginning of a predictive discourse that is carried forward by *wᵊqāṭal* forms. Third is a "narrative" discourse. Here, an *x-qāṭal* signals a shift from "predictive" to

[14] Gen 26,1-33 is characterized by direct discourses of the different characters. While there are a good number of short discourses, there are also a few longer ones such as the discourse uttered by the group of Abimelech in vv. 28-29 and the divine oracle in vv. 2b-5. Again, for purpose of brevity we only treat here the divine oracle in vv. 2-5.

[15] See P. Joüon – T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew,* 543-551. See especially the discussion on particle כִּי (*kî*) and on word order for purpose of emphasis.

[16] See Ibid., 599-601.

"narrative" discourses, which is carried forward by a *wayyiqṭol*. These types of discourses respectively contain the command and promises of YHWH to Isaac and Isaac's identification with Abraham, linking Gen 26,1-33 to greater patriarchal narratives.[17]

Historical-Critical Considerations

There are three versions of the wife-sister episode[18] in the patriarchal narratives (cf. Gen 12,11-20; 20,1-18; 26,7-11). In Gen 12,11-20, Abraham, Sarah[19] and the Pharaoh of Egypt are the central characters and the place of the event is Egypt. In Gen 20,1-18, the main characters are Abraham, Sarah and Abimelech king of Gerar and the place of the happening is Gerar. In Gen 26,7-11, as already mentioned, Isaac, Abimelech king of the Philistines (not as king of Gerar; cf. 20,2) and Rebekah are the central characters; and the place where the event has taken place is Gerar. These three versions of what seems to be the same event, narrating a patriarch who tells of his wife to be his sister, are a classic example of parallel narratives with which one may assume the presence of different sources or traditions in Genesis.[20]

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[17] We now consider some historical-critical questions. We limit such treatment to vv. 2-5 and vv. 7-11 nonetheless.

[18] It would be helpful at this point to clarify and distinguish an episode from scenes. An episode may be defined as the first subdivision of a larger narrative while scenes are the subdivisions of an episode. See Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 33-36. We propose to identify the wife-sister event to be one of the episodes constituting the episodic plot of Gen 26,1-33.

[19] For the sake of consistency we will use the names Abraham and Sarah even when referring to the names *ʾabräm*; "Abram" and *Säray* "Sarai" appearing in Gen 12,11-20.

[20] In this paper we use J for Yahwist, E for Elohist, D for Deuteronomistic and P for Priestly sources. See M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1972). See also E. A. Speiser, *Genesis.* Introduction, Translations, and Notes (AB; Garden City, NY 1964). See Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch,* 127-164. See Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore,* 161.

"In classical formulations of the documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch, this triplet has been seen to demonstrate the existence of distinct documentary sources for the book of Genesis."[21] Gen 12,11-20 and 26,1-16[22] are commonly assigned to J while Gen 20,1-18 to E, mainly on grounds of the use of the divine names YHWH (cf. 12,17; 26,2.12) and Elohim (cf. 20,3.6.11.13.17). Our preferred range of verses to cover the wife-sister episode in the narrative of Gen 26 (cf. vv. 7-11) also puts into question this view of assigning such version to J primarily based on the use of the divine names. The divine name YHWH, attributed to the Yahwist, appears outside the range of Gen 26,7-11.[23] Thus such version cannot be assigned solely to J with certainty on the basis of the appearance of the divine name YHWH.

Speiser assigns Gen 26,6-11 to J due to the occurrences of the divine name YHWH and the anachronistic identification of Abimelech as king of the Philistines. Nevertheless, even if we accept such anachronistic identification, the name YHWH that appears outside the range of verses (cf. vv. 6-11), which Speiser himself suggests for the wife-sister episode, does not strongly support this Yahwistic assigning. "J knew of two occasions (a, c) when a patriarch thought it necessary to introduce his wife as his sister; there

[21] M. E. Biddle, "The 'Endangered Ancestress' and Blessings for the Nations," *JBL* 109/4 (1990) 599-611. In a note, Biddle raises an important question on the classical identification of Gen 12 and 26 to J, and of Gen 20 to E vis-à-vis the view of Noth that doublets must be explained by the existence of separate documentary sources. How could the doublet appearing in Gen 12 and 26 accordingly then be explained within the J?

[22] For a preference of expanding the wife-sister episode from v.1 to v. 16, see R. de Hoop, "The Use of the Past to Address the Present: The Wife-Sister Incidents (Gen 12,10-20; 20,1-18; 26,1-16)", *Studies in the Book of Genesis* (2001) 366. See also G. W. Coats, *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1983) 182. For Coats, the "Threat to the Ancestress" covers vv. 1-17. For those who prefer the range of vv. 1-11 for the same episode see Biddle, "The 'Endangered Ancestress' and Blessings for the Nations", 599. See also J. Ronning, "The Naming of Isaac: The Role of the Wife/Sister Episodes in the Redaction of Genesis", *WTJ* 53 (1991) 1. In consideration of our textual treatment above, we prefer to limit this wife-sister episode within vv. 7-11. See Gunkel, *Genesis,* 295. Gunkel suggests the same range of verses (vv. 7-11) to constitute Rebekah's adventure.

[23] We want to take note, likewise, of the use of the divine name YHWH as also appearing within Gen 20,1-18 (cf. vv.4.18), which is commonly assigned to E.

is in them no duplication of principals, locale, or generations."[24] This argument based on the study of tradition suggests the primacy of Gen 26.[25] It is closer to tradition practiced in the Hurrian society.[26]

Gunkel makes a comparison of these versions that he termed variants, focusing on points that characterize the total narrative structure rather than the arbitrary individual points. He points out that scholars' opinions vary as regards the age of these variants.[27] Highlighting the character of Gen 12 as naively presented, Gunkel upholds it to be the oldest, followed by Gen 20 and then by Gen 26. As regards the question of which is oldest and which is latest, Gunkel avoids to generalize. "This does not suggest, however, that every individual element in chap. 20 is younger than those in chap. 12 or that those in chap. 26 are younger than those in chap. 20."[28]

There are other scholars who affirm the lateness of the version found in Gen 26. "The first episode of the threat to the patriarch's wife in vs. 1-11 is a rather tame version of the two stories in Gen. 12:10-20 and chapter 20, with elements drawn from each."[29] Van Seters, in suggesting that the version found in Gen 26 is a combination of elements found in Gen 12 and 20, logically suggests as well that Gen 26 is the latest of the three versions.

Several other scholars also share this view though with different focus in terms of arguments.[30]

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[24] Speiser, *Genesis,* 151.

[25] There are also other scholars who uphold the version in Gen 26 as more ancient. See J. K. Hoffmeier, "The Wives' Tales of Gen 12, 20 & 26 and the Covenant at Beer-Sheeba", *Tyndale Bulletin* 43/1 (1992) 81. Hoffmeier enumerates a few of such scholars.

[26] For a discussion on the wife-sister incident as a peculiar custom of Hurrian society, .see Speiser, *Genesis,* 91-92.

[27] See Gunkel, *Genesis,* 223.

[28] Ibid., 224.

[29] *J. Van Seters, Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, Kentucky 1992) 268.

[30] See Coats, *Genesis*, 188-195. Coats suggests that a tale concerning the "Threat to the Ancestress" (cf. vv. 1-17) is combined with the "Well Itinerary" (cf. vv. 17-33) See also C. Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (Text and Interpretation; Grand Rapids, Michigan 1987) 184-189. Westermann proposes that Isaac's dealing with Abimelech is central in such combination of several traditional units.

Niditch, in her study of wording and texture, questions the process of redaction proposed by Gunkel and Van Seters. She claims, for example, that the conclusion reached by Van Seters as regards these versions classified as tales is not upheld by an examination of language. "The complaint of the ruler, 'What [is this you] have done to me/us?' found in Genesis 12:18; 20:9; and 26:10 is idiomatic language in biblical Hebrew to accuse a person of wrong doing."[31] Thus in terms of the process of redaction concerning the three tales, there is no linguistic evidence to support the idea of dependence. Further, in terms of style, Niditch identifies Gen 26,1-17, especially the first five verses, as anthological. This means that phrases found elsewhere in the tradition are reused in this narrative, whether as a formula or as a quotation.[32]

We now turn to the divine oracles appearing in Gen 26 (cf. vv. 2-5.24). We have already pointed out that one may skip vv. 2-5 of Gen 26, tying up at once v. 1 and v. 6 together without effecting noticeable changes to the flow of the narrative. This particular divine oracle (cf. vv. 2-5) containing promises to the patriarchs, for example, is an interruption to the narrative flow. This case however is not isolated. "In fact, the promises in most cases are not integral part of the narratives in which they stand but serve to unite the individual episodes or larger narrative complexes inside Gen 12-50."[33] We have in fact a network of these promises to the patriarchs within the patriarchal narratives aside from those found

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[31] See Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore,* 39.

[32] Niditch also distinguishes a formula from a quotation. A formula is a flexibly employed linguistic building block of a literary tradition while a quotation is a direct reuse of borrowing of a phrase quite set in the tradition. See Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore,* 36. An anthological style supports the late character of Gen 26,1-17.

[33] K. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures; Winona Lake, Indiana 2010) 98. Schmid uses the terms "promises to the ancestors" to refer to what seem to be overarching connections of the individual narratives. He points out that a travel directive stands in the context of every promise. See also Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch,* 87-95. Ska provides arguments for the late character of what he termed as "divine discourses," within which the promises are an important part.

in Gen 26.[34] Two things are worthy of attention: first, these promises go together with other elements (i.e. commands) forming the divine oracles; second, most of these promises, context-wise, reflect a secondary character.

We are nonetheless primarily interested in the question of sources and redaction of the text under analysis, Gen 26,2-5 and v. 24. By virtue of the divine name YHWH appearing in vv. 2 and 24, vv. 2-4 and 24 are classically assigned to J. The first oracle has the promise (vv. 3-4) that goes with a travel command (v. 2) and with a reason for the promise (v. 5).

The reason stated in v. 5 seems to sound Deuteronomistic.[35] "Added to this reasoning in 26.5b is a normative-religious interpretation in the Deuteronomistic style and spirit."[36] The second oracle in v. 24 also has a promise that stands in between an

[34] Cf. Gen 12,2-3.7; 13,14-15; 15,5; 15;13-16; 15,18; 17,6-8; 18,10; 22,17-18; 28,13-14; 35,11-12; 46,3-4; 48,3-4). On the one hand, the promises occurring in Gen 15,5.18; 18,10 are examples of those which cannot simply be excised from their respective narratives. On the other hand, those appearing in Gen 13,14-15; 15,13-16 are examples of those which are clearly inserted in their respective narratives. See R. Rendtorff, "The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch", *JSOT* 89 (Sheffield; 1977) 55. Rendtorff also identifies Gen 22,15-18 as a clearly defined piece. We recognize that Gen 22,1-19 is generally considered to be an example of a well unified plot and that its seam is not as clear as compared those in Gen 13,14-15 and 15,13-16. Nonetheless, going back to our basic definition of what a unified plot is, we can ask ourselves: Can we skip vv. 15-18, without any harm to the narrative flow of Gen 22? See Z. Weisman, "National Consciousness in the Patriarchal Promises", *JSOT* 31 (1985) 55-73. The comparison made by Weisman between the promises found in Gen 22,16-18 and Gen 26,2-5 highlights the similarities of these promises in terms of style and content. He evaluates Gen 22,16-18 to be an insertion by a late redactor and that such evaluation can also be extended to Gen 26,2-5.

[35] Here, we do not intend to enter into a detailed discussion vis-à-vis the redactional relation between the two different possible classical sources of vv. 2-5 namely J and D. Nonetheless, for our purpose, it would be of certain value to note that there is such a thing called "Post-Deuteronomistic Yahwist" nowadays. See Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch,* 137-139. This also affirms the fact that J is also losing credits just as does the E in terms of their classical formulation and designation in the documentary source hypothesis. Ska also notes certain scholars, such as Blum and Carr, who prefer to speak about non-priestly (non-P) texts. See ibid., 145.

[36] Ibid., 62.

imperative (do not fear) and a reason (on whose account) why the blessing is promised.

Van Seters highlights the centrality of these promises within the entire narrative while rejecting the cogency of the generally held reasons for explaining that vv. 3b-5 is a later expansion: the dependence from 22:15-18 (judged to be a later addition itself) and the Deuteronomistic language of vs. 3b-5. "Neither of these reasons is particularly cogent for the present study, because it is argued that 22:15-18 is not an expansion of the earlier story and all the promises are equally of late date."[37] For Van Seters, v. 24 is a shorter version of vv. 3-5 and he argues that the unity of these two oracles is by the same hand, just as the author of the Isaac story and of the promises are the same. This argument becomes understandable when one thinks that, according to Van Seters, the story of Isaac in Gen 26 is a reconstruction paralleling that of Abraham. "I argue that no older traditions lay behind the Yahwist narrator and that he simply constructed a life of Isaac based upon similar episodes in the life of Abraham."[38] But if one takes the idea that Gen 26 is a reconstruction of what are said of Abraham, how can one explain such reconstruction in terms of sources and redaction, particularly when one speaks of the divine oracles?

David Carr offers significant points in this regard. He discusses the composition of what he called "proto-Genesis."[39] He builds on what he termed as the non-P Abraham story (J and E are integrated). "Any evaluation of the significance of divine designation, "God" versus "YHWH," in the non-P Abraham story must be seen in the context of the above survey of how "Yahwistic" and "Elohistic" portions of the Abraham story are integrally connected with each other."[40] Carr suggests that this non-P Abraham story is seemingly created out of various tradition patches that are integrally linked in a concentric whole, the central theme of

[37] Van Seters, *Prologue to History,* 269.

[38] Ibid., 268.

[39] See D. M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis.* Historical and Literary Approach (Louisville, Kentucky 1996) 177-232.

[40] Ibid., 200.

which is introduced in Gen. 11:28-30; 12:1-4a, 6-8.[41] Each of these verses is part of a broader system of interconnections. "Isaac's sojourn in Gerar, whatever its prehistory, is now linked to this broader system by the travel command and promise in Gen 26:2-3ba."[42]

Carr further claims that the non-P Abraham story and the broader non-P story have the same author. Another significant assertion is that the author of such non-P broader connections (mainly stories of Abraham and Isaac) is different from author of the Jacob-Joseph and primeval history materials. The author of the non-P broader connections built on and/or modified the bulk of the primeval history and the Jacob-Joseph sections so that the materials would fit together in a much broader scheme. Thus for example, the themes that have developed from Gen. 11,28-30; 12,1-4a, 6-8 are now found being inserted in the Jacob-Joseph material, presenting itself, for example, in the narrative unit of Gen 26,1-33. The promise that links to the travel command now constitutes a central theme in the entire Gen 26,1-33. This linking together of the promise to the travel command further attests to the late character of the divine oracles found in Gen 26,1-33.

This historical-critical treatment of the three versions of the wife-sister episode and of the divine oracles has led us into two important affirmations. First, the treatment of the wife-sister episode strengthens our initial claim about Gen 26,1-33 as episodic. We may consider vv. 7-11 as one of the episodes within the narrative of vv. 1-33, the other versions being suggestive of its possible insertion therein. Second, the historical-critical treatment of the divine oracle in vv. 2-5 has led us to affirm its secondary character, which is based on its late and overarching character.

[41] From such verses accordingly the themes of travel, promise and transmission of the promise began to develop.

[42] Ibid., 196.

The Notion of Time

Non-Chronological Character

Before we proceed to our analysis, it would make sense to do a short investigation about the temporal setting in v. 1. Our initial task here is to calculate an approximate time interval between the first famine and the famine told in Gen 26, drawing out possible clues from the related textual evidences. This investigation may serve as our springboard to understand the character of the chronology of Gen 26,1-33.

Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob and Esau were born (cf. Gen 25,26). Isaac took Rebekah as wife when he was 40 years old (Gen 25,20). The text and context of Gen 26,1-33 tell that at the time of the second famine, Isaac has already taken Rebekah as wife, thus he must not be less than 40 years old. And if we take the text, as it is, taking the absence of Jacob and Esau to mean that they were not yet born in the account of Gen 26,1-33, the second famine must have taken place before he has reached 60 years old. Further, Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran (cf. Gen 12,4). We can only locate the first famine after this event. Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born (cf. Gen 21,5). This gives us a 25-year interval from the time when he left Haran to the time of Isaac's birth. If we add this span of years to the age of Isaac (60 years old) at the time when his sons were born we would get an interval of not more than 85 years between the two famines. This tracing out of the interval is significant to our analysis because it suggests that Abraham must have survived the two famines. If Abraham's age when he left Haran (75) is added to the number of intervening years of two famines (85), Abraham

must have been 160 years old at the time of the second famine.[43] This shows a clear contradiction of chronological data.

Furthermore, we have already affirmed that Gen 26,1-33 appears to disrupt the narrative flow of Gen 25,19-34 and 27,1-28,9. The absence of Jacob and Esau in Gen 26,1-33 raises serious questions of chronology. This also paved the way for different opinions as to whether or not the twins were already born in the time of this second famine.[44] "The question of chronology is certainly important for the interpretation of this chapter, and much depends on whether its interpreters locate the events it narrates before or after the birth of Isaac's sons."[45] The choice of such location, before or after the birth of the twins, is important because the textual evidence as regards chronology is contradictory. Abraham died at the age of 175 (cf. Gen 25,7). This would mean that Isaac was already 75 years old then. Isaac was 60 years old when his sons were born (cf. Gen 25,26). This would also mean that Jacob and Esau were already 15 years old when Abraham died. In Gen 26,18 the death of Abraham is referred to.

[43] Such chronological problem is even more made evident if we take the minimum of 65-year interval, adding the age of Isaac when he took Rebekah as wife to the 25-year interval between the time Abraham left Haran and birth of Isaac. Moreover, there are other indicators leading to slightly different computation: the 10-year stay of Abraham in Canaan at the time Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham (cf. Gen 16,3). If we presume that there has not been a longer time interval between the time that he left Haran and the time when he started to stay in Canaan, our data would somehow tally. He left Haran at the age of 75 and he stayed in Canaan for 10 years before Ishmael was most probably conceived. Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born. There is an interval of 14 years between the birth of Ishmael and Isaac (cf. Gen 16,16; 21,5), getting a sum of 24 years. If we add this to the age of Isaac by the time he took Rebekah as wife we would get a minimum of 64-year interval between the first and second famines. The problem with regard to chronology therefore remains.

[44] For the view affirming that Isaac and Rebekah were still childless in Gen 26,1-33, see Nicol, "The Chronology of Genesis: Genesis XXVI 1-33 as 'Flashback'", *VT* 46 (1996), 330-338. For a different view, see Ronning, "The Naming of Isaac", 20.

[45] Nicol, "The Chronology of Genesis", 330.

This would mean that Jacob and Esau must have been older in the narrative of Gen 26,1-33 since they were already 15 years old when Abraham died. It is possible but we deem it most unlikely.[46]

Even if we accept the non-mentioning of the twins in Gen 26,1-33 to mean that they were already grownups, we cannot still attain an absolute chronology for Gen 26,1-33 vis-à-vis its surrounding narratives. Besides, such ignoring of the birth of the twins by the text of Gen 26,1-33 is not an isolated case. Here we only cite an example to show that Gen 26,1-33 does not have an absolute chronology. "Gen. xxv 11 states that after Abraham's death God blessed Isaac; yet in xxvi 1-33 he is promised blessing at *v.* 3, receives it at *v.* 12, and acknowledge it at *v.* 22, although it is not finally acknowledge by others (Abimelech) until *v.* 29."[47] What can be affirmed so far is that the events concerning the narrative of Gen 26,1-33 vis-à-vis its surrounding narratives are not presented in an exact chronological order. "The fact that one section of narrative might tell the events of a few hours, but be set side by side with another that recounts the story of several years also counts against that the sequence in which events are narrated can always be chronological."[48]

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[46] One may just ignore the absence of Jacob and Esau in Gen 26,1-33 and continue with the idea that they were already grownups in the narrative of Gen 26,1-33, but one will never escape other contextual questions. How, for example, Rebekah would remain a desirable woman being a mother of the grownup twins?

[47] Nicol, "The Chronology of Genesis", 337. We only intend to expose at this point this chronological problem confronting Gen 26,1-33. Nicol also takes the Priestly (P) chronology, with the help of the *tôl^{e}dōt* formula, as a clue to the reading of the chronology of Gen 26,1-33. For a more lengthy discussion of the *tôl^{e}dōt* formula, see also R. L. Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis", *JSOT* 25 (1983), 3-16. In any case, Nicol's proposal to see the chronology of Gen 26,1-33 as "flashback" is worth mentioning here. We do not intend to offer a detailed discussion concerning this proposal, since we now recognize that the reference to the "first famine" is thematic rather than chronological. Nonetheless we only want to note here that we do not also see major problems in accepting the proposal of taking the chronology of Gen 26,1-33 as "flashback." See also C. J. Collins, "The *Wayyiqtol* as 'Pluperfect': When and Why?" *TB* 46.1 (1995) 117-140.

[48] Nicol, "The Chronology of Genesis", 332.

"Story-Time" and "Discourse-Time"

We now turn to the analysis of the relationship between "story-time" and "discourse-time."[49] Even if Gen 26,1-33, in relation to its surrounding narratives, is characterized by a non-chronological ordering of events, its unit is nonetheless arranged with several temporal markers (cf. vv. 1.8.12.15.18.24.31.32.33). These markers also serve as aids in our analysis.

In v. 1a we are in a "summary,"[50] thus "story-time" here is longer than "discourse-time." In v. 1b we pass to first "scene"[51] where "story-time" becomes quite close to "discourse-time." Right after this "scenic" narration there seems to be an ellipsis however, where "story-time" seems to be infinitely longer. "There is an 'ellipsis' in a narrative when events of the 'story' are simply bypassed in the 'discourse'. The narrative 'skips over a moment of time' (Genette, *Figures III,* 92 [English, 52])."[52]

Certain comparison of the two appearances of the divine oracles (cf. vv. 2-5 and v. 24; including the "scenic" narrations and dia-

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[49] See Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 7-15. He offers a simplified explanation as regards the notion of time functioning in narratives and mentions the different terms used by several scholars to refer to "narrative time" and "narration time." We prefer to use the terms suggested by Chatman, as quoted and explained by Ska.

[50] For the discussion on "duration," see Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 12-14. For the explanation of "time-ratio" and distinction between "summary" and "scene" see ibid., 22-23. Narration may be "summative" or "scenic."

[51] Here, our discussion as regards "scene" has nothing to do with plot analysis as yet. Rather we only want to show here, for the meantime, the relationship of "story-time" with "discourse-time."

[52] Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 13. Ska also explains the difference between "blanks" and "gaps" on the one hand and "ellipses" on the other hand. "Blanks" and "gaps" refer to the problems of order (elements retrospectively not filled in (blanks) or filled in (gaps). Ellipses refer to a problem of duration ("speed") such as the ratio of the "story-time" and "discourse-time." See M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington 1987) 235-240.

logues or direct discourses) shows that the one in v. 24 employs a temporal marker "that night," which the one in vv. 2-5 lacks.[53] With this, we may suggest that there is an ellipsis in between v. 1b and v. 2. The reader may ask: When did the Lord appear to Isaac in v. 2? What happened immediately after Isaac's arrival in Gerar? Thus, as Ska points out, an ellipsis provides an opportunity for the reader to participate actively by prolonging the contemplation of the scene.

From vv. 2b-5 we are in a direct discourse. Here "story-time" is equal to "discourse-time." We have another "summary" in v. 6 and again, "story-time" becomes longer than "discourse-time." From vv. 7.8b-11 we have a combination of "scenic" narrations and dialogues; thus our ratio between "story-time" and "discourse-time" is very close.[54] In v. 8a we have a temporal marker: "when he had been there a long time," which is employed to "summarize" a long period of time. Here "story-time" is therefore longer than "discourse-time."

We can look into the phenomenon of "frequency"[55] in vv. 12-14. There is a clear temporal marker in v. 12: "in that year" that indicates two different events happening in a year, in succession (cf. v. 12a). However in v. 12b, the phrase "the Lord blessed him" is a "summary" indicating that "story-time" is much longer than "discourse-time." We may suggest that such blessing of Isaac by the Lord is an event that happened just once in the "story," as indicated in this segment, but with global effect nonetheless. This is being followed by the "iterative" passage of the "discourse" in

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[53] This comparison also speaks of a "paratactic" narrative structure of Gen 26,1-33. Ska explains that a narrative is "paratactic" when the logical and temporal indicators are not expressed by linguistic means (i.e. logical and temporal markers). In a "paratactic" narrative structure the "scenes," narrative segments and episodes are simply juxtaposed. A narrative is "hypotactic" when the logical and temporal connections between "scenes," narrative segments and episodes are expressed through linguistic means. See Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 12.

[54] It is interesting to note that the *RSV* translates v. 7b: "When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said," as if there is another temporal marker. See R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York 1981) 26. Alter gave an example of distinction between "parataxis" and "hypotaxis" arrangement of statements.

[55] See Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 14-15.

vv. 13-14a. These indicators also logically suggest that the phrase "and the Philistines envied him" in v. 14b happens not only once in the "story," an idea which is supported by the use of the stative of *qannä´* "to envy" in piel.[56]

The *wāw-x-qāṭal* form in v. 15 indicates a suspension of "story time." Here we have an example of what is called "author's intrusions or interventions."[57] After this suspension of "story-time," the ratio of "story-time" again equals that of "discourse-time" in a "scenic" narration with dialogue in v. 16.

With regard to "singulative" and "iterative" narratives, Ska further points out that special effects result from the alternation of "singular" and "iterative" passages. In line with this idea of special effect, Ska further explains that an "iterative" segment can anchor a singular event in history (i.e. etiologies). This particular use of "iterative" segment to highlight an etiology is true to Gen 26,1-33, as the narrative ends with Isaac's naming of Beersheba in v. 33 (cf. also v. 32). But a more interesting effect in this regard is built upon the "iterative" passage that runs from vv. 17-22. We have already noted in our textual investigation that these verses form a peculiar narrative segment, characterized by the verb "to give name" with Isaac as the subject.[58]

We have again a close ratio of "story-time" and "discourse-time" from vv. 24-33, with "scenic" narrations and dialogues. The temporal markers, appearing in v. 31: "in the morning" and in v. 32: "that (same) day," strongly attest to such closeness of time-ratio. The oath making, the sending away in peace, the digging of well, the finding of water and the naming of Beersheba all took place in one day.

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[56] See Ibid., 14. Ska explains: "Most frequently, a single event is told a single time (Genette calls this narrative a 'singular' or 'singulative' narrative). Or a narrative can tell once events that occurred many times (Genette calls this narrative an 'iterative' narrative)." For the frequentative piel, see B. K. Waltke – M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN 1990) 144.

[57] Ibid., 12.

[58] It is interesting to note that after this "iterative" passage, the following verse (v. 23) mentions Beersheba, first of two appearances in the narrative, framing vv. 23-33.

Narrator's Choice

The narrator's voice speaks of the narrator's choice. While we recognize that in dialogues (direct discourses) we hear the voice of the characters, the fact remains that dialogues are commonly found embedded within "scenes." Each of these dialogues is connected to "summaries," "intrusions," and the like through the "scenic" narration employed by the narrator. Now this allows the reader to hear changes of rhythm in the narrative. For example, in "summaries" time passes quickly while in "scenic" narrations and/with dialogues time passes slowly. We have already pointed out that in "scenic" narrations and/with dialogues the ratio of "story-time" is very close to "discourse-time." But in "summaries" "story-time" is longer, in "ellipses" it is infinitely longer and in "intrusions" it seems to be suspended. This change of rhythm is heard through this kind of "speeding up" and "slowing down." The narrator cannot include everything. He has to choose. Time-ratio helps to detect the narrator's necessary choices.

As already suggested, there seems to be an ellipsis between the first action in v. 1b and the "scenic" narration in v. 2a. We can detect the narrator's choice when he skips over a moment of time after Isaac went to Gerar, upon his arrival, so to say. The narrator rather proceeds to the divine oracle that he introduces through a "scenic" narration. This idea is also supported by the length of verses the narrator devotes to this first appearance of the divine oracle (cf. vv. 2b-5).

There is again a "speeding up" of "story-time" in a "summary" in v. 6. This is followed by another "slowing down" of "story-time" in the entire "scenic" representation (detailed "scenic" narrations with dialogues)[59] in vv. 7-11. With the employing of "scenic" representation, the reader can detect the importance that the narrator puts into these verses. We only want to single out two significant "summarized" events in the sequences of vv. 12-16 that show a kind of "speeding up" of "story-time" while at the same time suggestive of the "frequency" of respective events. This is in order to create certain special effects. First: "The Lord

[59] For the term, as well as for further discussion on the notion of time, see S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield 1997) 143-184.

blessed him" (cf. v 12b) and "and the Philistines envied him" (cf. v. 14b). The first happened once but with global effect while the second may have happened many times though recounted once. These "summative" phrases also create a venue for successive moments in time characterized by "suspension," "slowing down" and "speeding up" in vv. 15.16.17 respectively. These moments in turn connect the reader to another set of sequences of "summarized" events in vv. 18-22. After the "speeding up" of "story-time" in v. 23, there are two sets of "scenic" representations: vv. 24-25 and vv. 26-33a. The narrative ends with another seemingly time-suspension in v. 33b with a nominal phrase that signals an author's "intrusion."

Bar-Efrat affirms the importance of time-ratio analysis not only in the detection of the things that the narrator has chosen to include in the narrative but also in identifying what is central in the narrative. "If we note the variations in narrated time in relation to narration time, we will discover the narrative's focal points and the relative importance of its subjects."[60] What is observable in the narrative is that the movements of Isaac (i.e. going, dwelling, etc.) are told in "summaries" where there is a kind of "speeding up" of the story-time. Isaac's dealings with Abimelech are told in "scenic" representations (cf. vv. 7-11.26-31) where there is a "slowing down" of the story-time. The divine oracles (cf. vv. 2-5.24) are also told in detailed direct discourses where "story-time" slows down.

Here are some important affirmations as regards this analysis pertaining to the notion of time. The first is on questions of chronology and order. There is no absolute chronology of Gen 26,1-33 vis-à-vis its surrounding narratives. Despite its temporal markers, the narrative structure of Gen 26,1-33 is "paratactic," where the segments are simply juxtaposed. The second is on the ratio of "story-time" and "discourse-time."

[60] Ibid., 151. The term we are using "story-time" is "narrated time," while "discourse-time" is "narration time."

The alternate arrangement of "summaries," "scenic" representations," "intrusions" and the like make evident changes in rhythm. The third is on the narrator's choice. The "speeding up" and the "slowing down" of "story-time" make evident the narrator's preferences. The significance of the divine oracle (cf. vv. 2-5) is highlighted by an "ellipsis" preceding it. The movements of Isaac are traced out in "summaries." The centrality of Isaac's dealings with Abimelech is put forward by segments of "scenic" representations.

Analysis of the Plot

Our analysis of the notion of time enables us to arrive at two significant affirmations. First, the narrator clearly gives importance to the divine oracles (cf. vv. 2-5.24) through the special effects he creates in effect for these verses (i.e. ellipsis and temporal marker).[61] Second, the narrator chooses to recount Isaac's dealings with Abimelech in "scenic" representations in two narrative blocks: the segments of the wife-sister (cf. vv. 7-11) and the oath making at Beersheba (cf. vv. 26-31).

Definition of the Plot

Before going further with our analysis, it is of great value to define whether we have in Gen 26,1-33 a "plot of resolution" or a "plot of revelation."[62]

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[61] We have already recognized the secondary character of the divine oracles appearing in this narrative. But we can fully analyze the character of these oracles and the function they play in the narrative only after we have analyzed the different episodes and other larger narrative segments that constitute the narrative of Gen 26,1-33.

[62] See Ibid., 18-19. Time, events and happenings are essential in a plot of resolution. In a plot of revelation, time, events and happenings are of little interest in themselves. In a plot of resolution the main question is: "What will happen?" In a plot of revelation the main question is: "What is revealed?"

In this task of defining the plot,[63] we should first ask ourselves: Is the major change in this narrative unit a change of situation **or** of knowledge, or a change of situation **and** of knowledge?

Having in mind our assertion about the episodic character of Gen 26,1-33, we proceed with our analysis by first considering the two narrative blocks of "scenic" representation mentioned above. In the narrative segment of vv. 7-11 a certain movement of Abimelech "from ignorance to knowledge"[64] is quite observable. Abimelech is initially ignorant of Isaac's true relationship with Rebekah (cf. vv.7-8a). There is a change of knowledge, on the part of Abimelech, only when he accidentally sees Isaac "playing" with Rebekah (cf. v. 8b). The ignorance has initially been collective (cf. "men of the place" in v. 7). But this collective ignorance is changed to a collective knowledge (cf. "all the people" in v. 11). We have here a clear ignorance-to-knowledge plot. "With surprisingly few exceptions, however, in each tale at least one character goes through a drama of discovery, complete with *anagnorisis* if not with a whole series of them, and none ends as unenlightened as he began."[65]

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[63] We have identified in the first part of this paper that Gen 26,1-33 is classified as episodic. There, we have considered the plot mainly in terms of the narrative materials and the nature of their composition. We have done such in order to see whether our narrative at hand is composed of several independent narrative segments or not. Thus there we have dealt with questions of sources and redaction. Here as we try to define whether the plot of Gen 26,1-33 is one of resolution or revelation, our main consideration is rather the development of the plot in terms of changes either in situation or in knowledge, or in both. Here the main questions that can be posed are: What is the "narrative objective" of the narration? What is the point of departure? What is the point of arrival? In comparison, we may recall the basic questions we have tried to answer when we identified our plot type: Can we skip an episode or rearrange the order of events without harm? Are there other parallel narratives found outside the narrative unit under analysis, and from whence comes the source? Do some parts of the narrative indicate a secondary character or lateness in terms of redactional process? Further, by "narrative objective" we refer to the "narrative program," of which fulfilment is expected to happen as the narrative unfolds. See Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 20-33.

[64] See Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 176-179. Sternberg speaks of "plot of discovery" to refer to "plot of revelation."

[65] Ibid., 176. For a concise explanation of the difference between *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia,* see Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 27. Ska explains that in a plot of revelation the resolution is called an *anagnorisis* while in a plot of "resolution" (action) the resolution is called a *peripeteia.*

The narrative segment of vv. 26-31 is characterized by an evolution of time and ordering of events. The development is unraveling from the moment Abimelech, Ahuzzath and Phicol come to Isaac to the moment they depart from him. Interest is put on the happenings of events concerning feast and oath making in vv. 30-31. There is a change of situation on the part of Isaac, from his being a sent away envied man (cf. v. 27: here the sending away is part of Isaac's recalling of a previous event; cf. also v. 16) to being the one to send Abimelech's group off (cf. v. 11). This *peripeteia* attests that this narrative segment is predominantly a plot of resolution. However, the two-fold acknowledgment by Abimelech's group of YHWH as being with and having blessed Isaac shows itself as another *anagnorisis.* This *anagnorisis* tells of another movement of Abimelech (and company) from ignorance to knowledge, but this time it serves as a resolution to the ignorance of Abimelech's group within the "macro-plot."

This *anagnorisis* of the "macro-plot" now connects us to another narrative block (cf. vv. 12-22). This block can be divided into two smaller segments in terms of focus: one that tells of the growth and expulsion of Isaac (cf. vv. 12-16) and the one of the disputes over the wells (cf. vv. 18-22). In the first segment (cf. vv. 12-16) Abimelech is mentioned once and as a representative of a collective voice (cf. v. 16). This expulsion leads to the happenings in the second segment (cf. vv. 18-22), with v. 17 as a kind of transitional verse. In the second segment, the name of Abimelech is not mentioned but the segment shows some links across the other segments through certain association of the name of Abimelech with the words such as "Philistines" and "herdsmen of Gerar" (cf. vv. 1.6-7.8.14-15.17-18.20.26).

If we accept this idea suggesting that there is a movement from ignorance to knowledge on the part of Abimelech's group concerning YHWH being with and having blessed Isaac, which operates in the level of the "macro-plot," we have somehow pegged this ignorance-to-knowledge "macro-plot" to its point of arrival. Our point of departure then is the lack of knowledge, on the part of Abimelech's group, that YHWH is with Isaac and that

YHWH has blessed Isaac.[66] This ignorance gives rise to the conflict operating in our plot of revelation in the "macro" level. The remark of Sternberg holds true here: "No ignorance, no conflict; and no conflict, no plot."[67]

The change of situation is also evident in this "macro-plot." The unraveling of the plot in this regard is a movement, as Sternberg would put it, from "unhappiness to happiness."[68] In v. 1 Isaac went to Abimelech but in v. 16, Abimelech has driven Isaac away. In the following verses we find Isaac in even more intensified conflicts, which will only find a final resolution in the oath making in vv. 30-31. In this segment, it was Abimelech (and company) who came to Isaac (cf. v. 26) and it was Isaac who sent them off in peace (cf. v. 31). The following verse tells about the finding of water by Isaac's servants (cf. v. 32), which does not anymore lead to dispute as in vv. 17-22 but to a historical anchor, the naming of Beersheba (cf. v. 33).

In the narrative of Gen 26,1-33, there is a kind of fusing together of the plots of resolution and revelation, where the change "from ignorance to knowledge" takes the priority over the change "from unhappiness to happiness."
"Rather, external and internal plot fuse together into a movement in which history turns on discovery…"[69] Thus we may now affirm that the major change in our plot, in the "macro-plot," is a change of situation and knowledge. Therefore, even if the plot is basically "resolved" through the *peripeteia,* something very im-

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[66] This *anagnorisis* connects us to the promise in v.v. 3b-4. Could such promise then be the "narrative objective?"

[67] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 173.

[68] See ibid., 176. We also would like to emphasize here the happiness of both camps: on the side of Abimelech, their sending away in peace; on the side of Isaac, the digging and finding of water freely and without dispute. The happiness attained by both camps resolved the unhappiness that marks the beginning of the narrative with the famine "in the land," a famine which extent and coverage, interestingly, remain unspecified. This is suggestive of the idea that Gerar, where Isaac has gone and where he has been instructed by a divine intervention is not necessarily fully exempted from the possible inclusion to the description "there was a famine in the land" (cf. v. 1).

[69] Ibid., 177. By "external," Sternberg refers to the plot of resolution; and by "internal," to the plot of revelation.

portant is also revealed through the *anagnorisis*. The *anagnorisis* combines the identity of Abimelech (specific object) with the truth about YHWH as being with and having blessed Isaac (global or abstract truth), to follow the line of Sternberg. This truth is explicitly articulated in the divine oracles, one appearing at the beginning of the entire narrative (cf. vv. 2b-5) and another in v. 24, just before the segment when Abimelech appears to recognize such truth (cf. vv. 28-29).

Subdivisions of the Plot

We have already identified two narrative segments recounted in "scenic" representation: vv. 7-11 and vv. 26-31. These segments contain "scenes" that have developed into episodes, each having their own "micro-plot" (cf. vv. 1-11 and vv. 23-33). However, sequences of "summaries" instead of "scenes" are found in vv. 12-22. Here we prefer to call such sequences of "summaries" "chronicles."[70] We can affirm that Gen 26,1-33 is characterized by both sequences of "scenes" and sequences of short "summaries" of events. Our proposal then is to primarily subdivide the entire unit between episodes and "chronicle." We propose to take vv. 1-11 as one episode, vv. 12-22 as "chronicle" and vv. 23-33 as another episode.

Our main criterion for the division of the first episode (cf. vv. 1-11) and the "chronicle" (cf. vv.12-22) is "action." In vv. 7-11, Abimelech registers actions, in the foreground, "(he) looked out," "he saw," "he summoned," "he commanded" (cf. vv. 8.9.11), while in v. 12, Isaac becomes the subject of actions in the foreground "(he) sowed" and "he found." This is supported by the ratio between "story-time" and "discourse-time" and by a change of character and locale. "The end of a scene often coincides with a 'pause', marked by an interval of time (ellipsis) or a change of rhythm (time-ratio of a 'summary' concluding a 'scene'; cf. pp. 12-14). In other cases the narrative tension drops because something new

[70] By "chronicles" we simply refer to sequences of very short "summaries" of events or to narrative segments that have not developed compared to sequences of "scenes" that normally develop into episodes in narrative units.

is needed to continue the action."[71] We have here an "ellipsis" followed by new elements. We have skipped over a moment of time and we do not know what happens immediately after Abimelech has warned all the people not to touch Isaac and Rebekah. A scene about Abimelech giving a command to all the people in favor of the couple is different from a scene that tells of Isaac as a patriarch who sowed and found a hundredfold in "that" land.

Our main criterion for the division between the "chronicle" and the second episode is the "change of locale." This is of value because in vv. 1-22, the principal locale is Gerar and its vicinity. In v. 23, Beersheba is not only mentioned for the first time in this unit, Isaac went up there. With the temporal marker in v. 24 "that night" it is difficult to suggest a longer time interval between vv. 23 and 24. But the logical transition from v. 22 to v. 23 may suggest another ellipsis.[72] What happens immediately after he has named the third well Rehoboth? Have we skipped over another moment of time here? Our suggestion is affirmative.

We are now going to proceed with possible smaller subdivisions of the episodes (cf. vv. 1-11 and 23-33) into "scenes" and of the "chronicle" (cf. vv. 12-22) into short "summaries" of events.[73] The first episode, vv. 1-11, can be subdivided into two scenes:

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[71] Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 33.

[72] See Alonso Schökel, *¿Donde está tu hermano?,* 121. Alonso Schökel calls our attention to a perception that there seems to be a lack of narrative substance here. He however suggests that the discovery of the third well Rehoboth "Space" makes room for the discovery of the fourth well. Nevertheless, even if we accept this suggestion, this does not militate against the proposal for an ellipsis between v. 22 and v. 23.

[73] Before we finally divide these episodes into scenes, it is worthwhile to raise a few more significant observations. In vv. 1-11 on the one hand, what has been added to the "scenic" representation of wife-sister is the divine oracle (cf. vv. 2-5) framed by the two basic movements of Isaac that we have pointed out: his going (cf. v. 1) and his dwelling (cf. v. 6), in Gerar. On the other hand, in vv. 23-33, what has been added to the "scenic" representation of the oath making at Beersheba is another oracle (cf. v. 24); and the whole episode, vv. 23-33, is seemingly framed by two of Isaac's important actions: his going up and his giving of name to Beersheba. We have two different, yet similar, divine interventions in two different locations. In between is the episode in vv. 12-22 framed by the mentioning of YHWH (cf. vv. 12 and 22) and appears to be a passage that connects the happenings in Gerar and Beersheba.

between vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-11. The movement of Isaac on the one hand, typified by his "going" and "dwelling," is most evident in this scene (cf. v. 1 and v. 6). The divine oracle (cf. vv. 2-5), which these two actions seem to frame, contains commands that link to Isaac's movements (i.e. "to settle"). On the other hand, the actions in vv. 7-11 are characterized by a series of actions of Abimelech in the "foreground," resulting from the question raised by the men of the place (of Gerar) and Isaac's ruse about Rebekah. This scene division becomes more evident if one considers the "paratactic" nature of the link between v. 6: "And Isaac dwelt in Gerar." and v. 7: thus, "And the men of the place asked him about his wife…" With this, one feels a certain change of rhythm between v. 6 and v. 7 brought about time-ratio of a "summary" that concludes the scene of vv. 1-6.

By the subdivision of the "chronicle" found in vv. 12-22, we have already proposed that one may subdivide vv. 12-22 between vv. 12-16 and vv. 18-22. There are elements showing changes of characters (the herdsmen of Gerar appear while Abimelech disappears in vv. 18-22), of place (from "that land" in v. 12 to the valley of Gerar in v. 17), and most importantly, of action (the series of Isaac's actions from "sowing and finding" in v. 12 to "digging and giving name" in vv. 18-22). Moreover, the event told in v. 17 highlights the idea that we have several events in sequences of "summaries" in this part of the narrative.[74] We suggest that there are five "summarized" events in sequence that run through vv. 12-22: the blessing of YHWH and the growth of Isaac (cf. vv. 12-14), the envy of the Philistines and the expulsion by Abimelech (cf. 15-16), the encampment in the valley of Gerar (v. 17), the disputes over the wells (cf. vv. 18-21) and the "room" that YHWH has enlarged (cf. vv. 22).

The second episode in vv. 23-33, which follows the "chronicle," can be subdivided into three "scenes": vv. 23-25, vv. 26-31

[74] It is interesting to note that in the narrative structure proposed by Coats, the two major divisions of the unit overlap: "Threat to the Ancestress" (vv. 1-17) and "Well Itinerary" (vv. 17-33). See Coats, *Genesis*, 188-195. This suggests that v. 17 is a short "summary" of an event about Isaac's encampment in the valley of Gerar resulting from his expulsion. This also attests to the transitional character of v. 17, which at the same time seems to connect the two sets of sequences of "summaries" of events (cf. vv. 12-16 and 18-22).

and vv. 32-33. The oracle in v. 24 is framed by a major change of place (cf. "Isaac went up to Beersheba." in v. 23) and by a resumption of the action of "digging" in such a place (cf. "And Isaac's servants dug a well" in v. 25b). On the one hand, there is a change of rhythm after v. 25b brought about by a time interval, probably an ellipsis (we also have a gap here). The narrative tension also clearly drops and new elements are introduced (i.e. Ahuzzath and Phicol, while Abimelech is mentioned again) in v. 26. On the other hand, regardless of the temporal marker "in that day" in v. 32a, the change of action suggests another "scene" division. The series of actions that culminates in Isaac's sending Abimelech's group off in peace and their consequent going is followed by an *analepsis*[75] that fills up the gap we have left in v. 25b.

Unifying Elements

We now turn to the divine oracles appearing in vv. 2-5 and 24. These two oracles appear in each of the first scenes of the first and second episodes. Both are also preceded by Isaac movements: "And Isaac went to Gerar" (cf. v. 1b) and "And he went up from there to Beersheba" (cf. v. 23). Both these actions are characterized by a major change of locale, one to Gerar[76] and another up to Beersheba. Both are also followed by more developed "scenic" representations (cf. vv. 7-11 and 26-31). In terms of rhythm, the first oracle is preceded by a "slowing down" of the story-time while the second is characterized by a temporal marker indicating a very short time interval between Isaac's upward movement and the divine intervention. We have reasons to affirm the strategic places of the two oracles, and that they are employed so as to unify the different segments of the narrative.

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[75] For the discussion on the topic of *analepsis* and gap, see Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 8-9. Ska explains that a gap is a discontinuity in the order of narration and the order of occurrence or a lack of information nonetheless relevant to the narration. A gap is to be filled in by an *analepsis.*

[76] We only want to note here the phrase: "Do not go down to Egypt" (cf. v. 1b), which is suggestive of a downward movement characterizing the first scene.

Furthermore, the appearances of the divine name YHWH in vv. 12 and 22 seem to frame the sequences of events told in short "summaries" appearing in the entire segment of vv. 12-22. These occurrences of the divine name show a strong connection to the divine oracles and thus suggest a late character. The context of the first appearance is the blessing of Isaac by YHWH (cf. v. 12b) resulting in conflict with the Philistines (cf. v. 14b-15) and in the eventual expulsion of Isaac by Abimelech (cf. v. 16). The second appearance is put in the voice of Isaac and the context is the third well (cf. v. 22b) that seems to end the conflict concerning the previous wells (cf. vv. 19-21). We may suggest that the occurrences of the divine name YHWH in vv. 12 and 22 do not only frame the sequences of "summarized" events in the segment of vv. 12-22 but also connect such entire "chronicle" to the two other episodes (cf. vv. 1-11 and 23-33).

Moreover, if this suggestion has certain weight, it may further suggest that the elements of blessing (cf. v. 12) and of well (cf. v. 22) also share in the function of unifying the different segments of the entire narrative unit. The element of blessing is explicitly articulated in predictive discourses within the divine oracles (cf. vv. 3 and 24) and in the narrator's voice in the "foreground" (cf. v. 12). Our proposal, on the one hand, is to take the blessing of Isaac by YHWH in v. 12 to have a global effect within the entire narrative but primarily resolves the initial issue of the famine (cf. v. 1 and also vv. 12-14a). On the other hand, the promise blessing articulated in v. 24 finds strong connection to the issue of the well in v. 25, an issue or conflict that dominates the second part of the "chronicle" (cf. vv. 18-22) and which seems to unite the different "scenes" of the second episode (cf. vv. 23-33).

Unifying the Different Moments of the Plot

The divine oracles, the elements concerning the blessing and the well appear to bind together the different moments of the "macro-plot" into an integrated whole.[77] These unifying elements stand along with the narrative objective of divine accompaniment and blessing of Isaac's by YHWH, around which the different moments of the "macro-plot" do revolve and progress.

In v. 1a we are in "exposition" and we pass into the "scene" in v. 1b. Immediately after, in v. 2, we are in a "scenic" representation that contains the longest direct discourse in the narrative (cf. vv. 2b-5), within which the narrative objective is embedded: YHWH will be with Isaac and will bless Isaac. The "inciting moment" is within vv. 6-11. Isaac "dwelt" after he was instructed to "sojourn," then after "a long time" the ruse about his relationship with Rebekah was discovered. The conflict about the ruse was resolved at once within the "micro" level of the plot of resolution. Thus we have a resolved "micro-plot" here.

Within the "macro-plot," the complication seems to be preceded by "preparatory" sequences of "summarized" events in vv. 12-16.[78] The blessing and increase of Isaac's greatness, told side by side with the envy of the Philistines, prepares the reader for the real point of departure. The suspension of the "story-time" in v. 15 also creates an impact and heightens the tension in v. 16. Further, the narrator's intrusion in v. 15 betrays a seemingly intentional association of the Philistines with the issue of the well (cf. Gen 21,25).

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[77] See Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us*",* 20-30. Ska provides concise and clear explanations as to how the different moments of the plot could possibly be analyzed.

[78] See Ibid., 26. Ska explains what a "preparatory scene" is: a "scene that often prepares for a decisive meeting and creates an appropriate atmosphere of hope, fear, or curiosity." But since our proposal is to take vv. 12-16 as the first part of the "chronicle," we could only maintain its "preparatory" function that operates in sequences of very short "summaries" of events rather than in sequences of "scenes."

Such "preparatory" sequences of "summarized" events lead to complication in vv. 17-22. In the narrative of Gen 26,1-33, the four-step (3+1) structure is used.[79] Four times have Isaac's servants dug wells and four times has Isaac given names to each well before the final resolution is reached.

Isaac's question in v. 27 serves as the climax.[80] The "macro-plot" has reached the highest moment of tension. This is followed by the recognition of Abimelech's group that YHWH is with Isaac and that YHWH has blessed Isaac (cf. vv. 28-29). We propose such recognition to be the turning point within the "macro-plot." It seems that the falling action begins here. And we further propose vv. 31-33 to constitute the "two-fold" final resolution, one pertaining to the conflict that arises from Isaac being blessed by YHWH (cf. vv. 12-16) and another conflict that arises from the issue concerning the well (cf. vv. 18-22 and 23-25).

The Theme of the Narration

We first affirm Isaac's function in Genesis: the authentication of his descendants' rights to land.[81] As far as Gen 26,1-33 is concerned, such command forbidding Isaac to go down to Egypt for reason of exalting his status as the only patriarch who never leaves the land, is also supported by the second oracle in v. 24. This second divine intervention affirms Isaac's action in v. 23 that parallels the negative command in v. 2. Immediately after Isaac has gone up to Beersheba, YHWH appeared to him "that night." In v. 25, Isaac's situation is characterized by certain stability after

[79] See Ibid., 26. Ska calls our attention to the fact that the Bible usually employs a staircase construction in building up the tension of the narrative, employing different structural steps, leading to the resolution of the tension.

[80] Isaac's question to Abimelech's group: "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" throws us back to vv. 12-16. It seems that we have an *analepsis* here that fills in the gap left in v. 16 as regards Isaac's sentiment after Abimelech has sent him away.

[81] See Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch,* 205.

he has gone up to Beersheba: "he built an altar" and "he pitched his tent." This "pitching" of tent puts Isaac in "settlement" in an already specified area called Beersheba.[82]

The peculiarity of the narration of Gen 26,1-33 is found in the unique narrative features it has. Ska proposes to consider the absence of Isaac's sons in Gen 26,1-33, as in itself part of the unique features of the narrative. "Both sons, Esau and Jacob, are strangely absent from Genesis 26. The chapter describes a series of conflicts that take place in the region of Gerar, and King Abimelech steps in. These unique features set this chapter apart from those surrounding it."[83] Aside from its place in the entire Jacob Cycle, Gen 26,1-33 has unique narrative features within it. The two separate divine oracles, which mark out the "narrative objective" and its "fulfillment," manifest certain unique features.[84] What makes the employment of this double appearance of the oracle is that the first one sets the "narrative objective" while the second

[82] We only have to recall the idiomatic expression "from Dan to Beersheba" and it would remind us of the extent of Israel's land territory. For example, cf. Judg 20,1; 1 Sam 3,20; 2 Sam 3,10; 17,11; 24,2.15. Furthermore, we can now see the drama of Isaac's movement in relation to the divine command. After a series of Isaac's attempts to "dwell" in several demarcated areas: in Gerar (cf. *yäšab* in v. 6), in the valley of Gerar (cf. *yäšab* in v. 17), the "unspecified land" (cf. *šäkan* in v. 2) referred to in the divine oracle is now specified in Beersheba as "he pitched his tent" there (cf. *nä†â* "to pitch a tent" in v. 25). It is also interesting to note that the text and context when Beersheba would be mentioned again after Gen 26,33 is in Gen 28,10, when Jacob left Beersheba and went to Haran.

[83] Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch,* 205. See also M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture.* Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts (New York 1979) 40-62. In relation to the entire Jacob Cycle (cf. Gen 25,19-35,22), Fishbane suggests to see Gen 26 as an interlude that shows a kind of symmetry with Gen 34. See ibid., 47.

[84] Since Gen 12, 2-3.7 shows a closer parallel with Gen 26,2-5.24, we decided to compare these two sets of oracles. This comparison could serve as our springboard in showing the uniqueness of Gen 26,1-33. While there are a number of possible points of comparison, for purpose of brevity, we only cite one comparison here. In Gen 12,2-3.7, the blessing for the nations is well articulated in the first oracle and nothing is said about it within the rest of the unit. In Gen 26,2-5.24, the blessing for the nations is told in the first oracle but it shows traces within the "scenic" representation that immediately follows the second oracle (i.e. Abimelech's group is sent off in peace by Isaac).

oracle functions as an anchor for the fulfillment of the "narrative objective" in several levels.

First, the "I will be with you" in v. 3b and in v. 24 shows progression as regards the fulfillment of YHWH's promise of being with Isaac: from the first "predictive" discourse in v. 3 up to Isaac's going up to Beersheba in v. 23; and from the second "predictive" discourse in v. 24 up to Isaac's naming of Beersheba in v. 33. Secondly, the "I will bless you" in v. 3 contains three main elements: land, descendants and blessing for the nations. The blessing for the nations is fulfilled in the oath making at Beersheba resulting to a peaceful sending off by Isaac of Abimelech's group. The promise of land is fulfilled with Isaac's "pitching of tent" in Beersheba.[85] We cannot end this analysis however without again looking into the question pertaining to the fulfillment of the promise of descendants to Isaac. This is closely connected to the function of Isaac that, as already mentioned, authenticates his descendants' rights to the land.

The oracles remain instructive all the more. We do not wonder why the promises of land and blessing for the nations are no longer told in v. 24. These two elements have already developed within the narrative itself, both being fulfilled. But the promise of descendants in v. 4 remains a promise in v. 24, being in a "predictive" discourse. This also explains why the land is promised both to Isaac and his descendants in v. 3b. It is fulfilled in Isaac and it will be fulfilled in his descendants. The promise of the multiplication of Isaac's descendants is yet to be fulfilled in the greater narratives of the Jacob Cycle. The promise of land to Isaac's descendants will have to remain a promise within the Jacob Cycle (cf. Gen 28,13; 35,12), within the Book of Genesis (cf. Gen 50,24), and even throughout the entire Torah (see Joshua 13–19).

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[85] We would like to suggest that the first scene in the third episode (cf. vv. 23-25) serves as another preparatory scene that seems to balance the one appearing in vv. 12-16. The second oracle is inserted within this scene. Such proposed preparatory scene in vv. 23-25 ends with another gap: "And Isaac's servants dug a well" (v. 25b) that is filled in with an *analepsis* in v. 32-33. Here all the previous conflicts pertaining to wells are resolved. The gap found after v. 25b is also suggestive of the fulfillment of the promise of land due to the entire content of v. 25 (i.e. the building of an altar and the pitching of tent).

Conclusion

Gen 26,1-33 is a composite narrative unit that exalts Isaac's authoritative character as patriarch.[86] Even if one entertains the idea that Gen 26,1-33 is based on already existing narratives about Abraham (cf. Gen 12,10-20; 13; 21,22-26), one cannot still deny the evidences telling that this narrative is shaped to exalt Isaac's character as a patriarch in his own right. The segments of "wife-sister," "disputes over the wells" and "oath making at Beersheba" are put together to form a unit, with distinctive narrative features, to present Isaac in a different light.

In Gen 26,1-33, Isaac's character surpasses that of a passive son and the presentation of his life outshines the idea suggesting that his life is a mere imitation of that of his father. First, both Abraham and Isaac went to foreign rulers due to famine but it is Isaac who never leaves the land. Second, both of them experienced disputes as regards the well leading to the naming of Beersheba but it is Isaac who is presented to have named Beersheba. Third, both of them entered into a covenant with Abimelech's group but it is Isaac who eventually sent Abimelech's group away in peace. This presentation of Isaac's character strongly supports his function in the patriarchal narratives: to authenticate his descendants' rights to the land. Moreover, his authoritative character as patriarch is religiously sealed by the fulfillment of the two-fold promise of accompaniment and blessing, within Gen 26,1-33, by YHWH.

Theological-Pastoral Implications

What could be the theological-pastoral implications of our narrative analysis of this unit?

We have already pointed out that YHWH's blessing of Isaac as promised in Gen 26,3 includes three important elements: land, descendants and the blessing for the nations. We have also claimed

[86] For further discussion with regard to composite narrative, see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 131-177.

that the blessing pertaining to the promise of land to Isaac and blessing for the nations are both fulfilled in the narrative unit of Gen 26,1-33 while the blessing with regard to the promised multiplication of descendants will still have to be fulfilled in Jacob Cycle.

On the one hand, we agree with Ska when he claims that the function of Isaac in Genesis is to authenticate his descendants' rights to land. On the other hand, we claim that the narrative unit of Gen 26,1-33 puts forward Isaac's authoritative character as patriarch. While it might be held true that Isaac does authenticate his descendants' rights to land by the textual evidence that tells of Isaac as the only patriarch who never left the land and as the one who pitched his tent at Beersheba, we on our part think that Isaac's authoritative character is advanced by the way he sets the example for his descendants to follow.

His descendants must be able to make a similar peace pact should they be truly worthy of the land that will be given them. The giving of the land to them cannot be separated from the challenge of becoming a channel by which all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves (cf. Gen 26,4). The promised of land to Isaac has been fulfilled, which in turn has led to the resolution of conflict between Isaac and Abimelech's group. This clearly shows that through Isaac, the neighboring nation of Gerar, represented by Abimelech, has also been blessed.

Our analysis of Gen 26,1-33 remains to be very relevant to our present context. What is revealed in this narrative is that the Lord is with Isaac. Abimelech and his group have realized this. This realization has led to an oath taking in order to establish peace between them. The Lord has blessed Isaac. Isaac, appearing to have been self-conscious of being blessed, has sent the group of Abimelech away in peace. This brings us back to the basic reality that "the land is the Lord's" (cf. Lev 25,23), posing to us some challenges concerning non-appropriation.

Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* (the Gospel of Joy) clearly challenges us to work for the attainment of a more lasting peace, one that is based on equality. "Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot

and never will be able to resolve."[87] Pope Francis is denouncing inequality in all its manifestations but he also stated his conviction that violence will not solve our present societal problems. According to Pope Francis such violent way to try to resolve conflicts, being propelled by the present economic mechanisms, only serves to offer false hopes. This is the reason why the Pope has explained that one of the principles to be applied should we attain a more lasting peace is the principle that says: "time is greater than space."[88]

What seems to be easy and quick solutions to societal problems appear to be very attractive and enticing. Nowadays, violence escalates because many do not know how to respect time and processes. Those in power tend to impose their will through an exercise of force and coercion. And what could even be more alarming is when violence enters the cultural realm. How will our next generation, our descendants, become instruments through which others will also be blessed when the cultural signal we are passing on to them only leads to a culture of violence? It is as if we are telling our children it is all right to kill people as long as we attain the societal changes we want.

Abimelech and the Philistines have used this easy approach to resolve disputes. This is shown in the way they treated Isaac, pushing Isaac away and elbowing him out because they envied and feared him (cf. Gen 26,15-16). Isaac, on his part, could have retaliated and could have violently taken revenge against Abimelech and his group when he already has the capacity to do so, but he never did. Isaac became a blessing to others. This seals his authoritative character as patriarch. This remains to be a great challenge to his descendants.

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[87] *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 60.

[88] See *Amoris Laetitia* no. 3. Pope Francis will also build on this principle in his Encyclical on Love in the Family.