

Appendix 4 A Discourse Analysis of Gen 14:20b: Who Gave Tithe to Whom

In chapter four, we discuss Smith's misreading of Gen 14:20b, מִנְשֶׁר מִכֶּל נִתְן־לֵו. While it is true that the subject and object of this phrase are not clear, a discourse study may dispel the ambiguity. In Gen 14:14 and through v. 16, Abraham's name is spelled out; undoubtedly, Abraham is the subject of all the verbs. Next, the subject changes. The king of Sodom (also spelled out) is the subject, that is, the one who came out to meet "him" (לְקַרְתָּה). Who is this "him"? We are left with no other choice than Abraham (cf. בְּחִזּוֹת אֶת־כְּרָדְבָּלָעָמָר וְאֶת־הַמְּלָכִים אֶחָרֶת שׁוֹבֵד, v. 17a). Then there is a syntactical break in v. 18 from v. 17. The use of 'waw + noun phrase + qatal' clues the reader that a new character has arrived and is being introduced into the narrative. The name of the subject is spelled out in detail: Melchizedek, the king of Salem. The subject of יְיָרְכָהוּ in v. 19 is Melchizedek since he has just been introduced as the subject of v. 18. The object (suffix הָיָה) of the verb יְיָרְכָהוּ is not difficult to determine since (1) it is the same [as the?] object of v. 17 (Abraham), and (2) the content in v. 19 clearly indicates it is Abraham (בְּרוּךְ אֶבְרָהָם). This limits the candidates for subject and object (לֵו) in v. 20b to two, namely, Abraham and Melchizedek.

With the above two candidates, a discourse analysis of dialogue in quotation formulas is applied to ascertain the identity of who gave whom a tenth. According to J. Daniel Hays, this episode follows a pattern of dialogue: one speaks and the other one either responds verbally or acts nonverbally to complete the dialogue.⁸⁹⁸ In our case, Melchizedek speaks (a benediction) and Abraham acts (gives a tenth) to complete the dialogue. Then v. 21 reiterates the subject, the king of Sodom (spelled out), followed by another speech by Abraham (name spelled out) in vv. 22-24.⁸⁹⁹ The discourse analysis has helped pinpoint the who and the whom in v. 20b; that is, it was Abraham who gave a tenth to Melchizedek. This happens in line with the interpretation of the author of Hebrews: "and Abraham gave him [Melchizedek] a tenth of everything" (NIV, Heb 7:2).

⁸⁹⁷ Smith, "Abraham and Melchizedek," 134.

⁸⁹⁸ J. Daniel Hays, "Quotation Formulas in the Abraham Narrative," *JOTT* 5 (1992): 355. Hays thinks a dialogue may contain a speech and a verbal or non-verbal response.

⁸⁹⁹ Using Hays' framework, then, there are two dialogues in Genesis 14: Dialogue one is vv. 18-20a and v. 20b and dialogue two is vv. 21 and vv. 22-24. See Hays, "Quotation Formulas," 355.