

## 4 A Literary and Discourse Analysis of Genesis 14

Any study of Melchizedek should begin with Genesis 14. The reason is simple. Among the three biblical references, Genesis 14, Psalm 110 and Hebrews 5-7, the one and only *historical* appearance of Melchizedek in the Bible is found in Genesis 14. Based on this historical account, Psalm 110<sup>130</sup> and Hebrews 5-7 apparently further explore the significance of the Melchizedek text in Genesis 14. Therefore any investigation of Psalm 110 or Hebrews 5-7 should be viewed within the framework of how one reads Genesis 14.<sup>131</sup>

The two methodologies delineated in the last two chapters, that is, discourse analysis and rhetorical criticism, will be applied to Genesis 14. More specifically, the rhetorical function of Genesis 14:18-20 within the chapter holds our interest; next we will look at the discourse role and function of Genesis 14:18-20 in the thematic development within Genesis.<sup>132</sup> This thematic development is carried out by the use of certain key words to be examined under the scrutiny of our two methodologies. Therefore, the structure of this chapter will neatly divide into two segments: the rhetorical and discourse analysis of Genesis 14.

### 4.1 Rhetorical Criticism of Genesis 14

In chapter two, we set forth three steps to guide us into the rhetorical criticism of Genesis 14. The first task at hand is to determine the rhetorical unit;<sup>133</sup> second, we will examine the arrangement through various devices, and third, we will investigate the stylistic use of words with an eye to their theological emphasis. With that plan in mind, we now commence.

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**130** Here we encounter the issue of dating two biblical texts, Genesis 14 and Psalm 110; we have already touched on this subject in chapter 3. We assume instead to prove that Genesis 14 is the priority text that the writer of Psalm 110 read and interpreted. This is the position we take when these two texts are studied together.

**131** J. W. Bowker remarks that "whether that understanding of the Psalm is correct depends to a great extent on the place and meaning of Gen. xiv 18-20, the only other passage in the O.T. where Melchizedek is mentioned." Bowker, "Psalm CX," *VT* 17 (1967): 36; quoted in Raymond Tournay, *Voir et Entendre Dieu avec Les Psaumes*, Cahiers de La Revue Biblique 24 (Paris: Gabalda, 1988), 166.

**132** In our next two chapters, we will then investigate the literary-thematic role of the Melchizedek episode in relation to its cotexts: first within the Pentateuch, especially Numbers 22-24 and second in the Historical Books, particularly 2 Samuel 7. This examination will shed light on how a later biblical writer (of Psalm 110) read Genesis 14 and its cotext when constructing his own composition.

**133** See Shaw, *Speeches of Micah*, 23-24. He places textual criticism before translation as a necessary part of the work determining the rhetorical unit. (His methodological basis is derived from Fox, "Ezekiel's Vision" and Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*.) Nonetheless, we will only selectively discuss certain significant textual variants in this project.

#### 4.1.1 Rhetorical Criticism: Determine the Rhetorical Unit

Determining whether Genesis 14 is a rhetorical unit should be relatively simple except for one segment of text in Genesis 14, namely, vv. 18-20. This small unit contained in Genesis 14 has received critical attention, for nearly all commentators regard the Melchizedek episode as a later insertion.<sup>134</sup> The consensus of opinion is nearly unanimous for a late insertion of the Melchizedek episode, a reaction that demands our response and is presented in our appendix 2. Though it is inconclusive to argue that this episode is not an insertion (or the other way around), for our present purposes, we intend to read Genesis 14 as one rhetorical unit.

The prominence of several practical clues allow us to detect the beginning and ending of a rhetorical unit: a word or phrase that appears at the beginning and repeats at the end of a unit, the development of a theme or plot, or evidence from content, grammar, and structural devices.<sup>135</sup> Grammatically, the special use of **וְיְהִי בְּנֵי**<sup>136</sup> in 14:1 serves as a mark to sever Genesis 14 from the previous chapter, and the use of **הַאֲלָהָאֶחָר הַדְּבָרִים** in 15:1 marks off this chapter from chapter 14.<sup>137</sup> In terms of subject matter, Genesis 14 noticeably differs from chapter 13 and 15. In the chapter is an account of international warfare occurring in the vicinity where Abraham<sup>138</sup> resided.<sup>139</sup> In this incident, four kings battled against five other kings;<sup>140</sup> in the course of the battle, Lot was captured, prompting Abraham to rescue his nephew. Near the end of the account, Abraham encountered the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. Furthermore, the

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<sup>134</sup> For example, see Gammie, "The Melchizedek Tradition," 385. Gammie begins his article with this statement: "There is virtually unanimous opinion among scholars that vss. 18-20 were not originally of a piece with the rest of Genesis 14." Compare Alastair G. Hunter, "Genesis: The Evidence," in *Creating the Old Testament: The Emergency of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Stephen Bigger (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989, reprint, 1994), 100-101.

<sup>135</sup> See Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 9-12. Isaac Kikawada, "Some Proposals for the Definition of Rhetorical Criticism," *Sem* 5 (1977): 70; cf. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 33-34.

<sup>136</sup> The LXX interprets this phrase as "ἐγένετο δέ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ." See Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC, vol. 1 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 303 (note 1a).

<sup>137</sup> The phrase **הַאֲלָהָאֶחָר הַדְּבָרִים** is not necessarily a disjunctive mark. Plot-wise, its function is to sum up the last chapter and move to a new though not totally unrelated subject. See the phrase used in Gen 22:1, 39:7, 40:1, 1 Kgs 17:17, 21:1, and Esth 2:1, 3:1.

<sup>138</sup> Throughout this project, we will use the rendering Abraham (and Sarah), though we recognize that Abram (and Sarai) precede Abraham (and Sarah) in the biblical text.

<sup>139</sup> For a visual aid of the geographical locations of the warfare and from whence the kings came, see Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 114; Barry Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 82-83 and Denis M. Bétoudji, *El, le Dieu Suprême et le Dieu des Patriarches (Genesis 14, 18-20)*, Religionswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien 1 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1986), 231.

<sup>140</sup> The historicity of the battle in Genesis 14 has recently been defended by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through The Jewish Wars* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 58-62.

subject matter in this chapter is reinforced by the special use of the word מלך. The word מלך first occurs in the OT in Genesis 14, and has multiple entries.<sup>141</sup> Suffice it to say, Genesis 14 is a rhetorical unit.

#### 4.1.2 Rhetorical Criticism: An Examination of the Arrangement of Genesis 14

Literary-structural devices such as word play, chiasm, inclusion, keywords, motifs, and symmetry are examined in this portion of the analysis.<sup>142</sup> Once we have detected the unit's arrangement, we will be able to examine its persuasive effectiveness. As our study will show, the key thrust of this unit is centered in vv. 18-20.

The rhetorical arrangement of Genesis 14 can be seen exhibited in figure 1:

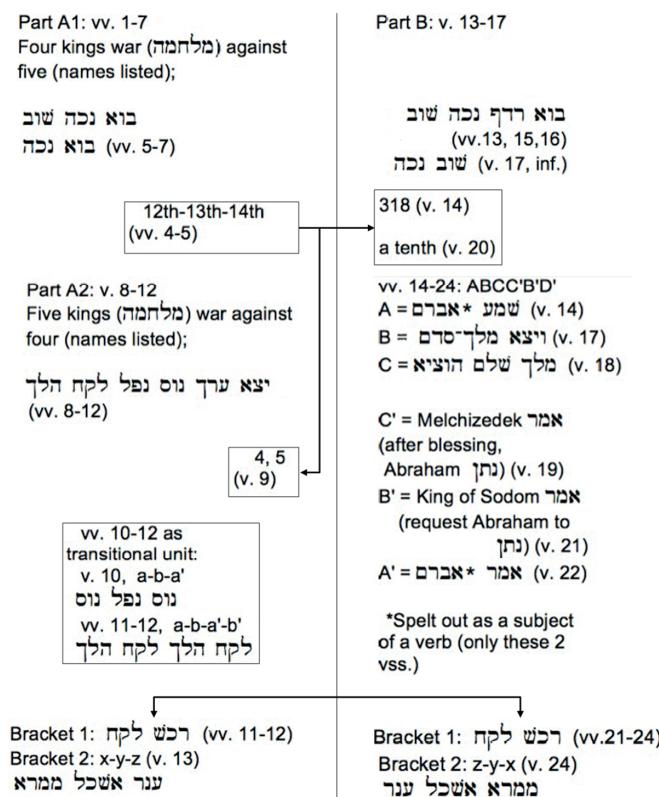


Figure 1. Diagrammatic Analysis of the Literary Structure of Genesis 14

<sup>141</sup> Gen 14:1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 17, 18, 21, and 22. The notion of kingship is a significant contribution to the overall theme of Genesis, the Pentateuch and the entire OT, upon which we intend to elaborate later in the project. Note also in Hebrews 1 and 7 how this kingly motif is stated (see chapter 10 and 11 of this project).

<sup>142</sup> Compare Lenchak, *Rhetorical-Critical Investigation*, 173.

The above figure basically serves as a visual aid summarizing the MT layout of Genesis 14<sup>143</sup> provided in appendix 3. Please refer to both as we narrate our observations.

First, the author of Genesis clearly intends to divide this chapter into two parts: Part A, vv. 1-12 and Part B, vv. 14-24, with verse 13 functioning as a content link<sup>144</sup> between the two segments. Part A is clearly marked off by the presence of **וַיַּחַי בִּימֵי** (v. 1) and **אַבְרָהָם** (v. 13) who relates to **מִרְאָה אַשְׁכָּל נָגָר** (we label them as x-y-z elements). Meanwhile, Part B begins with **אַבְרָהָם** (v. 14) and ends with **נָגָר אַשְׁכָּל מִרְאָה** (now they become z-y-x). The term, **אַבְרָהָם** (and his friends, **מִרְאָה אַשְׁכָּל נָגָר**), serves as disjunction (marking off Part A and B) as well as conjunction (connecting both together plot-wise). Notice also how each of these two parts ends with another lexical bracket signified by words **לְקַח** and **רָכַשׁ** (vv. 11-12, cf. vv. 21-24).

Second, we have mentioned how the first (as well as multiple) appearance of **מֶלֶךְ** in the OT occurs in Genesis 14. The MT layout (appendix 3) enhances the significance by the use of this term that culminates in the appearance of Melchizedek as the "king" of Salem.<sup>145</sup> The author of Genesis also employs the term to divide Part A into two sections: vv. 1-7 (A1) and 8-13 (A2); each begins with a string of **מֶלֶךְ**. In the second string of **מֶלֶךְ** (vv. 8-9), the names of the five kings were omitted while the order of the names of the four kings was slightly rearranged: from Amraphel-Arioch-Kedorlamer-Tidal to Kedorlamer-Tidal-Amraphel-Arioch.<sup>146</sup> Worthy of mention is the use of the phrase **הַמֶּלֶךְ** (vv. 8-9) (עַמְקָה שָׁוָה) in v. 17 prior to the appearance of the king of Salem. This phrase rhetorically contrasts with another phrase **עַמְקָה חַשְׁדִּים** (used throughout the early part of the chapter; vv. 3, 8, 10). While the latter signifies warfare (vv. 3, 8) and disaster (v. 10), the former (the King's Vale, **עַמְקָה המֶלֶךְ**) highlights Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek who blessed him after the war.

**143** Cf. Francis I. Andersen, "Genesis 14: An Enigma," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. David Wright, David N. Freedman and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 507-508. He designed an English version layout for Genesis 14; admittedly, our layout is the product of independent study, which was later modified upon reviewing Andersen's impressive work.

**144** The result of the kings' battle led to a report made to Abraham (v. 13), who then mounted a counter offensive to rescue his relative Lot (v. 14). In v. 13, Abraham is the object to whom the word/verb "report" refers while in v. 14, he becomes the subject of the verb "hear."

**145** Although the King of Sodom appears in the final scene of this chapter, his role is to serve as part of a literary device that brings out the magnanimity of Abraham. See Yochanan Muffs, "Abraham the Noble Warrior: Patriarchal Politics and Laws of War in Ancient Israel," *JJS* 33 (1982): 81 (note 1).

**146** Sailhamer argues that such rearrangement is a deliberate literary device by the author of Genesis to connect Genesis 14 to the previous chapters (10, 11). Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *EBC*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 121-22; cf. his *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 145-46.

Third, related to the above, the word מלחתה (vv. 2, 8), when sandwiched in by מלך,<sup>147</sup> serves a rhetorical purpose. The word is sandwiched in by a four-fold repetition of מלך, followed by a five-fold occurrence of the same word (vv. 1-2); then five-fold is followed by four-fold (vv. 8-9, see appendix 3). The author intends to clearly portray how when these kings – including the king of Sodom – came out (אֹיֵ, v. 8), they did nothing but war. This point is further reinforced by the use of אֹיֵ with the king of Sodom (v. 17), who could be suspected of warring with Abraham when coming out from his hiding place. Thus, for the purpose of the king of Salem's meeting with Abraham, the author of Genesis utilizes the nine kings, especially the kings of Sodom, as a device to create a significant if not dramatic contrast. The king of Salem does not come to wage war but to bless.<sup>148</sup>

Fourth, the use of numbers is quite noticeable in Genesis 14.<sup>149</sup> In Part A, the use of ordinal numbers, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> in vv. 4-5 is followed by cardinal numbers, e.g., 4 and 5, in v. 9. In Part B this is balanced by the use of the cardinal number "318"<sup>150</sup> and then a fractional number, "a tenth," in vv. 14, 20. The last number, "a tenth," is significant not only for biblical interpretation, but also for Jewish and Christian practice (tithe and offering).<sup>151</sup>

Fifth, Genesis 14 is a story filled with motion or action, an effect achieved by the author's use of a series of verbs. A string of verbs (String A) is repeated in each part of Genesis 14: In Part A1, we have נִכְחָה, בָּא, שָׁב, בָּא, נִכְחָה (the top box; vv. 5, 7), balanced by (String B) הַלְּכָה, לִקְחָה, נִפְלָא, עָרָךְ, צִאָה (the bottom box; vv. 8, 10-12). Another similar string of verbs (String C) follows in Part B: נִכְחָה, שָׁב, שָׁב, נִכְחָה, רָדָךְ, רָדָךְ (vv. 13-17).<sup>152</sup> String A describes the unstoppable conquest of the four kings; string B describes the failed counter-attack of the five kings spearheaded by the King of Sodom; thus the four kings pillaged, captured Lot, and walked off with plundered spoil. As in figure 1, the chiastic structure of these two sets of verbs is remarkable: בָּא, נִכְחָה, נִכְחָה, בָּא (v. 10, a-b-a') and הַלְּכָה, לִקְחָה, לִקְחָה, הַלְּכָה (vv. 11-12, a-b-b'-a').<sup>153</sup> While the king of Sodom fled and fell (then

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Hunter, "Genesis: The Evidence," 109: the word "king" appears 26 times; it should be 27 times excluding the one in Melchizedek.

<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, the warfare waged by these kings happens to be noticed by the writer of Psalm 110, an observation we will elaborate upon in chapter 7 (cf. chapter 9) of this project.

<sup>149</sup> Andersen notices partially number usage in Genesis 14. See his "Genesis 14," 506.

<sup>150</sup> See G R Driver, "Playing on Words," in *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Papers*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish studies, 1967), 126-67.

<sup>151</sup> The term תְּנִשְׁאָה first appears in Gen 14:20. See the discussion of this term in Gen 14:20 in Richard E. Averbeck, "תְּנִשְׁאָה" in *NIDOTTE*, 2:1037-38. For a broader view of tithe, see J. Christian Wilson, "Tithe," in *ABD* 6: 578-80. In Gen 14:20, it is not clear who was giving a tenth to whom, but we will clarify this via discourse analysis in appendix 4. The notion of tithe is noticed by the author of Hebrews in Heb 7:1-10 (vv. 2, 4-7, 9). See chapters 10 and 11 of this project.

<sup>152</sup> We have omitted words like נִרְאָה and נִמְלָא (vv. 13, 14) in this analysis since they do not pertain to the motion or action of warfare. Cf. Hunter, "Genesis: The Evidence," 109-110. He divides 'smite', 'give' and 'take' from the motion verbs; go, return, come out, array, flee, fall, pursue. if the single quotes indicate mention rather than use, then perhaps all mentioned verbs should be in single quotes.

<sup>153</sup> Note also the chiastic structure of בָּאָה in vv. 16, 17 (see appendix 3, two Hiph. followed by an inf.)

later emerged after the four kings were defeated by Abraham), the rest (הנִשְׁאָרִים) also fled so that one escapee could come and report to Abraham. The second occurrence of נִקְלָה and נִלְלָה stresses the capture of Lot for whom Abraham later mounted a rescue.<sup>154</sup> String C describes almost a reversal process of the war and its result by a series of actions carried out by Abraham: compare String A and C as follows (line 1 for the four kings and line 2 for Abraham):

line 1: בָּאָה came, נִכָּה struck, שׂוֹב turned

line 2: רָדָה pursued, נִכָּה struck, שׂוֹב (Hiph.) brought back

After Abraham regained all the captured possessions and rescued Lot, the stage was set for the climactic scene, that is, the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek. In that meeting, Melchizedek frames the actions of Abraham (which ultimately led to his victory over the kings) into a divine perspective; his victorious action is a blessing from God (Gen 14:20).

The final observation is crucial because it concerns the climactic scene of this chapter: the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek. This climactic scene, which is also the thrust of the whole narrative, is constructed within a chiastic structure. We build on what Wenham has observed, namely, that there is a chiastic structure in the final verses of Genesis 14.<sup>155</sup>

We see, however, a larger structure as ABCC'B'A' as follows:

A טָמֵן אֶבְרָם (vv. [13], 14-16)

B יְיָ אֱלֹהִים (v. 17)

C מלְךָ שָׁלֹם הוֹצִיא (v. 18)

C' אָמַר (מִלְכִירְצָךְ) (v. 19, with his blessing, v. 20).

Then Abraham gave [גַּם] him tithe after this.)

B' אָמַר מלְךָ שָׁלֹם (He asked Abraham to give [גַּם] him back his people, v. 21)

A' אָמַר אֶבְרָם (v. 22-24)

<sup>154</sup> Some commentators, for example, Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 198-99, view this (a-b-b'-a') as clumsiness, a patchwork, a redactional seam joining together two independent units. Such commentary fails to account for the techniques of narrative and/or rhetoric and for the discourse perspective of a story. Those sensitive to the nature of biblical narrative see these verses differently. For example, Nahum M. Waldman calls it "poetic flavor." Waldman, "Genesis 14 – Meaning and Structure," *Dor le Dor* 16 (1988): 261. Cf. Sailhamer, "Genesis," 125 (notes for vv. 11-12).

<sup>155</sup> This is what Wenham proposes in his commentary:

v. 17 King of Sodom comes A

v. 18 Melchizedek King of Salem B

brings out bread and wine

vv. 19-20 Melchizedek speaks B<sup>1</sup>

v. 21 King of Sodom speaks A<sup>1</sup>

vv. 22-24 Abram replies

See Idem, *Genesis 1-15*, 315. Note that vv. 22-24 is not in his chiastic structure. Cf. Waldman, "Genesis 14," 261-62, on extended chiastic for vv. 19-22. Also, Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, NAC, vol. 1B (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 149 on his chiastic structure for vv. 19-20.

Indubitably, this concentric chiastic structure makes a rhetorical impact on Genesis 14,<sup>156</sup> and often produces a sense of convergence that the following remarks help solicit.

First, we start with the outer elements of the concentric structure. In AA', note that the name Abraham (אַבְרָהָם) is spelled out as a subject of two verbs (וַיֹּאמֶר, וַיַּשְׁמַע) only in these 2 verses (14, 21).<sup>157</sup> In addition, the inclusio or bracketing effect, signified by the presence of עָשָׂה, וְיָמָר, and מִמְרָא (though slightly rearranged), unmistakably calls for A and A' to be read together. Moreover, in A, Abraham performed a series of action from v. 14 through v. 17 after he heard (שָׁמַע) the report. In A', following the introductory "and Abraham said" (וַיֹּאמֶר in v. 22), the content of what Abraham said fills the remainder of the chapter, that is, from v. 22 through v. 24.

Second, we move to the inner elements of the chiastic structure where the king of Sodom came out and later (following the interruption caused by the sudden appearance of the king of Salem) pleaded for what he wanted (in BB'); counter-posed in CC', the king of Salem (Melchizedek) brought out provisions to refresh a worn-out warrior, Abraham, and later blessed him. It is in CC' that the key rhetorical thrust converges: the significance of Melchizedek and his blessing bestowed on Abraham, the main character in the narrative of Genesis 12-22.<sup>158</sup>

To summarize, the rhetorical effect on the present literary arrangement of Genesis 14 concerns not so much the war between two groups of kings but it concerns how Abraham was blessed by a kingly priest (מלך and מלך), Melchizedek. Unlike the rest of the kings, Melchizedek, the king of Salem, came to bless (ברך) not to wage war. Melchizedek also views Abraham's victorious campaign as a result of God's blessing;

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**156** Other scholars have noted a concentric structure of Genesis 14. See Joseph Doré, "La rencontre Abraham-Melchisédech et le problème de l'unité littéraire de Genèse 14," in *De la Tôrah au Messie*, eds. Maurice Carrez, Joseph Doré and Pierre Grelot (Paris: Desclée, 1981), 90. His argument collaborates with E. Galbiati, "L'Episodio di Melchisedech nella struttura del C. 14 della Genesi," in *Miscellanea Carlo Figini* (Venegonon, n. p., 1964), 3-10; quoted by Doré, "La rencontre Abraham-Melchisédech," 95. However, Doré sees Genesis 14 as having two concentric structures: vv. 1-9 with vv. 4-7 as center and vv. 13-24 with vv. 18-20 as center (vv. 10-12 as natural transition or addition to both structures). The literary role of the king of Sodom is elevated in Doré's analysis. Cf. Muffs, "the Noble Warrior," with a more moderate view of the literary role of the king of Sodom. We disagree with such an elevated role given to the king of Sodom (see note 28). Furthermore, our analysis would only allow one centric element, i.e., vv. 18-20 with vv. 1-13 serving as a background. See J. A. Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis XIV," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 76-77, for his critique of Doré's work.

**157** בָּבָשׂ appears seven times in Genesis 14: vv. 12, 13 (2x), 19, 21, 22, 23. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 102; he points out the "seven" times of the appearance of "Abraham" and the "seven" words in each of Melchizedek's two blessings.

**158** The blessing pronounced by Melchizedek is not merely an isolated incident but links back to Genesis 12. A syntagmatic study of the word מלך later in this chapter (in "discourse analysis" section) will confirm what we say here.

God gave (בָּרוּךְ) him the victory (Gen 14:20). Furthermore, Abraham himself is the object of divine blessing (Gen 14:19) even in a war-filled situation.

Several Hebrew words in the last paragraphs are spelled out, and are deemed key words in the composition of Genesis 14, worthy of further analysis in the next section.

#### 4.1.3 Rhetorical Criticism: Stylistic Use of Several Keywords

In the above section, the use of diction in the composition and structure of Genesis 14 made a rhetorical impact on the meaning of the chapter. Now we will concentrate on the stylistic use of words in vv. 18-20, organizing our study into three treatments of the respective Hebrew words: בָּרוּךְ, מַנְנָה, and כְּהֻן.

First, the use of the keyword בָּרוּךְ<sup>159</sup> and the poetic lines led by it serve to make a theological thrust and convey a message. It has been established that poetic lines are theologically significant when found in the body of narrative.<sup>160</sup> Scholars have long maintained that when a poem or psalm occurs in a large block of narrative material, its literary function plays a “thematically climactic and structurally crucial” role in a composition.<sup>161</sup> The poetic lines of vv. 19-20 embedded in this chapter of prose reinforce what we have argued earlier; namely, the Melchizedek episode is the thematic climax of this chapter based not only on the chiastic structure analyzed earlier through rhetorical study, but also based on the poetic function within a narrative.

Furthermore, the keyword בָּרוּךְ (three times) only appears in the Melchizedek episode in Genesis 14; therefore, we should note the dual rhetorical effect produced by the use of the term (בָּרוּךְ) itself *and* by the term as a leading element in the poetic lines. Briggs classifies the poetic lines in vv. 19b-20a as a tetrasstich, forming two progressive couplets.<sup>162</sup> The first בָּרוּךְ is used to describe Abraham being blessed by

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<sup>159</sup> For a systematic study of this Hebrew word, see Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK “to Bless” in the Old Testament*, SBLDS 95 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1987). His book examines the etymology of בָּרוּךְ, the history of the interpretation of this word, God blessing man, man blessing man, and the use of בָּרוּךְ in the praise of God. According to Mitchell, the meaning of בָּרוּךְ can be summarized as follows. First, for God blessing man, it is based on a favorable relationship between God and the person blessed. It can be construed two-ways; God promised to bless but the ones (e.g., Israel) being blessed needed to keep God’s standard. Second, for a man to bless a man, no magical power is invoked but God is asked to get involved in the blessing. Third, when בָּרוּךְ is used as “praise” to God, it serves as man’s natural response to God’s benefaction.

<sup>160</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 205.

<sup>161</sup> James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative*, JSOTSup 139 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 11.

<sup>162</sup> Charles A. Briggs, *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1899), 391. See Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 72: Alter translates the lines as “Blessed be Abram to El Elyon possessor of heaven and earth and blessed be El Elyon who delivered your foes into your hand.”

God<sup>163</sup> and the second one is used to praise God.<sup>164</sup> The net rhetorical effect at the climax of this story is that not one of the kings is singled out and blessed; rather, it is Abraham alone who is blessed by a kingly priest Melchizedek.

Besides the poetic nature, vv. 19b-20a is the first dialogue (speech) in the entire chapter, and it is worth mentioning that dialogue in biblical narrative often serves a theological purpose. It is “atypical of early Hebrew narrative in that there is no dialog until the Melchizedek episode.”<sup>165</sup> In this dialogue “we have an interpretative theological remark to the effect that God gave Abram the victory.”<sup>166</sup>

Second, we turn to the deliberate choice of the key word **פָּraise** (v. 20), which creates a compositional and rhetorical effect in Genesis 14. The word is embedded in “praise” (**בָּרָךְ**) to God. It is a peculiar term<sup>167</sup> that occurs a scant three times in the entire OT: Prov 4:9, Hos 11:8 and here. In the first two references, it is used to parallel the word **נָצָר**, a word frequently employed to describe God who gives victory to Israel over her enemy in battle.<sup>168</sup> The author of Genesis 14 deliberately chooses the word **פָּraise** for two reasons: (1) It serves as a semantic connection between Genesis 14 and 15. The word **נָצָר** (15:1) shares the same root with **פָּraise** in 14:20,<sup>169</sup> indicating that Yahweh, who gave victory to Abraham, was also a shield to him. (2) The word choice rhetorically heightens and links back to the indisputable fact that the victory Abraham experienced in vv. 14-16 should be attributed to God, who deserves **בָּרָךְ**. Thus, the particular key word choice balances the exalted imagery of Abraham as a noble warrior<sup>170</sup> with the credit rendered solely to God who delivers (**פָּraise**) the enemy to Abraham.

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**163** At the risk of being redundant, it is important to our thesis that the first use of **בָּרָךְ** is meant to provide a thematic-semantic link back to Gen 12:1-3, the foundational passage of the Abraham cycle that Abraham will be blessed and be a blessing to others. See our syntagmatic study of **בָּרָךְ** in “discourse analysis” later in this chapter. For the structure of this phrase . . . **בָּרָךְ אֶבְרָם**, see a study by Josef Scharbet, “Gesegnet sei Abram von Höchsten Gott?” zu Gen 14,19 und ähnlichen Stellen im Alten Testament,” in *Text, Methode und Grammatik: Wolfgang Richter zum 65. Geturstag*, ed. Walter Gross, Hubert Irsigler and Theodor Seidl (St. Ottilien, Germany: Eos, 1991), 387-401.

**164** There is a notion that Melchizedek’s priesthood was taken away and given to Abraham because Melchizedek blessed Abraham first instead of blessing God first. See “Melchizedek,” in *EncJud* 11: 1289.

**165** Andersen, “Genesis 14,” 506.

**166** Ibid.

**167** See a detailed discussion of **פָּraise** by Michael A. Grisanti, “**פָּraise**” in *NIDOTTE* 2: 844-85. Cf. *HALOT* 2: 545. See the Janus parallelism in this word in Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, JSOTSup 223 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 13.

**168** Cf. Deut 20:13 and Sailhamer, *Pentateuch*, 148.

**169** Cf. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 412 and Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 317.

**170** Cf. Muffs, “The Noble Warrior.”

Third, the first but rare occurrence of **נָזָר** in Genesis<sup>171</sup> highlights the uniqueness of the priesthood of Melchizedek. The word, in collaboration with **נָזָר**, is used in v. 18 to describe precisely who Melchizedek was. Later in the Pentateuch, we find that **נָזָר** occurs repeatedly in Exodus-Deuteronomy<sup>172</sup> when the Israelites' priesthood was being instituted according to God's commands to Moses and developed under Moses' leadership.<sup>173</sup> Its usage in the Pentateuch (except Gen 14:18-20), however, does not associate with the notion that a king could also be a priest.<sup>174</sup> Long before the Israelite priesthood was set up, another kind of priesthood, a royal one, was already in place in biblical history.<sup>175</sup>

A summary of all the data obtained through rhetorical study is due here. Genesis 14 is a unique chapter, carefully written as a unit. The author skillfully employs both structural arrangement and certain key words to bring out his rhetorical-theological message. Thus far our study evidences that the rhetorical thrust is in vv. 18-20, and it is in this compact poetic unit that a unique person, Melchizedek – a king who is also a priest – blessed the main character Abraham. Abraham is cast among other royal figures (kings, especially the king of Sodom); thus by use of contrast, Abraham is the *only* one who obtains divine favor.

As stated at the onset, we have divided this chapter into two segments. First, we have looked at the rhetorical effect of the structural arrangement, and highlighted key words that affect Chapter 14's rhetorical-theological message. Next, we turn to the second part of our treatment, that is, the discourse analysis of Chapter 14.

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**171** The other appearances of **נָזָר** in Genesis are in 41:45, 50, 46:20, 47:22, 26. The first three references refer to the same person, Potiphera, priest of On, while the last two references refer to "priests" of Egypt. See also Philip Jensen, "נָזָר," in *NIDOTTE*, 2: 600-605.

**172** Compared to a meager handful of times in Genesis, **נָזָר** occurs over 200 times in Exodus-Deuteronomy, based on statistics gleaned from BibleWorks for Windows Version 9.0, Norfolk, VA., 2011.

**173** It is not uncommon in the ANE for the union of king and priest to be bound in one person. See Aelred Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, AnBib 35 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), chap. 4, for the debate on the ANE's influence on the Israelites' priesthood. Cf. Eugene H. Merrill, "Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif," *BSac* 150 (1993): 57-58. For the debate on class structure within the Israelites' priesthood, see Risto Nurmela, *The Levites: Their Emergence as a Second-Class Priesthood*, SFSHJ 193 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1998). Note that Nurmela's book contains no reference to Gen 14:18 in the discussion.

**174** Statistically, the words **נָזָר** and **נָזָר** (both without article) never exist in the same verse except in Gen 14:18, Amos 7:10, and Lam 2:6 in the OT, based on statistics gleaned from BibleWorks for Windows and *NCB*. Scholars often point to a separation between the offices of king and priest in the history of Israel; this separation is dissimilar to her ANE neighbors despite an abundance of interactions between Israel's kings and priests in biblical data. Importantly, none of Israel's kings claimed to be a priest. See *TDOT* 7: 73.

**175** In chapters ten and eleven, we will argue that the author of Hebrews compared and contrasted the Levitical priesthood with Melchizedek's because he read Genesis 14 as well as its contexts (the Pentateuch as a whole).

In the following section, we will look at several key words through syntagmatic discourse analysis and extract the meaning and function of each key word at various discourse segments in Genesis.

## 4.2 Discourse Analysis of Genesis 14

Now we will apply a discourse analysis to Gen 14:18-20, paying particular attention to the syntagmatic dimensions of key words. (For details regarding the syntagmatic dimension of a word, see chapter three.) Several key terms, repeated in vv. 18-20, lend themselves to a progressive (syntagmatic) thematic development in the discourse of Genesis 14. As a result, the following analysis will focus on (1) מלך, (2) שלם, (3) יצא, (4) ברך, and (5) אל עליון.

### 4.2.1 Discourse Analysis: A Syntagmatic Study of the Keyword מלך

We have examined the term מלך in the rhetorical criticism section. We have noted its first appearance and its frequency rate in Genesis 14, observing not only how it creates a rhetorical effect, but how it also provides a structural frame for that chapter. In the OT, the recurrence of this word מלך,<sup>176</sup> prohibits us from doing a detailed syntagmatic study. Nevertheless, a syntagmatic albeit limited study of מלך in Genesis provides valuable insights delineated as follows.

First, God promised a kingly posterity to Abraham as מלך is used syntagmatically in the narrative of Genesis. The next occasion appears after Genesis 14 is in 17:6, 16 where the Lord promised Abraham and Sarah that "kings" would come from them. This is a similar promise to the one given by God to Jacob in Gen 35:11:<sup>177</sup>

Gen 17:6	וְהִבְרִית אֲתָךְ בְּמֹאךְ מָאךְ נָתָתִיךְ לְנוּם וּמְלָכִים מִמְּךְ יִצְאָה:
Gen 17:16	וּבְרִכְתִּי אֶתְּךָ וְגַם בְּרִכְתִּי מִפְנֵה לְךָ בֵּן
	וּבְרִכְתִּי וְהִזְמִיחַ לְנוּם מֶלֶךְ עָפָר מִמְּךְ וְהִזְמִיחַ
Gen 35:11	וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֶלְעָזֶר אָנֹי אֶל שְׁנִי פָּרָה וְרַבָּה נָוִי וּקְהַל נָוִים וְהִזְמִיחַ מֶלֶךְ וּמְלָכִים מִתְּחִלָּיו יִצְאָה:

<sup>176</sup> See discussions on מלך in *TDOT* 8: 346-75 and Philip Nel, "מלך," in *NIDOTTE*, 2: 956-65. It should be noted that the word group of מלך is the fourth most frequently occurring noun in the OT after יהוָה, אלֹהִים, and בָּן. See *TDOT*, 8: 354. According to *NCB*, the noun form of מלך occurs 2518 times in Hebrew and 180 times in Aramaic.

<sup>177</sup> Other than Genesis 14, the rest of its appearances in Genesis refer to foreign kings (i.e. Abimelech or Pharaoh) except 36:31 and 49:20.

Syntagmatically, מלך (in plural) is used with a familiar word נָא in Gen 17:6, indicating that from Abraham kings will come. Then in 17:16, מלך (plural again) is embedded in the same promise reiterated to Abraham's wife Sarah.<sup>178</sup> It is in construct with the word עָמִים, denoting that the rule of the kings from the union of Abraham and Sarah has wider implication in terms of geographical area and population. In Gen 35:11, מלך appears again in conjunction with נָא and with מלך צָרִים.<sup>179</sup> The use of the last word is significant. Only three times does this word מלך צָרִים occur in this exact form מלך צָרִים: Gen 35:11, 1 Kgs 8:19 and 2 Chr 6:9 (parallel text to 1 Kgs 8:19). In the last two passages, King Solomon used it as a reference to himself, namely that God had promised David a son "from his loins" who would build the temple.<sup>180</sup>

Second, when the word מלך in Genesis 14 is used syntagmatically with other proper nouns and geographical locations,<sup>181</sup> it ultimately portrays the importance of one king, Melchizedek. For example, in this phrase (v. 2) בֶּרֶע מֶלֶךְ סְדָם, the word מלך depicts the geographical location (Sodom) where Bera ruled. It is not unusual when the phrase appears in v. 18, except that it becomes part of a proper noun (מלך-zedek). In the narrative discourse of Genesis 14, Melchizedek was the "tenth" king to appear on the scene.<sup>182</sup> Although the author did not explicitly say so,<sup>183</sup> the appearance of Melchizedek as the tenth king may indicate a discourse-literary device commonly used by Hebrew writers.<sup>184</sup> Thus, this contributes to the significance of the word מלך used syntagmatically with the proper name "Melchizedek," which also contains the word מלך. In other words, the king of Salem, Melchizedek, is put in a distinctive rhetorical position in the construct of this discourse.

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<sup>178</sup> Changing נָא to מלך is significant in light of this loyal addendum since the latter denotes the meaning of a "princess." See Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 476.

<sup>179</sup> The exact same form מלך צָרִים (with ז) appears only in 1 Kgs 8:19, 2 Chr 6:9, and here. (Its other occurrences – similar but not the exact same form – are found in Isa 5:27, 11:5, 32:11, Jer 30:6, Job 31:20, 38:3, 40:7). See Hamilton, "מלך," in *NIDOTTE*, 2: 159-60. Hamilton cites the three references in his first paragraph but fails to delineate their significance.

<sup>180</sup> The key to whether or not Solomon is the one predicted in Nathan's oracle in 2 Samuel 7 is this word מלך. We will explore the subject further in our study of 2 Samuel 7 in chapter six.

<sup>181</sup> Hunter, "Genesis: The Evidence," 109. He confers this kingly title to Abraham. In our opinion, he misses the point.

<sup>182</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 399.

<sup>183</sup> The readers are reminded of the number of kings by this phrase אַרְבָּעָה מֶלֶךְים אֶת-הַקָּמָנִים in v. 9.

<sup>184</sup> See P. P. Jensen, "נָשָׁׁה," in *NIDOTTE*, 3: 553. Jensen discusses the number ten as one of the literary structuring principles, an obvious example being the ten plagues in Exodus 7-11.

#### 4.2.2 Discourse Analysis: A Syntagmatic Study of the Keyword **סֵלֶם**

The word **סֵלֶם** has stimulated an ample amount of discussion,<sup>185</sup> and it might be a natural reaction to debate its identity. To ask if Salem is Jerusalem seems a fair question. Basically there are two camps: those who oppose equating Salem with Jerusalem can be classified into three groups: some emend the text; others identify it with some other locations; others flatly oppose the historicity of the story.<sup>186</sup> Those who equate Salem with Jerusalem substantiate their argument based on a Scriptural reference. The word (**סֵלֶם**) only occurs twice<sup>187</sup> in the OT: Ps 76:3[2]<sup>188</sup> and here. The parallel of Zion to Salem drawn in Ps 76:3[2] has become the main argument for its identification.<sup>189</sup>

From a discourse perspective, the word **סֵלֶם**, however, serves at least three literary-thematic functions. First, with the lexeme **מִצְרָיִם** (embedded in the proper name Melchizedek), a word play is possible to link this chapter to Genesis 15<sup>190</sup> where Yahweh declared Abraham to be righteous (**מִצְרָאֵת**, v. 6) and promised the patriarch that he would die in peace (**סֵלֶם בָּקָר**, v. 15). This declaration of assurance was given to the same Abraham who on an earlier occasion was blessed by Melchizedek. Second, the root **סֵלֶם** (as a city's name) connects with the word **סֵלֶם**<sup>191</sup> and this type of association creates a literary reciprocal effect for a perceptive reader of these two chapters.

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<sup>185</sup> See HALOT, 4: 1539 for a concise summary of the discussions. Cf. Werner Schatz, *Genesis 14: Eine Untersuchung* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1972), 187-89. See Philip Nel, “**סֵלֶם**,” in NIDOTTE, 4: 130-35.

<sup>186</sup> From among many, we only list representative studies: (1) For emending the text, see W. F. Albright, “*Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Discovery*,” *BASOR* 163 (1961): 52; (2) for identifying with other locations such as Shechem, see J. R. Kirkland, “*The Incident at Salem: A Re-Examination of Genesis 14: 18-20*,” *StudBT* 7 (1977): 3-23. Cf. Robert Houston Smith, “*Abram and Melchizedek (Gen 14: 18-20)*” *ZAW* 77 (1965): 149-52; (3) for denying the story's historicity, see Waldman, “*Genesis 14*,” 256. The denial of the historicity of vv. 18-20 also implies a similar concern for the whole chapter. See Andersen, “*Genesis 14*,” 498-99, for a synthesis of five components of the historicity to be examined. For a defense of the historicity of the patriarchal narrative, see A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, eds. *Essays on the Patriarchal Narrative* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1980); this monograph (particular the article by Wenham) contains major responses to John Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) and Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narrative: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974).

<sup>187</sup> Gen 33:18 is another possible text. See Emerton, “*The Site of Salem*,” 45.

<sup>188</sup> Throughout this project, versification of biblical references is based on the MT or Greek text, whichever is applicable. The English version's versification is inserted in square brackets.

<sup>189</sup> In our opinion, the best defense of such identification is Emerton's, “*The Site of Salem*,” 45-71.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gen, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 94-97.

<sup>191</sup> For a more recent article on this word, see Shemaryahu Talmon's “*The Significance of **סֵלֶם** and its Semantic Field in the Hebrew Bible*,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. S. Talmon and Craig A. Evans (Brill, The Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 75-115.

Whereas Yahweh promised a peaceful death to Abraham in Genesis 15,<sup>192</sup> Melchizedek blessed Abraham in Genesis 14; assuredly Melchizedek's appearance is not for harm but for peace. His blessing uttered to Abraham (vv. 19-20) proves his peaceful intention, in contrast to the intentions of the king of Sodom. Third, the word play (שָׁלֵם and צָדֵק) in the context of the blessing by Melchizedek has wider implications for biblical study – that the association of peace, righteousness, and blessing is well-attested in later biblical writing. For example, in Num 6:24-26, whoever has God's peace is blessed; and in Isa 60:17, the Lord promises peace and righteousness in a blessed state.<sup>193</sup>

#### 4.2.3 Discourse Analysis: A Syntagmatic Study of the Keyword צָדֵק

We have already noted how this word **הַצִּדְיָא** stands in contrast to **צָדֵק** used to describe the king of Sodom (v. 17), but a syntagmatic study should broaden the significance of this word. The same word (in exactly the same form, **הַצִּדְיָא**, independent of any affix) appears in Exod 12:51, 13:3, 16:6, 18:1 (cf. Deut 6:23, 7:8, and 1 Kgs 9:9) in a similar phrase: Yahweh has brought (Israel or you) out of Egypt **מִמִּצְרַיִם**. Is this a future depiction of what Yahweh will do for Israel in Exodus through the use of the exact same form of this word, thus, making Melchizedek similar to Yahweh?<sup>194</sup> We believe such a possibility exists when we approach the syntagmatic study of the word “**בָּרָךְ**” detailed further in this chapter.

#### 4.2.4 Discourse Analysis: A Syntagmatic Study of the Keywords אל עליון

The name of God **אל עליון** has provoked debate over who exactly **אל עליון** is.<sup>195</sup> Is he a Canaanite god later adopted by the Israelites, as proposed by some scholars, or is it the epithet of the divine name for Yahweh or Elohim? Most scholars would contend that El Elyon has Canaanite origins. For example, Cross would allow the ANE and

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<sup>192</sup> See 2 Sam 7:12a and chapter 6, where we will discuss the allusion to Gen 15:15 in 2 Sam 7:12a.

<sup>193</sup> See Heb 7:2; the author of Hebrews seems to play on the name Melchizedek, the king of Salem, translating them as “righteousness” and as “peace.” See our discussion on 7:2 in chapter eleven. See also Philip Nel, “**שָׁלֵם**,” in *NIDOTTE*, 4: 134.

<sup>194</sup> See a discussion of **אָמַת** in the Hiph. form in the sense of redemption in Eugene H. Merrill, “**אָמַת**,” in *NIDOTTE*, 2: 498-99. The Exodus theme as God's redemption is key to later biblical texts like Numbers 22-24 and 2 Samuel 7, which we will study in our next two chapters.

<sup>195</sup> An interesting suggestion offered by G. Levi della Vida is to divide El Elyon into two deities: the former as the Lord of the earth, and the latter as the Lord of heaven. See della Vida, “El ‘Elyon in Genesis 14:18-20,” *JBL* 63 (1944): 1-9. This is merely speculative; noticeably, in biblical texts **אל עליון** only occurs in Ps 78:35.

Ugaritic literature to shed light on this discussion, making Elyon El's epithet.<sup>196</sup> Since no consensus has been reached, there is no commanding conclusion regarding the identity of El Elyon.<sup>197</sup>

A syntagmatic study of אל עליון will reveal a theme-rheme progression in this text regarding the deity both Melchizedek and Abraham worship.<sup>198</sup> First, note the following syntagmatic relations between אל עליון and some other phrases:

- v. 18 לאל עליון
- v. 19 לאל עליון קנה שמים הארץ
- v. 20 אל עליון אֱשָׁר-מִן צְרוּךְ בָּרוּךְ
- v. 22 אל עליון יְרָחָ קנה שמים הארץ

Second, a reader will notice the authorial deliberation in the employment of the name of the deity for a discourse purpose, linking the last few verses together. Third, an exploration of the meaning and purpose of such usage through its syntagmatic relationship with other phrases or terms informs the following two observations.

First, special use of a term (קָנָה) embedded in the description "creator of heavens and earth"<sup>199</sup> for El Elyon creates a retrospective effect on the discourse. The word קָנָה (glossed as "creator, owner") is problematic for many scholars. For example, W. H. Schmidt disputes this type of translation because neither the context of the Melchizedek episode nor the ANE textual traditions lend a decisive understanding of the word.<sup>200</sup> Through a syntagmatic study of קָנָה, the only antecedent of this word is

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<sup>196</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 44-60. But Rolf Rendtorff disagrees with Cross and cautions against the use of Ugaritic material in the study of El. See Rendtorff, "The Background of the Title אלה אל in Gen XIV," in *The Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Paper*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: World Union of the Jewish Studies, 1967), 167-68.

<sup>197</sup> Other studies similar to Cross should be noted: Bétoudji, *le Dieu Suprême* is a monograph devoted to this topic. Others in article form include Réem Lack, *Les Origines de Elyon, le Tres-Haut, dans la Tradition Cultuelle D'Israël*, *CBQ* 24 (1962): 44-64; Norman C. Habel, "Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study in Tradition Criticism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 321-37; Patrick D. Miller, "El, the Creator of Earth," *BASOR* 29 (1980): 43-46; Bruce Vawter, "Yahweh: Lord of the Heavens and the Earth," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 461-67; Edmund Berg, "Who Was Melchizedek?" *Dor le Dor* 16 (1988): 183-85; R. E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (Britain: SCM Press, 1967). See *TDOT* 11: 121-39; a study surveying "Elyon" in biblical and extra-biblical data.

<sup>198</sup> According to Wenham, the textual evidence attests that Abraham at least "knew of Yahweh, Elohim, El Elyon, El Shaddai, El Roi, and El Olam." Wenham, "The Religion of the Patriarch," chap. in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narrative*, 163.

<sup>199</sup> Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 139 and 250. The lack of an article before heavens and earth may be due to the poetic nature of the text.

<sup>200</sup> See W. H. Schmidt, "הָרָחָב," in *TLOT*, 3: 1152-53. See also a discussion in his *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift*, WMANT (Neukirchen-Vluyn: NeuKirchener, 1964), 28 (footnote 2). Cf. Izak Cornelius and Ramond C. van Leeuwen, "הָרָחָב," in *NIDOTTE*, 3: 941.

found in Gen 4:1: וְתַאֲמֵר קְנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת-הָרָהָה. Although the meaning of the clause, particularly with תַּאֲמֵר, is disputable,<sup>201</sup> the fact that Eve gave birth to a son should be viewed in light of Gen 1:26-28. It was the beginning of the first couple's attempt to obey what God commanded them to do: "be fruitful and multiply," under the rubric of God's "blessing." Cast in the blessing context, Eve's words may be viewed as her work in comparison to Yahweh's: as the former brought forth a son, the latter created the world.<sup>202</sup> Therefore, it is literary and thematically appropriate for the author of the Melchizedek episode to use the term נָמֵך as he "blessed" Abraham.

Second, through a syntagmatic study, clearly אל עליון is not any local deity but is Yahweh himself (v. 22); furthermore, he is identified as "creator of heavens and earth." Importantly, this identity is uttered directly from the mouth of Abraham, the key character of the narrative discourse in Genesis 12-22. In the syntagmatic development, a rheme, קָנָה שְׁמִים וְאֶרֶץ, is added to the theme, אל עליון; another rheme, הָיָה, is added to the theme, שְׁמִים וְאֶרֶץ.<sup>203</sup> The discourse intention of the narrator, through this rheme-theme progression in this narrative, is clear: Yahweh is the same God, "God Most High,"<sup>204</sup> creator of heavens and earth, whom Melchizedek and Abraham worshiped.<sup>205</sup> It was upon this God that Abraham swore not to take anything from the king of Sodom (v. 23).

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<sup>201</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, From Adam to Noah*, *Genesis 1-6:8*, trans. Israel Abrahams, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 197-202. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 94 (note 1.d) and 101-102.

<sup>202</sup> Cassuto, *Adam to Noah*, 201.

<sup>203</sup> See Deut 32:6.

<sup>204</sup> Willem VanGemeren renders אל עליון as "God Most High" and argues that by designating God as El Elyon, it "signifies that he alone is supreme. He is King over all." VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), 56. VanGemeren's argument is based on his reading of other OT texts (see *ibid.*, 56-58).

<sup>205</sup> See Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 410. His approach is similar to ours and his conclusion also looks like ours. In summary, he proposes that (1) El Elyon cannot be viewed as a Canaanite deity even though? in the Canaanite pantheon both El and Elyon, his grandson, are detected, they always appear separately; and (2) if Melchizedek were a Canaanite king, he would have blessed Abraham in the name of a Canaanite deity but that did not happen. Hamilton also provides a list of correlation of Elyon with El (Num 24:16, Ps 73:11), with Yahweh (2 Sam 22:14, cf. Ps 18:14[13]), with Elohim (Ps 46:5[4], 50:14), with Shaddai (Ps 91:1). Pss 57:3[2] and 78:56 speaks of "God Most High" (Elohim Elyon); Ps 7:18[17] refers to "Yahweh, the Most High." From the perspective of history of religion, many scholars see the adaptation of a Canaanite god by Israel occurring here. Cf. *TDOT* 11: 123-30. Yet their underlying assumption that Melchizedek is a Canaanite is unwarranted here. Hence, we should reject Fisher's assertion that Melchizedek is a Canaanite priest-king (U. Cassuto argued the same). See Fisher, "His Priest-King," 264-70, especially p. 269 and Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, trans. Israel Abrahams, vol. 1, *Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 72-73, 246. The identity of Melchizedek should be rendered undeterminable since the Scripture is silent in this regard.

#### 4.2.5 Discourse Analysis: A Syntagmatic Study of the Keyword בָּרָךְ

Finally, a syntagmatic study of בָּרָךְ shows that the blessing of Melchizedek lays a foundation (foreshadowing) for the patriarchal blessing bestowed on his descendants,<sup>206</sup> cast in parallel to the form of divine blessing conferred on a human. The verb בָּרַךְ is syntagmatically followed by another verb אָמַר in Gen 14:19. If we analyze the discourse structure in this blessing episode, the result may look like this: the verb בָּרַךְ has a subject that is either a deity or a person and its object is a human, followed by the verb אָמַר, and immediately followed by an actual speech. With the assistance of a diagrammatic view, the formula for our research looks like this:

1. subject (divine or human) + בָּרַךְ + object (human)
2. אָמַר with or without waw (with same subject as above)
3. a speech following אָמַר (contains idea of blessing)

Using this discourse formula or structure, we find it only appears four times in Genesis: 1:28, 9:1, 14:19, and 27:27.<sup>207</sup> While the first two references describe God who blessed humanity and Noah respectively, the last two references differ in that they are human to human; Melchizedek to Abraham and Isaac to Jacob. The sayings in the first two references are prose, while the ones in the last two references are poetic. The last two references share similar vocabularies: (1) the root בָּרַךְ occurs three times in each reference (14:19-20 and 27:27, 29) and (2) both “heavens” and “earth” appear in both texts (14:19 and 27:28).<sup>208</sup> While the first two references contain the same decree (“be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”) in God’s blessing, the last two references have the exact same verbal structure: *וַיְבָרֶךְ הוּא וַיֹּאמֶר*.

The above analysis, made possible through a sensitive reading of the text via discourse analysis, deserves theological reflection on בָּרַךְ. It appears that the author of Genesis 14 portrays that Melchizedek’s blessing to Abraham is founded in the earlier divine blessing on mankind, given first to Adam and Eve and then to Noah.

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**206** For a delineation of man blessing man in several key passages, like Genesis 27 (Isaac to Jacob), 48 (Jacob to two Joseph’s sons), 49 (Jacob to all his sons), and Deut 33 (Moses to Israelites), see Mitchell, *Meaning of BRK*, 79-90.

**207** There are three more references that we do not consider: Gen 1:22, 35:9-10 and 48:15-16. In Gen 1:22, the blessing is given to water and air creatures, not to a human being. For Gen 35:9-10, there is no actual pronouncement of blessing but God changes Jacob’s name to Israel. In 48:15-16 (Jacob blessed Joseph’s two sons), while the structure matches our formula completely, we place our emphasis on 27:27 (Isaac blessed Jacob), which is more representative. See Michael Brown, “בָּרַךְ,” in *NIDOTTE*, 1: 760 on Jacob-Esau’s struggle for fraternal blessing. Later in studying Genesis 49, we will address Gen 48:15-17 and the blessing of Jacob to Judah and Joseph in Genesis 49 regarding the use of בָּרַךְ in both texts.

**208** One might want to add another set of synonymous vocabulary in both texts: יְרַנֵּן and תִּרְנַנְתָּ (14:18 and 27:28, wine and new wine; cf 27:25, 37). See their semantic relationship in J. Pairman Brown, “The Mediterranean Vocabulary of the Vine,” *VT* 19 (1969): 169. Cf. *HALOT*, 4: 1728.

Melchizedek's blessing, in turn, lays the foundation for man's blessing to man, namely, Isaac to Jacob. The initial divine blessing (Gen 1:28) contains the idea of multiplication; clearly the same blessing (of multiplication) is given to Noah after the flood, that is, God's judgment of the world.<sup>209</sup> In view of Genesis 3:15, the blessing of multiplication became increasingly acute after the Fall and the flood. Perhaps we could say that the major purpose behind the blessing of multiplication was to produce a "seed" that could reverse the fate of humanity (cf. Gen 3:15). The last two references (14:19, 27:27) lend themselves to distinguishable contrasts between Melchizedek and Isaac. Melchizedek, not part of the Abrahamic line, is depicted similarly to God pronouncing blessing to a human being. Thus commences a tradition Isaac readily follows,<sup>210</sup> for he blessed his son Jacob who in turn blessed his twelve sons (Genesis 49). The special form יָבֹךְ (waw, 3ms + suff., 3ms)<sup>211</sup> can only be found in Gen 14:19, 26:12 (Yahweh blessed Isaac), and 27:23, 27. Furthermore, Isaac clearly comes from an established genealogical record whereas Melchizedek clearly does not.<sup>212</sup> Only by juxtaposing the last two references, based on our discourse formula, can we arrive at this conclusion.

The multiple occurrence of יָבֹךְ may serve a discourse function. We have seen that a key word repeated within a text or series of texts implies a crucial discourse function recognized by the discerning reader.<sup>213</sup> Does the multiple occurrence of יָבֹךְ in the Abrahamic cycle have a discourse effect, and if so, what is it?<sup>214</sup> The following figure (figure 2) should lead us to the answer.

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**209** We have noted the root יָבֹךְ in Gen 4:1 when we discuss the word יָבֹךְ in 14:19. Again, what we have here reinforces our earlier discussion of יָבֹךְ, that is, the divine blessing and the multiplication of human seed interlock.

**210** Significantly, the biblical text did not mention that Abraham blessed Isaac. Cf. Gen 25:5.

**211** This form does occur outside the Pentateuch: Josh 14:13, Judg 13:24, 2 Sam 13:25, 19:40[39] and 2 Kgs 10:15.

**212** Is the author of Hebrews reading Genesis 27 in conjunction with Genesis 14 when he writes Heb 7:1-3 (Melchizedek has no genealogy)? This will be reviewed in chapter 11 of this project.

**213** Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Bible and Literature Series 17 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 212-15.

**214** Cf. Zimmerli, "Abraham und Melchisedek," in *Das Ferne und Nahe Wort: Festschrift Leonard Rost*, BZAW 105, ed. Fritz Maass (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1967), 255-64.

Gen 12:2-3

וְאַעֲשֶׂךְ לְנוּ גָּדֹל  
וְאַרְכֵּךְ  
וְאַדְלָה שָׁמֶךְ  
וְתִּרְחַ בְּרָכָה:  
וְאַרְכָּה מִבְרָכִיךְ  
וּמְלָלָךְ אָאָרְךְ  
וּבְרָכִי בָּךְ כֹּל מִשְׁפָּחָת הָאָדָם:

Gen 14:19-20

וְבְרָכָה  
נִיאָמֶר  
בָּרוּךְ אֲבָרְם לְאָלָל עַלְיוֹן כְּנָה שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ:  
וְבָרוּךְ אַל עַלְיוֹן אֲשֶׁר-מִן אַרְךְ בָּרָךְ

Gen 22:16-18<sup>215</sup>

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיַי נִשְׁבְּעָתִי נִאָסִי-יְהוָה  
כִּי יִמְצֶא אֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂית אֶת-יְהִלְךְ תַּהֲנֵה  
וְלֹא חִשְׁכַּת אֶת-יְבָנֶךְ אֶת-יְחִידָךְ:  
כִּירְךְ אַבְרָהָם  
וְתַּרְבַּה אֲרָבָה אֶת-זָרָעָךְ בְּכָכְבֵּי הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וּבְחַול אֲשֶׁר עַל-שְׁפָת תְּנִסֵּם וּבְשַׁזְׁבָּעָךְ אֶת שַׁעַר אִקְיָה:  
וְהַבְּרָכָה בְּזָרְעָךְ כֹּל נָוִי הָאָרֶץ  
עַקְבָּךְ אֲשֶׁר שְׁמַעְתָּ בְּלָלָי:

**Figure 2.** Multiple Occurrence of בָּרָךְ (in italics) in Abrahamic Cycle (Please note that Anthony Abela also provides a chiastic structure for Genesis 22:16-18)

Before we explore the syntagmatic discourse meaning of בָּרָךְ, we have three remarks concerning the structure in Genesis 12:1-3 and 22:15-18; these remarks will put our interpretation or observation into a discourse perspective. First, the bracketing effect of Genesis 12 and 22 in the Abrahamic cycle deserves notice. Although Abraham appears after Genesis 22,<sup>216</sup> scholars have long argued that striking parallels exist between these two texts. Thus, it is safe to say a bracketing intention is apparent in these two

**215** Anthony Abela, *The Themes of the Abraham Narrative: Thematic Coherence within the Abraham Literary Unit of Genesis 11,27-25,18* (Malta: Studia Editions, 1989), 26-28. He provides a chiastic structure for these verses (footnote 62).

**216** Genesis 23 tells of Abraham buying a piece of land for Sarah's burial. In Genesis 24, he appeared briefly before the narrative switched to a description of how his servant, upon Abraham's command, found Isaac a wife. Gen 25:1-11 details his preparations and his death. Joel Rosenberg argues for a chiastic structure of the Abrahamic cycle in Genesis 12-25, making Hagar (Genesis 16) the center of the structure. In our opinion, his analysis overlooks the main thrust of the Abrahamic cycle. Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1986), 84. Cf. a similar structure by VanGemeren, *Progress of Redemption*, 111; See also Gary A. Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 28-29.

chapters to mark off the Abrahamic cycle. For example, Paul Williamson, based on extensive studies, argues that Gen 12:1-9 and 22:1-19 forms an inclusio because of the host of similarities between these two passages,<sup>217</sup> such as, (1) the first and last times the narrative records the deity (Yahweh and God respectively) speaking to Abraham are in these texts;<sup>218</sup> (2) the phrase נָתַן which appears in the exact same form in both texts, is not found elsewhere in Scripture;<sup>219</sup> (3) the destinations where Abraham was ordered to go, though vague, are described by two strikingly similar phrases אֲשֶׁר אָרַאְךָ אֱלֹהִים; and (4) the repeated use of בָּרוּךְ<sup>220</sup> (as we have highlighted in figure 2).

Our second remark concerns the study of Gen 12:1-3 since most consider this text foundational for the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>221</sup> For instance, Williamson shows how in terms of structure these verses form two sections (vv. 1-2a, vv. 2b-3) with two distinct prospects:

The first section refers to Abraham in relation to the nation of Israel (i.e. the land to which he is being called and the nation of which he will be the progenitor); the second section refers to Abraham in relation to an international community (i.e. ‘all the families of the earth’, v. 3). The theme of ‘blessing’ in Gen 12:1-3, therefore, is twofold: in the first section . . . it concerns national blessing promise to Abraham; in the second section . . . it relates to international blessing promise through Abraham. The two elements are nevertheless related.<sup>222</sup>

Such analysis from structure to meaning is commendable. Nevertheless, we should note that Abraham’s role in God’s blessing to the nation Israel specifically, and expanding outward to the nations, was later replaced by his seed; namely, his seed

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<sup>217</sup> Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*, JSOTSup 215 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 217-220. See the extensive bibliographical listing of studies of the relationship between Genesis 12 and 22 in note 1. To his bibliographical data, we add Goerg Steins, *Die ‘Bindung Isaaks’ im Kanon (Gen 22): Grundlagen und Programm einer Kanonisch-Intertextuellen Lektüre* (Breisgau: Herder, 1999), 135-47 and Yair Zakovitch, “Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversion of Genesis Stories in the Bible,” *BibInt* 1 (1993): 143-44.

<sup>218</sup> Williamson (*Israel and the Nations*, 219) notes that the divine communication taking place in Genesis 12 and 22 is used as an inclusio device. Moreover, he suggests a chiastic structure of Genesis 12-22, making the birth of Ishmael in Genesis 16 the center of his chiastic structure. It is, however, problematic because it distorts the discourse effect on the seed promise, substituting Ishmael for Isaac in the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.

<sup>219</sup> Julius B. Moster, “The Testing of Abraham,” *Dor le Dor* 17 (1989): 239.

<sup>220</sup> Bar-Efrat, *Biblical Narrative*, 216. He calls the repetition of the key word (in our case נָתַן) in different texts the “envelope” technique.

<sup>221</sup> A lot of studies have been done on this text; see the exegesis, structure, and meaning of this text by Williamson, *Israel and the Nations*, 220-34 (and the detailed bibliography in footnote 10).

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 233-34. The second blessing bestowed with an international perspective may answer why Genesis 14 is in its present context.

superceded Abraham's role in God's blessing to Israel and the nations (Gen 22:17-18; see our syntagmatic study below).

Our third remark concerns the numerous studies of Gen 22:1-19. Setting aside the issue of human sacrifice,<sup>223</sup> which is not the central concern of this text, we see that nearly all scholars agree with a late insertion of vv. 15-18.<sup>224</sup> This issue reminds us of similar problems facing Gen 14:18-20, viewed overwhelmingly by biblical scholarship as a later insertion. Again, this discussion addressing the authenticity of vv. 15-19 in Genesis 22 stretches beyond the scope of our project. Notably, Wenham who quotes others, has argued convincingly for the integrity of this text.<sup>225</sup> Some scholars propose to read this as the "climax" of the blessing theme in the Abrahamic cycle.<sup>226</sup> To prove this point, we believe, is the task of the syntagmatic study of the keyword **רַבָּ**, to which we now turn.

There are several key observations based on figure 2 in terms of the syntagmatic study of **רַבָּ**. The study shows a thematic progression tied in with this keyword. First, the thematic progression concerns Abraham and his seed. Instead of God's blessing through Abraham (בָּבָרְכָו, 12:3),<sup>227</sup> the last text indicates that it is through his "seed" (בָּרַעַךְ וּוּחַבְרָכְו, 22:18) all nations will be blessed. On top of making Abraham a great nation (לְנוּ גְּדוּלָה, 12:2), it is more specifically – in the last text – that his seed will be greatly multiplied (וְהַרְבָּה אֶרְבָּה, 22:17), implying it will become a nation. The focus, therefore, shifts from Abraham to his seed. Once again, blessing and multiplication interlock together<sup>228</sup> (in 14:19 it is by the use of **תִּתְּבִּיחַ**), but now the focus narrows to the "seed."

Second, the blessing also connotes military victory over one's enemy: from God who delivered Abraham's enemy into his hand (14:20) to Abraham's seed, who

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**223** See Westermann's excursus on this topic in his *Genesis 12-36*, 357-58; cf. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 158-59. Anyone who interprets this text preoccupied with the notion of human sacrifice misses the opening phrase, נֶפֶה אֶת-אֶבְרָהָם נֶפֶה אֶת-אֶבְרָהָם. Pinchas Doron explains this as assigned to the "minimum principle" and as part of a narrative device to go on to the plot. Doren, "The Art of Biblical Narrative," *Dor la Dor* 17 (1988): 5.

**224** Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 363.

**225** Gorden Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, WBC, vol.2 (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1994), 102-103.

**226** Abela, *Abraham Narrative*, 26. Also Moster, "Testing of Abraham," 238. A similar conclusion is reached by R. D. Bergen, "The Role of Genesis 22:1-19 in the Abraham Cycle: A Computer-Assisted Textual Interpretation," *CTR* 4 (1990): 325; there Bergen calls it "climax of blessing motif." Cf. Gros Louis, "Abraham: I," chap. in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, ed. Louis, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 76, and argues for reading Genesis 22 as a kind of *cola* that epitomizes the themes of the Abraham narrative.

**227** Some Hebrew words with vowel points for emphasis and clarification.

**228** Abela, *Abraham Narrative*, 27 (footnote 62).

possesses the gates of the enemy (22:17).<sup>229</sup> While Genesis 12 delineates an emphasis on blessing to and through Abraham, Genesis 22 makes a distinct shift to his seed.<sup>230</sup> Here we may add a supplementary remark. The long divine name in the first בָּרוּךְ in Gen 14:19 appears irrelevant in the syntagmatic discourse. Nonetheless, the divine name contains a discourse effect, that it is God – the same one who, in Genesis 1-2, blessed his creation – who now provides blessing to Abraham and his seed thereafter.

The multiple-fold appearance of בָּרוּךְ in these three texts should never be dismissed as accidental in light of the larger narrative structure of the Abrahamic cycle. Evident from figure 2, it is clear that Genesis 14:18-20 is sandwiched in by Genesis 12 and 22. Tracing the movement from Yahweh's blessing to Abraham, Melchizedek's blessing to Abraham, and then in a circular return to Yahweh's blessing conferred to Abraham, emphasizes, in the forefront, Melchizedek's distinctive role and position.

The last statement leads us to explore the role of Melchizedek in the blessing motif of Abrahamic cycle. We have two comments, one negative and one positive.

First, some scholars fail to pay sufficient attention the Melchizedek's role in the blessing motif of the Abrahamic cycle when analyzing this episode. For example, Abela sees the role of Melchizedek as that of a Canaanite representative, which perhaps informs his view of Genesis 14 as a depiction of how Abraham deals with the Canaanite population.<sup>231</sup> That Melchizedek is a Canaanite is an unwarranted assumption. Some scholars project back onto the text: Smith, for example, argues that Genesis 14:18-20 should be read independently of its present context and proposes, of course with the conjecture that Abraham came to Melchizedek's city and posed a threat. Thus following this line of reasoning, Melchizedek came out to make peace with Abraham by bringing bread and wine as a token of hospitality, and going

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<sup>229</sup> See Gerhard von Rad's comment that the phrase "possessed the enemy's gate" is "foreign to the basis of promise." See his *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 243. The basic meaning of 14:20 and 22:17 is the same: God's promise in terms of "blessing" is a victory over the enemy. The difference in wording may be due to the context: in Genesis 14, God handed over the enemy to Abraham, who was seen without an army, while in Genesis 22, the promise of victory over the enemy alludes back to 3:15 (cf. אָכַז with אָכַז) since Gen 22:17 is dealt with the promise of the "seed."

<sup>230</sup> See T. Desmond Alexander, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology," *TynBul* 49 (1998): 191-212. From an analysis of the syntactical structure of this text, "seed" is singular.

<sup>231</sup> Abela, *Abraham Narrative*, 21 (footnote 37). He quotes L. Ruppert, *Das Buch Genesis*, and his own dissertation, "Reading the Abraham Narrative in Gen 11, 27-25, 18 as a Literary Unit." Both references are unavailable to us.

to the extent of presenting Abraham with a tithe.<sup>232</sup> This conjecture is partially based on Smith's reading this phrase in Gen 14:20b: **מֶלֶךְ־לְךָ מֶלֶךְ־לְךָ תְּשַׁבַּח**.<sup>233</sup> One way to understand the phrase is that the subject of this action (gave) is Melchizedek. The other way to understand this phrase is that Abraham is the subject of the action of giving, which is in line with how the author of *Herbews* read the text: "and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything" (7:2, ESV).

Second, the discourse study thus far gives an apt description of Melchizedek and his blessing. His uniqueness is characterized in at least three ways. First, the king of Salem, Melchizedek, is portrayed differently than the rest of the kings in Genesis 14 and given a distinctive rhetorical role in the discourse.<sup>234</sup> Second, his name and his city seem to embody the notion of peace and righteousness, besides serving as a word-play to link Genesis 14 to 15.<sup>235</sup> Third, Melchizedek bridges the divine blessing conferred to a human, to a human blessing being conferred from one human to another.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, Melchizedek deserves Abraham's tithe. If Abraham was portrayed as a noble warrior, how much more noble is Melchizedek, who deserves Abraham's tithe.<sup>237</sup>

#### 4.2.6 A Summary of the Rhetorical and Discourse Study and Its Implication for the Next Chapter

In our rhetorical analysis, the concentric structure elevates vv. 18-20 as the crux of the interpretation of Genesis 14: Melchizedek's blessing to Abraham. Therefore when scholars center their attention on surrounding materials, for example, the identity and historicity of the cities and kings,<sup>238</sup> they neglect the rhetorical and literary role of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, let alone his greater role related to the Abrahamic cycle. Our syntagmatic study of several key terms in these verses also reinforces the importance of the blessing role Melchizedek played: the blessing he pronounced

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<sup>232</sup> Smith, "Abram and Melchizedek," 137. In a similar vein, some project that this episode is written with a political motivation, i.e., to support the legitimacy of David's reign in Jerusalem and the building of Solomon's temple. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), chap. 4. Others, like Diana Lipton, argue that together with Genesis 15, Genesis 14 is a midrash prefiguring the Davidic dynasty. *Idem*, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis*, JSOTSup 288 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 212; she quotes A. Caquot, "L'alliance avec Abram (Genesis 15)," *Sem* 12 (1962): 51-66 in note 117, to support her contention.

<sup>233</sup> Smith, "Abram and Melchizedek," 134.

<sup>234</sup> See p. 95.

<sup>235</sup> See pp. 100-103.

<sup>236</sup> See pp. 110-14.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Heb 7:4.

<sup>238</sup> We do not deny the importance of these issues. The great effort represented in the prodigious works of these scholars committed to a study of the historicity of Genesis 14 should be appreciated.

was a continuation of what Yahweh had done in Genesis 1-2, and significantly, from the same God (אֱלֹהִים קָדוֹשׁ וְאֶלְ�לִים) whom both Abraham and he worshipped. Nonetheless, Melchizedek's blessing upon Abraham should be examined in a later context, namely, in the Abrahamic cycle. For this task, we now turn to the next chapter.