
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Relationship between Genesis 26:5 and the Patriarchal Narrative of Abraham

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Abraham is commended throughout the Bible as a model of faith and yet Genesis 26:5 commends him above all for his obedience using language evocative of the later Sinai covenant. This article provides a close reading of the Genesis material to help us grasp the Abraham narrative in its own terms.

1. Introduction

> "… because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." (Genesis 26:5, ESV)

At first glance, this clause seems strikingly out of place. The reader of Genesis, having already read the Abraham cycle (Genesis 11:27–25:11), may recall that Abraham has previously been commended for obedience to Yahweh (22:18). However, the language of "charge," "commandments," "statutes," and "laws" seems completely foreign to the patriarchal narratives. These terms sound evocative of the later Sinai covenant, and yet here they are used to describe the behaviour of Abraham.[1] This article will investigate the function and significance of the language of Genesis 26:5, and explore how this verse relates to the preceding narrative and to the rest of the Pentateuch.[2]

Inevitably, any discussion of this literature must adopt a position regarding the origins of the text, and the position one adopts has a bearing on the outcome of one's investigation. For example, it must be said that a source-critical approach to the Pentateuch does offer an attractively simple explanation for the awkwardness of Genesis 26:5: it could be

[1] See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 304–5; Daniel I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians," *Hiphil* 3 (2006): 2 n. 2.

[2] The most detailed treatment is that of Sailhamer, who lists various rabbinic readings of this verse and seeks to relate it to the rest of the Pentateuch. John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 66–78.

an artless editorial insertion.[3] If the text is an incoherent assemblage of materials, we need not expect Genesis 26:5 to have any relation to its context, and so the surprising language is easily accounted for.

However, this will not be the approach I adopt, for several reasons. Firstly, as I shall discuss, there is an unmistakable allusion to Genesis 22:18 in Genesis 26:5, marked by distinctive vocabulary, and therefore wholesale literary atomism is impossible to defend.[4] Secondly, I would argue that Genesis 22:18, far from being another isolated fragment, is an integral component within *the* climactic chapter of the entire Abraham cycle.[5] By extension, Genesis 26:5, which alludes to this, must be related

[3] Von Rad sees 26:5 as a development of J, "by a very much later hand.… [It] is quite a new thought in the patriarchal stories." See Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (London: SCM, 1972), 270–271. Gunkel argues for a "late origin of this addition," on the grounds that it "manifests later (legal) piety." Herman Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 294. Westermann similarly argues that 26:2–5 are "an addition as elsewhere, e.g., 22:15–18, where promises are subsequently appended to narratives." He dates this to the "post-Deuteronomic period." Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1986), 424–5. Janzen argues that 26:5 has "all the marks of a late, perhaps Deuteronomic editor." J. Gerald Janzen, *Abraham and all the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12–50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 100.

[4] Ska, on Genesis 22:18, notes that "la même expression réapparaît dans l'oracle de Gn 26,5a dans des termes identiques lorsque YHWH s'addresse à Isaac." J.L. Ska, "Essai sur la nature et la signification du cycle d'Abraham (Gn 11:27–25:11)," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis,* ed. A. Wénin (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 168. Van Seters, though a source critic, uses this link to connect 26:5 with J material, and so he attributes it to the Yahwist—thus recognising its connectedness with what comes before. John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (London: Yale University Press, 1975), 288.

[5] The importance of Genesis 22 is evident from its position in the structure of the cycle, positioned as it is near the outer edge of the overarching chiasm and matching the key episode of Genesis 12, where the promises are first given. Cassuto: "The last trial corresponds to the first. (*Go from your country* etc.; and *go to the land of Moriah* etc.; in the former passage there is a command to leave his father, in the latter a bid farewell to his son; in both episodes the blessings and promises are similar in content and phrasing)." Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II From Noah to Abraham, with An Appendix: A Fragment of Part III,* trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1974), 296. Therefore, following Sarna, Rendsburg labels Genesis 22 the "Climax of Abraham's Spiritual Odyssey." Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis,* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 30. For a more equivocal assessment of 22:15–18's originality, see R.W.L. Moberly, "The Earliest Commentary on the Akedah," *VT* 38/3 (1988): 304–311.

to the narrative context. Thirdly, literary-critical studies of recent decades have done much to elucidate narrative unity within the Pentateuch.[6] This is not to discard all source criticism as irrelevant;[7] but it is surely appropriate to presume there is a unity to the final form of the text.[8] Fretheim takes this approach to the Abrahamic cycle: "whatever one might say about the complex history of this material, it has now been decisively shaped by a narrative flow and themes that encompass the entire cycle."[9]

Even if we do attribute Genesis 26:5 to a redactor at a late stage of the text's development, we must still explain why that redactor saw fit to describe Abraham in this way, given what comes before.[10] Therefore this enquiry is legitimate, regardless of which position we adopt on the Pentateuch's composition, unless we hold to an atomistic model in which

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[6] Alter's approach takes the text as "a real narrative continuum … a coherent unfolding story in which the meaning of earlier data is progressively, even systematically, revealed or enriched by the addition of subsequent data." Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 11. Other works which explore biblical narrative include: Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis (*Assen; Van Gorcum, 1975); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). Thematic unity to the Pentateuch has also been advocated by David A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978).

[7] Wenham: "Synchronic and diachronic approaches … are both valid and complementary.… [L]iterary criticism tells us what the stories meant to the final editor; source criticism, how he composed Genesis." Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Dallas: Word, 1987), xxxiv. Even conservatives who argue for a unified Pentateuch acknowledge the use of sources in composition, e.g. Sailhamer: "The author took written records and wove them together into a coherent whole so that the whole of his narrative has a center, a focus, and tells a complete story of real events." John Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation.* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 23.

[8] "It is the commentator's first duty to understand the present form of the text, what Genesis meant to its final editor or author." Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, xxxvi.

[9] Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 85.

[10] If we believe the verse may predate the final redactor, we must equally ask why they saw fit to leave it in. Janzen: "The question then is, where in chapters 12–25 did that editor see Abraham doing all this?" Janzen, *Abraham*, 100. From a conservative standpoint, Waltke suspects that, "Moses himself later interpolated alleged D material into his finished composition (e.g., Gen. 26:5)." Bruce K. Waltke, with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 28.

redactors cared for neither coherence nor context.[11] In this article, I will presume a unity to the final form of the text of the Pentateuch and refer to the one responsible for this as the author.

To investigate Genesis 26:5, my method shall be to use lexical/exegetical analysis to examine the language of Genesis 26:5, with a view to answering the question of how it relates to its context. This first section will demonstrate that Genesis 26:5 identifies the ethic performed by Abraham in the *Akedah* episode with the ethic of the Sinai covenant. Subsequently, the second section will discuss how this impacts the way in which we read the Abrahamic narrative and how we relate Abraham to the rest of the Pentateuch.

2. Lexical/Exegetical Study of Genesis 26:5

This section will examine three components of Genesis 26:5, and seek to identify the contribution they make in connecting the figure of Abraham to both the broad and the immediate literary contexts. I have chosen to divide the discussion into three sections, focussing on different components of the verse: firstly the conjunction *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer,* secondly the clause *šāmaʿ ʾaḇrāhām bᵉqōlî,* and thirdly the coordinate clause *wayyišmōr mišmartî miṣwōṯay ḥuqqôṯay wᵉṯôrōṯāy*.

2.1 The Conjunction *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer*

Grammatically, Genesis 26:5 consists of a subordinate clause, introduced by the compound conjunction *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer*. This is an uncommon expression, occurring twice in Genesis and only one other time in the whole canon.[12] It consists of the term *ʿēqeḇ* followed by the common relative pronoun *ʾăšer.*

The unusual term *ʿēqeḇ*, which occurs fifteen times in the canon, can be used adverbially and as a substantive.[13] Its range of meaning in

[11] Whybray's fragmentary proposal would be representative of this: "The author … had at his disposal a mass of material, most of which may have been of quite recent origin and had not necessarily formed part of any ancient Israelite tradition. Following the canons of the historiography of his time, he radically reworked this material, probably with substantial additions of his own invention, making no attempt to produce a smooth narrative free from inconsistencies, contradictions and unevennesses." Norman Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, JSOTSup 53 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 242.

[12] Genesis 22:18, 26:5; 2 Samuel 12:6.

[13] *ʿēqeḇ* is used as a substantive in Psalm 19:12 (Eng. 19:11) and Proverbs 22:4. It is used adverbially in Psalm 119:33, 112, although this is challenged by Allen, who

these cases includes, "the very back, the end," "right to the end," "result, wages."[14] However, we shall focus on its use as a conjunction, operating on the assumption that "syntagmatic combinations play the determinative role" in lexical semantics.[15] These uses of *ʿēqeḇ* as a conjunction occur in several different syntagmatic arrangements. In four instances it stands alone;[16] twice in the Psalter it is preceded by *ʿal*;[17] twice it is followed by *kî*;[18] and thrice it is followed by *ʾăšer*.[19] Following Joüon, I would argue that *ʿēqeḇ* and its compounds introduce explanatory clauses, with "the special nuance *in recompense for the fact that* or in the pejorative sense of *in punishment for the fact that*," and that this nuance is probable in most of these occurrences.[20]

To start with the most ambiguous case, the compound *ʿal-ʿēqeḇ* occurs twice, in Psalm 40:16 (Eng. 40:15) and 70:4 (Eng. 70:3), where its meaning is not entirely clear.[21] Some take it as a causal conjunction, but others construe it as a noun meaning "slander."[22] A retributive reading is

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argues for a substantive use. Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, WBC 21 (Nashville: Nelson, 2002), 178 n. 33a. So also Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, AB 16 (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 163, 167.

[14] *HALOT* 873a.

[15] Moises Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 120.

[16] Numbers 14:24; Deuteronomy 7:12, 8:20; Isaiah 5:23.

[17] Psalm 40:16 (Eng. 40:15), 70:4 (Eng. 70:3).

[18] 2 Samuel 12:10; Amos 4:12.

[19] Genesis 22:18, 26:5; 2 Samuel 12:6.

[20] Joüon §170g. *HALOT* also recognises this nuance, suggesting translations such as "for the reason that," "as wages for." *HALOT* 873a. This notion of recompense is reflected by the Septuagint's common rendering of *ʿēqeḇ* with ἀνθ' ὧν (Genesis 22:18, 26:5; Deuteronomy 8:20; 2 Samuel 12:6,10). Muraoka comments that this expression occurs "introducing a clause the verb of which is in the past and specifies a commendable or (mostly) punishable deed." T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 58a.

[21] LXX in both instances takes *ʿal-ʿēqeb* as an adverb denoting haste, suggesting that the unusual expression led to confusion among readers even in antiquity.

[22] Tate understands this phrase in both cases as meaning that the Psalmist's foes will be confounded "*in consequence of*" the shameful defeat which will fall on them, with a simple causal idea. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Nashville: Nelson, 1990), 203 n. 4b (my Italics). Others prefer a penitential reading, where the foes are appalled *because of* their shameful acts, e.g. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, 168. John Goldingay, *Psalms,* 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 1:577, 2:359–60. However, those who defend this position interpret *ʿēqeḇ* as a noun meaning "slander," (with the causal idea coming from the preposition *ʾal*) thereby ruling it out of our discussion.

not inconceivable, that they are confounded *in return for* their shame(ful deeds), but this is improbable since the context clearly speaks of shame as punishment, rather than perpetration.[23] Given the confusion, the most we can say is that if *'al-'ēqeḇ* is indeed a conjunction, it is causal, but probably not specifically retributive. Either way, the unusual structure of the compound, in which *'ēqeḇ* follows rather than precedes the other preposition, sets this case apart from our other data, limiting its relevance for us.[24]

To consider the uncompounded occurrences of *'ēqeḇ,* it is clear that *'ēqeḇ* introduces causal clauses with the nuance of recompense. For example, in Numbers 14:24, *'ēqeḇ* occurs in the context of Yahweh rewarding Caleb on account of his "different spirit." Similarly, *'ēqeḇ* in Deuteronomy is used to introduce behaviour *in return for which* Yahweh will prosper (7:12) or judge (8:20) Israel.[25] In Isaiah 5:23 it is used in a bribery context, to introduce the reason in return for which wrongful acquittals are granted.[26] It appears the notion of recompense is present in these.

Similarly, the two compounds *'ēqeḇ kî* and *'ēqeḇ 'ăšer* both occur in 2 Samuel 12, where they introduce *reasons for which* retributive punishments must be inflicted. Clearly a retributive causal nuance is intended, because the reasons in question consist of behaviour which is deserving of punishment.[27] That both compounds of *'ēqeḇ* are used in

[23] Notice the language of shame and disgrace as a punishment in Psalm 40:15 (Eng. 40:14), 70:3 (Eng.70:2).

[24] Perhaps we should attribute *'al-'ēqeḇ'*s peculiarity to the poetic diction of the Psalter.

[25] Some translations render *'ēqeḇ* as if it introduced a conditional protasis in Deuteronomy 7:12, so NIV, NRSV. See also Jeffery H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 88. However, this obscures the writer's deployment of *'ēqeḇ* to create an *inclusio* with Deuteronomy 8:20, and these translations tend to recognise inconsistently *'ēqeḇ'*s causal function in 8:20. Other commentators seem comfortable translating 7:12 as "because," to convey the emphatic causal nuance. So Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9,* WBC 6, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 164; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 372; J.G. McConville, *Deuteronomy,* ApOTC (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 148.

[26] Oswalt renders *'ēqeḇ* "for the sake of." John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 163.

[27] See 2 Samuel 12:4–6, 9, 10, 14. The causal idea is heavily reinforced by other causal conjunctions in the context, such as *'al 'ăšer* in 12:6, and *kî* in 12:12, 14. These however need not necessarily carry a retributive nuance. Alter brings out the distinctive retributive flavour of *'ēqeḇ 'ăšer* in contrast to the simple causal idea

the same way in the same passage suggests that there is little distinction between them.[28] Also, *ʿēqeḇ kî* occurs in Amos 4:12, where, despite various issues with the verse, commentators recognise a causal (and perhaps a retributive) nuance.[29]

This brings us to *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer* in Genesis 22:18, which, as part of the preceding context of Genesis 26:5, plays a key role in our investigation. Here, the clause introduced by *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer* is probably modifying not just 22:18a, but all the clauses in 22:17–18a introduced by the asseverative *kî,* in which Yahweh asserts that he will bring about his covenant promises.[30] It is clear that *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer* introduces a causal clause here, because it is paralleled grammatically by *yaʿan ʾăšer* in 22:16, which introduces a causal clause detailing *the reason for which* Yahweh will keep his promises.[31] In other words, the covenant promises (22:17–18a) are bracketed by two explanatory clauses.[32] Furthermore, it seems probable that *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer*

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of *ʿal ʾăšer* in his translation of 12:6: "And the poor man's ewe he shall pay back fourfold, *in as much as* he has done this thing, and because he had no pity!" He translates it in 12:10 with the expression, "seeing you have despised me …" Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: Norton, 1999), 259–60 (my italics).

[28] Joüon lists them together, alongside uncompounded *ʿēqeḇ*, as functionally identical. Joüon §170g.

[29] Smith and Page translate *ʿēqeḇ kî* as "because," taking the clause it introduces to be describing God's coming action of judgment. In this case it would function as a simple causal conjunction, "because I will do this." Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 89. So also Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos,* trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 215a. This reading makes the clause frustratingly redundant, for then no reason for the coming summons to judgment is really being given, apart from the fact that Yahweh is going to do it. On the other hand, Andersen and Freedman suggest that the sense is: "Because [or inasmuch as] I have this done to you: [and because you have not returned to me] prepare to confront your God, O Israel!" Here, the retribution comes because of Israel's refusal to repent (which we have to supply here, although it is mentioned in 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11), despite Yahweh's efforts to prompt this through his actions mentioned throughout the chapter. In this case, the redundancy is removed and a retributive nuance is plausible. See Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 450.

[30] For the asseverative *kî* in 22:17, see Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 116.

[31] For the "causal nuance," of *yaʿan ʾăšer,* see Joüon §170f.

[32] This does not necessarily mean that the conjunctions introduce precisely the same causal idea; if *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer* carries a specific notion of recompense, then we can see this as a refinement or specification of the more general causal idea in Genesis 22:16.

carries this specific notion of recompense here, since, just as in 2 Samuel 12:6, human behaviour is in view, in return for which a divine recompense is predicted.

Therefore, given what we have seen, it is likely that *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer* in Genesis 26:5 introduces a causal clause with the notion of recompense, since in both of the compound's other occurrences (and in some related compounds) this idea is present. Furthermore, Genesis 26:5 fits well with this reading, since the good conduct of Abraham is the reason for the bestowal of blessings, as it is in Genesis 22. We might translate it as "in return for the fact that."

There are two points of intertextual significance which this conjunction illuminates. Firstly, its rareness makes it stand out and draws attention to its only other occurrence in the text of Genesis, at 22:18. This makes the direct allusion unmistakable, and forces the reader to bring to mind Abraham's commendation from the *Akedah* episode. This must be the key context for understanding Genesis 26:5. Therefore, the distinctive conjunction helps us to identify the particular behaviour Abraham is being commended for, and thus implies that his behaviour in Genesis 22 is the referent of Genesis 26:5. If so, this would preclude the efforts of rabbinic and medieval exegesis to identify the commands and decrees as Noahic laws, or special Abrahamic revelation not mentioned in the narrative, or traditions which Abraham received from Enoch, and so on.[33] Abraham is being commended for behaviour found *within the narrative*. Furthermore, the strong allusion to Genesis 22 also means that we do not need to scour the patriarchal narratives searching for echoes of specific Mosaic laws. Sailhamer critiques Kaiser for this approach, while nonetheless committing it in his exegesis of Genesis 14.[34] While he is correct that there are undoubtedly echoes of the warfare laws (Deuteronomy 20) in Genesis 14, this does not necessarily mean that Genesis 14 is the event to

[33] E.g. *Jubilees* 21:5–20. For these understandings as they relate to Genesis 26:5, see Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 66–70. For a broader consideration of Jewish readings of Abraham, see Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 167–269.

[34] For Sailhamer critiquing Kaiser, see Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 67 n. 119. For Kaiser's identification of the Decalogue embedded in the patriarchal narratives, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 82. For Sailhamer on Genesis 14 as the referent of Genesis 26:5, see Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 147–8, 187, 458–9.

which Genesis 26:5 alludes.[35] Whatever 26:5 is referring to is, it must be found specifically in Genesis 22.

Secondly, we must notice that the only other incidences of *'ēqeḇ* as a conjunction in the Pentateuch occur in the *inclusio* of Deuteronomy 7:12–8:20 and in the commendation of Caleb in Numbers 14:24. Therefore assuming a unity to the Pentateuch, all of *'ēqeḇ*'s occurrences outside Genesis occur in relation to the Sinai covenant, and concern the wider theme of who may possess the land of Canaan. Without wishing to make too much of this, it might be possible to argue that *'ēqeb*'s use here is intended to invoke the Deuteronomic offer of life in the land on the condition of covenant obedience. The least we can say is that an anticipation of these themes is possible in Genesis 26:5.

2.2 The Clause *šāma' … bᵉqōlî*

The main clause of Genesis 26:5 consists of a finite verb *šāma'* and its subject *'aḇrāhām,* modified by the prepositional phrase *bᵉqōlî*. This is a common expression in the Hebrew Bible, and deserves examination.

To begin with the verb, *šāma'* is a very common term, occurring over a thousand times in the canon with a variety of different nuances. *HALOT* lists a number of possible shades of meaning for the Qal form, including "to hear," "to listen to," "to hear and accept a request," "to obey," "to understand."[36]

I would argue that *HALOT*'s classifications could be slightly reshuffled, as my analysis has led me to conclude that the "obedience" usage and the "accept a request" usage are actually deployments of the same usage in different contexts. Certainly, when these uses are found, *šāma'* should be translated differently, depending on who is speaking and to whom; it can be rendered "agree" (Genesis 37:27), "listen to," (30:22), "obey," (28:7), "do what I say," (27:13) "I have heard you," (17:20; all NIV). However, what these examples have in common is the notion

[35] I would not question the fact that in many ways Abraham's behaviour anticipates Israel's future (Genesis 12:10, 17–20; 14:13–24; 22:2; 23:19). This is highly significant, for it suggests continuity between the patriarch and his descendants. Nor would I question the fact that the patriarchal narratives have a holistic ethical agenda, that as we read we are to "build up a catalogue of the virtues as they are perceived by the author, an identikit picture of the righteous." Gordon Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading The Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 100. Nonetheless, strictly speaking, Genesis 26:5 demands to be read with 22:18 as its referent. I will nuance this by discussing how the *Akedah* relates to the overarching Abrahamic ethic later in this discussion.

[36] *HALOT* 1571a-1572b.

of implicit compliance with the speech of the speaker. It is simpler to assume that *šāmaʿ* in this usage merely implies listening with compliance, and that it does not imply anything about the power dynamic between the speakers. This allows context to determine whether "heeding," "agreeing," or "obeying," etc. is the best translation.[37]

It is this "implicit compliance" usage of *šāmaʿ* which I would argue is found in Genesis 26:5. It is clear from the subsequent clause "*wayyišmōr mišmartî* etc." that Abraham's compliance with Yahweh's instruction is in view, therefore his "listening," is unlikely to consist merely of hearing Yahweh's voice. What's more, the context is that of an authoritarian power relationship, since Yahweh, whose voice created the world, is addressing his human covenant partner. The subsequent terms, "charge," "commandments," etc. imply Yahweh's authority over Abraham. Therefore, the notion of obedience is present here, and we would be justified translating *šāmaʿ* as "obeyed."

This "obedience" usage of *šāmaʿ* can occur with a variety of syntactical arrangements, including the preposition *bᵉ*.[38] Grammatically this *bᵉ* is to be understood as a "*bet* of transitivity," indicating the object of the verb.[39] While this combination of *šāmaʿ* and *bᵉ* does not denote obedience in every context, it is frequently used to express obedience, often in conjunction with the noun *qôl*.[40] The chief exegetical question for 26:5 concerns the nature of this obedience, and the key to ascertaining this is identifying the referent of the noun *qôl*.

To answer this, the surrounding context provides important evidence. Firstly, we may observe that when this phrase occurs elsewhere in Genesis, *qôl* can be used to refer to a specific request or instruction.[41] Secondly, we note once again that Genesis 22:18 is being directly alluded to, for the same constellation of *šāmaʿ* + *bᵉ* + *qôl* + a pronominal suffix occurs, prefixed by the conjunction *ʿēqeḇ ʾăšer*, and spoken by Yahweh about

[37] To look within the text of Genesis, *šāmaʿ* is used for God's heeding of human prayers (Genesis 30:6) and for Abraham and his Canaanite peers appealing to each other in negotiations (23:6, 8, 11, 13, 15,16), neither of which implies an authoritarian power relationship. As a translation, "heed," or "comply," is preferable in these contexts to "obey."

[38] *HALOT* gives examples with the accusative direct object, with the prepositions *bᵉ*, *lᵉ*, *ʿal* and *ʾel*, and in an absolute construction. *HALOT*, 1572a.

[39] Joüon §125m.

[40] See below, especially n. 48.

[41] Genesis 21:12; 22:18; 27:8, 13, 43; 30:6. This observation is also true for the two instances of *šāmaʿ* with *qôl* plus the *lᵉ* preposition in Genesis, a construction which appears to be indistinguishable in meaning from our phrase (Genesis 3:17; 16:2).

Abraham.[42] Therefore, whatever *qôl* refers to in Genesis 22:18 is likely to be the referent of *qôl* in 26:5.

The obvious candidate for this is the specific command to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22:2. It is Abraham's specific act of not withholding his only son for which Yahweh commends him in 22:12 and 16, so this must be the obedience spoken of in 22:18. Once again, we must notice how this rules out the rabbinic reading strategies which identify Abraham's obedience elsewhere. It is in obeying the command to kill Isaac that Abraham obeys the voice of Yahweh.

However, this point can be expanded upon. While Abraham's obedience is certainly no less than the sacrifice of Isaac, it may be more extensive. Instead of spotting Torah echoes in Genesis 14, a more persuasive way of arguing for pervasive Abrahamic obedience is to observe the narrative function of Genesis 22. Literary approaches to Genesis have made a strong case for the unity of the Abrahamic narrative around a broad chiastic structure, of which Genesis 12 is the commencement and 22 is the climax.[43] There are numerous linguistic connections between the two passages, and, significantly, both contain promises and commands from Yahweh and obedience from Abraham.[44] Indeed, dramatic obedience

[42] Wenham refers to this as a "clear quotation of Gen 22:16–18." Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 190. See also Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50,* 194; Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26,* TNAC 1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 405; Moberly, "Commentary on the Akedah," 322.

[43] Cassuto: "The last trial corresponds to the first. (*Go from your country* etc.; and *go to the land of Moriah* etc.; in the former passage there is a command to leave his father, in the latter a bid farewell to his son; in both episodes the blessings and promises are similar in content and phrasing)." Cassuto, *Genesis: Part II*, 296. Sarna: "Fittingly, it [Genesis 22] is the last occasion on which God speaks to Abraham, so rounding out the cycle of divine communications that began back in Haran." Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 160. For this structure, see also Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 89–90; George W. Coats, *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 97–98; Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis*, 28–29; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 262–3.

[44] Rendsburg lists fifteen sets of connections between the two. He concludes: "It is abundantly clear that the two stories are related. Numerous parallel themes and theme-words serve to connect them, alerting the reader to the literary texture of the Abraham cycle. The redactor utilized these two episodes in the patriarch's life to mark the beginning and the end of his religious journey." Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis*, 31–33.

is surely the point being emphasised in Genesis 12:4.[45] It is therefore natural to read Genesis 22 as the climax and culmination of Abraham's longstanding obedience to Yahweh. If we were to construct an Abrahamic ethic based on the data in chapters 12–25, the obedience of Abraham in these two episodes would be crucial.[46] It is possible that their positioning is an attempt to suggest a unity to not only the narrative's plot, but also to its ethic.[47] Therefore, it is probable that the obedience to Yahweh which Genesis 26:5 denotes is that obedience which reaches its climactic expression in the *Akedah*, but which has its beginning in Genesis 12.

Having established what *šāma' … bᵉqōlî* denotes, we may also consider what it connotes. When *bᵉ* occurs in the canon with the noun *qôl* and a Qal form of the verb *šāma'*, the nuance of compliance is present 97 times out of 99;[48] within these 97, there are 68 instances where obedience to Yahweh's voice (or that of his representatives) is in view.[49] Of these

[45] "'As the Lord told him,' emphasizes Abram's obedience." Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* 278. "It is clear that Abram is presented to the reader as a paragon of faith and obedience." Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 376.

[46] See 3.1 below for a discussion of this.

[47] For a more fractured reading of the cycle's ethic, which sees the different faith and obedience elements as pertaining to different Abrahamic covenants, see T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 48–61.

[48] The two instances of the phrase without the compliance nuance are: 2 Samuel 19:36 (Eng. 19:35); Psalm 95:7. In the former case, the verb cannot imply compliance, since the noun *qôl* is denoting the sound of music. In Psalm 95:7, it is possible that the verb implies compliance, if the clause beginning with *'im* is understood as an asseverative clause, so Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150,* trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 245. However, a case can also be made for a taking the clause as conditional, which would not fit with the notion of compliance, so LXX; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3:95.

[49] The 29 instances of the phrase which do not concern obedience to Yahweh are: Genesis 21:12, 27:8, 27:13, 27:43, 30:6; Exodus 18:19; Numbers 21:3; Deuteronomy 1:45, 21:18, 21:20; Joshua 10:4; Judges 13:9, 20:13; 1 Samuel 8:7, 8:9, 8:22, 12:1, 15:24, 19:6, 25:35, 28:21, 28:22; 2 Samuel 12:18, 13:14; 1 Kings 17:22; Jeremiah 35:8; Zephaniah 3:2; Psalm 130:2; Proverbs 5:13. The remaining 68 instances of the phrase with the nuance of compliance relating to Yahweh and his representatives are: Genesis 22:18, 26:5; Exodus 4:1, 5:2, 19:5, 23:21, 23:22; Numbers 14:22; Deuteronomy 4:30, 8:20, 9:23, 13:5 (Eng. 13:4), 13:19 (Eng. 13:18), 15:5, 26:14, 26:17, 27:10, 28:1, 28:2, 28:15, 28:45, 28:62, 30:2, 30:8, 30:10, 30:20; Joshua 5:6, 22:2, 24:24; Judges 2:2, 6:10; 1 Samuel 8:19, 12:14, 12:15, 15:19, 15:20, 15:22, 28:18; 1 Kings 20:36; 2 Kings 18:12; Isaiah 50:10; Jeremiah 3:13, 3:25, 7:23, 7:28, 9:12 (Eng. 9:13), 11:4, 11:7, 18:10, 22:21, 26:13,

68, there are 37 instances in total where the obedience in question is specifically obedience to part (or all) of the Sinai covenant.[50] There are a further 11 instances where the obedience in view is *related to* the Sinai covenant.[51] This means that, across the canon, when this expression is used in connection with obedience to Yahweh and his spokespeople, Sinai connotations are present 48 times out of 68, which amounts to 70%.

Naturally, we ought to be a little reluctant to foist statistical analyses upon literature. Nonetheless, generally speaking, we can say that when this phrase is used in relation to obeying Yahweh, most of the time it refers to obedience to Sinaitic covenantal revelation. This suggests that Sinai connotations may be present in Genesis 26:5.

The phrase's prominence, as well as its frequency, may also be considered. It is significant that this expression occurs prominently in key parts of the Pentateuch which deal with the Sinai covenant.[52] What's more, the phrase is used frequently with Sinai connotations in Jeremiah, where obedience/disobedience appears to be a key motif in Jeremiah's covenant prosecution of Israel.[53] In Daniel's prayer concerning the exile, it is precisely this phrase which the writer employs to encapsulate the whole sweep of Israel's covenant infidelity.[54] In other words, the Sinai covenant is summarised elsewhere in the canon precisely in terms of obedience to the voice of Yahweh. This increases the plausibility of a Sinai allusion in Genesis 26:5.[55]

32:23, 38:20, 40:3, 42:6 (a), 42:6 (b), 42:13, 42:21, 43:4, 43:7, 44:23; Haggai 1:12; Zechariah 6:15; 103:20, 106:25; Daniel 9:10, 9:11, 9:14.

[50] These 37 instances relating to Sinai are: Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 4:30, 8:20, 13:5 (Eng. 13:4), 13:19 (Eng. 13:18), 15:5, 26:14, 26:17, 27:10, 28:1, 28:2, 28:15, 28:45, 28:62, 30:2, 30:8, 30:10, 30:20; Joshua 24:24; Judges 2:2, 6:10; 1 Samuel 12:14, 12:15; 2 Kings 18:12; Jeremiah 3:13, 3:25, 7:23, 7:28, 9:12 (Eng. 9:13), 11:4, 11:7, 26:13, 32:23, 44:23; Daniel 9:10, 9:11, 9:14.

[51] These 11 instances are: unspecified obedience to the angel of Yahweh (Exodus 23:21, 23:22); obedience to Yahweh's command to enter the land (Numbers 14:22, Deuteronomy 9:23, Joshua 5:6, Psalm 106:25, which relate to Numbers 13:2); obedience to Yahweh's command to annihilate the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:19, 15:20, 15:22, 28:18, which relate to 1 Samuel 15:3 and Deuteronomy 20:17); unspecified obedience to the covenant prosecution of the prophets (Jeremiah 22:21).

[52] Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 13:5, 26:14, 26:17, 27:10, 28:1–2, 30:20.

[53] Jeremiah 3:13, 3:25, 7:23, 7:28, 9:12 (Eng. 9:13), 11:4, 11:7, 26:13, 32:23, 44:23.

[54] Daniel 9:10–14.

[55] It is interesting that, *šāma'* with *qôl* plus the *l*^{e} preposition is also used on three occasions to denote the Sinai covenant (Exodus 15:26; Judges 2:20; Psalm 81:12), and on one further occasion to refer to a command related to the Sinai covenant (1 Samuel 15:1).

In sum, the phrase *šāmaʿ … bᵉqōlî* in Genesis 26:5 refers back in the narrative to Abraham's climactic obedience in Genesis 22, while simultaneously alluding forwards to the language of the Sinai covenant, where obedience to the voice of Yahweh is prominent.

2.3 The Clause Introduced by *wayyišmōr*

The second clause in Genesis 26:5 consists of the *wayyiqtōl* form of the verb *šāmar,* with four direct objects, *mišmartî, miṣwōṯay, ḥuqqôṯay wᵉṯôrōṯāy* (all nouns with pronominal suffixes).

Lexically, all but one of these terms is straightforward to define. The Qal of *šāmar,* when used with this vocabulary as its objects, means "to keep" in the sense of "to perform a duty,… observe an order, stick to an agreement, keep an appointment."[56] "Commandment" is the standard gloss of *miṣwâ;*[57] "Statute" is that of *ḥuqqâ;*[58] "Direction/instruction" is that of *tôrâ*.[59] It must be noted that none of these nouns have occurred previously in the narrative of Genesis, making it unlikely that they are alluding to any specific antecedent(s) in the way in which *šāmaʿ … bᵉqōlî* does.[60]

The meaning of *mišmereṯ* is slightly more ambiguous. *HALOT* suggests "obligation" for Genesis 26:5, although it can also mean "what is to be held in trust,… guard,… service, duty" in both secular and religious senses.[61] Analysis of its use reveals that a religious/cultic responsibility is a common meaning of the word.[62] Therefore it could be translated "charge"

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[56] *HALOT* 1583b.

[57] *HALOT* 622b.

[58] *HALOT* 347a.

[59] *HALOT* 1710b. On the meaning of *tôrâ*, see Martin J. Selman, "Law," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 499a.

[60] "Early Rabbinical approaches attempted by word associations to identify each of the terms used here with a specific act of obedience by Abraham within the patriarchal narratives.… [T]his approach did not gain wide acceptance, however, because, apart from a remote link to circumcision, none of the terms in 26:5 could be associated with events or actions from the life of Abraham within the biblical narratives." Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 67.

[61] *HALOT* 649b-650a.

[62] *Mišmereṯ* is used in cultic contexts 48 times: Leviticus 8:35, 22:9; Numbers 1:53, 3:25, 3:28, 3:31, 3:32, 3:36, 3:38 (a), 4:27, 4:28, 4:31, 4:32, 8:26 (a), 8:26 (b), 18:3 (b), 18:4, 18:5 (a), 18:5 (b), 18:8, 19:9, 31;30, 31:47; Ezekiel 40:45, 40:46, 44:8 (a), 44:8 (b), 44:14, 44:15, 44:16, 48:11; Nehemiah 12:9, 12:45 (a), 12:45 (b), 13:30; 1 Chronicles 9:27, 23:32 (a), 23:32 (b), 23:32 (c), 25:8, 26:12; 2 Chronicles 7:6, 8:14, 13:11, 23:6, 31:16, 31:17, 35:2.

(ESV) in the sense of "priestly responsibility," and taken as referring to Abraham's previous priestly behaviour in building altars, as some might argue.[63] However, this is a rather literalistic reading, and unless we are also willing to identify literal *miṣwôṯ* and so on embedded in the preceding narrative, it should be regarded with suspicion.

An alternative meaning of *mišmereṯ* is "obligation," in the sense of an ethical responsibility.[64] This use is much rarer, but where it does occur, *mišmereṯ* is used to denote an ethical responsibility to be observed. When used in the singular, it can denote a holistic collection of regulations.[65] This could explain why *mišmereṯ* is the only noun to occur in the singular in Genesis 26:5. To demonstrate the plausibility of this reading, we must consider the connotations of the rest of the vocabulary in the verse.

I would argue that the connotations of the vocabulary in Genesis 26:5 are overwhelmingly Sinaitic.[66] To demonstrate this, various arguments could be deployed, of which I will articulate two. Firstly, analysis of the other three nouns elsewhere in the canon (in both singular and plural forms) demonstrates that, in the majority of cases, they are used to refer to Sinai covenant commandments, in whole or in part.[67] This fact alone does

[63] For Abraham understood as an Adamic priest given custody of the sanctuary of the promised land, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 235; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's plan for life on earth* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 83.

[64] *HALOT* 650a. I would argue that there are five clear instances of this ethical use: Leviticus 18:30; Numbers 9:19, 19:23; Joshua 22:3; 1 Kings 2:3. Three additional unclear cases are: Deuteronomy 11:1 (in the plural); Zechariah 3:7; Malachi 3:14. Block argues that, in its plural occurrence in Deuteronomy 11:1, *mišmereṯ* "refers to obligations and instructions in a general sense." Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 275. In Zechariah and Malachi, it is unclear whether the charges in question are cultic or ethical observances.

[65] There are two clear collective singular instances of *mišmereṯ* used in this way: Leviticus 18:30; 1 Kings 2:3.

[66] It has been traditional for commentators to label these connotations Deuteronomic, though Wenham argues that the terminology has more in common with Numbers and Leviticus. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 190. My position is that we do not have to choose between these, and that "Sinaitic" is the best rubric with which to label the vocabulary, as long as we are dealing with the final form of the Pentateuch. Source-critical approaches might wish to be more specific, depending on their models of what the source documents of the Pentateuch were. For a discussion of the unity of the covenant from Exodus to Deuteronomy, and the ways in which "Deuteronomy … fuses Sinai and Moab together," see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 377–383.

[67] By my analysis (the working of which is too lengthy to reproduce in full), *miṣwâ* has Sinai referents 139 times out of 181 (77%); *ḥuqqâ* has Sinai referents 84 times

not guarantee a Sinai connotation, but it greatly increases the probability of one. The second line of argument in my view makes the Sinai connection unmistakable, and that is consideration of what I have termed the "cluster texts." These are texts elsewhere in the canon in which three or more of the terms we find here in 26:5 recur, in a cluster. My analysis has yielded eighteen cluster texts in which three terms occur, five texts in which four terms occur, and two texts in which five terms occur.[68]

Almost without exception, in these cluster texts the commandments in view are those of the Sinai covenant.[69] This is especially apparent when we consider those clusters with the highest incidences of key terms, which therefore bear the closest resemblance to Genesis 26:5. Deuteronomy 30:5 (five terms) looks ahead to Israel's future obedience to the Sinai covenant. First Kings 2:3 (five terms) is David's exhortation to Solomon to observe his covenant obligations "as it is written in the law of Moses." Deuteronomy 11:1 (four terms) is a summary of the covenant ethic.[70] Deuteronomy 28 (two clusters of four terms) contains the covenant blessings and curses. Second Kings 17 (two clusters of three terms and one of four) is an explanation for the exile of Israel in terms of their

out of 105 (80%); *tôrâ* has Sinai referents 178 times out of 215 (83%). Of course these figures depend on the methodological criteria one adopts to determine what counts as a Sinai referent. For my approach, I chose to recognise a Sinai referent where there was contextual evidence that a noun was denoting part or all of the Sinai covenant commandments, or a restatement or reapplication of them (such as 1 Samuel 15:1–3, applying Deuteronomy 25:17–19). Despite there being some textual uncertainty about Deuteronomy 5:10, 7:9, and 8:2, I chose to include these verses in my analysis and count them as Sinai referents. However, I chose not to count as Sinaitic the occurrences of the nouns in Exodus chapters 12–18, since strictly speaking this section precedes Sinai. While we may debate these (and other) details, I am confident that, overall, other analyses of the data will arrive at more or less the same conclusion as mine.

[68] The texts in which five terms occur are: Deuteronomy 30:10; 1 Kings 2:3. The texts in which four terms occur are: Deuteronomy 11:1, 28:15, 28:45; Joshua 22:5; 2 Kings 17:3. The texts in which three terms occur are: Exodus 16:28; Deuteronomy 6:2, 8:11, 10:13, 26:17, 30:16; Joshua 22:3; 1 Kings 6:12, 9:6, 11:34, 11:38; 2 Kings 17:34, 17:37, 23:3; Jeremiah 44:23, Psalm 89:31–32 (Eng. 30–31); Nehemiah 9:14; 1 Chronicles 29:19.

[69] A case could be made that Exodus 16:28 is proto-Sinaitic, even though it occurs before Sinai in the narrative of Exodus (see note 66 above).

[70] This is the verse which most commentators mention for its similarity to Genesis 26:5. See Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50*, 194; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36,* 425; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26,* 405; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), 153; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 190.

covenant disobedience. In sum, the verses elsewhere (in the Pentateuch *and* the canon) which most resemble Genesis 26:5 are unmistakably to do with Sinai.

Since the two clear instances of *mišmereṯ* used in an ethical collective sense in the singular are cluster texts which concern the commands of the Sinai covenant, it is highly probable that this meaning of *mišmereṯ* is intended in Genesis 26:5.[71] The term is being used in the singular to mean a unit of ethical responsibilities, and to connote that great obvious unit of ethical responsibilities which it denotes elsewhere, the Sinai covenant.

The intertextual implications of this clause are significant. The occurrence of this vocabulary in Sinaitic cluster texts deters us from seeking literal referents for these nouns in the minutiae of the previous narrative. Instead, we are to see this collocation of terms as a literary strategy to evoke the ethic of the Sinai covenant, and to figuratively equate this ethic with the formal referent of the verse, namely Abraham's obedience in Genesis 22. The writer is not claiming that Abraham literally kept divine commandments and statutes; such commandments have been conspicuously absent from the narrative. Rather, the writer is claiming that Abraham's literal obedience to Yahweh's voice is, figuratively speaking, *the same thing* as what the Sinai covenant required of the Israelites.[72]

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the language of Genesis 26:5 forms intertextual connections both backwards and forwards in the narrative of the Pentateuch. Genesis 26:5 identifies the ethic of Abraham (climactically performed in the *Akedah* episode) with the ethic of the Sinai covenant.

3: The Intertextual Significance of Genesis 26:5

Having identified the rhetorical strategy of Genesis 26:5, we are now in a position to discuss its significance. The fact that this verse equates

[71] Leviticus 18:30; 1 Kings 2:3.

[72] This is recognised by commentators: "[Genesis 26:5] gives the impression that Abraham did more than obey the occasional commandments of God. Rather, it seems he followed the way of life laid out in detail on Mount Sinai." R.R. Reno, *Genesis* (London: SCM, 2010), 223. "By employing covenant terminology, the author depicts the complete obedience of Abraham as the ideal for Israel in the land who must observe the provisions of the Sinai covenant." Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 405. "Genesis 26:5 is inviting Israelites to see in Abraham a prototypical covenant keeper." Deryck Sheriffs, *The Friendship of the Lord: An Old Testament Spirituality* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 48.

Abraham's obedience with that of the Sinai covenant has implications both for how we understand the Abrahamic narrative and for how we relate it to the rest of the Pentateuch.

3.1 The Abrahamic Narrative

Firstly, we must consider how the commendation of Genesis 26:5 shapes the way we read Genesis 12–25. What we have seen is that the verse's referent is the *obedience of Abraham* seen in Genesis 22, which forms the chiastic climax of the narrative cycle. This is what Abraham is especially commended for.

At the very least, this should cause us to reconsider what the overall ethic of the Abraham cycle is. Following Wenham, I take it that Genesis is "trying to teach ethics as well as theology," because it gives such extensive portrayals of human behaviour.[73] The great shock for Christian exegetes, however, is that Abraham's life is summarised by the author in terms of his obedience to Yahweh, *not* in terms of his faith.[74]

Christian readings of the Abraham cycle often conclude that faith is the centrepiece of the Abrahamic ethic. This is of course derived from Paul's description of Abraham as "the man of faith" (Galatians 3:9) and the emphasis on faith in New Testament readings of the narrative.[75] Consequently, Christian theologians have often expounded the entire Abraham cycle as if faith were the main ethical point.[76]

This tendency is surely guilty of reductionism. As we have seen, it is the *obedience* of Abraham which is explicitly commended in Genesis 26:5, an obedience which is foregrounded in chapters 12 and 22.[77] What's

[73] Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 2.

[74] The author of Genesis summarises Abraham's life on two occasions after his death, in 26:5 and 48:15, and neither of them mentions faith. The latter summary commends him for "walking before God," a phrase with echoes of Enoch and Noah which is discussed in detail by Sheriffs, *Friendship*, 30–45.

[75] Galatians 3:6–29; Romans 4:1–25; Hebrews 11:8–19.

[76] For example: "Abraham's character can be summed up in one word: faith.… [T]hroughout the Abraham narrative faith is the key aspect of the patriarch's character to which the writer repeatedly draws our attention." P.R. Williamson, "Abraham," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 11b. "Abraham's life in particular focuses on his wavering faith.… [T]he lives of Abraham and the other patriarchs illustrate for the reader the life of faith." Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester, Apollos, 1995), 54. In the context of these quotations, there is barely any acknowledgement of other ethical dimensions.

[77] Hartley recognises this subtlety, commenting that Genesis 12 and 22 are "two amazing examples of Abraham's complete obedience to God." John E. Hartley,

more, if we search the narrative for ethical material, we find that faith is mentioned explicitly only once (Genesis 15:6). We also find that other ethical aspects are present, including obedience (Genesis 12:4; 15:9–10; 17:23; 22:18), blamelessness (17:1), walking before Yahweh (17:1, 24:40, 48:15), hospitality (18:2–5), the fear of God (20:11; 22:12), teaching/walking in the way of Yahweh (18:19), performing justice and righteousness (18:19), covenantal and familial *ḥeseḏ* (14:13–14, 24), generosity (13:8–9), calling on the name of Yahweh (12:8, 13:4), and intercessory prayer (18:23–33; 20:17). In other words, there is a whole host of ethical material in the Abrahamic narrative, which is simply not done justice to if it is collapsed into faith.

Of course, I am not suggesting that faith is marginal or irrelevant in the Abraham narrative. It is surely implicit in the key episodes of obedience (12:4–5; 22:3–8) and elsewhere.[78] Faith is certainly one aspect of the Abrahamic ethic, but it is misguided to make faith the central or the only aspect. As Levenson says:

> Abraham may have been the knight of faith that Kirkegaard, like most Christian and Jewish thinkers, have seen in him. But texts like Genesis 22:1–19 and Genesis 26:5 stress another side of the Patriarch – Abraham as the knight of observance, rigorously keeping his divine master's charge.[79]

Rather than simply taking "faith" as the overarching ethical implication, we must do justice to all the ethical material in the text. There is work to be done in piecing together a more holistic Abrahamic ethic, which accounts for all the data.[80] "Faith" on its own will not do, and even "obedience and faith" leaves material unaccounted for.[81] I speculate that the metaphors of "walking before/in the way of the Lord" could provide an equally viable candidate, not only because of their occurrences in Genesis, but also because Abraham's obedience in 12 and 22 is literally

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Genesis, NIBC (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 8.

[78] Williamson, "Abraham," 11b.

[79] John D. Levenson, The *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1993), 141.

[80] As I have suggested, the chiastic structure of the cycle suggests an ethical unity to the narrative (see 2.2 above).

[81] "Obedience and faith" is the suggestion of Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 80.

expressed through *walking*.[82] This could be significant, though it is beyond the bounds of this article to explore this.

The point is that the Abrahamic narrative is more complex and substantial than the summary of "faith" on its own will allow. Commendation of faith in Yahweh's covenant promises may be part of the author's didactic intent, but it certainly does not exhaust it.[83] The implication is that our expositions and accounts of the Abrahamic material must avoid oversimplification, or we will risk missing some of what the author intends to communicate.

3.2 The Sinai Covenant and Abraham

Secondly, we must consider how Genesis 26:5 positions Abraham in relation to the rest of the Pentateuch. As we have discussed, the language of the verse seeks to equate the ethic of Abraham with that of the Sinai covenant, and therefore draws a line of continuity between the two.

This point does not sit well with certain Christian biblical-theological frameworks, which draw a clear distinction between the two ethics in question. John Sailhamer would be representative of this: "The purpose of the Pentateuch is not to teach a life of obedience to the law given to Moses at Sinai, but to be a narrative admonition to be like Abraham, who … fulfilled the law through a life of faith.… The Pentateuch lays out two fundamentally dissimilar ways of 'walking with God.'"[84]

This position has its theological ancestry in Luther's hermeneutic, which divides all of scripture into law and gospel.[85] While there are many ways in which one might recognise "an irony," "an internal conflict," or a "tension between law and grace," in the Pentateuch, Sailhamer's

[82] Genesis 13:17, 17:1, 18:19, 24:40, 48:15.

[83] For this reason I am not challenging the validity of Paul's "faith" exposition of Genesis 15–17 in Romans 4, which may be regarded as a legitimate reaction against a "tendency to subordinate the divine promise to Abraham's piety" in Jewish readings (Watson, *Hermeneutics of Faith*, 268). Besides, Romans 4 is not an attempted commentary on the whole Abraham cycle. It is against holistic accounts of the cycle that the criticism applies.

[84] Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch,* 14.

[85] "Here we must point out that the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises." Martin Luther, *Freedom of a Christian: Luther Study Edition*, trans. and introduced by Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 57. "God's word is always encountered as law and gospel, never in any absolute form beyond law and gospel." Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 191.

approach is particularly stark.[86] He pits Abraham against Moses, and reads the Abrahamic material as an undermining of the injunctions of the Sinai corpus.

Sailhamer interprets Genesis 26:5 as follows. He recognises the Sinai connotations, but sees this allusion as an attempt to subvert the Sinai ethic by recasting it as a faith ethic: "In effect, the author says, 'Be like Abraham. Live a life of faith, and it can be said that you are keeping the Law.'"[87] Notice here that Sailhamer speaks of two antithetical ethics, one of faith and one of law-keeping.[88] In his reading, Genesis 26:5 is an attempt to pour the substance of the former into the rhetoric of the latter.

My analysis of Genesis 26:5 raises some problems for this approach. Firstly, Sailhamer's position is built upon the assumption that the Abrahamic ethic consists of faith. As I have argued, this "knight of faith" reading is an inadequate summary of the ethical content of Genesis 12–25; it is simply not what Abraham is explicitly commended for. Sailhamer arrives at his position by reading Genesis 26:5 as a commendation of the implicit faith, rather than the explicit obedience, of Genesis 22, but his privileging of the implicit over the explicit is exegetically problematic. On top of this, the context of the verse shows that the commendation of Abraham is mentioned "in order that Isaac [and therefore the implied reader] may be stimulated to an imitation of his example."[89] This is exactly what Isaac does in the immediate context by obeying Yahweh's command to sojourn in Gerar (Genesis 26:3- 6); he is imitating Abraham by obedience. The idea that Abraham's example is being *pitted against obedience to Yahweh* makes no sense.

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[86] See J. Gordon McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 133; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2013), 146 (paraphrasing Francis Watson); Gary Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 63.

[87] Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 71.

[88] He would say this faith ethic is present in parts of Deuteronomy, such as 30:6. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 187.

[89] John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 2:61. If the implied reader is an Israelite under the Sinai covenant, we might think it unsurprising that the text would commend obedience to this covenant, but this is precisely what Sailhamer disputes. He does not see the Pentateuch's narrative strategy as promoting Sinai covenant piety. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 13-14.

Instead, I have argued that the language of Genesis 26:5 draws a line of continuity between the obedience of Abraham and the Sinai covenant. The intent of the author is not to show how Abraham differs from Sinai, but to show how he resembles Sinai, and so to exhort the reader to comparable obedience. This should lead us to consider alternatives to Sailhamer's model of the Pentateuch's theology.

One such alternative is the position of Daniel Block. In terms of biblical theology, Block argues for "the essential theological and ethical unity of the Testaments," and is critical of the Lutheran law-gospel distinction: [90]

> We are all grateful to Martin Luther for having discovered the gospel of salvation by grace alone.… [H]owever, we are less pleased with the wedge he drove between Old Testament faith and New Testament faith with his law-gospel contrast.[91]

Instead, he calls on theologians "to begin focusing on the continuities between Old and New: Israel's faith and Christian faith."[92] He argues that Deuteronomy "proclaims gospel" and that the Sinai ethic is actually "'the obedience of faith' … [which] is common to Old and New Testaments."[93] In line with this, when considering the Pentateuch, he emphasises unity, arguing that "though some draw sharp lines of distinction between the Abrahamic covenant and the covenant made with Israel at Sinai, Deuteronomy perceives these to be organically related and united."[94]

It must be said that this "unity" model makes good sense of Genesis 26:5. Abraham's ethic is equated with Sinai because they are theologically continuous. Block himself makes this connection: "[Abraham] offers an early example of a man of faith for whom the Torah is written on his heart."[95] If this equation is made, it would also explain why many

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[90] Block, "Preaching Old Testament Law," 23.

[91] Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel According To Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), 297.

[92] Block, *Gospel According to Moses*, 298.

[93] Block, *Gospel According to Moses,* xii. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Law," 21.

[94] Block, *Gospel According to Moses*, 16.

[95] Daniel I. Block, *Old Testament Theology Lecture Notes. BITH 638* (Wheaton: Wheaton Graduate School, Fall Semester 2007), 213. I am grateful to Dr Chris Ansberry for supplying me with this resource.

facets of the Abrahamic ethical material which I have highlighted recur throughout the Sinai material.[96]

Whether we fully embrace Block's position or not, Genesis 26:5 inclines us towards some sort of "ethical unity" model. We can specify the sort of unity we mean by several comments.

Firstly, the unity does not appear to pertain to the specific commandments given to Abraham and Israel; Abraham was given no food laws, and the Israelites were not sent to Moriah to sacrifice their children. We should therefore avoid a simplistic accumulative model of Pentateuchal ethics. Our account of unity must allow for an understanding of progressive revelation. One ethical disjunction between Abraham and Sinai is the issue of holiness, which goes unmentioned in the Abrahamic narrative, perhaps because Yahweh dwells with Israel in the Tabernacle in a way in which he does not dwell with Abraham. Secondly, though, there are some points of identical ethical correspondence; Abraham and Israel were to show the same attitude of obedience to the voice of Yahweh, for instance.

Thirdly, we must interpret the ethical equation of Genesis 26:5 within the Adamic context of Genesis. Abraham and Israel's obedience to Yahweh's voice is surely an outworking of their vocation to be a new humanity, in contrast to Adam, who disobeyed Yahweh's voice.[97] It is not simply that Abraham performs a certain ethic which then happens to form the core of the Sinai ethic. Both are expressions of their vocation to be Yahweh's new humanity, "an obedient son in the covenant relationship."[98] Therefore we must understand the ethical unity with respect to the Adamic creation paradigm.

3.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, we are describing an ethic which is unified in its attitudinal core, is anchored in creation, and yet varies in its instantiations across time due to the progressive nature of revelation. I hope to have shown that this is a viable and attractive approach to understanding the ethics of the Pentateuch. More work remains to be done in developing this

[96] For instance, blamelessness recurs in Deuteronomy 18:13, the fear of Yahweh in 10:12, walking in Yahweh's ways in 11:22, teaching children in 6:1–7, faith (by implication) in 32:51, hospitality in 10:19, etc. More work could be done in mapping these connections thoroughly.

[97] For Abraham and his family as a "last Adam," see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 224–228.

[98] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 294.

and constructing a holistic account of the Pentateuch's ethics. However, Genesis 26:5 lays crucial piece of the groundwork, because it shows that strong discontinuity models, which see Abraham as being at odds with Sinai, are inadequate.

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