5 A Literary and Discourse Analysis of the Contexts of Genesis 14: Various Texts in Genesis and Numbers 22-24

In the previous chapter, it became patently clear that we needed to touch on various cotexts before and after Genesis 14 in our rhetorical-discourse analysis. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to develop a better understanding of Genesis 14, particularly vv. 18-20, by examining the cotexts preceding and following Genesis 14. These cotexts, we believe, should be read together with Genesis 14 in order to best appreciate the role and thrust of the Melchizedek episode in the Abrahamic cycle, and its contribution to OT theology.

We need to determine the extent of the cotexts of Genesis 14 as we seek to understand their contribution to the literary-thematic role of Melchizedek. The immediate cotext for vv. 18-20 is Genesis 14 itself. By extension, the cotexts of Genesis 14 should be Genesis 13 and 15.

Should the reader stop at Genesis 13 and 15, the immediate cotext of Genesis 14? For that matter, how do we set the limits of the text's cotext? To be cautious, the criteria to include certain passages as cotexts of Genesis 14 should not be arbitrary. These criteria include the existence of both literary-semantic and thematic connections of these cotexts to Genesis 14. In addition, encompassing all these texts is a literary-semantic use of the multiple entries of ברך.[239] We have delineated in our last chapter the multiple entries of ברך as a bracket to delimit the Abrahamic cycle from Genesis 12 to 22. Therefore, in one broad stroke, Genesis 12-22 serves as a cotext for Genesis 14.

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239 The multi-entry of ברך in a text means that the word ברך must occur at least three times within two to three verses to be considered as significant. This criteria *alone* gives us these texts: Genesis 12, 14, 17, 22, 27, 48 and 49, Numbers 24, Deuteronomy 7, 28, 33, 2 Samuel 7, Psalms 72, 115, 134, 135. While Genesis 12, 14, 17, 22 and 49, and Numbers 24 will be handled in this chapter, 2 Samuel 7 will be studied in the next chapter. (Genesis 27 has been discussed in our previous chapter.) For the remaining texts, Deuteronomy 7 and 28 record Moses' challenge to Israelites to obey God and keep his commands (7:12-16; 28:1-6). The use of ברך in Ps 115:12-15 confines the Lord's blessing to the house of Israel, the house of Aaron and those who fear him. For Psalms 134, ברך is used as "praise" (to the Lord) in vv. 1-2 and as "bless" in v. 3. For Psalm 135, ברך is used only as "praise" in vv. 19-21. See our discussion later in this chapter when we study Genesis 49 (also please refer to appendix 5 for a study of Genesis 48, 49 and Deuteronomy 33). Psalm 72 will be examined in later chapters of this project when we deal with Psalm 110.

Due to the scope of this project, however, we limit the cotexts of Genesis 14 to several passages, that is, Genesis 12-15, while keeping in mind Genesis 17, 22 and 49.[240] A literary-thematic analysis would also lead the discussion to Numbers 22-24 and 2 Samuel 7,[241] based on the thematic-semantic links between these texts and Genesis 14.[242]

With all these texts in mind, this chapter is divided into two major parts: Part 1, cotexts in Genesis, Part 2, Numbers 22-24, followed by a brief conclusion of the relationship between Genesis and Numbers (the text of 2 Samuel 7 will be studied in the next chapter).

5.1 Studies on the Cotexts of Genesis 14: Various Texts in Genesis Itself

The analysis commences with the relationship between Genesis 13 and 14. Next, the relationship between Genesis 14 and Genesis 12 and 15 will be examined; the latter two are a foundational text for the Abraham narrative. We will argue for treating Genesis 12-15 as a "unit," and upon resting our case, the literary relationship between Genesis 12-15 and chapters 17, 22 and 49 will then be assessed.

5.1.1 The Literary-Thematic Relationship Between Genesis 13 and 14

At first glance, the two chapters seem to have no literary connection. From a discourse perspective, however, Genesis 14 should be read closely to 13. Note the following regarding Abraham:

Gen 13:18 וישב באלני ממרא

Gen 14:13 הוא שכן באלני ממרא

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240 The majority of scholars agree that the Abraham narrative begins at Genesis 12 and ends roughly in Genesis 22. See, for example, Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis*, 27-30 and U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II, From Noah to Abraham, Genesis 6:9-11:32*, trans. Israel Abrahams, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 294-96. In the course of this chapter, we will justify the reasons why we include Genesis 17 and 22. In addition, Genesis 49 will also be discussed as part of the cotext of Genesis 14. See Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 16 (table for JEDP source analysis on Genesis). Hamilton's analysis is indebted to E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB, vol. 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983). In source analysis, only Genesis 14 and 49 are given an "x" mark for source analysis, meaning unknown or undeterminable.

241 We realize 2 Samuel 7 contains two parallel texts: Psalm 89 and 1 Chronicles 17. We will discuss the difficulty of studying the parallel texts when we come to 2 Samuel 7 (in our chapter 6).

242 Note the multi-entry of ברך in Numbers 22-24 and 2 Samuel 7.

The closing verse of Genesis 13 describes the vicinity where Abraham resided; the next scene in Genesis 14 is one of warfare waged by four kings unevenly matched against five. The use of nearly the exact same phrase in Genesis 14:13 reminds the reader of where Abraham was situated when an escapee reported to him Lot's capture.[243]

A second discourse connection is the name of Yahweh. Surely, יהוה frequently occurs in the OT and therefore may not be as apparent a connection as it should be. Nonetheless the text of Gen 13:18 concludes with these words, ויבן־שם מזבח ליהוה. The next and only other time Yahweh appears in Genesis 14 is in v. 22.[244] The appearance of Yahweh in both chapters depicts Abraham as a Yahweh worshipper.

Third, another semantic link is the word רכש. Both Lot and Abraham owned great possessions כי היה רכושם רב in 13:6.[245] In 14:12, Lot – along with his possessions – was captured (ויקחו את־לוט ואת־רכשו).[246] Furthermore, Rendsburg points out two "nexuses" in these two chapters: Lot lived near Sodom and the town of Zoar: compare 13:10-12 and 14:2, 8, and 12.[247] Thus the above data proves an interconnection between these two units.

We now turn to the literary-thematic role of Genesis 13 in light of Genesis 14. Genesis 13 serves two such functions from the vantage point of Genesis 14 and the larger thematic framework of the Abrahamic cycle. First, Genesis 13 provides the background for Abraham's involvement in the international battle that transpires in Genesis 14 because of his familial tie with Lot. That tie is characterized by the use of the word אח. Lot was first introduced by the biblical narrator in 12:5: אשתו ואת־לוט בן־אחיו ויקח אברם את־שרי. In 13:8, Abraham reminded Lot that they are brothers (or kinsmen, כי־אנשים אחים אנחנו) following their servants' quarrel over the land being too small for them (vv. 6-7). Lot chose where he wanted to live (13:10-11), a choice that ultimately led

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243 Cf. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch,* 145.

244 Major commentaries have failed to notice this point: von Rad, Westermann, Wenham and Hamiltion. Though the word יהוה is missing in the LXX and Peshitta, we view this (as noted earlier in the project) as the attempt by the biblical narrator to make a syntagmatic effect on God's name. For the LXX, cf. John Willam Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, SBLSCS 35 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1993), 200.

245 Note the a-b-a structure of this verse:

a ולא־נשא אתם הארץ לשבת יחדו

b כי היה רכושם רב

a ולא יכלו לשבת יחדו.

246 Later in this chapter, we will examine the syntagmatic use of רכוש as a binding device for Genesis 12-15.

247 Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis,* 48.

to his capture by the kings.[248] In 14:12, the narrator describes Lot as בֶּן־אֲחִי אַבְרָם.[249] In 14:14, 16, the word אָח is consistently used to refer to Lot and his relationship with Abraham. The recurrent usage of אָח in Genesis 14 intentionally links together the two chapters.

Second, two components – the land and the seed – in the Abrahamic cycle are being delineated in Genesis 13. Following Lot's departure, Yahweh reiterated these two components to Abraham (vv. 14-17), and we can view these verses in a chiastic way: a-b-a as land-seed-land in vv. 14-15, 16, 17 respectively. We might suspect that Lot himself could be a candidate for the "seed" of Abraham in the narrative framework of Genesis 12-22. Therefore, his departure (Genesis 13) and capture (Genesis 14) threaten this aspect of God's promise.[250]

5.1.2 The Literary-Thematic Relationship Between Genesis 14 and 15

Compared with Genesis 13, chapter 15 has aroused substantial interest in biblical scholarship.[251] Perhaps because the word ברית is first officially used in the Abrahamic cycle? God's relationship with Abraham was specifically spelled out as a covenant;[252] then again, perhaps it is the discernable structure of Genesis 15 centered on the key text in v. 6. For instance, Ha, stating that v. 6 is a theological declaration of Abraham's faith and Yahweh's reckoning of righteousness, yields a graphicalanalysis of two parallel sections of vv. 1-5 and vv. 7-21.[253] Sarna is more precise in pointing out the parallels in these two sections:

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248 Louis, "Abraham I," 53.

249 The position of this phrase in v. 12a is quite awkward: וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־לוֹט וְאֶת־רְכֻשׁוֹ בֶּן־אֲחִי אַבְרָם. Such awkwardness may be intentional; we will examine such construction in light of the discourse structure of Genesis 12-14 later in this chapter.

250 This notion of Lot as Abraham's possible heir is not foreign to rabbinic and Christian interpreters. See Larry R. Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives," *JSOT* 25 (1983): 82. In endnote 30, he cites Rashi's commentary concerning the same notion. Cf. Williamson, *Israel and the Nations,* 254.

251 For an up-to-date research survey, Hallvard Hagelia's recent monograph should be consulted. Hagelia, *Numbering the Stars: A Phraseological Analysis of Genesis 15*, ConBOT 39 (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1994), 1-3. Among all the works on Genesis 15, John Ha, *Genesis 15: A Theological Compendium of Pentateuchal History,* BZAW 181 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989) is frequently quoted and referred to by scholars.

252 In the Abrahamic cycle, the word ברית first appears in Gen 14:13 (Abraham allied with the three brothers). Then it appears in 15:18. It occurs multiple times in Genesis 17. Because of its repeated use in Genesis 17, we will have to explore Genesis 17 later in this chapter. (The next occurrences of this word are in 21:27, 32 referring to the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech. The last two occurrences in Genesis refer to Isaac's covenant with Abimelech, 26:28 and Jacob's covenant with Laban, 31:44.)

253 Ha, *Genesis 15,* 61. Hagelia also sees the chapter divided into two sections: vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-21 (*Numbering the Stars,* 6-7).

Each has three elements: a divine promise (vv. 1, 7), an expression of apprehension by Abram (vv. 2-3, 8), and a divine assurance by verbal and by symbolic action (vv. 4-5, 9-21). In both sections God introduces His speech with the formula "I am" (vv. 1, 7), and the patriarch's response begins with the invocation, "O Lord God" (vv. 2, 8) which is an exceedingly rare expression in the Torah. Finally, it is clear that Nehemiah 9:7-8 understands the covenant to be [in?] response to Abram's act of faith in his initial encounter with God, so that verse 6 forms the connecting link between the two parts.[254]

Given the importance of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham, the question is how does this chapter thematically link to the previous one? There are numerous semantic links between these two chapters. As noted earlier in this project, a possible word play on the proper name of Melchizedek (וּמַלְכִּי־צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם) in Gen 14:18 may be identified in Gen 15:6, 15.[255] Besides this, some scholars have pointed out various semantic links in these chapters. For instance, Rendsburg, in agreement with Sarna, has pointed out ten more semantic connections between these two chapters: מגן (14:20, 15:1),[256] רכש (14:11, 12, 16, 21, 15:14), דמשק (14:15, 15:2), ברית (14:13, 15:18), האמרי (14:7, 13, 15:16, 21), עבד (14:4, 15, 15:13), בית (14:14, 15:2-3), רפאים (14:5, 15:20), דן (14:14, 15:14) and the verbal and noun form of עבר ("pass over" and "Hebrew:," 14:13, 15:17).[257] All of these semantic connections help establish a literary connection between these two chapters.

The thematic connections of Genesis 14 and 15 converge into two portraits of Abraham, transforming him from a military victor to a prophet. The military victory of Abraham in Genesis 14, cast as a blessing from God in Gen 14:20, now carries over to Genesis 15, which begins with Yahweh's self-presentation as Abraham's shield[258] (מָגֵן, with a military overtone). Nonetheless, Abraham's imagery as a warrior is now subtly transformed by this phrase הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם בַּמַּחֲזֶה.[259] Scholars fully recognize the prophetic connotation of this expression[260] depicting Abraham as a prophet (cf. Gen 20:7); thus, this imagery sets the tone for the prophecy of bondage and deliverance of Abraham's descendants in Egypt (vv. 13-14, 16). The juxtaposition of the two imageries – military victor and prophet – is not totally unrelated. For one, there is a cultic context in both portraits: Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek in Gen 14:20[261] while he made sacrifices to Yahweh in 15:10. Though the word ברך is absent in Genesis 15, the thematic notions of promise and covenant are reiterated three times: the

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254 Sarna, *Genesis,* 109-10.

255 See our chapter 4, pp. 102-103. Cf Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis,* 48.

256 Earlier in our last chapter, we also noted that the root מגן appears in Gen 14:20 and 15:1.

257 Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis,* 48. Cf. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis,* 121-22. To this list, we should add שמים (cf. Sailhamer, "Genesis," 125, notes for vv. 11-12).

258 Ha points out that the metaphorical description of Yahweh as a shield occurs only two times in the Pentateuch: here and in Deut 33:29. See Ha, *Genesis 15,* 98. Cf. Lipton, *Patriarchal Dreams,* 211.

259 The phrase דבר־יהוה occurs 242 times in the OT; noticeably, it is used overwhelmingly (225 times) as a technical term to signify "prophetic verbal revelation." See G. Gerleman, "דבר," *TLOT,* 1: 330.

260 Hagelia, *Numbering the Stars,* 13-18. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36,* 217. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17,* 417-18.

261 Scholars have noticed the cultic or liturgical context in 14:18-20. Seters, *Abraham in History,* 302.

promise of the seed (vv. 4-5); the prophecy of bondage and the promise of deliverance of Abraham's seed (vv. 13-14, 16); and the promise of the giving of the land to Abraham's descendants (vv. 18-21). The last two promise-covenant thematic notions imply a necessary military victory over the enemy of Abraham's descendants.

Having established the thematic link between Genesis 14 and 15, some words or phrases have been either re-used or noticed syntagmatically by the same biblical writer (within the Pentateuch) or a later biblical writer (of the Historical Books). A couple of examples are sufficient to make our point. The word במחזה (Gen 15:1) and ברך (Gen 14:19-20) reappear together in Numbers 22-24; it is noteworthy that the word מַחֲזֶה occurs a mere four times in the entire OT: Gen 15:1, Num 24:4, 16 and Ezek 13:7. Other phrases like אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֵּעֶיךָ (Gen 15:4) reappear exactly in 2 Sam 7:12 (plus the appearance three times of ברך in 2 Sam 7:29). This evidence encourages us to investigate the possibility of a later biblical writer reading and interpreting his antecedent Scripture with its cotexts in mind.

Thus far the literary-thematic relationship between Genesis 14 and its immediate cotexts (13 and 15) have been inspected. It heartens us to find this number of links in these three chapters; however, given the foundational nature of Genesis 12 in the Abrahamic cycle, we should extend our examination to the literary-thematic relationship between Genesis 12 and 14.

5.1.3 Literary-Thematic Relationship Between Genesis 12 and 14

On a narrative level, Abraham is the key figure connecting together these two chapters. There are, however, three semantic links between Genesis 12 and 14. (1) The multiple occurrences of ברך in both chapters have already been registered; (2) Lot was introduced in Gen 12:5 as אֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־אָחִיו while nearly the exact same phrase reappears in 14:12 אֶת־לוֹט . . . בֶּן־אֲחִי אַבְרָם; and (3) Note the use of רכשׁ (with לוט and בן־אח) as a plot-carrying or discourse technique: the narrator takes great pains binding Genesis 12, 13, and 14 together with this word ("a" stands for בן־אח and/or לוט and "b," רכושׁ). Observe the following:

Gen 12:5 . . . וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם

   a   וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־אָחִיו

   b   וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ

Gen 13:6

   b   כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב

Gen 14:12

   a   וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־לוֹט

   b   וְאֶת־רְכֻשׁוֹ

   a   בֶּן־אֲחִי אַבְרָם

Gen 14:16 . . . וַיָּשֶׁב

   a   וְגַם אֶת־לוֹט אָחִיו

   b   וּרְכֻשׁוֹ הֵשִׁיב

In 12:5, Abraham took (singular verb) Sarah and Lot with all the possessions they (presumably Abraham and Lot) accumulated (plural verb). The great wealth accumulated became problematic, resulting in Lot departing from Abraham. After Lot was captured in Genesis 14, the narrator again takes great pains describing how Lot's possessions were also taken away (14:12), and records how Abraham recaptured the possessions (14:16).[262] Furthermore, the same word reappears in Gen 15:14 (a divine promise that Abraham's descendents would come out of the land of slavery with great possessions, בִּרְכֻשׁ גָּדוֹל). Could the last occurrence of רכושׁ in 15:14 serve as a link between all these chapters? We believe so, and its occurrences signifie more than what it is on the surfeace. Therefore, to consider these links we now turn to our next section.

5.1.4 A Study of Genesis 12-15 as a "Unit"

We propose that these four chapters lay the foundation for the themes of the Abrahamic cycle. Our argument is based on the occurrences of keywords or themes: the word ברך, the promise pertaining to the "seed," and the covenant made between Yahweh/God and Abraham.[263] Each of these already appeared in Genesis 12-15.

What follows is an elaboration of our point: first, regarding the keyword ברך, our conclusions have already been established in our syntagmatic study of this word.[264] Second, it is obvious that God's promise to Abraham is multi-fold:[265] the presence of God, the land and posterity (seed and son).[266] Nonetheless, our interest narrows to the seed-promise, partly because of the limitations of this project, and partly because of its development in the later biblical writings (Numbers 22-24, Psalm 110, Hebrews 5-7) that appear to place more interest in the "seed" (a person). Last, the word covenant (ברית) *and* the making of the "covenant" are formally introduced in Genesis 15.

It appears that another covenant was made later in Genesis 17. Are these two related, and if so, how? With this question in mind, we turn to our next section.

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262 All the occurrences of רכושׁ in the Abrahamic cycle are in Gen 12:5, 13:6, 14:11, 12, 16 and 15:14.

263 Note that Elohim "God" as a character did not appear to Abraham until Genesis 17. This is noted by Rendsburg, *Redaction of Genesis,* 46.

264 See chapter four.

265 Interestingly, neither *ABD* nor *NIDOTTE* list "promise" as a topic for their study.

266 See C. Westermann, "Promises to the Patriarchs," in *IDBSup,* 690-93. David D. J. Clines proposes a three-fold promise: descendants, relationship, and the land. See his *The Theme of the Pentateuch,* JSOTSup 10 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978, reprint, 1982), 29-43. VanGemeren elaborates on the patriarchal promise in four aspects: the seed, the land, personal blessing, and blessing to the nations; VanGemeren, *Progress of Redemption,* 104-108 (see the table 6 on p. 105 for an illustrative summary).

5.1.5 A Study of the Relationship Between Genesis 12-15 and 17

Scholars are divided on whether or not the covenants in Genesis 15 and 17 are the same. According to Williamson's detailed study, scholars explain the relationship between the two covenants in Genesis 15 and 17 in the following four ways: as two different sources or traditions; as two stages of a covenant-making process of one single covenant; seeing Genesis 17 as a renewal or reaffirmation of what is established already in Genesis 15; or as two different covenants in terms of focus and function.[267] While we may not be able to resolve the issue of continuity and discontinuity between these two chapters (or possibly two covenants), we should point out, through the syntagmatic study of two words יצא and זרע in this chapter, that some kind of thrust or theme emerges, namely, the seed occupies the center of the divine promise.

   Two comments on these two Hebrew words (יצא and זרע) are illuminative of the position that the seed may occupy the center of God's promise with regard to the themes of these two chapters. First, note the use of יצא in these two chapters:[268]

כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֵּעֶיךָ הוּא יִירָשֶׁךָ Gen 15:4
וּמְלָכִים מִמְּךָ יֵצֵאוּ Gen 17:6

Both stress that the heir or the seed has to come from the body of Abraham. In addition, and significantly, a royal line is embedded in the seed. Second, both chapters spell out the seed and the land but syntactically stress the former more than the latter:

לְזַרְעֲךָ נָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת Gen 15:18
וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֵת אֶרֶץ Gen 17:8

Note how in Gen 15:18 the phrase לְזַרְעֲךָ is in an emphatic position.[269] In Gen 17:8, the word אַחֲרֶיךָ that follows וּלְזַרְעֲךָ seems redundant but its function is to juxtapose with לְךָ[270] in order to sandwich in the "seed," thereby making it more distinctive. There is no question about Williamson's thinking that both aspects of the divine promises – the

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267 Williamson, *Israel and the Nations,* chapter 2. He summarizes chapter 2 on p. 260.

268 Note that יצא occurs four times in Genesis 15 but only once in Genesis 17 (v. 6). In 15:5, 7, both are in Hiph. form while in vv. 4 and 14 they are in Qal form.

269 Major commentaries do not remark on this point, except Erhard Blum. He notices the first position given to לְזַרְעֲךָ but only attributes its significance to documentary source (D). Erhard Blum, *Der Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984), 381; quoted in Hagelia, *Numbering the Stars,* 166 (footnote 27). But see R. Rendtorff, "Genesis 15 im Rahmen der theologishen Bearbeitung der Vätergeschichten," in *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testament: Festschrift Claus Westermann,* ed. Rainer Albertz, Hans-Peter Müller, H. W. Wolff and W. Zimmerli (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1980), 77-80.

270 Cf. to v. 7: לָתֵת לְךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת. Again, there is a thematic progression between v. 7 and v. 18. The gift of land is now transferred from Abraham to his seed.

land and the seed – should be read "in conjunction with the other, rather than in isolation from one another."[271] The question remains, however, which one has already been given "priority" by the biblical writer of the Pentateuch? The seed seems to be the answer.

To search further for the answer, two areas of study are suggested: first, to examine the co-appearance of ארץ and זרע and second, to see how זרע is syntagmatically used with the other key word בן. First, disregarding the context of these two words ארץ and זרע where they occur, we find that the former occurs 41 times and the latter 15 times in Genesis 12-22. Nevertheless, in all three chapters (Genesis 15, 17 and 22) that contain God's promise on land and seed, זרע occurs more than ארץ: Genesis 15: 4 vs. 3 times, Genesis 17: 6 vs. 2 times and Genesis 22: 3 over 2 times respectively.[272] If we put the word ארץ back into the context, in both Genesis 17 and 22, the promise concerning the land is either minimally stressed or almost absent.[273]

Second, another study of the syntagmatic perspective of זרע with another keyword בן produces the following result. Through a computer-assisted search,[274] within two verses we find the syntagmatic appearances of these two words in Genesis: (1) 3:15-16, (2) 4:25-26, (3) 8:22-9:1, (4) 9:9, (5) 15:3, (6) 16:10-11, (7) 17:19, (8) 21:12-13, (9) 22:16-17. More relevant to our interest are (1), (2), (5), (7), and (9).[275] Thus, each of the above passages will be examined as follows.

A syntagmatic study of זרע and בן on Gen 3:15-16 will result in a juxtaposition of God's mercy (as promise) and his justice (as discipline). While the former word (זרע) is to signify the struggle between the "seed" of the woman and that of the serpent (v. 15) with the ultimate triumph of the woman's seed as God's promise, the latter purports

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[271] Williamson, *Israel and the Nations,* 133. See his exposition on the interconnections between these two aspects of divine promise in pp. 133-135.

[272] Compare the following chart (x = times):

Chapters	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	Total
זרע	1x	3x	0x	4x	1x	6x	0x	2x	0x	2x	3x	15x
ארץ	9x	9x	2x	3x	1x	2x	3x	6x	2x	4x	2x	41x

Note: also the word "covenant" only appears in Genesis 15 and 17.

[273] See 17:8 (2x for ארץ) and 22:2 and 18 (promise of land absent).

[274] BibleWorks for Windows.

[275] A brief note is in order for (6) and (8). Both (6) and (8) deal with Ishmael. The tension of who should be Abraham's "seed" begins in Genesis 13 (as noted in Lot, whom we have discussed in our last chapter) and continues through the birth of Ishmael. Could Ishmael as the "son" of Abraham through Hagar be the "seed" of God's promise? The answer is two-fold: (1) Gen 21:12b seems to rule out the possibility and (2) the use of בן in referring to Isaac and Ishmael indicates who should be the candidate. In all its appearances in Genesis 12-22, בן refers to Isaac 21 times while to Ishmael only 8 times. (If we add Genesis 24 to our statistics [see below], בן exclusively refers to Isaac 13 more times. In reference to Isaac: Gen 17:16, 17, 19; 18:10, 14; 21:2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10; 22:2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16; 24: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 36, 37, 38, 40, 44, 48, 50. For Ishmael: Gen 16:11, 15; 17:23, 25, 26; 21:9, 10, 13.) This makes Isaac the (partial) fulfillment of the divine promise of the seed.

that the pain of giving birth, of bearing "children" (בֵּן, plural) is an indication of God's discipline meted out for human sin (v. 16). Yet without any birth of "children," there would be no woman's "seed." The two are so intertwined together that a divine promise (regarding the seed of the woman) is mixed with a divine discipline (pain of childbirth). Thus, some have read 3:15 as a divine promise of deliverance through the birth of a messianic figure. At least Eve seemed to understand it that way. In her response to the birth of a "son" (בֵּן), Eve's recitation of the word "seed" (זֶרַע) in 4:25-26 may intend to show her understanding of or association with the promise given in 3:15.[276] Furthermore, this messianic figure is later imbued with royal overtones in the development in Genesis, the Pentateuch, and even the OT historical books.[277]

The next syntagmatic use of זרע and בן in Gen 15:3 is a reiteration of God's promise in addition to introducing another keyword בית into the discussion. In Gen 15:3, it reads: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם הֵן לִי לֹא נָתַתָּה זָרַע וְהִנֵּה בֶן־בֵּיתִי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי (cf. v. 2).[278] The juxtaposition of these two words (with בית) can be viewed as a chiastic structure (with verse 2):

a וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֲדֹנָי יֱהוִה
b מַה־תִּתֶּן־לִי
וְאָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי[279]
c וּבֶן־מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא דַּמֶּשֶׂק אֱלִיעֶזֶר:
a' וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם
b' הֵן לִי לֹא נָתַתָּה
זָרַע
c' וְהִנֵּה בֶן־בֵּיתִי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי:

The correspondences of this chiastic structure are obvious: ויאמר אברם in aa', נתן in bb' and ביתי and בן in cc'. Abraham's concern is crystallized through this rhetorical-structural analysis in that he remained childless because Yahweh, who had yet to fulfill what He promised, did not give him the "seed." In Abraham's mind, someone

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276 Cf. T. D. Alexander, "From Adam to Judah: The Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis," *EvQ* 61 (1989): 15-16. Now Seth, replacing Abel, is the prime candidate of the divine promise.

277 See Walter Wifall, "Gen 3:15 – a Protevangelium?" *CBQ* 36 (1974): 361-65; Alexander, "From Adam to Judah," 15-18 and his "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *TynBul* 44 (1993): 67-69. Cf. Jack Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *TynBul* 48 (1997): 139-48 and Alexander's response in "Further Observations on the Term "Seed" in Genesis," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 363-67.

278 Verse 2b has posed a big challenge to interpreters and translators. See Hagelia, *Numbering the Stars,* 40-44, Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17,* 420-22, Wenham, *Genesis 1-15,* 328-29, Westerman, *Genesis 12-36,* 219-20.

279 There is a possibility of word play with עֲרִירִי and זֶרַע (cf. b'). See Sailhamer, "Genesis," 131-32 (notes on vv. 2-3).

else's "son" (בֵן in construct)[280] would become his heir; subsequently, Yahweh struck down this notion and reassured Abraham of His promise (cf. vv. 4-5).[281]

The "seed" and "son" contention comes into sharp focus in Gen 17:19. Doubting God's promise about Sarah's forthcoming pregnancy (17:15-16), he questioned within himself (v. 17) and suggested to God to bless Ishmael (v. 18). God's reply is assuring but clear (אֲבָל שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ יֹלֶדֶת לְךָ בֵּן) (v.19a). Coupled with the promise of a son, v. 19b puts son, seed, and covenant together in one breath: וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לִבְרִית עוֹלָם לְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו. [282]

After Abraham had the "son" Isaac, as promised, Gen 22:16-17 reiterates the divine promise in a solemn form with two new additional features:[283] first, God's promise concerning Abraham's seed (three times in vv. 17-18) was given in conjunction with Abraham's obedience because he did not withhold his son (וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ).[284] Second, the military overtone of what had been promised to Abraham (Genesis 15) now shifts to his seed in Gen 22:17 (וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֵת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו). Third, the promise here is in its accumulative effect, particularly with the stress on the numerousness of Abraham's descendants. Note the use of *both* "star" and "sand" to describe the numerousness of Abraham's descendants in 22:17 while *only one* of these, "star," "sand" or "dust," is used on other occasions to depict the same notion.[285]

We pause to recap what we have delineated thus far in our study. From a discourse analysis of all these texts and under the rubric of blessing, God's promise to Abraham is formalized in the form of covenant. Contained in this blessing-promise-covenant formula, one takes note of several key elements: (1) the seed is confined to Abraham and his direct descendants (through Sarah); (2) the agent of blessing shifts from Abraham to his seed; (3) the seed of Abraham has a royal line; (4) the seed is linked to a (military) victory over its enemy; and (5) the seed (זרע) has been transformed into a specific son (בֵן).

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280 בֶן־בֵּיתִי is usually glossed as "slave of my house." See Hagelia, *Numbering the Stars,* 47-48. It is not uncommon for a house slave to be adopted as "son" or "heir" in ANE practice (cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17,* 420).

281 Abraham's notion of adopting a slave to be his heir downgrades the divine promise and is therefore forbidden by Yahweh. Thus, the phrase אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֵּעֶיךָ in v. 4 is to expel such unwarranted notion.

282 We also detect a thematic progression in 17:19b. The phrase לְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו projects that Isaac will have his own seed (even before he was born).

283 We have already noted earlier (last chapter) that the agent of blessing now shifts from Abraham to his seed.

284 The debate of the conditionality/unconditionality of the covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 extends beyond the scope of our investigation. See Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *TMSJ* 10 (1999): 209-10 (and bibliography cited there).

285 To depict the numerousness of the seed, "dust" is used in Gen 13:16, 28:14; "stars" in 15:5, 26:4; and "sand" in 32:13[12].

5.1.6 A Study of the Relationship Between Genesis 12-15 and 22

Earlier we have touched on the bracketing effect of Genesis 12 and 22. Nonetheless, our purpose here is to highlight the syntagmatic effect of this text in the framework of blessing-promise-covenant. First, the formal elements of divine oath or confirmation should be noted: נְאֻם־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי (Gen 22:16). This is the only instance in which the divine promise or oath is introduced with Yahweh swearing by himself (בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי) and it is a unique use of נְאֻם־יְהוָה, with a clear prophetic overtone.[286] If all the previous blessings-promises prior to Genesis 15 are now cast in the form of a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17, Yahweh reaffirms them again with solemn formality in Gen 22:16. Second, we reiterate the shift from Abraham as the instrument of God's blessing to his seed from a syntagmatic point of view.[287]

5.1.7 A Study of Genesis 49, With Special Reference to vv. 8-12 in View of Genesis 12-15

At first glance, Genesis 49 seems "remote" from the Abrahamic cycle in a literary sense. Nonetheless, as we have summarized above, Genesis 49 contains nearly all of the ingredients under the framework of blessing-promise-covenant.[288]

Although our focus on Genesis 49 will be on the tribe of Judah, we should acknowledge the context in which this text is found. Since the prediction about Judah[289] is cast in the framework of blessing, the obvious connection between Genesis 49 and 12-15 is the multiple use of ברך in Genesis 49:28: שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אֲבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כְּבִרְכָתוֹ בֵּרַךְ אֹתָם כָּל־אֵלֶּה. The ברך in v. 28 puzzles many scholars since the content does not sound like a blessing. Thus their interpretations range from bidding farewell, to testimony, to merely a collection of tribal sayings.[290] We suggest, however, that the authorial intent for the use of ברך is to connect back to Genesis 12-15, that is,

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286 Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 116. The writer of Hebrews also makes a note of this phrase. See Heb 6:13 and chapter 10 and 11 of this project.

287 See chapter 4.

288 Due to the scope of this project, we refer our readers to the critical issues of Genesis 49 and its history of interpretation to Chien-Kuo Paul Lai, "Jacob's Blessing on Judah (Genesis 49:8-12) within the Hebrew Old Testament: A Study of In-Textual, Inner-Textual, and Inter-Textual Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993), chapters 3 and 4 and Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 466-87.

289 See Walter Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), 50-53.

290 See Lai, "Jacob's Blessing," 124-25 and the bibliographical data cited there.

to the foundational text of God's blessing-promise-covenant to Abraham and his seed.[291]

Having established the context of Gen 49:8-12, it is suggested that the prediction of Judah is given a more prominent place among all of Jacob's sons, as some scholars have already indicated.[292] There are two elements in Jacob's blessing of Judah that contributed to Judah's prominence, and therefore deserve attention. First, none of Jacob's sons were addressed as "my son," בְּנִי except Judah in v. 9.[293] The word בן occurs nine times in Genesis 49: three times it is plural, referring to "sons" (in the sense of children) of Jacob (vv. 1, 2, 33), and four times it is used as an idiom (vv. 11, 22 [twice] and 32).[294] The last two references are found in Judah's pericope: v. 8 as "the sons of your father will bow to you" and in v. 9, as "my son." The intentional use of בן in v. 9 should not be dismissed lightly.[295] We believe it serves as a lexical link back to the seed/son contention in Genesis 12-15. Our belief is further reinforced by the military victor and royal imagery found in v. 8a ("your hand will be on the neck of your enemy") and in vv. 9b-10 (the "scepter" and the "ruler's staff"). This leads to the next point.

Second, only Judah was given the royal treatment in Genesis 49. Such notion is supported by several key words in v. 10: שֵׁבֶט, מְחֹקֵק and שִׁילֹה. Besides v. 10 as the crux in Judah's pericope,[296] some challenge the kingly connotation of these two words, שֵׁבֶט and מְחֹקֵק.[297] Nonetheless, the decisive understanding of the kingly notion should

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291 One can find the multi-appearance of ברך only in Joseph's pericope in Jacob's blessing. See vv. 25-26; the root ברך appears 6 times (none occur in vv. 8-12, Judah's pericope). Nonetheless, some key elements in the framework of blessing-promise-covenant are missing in Joseph's account. For instance, the notion of kingship is wanting. See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 469 on the term נזיר in v. 26. This word in v. 26 is the only term in Joseph's account that may have a kingly notion. Further in our study is an explanation of the prediction of Judah. For an apparent tension between Joseph (his two sons) and Judah, please see appendix 5.

292 Judah's pericope is the second longest, next to Joseph's. In a narrative perspective (of Genesis 12-50), T. D. Alexander comments that such "special blessing given to Judah is somewhat unexpected." See his "Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis," chap. in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Text,* ed. Philip Satterthwaite, Richard Hess and Gordon Wenham (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995), 33. See also appendix 5.

293 Lai has noted this ("Jacob's Blessing," 134-35) but did not elaborate on its significance.

294 The idiomatic use of בן in these verses are: בְּנִי אֲתֹנוֹ, (literally) "his ass's colt"; בֵּן פֹּרָת, (literally) "son of being fruitful" (in this exact form twice in Joseph's periscope) and בְּנֵי־חֵת, (literally) "sons of Heth" respectively.

295 In their explanation, most commentators focus on the lion's imagery and miss the phrase "my son." Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 476 and Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 658. Hamilton points out the change from second person to third person in the middle of v. 9 (ibid., 657).

296 Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 658.

297 G. Ch. Aalders, *Genesis,* trans. William Heynen, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), 277-78. Aalders' challenge is based on how these two words are used. For him, to argue for a kingly notion in these two words is inconclusive.

come from the former word (שֵׁבֶט)[298] based on its occurrence in Num 24:17a, שֵׁבֶט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, דָּרַךְ כּוֹכָב מִיַּעֲקֹב וְקָם, in conjunction with 24:19a, וַיֵּרְדְּ מִיַּעֲקֹב. Our argument is not simply about a lexical-semantic link but about a syntagmatic link between Genesis 12-15, 49 and Numbers 22-24, which will be developed later.

The kingly notion is further implied by the difficult word שִׁילֹה. Among all explanations,[299] Sarna points out that the word is understood by the early traditions in Qumran, Targums, and rabbinic literature as a "messianic title."[300] In addition, Walter Kaiser, after repointing the Hebrew word with the support of the LXX, Theodotian, Aquila, Symmachus, Targum Onkelos, and some Hebrew manuscripts, reads this word as "until he comes to whom it [i.e., the scepter, or the rule] belongs."[301]

To recapitulate our findings thus far, Genesis 49 shows a thematic progression in the understanding of God's blessing-promise-covenant. Judah, one of the twelve sons (בֵּן) of Jacob or the seed of Abraham, is singled out to contain the royal line promised earlier in Genesis 17, whose seed is flavored with a military victory over his enemy.

5.2 A Study of Numbers 22-24 as a Cotext for Genesis 14 (12-15): Their Literary-Thematic Relationship

Like Melchizedek in Gen 14:19-20, the pericope of Balaam as well as Balaam as a character have long puzzled biblical scholars. Most regard Melchizedek and Balaam as enigmatic.[302] Nonetheless, the Balaam oracles are regarded as some of the most important oracles in biblical study. To appreciate the literary role and function of the oracles of Balaam in the Pentateuch, especially its link to Genesis 14, two tasks must be completed: to examine the oracles in their present literary context, and to examine

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298 It can be glossed as "tribe" or "rod" in all its occurrences, depending on the context. In the Pentateuch, these occurrences clearly meant "rod": Gen 49:10, Exod 21:20, Lev 17:32, Num 24:17.

299 See Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 661 for an overview of all possible interpretations.

300 Sarna, *Genesis,* 337. Cf to Benno Jacob's comment: "Est ist Name einer Person, und zwar des künftigen Messias. Diese Deutung tritt zuerst im Talmud . . . auf." Jacob, *Das Erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934; reprint, New York: Ktav, n.d.), 904.

301 Kaiser, *The Messiah,* 51-52. See a longer form in Ezek 27:32[27]. Kaiser's proposed reading is quite similar to what Herman Gunkel suggested in 1910. See Gunkel, *Genesis*, 456.

302 John T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters: A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions*, BJS 244 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1992).

how they relate to Genesis 12-15.[303] Our next section will deal with the oracles in the present literary context.

5.2.1 The Oracles of Balaam in Their Present Literary Context

The goal of this section is to examine the Balaam oracles in their present form. As a whole, the Book of Numbers poses a challenge for biblical exegetes who fail to arrive at a consensus on the structure or arrangement of the book.[304] Nonetheless, the narrator of Numbers seems to structure his materials according to chronology and geography. Adopting the latter, the narrative moves along on two axes.

First, the narrator of Numbers employs geographical markers to move along his story: Num 21:11 brings the Israelites into a place facing Moab (פְּנֵי מוֹאָב). Readers should note that Moab (מוֹאָב), does not appear after Exod 15:15 (the only time in Exodus) until here.[305] It occurs three times in Genesis: 19:37 (twice) and 36:35. The last reference is crucial because in the early part of the Pentateuch the narrator has already tied Moab to Midian:

הַמַּכֶּה אֶת־מִדְיָן בִּשְׂדֵה מוֹאָב.

This geographical reference is repeated several times before the Balaam episode to lead the reader of the narrative into the encounter of Balaam and Balak: 21:13, 20, and 22:1. Besides the geographical reference serving as a narrative device, we propose

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303 To go into a detailed exegesis of every word of the text is prohibited by the scope of this project. Several exegetical works can be consulted: Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, 4A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 241-63. Levine's commentary covers the Balaam oracle with 140 pages and is regarded as the most comprehensive study of this oracle among all the English works. Cf. to Hedweige Rouillard, *La Péricope de Balaam (Nombres 22-24): La Prose et Les "Oracles"* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1985). Cf. also Michael S. Moore, *The Balaam Traditions: Their Character and development*, SBLDS 113 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1990), chap. 2. Furthermore, it is impossible to discuss certain critical issues of the oracles, such as the tradition and background history of the oracles. Readers should consult these issues in John T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters*. Regarding the comparison and relationship between the Balaam oracle and the text discovered at Deir 'Alla, see Levine, *Numbers 21-36*, 241-63. He supplies an up-to-date translation of and comments on the inscriptions from the text at Deir 'Alla. For a comprehensive bibliography on the study of the inscriptions at Deir 'Alla, see Walter Kaiser, Jr., "Balaam Son of Beor in Light of Deir 'Alla and Scripture: Saint or Soothsayer?" in *"Go to the Land I Will Show You": Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young,* ed. Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 95 (footnote 1).

304 Wenham provides a concise survey of several major commentators germane to the outline of Numbers: Wenham himself, Olson, Douglas, and Milgrom. See Wenham, *Numbers*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 17-25; brief notes on Gray, Noth, de Vaulx and Budd on p. 16 (for the authors cited in our text above, see the bibliographical data there).

305 Moab occurs in Numbers in these references: 21:11, 13, 15, 20, 26, 28, 29, 22:1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 14, 21, 36, 23:6, 7, 17, 24:17, 25:1, 26:3, 63, 31:12, 33:44, 48, 49, 50, 35:1, 36:13.

that Moab is purposefully juxtaposed with Midian to bracket the Balaam oracle: for instance, observe how both terms appear in 22:3-4 and 25:1, 6.[306]

Besides geography, the narrator utilizes personal names to carry his plot forward. Together, represented by Balak and the elders of Midian, they signify "those who curse" (Gen 12:3, מְקַלֶּלְךָ, cf. 27:29, אֹרְרֶיךָ) the seed of Abraham, the Israelites,[307] by engaging Balaam to do the job. It is in this framework that we find the antithesis to the "curse," namely the "blessing" in the Balaam oracles. Having detected the narrative flow, we now proceed to a four-part study of the Balaam episode: a survey of the content; the rhetorical arrangement of the Balaam pericope; a syntagmatic study of ברך; and the thematic progression of the oracles.

5.2.2 A Survey of the Content of the Balaam Pericope

A survey of the content of the Balaam story puts our interpretation into perspective. Num 22:2-21 sets the stage: Balak sent for Balaam to curse the Israelites, but Balaam's trip is interrupted by a phenomenon: Balaam's donkey saw (ראה) a danger Balaam could not see, and finally the donkey spoke to its master.

While some scholars regard this donkey episode an interpolation and consider it out of place in the Balaam story,[308] they basically agree it serves two functions here. The incident humiliates Balaam,[309] thus preemptively balancing the imagery of a foreigner being given an exalted prophetic role to bless Israel later in this narrative.[310]

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306 Moab in 21:28-29 already signifies divine displeasure on itself.

307 Note ארר and קבב (synonym קלל, see *NCB,* 997) are both used in Numbers 22-24: 22:6, 12, 23:7, 24:9 for ארר and 22:11, 17, 23:8, 11, 13, 25, 27 and 24:10 for קבב. Lai's notation of "Balak used ארר whereas Balaam used קבב" is questionable. See Lai, "Jacob's Blessing," 229. See Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 169-73.

308 For example, J. Milgrom, *Numbers: the Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation,* The JPS Torah Commentary (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 469.

309 Milgrom, *Numbers,* 469; Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 154.

310 Milgrom lists many similarities between the ass episode and Balaam in Numbers 23-24: "Balaam, who desires to subdue Israel with words, cannot subdue his ass with a stick . . . . Balaam, who claims prophetic speech since the Lord puts words into his mouth (22:38, 23:5, 12, 16), is now matched by his ass (v. 28). Balaam, who boasts that 'his knowledge is from the Most High' (24:16), has to admit, 'I did not know' (v. 34; . . .). . . . Balaam, who would slay his ass if only he could find a sword (v. 29), does not see the sword extended by the angel (v. 23)." See his *Numbers,* 469.

The incident also functions as a prefigurement of Balak's dealing with Balaam.[311]

After Balak finally met Balaam in Num 22:36-40, verse 38 sets the tone for what Balaam is going to say: הֲיָכוֹל אוּכַל דַּבֵּר מְאוּמָה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יָשִׂים אֱלֹהִים בְּפִי אֹתוֹ אֲדַבֵּר. What the Lord put in Balaam's mouth is the central thesis of this narrative: a blessing upon and the prediction for God's people. Therefore, in our next three sections, we will examine the rhetorical arrangement of the four oracles, finally stressing a key word, ראה, the syntagmatic progression in our study of the word ברך, and the thematic progression of the four oracles.

5.2.3 A Rhetorical Arrangement of the Four Oracles

The task here is to appreciate the rhetorical effect based on the arrangement or structure of these four oracles.[312] Such rhetorical effect ultimately casts Balaam's oracles not as a historical artifact but as a prediction for the distant future. There are four rhetorical features in these four oracles.

The first feature: both the first and second oracles are introduced by the same introductory phrase וַיִּשָּׂא מְשָׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמַר[313] (v. 7//v. 18) with the name Balak cited, likewise for the third and fourth oracles (vv. 3-4//15-16).[314] All four oracles, however, contain this phrase וישא משלו ויאמר. The second feature: all four oracles are linked by the proper names Jacob and Israel used in a pair; first oracle: 23:7, 10, 21, 23; second oracle: 23:21, 23; third oracle: 24:5 and fourth oracle: 24:17, 18-19.[315] The third feature: there are two

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311 Timothy R. Ashley comments: "Just as the donkey has been caught three times between seeing a vision of an armed and dangerous angel of Yahweh on the one hand and feeling the stick of the blind Balaam on the other, so Balaam, who now sees that Yahweh's will for him is to bless Israel, will soon be caught, in three ever tighter situations, between doing Yahweh's will on the one hand, and succumbing to Balak's pressure to curse Israel on the other. . . . Balaam has become the donkey who can now see the divine anger, and whose mouth will be opened by God, in spite of the stick of Balak." Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 460. R. W. L. Moberly sees "discernment" (based on the word ראה) as one of the major concerns in this story and he argues for the reversal of roles between ass-Balaam and Balak-Balaam. Balaam could not see what the ass saw followed by Balak not seeing what Balaam saw (i.e., God's blessing upon Israel). Moberly, "'God Is Not a Human That He Should Repent' (Numbers 3:29 and 1 Samuel 15:29)," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Timothy K. Beal and Tod Linafelt (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1998), 117.

312 Our expositions of the four oracles are mostly indebted to Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 210-216.

313 This expression is commonly found in prophetic literature. See Gerald Wilson, "משל," in *NIDOTTE*, 2: 1135.

314 A minor difference exists between v. 4 and v. 16. The latter contains this phrase וידע דעת עליון. *BHS* suggests inserting this phrase in v. 4.

315 All of the appearances are in this sequence: Jacob-Israel except 24:18-19, where Israel-Jacob is found.

sets of connections between the second and third oracles. (1) The imagery is a lion, pictured rising "up to leap, who will not crouch down . . . until he has caught his prey" (23:24, in the second oracle), which connects to the same lion who "has already crouched down, and is devouring his prey, so that no one can possibly drive him off" (24:9, in the third oracle).[316] (2) The Exodus is alluded to, signified by this repeated phrase, אֵל מוֹצִיאוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּתוֹעֲפֹת רְאֵם לוֹ in the second and third oracles (23:22, 24:8).[317]

The fourth feature: this last feature is crucial. There is a bracketing and rhetorical effect created by the use of the word ראה[318] in the Balaam oracles. It is used three times in the poems or oracles: 23:9, 21 and 24:17.[319] The first and last are written in the exact form: אֲרְאֶנּוּ. In Num 23:9 (first oracle), the absence of a clear antecedent as an object for the verb "see" (כִּי־מֵרֹאשׁ צֻרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ) has caused interpreters to make some emendations.[320] We believe revision is unnecessary because there is an authorial intention to bring the present moment of Balaam's seeing Israel as God's people to the distant future in a vision, a prediction of a person with royal status (24:17, 19).[321] This vision of the distant future is further reinforced by the presence of these prophetic terms נְאֻם and יֶחֱזֶה (24:16, cf. v. 4). How does the use of ראה tie in with ברך? We will answer that toward the end of the following section.

5.2.4 A Syntagmatic Study of the Key Word ברך

The most evident key word in the Balaam story is ברך; while it serves as a connective link between Genesis 12-15 and Numbers 22-24, it shapes a reader's understanding of the theme of the discourse of the Balaam pericope. It occurs 14 times in Numbers 22-24

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316 Levine, *Numbers 21-36*, 211.

317 According to Levine, these connective devices provide a "transition from defining Balaam's mission and status to vis-à-vis contemporary Israel, which is the agenda of the first two poems, to the predictions of future Israelite victories on both sides of the Jordan, the subject of the third and fourth poems." Ibid.

318 See Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 104-107, who uses this word as *Leitwort* of the Balaam story.

319 Note its synonym שׁוּר also occurs in 23:9 and 24:17. Concerning the LXX readings for 24:17a (cf. *BHS*), consult John W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers*, SBLSCS 46, (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1998), 412.

320 See W. F. Albright, "The Oracles of Balaam," *JBL* 63 (1944): 212 (note 23); quoted in Ashley, *Numbers*, 468 (note 6).

321 Cf. Levine, *Numbers 21-36*, 210.

and each time the root occurs in a pair except 22:12 and 24:1.[322] On a discourse level, we have to discern where – in the poetic or narrative section[323] – this word occurs. These are the references at the narrative level: Balak hired Balaam because he knew Balaam had power to bless (22:6). Before Balaam embarked on his trip, however, God already affirmed to him that the people of Israel are blessed (כִּי בָרוּךְ הוּא, 22:12). After each of the first three oracles, Balak rebuked Balaam, commanding that he not bless Israel (Num 23:11, 25, 24:10).[324] ברך is used in the narrative one more time, when Balaam saw it pleased Yahweh to bless Israel (24:1).

Now the word ברך also appears at the poetic level (the oracles proper): 23:20 and 24:9;[325] serving as a connective of the second oracle to the third oracle. In 23:20, God's unchanging will to bless his people (23:19) now is executed by Balaam: דדא אֲשִׁיבֶנָה רתֵשׁא צאפס. Even if there is a textual problem for לְקַחְתִּי,[326] the meaning of the sentence is quite clear. Yahweh's irrevocable blessing to Israel is further reinforced at the conclusion of the third oracle, Num 24:9b: מְבָרֲכֶיךָ בָרוּךְ, which is an exact repetition of Gen 12:3 when Yahweh declared, "I will bless those who bless you" (וַאֲבָרֲכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ).

Thus far the study points to a compositional technique used by the author of the Balaam pericope to produce a thematic progression. The author has stitched the four oracles together by using ראה for the first and last oracles and ברך in the second and third oracles in the Balaam composition. Through this combination, there is a progression in the conglomerated notion of God's blessing (ברך) and prediction (ראה) in the Balaam oracles: the blessing moves from the present Israel as a people to the future via a royal figure. We can come to a similar conclusion in our examination of the thematic progress in our following section.

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322 The scholarly debate on the integrity of the Balaam pericope usually centers on the poetic and narrative components in the text. See Levine who gives two separate "comments" in his *Numbers 21-36*, 209-37. Cf. Milgrom who discusses these in two "excursuses" in his *Numbers*, 467-49. Generally, the oracles proper are poetic and the rest is in prose. If Walter Gross, *Bileam: Literar- und Formkritische Untersuchung der Prosa im Num. 22-24* (Munich: Kösel, 1974) represents a major study on the prose of the Balaam story, then Dieter Vetter, *Seherspruch und Segensschilderung: Ausdrucksabsichten und Sprachliche Verwirklichungen in den Bileam-Sprüchen von Numeri 23 und 24* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1975) does the same on the poems.

323 These are the references with double entry of ברך: Num 22:6, 23:11, 20, 25, 24:9, 10.

324 The phrases used by Balak look similar: וְהִנֵּה בֵּרַכְתָּ בָרֵךְ (23:25), בֵּרַכְתָּ בָרֵךְ וְהִנֵּה (23:11), גַּם־בָּרֵךְ לֹא תְבָרֲכֶנּוּ זֶה שָׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים (24:10).

325 We believe that these last two references are *crucial* to understanding the interrelationship between the Balaam oracles and Genesis 14 (12-15).

326 See Wevers, *Text of Numbers,* 395.

5.2.5 A Thematic Progression Of the Balaam Oracles

The paragraph indentation is different throughout the document. In this section, the goal is to detect the thematic elements and their progression in these oracles. Thus each of the oracles will be examined. The theme of the first oracle is in 23:9b-10a. Balaam could not curse Israel (v. 8) because God blessed His people (עַם), described as the "dust of Jacob" that cannot be counted מִי מָנָה עֲפַר יַעֲקֹב. This last phrase reminds the reader of the one in Gen 13:16, וְזַרְעֲךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ,[327] a fulfillment of the divine promise given to the patriarchs. Thus, the key thrust of the first oracle is God's blessing fulfilled in the numerous descendents of Jacob/Israel as God's people.

Built upon the first oracle, the main theme of the second oracle is a reassurance of God's antecedent promise to the patriarchs, a reassurance that is three-fold: first, God will not change his promise but will fulfill it (23:19); hence, neither Balaam nor Balak could do anything about it but bless (23:20). Second, God's relationship with Israel (23:21) as God's redemptive people (עַם, 23:22-24) is reiterated. Third, the notion of kingship (וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ, 23:21) is buttressed.[328]

The theme of the third oracle is not as easy to determine, but it continues what preceded it.[329] We detect a two-fold theme: first, as blessed people of God, Num 24:5-7 might depict "Israel's tents or dwelling (symbolic of their dwellings in the land of promise) are (will be) good and appropriate"[330] though at the time they had yet to enter the land of Canaan. The imagery in vv. 5-7a greatly enriches the earlier depiction of Israel in 23:9-10a. Second, the notion of kingship is spelled out more specifically in 24:7b:וְיָרֹם מֵאֲגַג מַלְכּוֹ וְתִנַּשֵּׂא מַלְכֻתוֹ. At first glance, the meaning of this clause is not clear,[331]

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327 Compare to Gen 15:5 and 28:14. Regarding the apparent contradiction that when Yahweh led Abraham outside to look at the sky and the stars, the sun had not yet set (Gen 15:12), see Scott B. Noegel's convincing resolution to this contradiction. Noegel, "A Crux and a Taunt: Night-time then Sunset in Genesis 15," in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspective,* ed. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines, JSOTSup 257 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 128-35.

328 Ashley, *Numbers,* 479. He argues for interpreting Yahweh as the king among his people. Cf. Rouillard, *La Péricope,* 286-90. Her study is inconclusive but leans toward identifying him with Yahweh. But the identity of this king is made clear in the next two oracles.

329 Note how the narrative in 24:1-2 provides an interpretative clue to the importance of the following two oracles: (1) Balaam no longer resorted to divination and (2) the coming of the Spirit of God was upon him. Therefore, Shubert Spero's comment is valid: "The first two oracles are consciously prepared as divination with God forcing the words of blessing upon Balaam. In the last two orations, Balaam yields to the spirit of the Lord and truly becomes a prophet of the living God." Spero, "Multiplicity of Meaning as a Device in Biblical Narrative," *Judaism* 34 (1985): 473.

330 Ashley, *Numbers*, 489.

331 The word Agag (אֲגַג) has puzzled exegetes but see various interpretative options offered by Ashley (*Numbers,* 492-93). Cf. Milgrom, *Numbers,* 204. There Milgrom comments: "The Septuagint and Samaritan read 'Gog,' the legendary future antagonist of Israel mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39, thereby giving the oracle an eschatological thrust."

but it should be read in light of the last oracle (see next paragraph). Nonetheless, we should note that this kingly notion is embedded in the depiction of Israel's descendents or seed (וְזַרְעוֹ, v. 7a).

The fourth oracle[332] challenges interpreters[333] though it seems safe to say that what we find in the first three oracles has a definite eschatological and messianic overtone. If one takes away the narrative between the third and fourth oracles (24:10-14) and omits the introductory remark in the fourth oracle (24:15-16), what is left off in the third oracle will continue into the fourth. That is the blessing formula (מברכיך ברוך, v. 9b) tied to a person[334] (אשורנו and אראנו, v. 17a), a kingly figure (כוכב and שבט, v. 17 and ירד, v. 19), someone in the distant future (cf. v. 17a).[335] We can view the text as follows:

Num 24:9a	מְבָרֲכֶיךָ בָרוּךְ
Num 24:17	אֶרְאֶנּוּ וְלֹא עַתָּה אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב
	דָּרַךְ כּוֹכָב מִיַּעֲקֹב וְקָם שֵׁבֶט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
Num 24:19a	וְיֵרְדְּ מִיַּעֲקֹב

As observed, several key words are found in verse 17, therefore making v. 17 the key verse in the entire oracle. Indeed, v. 17 has traditionally been interpreted as messianic by various textual traditions.[336]

Following an investigation of the conglomerative use of ראה and ברך in the oracles' rhetorical structure and the examination of the thematic progressive movement, we conclude that it is God's unchanging promise and intention to bless his people. His steadfast promise (to the patriarchs) is once again affirmed through the sayings of Balaam. Yet the promise is ultimately streamlined to a messianic, royal figure coming from Jacob's seed, evident in the last two oracles of Balaam.

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332 The fourth oracle has two parts: vv. 15-19 and vv. 20-24. Our focus will be on its first part.

333 Ashley remarks (*Numbers,* 497) that the "fourth oracle (24:14-19), as well as the brief series of three oracles that follow (24:20-25), are difficult textually, hermeneutically, and theologically. On the one hand, they represent the climax of the whole series (they arise from the mention of a 'king' in 24:7); on the other hand, these oracles are different from what has gone before in that they are wholly concerned with the future."

334 The LXX has ἄνθρωπος for the scepter. See G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 59.

335 The notion of a distant future is reinforced by vv. 14-16, the uses of prophetic terms: בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים, נְאֻם, and יֶחֱזֶה, with the poetic lines in v. 17: לֹא קָרוֹבלֹא עַתָּה.

336 Vermes sees that the whole fourth oracle has a "strong, eschatological note." Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition,* 165; cf. 59; Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 200 and Jacques de Vaulx, *Les Nombres,* SB (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1972), 293; contra Dennis T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*, BJS 71 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1985), 162-64.

5.3 A Summary: The Literary-Thematic Relationships Between Genesis 14 (12-15) and Numbers 22-24

A meticulous reader of Genesis and Numbers will notice the connections between Genesis 14 and Numbers 22-24. A case in point is the key word ברך that occurs multiple times in both texts. Another example is Genesis 12-15, which exhibits some similarities with the Balaam oracles in Numbers 22-24. For instance, in Genesis 14-15, the sequence is blessing (14:19-20a) followed by offering or sacrifice (14:20b, 15:17). The sequence is reversed in Numbers 22-24, where sacrifice is followed by blessing (23:6, 7-10; 23:17, 18-24; 23:30-24:1, 3-9). Moore finds yet another instance delineating a "blessing-of-foreigners trajectory" in these characters: Melchizedek, Jethro, Balaam and the Sabean Queen.[337] Nonetheless, Moore fails to observe that of all these foreigners who pronounced blessings, only the Melchizedek and Balaam episodes contain a multiple occurrence of ברך.[338]

Furthermore, a militia tone is detectable in Genesis 14-15 as well as in Numbers 22-24. This tone is readily apparent in Gen 14:1-17 but also could be detected in Genesis 15.[339] In Numbers, however, the multitude of Israelites posed a threat to Moab (22:1-3) and thus Balak desired Balaam to curse Israel so that he could defeat (נָכָה and הִלָּחֵם, both terms possessing military connotations; 22:6, 11) them and drive them out from the land (22:6).[340] Unmistakably, the military motif has everything to do with the divine promise, and not surprisingly, the numerous descendants promised to the patriarchs are "envisaged as the prerequisite of military conquest."[341] Finally and significantly, the unique name for God, Elyon, appears in both texts (Gen 14:18-20, 22 and Num 24:16).[342] Note how both El and Elyon appear in Num 24:16 (the fourth

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337 Michael S. Moore, "Ruth the Moabite and the Blessing of Foreigners," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 206-10.

338 The blessing offered instead of the curse by Balaam, if viewed from the framework of the blessing-promise-covenant, is tied to the Abrahamic covenant, as VanGemeren (*Progress of Redemption,* 139) remarks: "The Lord changed Balaam's curse into a blessing, and thereby he confirmed each of the promises made to Abraham."

339 Ha argues that the author of Genesis 14 "might have been struck by the military overtone of Genesis 15 and thought his work might provide a fitting setting to it." Ha, *Genesis 15,* 204; quoted in Lipton, *Patriarchal Dreams*, 211. Cf. Ha's remark on the military tone on the word "shield" in "YHWH as Shield" section in *Genesis 15,* 96-99.

340 There are two censuses in Numbers (chaps. 1-4, 26). Both serve a military purpose; see Ashley, *Numbers,* 531 (cf. 49-51). In observing the structure of Numbers, Rolf Knierim argues for a militia for cultic warfare. See Knierim, "The Book of Numbers," in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag,* ed. Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz and Ekkehard W. Stegemann (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 160-62.

341 Muffs, "the Noble Warrior," 101; cf. Gen 24:60.

342 Elyon, as another name for God, can serve as a connective between Genesis 12-15, 17 and Numbers 22-24. Another God's name, שַׁדַּי, also serves to connect the Abrahamic cycle to Numbers 22-24; see Gen 17:1 and Num 24:4//24:16.

oracle), and as we have already highlighted, the phrase וידע דעת עליון is only found here. The unique presence of El and Elyon adds to the importance of the fourth oracle or at least that is what Ashley thinks because this oracle concerns the distant future.[343]

From a discourse perspective, the co-appearance of El and Elyon in Num 24:16 will alert any reader perceptive to the narrative discourse to refer back to Gen 14:19-20. The uniqueness of this co-appearance almost confines a discourse reader to examine both texts in detail and to inevitably conclude that the composition of the Balaam oracle has Genesis 14 (cotexts 12-15) as its literary influence. Such conclusion is not only supported by El and Elyon's unique appearance in both texts but also by many shared similarities detected earlier. From this we can draw our conclusion.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

In the above study, the motif of the Balaam oracles is built upon the antecedent texts, namely, Genesis 14 and its cotexts (chapters 12-15, 17, 22 and 49). We have seen the multiple occurrence of ברך in both Genesis 14 (12 and 22) and Numbers 22-24. The substance of God's blessing, however, progresses from Abraham to his seed, which can be viewed from two angles. First, the promise of seed is fulfilled in the numerous descendants in Genesis 49 and Numbers 22-24 (see Gen 49:1; cf. Exod 1:7; and Num 22:3). Second, the focus on one seed – a royal messianic figure – is more refined in Genesis 49 (from the tribe of Judah) and in Numbers 23-24 (kingly figure in the future).

Could someone in the history of Israel fulfil this blessing-promise as presented in Genesis and Numbers? This question naturally leads us to additional study, prompted by other multiple appearances of ברך found in 2 Samuel 7. In the course of Israel's biblical history, two prime candidates surface: David and Solomon, and 2 Samuel 7 is a key text for both kings. This is the focus of our next chapter.

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343 Ashley, *Numbers,* 499.