

GENESIS 22 AND THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORMS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

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ABSTRACT – Genesis 22 and the Ezrean Reform

The objective of this research project is to build a sound defense of the hypothesis that Genesis 22, the story of the testing of Abraham, functioned in Persian Period Judah to benefit the systematic socio-religious reforms implemented by Ezra the priestly scribe. It is argued in this dissertation that the “Book of the Law” Ezra read to the Temple community is a version of the Pentateuch, which under Ezra’s care had become the holy writ of Judaism. Based on Ezra’s scribal abilities, priestly status, royal commission to teach God’s Law to the people of the Trans-Euphrates Satrapy, and his impetus to reform the apostate Temple community, it is argued that Ezra is the final redactor of the Book of the Law of Moses. Being deeply immersed in the Pentateuch, it is most likely that Ezra would have used the narrative material in the corpus that would best effect socio-religious reform. It is shown in this dissertation that there could be no better text than Genesis 22 to instill that ideology in the apostate Temple community. It is further postulated that Genesis 22 would have been used at that time to instill in the apostate members of that community a sense of reverence for God, obedience to the tenets of the Book of the Law, which overwhelmingly advocates a lifestyle of socio-religious separateness. It is also argued that embracing that ideology was paramount to the survival of the Temple community as a distinct religious entity in the Persian Empire, as well as to regaining their autonomy over the Land.

A redaction critical analysis, an examination of key words and phrases, a consideration of separateness as the ideology of the postexilic period, and a study on cultic reform in Ancient Israel are used to support the argument that Genesis 22 was used to impact the wayward fifth-century Jews. Furthermore, it is shown that divine testing, the fear of God, covenant, and socio-religious separateness expressed in the Abraham cycle (all of which culminate in Genesis 22) are the main concerns of Ezra, making the narrative an indispensable didactic in the reform and indoctrination of the apostate elders, priests and Levites of the Jerusalem Temple community. It is shown that Abraham’s demonstration of utter reverence and radical obedience to God’s directives would have best set the standard of the God fearing Jew at that time. Having apparently lost their identity as the people of Yahweh, whose original vocation it was to bless the nations with the revelation of the one true God of creation and his Law, it has been argued in this dissertation that Genesis 22 would have been used in the effort to restore that identity to the Temple community in the fifth-century reform movement.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AKOT	Analytical Key to the Old Testament
ANET	Ancient Near East Texts
ASOT	Annotated Study of the Old Testament
BA	The Biblical Archaeologist
BAR	Biblical Archaeology Review
BR	Biblical Review
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible
BZAW	Bezeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
DBI	Dictionary of Bible Imagery
DDD	Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible
Dtr	Deuteronomic
DtrH	Deuteronomic Historian
E	Elohist
ET	Expository Times
FRLANT	<i>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</i>
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
HSM	Harvard Semitic monograph
HUC	Hebrew Union College
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
Int.	Interpretation
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Study
J	Yahwist
J ¹	Original Yahwist Document
J ²	Subsequent Yahwist Document
J ³	Subsequent Yahwist Document to J ²
J ^s	Alternative J proposed by Budde
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBQ	Jewish Bible Quarterly
JBL	Journal of Bible Literature
JerD2	Jeremiah Deuteronomist 2
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
LAB	<i>Liber antiquitatum biblicarum</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis

NIV	New International Version of the Bible
OTG	Old Testament Guide
P ¹	Original Priestly Document
P ²	Subsequent Document to P ¹
P ³	Subsequent Document to P ²
R	Redactor of Documents (R ^j , R ^e , R ^d , R ^p)
R ^{je}	Redactor who combined J and E
R ^{jed}	Redactor who combined J, E and D
R ^{jedp}	Redactor who combined J, E, D and P
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SDHS	Society for Distributing Hebrew Scriptures
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSupp	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> Supplement
WBC	Word Book Commentary
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

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INTRODUCTION

Although the period from the end of the exile to the restoration is most important in regard to understanding the development of monotheistic Judaism, it is thought to be the most difficult to reconstruct and most misunderstood.¹ In fact, it is one of the most neglected periods in Syro-Palestinian history.² Surprisingly, archaeological findings from that period have not shed any light on the development of monotheistic Judaism at that time. Yet, its importance in the development of monotheistic Yahwism/Judaism and the production of biblical texts at that time is unparalleled in the history of the Jews. Hugh Williamson comments that the best primary sources we have from Persian Period Judah are the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the Prophets Trito-Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who lend some clarity to the situation of the Jewish religious elite of the Persian Period.³ He adds that the amount of editing that has apparently been done on Ezra-Nehemiah results in such a fragmented narrative from which reconstruction of Persian Period Judah becomes problematic.⁴ Although it is known from outside sources that the Persian Period was an unstable era, this is not reflected in Ezra-Nehemiah.⁵ Supportive external records that were available to the Deuteronomic Historian,⁶ which offered a chronological structure to the history of the Monarchy, do not appear to have existed for the writer of Ezra-Nehemiah.⁷ If they were available, they were ignored, and as Peter Ackroyd assumes, it was the Chronicler who rearranged accounts in Ezra-Nehemiah on his own principles of interpretation to direct attention to theological rather than historical realities.⁸ Yet, what is attainable from Ezra-Nehemiah is that there was an urgent need for socio-religious reform, as if the survival of Judaism depended on it, or at the least the survival of the Temple community as the sanctioned religious entity of the Persian Empire in Israel.⁹

These are the people whose lives were centred in the religious life of the

¹J. Blenkinsopp. 'The Age of the Exile'. *The Biblical World*. J. Barton, (ed.). London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 416.

²P. McNutt. *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*. London: SPCK, 1999, 185.

³H. G. M. Williamson. *Studies in the Persian Period History and Historiography*. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament*, 38, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 3-4.

⁴Williamson, *Studies*, 3-7.

⁵D. L. Smith-Christopher. 'Ezra-Nehemiah'. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. J. Barton and J. Muddiman (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 309.

⁶For instance, 'Chronicles of Solomon'(1 Kgs. 11:41), 'Chronicles of the Kings of Judah' (1 Kgs. 14:29; 15:7, 23; 22:45; 2 Kgs. 8:23; 12:19; 14:18; 15:36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17; 21:25; 23:28; 24:5) and 'Chronicles of the Kings of Israel' (1 Kgs. 14:19; 15:31; 16:27; 22:39; 2 Kgs. 1:18; 10:34; 13:8, 12; 14:28; 15:11, 15, 26, 31).

⁷Williamson, *Studies*, 4.

⁸P. R. Ackroyd. *Exile and Restoration*. London: SCM Press, 1968, 139, 252.

⁹The Temple community consists of the fifth-century elders, priests, Levites, servants and laity who participated in the religious life of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, on whom were imposed religious reform by Ezra and Nehemiah.

Jerusalem Temple, whom Ezra refers to as the ‘remnant’ (Ezr. 9:8), a small group of devotees to Yahweh, who had fallen short of the standard set for them by their forefathers, in the particular case of Abraham, who to this day is esteemed as the Father of the Jews. Even as late as the New Testament Gospels, Jesus is said to castigate the religious elite for not following after this patriarch:

‘If you were Abraham’s children’, said Jesus, ‘then you would do the things Abraham did’ (Jn. 8:39).

It is from this that I propose that the Abraham cycle (Gen. 11:27-25:11) played an important role in Ezra’s reform of the apostate elders, priests and Levites of the Jerusalem Temple community.

Gerhard von Rad understood that Genesis 22, the story of Abraham’s testing, alternatively referred to as ‘the binding of Isaac’, from which the Hebrew title ‘Aqedah’ originates,¹⁰ had undergone extensive revision over the centuries, resulting in the many levels of the narrative, with no absolute meaning being established.¹¹ In one of the most recent commentaries on the Book of Genesis, Gordon Wenham says that no other story in Genesis, or in the Old Testament for that matter, can match the Aqedah ‘... for its haunting beauty or its theological depth’, while admitting, ‘so much is packed into so few words that our lengthy comments have not done it justice’.¹² Since this dramatic and theologically pregnant narrative can be considered to be no less than the pinnacle of the Abraham cycle and perhaps, the centrepiece of the Pentateuch, a determination of how the narrative in its final form functioned in the religious life of Ancient Israel is much overdue. In consideration of the legend’s importance to Jews, Christians and Muslims, all of whom, Enzo Cortese remarks, ‘vie for the privilege of seeing their own founder upon “the pyre of Moriah”’,¹³ to which Carol Delaney adds, ‘it holds up a model of faith that has affected not only Jews but Christians and Muslims as well’,¹⁴ few modern exegetes have offered a fresh interpretation of Genesis 22.

Perhaps, it is due to the sensitivity required in dealing with this story since it crosses religious boundaries, and the dread of dealing with the issue of child sacrifice, or at least Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, that few chose to research the development of the Aqedah. Yet, I propose that this most compelling story about Abraham—the man God called אהבי ‘my friend’ (Isa. 41:8)—functioned in Ancient

¹⁰ Aqedah (Hebrew noun for ‘binding’) comes from the root עקד ‘to bind’.

¹¹ G. von Rad. *Genesis*. J. H. Marks (tr.). OTL. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956, 238.

¹² G. J. Wenham. *Genesis 16-50*. Word Biblical Commentary, Dallas: Word Books, 1994, 112-13.

¹³ E. Cortese. ‘Genesis 22, 1-19: History and Theology of the Narrative’. *The Sacrifice of Isaac: in Three Monotheistic Religions*, F. Manns (ed.). Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1995, 23.

¹⁴ C. Delaney. *Abraham on Trial: the Social Legacy of Biblical Myth*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1998, 111.

Israel during the fifth-century Persian Period reforms, which had been implemented by Ezra (Ezr. 9-10).

Based on various literary aspects of the narrative and the general consensus of the postexilic dating of the finalizing of the Pentateuch, I propose that it was used in religious reform to instil a sense of radical obedience and commitment to God's Law, at the very core of which is that Israel must remain separate from foreigners and their cultic practices.¹⁵ Given that Abraham had been traditionally accepted as the Father of the Jews since the Babylonian Exile (587 - 536 BCE), at least according to Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 51:1-3), there could be no better means of inspiring the elders, priests and Levites whom Ezra found to have violated the laws of socio-religious separateness by intermarrying with foreigners (Ezr. 9:1-2). Since Abraham was made to send away his foreign wife Hagar and their son Ishmael (Gen. 21:11-12), and was later directed to sacrifice Isaac, (obedience which ultimately led to the founding of the nation of Israel) he would serve as an exemplar of courage and faithfulness for the men of the Temple community, who were also directed to send away their foreign wives and children (Ezr. 10).

It needs to be said at this point that although the focus of this dissertation is on Genesis 22, the story of Abraham in its entirety will be pulled into the discussion. Following Lawrence Turner's reasoning that since the introductory phrase in Genesis 22 'after these things' refers to more than the events of Chapter 21 and to the beginning of the Abraham story when he first encounters God in Genesis 12, the Aqedah needs to be read against the backdrop of the entire Abraham cycle.¹⁶ In agreement, Lieve Teugels makes a point of bringing the entire Abraham cycle into her discussion of Rebekah in Genesis 24,¹⁷ and Cortese recognizes that the prediction of Israel being tested in Genesis 15 begins to be fulfilled with Abraham's testing in 22.¹⁸ Since the apparent aim of the editor of Genesis was to compose a relatively cohesive story of Abraham, Genesis 22 can not be examined independently of Chapters 11 through to 25.¹⁹ The need to do that is particularly evident in Chapters 21 and 22, which begin with the account of the competition between Isaac and Ishmael and ends with Isaac replacing his half-brother as the firstborn son, successor and heir of Abraham. Based on the announcement that Isaac will be the child of promise in Genesis 21:12, with the affirmation of that in Chapter 22,

¹⁵ See for instance, Exod. 19:5; 20:3-4, 23; 22:20; 23:13, 24; 32; 32: 7-8; 34:13-14; Lev. 17:7; 19:26; 20:1-8; Num. 25; Deut. 5:7-8; 6:13-14; 7:3-6; 11:13-16; 12:1-4; 29-31; 13:1-5; 14:1-2; 16:21; 18:9-13; 26:18-19; 27:15.

¹⁶ L. A. Turner. *Genesis*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 98.

¹⁷ L. Teugels. 'A Strong Woman Who Can Find? A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, with some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the General Narratives'. *The Pentateuch*. J. W. Rogerson (ed.). JSOTS (Biblical Seminar 39), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, 89.

¹⁸ Cortese, 'Genesis 22:1-19', 17.

¹⁹ Turner, *Genesis*, 98.

the parallels of attaining a wife for Ishmael in Genesis 21:21 and the hint of Isaac's future wife in the announcement of Rebekah in 22:23, as well as the divine promises of both sons founding great nations (21:18 and 22:17), the continuous narrative flow of 21 and 22 is unquestionable. Williamson points out that the Aqedah has been treated as an independent unit, but to properly interpret the narrative it should be considered an integral part of an ongoing theme.²⁰ He asserts:

It is therefore appropriate to examine the role of Gen. 22.1-19, not simply within its immediate context (between chs. 21 and 22.20-21), but within its total literary setting (the Abraham narrative in the book of Genesis).²¹

Apart from the opening statement in Genesis 22, which indicates that Abraham is being tested, many take it that little else can be determined without much conjecture, as did Erich Auerbach (1892-1957), who regarded the narrative to be a model of restraint on the part of the storyteller, laced with 'silence and fragmentary speeches', which calls on the imagination to uncover the hidden.²² Yet, R. W. L. Moberly recognizes that beyond the issue of testing, there are strong clues that lead to further understanding of the narrative.²³ In agreement with Moberly, it is from recognizable clues or indicators that I defend my hypothesis, as follows: first, the highly redacted nature of Genesis 22 allowing for a postexilic editorial influence; second, 'Mt. Moriah' as a postexilic place name; third, the postexilic theology of 'fearing God'; and fourth, the phrase 'the gate of his enemies' (22:17) representing the local governance in Jerusalem allowed to the Jews under Persian rule. In addition, I will show how the Abraham cycle, and Genesis 22 in particular, would have benefited Ezra's reform measures by inculcating a sense of socio-religious separateness in the elders, priests and Levites, whom he found to have intermingled with foreigners.

This premise is defended through a historio-literary critical approach, which encompasses, as follows, first, a redaction critical analysis of Genesis 22 that reveals a postexilic editorial influence; second, an examination of certain terms and phrases in Genesis 22 that point to the Persian Period; third, the ideology of socio-religious separateness embedded in the Hebrew Bible, advocated by Ezra and enforced by Nehemiah; and fourth, a study of religious reform in Ancient Israel prior to Ezra's. It will be shown how Ezra's reform measures differed from those implemented by his predecessors of the monarchic period in Ancient Israel, and was successful in establishing a monotheistic form of Yahwism.

²⁰ P. Williamson. *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*. JSOTS 315, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 241.

²¹ Williamson, *Abraham*, 241.

²² E. Auerbach. *Mimesis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, 11-12.

²³ R. W. L. Moberly. *Genesis 12-50, Old Testament Guides*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, 40.

1. Interpretations of Genesis 22

According to Edward Kessler, Jewish and Christian interpretations of Genesis 22 until recently fall into three categories, as follows: first, the significance of Abraham and Isaac; second, concepts of atonement and forgiveness; and third, fulfilment of Christ in Scripture.²⁴ He adds that the Aqedah gained liturgical significance from early on both in Judaism, since prayer had to do with sacrifice, and in Christianity, since it was closely related to forgiveness (Gen. 13:4, 26:25; Isa. 56:7). For instance, in third-century Christianity, the Eucharist was conceived of as a sacrifice in a threefold sense, consisting of prayer, the bread and wine laid on the altar, with the sacred action on the altar as a parallel to Christ's death.²⁵

Von Rad understood that the Aqedah is 'basically open for interpretation to whatever thoughts the reader is inspired'.²⁶ Yet, not all interpretations were welcomed in the past, at least not in Jewish circles, which is evident in Philo's attack on those who failed to acknowledge the significance of Abraham's demonstration of radical obedience.²⁷ Pseudo-Philo criticised those who 'malign God' in their interpretation of Genesis 22.²⁸ Arriving at an interpretation from the narrative itself begins in the introductory statement (v. 1), where we are informed that the story is about God testing Abraham, with the objective of the test revealed in v. 12b—to prove that he fears God. However, from the verses thought to have been interpolated into the narrative at a later time (vv. 2, 13-14, 15-18, 20-24) alternative interpretations have been proposed and will be discussed below.

Beyond Genesis 22, 26:3-5 alludes to the story of Abraham's testing, where God tells Isaac that he swore an oath to his father because he was obedient (22:16), adding a guarantee of covenant blessings to Abraham's heirs. Numerous references to the Abrahamic Covenant are found throughout the Hebrew Bible, which hark back to Genesis 22, where the final pronouncement or the ratification of God's covenant is made.

Outside of the Hebrew Bible, in the apocryphal Book of 1 Maccabees, it is indicated that Genesis 22 is simply about God testing his servant Abraham:

Was not Abraham found faithful when tested and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? (1 Macc. 2:52).

²⁴ E. Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews and Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 30.

²⁵ Kessler, *Bound*, 33.

²⁶ von Rad, *Genesis*, 238.

²⁷ Kessler, *Bound*, 30. Philo VI, 'On Abraham'. The Loeb Classic Library. (5th printing). F. H. Colson (tr.). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984, 178.

²⁸ Kessler, *Bound*, 30. Pseudo-Philo. H. Jacobson. *Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 32.4. Leiden: Brill.

In another intertestamental work, the Book of Jubilees, the writer indicates that there were ten tests imposed on Abraham by God (19:18), with its version of the Aqedah differing in that the test arises from the provocation of Mastema (or Satan) due to his jealousy of the patriarch (17:16).²⁹ Abraham is said to have been proven faithful in everything (vv. 15-18), which indicates that the writer understood that after being called out of Haran by God, Abraham's life is about being tested for faithfulness at different intervals, at least until Isaac succeeds him as the custodian of the covenant and the carrier of the 'holy seed'.

Philo understands that Abraham's ordeal is about a radical test of faithfulness, and defends the patriarch's motive for being willing to sacrifice Isaac against those of the Greeks and barbarians, who sacrifice their sons for military success and other less virtuous reasons.³⁰ He concludes that Abraham's obedience is most exemplary, since Isaac is his only son born to him in his old age.³¹ Similarly, Josephus states:

It was not out of a desire of human blood that he was commanded to slay his son, nor was he willing that he should be taken away from him, whom he had made his father, but to try the temper of his mind, whether he would be obedient to such a command.³²

Our earliest Christian sources agree that Abraham's ordeal was a test of faith:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned' (Heb. 11:17-18).

Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (Jas. 2:21).

Fifth-century Eastern Orthodox Christian exegetes shifted the emphasis from Abraham's testing to Isaac's role as a type of Christ—the required and ultimate sacrifice of God—as well as the 'ram caught in the thicket' as a type of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.³³ Second-century Bishop Melito of Sardis understood that the ram represented the sacrifice of Christ as a ransom of humankind.³⁴ Since Isaac required redemption, there was no redemption for others from his near-death experience; thus, the ram becomes a model of Christ.³⁵ Kessler comments that Gregory of Nyssa held to a typological view:

Thus, for Gregory, the ram offered in the place of Isaac corresponds to Christ offered for the world. Isaac carrying the wood and the lamb being sacrificed are respectively

²⁹ H. F. D. Sparks. 'Jubilees', *The Apocryphal Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, 61-62.

³⁰ Philo VI, 'On Abraham', (184-207).

³¹ Philo VI, 'On Abraham', (195).

³² Josephus. *Antiquities*. Book I, H. J. Thackeray (tr.). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998, 13.4.

³³ G. J. Reinink. 'Syriac Exegesis and Anti-Islamic Apologetics', *The Sacrifice of Isaac: the Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations*. E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar (eds). Leiden: Brill, 2002, 116-17.

³⁴ Kessler, *Bound*, 141. S. G. Hall. (ed.). *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, (Frg. 10).

³⁵ Kessler, *Bound*, 141.

Christ who bore the sins of the world (the wood) and Christ the crucified. The surviving only-begotten son (Isaac) represents the undivided life of the Son of God and the lamb represents death. In their interpretations of the ram, we can see once again that the church fathers are keen to emphasize that Isaac did not suffer, die or was resurrected.³⁶

During the same period, it is attested in a Jewish source that the Aqedah stands as a banner or beacon to all future generations (Gen. Rab. 55:1).³⁷ According to fifth-century Jewish poet Yose ben Yose, the Aqedah pointed to the Temple service.³⁸ From Leviticus Rabah 2:11, it is understood that the Temple sacrifice of a ram (Lev. 16:3) was a recalling of Isaac, and from Genesis Rabah, the ram caught in the thicket points to the sin offering (56:9).³⁹ Hence, contrary to Christian interpretation, Isaac suffers on Moriah, from which arises the association of the future sacrifices on Mount Zion.⁴⁰ Although the ancient Jewish and Christian exegetes offer us logical interpretations of Genesis 22 in the context of Temple ritual, I understand that the narrative holds a deeper theological import, in that the true spirit of worship is reverence.

Perhaps in response to the Christian typological approach, Jewish exegetes also shifted the focus from Abraham to Isaac, evident in twelfth century Jewish poetry,⁴¹ where Isaac is the symbol of survival for Jews from the numerous attempts by hostile potentates to exterminate their race.⁴² Dan Vogel comments:

True, Isaac, the symbol of the Jewish nation-to-be in the Aqedah story, has been bound and re-bound to be slaughtered throughout the Jewish History. But inevitably a figurative angel has always come to stay the completion of the national sacrifice. The angel appears in various guises—sometimes as a human being, like King Cyrus, who permitted the building of the Second Temple, or Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, who reorganized national Jewry after the second Hurban. Sometimes the angel is in the guise of a societal situation, like the Dispersion of Jewish enclaves that lived on while others were being exterminated; at other times he is a political power of modern British and American Jewish minorities. Once, the angel was a stupendous historical event—the astounding rebirth of the State of Israel.⁴³

Vogel comments that Genesis 22 establishes a pattern of eternity of Israel, since as Isaac survived so would Israel throughout the ages.⁴⁴ Even in the struggle to explain why large numbers of Jews did not survive persecutions, a midrashic writer had Isaac frightened to death, but later resurrected (*Shibbolei ha-Leqet* 9a-b). In modern Jewish teaching, Abraham is a model to subsequent generations that all Jews must all be willing

³⁶ Kessler, *Bound*, 142.

³⁷ Kessler, *Bound*, 143. (*Genesis Rabbah*. Freedman, H. and M. Simon (eds.). London: Soncino.)

³⁸ Kessler, *Bound*, 143. (*Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*. Horbury and McNeil, (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 169-71.)

³⁹ Kessler, *Bound*, 143.

⁴⁰ Kessler, *Bound*, 142-43.

⁴¹ W. J. Van Bekkum. 'The Aqedah and its Interpretations in Midrash and Piyyut', *The Sacrifice of Isaac: the Aqedah (Gen. 22) and its Interpretations*. E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar, (eds.). Leiden: Brill, 2002, 91-2.

⁴² See Kessler, *Bound*, and A. Friedlander, *Against the Fall of Night*, London: Council of Christians and Jews, 1984.

⁴³ D. Vogel. 'The Forgotten Figure at the Aqedah'. *JBL* 31: 3, 2003, 203.

⁴⁴ Vogel, 'Forgotten Figure', 203.

to sacrifice their children to God, and as Dean of Ohr Tora institutions, Shlomo Riskin states:

The paradox in Jewish history is that, had we not been willing to sacrifice our children for God, we would never have survived as a God-inspired and God-committed nation.⁴⁵

Since Abraham clearly sets the standard of the God-fearing and sacrificial Jew in Genesis 22 in his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son, Genesis 22 would have undoubtedly benefited Ezra's measures to inspire the apostate Temple community to wholeheartedly revere God and obey his Law no matter what the cost to them.

Nineteenth-century western scholars determined that Genesis 22 held aetiological import, either to explain why animals are substituted for human sacrifice or Israel worships at a particular site.⁴⁶ For instance, Hermann Gunkel proposed that Genesis 22 was originally a legend about a shrine in Jeruel, a place located between En-Gedi and Jerusalem (also a three day journey from Beersheva) where the head deity required the sacrifice of firstborn sons, but allowed the substitution of a goat.⁴⁷ He pointed out, however, that the legend still knows that the child is the actual sacrifice, based on Abraham's return to his servants without mention of Isaac, which he concludes was the case in the original story:

The legend maintains its distance from polemic against this sacrifice. It is, therefore, pre-prophetic. Instead, it maintains the attitude which had already abolished the sacrifice long before the legend. The time had become softer. Then it was impossible for the tender father to offer child sacrifice.⁴⁸

On the other hand, Shalom Spiegel,⁴⁹ Alberto Green,⁵⁰ and Paul Mosca⁵¹ understand that the narrative explains why the animals are substituted for children.⁵² Spiegel comments:

The primary purpose of the Akedah story may have been only this: to attach to a real pillar of the folk and the revered reputation the new norm—abolish human sacrifice, substitute animals instead.⁵³

Moshe Weinfeld agrees:

...the binding of Isaac serves as aetiology for the opposite trend, intended as it is to explain the abolition of child sacrifices and the substitution of an animal.⁵⁴

⁴⁵ Delaney, *Abraham on Trial*, 116.

⁴⁶ J. D. Levenson. *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, 111, 114.

⁴⁷ H. Gunkel. *Genesis*. M. E. Biddle (tr.). Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997, xx, xxi.

⁴⁸ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 239.

⁴⁹ S. Spiegel. *The Last Trial*. New York: Behman House, 1967, 64.

⁵⁰ A. R. W. Green. *The Role of Child Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1976, 174.

⁵¹ P. G. Mosca. *Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion. A Study of Mulk and Milk*, Phd. Diss., Harvard University, 1975, 237.

⁵² Mosca, *Child Sacrifice*, 237.

⁵³ Spiegel, *Last Trial*, 64.

⁵⁴ M. Weinfeld. 'The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of the Heaven and its Background'. *Ugarit-Forschungen* 4, 1972, 134.

Based on the long-term practice of child sacrifice throughout the monarchic period (1 Kgs. 11:7; 2 Kgs. 16:3; 21:6; 23:10) and beyond alluded to by the Prophets Jeremiah (7:6, 31; 32:35), Ezekiel (16:20-21; 23:36-9), Micah (6:7) and Trito-Isaiah (57:5), it is plausible that the practice persisted as late as the Persian Period in Judah. Child sacrifice is not mentioned in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah; however, based on the mention of the ‘detestable’ religions of the foreign wives (Ezr. 9:2), particularly the Chemosh cult of the Ammonites and that of the Moab, where child sacrifice appears to have been normative,⁵⁵ along with Ezra’s extreme reaction to the report that even the elders and priests had married these women, it is likely that child sacrifice had further compromised the integrity of the Temple community. If this was the case, Genesis 22 would benefit the reform of child sacrifice, as well as inspiring Jews to maintain socio-religious separateness. Since Ezra’s protest is not directed against child sacrifice, but intermarriage with those whose culture of origin permitted and even promoted the practice, I propose that Genesis 22 represents more than the reform of child sacrifice, that in its final form the narrative was intended to function as a ban on intermarriage, in order to prevent such inevitable temptations that intermingling with foreigners brought, the worst of which was child sacrifice.

Yet Moberly comments that although child sacrifice is an important part of the background of the narrative against which the story should be read, there is no general consensus as to how Genesis 22 relates to the practice of child sacrifice.⁵⁶ The inability to form a general consensus on this interpretation suggests that the function of Genesis 22 in its final form is something other than the reform of child sacrifice. This is not to say that an earlier version of the story did not serve to explain why Israel sacrificed animals rather than humans, or why the Israelites worshipped at a particular site, but that in its final form it was applied to what was considered a more pressing cause. Paul Williamson quotes E. F. Davis:

In a narrative as highly styled as this one, it is difficult to escape the impression that the author has deliberately directed our attention away from the historical and ethical issue as the context for interpretation.⁵⁷

Since the command to sacrifice Isaac blatantly contradicts the promise of posterity to Abraham, Williamson understands that the key issue is not in ethical discernment, but

⁵⁵ It is widely recognized that child sacrifice was practiced by the Ammonites in the Molech cult and the Moabites in Chemosh cult from references to the practice in 1 Kgs. 11:7; Jer. 32:35 and 2 Kgs. 3:26-27 respectively. Additionally, the same term used to describe the sins of Manasseh תועבת ‘abomination’, the most heinous of which is child sacrifice, is also used in Ezra to describe the religious practices of the foreign wives of the Temple leaders and clergy, among whom were Ammonites and Moabites. This lends to the plausibility that these foreign wives continued to venerate their gods with child sacrifice (Ezr. 9:1).

⁵⁶ R. W. L. Moberly. ‘The Earliest Commentary on the Aqedah’. *VT* 38, 1988, 305.

⁵⁷ Williamson, *Abraham*, 239, quoting E. F. Davis. ‘Self-Consciousness and Conversation: Reading Genesis 22’. *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1, 1991, 34.

faith-generated obedience.⁵⁸ In consideration of the announcement in the introduction of Genesis 22 that the story is about God testing Abraham, any aetiological function should be considered secondary.

For Williamson, Abraham's 'blameless walk before God' had to be ascertained before God establishes an eternal covenant with him,⁵⁹ which in the case of Genesis 22 is guaranteed with a divine oath. In agreement with this, I maintain that the Aqedah is not about the prohibition of child sacrifice or the aetiology of a sacred shrine, but a test that determines Abraham's conformity to the divine will.⁶⁰ In the context of the Persian Period reforms, it can also be maintained that Genesis 22 is less about holocausts and cult sites and more about the obligation of the Jews to fear God and obey his Law, at the heart of which is that Israel remain separate from all foreigners. Pinchas Kahn recognizes that Abraham learns that he cannot judge or even fathom the divine will, but must only accept it and obey, as should his heirs.⁶¹ Yet, it will be argued below that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac on God's demand was not a matter of 'blind obedience' or dread, but a deep and enduring reverence for God.

Furthermore, since the tenets of socio-religious separateness dominate the Pentateuch (whether directly conveyed or alluded to in the laws that govern every aspect of life for the Jews), it can be argued that the stories of the patriarchs support these laws by demonstrating that it is possible and profitable for them to live apart from foreigners and their religions, evident in the legacy of blessing for their heirs (Gen. 22:16-18). Thus, the proposal that Genesis 22 had more to do with benefiting reform of those who violated the tenets of separateness outlined in God's Law (and who stood to forfeit the promised covenant blessings) is worth defending.⁶² Having realized that the demise of Judah in 587 BCE was the result of apostasy, Ezra and Nehemiah saw separateness as the ideology to be embraced if the Temple community was to survive and thrive as a religious entity under Persian rule. Indeed, there would be no better time for Israel's myths of origin to be embraced, when their identity as the covenanted people of Yahweh was at risk from having intermingled with foreigners.

2. The Postexilic Dating of the Pentateuch

In order to defend the Persian Period time frame for Genesis 22, it is essential to acknowledge the general consensus of scholars today of the postexilic dating of the finalizing of the Pentateuch. This is not an entirely new claim since nineteenth-century

⁵⁸ Williamson, *Abraham*, 239.

⁵⁹ Williamson, *Abraham*, 242.

⁶⁰ Williamson, *Abraham*, 242.

⁶¹ P. Kahn. 'The Mission of Abraham in Genesis'. *JBQ*, 333, 2002, 161.

⁶² See *Ezr.* 9:1-2; 10:3, 14; *Neh.* 7:6-65; 9:38-10:27; 10:30-31; 13:23-30.

source critic Abraham Kuenen argued that the Hexateuch (Genesis through to Joshua) was of postexilic origin, which he based on the allusions to that period in the legal and narrative material in the corpus.⁶³ His contemporary, Julius Wellhausen, who is credited with refining the former theories of the literary structure of the Hexateuch in the ‘Documentary Hypothesis’ and making it the acceptable methodology for interpreting the Pentateuch, agreed that Genesis to Joshua was composed during the postexilic period.⁶⁴ His argument is founded on the progressive institutional control of the cult alluded to in the legal text, which for him could only represent a postexilic theocracy.⁶⁵ Since Judah had no local Jewish monarch during the Persian Period, while ruled by the kings of Persia who according to the writer/s of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah supported the efforts to rebuild the Temple and city walls,⁶⁶ the Temple community could exist with a theocratic form of self-government, not unlike the Vatican in Rome today. Therefore, it is conceivable that this would have been the most conducive environment for the finalizing of the Pentateuch and establishing it as the holy writ of Judaism.

As for the book of Genesis, David Carr agrees that the work is postexilic, while recognising that it contains some very early material that has been so frequently modified that it is difficult to know much about its original form.⁶⁷ Rainer Albertz claims that there was an important redaction of Genesis beginning in the exilic period, when a patriarchal history was produced.⁶⁸ He proposes that there were two phases of composition (PH¹ and PH²) with the later phase being postexilic, during which time Genesis 20-22 was composed. Albertz bases this on the Diaspora of the early postexilic period (539-520 BCE), the literary period when Abraham is portrayed as an alien sojourning in Southern Palestine.⁶⁹ In fact, Abraham is not mentioned outside of Genesis until the exilic writing of Deutero-Isaiah (41:8-9; 51:1-2) and later in the postexilic writings of Trito-Isaiah (63:16), Nehemiah (9:7) and 2 Chronicles (20:7, 30:6), revealing a reliance on Abraham’s legacy of blessing to his descendants during the late stages of Ancient Israel’s history.⁷⁰ In this way, Israel’s election is traced back to Abraham, with

⁶³ G. I. Davies. ‘Introduction to the Pentateuch’, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. J. Barton and J. Muddiman, (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 14.

⁶⁴ J. Wellhausen. *Prolegomena: to the History of Ancient Israel*. [2nd Publication], Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003, 497.

⁶⁵ J. Blenkinsopp. *The Pentateuch: the First Five Books of the Bible*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 11.

⁶⁶ Ackroyd, *Exile*, 148-49.

⁶⁷ D. M. Carr. *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*. Louisville: John Knox Westminster Press, 1996, 39.

⁶⁸ R. A. Albertz. *Israel in Exile: the History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* D. Green (tr.). Atlanta: *SBL* 3, 2003, 247-48.

⁶⁹ Albertz, *Exile*, 254, 264, 269.

⁷⁰ Albertz, *Exile*, 247.

his call to the 'Land of promise' likened to the exiles return to the Land.⁷¹ Furthermore, Albertz understands that the mention of Abraham and Sarah apart from their offspring and numerous heirs is a reflection of Judah's diminished size during the postexilic reconstruction period,⁷² a possible veiled allusion to the marginalized group that comprised the Temple community referred to as God's שארית 'remnant' (Ezr. 9:13).

Others, such as Richard Coggins, are more conservative in dating the Pentateuch narratives, arguing that they were produced by an exilic writer, who might have incorporated some ancient traditions to satisfy the need to establish Israel's origin in the Land where the exiles hoped to return.⁷³ He bases this on the earliest mention of Abraham and Sarah outside of the Pentateuch in the book of Ezekiel (33:24).⁷⁴ Claus Westermann understands that the Abraham cycle has a long history of revision and that the narratives that have an expressly theological interest belong to a 'relatively late period', which for him extends to the late exilic period.⁷⁵ This consensus is the basis on which John Van Seters defends his claim of an exilic Yahwist, who wrote the patriarchal narratives.⁷⁶ R. N. Whybray comments that there is a consensus led by N. E. Wagner, R. Rendtorff, H. H. Schmid and A. D. H. Mayes, who are convinced that there was no Pentateuch until the sixth century at the earliest.⁷⁷ If this is correct it would mean that Josiah's Book of the Covenant discovered in the Temple archives in the seventh-century BCE was simply a law code, plausibly a version of Deuteronomy, and that Ezra's Book of the Law of Moses is the Pentateuch, or something close to it.

In defending the hypothesis that Genesis 22 was used to instil a sense of socio-religious separateness in the Second Temple community reforms implemented by Ezra, I will engage in a redaction-source critical study of Genesis 22. In agreement with Ernest Nicholson, who recognizes that although much attention has been given to identifying the sources and redactors who combined them, little has been done to determine what the redactors were trying to accomplish by combining texts, or how the combined sources are to be read and understood, my focus *will* be on the message of the narrative in the context of fifth-century Jerusalem.⁷⁸

I will further support my premise with an examination of certain terms and

⁷¹ Albertz, *Exile*, 247-48.

⁷² Albertz, *Exile*, 247-48.

⁷³ R. Coggins. *Introducing the Old Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 26.

⁷⁴ Coggins, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 25-26.

⁷⁵ C. Westermann. *Genesis 12-36*. Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament. Neukirchener Verlag, 1981, 39.

⁷⁶ J. Van Seters. *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992, 4.

⁷⁷ R. N. Whybray. *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*. JSOTS 53. Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1987, 221.

⁷⁸ E. Nicholson. *Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 250.

phrases in Chapter II, in order to show the narrative's relevance to that phase in the history of Ancient Israel. In addition, Chapter III is dedicated to a study of the ideology of socio-religious separateness in Ancient Israel that came to the fore during the Persian Period, and how Genesis 22 supports that ideology. I close in Chapter IV with a look at reform in Ancient Israel implemented by prophets and kings, and how Genesis 22 would best support the socio-religious reform efforts of the fifth-century Jerusalem Temple community implemented by Ezra and enforced by Nehemiah.

CHAPTER I A REDACTION CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 22

1.0 Introduction

In order to test the hypothesis that Genesis 22 functioned during the Persian Period as a support for the socio-religious reform measures imposed on the Temple community by Ezra, I will begin with a redaction critical analysis of the narrative. Since the objective of the thesis is to determine the function of the Aqedah, and how it was to be read after it reached its final form, it follows that a redaction critical approach is the appropriate methodology.⁷⁹ Norman Gottwald describes the methodology as follows:

The aim of redaction criticism is to discern the hand of the final writer or editor (redactor) by distinguishing how the final framing stage of composition has arranged earlier materials and added interpretive clues for the reader, in order to see how the entire composition was intended to be read, even though much of the content derived from earlier writers with differing points of view.⁸⁰

Since my objective is to determine the function of Genesis 22 during the Persian Period, or how it was to be read at that time, it follows that a redaction critical approach is the appropriate methodology.

Although Genesis 22 is believed to be the composition of the pre-Priestly sources—the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E) and the combinations thereof by the redactor called ‘R^{je}’, I will use the methodology with the aim of discovering additional editorial influences from the Persian Period.

It needs to be said that redaction critical analysis of the Pentateuch has relied upon source criticism, which was developed by European scholars in the nineteenth-century and refined by Julius Wellhausen in his Documentary Hypothesis. Contrary to the traditional claim originating from Philo of Alexandria, Josephus and the Gospel writers⁸¹ that Moses wrote the books of Genesis to Deuteronomy, scholars determined that they were actually compiled by a single editor who dovetailed the independent documents J, E and P, which were produced at different times and covered the same ground.⁸²

There are, however, two other major theories of the literary structure of the Pentateuch/Hexateuch that need to be mentioned, which developed over the past two centuries. The first is the ‘Fragmentary Hypothesis’,⁸³ which claims that one author took written fragments from independent short accounts and compiled them in a jumbled fashion. The second is the ‘Supplementary Hypothesis’, which claims that there was one

⁷⁹ W. Baird. ‘Biblical Criticism’. *ABD*, Vol. I, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 735.

⁸⁰ N. K. Gottwald. *The Hebrew Bible: a Socio-literary Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, 23.

⁸¹ See Mark 12:26, John 1:17 and Acts 13:39.

⁸² W. H. Schmidt. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1984, 46.

⁸³ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 46-48.

author who wrote a unified account to which other material was later added, resulting in a distortion of the original text.⁸⁴ Yet Davies comments that the revisions were attempts to update the biblical teachings.

Over the years the emphasis has changed, and when scholars speak of a redactor today they are thinking more often of a figure who may only have had in front of him a single document or account, and amplified it by the addition of words or sentences which would alter its overall meaning to present more clearly the teachings, which he himself believed to be most important for his day.⁸⁵

Whatever the case, Werner Schmidt points out that having one document to serve as a basic source to which others were interpolated is easier to conceive of, which is probably why it remains popular today.⁸⁶ Yet Whybray comments that all three methods could have been used in different parts of the Pentateuch, or at different stages in the process of its formation, which might account for the inconsistencies and the repetitions of the same stories.⁸⁷

1.1 Objections to the Documentary Hypothesis:

The Documentary Hypothesis has been met with disapproval over the decades and surpassed in most scholarly circles by newer methodologies in the quest to discover how, why and when the Pentateuch was composed and how it was meant to be read at that time. In light of this, a defence of the methodology is necessary, particularly since references will be made to the documentary sources throughout this dissertation wherever appropriate.

Opposition to source criticism, also called ‘Higher Criticism’, literary criticism, or as John Barton prefers, ‘biblical criticism’, comes from the misconception that seventeenth to nineteenth-century European scholars had an agenda to devalue the Scriptures:

On the one hand, biblical conservatives need to be reminded that it is not the rationalism of the Enlightenment, or the materialism of the nineteenth-century, or the supposed skepticism of modern German theology that have discovered the inconsistencies and the historical difficulties in the biblical text and have led to ‘critical’ theories about it. Careful readers have always noticed such things. Far from being an invention of modern scholars who are trying to detract from the authority of the Bible, they are features of the text that have always cried out for explanation and have always been felt to do so.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 17-18.

⁸⁵ Davies, ‘Introduction to the Pentateuch’, 32.

⁸⁶ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 48.

⁸⁷ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 127.

⁸⁸ J. Barton. *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007, 11.

Barton points out that there is a German tradition tracing literary criticism not back to the Enlightenment as is often assumed, but to the Reformation.⁸⁹ Yet, he further comments that due to problems in the texts, doubts were raised about Mosaic authorship long before the Reformation, and in early Christian orthodoxy with Origen (185-254 CE) and Augustine (354-430 CE).⁹⁰ Augustine recognized two other blatant inconsistencies in the Pentateuch narratives—the longevity of the patriarchs and their ability to produce children in old age.⁹¹ Another related problem is that Abram’s age amounts to 135 years at the time he leaves Ur (Gen. 11:32); yet, he is said to be 75 when he leaves Haran (12:4).⁹² Andreas Carlstadt (1480-1541) argued against Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch due to the account of his own death (Deut. 34). He argued that no one added the account of Moses’ death to Deuteronomy, as has been traditionally used to explain the inconsistency, since it is written in the same style of the previous text.⁹³ From this developed a consensus that the Pentateuch was written by someone other than Moses

Early rabbis such as French-born Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105), better known by the acronym ‘Rashi’, also recognized inconsistencies and contradictions in the Pentateuch,⁹⁴ with some, such as Abraham Ibn Ezra even questioning Mosaic authorship.⁹⁵ It was from these textual problems that ancient rabbis became skilled at creating explanations to reconcile the inconsistencies. Although early Jewish scholars dissented from the traditional Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, it was not until the seventeenth-century that Jewish philosopher Benedict Spinoza published an analysis of the Pentateuch in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670), in which he emphasized that there were not just a few inconsistencies that could be explained away, but that they were pervasive throughout the five books ascribed to Moses.⁹⁶ From then on, both Jewish and Christian scholars grappled with the inconsistencies, particularly with German scholars, who devoted much effort to discovering how and why it was formed, which resulted in the practicable theories mentioned above. The most notable of them are Julius Wellhausen, Karl Graf, Abraham Kuenen, and August Dillmann, with Wellhausen being credited with making what has been called the ‘Documentary Hypothesis’ into an acceptable methodology then and now despite the opposition to it.

Blenkinsopp points out that literary criticism took an indelible hold in scholarship

⁸⁹ J. Barton. ‘Historical-critical Approaches’. *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. J. Barton (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 16.

⁹⁰ J. W. Rogerson. *Beginning Old Testament Study*. London: SPCK, 1983, 9-11.

⁹¹ Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 10, quoting Augustine, *City of God*, book 15.

⁹² Barton, ‘Source Criticism’, 163.

⁹³ R. Friedman. *Who Wrote the Bible?* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1987, 19.

⁹⁴ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 18.

⁹⁵ Schmidt, *Introduction of the Old Testament*, 46.

⁹⁶ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 20.

becoming the critical orthodoxy.⁹⁷ This is apparent in its application in major commentaries today, with the producer of one commentary on Genesis, Bruce Vawter, asserting that while there is no longer a comfortable scholarly consensus on the source-critical approach to the composition of Genesis, scholars remain convinced of its basic reliability regardless of its shortcomings and objections.⁹⁸ Still more recently, Gordon Wenham devoted the greater part of the introduction to his commentary on Genesis to the documentary source structure of the Pentateuch, and uses the methodology in his exegesis when appropriate, although sparingly.⁹⁹ In a more recent work, Lawrence Turner's commentary on Genesis affirms the soundness of the methodology:

From such historical-critical preoccupations we can arguably learn a great deal about the evolution and contexts of the biblical books, the ideologies of their putative sources, and by extension of the societies that produced them.¹⁰⁰

Turner adds that although the details of the number, nature, sequence and contexts of the sources have been debated, 'Nevertheless, some form of the hypothesis has provided the bedrock upon which research on the Pentateuch has been built', while having an enormous impact on the interpretation of Genesis and the scholarly understanding of the work.¹⁰¹ Barton comments that although the soundness of biblical criticism has been questioned from its inception, its contribution made to biblical scholarship needs to be appreciated.¹⁰² He asserts that the methodology should survive and prosper, and that attempts to exclude this approach to the study of the Bible, or even 'to cause it to die of attrition' would be, as he stresses, 'badly misconceived'.¹⁰³ For those who describe the methodology as being 'thin, rationalistic, positivistic, unliterary', Barton responds by saying that it is only the case when it is being poorly executed.¹⁰⁴ Mullen also maintains that literary criticism is a reliable means of analysing the Pentateuch, and responds to those who discredit the Documentary Hypothesis:

Any recent survey of opinion on the status of the study of the formation of the Pentateuch traditions and the Hebrew canon would conclude that while there may be selected attempts to discredit the Documentary Hypothesis, that theory remains the central bulwark of modern analyses of the formation of the initial five books of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁰⁵

William Dever argues that the classical form of literary criticism remains a fundamental starting point for analyzing the Pentateuch and that its ultimate goals are:

⁹⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 11-12.

⁹⁸ B. Vawter. *On Genesis: A New Reading*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977, 15-16.

⁹⁹ G. J. Wenham. *Genesis 1-15*. WBC. Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1987, xxv-xv.

¹⁰⁰ Turner, *Genesis*, 11.

¹⁰¹ Turner, *Genesis*, 11.

¹⁰² J. Barton. 'Source Criticism'. *ABD* 6, 1992, 163.

¹⁰³ Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ E. T. Mullen, Jr. *Ethnic Myths and Pentateuchal Foundations*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997, 1.

(1) the recovery from the texts of a real *history of events*; and (2) the exegesis of these texts so as to re-evaluate the *theological interpretations* to be derived from or attached to these events are defensible.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, there is nothing as compelling to replace it in identifying, analysing and understanding the inconsistencies, repetitions and contradictions detected in the Pentateuch. Blenkinsopp states that although there has been serious dissent recently from source critical analysis, no alternative paradigm has threatened to replace the methodology.¹⁰⁷ Moberly points out that many scholars still support the methodology as the best available explanation of the text, and that those who fail to appreciate it often maintain some aspects of it, particularly in regard to the existence of the Priestly writer.¹⁰⁸ The recent work of Anthony Campbell and Mark O'Brien,¹⁰⁹ which closely follows the source-critical assessments of Martin Noth,¹¹⁰ attests to the continued reliance on the methodology. Friedman more recently produced a Pentateuch in which he distinguishes by means of colours and fonts the documentary sources (J, E, R^e, DtrH, and R) in the text.¹¹¹ I will cite the assessments of Friedman, as well as Noth, and Campbell and O'Brien throughout this dissertation.

In contrast, Kenneth Kitchen points out that we do not have external evidence that texts were combined as claimed in the Documentary Hypothesis in the literature of the Ancient Near East.¹¹² However, Jeffrey Tigay argues that such an argument fails to consider the unique, and that Tatian's *Diatessaron* (170 CE), in which the four New Testament Gospels are dovetailed to produce a flowing narrative without repetition of the same events, has been considered the closest parallel to the Documentary Hypothesis.¹¹³ Since this has not been well received due to it being produced long after the Pentateuch,¹¹⁴ Tigay offers a more relevant parallel—the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Qumran proto-Samaritan (4QpaleoExod), in which comparable redactions have been detected.¹¹⁵ He illustrates how Deuteronomy 5 of the Masoretic Text, supplemented with Deuteronomy 18, was interpolated into the Samaritan Exodus (20:18-26) for the sake of

¹⁰⁶ W. G. Dever. *What Did the Biblical Writers Know & and When Did They Know It?* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ R. W. L. Moberly. 'When, Where, By Whom, and How was Genesis 12-50 Written', *Genesis and Exodus*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, 140.

¹⁰⁹ A. F. Campbell and M. A. O'Brien. *Sources of the Pentateuch*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

¹¹⁰ M. Noth. *A History of Pentateuchal Tradition*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972, 262-76.

¹¹¹ R. E. Friedman. *The Bible with Sources Revealed: a New View into the Five Books of Moses*. New York City: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.

¹¹² K. Kitchen. *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament*. Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966, 114-15.

¹¹³ J. Tigay. 'An Empirical Basis for the Documentary Hypothesis'. *SBL*, 1975, 330.

¹¹⁴ Tigay, 'Empirical Basis', 330.

¹¹⁵ Tigay, 'Empirical Basis', 336-38.

reconciling dissimilar accounts of the same events.¹¹⁶ In addition, Tigay points to the most notable redaction of the Samaritan Pentateuch—the addition of the tenth commandment to worship God exclusively on Mount Gerizim (20:17), done in opposition to the belief in Judah that Israel should worship on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.¹¹⁷ This is perhaps the most significant example of how redactors can alter texts to update socio-political developments.

Whybray is among the scholars who reject the Documentary Hypothesis, arguing that the Pentateuch is the work of an ancient historian, who wrote from a mass of material mostly of recent origin to him, which he radically reworked with substantial amounts of his own imaginative texts to form the story of the origins of the world and the people of Israel.¹¹⁸ He questions the soundness of the Documentary Hypothesis and whether it accounts for the data better than other literary hypotheses.¹¹⁹ Whybray criticizes the breaking-up of narratives into sources, which to him destroys the artistic and literary qualities of the text, and questions the evidence of sustained unique characteristics and theological message of each source.¹²⁰ Yet, dovetailing has to be recognized for its artistic merits as well, since it creates a new version of a story that reflects a socio-political or theological development.

Whybray also argues that the Documentary Hypothesis is illogical, self-contradictory, and deficient in the areas it sets out to explain.¹²¹ He complains that the original writers would not have allowed contradictions and repetitions in their documents, and that it was when the sources were combined that contradictory and repetitious accounts resulted. Whybray concludes:

Thus the hypothesis can only be maintained on the assumption that, while consistency was the hallmark of the various documents, *inconsistency* is the hallmark of the redactors.¹²²

Walter Kaiser responds to this by arguing that if the original writers would not allow these inconsistencies, neither would the redactors of the documents,¹²³ and—putting it another way—if the original writers did not mind the inconsistencies, why should the final redactors.¹²⁴

Whybray reports on four main alternative theories to the Documentary Hypothesis. First, instead of the Pentateuch being comprised of separate documents there

¹¹⁶ Tigay, 'Empirical Basis', 336-38.

¹¹⁷ Tigay, 'Empirical Basis', 340-41.

¹¹⁸ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 242.

¹¹⁹ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 18, 31-38.

¹²⁰ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 17-19.

¹²¹ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 18.

¹²² Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 18.

¹²³ W. C. Kaiser. *The Old Testament Documents: Are they Reliable & Relevant?* Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001, 137.

¹²⁴ Kaiser, *Old Testament Documents*, 137.

are ‘strata’, ‘strands’ or ‘parallel traditions’, such as those proposed by Aage Bentzen, Roland De Vaux and Georg Fohrer; yet, he finds these designations too vague to be useful or meaningful.¹²⁵ The next hypothesis, maintained by Jewish scholars Umberto Cassuto and Moses Segal, is that since the sources have been determined to have undergone much revision, it is doubtful that they were documents at all.¹²⁶ Cassuto claims that the Pentateuch was composed and refined in a single continuous process of redaction, with new material being added along the way.¹²⁷ In another theory, Scandinavian scholars Eduard Nielsen and Ivan Engnell proposed that the variants in the Pentateuch were the result of being written from oral material already fully developed into an oral narrative tradition and law codes.¹²⁸ In this way, the inconsistencies are not the result of periodic redactions, but existed from the beginning and were left that way by the scribes who put the oral traditions in writing.

The last hypothesis comes from scholars who object to splitting the narratives up into fragments, a method they refer to as ‘scissors and paste’, that is editing and then assigning them to the documents. Those like Scandinavian Johannes Pedersen opted for a thematic approach to the Pentateuch instead. As an example, he understood that the ‘Passover narrative’ in Exodus is an independent and complete work used for the celebration of the feast,¹²⁹ in opposition to what source critics agree is a composition of E, P and R¹³⁰ or J, P, and Dtr.¹³¹ According to the thematic hypothesis, the larger independent thematic narratives, which were not the result of continuous sources, were later combined with other non-homogeneous narratives.¹³²

Anselm Hagedorn suggests that literary critical analysis should be abandoned, recommending that we do not throw out all Pentateuch research where literary-historical differentiations recognized by early source critics continue to be correct.¹³³ He further argues that we must move on from the methodology to newer models, while admitting that ‘none of these has of yet reached the universal acceptance that Wellhausen’s model used to claim’.¹³⁴ He appears to underestimate the determinations made by the notable mid-twentieth-century scholars von Rad and Noth, and more recently, Barton and Friedman, who have done extensive research on how the Pentateuch was formed, and

¹²⁵ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 36.

¹²⁶ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 36-37.

¹²⁷ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 36. (U. Cassuto. *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch*, Jerusalem, 1961).

¹²⁸ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 37.

¹²⁹ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 37. (J. Pedersen. *Israel I-II*, London and Copenhagen, 1920).

¹³⁰ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 137-40.

¹³¹ Noth, *History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 268-69.

¹³² Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 37-38.

¹³³ A. Hagedorn. ‘Taking the Pentateuch to the Twenty-First Century’. *ET*, 119, 2007, 55.

¹³⁴ Hagedorn, ‘Taking the Pentateuch to the Twenty-First Century’, 54.

who maintain that the biblical/source-critical approach, is a sound methodology for researching the Pentateuch.¹³⁵

1.2 Objections to the Identification of Documentary Sources

It is necessary at this point to discuss the objections to the sources themselves, in particular J and E, since Genesis 22 has been thought to have been composed of the two sources, as well as the combination of J and E texts by R^{je}. For instance, one of the objections to the Documentary Hypothesis is that J and E, which are traditionally dated to the monarchic period, did not exist.¹³⁶ This has not been the case with the Deuteronomist, who is dated to as early as the seventh-century and as late as the exilic period and the Priestly Writer, who is broadly dated from the seventh-century to the postexilic period.¹³⁷ In fact, opposition to the Documentary Hypothesis arose due to the difficulty in distinguishing J from E, which Whybray points out had been the case with Wellhausen over certain texts. Yet, Ephraim Speiser suggests that E might have depended on J, making it difficult to distinguish one from the other.¹³⁸ One such text is Genesis 22:11, where it appears that J has been redacted into E text due to the inexplicable use of J's designation 'Yahweh' for God's name, in what had been thought to be a predominantly E section of the chapter (vv. 1-14). Thereby, Wellhausen and Dillmann ascribed the text to the redactor 'JE' (R^{je}), whom Wellhausen referred to as the 'Jehovist'.¹³⁹ Recently, Friedman ascribed v. 11 to R^{je},¹⁴⁰ also against the traditional consensus of E authorship, which was maintained by Samuel Driver (1904), and more recently, Otto Eissfeldt (1965), Peter Ellis (1968) and Martin Noth (1972).¹⁴¹ Davies points out that some of the confusion lies in the fact that there are similarities between the two sources; as he recognizes, they are most alike in regard to the matters of sin, punishment and mercy, in which God's government is exemplified.¹⁴² However, Gunkel asserted that this is not proof of dependence, since contacts were rare, and where there appears to be a literary connection, it was due to J and E having drawn from a common original source he referred to as *Grundschrift*.¹⁴³

¹³⁵ Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 29, 34.

¹³⁶ M. D. Coogan. 'J'. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 173.

¹³⁷ Davies, 'Introduction to the Pentateuch', 18-19.

¹³⁸ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1962, xxx.

¹³⁹ Whybray. *Making of the Pentateuch*, 28.

¹⁴⁰ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 65. (R^{je} ascription with the exception that E was interpolated into J.)

¹⁴¹ S. R. Driver. *Genesis*. London: Methuen & Co. 1904, 208; O. Eissfeldt. *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Noth, *History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 264, P. Ellis. *The Yahwist: the Bible's First Theologian*. Collegeville, Minneapolis: The Liturgical Press, 1968, 87-95.

¹⁴² Davies, 'Introduction to the Pentateuch', 26.

¹⁴³ H. Gunkel. *The Legends of Genesis: the Biblical Saga and History*. New York: Schocken Books, 1964, 127.

Hagedorn points out that the Yahwist and Elohist began to be re-evaluated in the late twentieth-century, with scholars like Theodor Nöldeke (1869), who ascribed the Pentateuch to priestly and non-priestly sources.¹⁴⁴ Again, this ignores the compelling literary differences detected in the non-priestly texts from the beginning of source critical analysis of the Pentateuch.¹⁴⁵ The lack of unity obvious in the diversity of style and linguistics, varying viewpoints and interests, and the repetitions of the same stories, indicate layers of authorship throughout the non-priestly texts, which necessitate identification, even if only to distinguish them as has been the case with J, E, Dtr and combinations of them (R^{ie}, R^{ied}). Surprisingly, there are scholars who reject the existence of J and E and their subdivisions (J¹, J²; E¹, E²), while accepting the Priestly strands (P^s (*Grundschrift*), P, P^h (the Holiness Code - Lev. 17-23), and P^s (Supplement to P), which were identified by the same early source critics who identified J, E and Dtr.¹⁴⁶ It has to be said that doing away with the designations for the non-priestly sources does not render them nonexistent. As Whybray is apt to comment:

It is easier to cast doubt on earlier theories than to offer a satisfactory alternative.¹⁴⁷

Objections to distinguishing J from E resulted from the distinction originally made by the use of the different names for God—יהוה ‘Lord’ and אלהים ‘God’. These were considered poor markers for identifying the sources, particularly in the case of E, the document considered to be the most fragmented.¹⁴⁸ Even so, Kaiser notes that today many scholars still rely upon the criterion of God’s names, despite the criticism against it.¹⁴⁹ The Jewish tradition, in which יהוה is representative of God in his mercy, whereas אלהים represented God in his justice, was challenged by eighteenth-century German minister Henning Witter (1711) and French physician John Astruc (1753).¹⁵⁰ They brought attention to the two alternating names for ‘God’ in Genesis, from which was theorized that different documents were used to form the texts.¹⁵¹ Although the criterion has been criticised, Astruc’s detection of different strands in Genesis laid the foundation for source criticism, which led to Gottfried Eichhorn distinguishing the two sources according to style and content in his 1780 publication, *Introduction to the Old Testament*.¹⁵² It can be said that it was from the anachronistic use of יהוה before the

¹⁴⁴ Hagedorn, ‘Taking the Pentateuch’, 53-54.

¹⁴⁵ Davies, ‘Introduction to the Pentateuch’, 12-28.

¹⁴⁶ See Wellhausen, Dillmann, Kuenen and Cornill (*Die Schichtung von P*) in H. Holzinger. *Einleitung in den Hexateuch*. Friburg i. Br.: Tabellen, 1893, 13-14.

¹⁴⁷ Whybray, *Making of the Pentateuch*, 9.

¹⁴⁸ R. D. Dillard and T. Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, 45.

¹⁴⁹ Kaiser, *Old Testament Documents*, 138.

¹⁵⁰ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 47.

¹⁵¹ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 47.

¹⁵² Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 47.

revelation of that name to Moses (Exod. 3:14), that theories of redactors began to emerge, who were thought to have interpolated texts from various documents to achieve a particular affect.

Karl Ilgen introduced a third source (1798), who also used אלהים for God's name, later called the Priestly Writer.¹⁵³ W. M. L. de Wette determined that Deuteronomy was an independent work that is connected to the Josianic reform, which provided a certain date of 622 BCE for Dtr.¹⁵⁴ Thereby, nineteenth-century source critics had four sources to work with, which they theorized had been combined at different intervals into what is called R^{je}, R^{jed}, and R^{jepd}. The 'sources within the sources theory' formed a new documentary hypothesis that is referred to as the 'Reuss-Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen Hypothesis'.¹⁵⁵ From this, scholars like Schmidt encourage exegetes to focus beyond the idea of a gradual enrichment of an original document to the alterations, transpositions and additions of R^{je}, R^p, and R^d, particularly with the work of the postexilic R^p, whom he understands combined JE with P, and R^d.¹⁵⁶

Subdividing the sources assumes dovetailing even within the same verse, which of course complicated source critical analysis of the Pentateuch, making it all the more unpopular with some exegetes.¹⁵⁷ Yet, it must be said that however controversial the criteria for distinguishing documentary sources are, they do hold merit in that they have been workable and profitable for so many biblical exegetes in the past two centuries. It should also be said that none of the source critics mentioned above are believed to have had an agenda to devalue the Pentateuch as scripture in any way. Instead, there were clearly attempting to answer difficult questions about numerous inconsistencies in the texts recognized by Origen, who had criticized contemporary Jewish exegetes for their literal interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵⁸

It has been further argued that the doublets and triplets that had been considered evidence of multiple authorships are actually Semitic literary style, in which the repetitions were intended to achieve a desired effect.¹⁵⁹ I find this to be a weak argument, from which I maintain that the doublets lend evidence to the multiple authorship of the Pentateuch. Others argue that the difference in style that distinguished one source from

¹⁵³ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 47.

¹⁵⁴ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 49.

¹⁵⁵ M. H. Segal. *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and its Authorship and Other Biblical Studies*. Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 1967, 3.

¹⁵⁶ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 50. He argues that R^d interpolated Dtr themes into the Pentateuch.

¹⁵⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 249-50.

¹⁵⁸ Kessler, *Bound*, 17.

¹⁵⁹ Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 45, R. Alter. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. London: Basic Books, 1981, 47-62, and Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 31-32.

the other is merely a matter of variance in subject matter. Yet, the difference in vocabulary used to distinguish J from E cannot be ignored, as in the case of E's use of 'Horeb' for the mountain where Moses received the Law (Exod. 3:1; 17:6; 33:6), while J uses 'Sinai' (19:1; 24:16; 34:2), E's preference for 'Amorite' when referring to the indigenous population of the Land (Gen. 15:16; 48:22; Jos. 24:12), while J uses the more familiar designation 'Canaanite' (10:19; 12:6; 13:7; 24:3, 37; 50:11; Exod. 13:11), E's use of Jethro for Moses' father-in-law (3:1; 4:18; 18:1), while J uses Reuel (2:18), and J's use of שפחה for bondwoman (Gen. 16:1, 3, 8, 32:23; Exod. 11:5), while E uses אמה (Gen. 21:10; 20:10, 17).¹⁶⁰ However, Whybray points out that we cannot be certain that the writer of the text in question used both terms synonymously, if he was speaking about different places and people, or if he was using different terms inexplicably for the same things, since these texts were written about two and a half thousand years ago.¹⁶¹ Yet his argument is weakened by the fact that the J and E terms consistently appear in passages that are characteristically J and E respectively, which suggest that the vocabulary preferences are valid distinguishing points. This can be seen for instance, in the use of E's alleged preference for אמה in Genesis 21, the greater part of which has overwhelmingly been ascribed to E from the beginning of source-critical analysis of the Pentateuch.¹⁶² E's alleged preference for 'Amorite' is found in Genesis 48:22, the last verse in a long E passage.¹⁶³ J's alleged use of Jethro is found in Exodus 2, with 22 out of 25 verses ascribed to J.¹⁶⁴

There is another objection coming from exegetes, who although recognize divergent material that has been ascribed to E, do not consider the text to belong to a continuous documentary source.¹⁶⁵ Hans Walter Wolff and Claus Westermann agree that the texts ascribed to E are independent stories that were blended into the J narrative,¹⁶⁶ which appears to bring us back to the supplementary theory of the Pentateuch. More recently, however, E is defended as a distinct and continuous documentary source by Friedman in his latest publication, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*,¹⁶⁷ as does Axel Graupner in his comprehensive work *Der Elohist: Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des*

¹⁶⁰ S. Driver. *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*. New York: Meridian Books, 1957, 119.

¹⁶¹ Whybray, *Pentateuch*, 56-67.

¹⁶² Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 264; Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 63-64.

¹⁶³ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 267.

¹⁶⁴ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 267.

¹⁶⁵ Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 41-42, R. Alter. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. London: Basic Books, 1981, 47-62, and Moberly. *Genesis 12-50*, 31-32.

¹⁶⁶ H. W. Wolff. 'The Elohist Fragments in the Pentateuch'. *Int.* 26, 1972, 159-60, Davies, 'Introduction to the Pentateuch', 33.

¹⁶⁷ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 7-31.

*transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte.*¹⁶⁸

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of E being a continuous documentary source, as well as existing in two strands E¹ and E², is based on the idea of an older Elohist tradition from the North, in which Isaac is actually sacrificed by Abraham according to E's first-fruit law of the sacrifice of the firstborn (Exod. 22:29b). The theory is that E² corrects the practice of child sacrifice with the substitution of the ram caught in the thicket in Genesis 22:13-14, and E's law of first-fruit offerings in Exodus, which does not include a redemption clause, is corrected by his successor E² in Genesis 22 in accordance with the theological development that allows animal substitution of the firstborn son.¹⁶⁹ Given J's redemption clause (Exod. 34:20), Friedman's ascription of the episode of the ram caught in the thicket (vv. 13-14) to R^{je} is logical choice of redactor.¹⁷⁰

Friedman understands that the E document begins in Chapter 20 with the story of Sarah and Abimelek, as opposed to Noth, Campbell and O'Brien, who detected E text from 15:3a and 15:1 respectively,¹⁷¹ while pointing out that Chapter 20 cannot be the beginning of an E document since the writer would have Abraham and his wife coming out of nowhere.¹⁷² Even if E begins in Chapter 15, Abraham still appears to come out of nowhere, as opposed to J's account of the patriarch's Mesopotamian origin and relocation to Canaan (11:27-12:5). Thus, it can only be taken that much of the E document was edited out in favour of J, or as Friedman would understand, parts of E were dovetailed into the J document.

It is interesting that after his testing in Genesis 22, the next and final time Abraham is mentioned in E is in the account of his exogamous marriage to Keturah (25:1-4),¹⁷³ whose offspring become the progenitors of the Shebaites, Dedanites, Midianites and Medanites, the desert tribes who eventually war against Israel (Jos. 6-7; Jdg. 6:1-2; Eze. 25:12-13). It appears to be the intent of the Elohist to portray Abraham at the end of his life as no longer engaging with Yahweh as he had, but instead becoming the procreator of Israel's antagonists. God and Abraham never speak to each other again (in any other source document), with Abraham only speaking about God (Gen. 22:14), nor is it said from then on that he speaks to Isaac.¹⁷⁴ For instance, Howard Moltz points out that Abraham does not appeal to Yahweh for assistance in finding Isaac a bride; but

¹⁶⁸ A. Graupner. *Der Elohist: Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte*. Nerkirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag, 2002.

¹⁶⁹ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 178.

¹⁷⁰ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 65.

¹⁷¹ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 263.

¹⁷² Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 61.

¹⁷³ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 70.

¹⁷⁴ H. Moltz. 'God and Abraham in the Binding of Isaac'. *JSOT* 96, 2001, 64-65.

instead self-assuredly predicts that God would send his angel before him (24:7).¹⁷⁵

The E narrative resumes with the issue of Isaac's inheritance in 25:1-6 and his encounter with Abimelek, short of two verses concerning Esau by P (26:1-33).¹⁷⁶ The Jacob cycle¹⁷⁷ is dominated by E, as well as a substantial amount of the Joseph story.¹⁷⁸ In light of this and the idea that E accounts for all four patriarchs in Genesis, as well as for Moses in the largest portion of the book of Exodus and a significant amount of text in Numbers,¹⁷⁹ it strongly indicates that E is a continuous documentary source with fragments dovetailed into J.

Some distinguishing points apart from the vocabulary of J and E recognized all along is that E presents through narrative the forewarnings of God, speaking through dreams and angels (20:3-7; 22:11), unlike J who has God speaking directly to Abraham (12:7; 13:14; 18:13). Speiser points out that J and E differ in that while J is concerned with populating the world (8:17; 13:16; 26:22)¹⁸⁰ and acquisition of the Land of promise (12:2, 7; 13:15; 15:7, 18; 18:19; Exod. 3:8),¹⁸¹ E focuses on obedience and loyalty to God (Gen. 20:11; 22:12; Exod. 20),¹⁸² cultic matters (Gen. 31:19; 35:1, 2; Exod. 22:26),¹⁸³ and moralistic concerns (Gen. 20:3; 21:8f; Exod. 21-23:19).¹⁸⁴ Sean McEvenue recognizes the Elohist's preoccupation with obedience and points out two crucial incidents when Abraham is said to obey God, such as when God tells Abram to obey Sarah, who wants him to disinherit Ishmael (Gen. 21:11) and to sacrifice his son (22:2), the point being that obedience to God is Israel's duty and obligation.¹⁸⁵ E is not concerned with reward, but that revering God is obligatory.

Fearing God is most important to E, evident in his portrayals of Abraham finding the men of Gerar not fearing God (20:10), Abraham's testing to see if he fears God (22:12), and the Hebrew midwives fearing God by not killing the male infants (Exod. 1:17).¹⁸⁶ Although family succession of Israel's forefathers dominates the J document, E is concerned that the patriarchs remain faithful and obedient, as in the case of Abraham

¹⁷⁵ Moltz, 'God and Abraham, 64.

¹⁷⁶ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 73-74.

¹⁷⁷ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 77-90. See 28:11b-12, 17-18, 20-21; 30:1b-24a; 31:1-2, 4-16, 19-54; 32:1-3, 14-33; 20; 35:1-8, 16-20).

¹⁷⁸ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 93-118. (37:3-4, 12-18, 21-22, 24, 28a, 29-30, 36; 40:1-23; 41:1-45, 47-57; 42:5, 7, 21-25, 35-37; 43:14, 23b, 45:3; 46:1-5a; 47:13-26; 48:1-2, 8-22; 50:15-21, 23-26.

¹⁷⁹ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 119-189, 258, 280-87.

¹⁸⁰ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 261.

¹⁸¹ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 261.

¹⁸² Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 262.

¹⁸³ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 262.

¹⁸⁴ Speiser, *Genesis*, 173.

¹⁸⁵ S. McEvenue. 'The Elohist at Work'. *ZAW* 96, 1984, 315-32.

¹⁸⁶ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 262.

and Isaac, who prove to be obedient regardless of the cost to them (Gen. 22:9-10).¹⁸⁷ If one takes the book of Joshua to be the final work of the Hexateuch, as did Wellhausen, his contemporaries and Driver, 24:14-15 most exemplifies E's concern that Israel fear God exclusively:

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River, and serve the Lord (v. 14).

In regard to literary style, E tends to justify and explain situations rather than show them through action, as does J.¹⁸⁸ John Skinner noted that E is less anthropomorphic in the approach to God in contrast to J, who depicts Yahweh walking through the garden (Gen. 3:8).¹⁸⁹ Driver recognized that E does not have the same literary power and command of language with descriptions that are poetical and generate colourful impressions as does J.¹⁹⁰ E is known for its loftiness of language, as in the case of Jacob's dream (28:11-12, 17-18, 19b-21a, 22), as well as for its tense dramatic style demonstrated in Genesis 22 (vv. 1-14, 19), the parts of the narrative Skinner described as the literary masterpiece of the Elohist:

...narrated with exquisite simplicity as each sentence vibrates with restrained emotion, revealing how E was impressed by the dreadfulness of Abraham's ordeal.¹⁹¹

J wrote the legends and myths that explain human beginnings and why things are the way they are and portrays man as having moral knowledge without achieving moral responsibility. The flood story is important to J, as well as his Abraham narrative, since there is a new beginning for mankind through this faithful individual.¹⁹² J portrays Yahweh as creator, who miraculously sustains the patriarchs to the founding of the twelve tribes of Israel prior to their invasion of the Land of Canaan.¹⁹³ For J, Yahweh God brings his chosen people into the Land as the fulfilment of promises made to Abraham (12:1-4a; 13:1-5, 7-11a; 12b-18).¹⁹⁴ Although J's focus is on the territory later to become Judah,¹⁹⁵ unlike E he is universal in scope in regard to God's purpose in all that he does for Israel:

...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (12:3b).¹⁹⁶

The Yahwist is considered to be the oldest source document, dated to as early as 960-930 BCE,¹⁹⁷ and although anonymous, there was a consensus that the writer served

¹⁸⁷ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 262.

¹⁸⁸ Speiser, *Genesis*, xxx-xxxii.

¹⁸⁹ J. Skinner. *Genesis: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930, 328.

¹⁹⁰ Driver, *Genesis*, xiii-xv.

¹⁹¹ Skinner, *Genesis*, 328.

¹⁹² G. A. Larue. *Life and Literature of the Old Testament*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1968, 7-8.

¹⁹³ Larue, *Life and Literature of the Old Testament*, 1.

¹⁹⁴ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 261.

¹⁹⁵ M. Coogan. 'J'. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 338.

¹⁹⁶ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 261.

¹⁹⁷ Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, 137.

in the court of David and/or Solomon having been commissioned to write a national epic.¹⁹⁸ It is understood that J was a Judahite, who took existing oral traditions, which Gunkel referred to as the *Grundlage*, from which the first documentary sources drew¹⁹⁹ to compose an authoritative account of Ancient Israel's history spanning from creation to David.²⁰⁰

In contrast, it has been accepted that the Elohist was from the Northern Kingdom, where most of the E narratives are set, as in the case of the Jacob and Joseph narratives (Gen. 28, 30, 31-35, 37, 40-43, 45-48, 50).²⁰¹ The Jacob and Laban narratives are predominantly E, with much of them viewed as metaphors of the disputes and peace agreements between Aram-Damascus and Israel.²⁰² Gottwald suggests that E would have been far less interested in the royal courts than J, and in the prophetic circles that venerated Elijah and Elisha, which might indicate that E was a conscious corrective to J, whose interest was the monarchy.²⁰³ Driver pointed out that E's interest in the prophetic is evident in his portrayal of Abraham as a prophet, 'possessing the power of effectual intercession'.²⁰⁴

And now, give the man's wife back, because he's a prophet, and he'll pray for you (20:7).

Although the Elohist does not call Moses a prophet, Driver points out that he:

...is represented by him essentially as a prophet, entrusted by God with a prophet's mission (Exod. 3; Num. 12:6-8).²⁰⁵

Perhaps it is from E's portrayal of Moses as a prophet, that his northern contemporary Hosea recognizes Moses as being one (Hos. 12:13).

Characteristic of E is his sensitivity, which is expressed in the account of Sarah and Abimelech (Gen. 20:1b-17),²⁰⁶ when the future matriarch of Ancient Israel and the King of Gerar are protected from guilt by divine intervention, as well as in the case of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, where Sarah is protected from guilt by being portrayed as a jealous mother merely protecting her son's inheritance (21:1-12).²⁰⁷

Skinner commented:

In E the appeal is to universal human sympathies rather than to the peculiar susceptibilities of the nomad nature; his narrative has a touch of pathos which is absent from J; it is marked by a greater refinement of moral feeling...²⁰⁸

¹⁹⁸ Coogan, 'J', 338.

¹⁹⁹ Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, 141.

²⁰⁰ Moberly, 'When, Where, By Whom, and How was Genesis 12-50 Written', 138.

²⁰¹ Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 117-18, 122.

²⁰² I. Finkelstein and N. A. Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed*. New York: A Touchstone Book, 2002, 39.

²⁰³ Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, 138.

²⁰⁴ Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 118.

²⁰⁵ Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 118.

²⁰⁶ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 60.

²⁰⁷ Larue, *Life and Literature of the Old Testament*, 4.

²⁰⁸ Skinner, *Genesis*, 324.

Again, the Elohist shows his compassionate side in the story in the declaration that Sarah has at last received a child in her old age (21:7), as well as in the miraculous rescue of Hagar and her son in the wilderness, and the appeasement of promising that Ishmael will also become the father of a great nation (21:18).²⁰⁹ Going with Campbell's and O'Brien's ascription of 22:13-14 to E,²¹⁰ this side of E is evident in the substitution of the ram.

This might also indicate that E has an interest in religious reform, given the traditional view that the story of Abraham's testing in its original form was a parable on the prohibition of child sacrifice. E's concern for reform is apparent when he accounts for Jacob ridding his household of idols and ordering them to purify themselves and their clothing (35:2),²¹¹ in the golden calf debacle (Exod. 32),²¹² and in what is referred to as the 'ethical Decalogue' (20:1-20) and 'Covenant Code' (20:22-23:19).²¹³

The Elohist's theology is most like J with the exception that as mentioned above, the former lacks the universal vision of the latter, and the emphasis on sin and punishment recognized in J.²¹⁴ Scholars that recognize the existence of the Elohist agree that the writer's main concern is like J in regard to the actualization of the promises of Yahweh to Israel. However, the Elohist appears to have been a priest, as opposed to a court scribe as is assumed of the Yahwist. Robert Pfeiffer points out that the probability of E having been a priest increases based on the interest in pouring oil on standing pillars (Gen. 28:18; 35:14), tithing at Bethel (28:18, 22), and prohibiting the consumption of hip sinew (32:32).²¹⁵ Owing to this, Wellhausen initially confused E with P, particularly since both writers use 'Elohim' for God's name.²¹⁶

Although few have doubted that J is a continuous documentary source, objections have been raised about dating, with some such as von Rad arguing that the Yahwist was commissioned to write a history of Ancient Israel during what he presumes was an 'Enlightenment Period' at the time of Solomon,²¹⁷ while others like Van Seters propose that J is an exilic writer,²¹⁸ or Winnett who dates J to the postexilic period.²¹⁹ Whybray rejects von Rad's dating based on the unlikelihood that there would be a model from which to create a history of Ancient Israel at that time.²²⁰ Adding to that, it is doubtful

²⁰⁹ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 63.

²¹⁰ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 262.

²¹¹ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 89.

²¹² R. H. Pfeiffer. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. [rev. ed.]. New York: Harper & Row, 1949, 170.

²¹³ Skinner, *Genesis*, 327.

²¹⁴ Davies, 'Introduction to the Pentateuch', 26-27.

²¹⁵ Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 173.

²¹⁶ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 13.

²¹⁷ von Rad, *Genesis*, 16-18.

²¹⁸ Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 4.

²¹⁹ F. V. Winnett. 'Re-Examining the Foundations', *JBL* 84, 1965, 12-13

²²⁰ Whybray, *Pentateuch*, 47.

that there would be an impetus for Solomon to commission such a work, at least as much as there would have been during the exilic and postexilic periods, following the exile when a renewal of Jewish identity with their past was critical.

A late J writer was proposed early on by Karl Budde, who detected two strands in the Yahwist corpus,²²¹ identifying them as J¹ and J².²²² Cornill similarly referred to them as J¹, J², and J³.²²³ They ascribed Genesis 11:28, 31 and 15:7 to J² based on the anachronism ‘Ur of Chaldeans’, which presupposes at the earliest a sixth-century BCE date when Ur had been revived by the Chaldeans, a group of five tribes, who became dominant in Southern Babylon at that time of King Nabonidus after a long period of decline.²²⁴ Outside of the Pentateuch, ‘Chaldeans’ is mentioned a total of seventy-four times in the exilic and postexilic works of Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Daniel, and Nehemiah. Even more interesting, outside of Genesis, Nehemiah 9 is the only other place that ‘Ur’ is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (v. 7), the chapter which F. Ahlemann theorized was interpolated from Ezra 10:15 and 16.²²⁵

The multiple J theory was modified by Wellhausen and Kuenen, who agreed to just two Yahwists—J¹ and J².²²⁶ Nicholson mentions that during the early twentieth-century, Rudolph Smend agreed with the existence of J¹ and J²,²²⁷ and more recently, George Fohrer agreed with the modification.²²⁸ Even the notable scholars of the past five decades who followed von Rad’s theory of a Solomonic Yahwist agree that certain J texts were written much later than the tenth-century.²²⁹ As an example, Genesis 7:1-5 (Noah obeying God’s command to enter the ark with family and animals) has been ascribed to a late successor to J since it raises the issue of clean and unclean animals—a distinction that had not been introduced in Israel until Leviticus, which has been dated to the Persian Period based on the introduction of a priestly hierarchy (7:19, 10:10).²³⁰

Gunkel’s response to the idea of multiple Yahwists was that J actually existed not as an individual, but in the form of a ‘scribal school’, which over the centuries reworked

²²¹ J. Blenkinsopp. ‘II Samuel 11 and the Yahwist Corpus’, *Theme and Motif of the Succession History. International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament. Volume du Congrès, Geneve: VT Supp 15*, Leiden: Brill, 1965, 45.

²²² Holtzinger, *Einleitung*, 2.

²²³ Holtzinger, *Einleitung*, 2.

²²⁴ G. W. Ahlstrom. ‘Administration of the State in Canaan and Ancient Israel’, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. J. A. Sasson (ed.). Vol. I. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000, 30.

²²⁵ F. Ahlemann. ‘Zur Ezra Quelle’ *ZAW* 59, 1942-1943, 89.

²²⁶ Holtzinger, *Einleitung*, 1.

²²⁷ Nicholson, *Pentateuch*, 44.

²²⁸ G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, London: SPCK. 1970, 111.

²²⁹ von Rad, *Genesis*, 16, 18.

²³⁰ J. Jensen. ‘The Book of Leviticus’, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 435.

the writings of their predecessor.²³¹ Blenkinsopp notes that previously, Budde and Cornill proposed that what they had identified as J text in 1 and 2 Samuel was the product of the first stage of the ‘Yahwist school’ based on the use of the composite name for God יהוה אלהים ‘Yahweh God’ twenty times in the creation account that had been generally ascribed to J (2:4b-3:24), and eight times in ‘David’s prayer’ (2 Sam. 7:18-29).²³² Recently, Eric Heaton building on von Rad’s hypothesis of a single Yahwist supported the school tradition theory in the way of an ongoing literary tradition that began in pre-exilic Israel and was maintained into the exilic period.²³³ Heaton suggests that besides the education system developed by Ezra for the interpretation and teaching of the Law in Persian Period Judah (Ezr. 7:10-12), there was a longstanding parallel school that preserved, produced and reproduced ancient texts.²³⁴

Scholars in favour of a Yahwist school generally agree that the objective of the organization was to preserve the style and interests of the Solomonic Yahwist with periodic modifications made to keep up with socio-political and theological developments. In agreement is Michael Fishbane, who comments:

For while traditions and teachings were undoubtedly transmitted orally throughout the biblical period—and, of course, long afterwards, as the non-Scriptural oral traditions of early Judaism abundantly testify—it is only as these materials achieve a literary form that a historical inquiry can examine their continuities and developments. The basic role of scribes as custodians and tradents of this tradition (in its various forms), is thus self-evident. Scribes received the texts of tradition, studied and copied them, puzzled about their contents, and preserved their meanings for new generations. Whatever the origins and history of our biblical material, then, they became manuscripts in the hands of scribes, and it is as such that we have received them.²³⁵

Others reject Gunkel’s school tradition theory, including Noth, who viewed the Yahwist as a masterful writer and theologian of the early monarchic period. In agreement, Peter Ellis regards the Yahwist as more than just the compiler of the historical texts, but as ‘the first and foremost theologian of the Old Testament—the ‘father of theology’.²³⁶ He dismissed the Yahwist school tradition theory along with Speiser,²³⁷ who also could not accept that the unique characteristics of the J corpus could have been produced by more than one writer.²³⁸ Ellis based his argument on the distinctive literary characteristics of J’s story patterns, composed narratives from existent patriarchal traditions, such as in his obstacle stories, genealogies, soliloquies, theological

²³¹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, lxxiii.

²³² J. Blenkinsopp. ‘Theme and Motif in the Succession History (2 Sam. xi 2ff) and the Yahwist Corpus’. VT Congress Geneva, Leiden: Brill, 1965-1966.

²³³ E. W. Heaton. *The School Tradition of the Old Testament*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, 186.

²³⁴ Heaton, *School Tradition*, 41.

²³⁵ M. Fishbane. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, 23.

²³⁶ Ellis, *Yahwist*, iii, v, 6.

²³⁷ Ellis, *Yahwist*, 22 and Speiser, *Genesis*, xxvii.

²³⁸ Ellis, *Yahwist*, 115.

comments, foreshadowing texts and use of parables.²³⁹

In response to those like Ellis, who argue against the school tradition theory based on the absence of an Ancient Near East parallel, Gösta Ahlstrom argued that there was a long-running scribal tradition that evolved in Egypt, in which an adherence to style, phraseology and literary patterns is identifiable, as in the case of the war accounts of the Pharaohs throughout the ages.²⁴⁰ This being the case, a J school that survived to the postexilic period is plausible and might have been the Persia Period editorial influence responsible for the final form of Genesis 22, which was used to benefit a particular cause at that time.

In contrast, H. H. Schmid and Martin Rose recognize that the J document reflects the disasters of the sixth-century as against the peace and prosperity of the earlier monarchic period,²⁴¹ and that the Babylonian Exile was the best setting to develop a ‘historiographical tradition’, where the myths of Genesis 1-11 had originated.²⁴² Ahlstrom comments that the legend of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel would have become known to the Jews no earlier than the Babylonian exile, since the biblical texts situate the stories in that country.²⁴³ The concentration on an exilic Yahwist led to the idea of a postexilic J writer, first proposed by Winnett who understood that there were two Yahwists—the first a court scribe who served under David and/or Solomon, and the second, a postexilic successor who reworked his material.²⁴⁴ Yet, Winnett failed to form a connection between them, such as the scribal school hypothesis, in which an enduring organization preserved and updated the original J document over the course of time.

Having said this, and following Barton, who contends that the biblical critical approach to reading the Pentateuch ‘is a productive and mature discipline, which sets itself the task of understanding the biblical text’,²⁴⁵ I will examine the literary structure of Genesis 22 with confidence when it supports the argument that Genesis 22 was edited by a postexilic redactor for a postexilic cause. In light of Schmidt’s admonishment, I will proceed with caution.

Since every textual statement is integrated into a context and changes as the context changes, it is not possible to extract its theological intention without taking into account its original and subsequent context. Consequently, the laborious work of literary criticism cannot be avoided, although it must be approached with caution.²⁴⁶

²³⁹ Ellis, *Yahwist*, 40, 113-14.

²⁴⁰ Ahlstrom, *History*, 46-47.

²⁴¹ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 29-30.

²⁴² Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 25-26.

²⁴³ Ahlstrom, *History*, 30.

²⁴⁴ Winnett, ‘Re-Examining the Foundations’, 12-13.

²⁴⁵ Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 7-8.

²⁴⁶ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 54.

1.3 The Documentary Sources of Genesis 22

In order to analyse the structure of Genesis 22, I have charted the source-critical assessments of nineteenth-century source critics Julius Wellhausen, August Dillmann, Abraham Kuenen, and Carl Cornill,²⁴⁷ along with more recent scholarship represented by Samuel Driver, Martin Noth, Peter Ellis, and Otto Eissfeldt, and currently, Richard Friedman.²⁴⁸ Below I have divided what has generally been thought to be part of the original E version in the left column from that determined to be interpolations in the middle column, with the various ascriptions listed in the right column.

1. Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'		E Unanimous
	2. And He said, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.'	R ^{je} Wellhausen R Dillmann R ^{je} Cornill R ^{je} Kuenen E Driver, Ellis, Eissfeldt, Noth, Friedman
3. So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering; and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.		E Unanimous (vv. 3-10)
4. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance.		
5. And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you.'		
6. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together,		
7. Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?' 'Yes my son?' Abraham replied. 'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'		
8. And Abraham said, 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.		
9. Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built an altar there, and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.		
10. And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.		
	11. But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am'.	R ^{je} Wellhausen R ^{je} Cornill, Kuenen R Dillmann E Noth, Ellis, Eissfeldt R ^{je} Friedman
	12. And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only, son, from me. '	E Unanimous except R ^{je} Friedman

²⁴⁷ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3.

²⁴⁸ J. Wellhausen, A. Dillmann, E. Cornill, A. Kuenen; Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 2-3; Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 15; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament* and P. Ellis. *The Yahwist*, 87-95; Noth. *Pentateuchal Tradition*, 264; Friedman. *Who Wrote the Bible?* 247-48.

	13. The Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.	E Unanimous except R ^{je} Friedman
	14. So Abraham called that place The Lord will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided'.	R ^{je} Wellhausen, Cornill J ² Kuenen R Dillmann R ^{je} Friedman
	15. Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven,	R ^{je} Wellhausen J Dillmann J ² Cornill, Kuenen J Driver J Ellis, Eissfeldt E. Noth R ^{je} Friedman
	16. and said, 'By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because You have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son,	R ^{je} Wellhausen R Dillmann J ² or R ^{je} Cornill, Kuenen J Driver J Ellis, Eissfeldt E. Noth R ^{je} Friedman (16a)
	18. and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'	R ^{je} Wellhausen, Cornill, Kuenen R Dillmann J Driver J Ellis, Eissfeldt E Noth, Friedman
19. So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.		E Unanimous
	20. Now it came about after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, 'Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor:	E or JE Wellhausen J Dillmann J ² Cornill J ¹ or J ² Kuenen J Driver, Ellis, Eissfeldt, Noth, Friedman
	21. Uz the first-born and Buz his brother and Kemuel the father of Aram	J Dillmann, Driver, Ellis, Eissfeldt, Noth, Friedman J ² Wellhausen, Cornill, Kuenen
	22. and Chesed and Hazo and Pildash and Jidlaph and Bethuel.'	J except for J ² Wellhausen, Cornill and Kuenen
	23. And Bethuel became the father of Rebekah; these eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother.	J except for J ² Wellhausen, Cornill and Kuenen
	24. And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah and Gaham and Tahash and Maacah.	J or R Dillmann J ² Wellhausen, Cornill and Kuenen

This illustrates the extent of the narrative's fragmentation, which has been found to be one of the most redacted narratives in the Pentateuch, being ascribed to various combinations of J, E, R^{je} and R.²⁴⁹ Genesis 11, 12, 16, 19, 21, 25, and 26 are also recognized as being highly redacted and composed of J, E, R^{je}, Dtr, P and R,²⁵⁰ which strongly suggests that the Abraham story has a substantial history of revision and adaptation. Due to the consensus of editorial influence from Dtr and P in the other

²⁴⁹ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 1-5 and Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 262-67.

²⁵⁰ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 5.

narratives of the Abraham cycle,²⁵¹ it is worthwhile to explore the possibility of additional editorial influence in the final form of Genesis 22.

1.4 Nahor's Genealogy and the Yahwist

Although the source most associated with Genesis 22 is E, no one has claimed that this writer was responsible for the entire narrative as it exists today. Wellhausen came close to doing that in his original assessment that vv. 1-14a and 19-24 are E, but later agreed with his contemporaries that vv. 20-24 is an interpolation of R^{je}.²⁵² Hence, the lack of unity of Genesis 22 was recognized early on from the incongruity of Nahor's genealogy, which was thought to have been added to the story of Abraham's testing at some later time for an unknown purpose. However, this idea is questionable since J has traditionally been determined to predate E by a century or more. Therefore, as Richard Friedman understands, the Elohist's account of Abraham's testing would have been added to the J document, and not the other way around.²⁵³

There are three other indicators that Nahor's genealogy is not E but a redaction, the first one being that there are no E genealogies in the Pentateuch; unless, of course, they had been edited out in favour of genealogies produced by J and P. The second indicator is that Nahor's genealogy is introduced with the same phrase used to introduce Genesis 22, ויהי אחר הדברים האלה 'And it was after these things'²⁵⁴ with a minor and inconsequential difference of a *yod* in אחרי in v. 20, suggesting that vv. 20-24 is an independent piece. The phrase is used sparingly in J (15:1; 39:7; 40:1), even less in E (22:1; 48:1), never in Dtr or P, rarely in Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) (1 Kgs. 17:17; 21:1) and the postexilic texts (2 Chr. 32:1; Est. 2:1; 3:1). Yet interestingly, it is used in Ezra's genealogy, where it is said that the priestly scribe is a direct descendant of Aaron through Eleazar, from whose lineage descended David's high priest Zadok:

And after these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah...the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the chief priest (Ezr. 7:1, 5).

The third indicator comes from Wenham's comment that the patriarchal stories follow a pattern of promise, journey, births, deaths and burials, and were written according to a coherent scheme.²⁵⁵ This is evident in J, which like P follows accounts of deaths, disasters, or expulsions from God's presence with genealogy, but with the exception of Genesis 22:20-24, which *precedes* Sarah's death (Gen. 23), as illustrated:

²⁵¹ See Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 262-67 and Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 2-3.

²⁵² Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3.

²⁵³ Friedman, *The Hidden Book in the Bible*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998, 3-56.

²⁵⁴ F. S. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs (*BDB*). *The Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001, 29-30.

²⁵⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 117-18.

	TEXT	GENEALOGY	CIRCUMSTANCE
1.	Gen. 4:1-2	Descendants of Adam and Eve	Expulsion from the garden 3:23 (J)
2.	4:17a,18-26	Descendants of Cain	Expulsion from presence of God v. 16 (J)
3.	9:18; 10:1-32	Descendants of Noah (J/P)	The Flood and Noah's death (P)
4.	11	Descendants of Shem - Abram (J/P)	Scattering of the people 11 (J)
5.	22:20-24	Nahor's genealogy	Following Abraham's testing
6.	25:1-7	Descendants of Abraham - Keturah	Abraham's death v. 7 (P)
7.	49:1-33	Jacob's sons	Jacob's death v. 33 (P)

Since Nahor's genealogy does not follow a disaster or death, but precedes one (the death of Sarah in Chapter 23), it indicates that vv. 20-24 was displaced from its original setting in the J narrative. Had the genealogy introduced the story of Isaac marrying Rebekah in Chapter 24 (J), it would conform to the pattern of J genealogy since it directly follows the Priestly account of the death of Sarah. Perhaps the redactor considered Isaac's succeeding Abraham as the carrier of the holy seed (if that was the intent of Genesis 22) to be of equal value to Rebekah succeeding Sarah as the mother of the nation Israel, and therefore joined both accounts in Genesis 22. Whatever the case, it was from these indicators that early debates arose over the authorship of vv. 20-24, with Wellhausen undecided between E and R^{je}, Dillmann ascribing it to J, Cornill opting for J², and Kuenen undecided between J¹ and J².²⁵⁶ Yet, it was from Driver's assessment that vv. 20-24 is J that a general consensus was formed.²⁵⁷

Friedman maintains that the first history ever written in the ancient world was produced by the Yahwist, beginning in Genesis 2:4b and ending in 1 Kings 2, and that what we have today is J's core epic enhanced with other documentary material.²⁵⁸ He illustrates this by extracting J from Genesis, which results in a continuous coherent narrative of an unbroken chain of events in the lives of the patriarchs:

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said [Gen. 21: 1a]. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age [v. 2a]. And she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age' [v. 7]. Some time later Abraham was told, 'Milcah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel, Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Kidlaph and Bethuel'. Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milcah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor. His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham. Tabash, and Maacah (Gen. 22:20-24).

In the J document, the announcement of Isaac's birth is more logically followed by the announcement of the birth of his future wife Rebekah, as opposed to its present location between the reward clause 22:15-18 (J/R^{je}/E) and P's announcement of Sarah's death in Chapter 23. By the removal of Chapters 22 and 23, the account of when Isaac weds

²⁵⁶ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3.

²⁵⁷ Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 15.

²⁵⁸ Friedman, *Hidden Book in the Bible*, 11-12.

Rebekah in 24 (J), would be the logical place for the genealogy, rather than where it is at present, particularly since it has also been overwhelmingly ascribed to J.

It is from this recognition that most scholars maintain that the genealogy is an artificial addition to the Aqedah. Gerhard von Rad remarked, ‘the Aramaic genealogy is an artless incorporation into the Aqedah’.²⁵⁹ Others see vv. 20-24 to be a separate piece, including Noth, who commented that the story of Abraham’s ordeal stands as a literary unit on its own apart from Nahor’s genealogy.²⁶⁰ Cassuto understood that the Abraham story begins in Genesis 12:1 and finishes in 22:19, with Nahor’s genealogy functioning as the introduction of the Isaac and Rebekah story in Chapter 24,²⁶¹ as does Nahum Sarna.²⁶² Speiser detached ‘the ordeal of Isaac’ from ‘the line of Nahor’ placing the latter, which he assigned to a late J writer ‘J²’ in a separate chapter of his commentary on Genesis.²⁶³ Westermann added that vv. 20-24 formed a distinct narrative based on the introduction, ‘Some time later Abraham was told...’ (v. 20), which mimics the introduction to Genesis 22, ‘Some time later God tested Abraham’ (v. 1).²⁶⁴ Walter Brueggemann mentions the ‘genealogical data’, but completely neglects to comment on it as if the passage is devoid of significance.²⁶⁵ Moreover, Julian Morgenstern and Michael Maher omit vv. 20-24 from their commentaries altogether.²⁶⁶

Yet others, such as William McKane, recognize the importance of the genealogy to the story of Abraham’s testing.²⁶⁷ McKane understands that it is a late redaction, while classifying it as an unhistorical magnification of the prominence of Abraham in his connection to all other surrounding peoples, as is the case with the genealogies of Abraham-Keturah (25:4) and Abraham-Hagar (25:12).²⁶⁸ Mark Brett asserts that Nahor’s genealogy functions to support the universality of God’s grace in J, based on the parallels in J’s account of Ishmael and Isaac, in which the competing sons of Abraham both receive the promise of blessed progeny (16:11-14; 22:15-18).²⁶⁹ However, he does not take into consideration the possibility that Genesis 22 is not purely J in its present form, and that it might have been influenced by an exilic or postexilic redactor, whose concerns in captivity would not be the universal grace of God, but more like P in

²⁵⁹ von Rad, *Genesis*, 240.

²⁶⁰ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 114-15.

²⁶¹ U. Cassuto. *Perush al Sefer Bereshit*. Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 1964, 296.

²⁶² N. M. Sarna. *Genesis*. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989, 121, 154.

²⁶³ Speiser, *Genesis*, 167.

²⁶⁴ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 448.

²⁶⁵ W. Brueggemann. *Genesis*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982, 185-94.

²⁶⁶ J. Morgenstern. *The Book of Genesis*. New York: Schocken Press, 1965, 152, and M. Maher. *Genesis*. Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1982, 131.

²⁶⁷ W. McKane. *Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives*. Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1979, 70-71

²⁶⁸ McKane, *Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives*, 70-71.

²⁶⁹ M. G. Brett. *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*. London: Routledge, 2000, 75-76.

maintaining Jewish identity through pure blood lineage. It is most likely the case that during the reconstruction period when the Jews were able to rebuild their religious life at the newly refurbished Temple, universal grace was not something that they would have even considered. Instead, they would have maintained that God's grace would be extended exclusively to them, Abraham's heirs, particularly in the form of the fulfilment of the covenant promise of possessing the Land.

Others, like Van Seters understand that the genealogies of the Pentateuch functioned as historical linkage from Adam to David in postexilic Judah, stating:

...both the primeval history and the patriarchal age are structured genealogically with the successive periods and passage of time represented by the linear succession of generations.²⁷⁰

Jon Levenson and Baruch Halpern, following Abraham Malamat, agree that the genealogies of the Ancient Near East were assertions about identity, territory, and relationships.²⁷¹ This being the case, Nahor's genealogy would serve to establish Rebekah's identity and relationship to Israel's forefather Isaac. Hence, as Sarna understands, the intent of including the announcement of the granddaughter of Abraham's kin Nahor and Milcah (22:20b-23) was to legitimize Rebekah, since she is the future mother of Jacob, whose sons become the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel.²⁷² Furthermore, the highly unusual inclusion of a woman's name in a biblical genealogy substantiates the theory that vv. 20-24 are more about Rebekah than anyone else. Sarna also sees an historical value in the genealogy that 'echoes historical reality' as do the other genealogies of Genesis, which often point beyond the individual named to the tribes they eventually produce. Hence Nahor's genealogy points to Rebekah and her future twelve grandsons, as well as the other twelve named individuals, who represent a league of tribes in comparison to the lists of the twelve tribes of Israel descended from Rebekah (Gen. 35:22-26 [P]; 36:40 [J]; 49 [J]).²⁷³

To summarize, it is apparent that Nahor's genealogy is a late addition to the story of Abraham's testing, or as Friedman logically claims, the Aqedah was added to the original Yahwist narrative at a later time for a particular purpose. In light of this, the most logical reason for the addition of the genealogy is to distinguish Isaac's future wife Rebekah as the legitimate successor to Sarah as Israel's matriarch. Plausibly, the purpose in combining the Aqedah with Nahor's genealogy during the Persian Period would be to benefit Ezra's aim of maintaining socio-religious separateness from those outside of the

²⁷⁰ Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 201.

²⁷¹ J. Levenson and B. Halpern. 'The Political Import of David's Marriages', *JBL* 99, 1980, 507-18. A. Malamat. 'King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies', *JAOS* 88, 1968, 168-73.

²⁷² Sarna, *Genesis*, 155.

²⁷³ Sarna, *Genesis*, 154-55.

lineage of Isaac and Rebekah, as well as to restore the identity of the Temple community with their forefathers as the people of Yahweh.

1.5 Verses 1-10

From the beginning of source-critical analysis, vv. 1-10 have been attributed to the Elohist, with the exception of v. 2, which has been alternatively ascribed to either R^{ie} or simply to R, based on God speaking directly to Abraham, which has from the beginning been the distinguishing mark of J. Driver's preference for E, however, has been generally accepted. Since E is concerned with priestly matters, such as tithes, vows, intercessory prayer²⁷⁴ and most significantly, building altars, as in the case of Shechem (Gen. 12:6) and Bethel (28:18), it is more logical that vv. 1-10 are E given the overall theme of sacrificial offering. Where E's authorship is most evident is in Abraham's obedience to the horrific directive to sacrifice Isaac in vv. 3-10, where it begins: 'Early the next morning, Abraham got up and saddled his donkey'.

Furthermore, the phrase, 'your son, your only son' in v. 2, as well as in vv. 12 and 16, which clearly confirms Isaac's firstborn status and Ishmael's dispossession that began in Chapter 21 (vv. 8-20), recently ascribed to E,²⁷⁵ should indicate (as the early source critics argued) that it is a redactional interpolation. Since Ishmael is said to be the progenitor of the Arabian tribes from the wilderness of Paran (Gen. 21:21), vv. 2, 12, and 16 would have particular relevance at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah since Sanballat's cohorts, who attempt to sabotage the rebuilding of the walls, are said to be Arabs (Neh. 2:19; 4:7; 6:1).

Moberly points out that the important points the storyteller makes are usually expressed in speeches of the main characters at dramatic and crucial moments.²⁷⁶ However, it is a change in terminology at a crucial moment that may also lend insight to the intent the narrator is trying to convey in a particular redactional interpolation. For instance, Hugh White hypothesizes that like the Greek legend of Athamas and Phrixus, the Aqedah functions as the initiation legend in which Isaac comes of age.²⁷⁷ Isaac is referred to by God as Abraham's בן 'son', which gives no indication of his age; yet, after his ordeal, the Angel of the Lord refers to Isaac as a נער 'lad' (v. 12a), which indicates that he is a youth, or at least at the age of initiation.

נער is the same term used for the accompanying servants, who we know are not

²⁷⁴ G. J. Wenham. 'The Religion of the Patriarchs', *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman (eds.). Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983, 271.

²⁷⁵ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 63.

²⁷⁶ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 40.

²⁷⁷ H. C. White. 'The Initiation of Isaac'. *ZAW* 91, 1979, 17.

young children.²⁷⁸ This appears to signify that for God, Isaac has come of age through his ordeal, being for him a rite of passage. Isaac's near death experience appears to have taken him from childhood to manhood, which could enable him to succeed Abraham as the carrier of the 'holy seed' and protector of the covenant. Abraham refers to Isaac as a lad to the servants (v. 5), indicating that he has already accepted his maturing. White comments that although Isaac is pushed into the background of Abraham's testing, he has forcefully entered into the drama of promissory history with the story of his initiation, which concludes with the climax that holds the assurance of his future.²⁷⁹

The deviation from Isaac's expectation of a lamb for the sacrifice (v. 7) to the sacrifice of the ram (v. 13) might also bear relevance to the fifth-century priests and Levites. Although this detail might seem pointless, since rams, lambs, bulls and goats were used for the various ritual sacrifices at that time, according to Mosaic Law, the sacrifice of rams has a unique application. It involves the installation of priests, a ritual in which one bull and two rams are offered up to Yahweh (Exod. 29:1-37; Lev. 8). The bull is presented as the *פר חטאת* 'bull of the sin offering' (Exod. 29:14; Lev. 8:14), one of the rams as a *עלה* 'whole burnt offering' (Exod. 29:15-18; Lev. 8:18), and the second ram offered up for a *איל מלאים* 'ram of fullness/ordination'. Following the first two sacrifices, the ram of ordination is slaughtered and its blood placed on the right ear, thumb and large toe of the ordinand (Exod. 19; Lev. 8:22-23). Samuel Balentine understands that this was meant to have symbolized the commitment of the priests to be ever attentive to the word of God, having hands ever ready to do the work of God and feet set to run in the service of God.²⁸⁰ Indeed, this is a picture of Abraham and Isaac.

The next part of the ordination ceremony entails laying portions of the ram in the hands of the ordinands, thereby symbolizing a spiritual filling/empowerment to receive and prepare sacrifices and to live off of the altar (Exod. 29: 24; Lev. 8: 27). Balentine comments:

Because the priests have stood in the breach between life and death, they are specially prepared for the ministry of mediation between God and humankind... Their installation as priests prepares them not only for passing between the dangerous boundaries, safeguarding the people from the hazards of the holy, while at the same time ensuring that a safe connection with a holy God will always be attainable (cf. Num. 16:46-48).²⁸¹

In the case of Isaac, the sacrificial ram caught in the thicket could thereby function as the ram of ordination, enabling him in his vocation as the next progenitor of the nation Israel. It is his descendants that are destined to be *ממלכת כהנים* 'a kingdom of

²⁷⁸ White, 'The Initiation Legend of Isaac', 17.

²⁷⁹ White, 'The Initiation Legend of Isaac', 17.

²⁸⁰ S. E. Balentine. *The Torah's Vision of Worship*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, 153.

²⁸¹ Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 154.

priests' and a **גוי קדוש** 'a holy nation' (Exod. 19:6). In this way Isaac like Abraham before him serves as the prototype for the Aaronite priest. Therefore, the variance of the ram from Isaac's expectation of a lamb (Gen. 22:7b), the usual animal for a sacrifice of thanksgiving and devotion to God (Lev. 1), suggests that the ram sacrificed in place of Isaac was actually *for* Isaac. Isaac can then function in the capacity as his father did before him, who as maintained above, functioned as a priest in the ritual activity of building altars and offering up sacrifices, and even more importantly, he was the guardian of the covenant. Later, God promises Isaac:

For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed... (Gen. 26:3-5).

Considering the consensus that the Hebrew Bible was written by priests for priests, Genesis 22 would function in this way to remind priests and Levites of their vocational vows to serve God in reverence and holiness, particularly those who were willing to submit to Ezra's reform. Isaac's willingness to give up his life in honour of his father and his God would certainly speak to the Temple community in regard to the challenge to submit to Ezra's reform measures. It is interesting that after pledging to send their foreign wives and children away, each priest offers up a ram (Ezr. 10:19), perhaps as a **אשם** 'guilt offering' according to the law of (Lev. 5:14-5), and/or to symbolize a recommitment to serve God according to his Law. Nehemiah indicates that purification is a prerequisite for Temple service:

So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each of his own task (Neh. 13:30).

In addition, v. 2 is thought to have been altered with the interpolation of the mysterious place name 'Moriah', where Abraham is directed to go and sacrifice Isaac. Wellhausen was one of the first to suggest that the Chronicler had replaced the original name of the site with the invented name 'Moriah', in the attempt to connect **בהר יהוה** 'in the mountain of the Lord' in v. 14b to Solomon's Temple Mount,²⁸² in order to explain why Israel worshipped there. Dillmann had ascribed v. 2 to E, with the exception of 'Moriah', which he ascribed to the anonymous 'R' who he thought also redacted v. 14, which refers back to 'Moriah'.²⁸³ Driver agreed with the consensus at that time that 'Moriah' is a corruption of the original name of the site and that 'mountain of the Lord' in v. 14 was an allusion to Mount Zion, since it appears to be said habitually.²⁸⁴

Robert Pfeiffer indicates that since the Chronicler uses 'Moriah' for Mount Zion,

²⁸² J. Wellhausen. *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*. Berlin, [3rd ed.], 1899, 20.

²⁸³ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3.

²⁸⁴ Driver, *Genesis*, 217, 219.

v. 2 is a postexilic redaction.²⁸⁵ The Chronicler has David, like Abraham, at the place he would have it understood to be Mount Zion, where both patriarchs encounter the angel of the Lord in a near-death ordeal (1 Chr. 21:15). The Chronicler would have it understood that the site of Abraham's testing later becomes the threshing floor purchased by David from Araunah the Jebusite, where he also builds an altar to worship God (v. 26), which legitimizes David's establishing Mount Zion as the cultic centre of Israel, the place where the Temple of God will be built (1 Chr. 22:1). Wellhausen's contemporary G. J. Spurrell understood that the reason for connecting Moriah in Genesis 22 to the Jerusalem Temple was that the chief sanctuary should not be ignored in the history of the patriarchs that would be read to a much later audience, in consideration of Judah's bias against Samaria.²⁸⁶

Gerhard von Rad commented that despite Mount Moriah being identified by the Chronicler as the Jerusalem Temple Mount, the geographic location of the 'region of Moriah' is left undisclosed in the Bible or any relevant external sources.²⁸⁷ This has led to the opinion that it is a fictitious name, or that the original name of the place Abraham is sent to was corrupted.²⁸⁸ Spurrell suggested:

Even if [ה] מריה were a genuine ancient name for the Temple hill, it is not credible that it was extended to the *land* in which it was, and still less that the hill itself should be described as 'one of the mountains' in the region named after it.²⁸⁹

Pfeiffer points out that the Chronicler resorted to inventing stories of miraculous divine interventions in the rewriting of sources to fulfil various objectives, most of which had to do with the legitimizing of the Jerusalem Temple and its Priesthood.²⁹⁰ Since the great Law giver Moses never entered Canaan, it would have to be Abraham's encounter with Yahweh on Moriah that would stand as the justification for David's plan to build the Temple on Mount Zion. Furthermore, even though Israel's Priesthood is established by Moses with Aaron the chief priest, Wenham recognizes that Adam served as a priest by working and watching after the Eden (Gen. 2:15).²⁹¹ In agreement with this, how much more would Abraham function as a priest, when he carries out the priestly duties of building altars to sacrifice to God where he 'calls on the name of the Lord' (Gen. 12:8; 13:4) and circumcising male members of his household (if not a priest's duty it is an important priestly interest) (17). Abraham offers up acceptable sacrifices to Yahweh, the

²⁸⁵ R. H. Pfeiffer. 'Chronicles, 1 and 2'. *IDB*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1962, 574.

²⁸⁶ Skinner, *Genesis*, 328-29.

²⁸⁷ von Rad, *Genesis*, 235.

²⁸⁸ Driver, *Genesis*, xix.

²⁸⁹ Skinner, *Genesis*, 328-29.

²⁹⁰ Pfeiffer, 'Chronicles, 1 and 2'. *IDB*, 574.

²⁹¹ G. J. Wenham. 'The Akedah: A Paradigm of Sacrifice'. *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honour of Jacob Milgrom*, D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman and A. Hurvitz (eds.). Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1995, 93.

last being the ram caught in the thicket on Moriah, the future site of the Temple built by Solomon, where God's servants offered sacrifices to Yahweh, which is only hinted at in Deuteronomy (12:5), but confirmed in 1 Kings 9:3.

1.6 Verses 11-13

Verses 11-13 have been taken to be a redactional addition noted by Michael Maher, who sees the appearance of the substitutionary ram caught in the thicket as being secondary to the initial climax when Isaac's sacrifice is aborted by the angel of the Lord.²⁹² This has been taken to be a modification of an original legend, wherein Abraham actually sacrifices Isaac, especially due to Abraham's return to his servants without any mention of Isaac (v. 19). Verse 11 has drawn the least consensus due to the introduction of 'Yahweh' (J's name for God), while v. 12 has unanimously been ascribed to E, owing to the use of 'Elohim' for God's name, which E uses in situations that predate the revelation of the name at Sinai. Since Abraham is not supposed to know the name 'Yahweh', the use of 'Elohim' in verses 1-3, 8 and 9 is appropriate.²⁹³ This inconsistency has been written off as a scribal error, or the result of E being superimposed onto J text as suggested by Speiser.²⁹⁴ Ruling out scribal error, given the importance of the names of God and the opportunities when it could have been corrected, it is arguable that the final redaction of Genesis 22 happened when both names were being used simultaneously.

The source known to use both 'Yahweh' (Deut. 3:26) and 'Elohim' (4:32) in conjunction, as in the case in the construct יהוה אלהי אבותיכם 'Yahweh the God of your fathers' (1:11), is the Deuteronomist and, of course, the biblical writers who depended on Deuteronomic theology. However, Noth rejected the idea of Dtr redaction in Genesis, with the first occurrence being identified by him in Exodus 12:24-27a, when the people are admonished to obey the regulations of the Passover Feast, and the consecration of the first-born and unleavened bread in Exodus 13:1-16 and testing for obedience with the promise of blessing in the form of healing in 15:25b, 26.²⁹⁵ Not even in the case of Genesis 26:6, where it is said that Abraham obeyed God's commandments, decrees and laws, does Noth consider it to be a Dtr redaction.²⁹⁶ If this be the case, a later source can be considered, who used both designations separately and in conjunction with each other, and who would have depended on Dtr theology. This could be the Priestly Writer, who also uses אלהים (Gen. 1:1-2; 17:19) and יהוה (17:1a), not to mention אל שדי 'El Shaddai'

²⁹² Maher, *Genesis*, 132.

²⁹³ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3. Cornill suggested E or R^{je}, Kuenen E or R, and von Spuren suggested R.

²⁹⁴ Speiser, *Genesis*, 66, 167.

²⁹⁵ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 268-69.

²⁹⁶ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 264.

(17:1b) or simply אל 'El' (21:3). Then again, the redactor could have been a priestly successor to P, perhaps someone like Ezra the priestly scribe, who uses both אלהים (Ezr. 9:6, 8, 9) and יהוה (9:5, 8, 15) separately and in conjunction with one another.

Albertz's response to the inconsistency in the use of the names of God is that 'Elohim' is used for God's name when he appears to be remote, whereas 'Yahweh' is used when he intervenes on behalf of the patriarchs and shows them mercy, as he does in Genesis 20:17-18, when God opened the wombs of Abimelech's wife and slave girls, when Sarah becomes pregnant as promised (21:1), and when Isaac is saved (22:11) and redeemed with the ram (Gen. 22:13).²⁹⁷ However, contrary to Albertz's understanding, there might be intentionality in the use of both designations. For instance, since 'Elohim' is not used beyond v. 12 (generally ascribed to E), it might indicate that the use 'Yahweh' from then on marks a shift in theology (as well as source), wherein the actualization of the covenant blessings become contingent on obedience to God's directives, particularly since 'Yahweh' is introduced in E just prior to Moses receiving the Law on Sinai (Exod. 3:14) (E).²⁹⁸ Another contradiction in E is in the three-time use of the phrase 'your son, your only son' in v. 12, since it is indicated in the predominantly E passage of Genesis 21(6, 8-33)²⁹⁹ that Abraham has two sons:

I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring (v. 13).

Then again, this inconsistency might be the result of an E² redaction. It is evident that v. 12 forms the climax to the story since it reveals why Abraham is tested (to see if he fears God), and that Abraham has passed the test. It also reveals that God never wanted Isaac to be sacrificed, but wanted to see if Abraham was willing to go through with it, which Gunkel understood to be 'an advanced concept of spirituality'.³⁰⁰ Wenham comments that 'fearing God/the Lord' is a common expression denoting honouring God in worship and in an upright life.³⁰¹ Although fearing God is thought to be central to E, it becomes all the more important to Judaism during the exilic period evidenced in DtrH (1 Sam. 12:14; 1 Kgs. 18:12, 2 Kgs. 17:39), as well as during the Second Temple Period. For instance, Nehemiah chooses leaders based on their fear of God (Neh. 7:2), Malachi indicates that God called Israel to revere him (2:5), and Trito-Isaiah prophesies that people from the West and the East will revere the name and the glory of the Lord (59:19). The postexilic Psalmist writes:

²⁹⁷ Albertz, *Exile*, 267.

²⁹⁸ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 123.

²⁹⁹ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 264.

³⁰⁰ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 236.

³⁰¹ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 110.

Happy is the man who fears the Lord and finds great joy in his commandments (112:1).³⁰²

Although the narrator does not clarify that the provision of the ram was miraculous, Gunkel's understanding is that Abraham sees it as being a divine sign since he offers it up to God.³⁰³ Although it has been deduced from vv. 11-13 that Abraham's offering to the Lord is meant to connect to the altar to the future site of the Temple where Israel is to offer up sacrifices to Yahweh, (particularly since the Deuteronomistic Historian (2 Sam. 24:18) and the Chronicler (1 Chr. 21:18) appears to have made a veiled connection of Abraham's sacrifice of the ram on Moriah to David's sacrifice on the altar he built on Araunah's threshing floor), I take it that this is at most a secondary function of Genesis 22. I believe that the narrative holds a greater message for the Persian period Temple community, and all future Jews who desire to know what God expects of his servants—that they must revere God and obey his commandments.

1.7 Verse 14

The reiteration of the naming of the place of the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham caused early source critics to divide verse 14 into two parts as illustrated above. However, the more recent and current scholars ascribe the entire verse to one source, whether that be J, E, or R. However, the earlier determination that 14a is a redactional addition was based on the supposition of a word play on מריה 'Moriah' and יהוה יראה 'the Lord will see', with ראה also used in v. 8 'the Lord יראה will himself see to it'. Driver compared this to J's account of Hagar naming the Lord 'you are the God of seeing' since 'I have now seen the one who sees me' (16:13),³⁰⁴ as did Kuenen, who ascribed the text to J.³⁰⁵ Moberly comments that there are only two places where God sees and is seen—Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.³⁰⁶ He further comments that since Mount Sinai is much farther away from Beersheba than a three-day journey, the place where God sees could not be Sinai. Where that three-day journey took Abraham will be discussed at length below in Chapter III. Unfortunately, 'this day' (14b) is unidentifiable, as well as the 'it' which is provided on the mountain of the Lord. Early on, Cornill logically determined that v. 14b is a later interpolation as it looks back from a time when this sacred site was part of Judah's centralized religious life, that is to say on Mount

³⁰² *NEB*

³⁰³ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 236.

³⁰⁴ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 263, Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 247.

³⁰⁵ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3.

³⁰⁶ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 47.

Zion.³⁰⁷ Driver comments that the tense of ‘said’ in ‘as it is said to this day’ (14b) indicates something that is said habitually, which points to regular worship on Mount Zion.³⁰⁸ It also indicates a redactional addition in the form of what Sarna refers to as ‘an editor’s note’.³⁰⁹ Whybray³¹⁰ and Moberly³¹¹ concur that a redactor who linked the ‘mountain of the Lord’ (v. 14v) to Mount Zion. In agreement with the early assessment of Cornill, Westermann suggests that the editor who inserted ‘Moriah’ in v. 2 was the one who inserted *בהר יהוה* ‘on the mountain of the Lord’ in v. 14b.³¹² Since the Elohist accounts for Moses ascending to the place he refers to as the ‘mountain of God’ to receive the Law in Exodus (4:27; 18:5; 24:13),³¹³ it is unlikely that he would use ‘mountain of Yahweh’ in a narrative about a time before Moses’ revelation of the name ‘Yahweh’ in Genesis 22. Whatever the case, a postexilic redactional addition of v. 14 is conceivable based on the dire importance at that time of re-establishing Mount Zion as the cultic centre of Israel. The legend of Abraham originally sacrificing there would surely help to legitimize Mount Zion as the only place where Israel is allowed to worship, and where the ‘Law of God’ imported by Ezra was introduced to the newly-organized Temple community.

1.8 Verses 15-18

John Emerton bluntly referred to vv. 15-18, called ‘the second speech’, as a ‘clumsy addition’, which follows the climax of what is recognized as a beautifully written story.³¹⁴ Westermann and Blum argued that not only does the second speech have a different narrative style from the rest of the chapter, but that its theme is testing and obedience—not reward.³¹⁵ Yet others see the reward clause having great theological significance, whether or not it is redactional. For instance, although the themes and theology of Genesis 22 have been considered characteristic of J and E, vv. 15-18 betrays a theological development contributed by either the Deuteronomist or someone who embraced Dtr theology. Levenson understands that the second speech of the angel, in which Abraham is told that he will be blessed because he did not withhold Isaac from

³⁰⁷ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 355, 361, 366.

³⁰⁸ Driver, *Genesis*, 219.

³⁰⁹ Sarna, *Genesis*, 154.

³¹⁰ Whybray, *Genesis*, 54.

³¹¹ Moberly, *Genesis and Exodus*, 129.

³¹² Moberly, *Genesis and Exodus*, 129.

³¹³ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 151-52.

³¹⁴ J. A. Emerton. ‘The Origin of the Promises to the Patriarchs in the Older Sources of the Book of Genesis’. *VT* 32, 1982, 18.

³¹⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 354-55, Blum, *Komposition*, 320.

God, is a transformation of great theological significance.³¹⁶ Sarna agrees that all the previous promises of blessings were pure acts of grace on the part of God (12:2-3, 7; 14:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:6-8, whereas Genesis 22 is the first time the blessings are said to be the result of Abraham's devotion to God.³¹⁷ Therefore, Genesis 22 becomes a foundational act, the consequence extended to all of Abraham's descendants:

It converts the standing promise to Abraham of innumerable progeny into a consequence of the near death of Isaac.³¹⁸

This theological transformation has been referred to as 'meritorious theology' found embedded in the book of Deuteronomy, informing Israel that they can only reap the promised blessings (nationhood, security, prosperity, and renown) contingent on their adherence to the stipulations outlined in God's Law to Moses (Exod. 23:25-31). The conditionality of blessings is pronounced in vv. 15-18 (hence referred to as the 'reward clause'), in which the 'angel of the Lord' tells Abraham that his heirs will be blessed due to *his* obedience to God's directive to sacrifice Isaac.³¹⁹ Israel's realization of the promised blessings, thereafter are contingent on their moral performance. Robert Alter aptly states that what had been unconditional and indefeasible could now be annulled.³²⁰ Based on the consensus that DtrH is an exilic writer due to his account of the demise of Jerusalem in 587 BCE (2 Kgs. 25), it can be argued that at least the DtrH redaction of the reward clause is exilic (assuming that vv. 15-18 was influenced by DtrH), or the contribution of a postexilic editor who relied on Dtr theology. It is not a new claim that an exilic writer modified the Genesis narratives by putting 'Yahweh' where 'Elohim' had been, as Wenham comments,³²¹ nor would it be a new claim that a postexilic J-writer, who relied upon Dtr theology, modified the pre-existing J document.³²²

In a similar study, William Johnstone points out the source connection between the Pentateuch and DtrH, as in the case of Exodus 23:20-33 and Judges 2:1-5, demonstrating the literary connectedness of the two divisions of the Hebrew Bible that were thought to have been separate blocks of writing by Noth, who divided the Tetrateuch from Deuteronomy through to 2 Kings.³²³ Johnstone rules out the idea that Dtr simply made sporadic adjustments to Exodus, but believes that Dtr of the exilic period revised the whole of Exodus (Dtr-Exodus), after which R^p made a sizeable

³¹⁶ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 173-74.

³¹⁷ Sarna, *Genesis*, 154.

³¹⁸ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 173-74.

³¹⁹ See Deut. 4:1; 5:16; 7:12-15; 8:1, 6-18; 28:1-14; 29:9; 30:8-10;

³²⁰ R. Altar. *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. New York: Norton, 1996, 124.

³²¹ Wenham, 'Religion of the Patriarchs', 181-82.

³²² Winnett, 'Re-Examining the Foundations', 12-13.

³²³ W. Johnstone. *Chronicles and Exodus: its Analogy and its Application*. JSOTS 275, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 11.

amount of transpositions from Dtr during the postexilic period.³²⁴ He further states that the narratives in Deuteronomy of the miracles in Egypt, the wilderness ordeal, the institution of Passover, laws pertaining to freeing slaves and the offering of the firstborn, have a matching Dtr version in Exodus that he recognizes as being ‘smothered’ by and overlying P redaction.³²⁵ If this is the case, it would be reasonable to argue that Dtr likewise modified the patriarchal narratives, in order to update the theology.

Further, by the curious use of מלאך יהוה ‘angel of the Lord’, which has been taken to be R^{je} based on the use of J’s designation for God ‘Yahweh’ and E’s use of angels as means of God communicating with man, there is evidence of Dtr redaction given that he used ‘Yahweh’ and ‘Elohim’ interchangeably and simultaneously, such as יהוה אלוהינו ‘the Lord our God’ (Deut. 1:6). The Elohist appropriately uses ‘the angel of Elohim’ in Genesis 21:17, since he uses angels to speak for God, but texts ascribed to E in Genesis 22 have an ‘angel of Yahweh’ speaking for God, which E would not have used before Moses, but which would be acceptable to Dtr. Although there are no instances of this composite designation in Deuteronomy, ‘angel of the Lord/God’ is used intermittently in DtrH beginning in Judges, where ‘angel of Elohim’ is found once and ‘angel of Yahweh’ nineteen times, in 1 and 2 Samuel where ‘angel of Elohim’ is used five times and ‘angel of Yahweh’ twice, and in 1 and 2 Kings where ‘angel of Yahweh’ is used six times.

Based on the apparent shift in theology of the second speech, in which the actualization of the covenant promises to Abraham’s heirs depends on obedience to God’s directives, Blum determined that it was a Dtr redaction.³²⁶ DtrH recalls God’s conditional promise to Israel:

I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses gave them (2 Kgs. 21:8).

Lothar Perlitt was one of the first to express the idea that the covenant material of Exodus had not been the early creation of J and E, but the work of the Dtr, pointing out that the writer formulated promises of blessings in terms of covenant.³²⁷ Hence, Genesis 22 would be the appropriate place for Dtr to express the actualization of the blessings contingent on obedience. Blenkinsopp argues that the traditional dating of J and E ‘had never been particularly effective over the entire span of the narrative (Pentateuch)’, and

³²⁴ Johnstone, *Chronicles and Exodus*, 12-14, 17.

³²⁵ Johnstone, *Chronicles and Exodus*, 17.

³²⁶ E. Blum. *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*. Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 57, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984, 320.

³²⁷ L. Perlitt. *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament*. Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament. Neukirchen-Vluyn 1: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969, 68-77.

when promises are linked to the Law they most certainly originate with Dtr.³²⁸ In addition, he found that the promises to Abraham and Isaac, as in the case of Genesis 18:17-19, 22:16-18, 26:4-5, although attributed to J or E, are written in the homiletic and hortatory style of the Deuteronomist.³²⁹ This was recognized by Cornill and Dillmann in regard to Genesis 26:5, which they suggested was a Dtr redaction.³³⁰ Hence, it can be said that Dtr theology dominates the entire narrative, since his interests are divine testing (Deut. 8:2), the fear of God (6:13), reward for obedience (7:12-15; 28:1-14), and the allusion to exogamous marriage in Nahor's genealogy (7:3). However, as suggested above, an editor who depended on Dtr theology could equally have been responsible for what appears to be the editorial work of the Deuteronomist. A possibility would be Ezra since he betrays a dependence on Dtr theology when he acknowledges that the failings of Israel's forefathers to abide by the Law resulted in foreign oppression (Ezr. 9:6-7) and that the Temple community had transgressed the law of separateness.

Moberly recognizes that Genesis 22 sets a theological precedent in that the covenant promises previously made to Abraham were solely grounded on the will and purpose of God, whereas now Abraham's obedience has been incorporated into the covenant promises to which Israel owes its existence.³³¹ Although he does not assume from this a radical departure from the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant, he comments that the narrative adds to the profound understanding of the value of obeying God. In objecting to the widely held view that vv. 15-18 had been added to harmonize with Dtr theology,³³² Moberly argues that if the blessing clause is an interpolation, it was added very early on before the shift to Deuteronomic theology in Israel.³³³ However, it would be difficult to see the second speech as representing anything other than a theological shift from the promise of blessings dependent on something other than simple belief, no less than the extraordinary willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son. This is particularly significant since Genesis 22 is the account of Abraham's last recorded encounter with Yahweh. Although the previous promises of blessing to Abraham's heirs are based on his fundamental belief in the God who led him to Canaan in 15:6, his progeny *will* thereafter be blessed, 'because you have listened to my voice' (22:18).³³⁴

The Hebrew noun 'עקב' 'consequence' is used in Genesis 22:18 as it is in

³²⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 122.

³²⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 122.

³³⁰ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3.

³³¹ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 48.

³³² Blum, *Komposition*, 320.

³³³ Moberly, 'Earliest Commentary', 303.

³³⁴ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3.

Deuteronomy 7:12,³³⁵ where Moses indicates that the consequence of keeping God's Law is an increase in numbers (v. 13), also promised to Abraham's heirs in Genesis 22:17. The consequence of obedience is articulated again using the conjunction **אם** 'if' in place of 'עקב':

So **אם** you faithfully obey the commandments I am giving you today—to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied (Deut. 11:8-12).

T. D. Alexander argued that the inclusion of vv. 15-18 functioned as the ratification of the former covenant material.³³⁶ If this is correct, the statement 'because you have obeyed me' (v. 18b) becomes an amendment to the former promise of blessings in Genesis 12 and 15. Further, when paired with Genesis 26:5, which Dillmann ascribed to R^d,³³⁷ wherein it is said that Abraham obeyed God's requirements, commands, decrees, and laws, which certainly betrays Dtr theology, the second speech marks a theological shift to Dtr.

Furthermore, there is additional Deuteronomistic thought in Genesis 22, in that Abraham is tested, which Dtr elsewhere indicates is part of Yahweh's relationship to Israel (Deut. 8:16). The object of Abraham's test is to see if he fears God (also a Dtr prescriptive [Deut. 6:13], better translated 'reveres God'), which means that he loves God more than anything else. This, again, is Dtr theology:

For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to keep his commands, decrees, and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess (30:16).

Therefore, it can be said that beyond the idea of Dtr influence on the second speech, the narrative in its final form is largely Deuteronomistic. Considering the promise made in Deuteronomy 30:16, there would be no better time than during the postexilic period, when the Jews were once again struggling under foreign rule, for that promise to be revived. Hence, Friedman's assertion that Ezra, was the final redactor of the Pentateuch makes him also the best candidate to influence Genesis 22 with Dtr theology.

Most significant in the second speech is the element of covenant, which as Balentine recognizes in the covenant material of Genesis 12 and 15, conveys the idea of relationship between God and Israel.³³⁸ He comments:

God announces that through this 'everlasting covenant' there will exist in perpetuity a binding relationship between God and those who enter into the community of Abram and Sarai.³³⁹

³³⁵ See *BDB*, 784.

³³⁶ T. D. Alexander. 'Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision.' *JSOT* 25, 1983, 17.

³³⁷ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 5.

³³⁸ Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 111.

³³⁹ Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 111.

Although not the first narrative to deal with that relationship in the Abraham story, the covenant promises in Genesis 22 are uniquely affirmed by God with a solemnly sworn oath. Perhaps due to the horrific test in Genesis 22, in which the former promises of progeny appeared to have been dashed, God swears to fulfil the promises made to Abraham in regard to his heirs. In light of the situation of the Second Temple community, who felt that they were no better than slaves to Persia (Neh. 9:36), God's oath to Abraham's descendants would have rekindled a hope for repossessing of all that had been lost to them, most importantly their sovereignty over the Land. J. Gordon McConville indicates that recent scholarship agrees with this, which is based on the postexilic Chronicler's exaltation of Solomon.³⁴⁰ Yet, as Frederick Holmgren asserts, if the exiles were to recover fully Abraham's land, they would have to return to Abraham's faithfulness.³⁴¹

The Abrahamic Covenant is markedly developed in the Mosaic Covenant, and takes centre stage in the Persian Period reforms when Ezra reads the Book of the Law of Moses to the assembly (Neh. 8). As in Deuteronomy 29:12-3, it is the people who swear an oath to God and not God to the people. The story of Abraham's devotedness is brought into remembrance in the assembly:

You are the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites (Neh. 9:8).

As illustrated above there was no consensus about the authorship of vv. 15-18 until the recent assessments of Noth, Campbell and O'Brien, who ascribe the second speech of the angel of the Lord to E. Friedman comes close to that with the exception of ascribing 15-16a to R^j. Wenham's assessment harmonizes with the earlier source critics who determined that vv. 15-18 was not the angel speaking for the second time, but were the words of a second author.³⁴² Moberly points out that the second speech is considered to be redactional interpolation based on the notion that vv. 1-14 already comprises a complete narrative,³⁴³ and adding the stylistic differences recognized by scholars:

The story is noted for its taut and economic style of telling, heavy with suggestion of background context and meaning which is passed over in silence. By contrast the style of vv. 15-18 is repetitive and cumulative, with use of synonyms and similes. It is a long address with no reference to any response from Abraham, unlike the short addresses to which Abraham responds in the preceding narrative.³⁴⁴

In another article, Moberly comments that if vv. 15-18 is an addition it was:

³⁴⁰ J. G. McConville. 'Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy'. *VT* 36, 2, 1986, 206.

³⁴¹ F. Holmgren. 'Faithful Abraham and the *mana* Covenant Nehemiah 9,6 – 10,1'. *ZAW* 104, 1992, 253.

³⁴² Wenham, 'Akedah', 95.

³⁴³ Moberly, 'Earliest Commentary', 304-7.

³⁴⁴ Moberly, 'Earliest Commentary', 307-8.

...an addition possibly made in the time of the exile in the mid-sixth-century when the Abrahamic stories were probably being re-appropriated as a foundation for Israel's future life after the exile.³⁴⁵

Moberly cites Deutero-Isaiah (51:1-3), who relies upon the Abraham tradition in his admonishment that Judah remember Abraham 'the rock from which you were hewn', their faithful obedient progenitor whom they embrace as their 'father'.³⁴⁶ Yet this can be said of the Second Temple community, who relied upon the promise made to Abraham's descendants based on his faithfulness (Neh. 9:7-8). However, Moberly questions the idea that vv. 15-18 is an interpolation based on 'testing' and 'fearing Yahweh', which reappears together in E in Exodus:³⁴⁷

Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning (Exod. 20:20).

Yet, this only serves to support the unity of vv. 1-14, since נסה and ירא are not used together in vv. 15-18. Moberly disagrees with those like Westermann and Blum, who argue that the theme of testing ends in v. 14, based on the obvious difference of literary style mentioned above, the unique terminology, and the introduction of the theology of merit.³⁴⁸ Yet those who argue for the unity of Genesis 1-19, such as Noth, Maher, and Campbell and O'Brien, ignore the possibility that a skilful redactor could have reworked the narrative to make it appear unified.³⁴⁹ Morgenstern recognizes that in spite of the redaction, a complete and artistic narrative is formed.³⁵⁰ Moberly suggests that the insertion of vv. 15-18 is a relevant and necessary part of the story given that the ordeal of Abraham would have done him little good in comparison to the spiritual and material benefits Job reaped from his ordeal.³⁵¹ This raises the question, however, of why the Elohist's theology would have to be in harmony with that of the book of Job. Further, it is generally thought that the E narratives were produced in the North prior to 722 BCE, while Job is considered an exilic or postexilic Judahite composition based on him being characterized as a monotheist and monogamist, more indicative of a postexilic Judahite than a wealthy pre-Mosaic man. Moreover, it has been well argued that the prologue of Job is a complete story supplemented with the dialogues, monologues (3-42:6), and the epilogue (42:7-17), which contains the reward passage (vv. 10-15).³⁵² If this is the case,

³⁴⁵ Moberly, *Genesis and Exodus*, 134.

³⁴⁶ Moberly, *Genesis and Exodus*, 134.

³⁴⁷ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 262.

³⁴⁸ Moberly, 'Earliest Commentary', 308, Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 354, Blum, *Komposition*, 320, Moberly, 'Earliest Commentary', 302-3.

³⁴⁹ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 264, Maher, *Genesis*, 131-32, Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 262.

³⁵⁰ Morgenstern, *Genesis*, 152.

³⁵¹ Moberly, 'Earliest Commentary', 303.

³⁵² M. Pope. 'Job'. *Anchor Bible*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965, xxiii.

it would invalidate Moberly's argument for the unity of Genesis 22, as vv. 1-19 conforms to the same basic structure having a prologue (v. 1a), dialogues and monologues (vv. 1b-14), and an epilogue that includes a reward clause (vv. 15-18).

Others disagree as to whether the second speech is redactional, as does Van Seters, who states that although there is plausibility, there exists no proof that the second speech is a redaction.³⁵³ Wenham sees the difference in style as not necessarily being proof of a redactional interpolation, but merely reflecting a difference in genre.³⁵⁴ He questions the idea that the second speech is proof of a second source, arguing that Genesis 16:8-12 has four divine speeches and Chapter 17 has five.³⁵⁵ However, Chapter 16 is equally fragmented, and what he calls 'speeches' appear to be only one speech with four statements, each introduced with the *waw* consecutive, which normally serves as a grammatical conjunction in Hebrew narrative when one action follows directly after another. Moreover, the speeches in vv. 8-12 are fragmented, with vv. 8 and 11 being ascribed to J³⁵⁶ and vv. 9-10 ascribed to what Campbell and O'Brien categorize as non-source text, or texts other than J, E, Dtr or P.³⁵⁷ In regard to the five speeches of Genesis 17, all of which are ascribed to P, they are delivered by God all at once, unlike that of Genesis 22 where the speaker is God (vv. 1-2) with a shift to the angel of the Lord (v. 11-12), after which it is announced that the angel speaks again (v. 15), although, it is God who is speaking in vv. 16-18. It is due to this shift from one speaker to the other that the second speech has been thought to be an addition. Wenham emphasizes that although vv. 15-18 might be a redaction the editor was responsible for many points in the Abraham story and can be regarded as the 'chief architect of its theology'.³⁵⁸

In an attempt to unify vv. 1-19, Moberly rearranged the verses to achieve what he considers to be a more natural order, that is to say, 1-13, 15-18 followed by v. 14 and the concluding remark of v. 19.³⁵⁹ The logic of this is that since 'Yahweh *Yireh*' is derived from the imperfect tense of ראה 'see/provide', it would indicate future provision for Abraham's heirs, placing v. 14 more appropriately after the blessing clause, since the promised blessings are projected into the future. Ernest Nicholson suggests that since the imperfect can be used to indicate repeated action, the original intent is that God habitually reveals himself. As valid as this might seem, and although Moberly's rearrangement may improve the flow of the narrative, it is even more logical that the

³⁵³ Van Seters, *Abraham in History*, 230.

³⁵⁴ Wenham, *Akedah*, 97.

³⁵⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 102.

³⁵⁶ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 263, and Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 261.

³⁵⁷ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 195, 261, 263.

³⁵⁸ Wenham, *Akedah*, 95-96.

³⁵⁹ Moberly, 'Earliest Commentary', 309-10.

naming of the place ‘the Lord will see to it/provide’ would directly follow after the ram is provided as a substitute for Isaac, and not after the promise of blessings. Nicholson indicates:

According to the old legend, Abraham’s reward was Isaac’s redemption—a fully sufficient reward for the paternal heart, but that a later editor, to whom this reward seemed insufficient, added a great promise. He (the redactor) took great pains to have the angel speak as solemnly and impressively as possible: God’s oath, the ancient and mysterious phrase נאם-יהוה ‘utterance of Yahweh,’ originally the characteristic word for the inspiration of the man of God, employed here on the lips of the angel in an entirely denatured sense, and the solemn particles יעו אשר (v. 16) and עקב אשר (v. 18).³⁶⁰

It is more reasonable, therefore, that the redemption of Isaac and the immediate provision of the ram as a substitute would account for the celebratory statement, ‘The Lord will see to it/provide’, rather than from the promises he would never live long enough to receive. Gunkel pointed out that Isaac’s death would have invalidated the former promises to Abraham, which would make the aborted sacrifice the greatest reward for this father faced with the most dreadful of all sacrifices.³⁶¹ He described the emotions of the moment that went from a heart-rending to a deep gratitude and joy when God freed Abraham from his ordeal.³⁶² Although for the modern reader the reward of promised blessings would pale in comparison with the immediate redemption of Isaac, the possession of the Land, with increase in population and national security (vv. 17-18) would have been of great interest to the exiles existing under the yoke of Persia.

Another consideration is the phrase in 16a, *בי נשבעת*, ‘By myself I have sworn’³⁶³ and *נאם יהוה* ‘the noun construct that literally reads ‘the utterance/declaration of the Lord’. Early on, Dillmann ascribed the phrase to R, as does Friedman more recently.³⁶⁴ Wenham mentions that *בי נשבעתי* is unique to Genesis.³⁶⁵ The phrase is next found in Exodus 32:13, which Noth argued was a Dtr supplement,³⁶⁶ and then in Deutero-Isaiah (45:23), both dating to the exilic period. The phrase *נאם יהוה* is also unparalleled in Genesis, but used by P in the book of Numbers (14:28).³⁶⁷ It can be found in the Prophets, sometimes in a slightly different form and translated ‘declares the Lord’, or ‘says the Lord’,³⁶⁸ as well as in Jeremiah (22:5; 69:13) and Trito-Isaiah (65:23):

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.
Where will you build a house for me,

³⁶⁰ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 236.

³⁶¹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 234.

³⁶² Gunkel, *Genesis*, 236.

³⁶³ See *BDB*, 989.

³⁶⁴ A. Dillmann. *Genesis: Critically and Exegetically Expounded*: Tr. Wm. B. Stevenson, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987, 141, and Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 247.

³⁶⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 111.

³⁶⁶ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 271.

³⁶⁷ Friedman, ‘Exile and Biblical Narrative’, 146.

³⁶⁸ See 2 Kgs. 1:4, 7:1, 9:26; Isa. 37:34; Jer. 23:31; Ezek. 13:6-7; 16:58; 37:14; Hos. 2:15, 18, 23; 11:11; Josh. 2:12; Ob. 4:8; Mic. 4:6, 5:9; Zeph. 1:2, 3, 10, 3:8; Zec. 8:17; and Mal. 1:2 (*BDB* 610).

Where shall my resting-place be?
 Where will my resting place be?
 All these are of my own making.
 and all these are mine **נאם יהוה** (66:1-2).³⁶⁹

God swearing oaths to the patriarchs is often recalled in the Hebrew Bible,³⁷⁰ such as by the postexilic writer of Psalm 105, who is familiar with the oath sworn to Abraham in Genesis 22, apparent in his reiteration of ‘as numerous as the stars in the sky’, and by mention of the oath sworn to Isaac, presumably referring to Genesis 26:

The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws (vv. 3-5).

There is a concentration of the phrase in First-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor Judahite Prophets with the exception of Habakkuk. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah use the phrases together:

But if you do not obey these commands’, declares the Lord, ‘I swear by myself that this palace will be a ruin (Jer. 22:5).

I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you’, declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘and you became mine’ (Ezek. 16:8b).

Significantly, a late redactor recalls that Yahweh ‘swore an oath’ to Abraham:³⁷¹

The Lord’s anger was aroused that day and he swore an oath: Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of the men twenty years old or more who came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—not one except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they followed the Lord wholeheartedly. The Lord’s anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the desert forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone (Num. 32:10-12).

Kuenen thought that this text was a very late addition, more recently, Noth ascribed the passage to ‘other’, which Campbell and O’Brien call ‘nonsource texts’.³⁷² For Friedman, who usually ascribes such texts to R, in this case he recognizes that there is both J and P influence.³⁷³ Yet P does not use **שבַּע** ‘he swore’, but **נשא את-ידי** ‘lifted up my hand’ (Exod. 6:8; Num. 14:30). E uses **שבַּע** in the case of the remembrance of the oath that was sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 50:25).³⁷⁴

In conclusion, based on the consensus that the Pentateuch was formed in the Persian Period and the detection of various indicators in Genesis 22 (the highly redacted

³⁶⁹ *NEB*

³⁷⁰ See Gen. 26:3; 50:24; Exod. 13:5; Deut. 1:8, 35; 4:31; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:8, 12, 13; 8:1, 18; Jos. 1:6; Jdg. 2:1, 15; Ps. 89:3; 110:4; 132:11; Isa. 62:8.

³⁷¹ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 275.

³⁷² Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 10, Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 275, Campbell and O’Brien, *Sources*, 263.

³⁷³ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 254, 259.

³⁷⁴ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 267.

nature that assumes revision over a long period of time, the connection of ‘Moriah’ to the postexilic writer known as the Chronicler, the meritorious theology of Dtr embraced by Ezra and the Temple community, Nahor’s genealogy alluding to the preoccupation of the fifth-century Temple community—socio-religious separateness), I maintain that the narrative functioned at that time in the particular cause of reform. Yet, the redaction-critical analysis of Genesis 22 is not in itself enough to substantiate this claim without an examination of certain terminology in the narrative that points to a Persian Period editorial influence. Thus, Chapter II will be dedicated to that purpose.

1.9 Verse 19

If any inconsistency had been the result of scribal error in Genesis 22, it would certainly have been the omission of Isaac returning ‘together’ with Abraham; yet it is unreasonable to think that this oversight would have escaped the notice of editors considering how much this narrative appears to have been reworked. This supports the existence of an earlier version that circulated from a different oral tradition. Both Skinner³⁷⁵ and Van Seters³⁷⁶ understood that Genesis 22 rests on a widespread motif of a hero having to sacrifice an only child at the command of a deity, as in the Greek legends of Kronos, who sacrificed his only son to Uranus, and Agamemnon his daughter, Iphigenia. The Agamemnon legend existed in two versions; in the first version Iphigenia is slain, and in the second, she is rescued by the deity who provides a substitute animal.³⁷⁷

In consideration of E’s regulation of first-fruit offerings, wherein Israel is required to sacrifice all firstborn sons and cattle to Yahweh (Exod. 22:28b), it is unlikely that E would contradict himself, at least not E¹ (if there were multiple Es) particularly in regard to such a serious matter:

Do not hold back offerings from your granaries or your vats. You must give me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to me on the eighth day (22:29-30).

There can be no doubt as to what this text means, based on ‘Do the same’, which indicates that the firstborn son was commanded to be slain along with firstborn animals. The subsequent redemption clause of the firstborn with an animal (13:11-13), originally ascribed to R^d by Kuenen and Cornill,³⁷⁸ and 34:19-20 generally ascribed to J,³⁷⁹ but

³⁷⁵ Skinner, *Genesis*, 332.

³⁷⁶ Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 260.

³⁷⁷ Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 260.

³⁷⁸ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 7.

³⁷⁹ Holzinger, *Genesis*, 271.

which Noth ascribed to Dtr³⁸⁰ and Larue to Dtr revised by R^p,³⁸¹ serves as a correction of E's statute on first-fruit offerings. P also expands the law of redemption for male infants with the appointments to the Levitical Priesthood (Num. 3:11-13), with an excess of boys (over two hundred and seventy-three) ransomed with five shekels (vv. 40-48).³⁸² Therefore, if the sacrifice of the ram in Genesis 22:13 is meant to modify an earlier tradition, then it must be said that Friedman's ascription to R^je based on the use of 'angel of Yahweh' is logical.³⁸³

1.10 Ezra as the Redactor of the Pentateuch

In order to further support the argument that Genesis 22 reached its final form during the fifth century, it would help to narrow down a plausible Persian Period editor of the Pentateuch. Since by reason the Pentateuch would have been formed by priestly scribes, it is possible that since Ezra was a priestly scribe and referred to in the book that bears his name as 'a teacher of the Law of God of heaven' (Ezr. 7:6, 12), who imported 'the Book of the Law of God' to Jerusalem (v. 14) to indoctrinate the people of the Trans-Euphrates (v. 25), his 'Book of the Law' was the Pentateuch.

Friedman proposes that Ezra was the final redactor of the Pentateuch,³⁸⁴ whose motivation for taking on the arduous task arose from the need to condense the multiple documents ascribed to Moses if Mosaic authorship was to be upheld at that time.³⁸⁵ He was not the first to propose that Ezra was the final redactor of the Pentateuch, since seventeenth-century Jewish philosopher Baruch 'Benedict' Spinoza postulated that Ezra had taken material, some of which originated from Moses, and adapted it to the Persian Period creating an epic work that consisted of the Pentateuch through to Kings. He assumed that the doublets, breaks and inconsistencies, which nineteenth-century source critics attributed to the combining of the sources, were due to a lack of revision on Ezra's part for whatever reason.³⁸⁶ Perhaps working alone and under pressure to update the documents left in his care before leaving on his mission 'beyond the River', he would not have had time to revise the Pentateuch material, and thereby, leaving inconsistencies and contradictions, which scholars struggle with to this day. Later, Graf argued that Ezra authored the legislative and historical sections ascribed to P,³⁸⁷ including parts of Ezra,

³⁸⁰ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 269.

³⁸¹ Larue, *Life and Literature of the Old Testament*, 5.

³⁸² Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 260.

³⁸³ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 65.

³⁸⁴ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 218.

³⁸⁵ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 226.

³⁸⁶ B. Spinoza. *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. Amsterdam, 1670, 121-22.

³⁸⁷ K. Graf. *Die sogenannte Grundschrift des Pentateuch*. Archiv für wissenschaftliche Erforschung des Alten Testaments. Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1869, 466-67.

Nehemiah and Chronicles.³⁸⁸ Since Ezra's main concern is socio-religious separateness of Yahweh's servants and the Priestly Writer's is the purity of the patriarch's bloodline, it stands to reason that either Ezra had the P Document and was influenced by it, or that perhaps he *was* the Priestly Writer.

Ezra was qualified to be just that, at least according to the writer of the book of Ezra, who indicates that he was expert *בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה* 'in the Law of Moses' (Ezr. 7:6), thereby having the ability to revise what Artaxerxes refers to as *דַּתַּהּ דֵּי-אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם* 'Law of the God of Heaven' (v. 12).³⁸⁹ In agreement that the Pentateuch was finalized during the Persian Period and that Artaxerxes was concerned that both civic and religious law be taught and enforced in Israel by Ezra, the priestly scribe is the most likely candidate to have edited and finalized the Pentateuch:

And you Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them (v. 25).

If Ezra did edit the scriptures due to Artaxerxes' commission to teach and enforce it, his revision would naturally have resulted in a didactic, which according to Ezra 7:25 was ultimately used to teach not only for those ignorant of God's Law, but those knowledgeable of it—the elders, priests and Levites, whom Ezra and Nehemiah found to have violated its statutes (Exod. 34: 16; Deut. 7:1-3; 20:17-18; 23:2). If we accept the Persian Period dating of the final redaction of the Pentateuch, the redactor would have been a priest and therefore a successor to P, which we know is the case of Ezra, becoming therefore the most plausible candidate, particularly since the reformer is said to have had access to the Book of the Law and the priestly skills to amend it, as well as the authority invested in him by Persia to promulgate it:³⁹⁰

He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel had given Moses... Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel... You are sent by the king and his seven advisors to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your god, which is in your hand (Ezr. 7:6, 10, 14).

Since Ezra is the only Persian Period scribe named in the Hebrew Bible, he remains the most plausible candidate for the final redactor of what we have today in the Pentateuch.

Gottwald comments that Ezra's designation 'scribe' implies that he served as a secretary in the Persian government, making him an authority on civil law as well,³⁹¹ which explains why the king would employ him to enforce Persian law in the Trans-

³⁸⁸ Graf, *Die sogenannte Grundschrift des Pentateuch*, 466-67.

³⁸⁹ Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 540. Driver assumed that Ezra's king is Artaxerxes I (Longimanus - 465-424 BCE).

³⁹⁰ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 223-24.

³⁹¹ Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, 435.

Euphrates satrapy (Ezr. 7:25-26). Yet, Charles Gilkey points out that Ancient Persia did not distinguish sacred from secular law,³⁹² indicating that Artaxerxes might have meant that the Law of the God of the Jews was, also, the Law of the king since it would be enforced in his empire to advance Persia's interests.

Friedman mentions that during the Persian Period the Aaronid priests were in power in the absence of not only a local Jewish monarch, but rival priesthoods, namely the Zadokites, which would allow them full authority to revise the texts.³⁹³ Hence, it would have been Aaronid priests who would have revised the Pentateuch. Thus, it can be taken from Artaxerxes' comment of Ezra having the *בדת אלהך די בידך* 'Law of God in your hand' (7:14), that the priestly scribe, although not said to be a high priest in Ezra-Nehemiah, had the power to oversee its preservation and its editing, or as Friedman argues, he *was* the editor who produced the Pentateuch.³⁹⁴ Klaus Koch points out Wellhausen's portrayal of Ezra as the protagonist of the absolute validity of the Torah, from which he becomes the father of modern Judaism.³⁹⁵ He also proposes that Ezra was the high priest at that time based on the inclusion of his genealogy and his officiating at the New Years feast by reading the Law,³⁹⁶ not to mention the conspicuous absence of any mention of another high priest. Yet the writer of the Apocryphal work I Esdras stressed that Ezra was the high priest:

On the new moon of the seventh month, when the people of Israel were in their settlements, the whole multitude gathered with one accord in the open square before the east gate of the temple; they told Ezra the chief priest and reader to bring the law of Moses that had been given by the Lord God of Israel. So Ezra the chief priest brought the law for all the multitude, men and women, and all the priests to hear the law, on the new moon of the seventh month (I Esd. 9:39-40).

Although the dating of I Esdras has not been determined, Williamson suggests that it was written earlier than the theorized Maccabean Period dating.³⁹⁷

Ezra's credibility as the author/redactor of the Pentateuch is upheld in Rabbinic teaching, where he is called 'the new' or 'second Moses', as well as 'the father of Judaism', who carried the Law out of Babylon to Jerusalem (Sanh. 21b.).³⁹⁸ He is also thought to have been the first man of the 'great synagogue', based on Nehemiah 8 when he reads Torah to the assembly.³⁹⁹ Koch recognizes that Ezra saw his march from Babylon to Jerusalem to be a cultic procession of a second Exodus and a partial

³⁹² C. W. Gilkey. 'Ezra'. *The Interpreters Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954, 626.

³⁹³ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 223.

³⁹⁴ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 218, 232.

³⁹⁵ K. Koch. 'Ezra and the Origins of Judaism'. *JSS* 19, 1974, 174.

³⁹⁶ Koch, 'Ezra and the Origins of Judaism', 190-93.

³⁹⁷ H. G. M. Williamson. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. J. D. G. Dunn and J. W. Rogerson, (eds.). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, 851.

³⁹⁸ J. Bright. *A History of Israel. OTL*. London, SCM Press, 1960, 374.

³⁹⁹ Koch, 'Ezra and the Origins of Judaism', 175.

fulfilment of prophetic expectations of possessing the Land of promise.⁴⁰⁰ Furthermore, he argues that the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:17) indicates that Ezra's main objective was to fulfil the promise made to the Israelites, that they would possess the Land of promise.⁴⁰¹ McConville points out that the prayers in Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9 imply that their relationship with Persia was burdensome and posed a formidable obstacle to reclaiming their sovereignty of the Land.⁴⁰² In light of this, Ezra would have edited the Book of the Law to make the promise absolutely clear to the Jews.

It has been thought that the whole record of Jewish literature was restored by Ezra (Justinian *de cultu feminarum* I.3; cf. II Esd. 14), and that 'If Moses had not anticipated him, Ezra would have received the Torah' (Tosef. Sanh. 4.7).⁴⁰³ It can be said that as Moses was preoccupied with establishing the Levitical order and Aaronid Priesthood, Ezra's concern was to reform their Persian Period descendants with the use the Book of the Law of God (Neh.8:18). Further, while it is said that Moses prepared the Israelites to reap the covenant blessings, Ezra prepared the Temple community to regain them through the teaching of God's Law. This being the case Isaiah's prophesy is fulfilled:

Many peoples will come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the
mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in His paths' (Isa. 2:3).

The most important consideration is whether or not the scroll Ezra read to the assembly was the Pentateuch (Neh. 8:1-5, 18), or at least, something close to it. Although some understand that Ezra's 'Bible' was a version of Deuteronomy, Philo's concept of it was more than legislation, consisting of the stories of the patriarchs who obey the Law prior to the Israelites receiving them on Mount Sinai, or as he described them, the 'living laws'.⁴⁰⁴ Although we cannot prove that the Book of the Law found in the Temple archives during Josiah's reign (2 Kgs. 22:1), or 'the Book of the Covenant' as it is alternatively called (23:2), was anything beyond a version of Deuteronomy, it has been argued from early on that Ezra's Scripture (Neh. 8:18) is the entire Pentateuch, or at least a version of it.

The earliest commentator available on this issue is Josephus, who understood that the first five books of the Hebrew Bible are the Book of the Law of Moses, which contain the traditions and law codes from creation to Moses' death.⁴⁰⁵ Abraham Kuenen

⁴⁰⁰ Koch, 'Ezra and the Origins of Judaism', 184.

⁴⁰¹ McConville, 'Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy', 206.

⁴⁰² McConville, 'Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy', 208-9.

⁴⁰³ R. H. Pfeiffer. 'Ezra and Nehemiah'. *IDB*, Vol. 2, 1962, 215.

⁴⁰⁴ Philo VI, 'On Abraham', ix.

⁴⁰⁵ Josephus. *Against Apion*. H. St. J. Thackeay (trs.), New York: Ktav, (1:39).

agreed with this and understood that the narratives and the laws were intimately connected,⁴⁰⁶ as did Wellhausen:

Substantially at least Ezra's law-book, in the form in which it became the Magna-Carta of Judaism in or about the year 444, must be regarded as practically identical with our Pentateuch, although many minor amendments and very considerable additions may have been made at a later date.⁴⁰⁷

Recently, Lester Grabbe and E. Theodore Mullen agree—the latter of whom indicates that even outside of conservative circles it is widely accepted that the Book of the Law of Moses used by Ezra is the Pentateuch.⁴⁰⁸ Hans Küng understands that Ezra's Bible was the Pentateuch based on the evidence that the Samaritans took over the Pentateuch in the fourth century BCE.⁴⁰⁹ Ralph Klein suggests that it is the Pentateuch, since the law is identified as the Law of Moses in Ezra 7:6, 12 and Nehemiah 8:1 and 13:1, although nothing in Ezra explicates that.⁴¹⁰ Yet, Hugh Williamson points out others take Ezra's corpus to have been Deuteronomy,⁴¹¹ the Priestly Document and Deuteronomy,⁴¹² or various parts of the Pentateuch.⁴¹³ Blenkinsopp understands that the redactor of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah mainly regards it in terms of Deuteronomic Law.⁴¹⁴ This is disputed by Grabbe, who argues:

It is true that a significant number of laws are found in Neh. 10; the prayer in Neh. 9 also covers some of the main points in the Pentateuch, including Adam, Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, events in the wilderness, and the taking of Canaan. Thus, the information presupposed in Neh. 9-10 in the canonical Ezra-Nehemiah relates to the whole of the Pentateuch and not just the legal sections. When we put this fact together with references to the 'book of the torah of Moses' (Neh. 8:1) and the 'book of torah of Yahweh' (Neh. 9:3) and the 'book of Moses' (= torah [Neh. 13:1-3]), there seems to be only one conclusion: the present text of Ezra-Nehemiah wants us to understand that Ezra's law was the complete Pentateuch.⁴¹⁵

Ezra alludes to the regulation found in Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6 concerning the celebration of the feast of trumpets mentioned in Nehemiah 8-9. Additionally, Nehemiah reminds the people of Moab's rejection of Israel (Neh. 13:1-3) recounted in Numbers 22; both Ezra and Nehemiah uphold the law forbidding intermarriage from Exodus 34:15-16 and Deuteronomy 7:3 (Ezr. 9:1-2; 10:3; Neh.

⁴⁰⁶ Davies, 'Introduction to the Pentateuch', 14.

⁴⁰⁷ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 497.

⁴⁰⁸ L. L. Grabbe. *Ezra-Nehemiah*. New York: Routledge, 1998, 147, Mullen. *Ethnic Myths*, 21.

⁴⁰⁹ H. Küng. *Judaism*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1992, 103.

⁴¹⁰ R. W. Klein. 'The Books of Ezra-Nehemiah'. *ABD*, David Noel Freedman (ed.). New York: Doubleday, 737.

⁴¹¹ U. Kellermann. 'Erwägungen zum Problem der Esradatierung'. *ZAW* 80, 1968, 55-87.

⁴¹² H. G. M. Williamson. *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Old Testament Guides, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987, xxxvii-xxxix.

⁴¹³ M. Noth. *The Laws in the Pentateuch and other Essays*. D. R. Ap-Thomas (tr.). Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966, 76.

⁴¹⁴ J. Blenkinsopp. *Ezra-Nehemiah*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988.

⁴¹⁵ Grabbe. *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 147.

13:25),⁴¹⁶ and the harvest celebration mentioned in Nehemiah 8 is based on Exodus 23:16 and Leviticus 23:40. Moreover, the recalling of Abram's name being changed to 'Abraham' when the Book of the Law is read to the assembly indicates that the Levites had read at least Genesis 15 and 17:

You are the Lord who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites (Neh. 9:7-8).

Not only are there texts from all five books of the Pentateuch represented in Ezra-Nehemiah, but Friedman points out that all four documentary sources of the Pentateuch are represented in the Levites' recital, as follows: v. 7 alludes to Genesis 17 (P); v. 8 Genesis 15 (J); v. 13 Exodus 19:20 (J), 20:22 (E) and v. 25 Deuteronomy 6:11 (Dtr).⁴¹⁷ Smith-Christopher points out:

The term 'separation' is deeply significant to the heightened purity consciousness of the Holiness Code/Priestly redaction of the Bible... The phrase 'broken faith' (been treacherous) has Priestly and other late use (Lev. 5:21; 26:40; Num. 5:6; Josh. 22:16; 1 Chr. 10:13; 2 Chr. 28:19; Ezek. 17:20; 20:27; 29:26; Dan. 9:7).⁴¹⁸

Since Genesis 17 is attributed to P, the writer widely accepted to be responsible for fitting J, E and Dtr into his framework of genealogy, narrative, and law code and is thought by most to have predated Ezra, it becomes all the more certain that Ezra read from the Pentateuch, and even more so, was the editor of JEDP 'R^{jedp}'. Additionally, there is the interesting use of 'Ur of Chaldeans', which is found only in Genesis 11:28, 31, 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7, and since Nehemiah 9 is thought to have originated from the book of Ezra, lends evidence to the theory that Ezra was the redactor of the Pentateuch.⁴¹⁹ Nineteenth century source critic Karl Graf assumed Ezra to have authored much if not all of what has been ascribed to P, including parts of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles,⁴²⁰ which led W. F. Albright to argue that all of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah were written by Ezra.⁴²¹

Another consideration is that the very existence of the individual called Ezra has been debated, due to various inconsistencies in the book of Ezra, (as if the condition of one's biography determines plausibility.) In spite of the general consensus that the book of Nehemiah had undergone revision, as is obviously the situation with the book of Ezra, only Ezra's credibility is disputed, and his connection to Nehemiah thought to be

⁴¹⁶ R. G. Kratz. *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament*. London: T & T Clark International, 2000, 294.

⁴¹⁷ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 269 n. 8. See pages 247, 251, and 254 for source critical assessments.

⁴¹⁸ Smith-Christopher, 'Ezra-Nehemiah', 317.

⁴¹⁹ See note 237.

⁴²⁰ Graf, *Die sogenannte Grunschrift des Pentateuch*, 466-67.

⁴²¹ W. F. Albright. *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965, 54.

dubious.⁴²² Although there are numerous Ezra traditions, the priestly reformer was considered by Charles Torrey to be a creation of the Chronicler, and like Pfeiffer he took him to be a writer of historical fiction, with Ezra being the personification of the Chronicler's interests.⁴²³ This comes from the assumption that Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah were a unit at one time, but which at the same time suggests that Ezra was the Chronicler who was responsible for all three works.

The suspicion that Ezra is a fictional character arises from the third person accounts of his coming to Jerusalem, from Ezra 7 to 10:44, which is interrupted by the first person account of Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem, from 8:15 to 9:15. The very fact that there is an interruption might indicate that the writer had access to the first person account, on which he could have based the remainder of the book of Ezra in the third person. This would suggest that the editor believed that Ezra existed, and that the third person accounts of Ezra were his retelling of Ezra traditions about the reform of the delinquent elders, priests and Levites. At the same time, it must be recognized that the use of first and third persons would not be an unusual way of writing about various events in the life of an individual, and therefore, should not be used as evidence that Ezra was a fictional character.

Furthermore, the redactor includes Ezra's genealogy showing a lineage reaching back to Aaron (7:1-6), which is not even afforded Nehemiah, whose historicity has not been doubted. It is unlikely that Ezra would have been tied to Seraiah (his father), the son of Azariah the son of Hilkiyah of Josiah's reign (v. 1), if he was a fictional character. It is more likely the case that since Ezra was a priest, and that his genealogy is in compliance with the requirement imposed on former exiles to show family records as proof that they were descended from the Judahites taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezr. 2:1, 62).

In addition, Raymond Bowman argued that Torrey's theory came from the erroneous notion that the Chronicler used almost no sources in Ezra.⁴²⁴ This was disputed by Noth, who recognized Ezra 7:12-26 (Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra) and 8:1-14 (list of family heads returning with Ezra) to be the sources used by the Chronicler in Ezra-Nehemiah.⁴²⁵ Williamson recognizes other sources represented in Ezra, as follows: the Decree of Cyrus (Ezr. 1:2-4); the inventory of temple vessels (1:9-11); the list of exiles who returned (2:1-67); various correspondences (4-5); Darius' Decree (6:3-12);

⁴²² R. Bowman. 'Ezra and Nehemiah'. *IB*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1954, 563.

⁴²³ C. C. Torrey. *Ezra Studies*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1970, 247-48.

⁴²⁴ Bowman. 'Ezra and Nehemiah', 552-54.

⁴²⁵ Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*. *OTG*, 21.

the Aramaic section (4:6-6:22); and Haggai's and Zechariah's prophecy (5:1-2).⁴²⁶ The lists in Nehemiah 3 and 7 differentiated from his biography (Neh. 1-7, parts of 12:27-43, 13:4-31), also, indicate the use of sources.⁴²⁷ In addition, Bowman points out that the shifts from Hebrew to Aramaic (Ezr. 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26) and from the third person to the first (Ezr. 8:15-9:15; Neh. 1:1-7:7; 12:31; 13:6ff) lend proof to a dependence on sources in both Ezra and Nehemiah.⁴²⁸ The use of sources is also apparent in the writer's misunderstanding and therefore misuse of them, such as when a list of men is used in two places in different contexts (1 Chronicles 9:1-44 lists exiles who resettled in Judah after the return from Babylon between the beginning of genealogy of Saul (8:1-39) and the end of it (vv. 35-44), and then uses an almost identical list in Nehemiah 11:3-24).⁴²⁹ It is due to this that scholars like Bowman argued that Ezra-Nehemiah was written by the Chronicler, and that at one time Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah existed as a literary unit, a view which many today reject:

The conclusion that Ezra-Nehemiah was originally part of Chronicles is further supported by the fact that the same late Hebrew language, the same distinctive literary peculiarities that mark the style of the Chronicler, are found throughout Ezra-Nehemiah. The same presuppositions, interests, points of view, and theological and ecclesiastical conceptions so dominate all these writings that it is apparent that Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah was originally a literary unit, the product of one school of thought, if not of a single mind, that can be called 'the Chronicler'.⁴³⁰

Influenced by Karl Graf, W. F. Albright argued that all of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah were written by Ezra.⁴³¹ Yet, scholars no longer insist on the Chronicler's authorship of Ezra based on the similarity of language, which as Williamson indicates has been decided to have been simply the general style of the language during the postexilic period.⁴³²

Additionally, inconsistencies in the text have led to the opinion that Ezra is not historical, whereas problems in the 'Nehemiah Memoir' have not caused scholars to doubt Nehemiah's historicity.⁴³³ For instance, Williamson recognizes that the 'Nehemiah Memoir'⁴³⁴ cannot be read as a single coherent narrative due to apparent gaps in the account, one being in chapter 7 which is abruptly cut short,⁴³⁵ as well as there being a difference of wall builders in the list in chapter 3 from the list in chapter 6.⁴³⁶ In addition,

⁴²⁶ Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, xxiii-xxiv.

⁴²⁷ Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, xxiv.

⁴²⁸ Bowman, 'Ezra and Nehemiah', 555.

⁴²⁹ Bowman, 'Ezra and Nehemiah', 555.

⁴³⁰ Bowman, 'Ezra and Nehemiah', 552.

⁴³¹ W. F. Albright. *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965, 54.

⁴³² Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah, OTG*, 23.

⁴³³ Bowman, 'Ezra and Nehemiah', 555.

⁴³⁴ The 'Nehemiah memoir' consists of Chapters 1-2, 4-6, 7:1-5, 12:31-43, and 13:4-31.

⁴³⁵ Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah, OTG*, 15.

⁴³⁶ Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah, OTG*, 15.

there is a twelve-year jump from chapter 12 to 13, as well as a shift of focus from the resettling of Jews to religious matters.⁴³⁷ Nor can the book of Nehemiah be considered a literary unit as many concede since Chapter 8 and possibly 9 and 10 had been displaced from Ezra, where they probably were situated between Ezra 9 and 10.⁴³⁸

What does account for Nehemiah's historicity is that it is written either in the form of a letter to the king, or as Kellermann points out, is a psalm categorized as 'Prayer of the Accused',⁴³⁹ where Nehemiah attempts to justify himself from false accusations.⁴⁴⁰ Furthermore, Nehemiah has been taken to be more credible than Ezra due to being mentioned in Ben Sira along with Zerubbabel, while Ezra's name is omitted:

How can we tell the greatness of Zerubbabel, who was like a signet-ring on the Lord's right hand? (49:11).

Nehemiah – may his memory be honoured – who raised up our ruins, and he repaired our breaches and set up the gates and bars (Ben Sira 49:13).

Grabbe mentions that those who have tried to explain the omission assume that either Ben Sira did not intend to be complete, or that he intentionally omitted Ezra for whatever reason, perhaps believing the book of Ezra to be unreliable.⁴⁴¹ He assumes that Ben Sira was working from other sources besides the canonical Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras.⁴⁴²

Surprisingly, the writer of 2 Maccabees honours Nehemiah as the builder of the Temple and altar (2 Macc.1:18-36), which the book of Ezra credits Zerubbabel and Joshua for having accomplished (Ezr. 3-6). In addition, Nehemiah is portrayed as being the compiler of sources, as in the case of 'chronicles of the kings', the 'writings of the prophets', the 'works of David', and 'royal letters about sacred offerings' (2 Macc. 2:13-14), which is what Ezra would have possessed given his vocation as a priestly scribe. A plausible explanation can be that Nehemiah ended up with Ezra's library at some point. Whatever the case, according to the Maccabean Nehemiah tradition, Ezra's role in reform and promulgating the Torah becomes superfluous, which might have been the intent of the writer of Maccabees. The omission of Zerubbabel, Joshua and Ezra of Persian Period Judah suggests that the writer did not have the book of Ezra or 1 Esdras. Remarkably, neither Ezra nor Nehemiah is mentioned in the New Testament. Yet, a first-century writer believed in Ezra enough to compose the Apocalypse of Ezra, otherwise referred to as 4 Ezra or 2 Esdras.⁴⁴³ However it must be noted as Grabbe points out, there

⁴³⁷ Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah, OTG*, 16-17.

⁴³⁸ Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, xxxix, 275, and Bowman, 'Ezra and Nehemiah', 557.

⁴³⁹ Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, xxv, U. Kellermann. *Nehemia: Quellen. Überlieferung und Geschichte*. BZAW 102. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967.

⁴⁴⁰ Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, xxv.

⁴⁴¹ Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 87-88.

⁴⁴² Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 88.

⁴⁴³ Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 90.

is not a true Ezra tradition in the work, suggesting that the author merely used the figure of Ezra to convey his message.⁴⁴⁴

Up until the latter part of the sixteenth century, the Hebrew version of Ezra and Nehemiah were one work under the title of 'Ezra', giving the priestly scribe prominence over Nehemiah. Our ancient witnesses to this are from Josephus, the Bishop Melito of Sardis of the second century, the Talmud (Baba bathra fol. 14 c.2), Massorettes' notations, ancient Jewish commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, and the earliest Hebrew and LXX MSS.⁴⁴⁵ In the early Christian versions of the Old Testament, Jerome's Latin Vulgate has Ezra-Nehemiah as 'First and Second Ezra', the Codex Alexandrinus entitles the work as 'Ezra the Priest', the Syriac Version has 'The book of Ezra the Prophet', and the Arabic Version calls the book of Ezra 'The First Book of Ezra the Priest, the Scribe' and the book of Nehemiah 'The Second Book of Ezra the Priest'.⁴⁴⁶ The English Bibles of the sixteenth century call Ezra-Nehemiah 'First and Second Ezra', with the variance of Wycliffe's and Coverdale's translations calling them 'First and Second Books of Esdras'. It is in the 1595 edition of the Bishop's Bible that 'Nehemiah' is called the '*The booke of Nehemias, or seconde booke of Esdras*'.⁴⁴⁷ Therefore, it can be said that since there was a strong Ezra tradition from the first-century CE, when Ezra is given credit for having a greater role in the reform of the religious life of the Jews than Nehemiah, that the individual Ezra actually existed.

Ezra's plausibility can, also, be based on the book of Ezra, wherein he is credited with bringing not only the Book of the Law, but Temple personnel, settlers and enormous wealth to Persian Period Judah, an incredible accomplishment that is not likely to have been assigned to a fictional character. For that matter, it could have all been credited to Nehemiah. Further, Othniel Margalith points to Ezra's role as a Persian appointed governor to Judah at the time of the mid-fifth century conflict with Egypt, which makes the story of the reformer's mission to Judah 'eminently logical'.⁴⁴⁸ Since it is unlikely that Nehemiah, who is taken to be an historical character, would be connected to a fictional character in Scripture, Ezra can be considered as plausible as is Nehemiah. This is not to say that Ezra was not fictionalized, for as Grabbe points out, the amount of precious metals the reformer is said to have taken to Jerusalem (19.5 tonnes) is hugely overstated, not to mention being unfeasible to transport by his entourage.⁴⁴⁹ In addition, Grabbe finds Ezra's embarrassment to ask the king for military support in transporting

⁴⁴⁴ Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 90.

⁴⁴⁵ H. E. Ryle. *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*. Cambridge: University Press, 1893, x-xi.

⁴⁴⁶ Ryle, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, xiii-xiv.

⁴⁴⁷ Ryle, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, xiv-xv.

⁴⁴⁸ O. Margalith. 'The Political Role of Ezra as Persian Governor'. *ZAW* 98, 1986, 116-18.

⁴⁴⁹ Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 140-41.

the treasure to be absurd (Ezr. 8:22), from which he concludes that the passage is not an account of a journey so much as a treatise in theology.⁴⁵⁰ Yet, this does not diminish Ezra's historicity, as much as it indicates the redactor's desire to exaggerate the facts. Morton Smith recognizes details that indicate the authenticity of the work and the character, such as when the assembly attempts to reconvene on the second day, they are rained out, which as he puts it is 'a realistic detail the editor would never have invented'.⁴⁵¹

If the only truth conveyed about Ezra is found in the first person accounts of the book of Ezra, we are left without any basis for a reform movement implemented by the priestly scribe, with the redaction in Nehemiah 8:18, 'Day after day, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God', leaving us with 'Ezra the teacher of Scripture' in *Nehemiah's* reform movement. Yet it is more likely the case that the writer of the third person accounts of Ezra's reform of the wayward elders and clergy comes from an Ezra tradition that the redactor gleaned from to form a narrative that explains how the fifth-century apostate Temple community became the elite and pious people who embraced socio-religious separateness, thereby establishing Jewish orthodoxy that has developed and endured to this day. Certainly, it was the intention of the redactor that having the favour of God, the King of Persia and his entourage, Ezra would have not left Jerusalem without having accomplished such a momentous reform.

1.11 Did Ezra leave the Pentateuch unrevised?

What should also be discussed at this point is the issue of the unrevised state of the Pentateuch in consideration that Ezra was the redactor. Perhaps it was due to a lack of time afforded him by Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem that the Book of the Law was left with the inconsistencies we grapple with. Since the king's letter of commission is not dated, it is unknowable how much time lapsed before Ezra's departure to Jerusalem. It is only said that he left Babylon on the twelfth day of the first month of the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes, and arrived in Jerusalem on the fifth month of the same year (7:9, 8:31). If Nehemiah 8, where it is said that Ezra read the Law of God to the people, was originally placed between Ezra 9 and 10 as many argue,⁴⁵² the assembly would have taken place in the seventh month, giving him a mere two months to rework the texts. However, taking the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah at face value, there appears to be a

⁴⁵⁰ Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 141.

⁴⁵¹ M. Smith. *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament*. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1987, 93.

⁴⁵² Williamson. *Ezra-Nehemiah, OTG*, 22.

thirteen-year gap between when Ezra arrived in Jerusalem and Nehemiah's first visit,⁴⁵³ which would have given him ample time to edit the five books ascribed to Moses and to finalize the corpus. If this was the case, the lack of revision that would have eliminated the inconsistencies recognized by biblical exegetes must be considered to have been intentional. In consideration of Wellhausen's determination that the Pentateuch was *absolutized* at that time, becoming sacred text, and that it was used to indoctrinate the Temple community, alterations might not have been possible. However, there is another consensus that Ezra's ministry in Judah lasted only one year, which again would afford him little time for revision.

The debate over a Persian influence on the writing of the Pentateuch should also be considered at this point. For instance, Jean Louis Ska argues that the Pentateuch became the legal texts of the Persian Empire. Blenkinsopp understands that according to the imperial policy, vassal nations were to be self-defined through a codified and standardized corpus of traditional law, which would then be backed by the central and regional government since Persia had no codified law of its own.⁴⁵⁴ Therefore, sanctioning the Book of the Law made it the law of the state (Ezr. 7:25-26).⁴⁵⁵ Yet, Blenkinsopp adds that if the Pentateuch has Persian influence in any way, shape, or form, it was by the sole discretion of its Jewish editors⁴⁵⁶ and concludes that imperial authorization merely remains a possible hypothesis.⁴⁵⁷ James Watts adds that although Persia might have encouraged the creation of a legal document, even designating it the 'official law' of Trans-Euphrates, it would only have been a token favour to the Temple leadership having little or no effect on its form or content.⁴⁵⁸ Whatever the case, it is conceivable that the Pentateuch was completed, with or without Persian influence, and that the king recognized it as an effective means of maintaining order in Judah, and therefore sanctioned it and commissioned Ezra to promulgate it. This would not be the first time that religion was used in Israel to maintain peace by a foreign suzerain, for we know from DtrH that Shalmaneser of Assyria returned a deported priest to Bethel to teach the Assyrians relocated there how to worship and thereby placate Israel's deity who sent lions to kill them (2 Kgs. 17:26-28). Although Persia is known to have been tolerant of the religious practices of vassal states, their interest was neither religious nor

⁴⁵³ Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah, OTG*, 20.

⁴⁵⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 239.

⁴⁵⁵ J. A. Soggin, *Israel in the Biblical Period*. J. Bowden (tr.). Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001, 43.

⁴⁵⁶ Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 239.

⁴⁵⁷ J. Blenkinsopp. 'Was the Pentateuch the Civic and Religious Constitution of the Jewish Ethnos in the Persian Period?' *Persia and Torah: the Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch*. J. W. Watts, (ed.). Atlanta: SBL Symposium Series, 2001, 61-62.

⁴⁵⁸ J. Watts. *Persia and Torah: the Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch*. J. W. Watts, (ed.). Atlanta: SBL, 2001, 3-4.

social, but in the increase of revenue obtained from taxation.⁴⁵⁹ Hence, religious tolerance extended to the Jews would be exchanged for the use of the Jerusalem Temple as an administration centre for tax collection, recording and storage.⁴⁶⁰ It can also be said that although the Pentateuch is without Persian editorial influence, it was not imported to Israel without Persian sanctioning. In light of this, some capable and trustworthy figure was used by Persia to standardize and promulgate the Law; therefore, the idea of having created such a character is illogical. Hence, I conclude that it is highly unlikely that Ezra was the creation of the Chronicler, and more likely the case that Ezra was the Chronicler.

1.12 Conclusion

Although there is no way to prove that Ezra was the final editor of the Pentateuch, simply based on the statements made in the book of Ezra which qualify him to be a skilful scribe, who brought the Law of God to Jerusalem on the order of Artaxerxes for the purpose of teaching it to all the people west of the Euphrates, it is highly plausible that he was responsible for its editing. In view of the consensus that the Pentateuch was sanctified at that time, it is further plausible that Ezra was responsible for the version of the Pentateuch we have today, or something very close to it.

⁴⁵⁹ P. R. Davies. *Scribes and Schools*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998, 65, 67.

⁴⁶⁰ McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 188-212.

CHAPTER II A WORD STUDY OF GENESIS 22

2.0 Introduction

To test the hypothesis that Genesis 22 functioned to support the postexilic socio-religious reform of the Temple community, more than any other period in the history of Ancient Israel, a consideration of the terminology of the narrative will be undertaken here. This will show that certain words and phrases bear particular relevance to that period and that cause. This will be as follows: one, נסה 'tested' (v. 1); two, ירא אלהים 'fearing God' (v. 12); three, מריה 'Moriah' (v. 2); and four, שער איביו 'gate of his enemies' (v. 18).

2.1 נסה 'After these things God 'tested' Abraham' (v. 1)

Brensinger defines נסה in the *niphal* as 'to be trained' or 'to be accustomed', and in the *piel* form 'to put to the test', as is the case in Genesis 22, or when the people put God to the test:⁴⁶¹

Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test? ... And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?' (Exod. 17:2, 7).

The theme of Israel testing God occurs in Deuteronomy 6:16, Psalm 78:18, Isaiah 7:12, Wisdom 1:2 and Sirach 18:23. For Israel to test God in the wilderness was to mistrust him, to forget all he had done for them, and to challenge his power, which resulted in God humbling them through testing:⁴⁶²

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments (Deut. 8:2).

נסה occurs 36 times in the Hebrew Bible and 15 times in the Pentateuch denoting both religious and secular forms of testing. The closest alternatives to נסה are בחן, which is used more in the intuitive sense with a strongly cognitive character, חקר used for intensive and thorough investigation that leads to an understanding, and צרף used for testing precious metals by fire/smelting.⁴⁶³ נסה and בחן are used in the same contexts in the Hebrew Bible, such as when Abraham is נסה, while Job is בחן, with both characters being put to the test by God to see if they revere God over everyone and everything else.

Helfmeyer comments that divine testing is purification by fire, a chastening of those whom God considers to be his friends.⁴⁶⁴ In consideration of the severity of

⁴⁶¹ F. J. Helfmeyer. נסה *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. IX. Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998, 443-50.

⁴⁶² Helfmeyer, *TDOT*, 448.

⁴⁶³ T. L. Brensinger. נסה *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Vol. 3, W. A. VanGemeren (ed.). Carlisle: Paternoster Publishing, 1996, 111, and Helfmeyer, *TDOT*, 443-44.

⁴⁶⁴ Helfmeyer, *TDOT*, 450.

Abraham's and Job's ordeals, צָרָה could have been used in the figurative sense. Job alludes to a fiery trial when he states:

But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me I shall come forth as gold
(Job 23:10).

Alternatively, נִסָּה is used in regard to testing items, as when David refuses to wear Saul's armour because he had not tested it for himself (1 Sam. 17:39).⁴⁶⁵

Although Genesis 22 holds the first mention of divine testing in the Pentateuch, God apparently tested humankind from their very beginnings. For instance, testing is implied in the story of Adam and Eve when God commands them not to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). Although they failed to obey, their descendants Noah and Abraham proved to be obedient and faithful, with the former following God's directive to build an ark in the face of public ridicule (7:5-6), and the latter obeying the call to leave family and country behind to resettle in an unfamiliar place (12:2).

Abraham is not the only one to be tested by God through ordeal, since Isaac also suffers through the humiliation of nearly being slain by his own father on the demand of his God. Born in the humiliating position of the second-born son, Jacob further suffers by being exiled to Padan Aram, where he lives in servitude to his uncle Laban for fourteen years (27-29). Jacob's beloved son Joseph is sold into slavery by his own brothers, and later falsely charged for raping Potiphar's wife (37:27; 39:20).

After their escape from Egyptian enslavement, the Israelites are tested in the wilderness (Exod. 16:4), proving to be a rebellious people (vv. 19, 27) as demonstrated in the golden calf debacle, where their lust for idol worship surpasses their trust in their God.⁴⁶⁶ It can be said that from the Deuteronomist's assessments of Israel's kings that they were being tested as well, with most of them proving to be unworthy of their position as Israel's anointed rulers. The Chronicler indicates that God tested Hezekiah:

But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart (2 Chr. 21:31).

The concept of testing, which is concentrated in Deuteronomy, DtrH, and the Apocrypha Wisdom Literature⁴⁶⁷ arose out of God's action in history or Israel's experience,⁴⁶⁸ as in the case of the recurrent foreign oppression imposed on them from the period of the Judges to the end of the monarchic period. Moberly points out that

⁴⁶⁵ Helfmeyer, *TDOT*, 111-12.

⁴⁶⁶ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 271-272, (J = Exod. 32:1a, 4b-6, 15-20, 25-35, E = Exod. 32:1b-4a, 21-24.)

⁴⁶⁷ Helfmeyer, *TDOT*, 449.

⁴⁶⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 356.

Yahweh tests Israel to see if they love him ‘wholly and solely’,⁴⁶⁹ and if they would keep his commandments with trials that usually involved humiliation and hardship. During Israel’s forty-year wilderness period, hardship came in the form of hunger and thirst (Exod. 15:25; 16:4; Deut. 8:3) and deception from false prophets (Deut. 13:3-4),⁴⁷⁰ and hardship through oppression from the Canaanites:

I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did (Jdg. 2:22).

The purpose of divine testing is revealed by the Elohist:

...so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning (Exod. 20:20).⁴⁷¹

Wolff points out that what is most essential to E is that God’s servants, beginning with Abraham the progenitor of his people Israel, be tested to prove their worthiness,⁴⁷² and (as the Dtr indicates) that God’s aim in testing Israel is to ultimately benefit them:

He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you (Deut. 8:16).

Moberly comments:

Initially, it should be noted that the notion of God testing is primarily a part of a theology of Israel and Torah, for this is where the language overwhelmingly occurs, particularly in the key passage Exod. 20:20. It follows from this that the use of this language with regard to Abraham is an extension of reapplication.⁴⁷³

It is implied in the book of Judith that testing is a fiery ordeal that disciplines believers and leads to wisdom (Jth. 8:27). From this it can be understood that divine testing becomes the fundamental part of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, not only to determine the depth of their devotion to him, but as the means of deepening it. Israel prospered through testing, particularly through Abraham’s response to his ordeal, which resulted in the promise of blessing to his heirs (Gen. 22:15-18).

Hugh White defines נס as:

... a type of judicial procedure which aims at extracting evidence concerning that which is hidden in the interior of man, in the human heart, as opposed to visual procedures of investigation which collect external information.⁴⁷⁴

In the case of Abraham, God is probing the inner recesses of his heart to bring to light evidence of faith,⁴⁷⁵ whose heart is laid bare to reveal that he loves God more than anyone or anything else. This can also be said of Isaac, who is willing to give up his life in honour of his father and his God. Enzo Cortese suggests that in light of the warning of

⁴⁶⁹ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 41.

⁴⁷⁰ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 41.

⁴⁷¹ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 157.

⁴⁷² Wolff, ‘Elohistic Fragments’, 158, 164. Also, see Gen. 20:11; 22:12; 42:18; Exod. 1:17, 21; 18:21; 20:20.

⁴⁷³ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 42.

⁴⁷⁴ White, ‘The Initiation of Isaac’, 13.

⁴⁷⁵ White, ‘The Initiation of Isaac’, 13.

Israel's enslavement in Genesis 15:13, Abraham's test is predictive of Israel's future testing,⁴⁷⁶ to which Guy Stern adds:

Abraham is tested to the point of utter 'unbearability' so that Israel who has received the promises of God would know that they, also, are being tested.⁴⁷⁷

The writer of the book of Judith understands that God's servants will be tested:

We have every reason to give thanks to the Lord our God; he is putting us to the test as he did our ancestors. Remember how he dealt with Abraham and how he tested Isaac, and what happened to Jacob in Syrian Mesopotamia when he was working as a shepherd for his uncle Laban. He is not subjecting us to the fiery ordeal by which he tested their loyalty, or taking vengeance on us; it is for discipline the Lord scores his worshippers (Jth. 8:25-17).

Jesus ben Sirach admonishes youth who aspire to serve God:

My son, if you aspire to be a servant of the Lord,
prepare yourself for testing.
Bear every hardship that is sent you;
be patient under humiliation, whatever the cost (Ecclus. 2:1, 4).⁴⁷⁸

Even as the Son of God, the Gospel writers have Jesus of Nazareth put to the test before his ministry begins, and as he approaches his greatest trial—the ultimate humiliation of the crucifixion (Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13).

The unresolved question of why Abraham is tested persists, since he had already been proven faithful and thereby deemed righteous (Gen. 15:6), at least according to J, to whom the passage is generally ascribed.⁴⁷⁹ Perhaps an editor was not convinced that he had been sufficiently proven worthy of the legacy promised to him (12, 13, 15, 17, 21). Going with Dtr's teaching that divine testing demonstrates one's love for God (Deut. 13:4),⁴⁸⁰ it cannot be said that Abraham had not been sufficiently tested. Even when Abram obediently relocated to Canaan, it cannot be said that it is done out of his love for God as much as when he is willing to sacrifice Isaac. Nor can it be said that Abraham proves his love for God when he obeys the directive to send Ishmael and Hagar away, given that the boy is not born of his beloved wife Sarah. Although the sages understood that suffering amounts to a trifle in comparison to what awaits them in heaven (Ps. 73:24-25),⁴⁸¹ all that would matter to Abraham was to have an heir. He asks Yahweh:

But Abraham said, 'O sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless. And the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my house will be my heir' (Gen.15:2-33).

⁴⁷⁶ Cortese, 'Genesis 22:1-19, 17.

⁴⁷⁷ G. Stern. *Die Bindung Isaaks (Gen. 22) in der Tora*, *Studies in the Book of Genesis*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001, 513.

⁴⁷⁸ *NEB*

⁴⁷⁹ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 261.

⁴⁸⁰ Helfmeyer, *TDOT*, 452.

⁴⁸¹ Helfmeyer, *TDOT*, 453.

In that time and place, without a son to carry forth his name, Abraham's life would have ended in futility and disgrace. Therefore, to be willing to forfeit all that mattered to him was the ultimate test of love for his God. Proving his love for God in this way sets the standard of the God fearing Jew, God's righteous servants, who are willing to obey God no matter how great the cost. The distinction of God's righteous servant assumes being called apart for a particular purpose, which requires testing. The principle of God testing the righteous is held by the psalmist:

The Lord examines the righteous,
but the wicked and those who
love violence
his soul hates (Ps. 11:5),

as well as by this exilic writer:

O Lord Almighty, you who examine
the righteous
and probe the heart and mind... (Jer. 20:12).

Although it is not said that the men are being tested through Ezra's mandate to send away their foreign wives and children, the fact that they complied with a sworn oath (Ezr. 10:3) suggests that in effect they were being tested like Abraham to see if they feared God enough to embrace not only the tenets of socio-religious separateness (Deut. 7:1-3), but all of God's directives outlined in the Torah. Nehemiah indicates that they did, and then bound themselves with a curse and oath to obey all the commandments (Neh. 10:29).

Westermann understands that Abraham's ordeal conforms to true testing in that the task is laid on him (Gen. 22:1b-2), he carries it out (vv. 3-10), and then he is informed that he has passed the test (v. 12b).⁴⁸² Similarly, Ezra lays the task on the men to send away their foreign wives and offspring (Ezr. 10:11), the men submit (vv. 12, 44), and therefore, in a sense are recognized for having passed their test by ordeal. In light of this, the story of Abraham's testing would have been an inspiration to the Temple community and therefore, indispensable to Ezra's attempt to instil a sense of obedience to God's Law, at the heart of which is to remain separate from all foreigners and their religious practices. Although the terms for testing *נסה*, *בחן* or *צרף* are not found in Ezra-Nehemiah, Abram is said to *מצא* 'be found' faithful (Neh. 9:8), another way of saying that he was tested and proven faithful:

You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You kept your promise because you are righteous (v. 8).

⁴⁸² Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 354-55.

The recalling of Abram's faithfulness in this passage was certainly meant to correct and inspire those who had not been faithful, who like Abraham should have been the spiritual guides of God's people in their capacity as elders, priests, and Levites.

Late usages of נֶסֶם are found in Psalms 81 and 95, wherein is acknowledged that Israel was brought out of Egypt and tested by God at the 'waters of Meribah'. Since there is no mention of a king in Psalm 81, along with the implication of impoverishment with a lack of wheat and honey (v. 16), it is applicable to the fifth-century Temple community, whose best produce is taken by Persia:

But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress (Neh. 9:36-37).

Walter Brueggemann points out that by God's grace, following divine testing divine provision will come, as is the case with Abraham:

That God tests is a disclosure of his free sovereignty. However, God provides showing his gracious faithfulness. Abraham comes to the awareness that these two marks of God (testing and provision) are always encountered together.⁴⁸³

The book of Job also illustrates this certainty, when Job is blessed by much more than he lost (41:12-17). Marsha Wilfong adds that those who pass God's testing become dependent on his gracious hand, being humbled and disciplined to the extent that they realize their own inability to provide and protect themselves.⁴⁸⁴ She points out that although the testing of the Israelites in the wilderness and then later in the Land have to do with obeying God's laws, the point of the testings is to measure the depth of trust in Yahweh's gracious provision.⁴⁸⁵ Nehemiah acknowledges this:

They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they revelled in your great goodness (9:25).

After enduring violent opposition to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and struggling to instil a sense of righteousness in the Temple community, it is evident that Nehemiah expects God's provision as he prays:

Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services... Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love... Remember me with favour, O my God (Neh. 13:14, 22b, 29, 31b).

In light of the parallel of Abraham's testing to that of the men of the Temple community, it is conceivable that a hope was rekindled in them for gaining back all that had been lost

⁴⁸³ W. Brueggemann. *Genesis*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982, 188-89.

⁴⁸⁴ M. M. Wilfong. 'Genesis 22:1-18' Expository Articles. *Interpretation*, 45, 1991, 393-97.

⁴⁸⁵ Wilfong, 'Genesis 22:1-18', 393.

to them, even their nationhood. As slaves of Persia and in effect aliens in the Land, they could claim this blessing promised to Abraham's heirs:

The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God (Gen. 17:8).

2.2 יִרָא אֱלֹהִים '...Now I know that you are fearing God...' (v. 12b)

Moberly asserts that although the precise sense of testing in Genesis 22 is crucial to understanding the story, it should not be taken on its own and apart from the object of the testing, which is to see if Abraham fears God.⁴⁸⁶ In agreement with that, the concept of fearing God will be examined here, not only to understand what it meant for Ancient Israel to fear God, but how Genesis 22 would have been used to inculcate that conviction in the people.

Ringgren points out that fearing God is without question a central concept of Old Testament religion, and quotes Pfeiffer, who suggests that it might be the earliest term for religion in biblical Hebrew and the Semitic language in general.⁴⁸⁷ He comments that the term יִרָא occurs 330 times in the Hebrew Bible and 75 times in the Pentateuch alone.⁴⁸⁸ It is thought to have been derived from the root רָא, with its original meaning fundamentally meaning 'to tremble' as is expressed in Isaiah 15:4 and this Psalm:⁴⁸⁹

From heaven you pronounced judgment,
and the land feared and was quiet—
when you, O God, rose up to judge,
to save all the afflicted of the
land (Ps. 76:9).

יִרָא is used 80 percent of the time in regard to God, either signifying fearing or revering him.⁴⁹⁰ Certainly, God evoked fear in Abram when he is told אל-תִּירָא 'fear not' (Gen. 15:1), and in Moses, who is afraid to look at God's face (Exod. 3:6). Yet, God also evokes יִרָא in the sense of awe and reverence, as is the case with Nehemiah who יִרָא God's name (1:11; 7:2). Other Hebrew terms used for God causing terror or dread, but not reverence are as follows: one, פָּחַד (Ps. 14:9); two, יָגַר (Deut. 9:19); three, גֹּר (32:27); and four, עָרַץ (Ps. 89:7).

A distinction between terror and reverence is made when Job wrestles with אִימָה 'terror' and פָּחַד 'fright' of God during his ordeal (13:11, 21), while God tells Satan that his servant יִרָא 'reveres' him (1:8). Further, since righteous Job intends to argue his case before God (13:3), it is unlikely that יִרָא in this context means terror or dread of God. In

⁴⁸⁶ Moberly, *Genesis and Exodus*, 124.

⁴⁸⁷ H. Ringgren. 'יִרָא' *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. G. J. Botterwick and H. Ringgren (eds.). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975, 297, and Pfeiffer. 'The Fear of God'. *Israel Exploration Journal* 5, 1955, 41.

⁴⁸⁸ Ringgren, *TDOT*, 292.

⁴⁸⁹ Ringgren, *TDOT*, 291.

⁴⁹⁰ Ringgren, *TDOT*, 291.

the case of the Aqedah I take it that **ירא אלהים** means that Abraham stood in utter awe and reverence before God in spite of his ordeal. Since **ירא** is paralleled in expressions with **יהב** 'to love' (Deut. 10:12), **דבק** 'to cleave' (10:20; 13:5), **יבד** 'to serve' (6:13; 10:12, 20), as well as to **שמר** 'to keep' in the context of obeying God's commandments (5:29; 6:2), and to **הלך** 'to walk' in the context of walking in God's way,⁴⁹¹ this implies that it means reverence instead of dread.

In the case of the patriarchs, Rowley understood that fearing God had nothing to do with terror since their relationship with him was one of intimacy and friendliness with promise.⁴⁹² This is most evident in Abraham's questioning God over his judgement on Sodom, which comes across more like a discussion between a father and his son than between a formidable deity and his fear-filled subject. Interestingly, Walter Eichrodt strikes a balance between fear and reverence of God in his understanding that religious feeling is bi-polar, with fear being forgotten in trustful love of the worshipper.⁴⁹³ In regard to Genesis 22, he comments:

Even here, however, some element of anxiety, however, slight, remains, so that the true mid-point of this basic religious feeling may be described as 'awe'.⁴⁹⁴

Where there can be no doubt that **ירא** signifies reverence is when God expects Israel to **ירא** his sanctuary (Lev. 19:30; 26:2), as well as his name (Deut. 28:58; Ps. 86:11; 102:15; Neh. 1:11; Mal. 4:2). Neither can **ירא** mean terror or dread of God in these Psalms:

Fulfil thy promises for thy servant,
the promises made to those who fear thee (Ps. 119:38).⁴⁹⁵

But in thee is forgiveness,
and therefore thou art feared (130:4).

O House of Levi, bless the Lord;
you who fear the Lord, bless the Lord (135:20).

Where **ירא** might be ambiguous is when Abraham recognizes that there is no fear of God in Gerar (Gen. 20:11). In this case it is more likely that Abraham recognizes that they do not worship his God, and therefore cannot be trusted with his life. In contrast, Wolff presumes that in E, fearing God is synonymous with obedience to God.⁴⁹⁶ However, since the men of Gerar do not know Abraham's God, there would be no directive from Yahweh to be obeyed. Wolff continues to defend his position with the story of Joseph, wherein the patriarch states that he is trustworthy because he fears God

⁴⁹¹ Ringgren, *TDOT*, 295-96.

⁴⁹² H. H. Rowley. *Worship in Ancient Israel*. London: SPCK, 1967, 34.

⁴⁹³ W. Eichrodt. *Theology of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2. London: SCM Press, 1967, 269.

⁴⁹⁴ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 269.

⁴⁹⁵ *NEB*

⁴⁹⁶ Wolff, 'Elohism Fragments', 163-64.

(42:18). Yet, Joseph does not receive a directive from God, and therefore his fearing God means that he reveres his God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The term is used again in E in the context of ‘God worshippers’, as in the case of the midwives (Exod. 1:17, 21),⁴⁹⁷ and the Israelites, whom Joshua admonishes to serve God in faithfulness (Jos. 24:14).⁴⁹⁸

Others argue that *ירא אלהים* in Genesis 22 is simply about obedience and submissiveness to God, as in the case of de Vaux,⁴⁹⁹ Rowley⁵⁰⁰ and Moberly.⁵⁰¹ As mentioned above, Moberly claims that Genesis 22 should be compared with Exodus 20:20, where the Israelites are tested to see if they will obey the commandments Moses received on Sinai. He quotes Brevard:

...the general sense of the connection between testing and fearing (which in Exod. xx 20 as much as in Gen. xxii means moral obedience rather than religious awe) is that God seeks by his commandments to draw out his people into fuller obedience and righteousness; a sense which seems well captured by the analogy between the divine testing and the refining of metals in Prov. xvii 2.⁵⁰²

Yet this ignores the most important of the commandments, ‘You shall have no other gods before me... you shall not bow down and worship them...’ (20:3-4), which clearly has more to do with reverent worship of God than obeying commandments. Then again, revering God should naturally lead to a commitment to obey all of God’s commandments.

Gerhard von Rad also equates obedience with *ירא אלהים*:

The exposition is much more accurate when it discovers in the narrative above all the idea of a radical test of obedience. That God, who has revealed himself to Israel, is completely free to give and to take, and that no one may ask, ‘What doest thou?’ (Job 9:12; Dan 4:32) is without doubt basic to our narrative.⁵⁰³

In response to von Rad, I would suggest that complete trust in and reverence of God seems to diminish the need to question his commands in the first place. Certainly, trusting God rather than blind obedience was the desired effect of Abraham’s ordeal, which was no trivial test, for as Derek Kidner comments:

Abraham’s trust was to be weighed in the balance against common sense, human affection, life-long ambition; in fact against everything earthly.⁵⁰⁴

Rowley, however, points out that the Israelites freely entered into their covenant relationship with Yahweh due to their gratitude for delivering them out of Egyptian

⁴⁹⁷ Campbell and O’Brien, *Sources*, 262.

⁴⁹⁸ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 12.

⁴⁹⁹ R. de Vaux. *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964, 67n.

⁵⁰⁰ Rowley, *Worship*, 42.

⁵⁰¹ Moberly, ‘Earliest Commentary’, 304-5.

⁵⁰² Moberly, ‘Earliest Commentary’, 304-5. B. S. Childs. *Exodus: a Commentary*. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1974, 373.

⁵⁰³ von Rad, *Genesis*, 239.

⁵⁰⁴ D. Kidner. *Genesis*. London: The Tyndale Press, 1971, 143.

bondage, and thereby were morally obligated to obey Yahweh.⁵⁰⁵ Yet, in the case of Ancient Israel on the whole, they did not accept that obligation, but instead more often than not worshipped other gods apart from or along with Yahweh. It must be recalled here that before Moses introduces the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, he finds them venerating the golden calf (Exod. 32), and in light of his outrage, the narrator would have it understood that they were not loyal to Yahweh. Essentially, the Decalogue is about Israel's requirement to revere God over all other gods, and therefore honouring his creation—parents and neighbours—should follow. Without truly revering God, obedience to God's commandments is improbable, which was the case with Israel, whose propensity to worship idols was greater than their commitment to their God. It is out of love and the reverence of God that eager and enduring submissiveness and trust results.⁵⁰⁶

Coats also understood that like Job, Abraham's ordeal is a test of obedience (Job 2:4-5).⁵⁰⁷ However, Job's test was not to determine whether he would obey God or not, but as indicated in the text, to see if he would curse God when severely afflicted (1:11-12). Job does not curse God, and in spite of the loss of his family, fortune and health, he trusts God and gives him the reverence due to him. To begin with, Job is already esteemed by God for being more blameless and upright than anyone else in the world since he *ירא אלהים* and shuns evil (v. 8). Thus, Job is not tested either for obedience or to see if he fears God since he excels in both. Job's ordeal follows the concept of God testing the righteous, in order that they will know the God they serve more deeply. As with Abraham, Job's testing culminates in God's providence, which in his case has to do with the restoration of family, fortune and health.

Wenham points out that the root *ירא* and its derivatives are frequently used to signify true religion in the sense that revering God equates to 'keeping His commandments and His laws', at least according to the Deuteronomist:

Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and revering him
(Deut. 8:6).

He adds that fearing God is a common concept in the Hebrew Bible, in which one is to honour God in worship as well as with an upright life.⁵⁰⁸ Yet, an upright life results from revering and trusting in God. This agrees with Wolff's modification of his position:

⁵⁰⁵ Rowley, *Worship*, 39.

⁵⁰⁶ Rowley, *Worship*, 41.

⁵⁰⁷ G. W. Coats. 'Abraham's Sacrifice of Faith: a Form Critical Study of Genesis 22'. *Interpretation* 27, 1973, 158.

⁵⁰⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 110.

God's normative word from Mount Sinai to all Israel is directed towards the same goal that he had set for the patriarchs; fear of God, which produced obedience through trust in God's promise.⁵⁰⁹

Wilfong comments:

Obedience to God's commandments and instructions is an expression of that trust, a measure of the people's faith.⁵¹⁰

Levenson argues that if Abraham had not been willing to sacrifice Isaac, he would not so much have been disobeying God as he would have been faithless in an unwillingness to trust God.⁵¹¹ In other words, trust and obedience result from revering God, even the most extraordinary kind demonstrated by Abraham in Genesis 22.

G. Lee understands that reverence is equated to obedience in the Holiness Code, such as in honouring the blind (Lev. 19:14), the elderly (19:32), the poor and enslaved (25:36, 43). However, these prescriptions are paired with, 'and you shall revere your God',⁵¹² indicating that respect for the disadvantaged is less about obeying the Law and more to do with honouring God. This wisdom writer understands this concept:

He who oppresses the poor insults his Maker;
he who is generous to the needy [כבודו] 'honours him' (Prov. 14:31).⁵¹³

In light of this, it can be said that even though Israel may not particularly sympathise with the oppressed, they might help them only to demonstrate reverence for their God.

Speiser⁵¹⁴ and Hamilton⁵¹⁵ interpret 'fearing God' in the context of Abraham's testing as being absolute dedication and commitment to God. That degree of devotion and commitment is expressed by Abraham in reverent worship, both in the near sacrifice of Isaac and the subsequent sacrifice of the ram caught in the thicket. Abraham does not have the Yahwist's Laws governing burnt offerings, but appears to be offering up the ram to God voluntarily out of reverence and gratitude for his God, perhaps according to the customs of the Ancient Near East; yet, out of right attitude nonetheless. Since sacrificing Isaac falls in the realm of sacrificial worship, which is already an essential part of Abraham's response to God's presence in his life, suffering the loss of his son Isaac appears to be secondary to his need to reverently worshipping him (12:7; 13:18).

It is conceivable that since the Aqedah is the longest narrative on sacrifice, it can be said to have more to do with reverent worship than obedience. Wenham understands

⁵⁰⁹ H. W. Wolff. *The Vitality of the Old Testament Traditions*. W. Brueggemann and H. W. Wolff (eds.). Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975, 75.

⁵¹⁰ Wilfong, 'Genesis 22:1-18', 393.

⁵¹¹ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 126.

⁵¹² G. A. Lee. 'Fear'. *ISBE*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982, 289.

⁵¹³ *NEB*

⁵¹⁴ Speiser, *Genesis*, 163.

⁵¹⁵ V. P. Hamilton. *The Book of Genesis*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990. 112.

that the book of Genesis is much more interested with the cult than normally realized, and that the sacrifices of Abel, Noah and Abraham appeased God so that although Israel proved to be unrighteous, they were blessed.⁵¹⁶ Due to Noah's sacrifice, the world is protected from catastrophic flooding regardless of the wickedness in the world (Gen. 8:21),⁵¹⁷ and Abraham's fear of God expressed in reverent worship hugely benefits his heirs, in spite of their utter unworthiness. Wenham aptly states:

...it is not simply that an extraordinary act of obedience by a righteous man leads to extraordinary blessing. It is that one man's obedience climaxing in an act of sacrifice leads to extraordinary blessing.⁵¹⁸

Wenham asserts that Genesis 22 has as much to say about the theology of sacrifice as it does testing, as well as more about reverent worship than obedience.⁵¹⁹ Most importantly, in establishing a paradigmic significance to the sacrifices of Abel, Noah and Abraham, Wenham concludes:

But Abraham's sacrifice, like Abel's and Noah's, is not seen simply as a once-for-all even whose efficacy continues down through time. It is also viewed as a paradigm for his successors. His wholehearted devotion to God expressed through obedience and sacrifice is a model for every Israelite. Obedience to God's word and the offering of sacrifice go hand in hand and lead to blessing for the whole human race.⁵²⁰

Abraham tells his servant that he is going to שחה 'to bow down oneself' with Isaac (v. 5), which some take to be an innocent lie. However, taken at face value one can only assume that Abraham's sacrificial offering of Isaac *is* worship, and given the nature of the sacrifice it is the most reverent and sacrificial form of worship, at least to the ancient way of thinking. Since this is the first time שחה is used in the Pentateuch and it is rarely used thereafter (24:26, 52), the scales tip towards the message of Genesis 22 being that God requires his people to revere him through heartfelt worship. Since Abraham tells his servants and Isaac that they are going to worship, this, paired with the object of his testing (to see if he reveres God), signifies that fearing God has all to do with reverent worship of God, and less to do with obeying God's commands. Gunkel stated:

The performance of the sacrifice is, then, unnecessary: God does not want the procedure itself, but the attitude resolved to perform the procedure—an advanced concept of spirituality.⁵²¹

Bearing this in mind, the advanced concept of spirituality expressed in Genesis 22 is trust and reverence of God in the face of the most extreme hardship. The psalmist uses the term שחה together with ירא:

⁵¹⁶ Wenham, 'Akedah', 93, 95.

⁵¹⁷ Wenham, 'Akedah', 95.

⁵¹⁸ Wenham, 'Akedah', 102.

⁵¹⁹ Wenham, 'Akedah', 95.

⁵²⁰ Wenham, 'Akedah', 102.

⁵²¹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 235-36.

But I, through thy great love, may come into thy house,
and [אֲשַׁתְּחִיחַ] ‘worship’ toward thy holy temple [בִּירְאֵתְךָ] ‘in reverence of thee’
(Ps. 5:8).⁵²²

Rowley understands that the quality of the worship is not in the form, but in the heart of the worshipper, which Abraham demonstrates throughout his story and most profoundly in Genesis 22.⁵²³ He comments:

...he wished to show the completeness of his own devotion to God. When we look beneath the act to the spirit from which it arose, we find here a very lofty spirit of worship, which is the more remarkable when we reflect on the antiquity of the times of Abraham.⁵²⁴

Reverence is the desired attitude towards God, with the purpose in it being as is expressed in this oracle from the book of Jeremiah:

I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them... I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me (32:39, 40).

Samuel Driver understood that revering God is Israel’s primary duty (6:13; 10:12; 20; 28:58),⁵²⁵ outlining the fundamental ideas in Deuteronomy that involve it, as follows: one, Yahweh is pure and worthy of Israel’s love; two, all false gods are to be destroyed; three, reverence for Yahweh manifests in love demonstrated by the Israelites towards God and man; and four, Yahweh is reverently worshipped at the one place where he dwells.⁵²⁶ In consideration of this, Abraham fulfils these requirements in the story of his testing since he proves his love of God beyond a doubt, exclusively worships the God of Israel, demonstrates his love towards God and man, and through the connection of Moriah to Solomon’s Temple Mount, he reverently worships where God will eventually dwell. In regard to the fifth-century Temple community, it is unknowable what scripture was read by Ezra to bring about the profound response of worship:

Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, ‘Amen! Amen!’ Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground (Neh. 8:5-6).

Yet, there could be no better narrative than Genesis 22 to inspire such a worshipful response.

Dtr understands that reverence and love differ from servitude and obedience; although, all four are expected of Israel:

And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you, but to revere the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good (Deut. 10:12-13).

⁵²² *NEB*

⁵²³ Rowley, *Worship*, 3.

⁵²⁴ Rowley, *Worship*, 25, 26.

⁵²⁵ S. R. Driver. *Deuteronomy*. (3rd ed.), ICC. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996, xxvi.

⁵²⁶ Driver, *Deuteronomy*, xxv.

Deuteronomic Law predominantly regulates the religious life of Israel, which at its very basis is the exclusive, proper and reverent worship of Yahweh (Deut. 5:7-15). For Dtr, revering God is learned from the study of Torah from early childhood, in order that all Israel may always do that (4:10). Furthermore, in the wake of the Babylonian invasion, which DtrH blames on apostasy of Judah's kings, and in anticipation of the return to Israel and the restoration of the Monarchy, Israel's rulers are required to:

...write for themselves on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel (17:18-20).

In view of this, in the absence of a Jewish king, revering God would have been paramount for the elders, priests and Levites of the Temple community, which would have produced in the hearts of the people a huge expectation of the fulfilment of Dtr's promise of sovereignty over the Land.

Erhard Gerstenberger mentions that Dtr uses ירא in a stereotypical fashion to express 'the sole orientation of believers to Yahweh' (4:10; 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; 8:6; 10:12).⁵²⁷ This can be said of the 'Shema' (6:4-9), the mantra that bonds both the individual and community to Yahweh:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (vv. 4-5).

Loving God can, thus, be understood as the prerequisite for obeying the Law (vv. 6-9). Eichrodt understands that loving God is a deeper understanding of fearing God, and asserts that it acts as a safeguard against legalism.⁵²⁸

Because its very nature demands that it go far beyond all legal requirements, staking a man's whole being without reservation for God's cause, it can never regard individual commandments as anything more than practical guidance in concrete cases—guidance which it accepts thankfully, but without anxiety or casuistic striving after perfect performance'.⁵²⁹

Additionally, he recognizes Dtr's twin theology of fearing God, in which the dread of God perpetuates striving for perfect obedience, but that loving God prevents being wearied by straining to meticulously follow the Law.⁵³⁰ Dtr recounts Moses breaking the tablets of the Law, through which is expressed that not only was the covenant broken, but perhaps Moses' anger over the utter futility of the Law without

⁵²⁷ E. S. Gerstenberger. *Theologies in the Old Testament*. J. Bowden (tr.). London: T & T Clark, 2002, 220.

⁵²⁸ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 299.

⁵²⁹ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 298.

⁵³⁰ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 315.

having a devotedness to and reverence of the God of the Law (Exod. 32; Deut. 9:17).

2.2.1 Fear of God as Second Temple Period Theology

Fearing God is not mentioned in the book of Ezra, although it is certainly assumed of Ezra based on his attitude towards God and his understanding that he was to:

Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children (Deut. 4:10).

However, Nehemiah is said to have warned offenders to ‘walk in the reverence of God’, which led to social reform in which property and money were returned to the poor given to secure loans to pay taxes to Persia (Neh. 5:9-13), which is a direct violation of Mosaic Law meant to protect the poor (Exod. 22:22-27; Deut. 24:6-17). This is where it can be said that sincere reverence of God results in revering his creation—God’s people. In fact, Nehemiah indicates that because he reveres God, he does not burden the people with heavy taxation (Neh. 9:15), and appoints leaders over the people who also revere God (7:2). Nehemiah indicates several times that he reveres God’s name (Neh. 1:9; 9:5), a late formality expressed in his prayer:

O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this servant and to the prayer of your servants, who delight in revering your name (1:11).

Reverence for שמו ‘his name’ is a means to avoid verbalizing the name of God, which was revealed to Moses, such as in Psalm 61:5⁵³¹ where it is said, ‘...you have given me the heritage of those who revere your name (61:5). The Chronicler refers to God as ‘his/my name’ too many times to mention. Malachi preaches to the apostate clergy:

‘And now this admonishment is for you, O priests. If you do not listen and if you do not set your heart to honour my name,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them because you have not set your heart to honour me’ (Mal. 2:1-2).

‘But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will break loose like calves released from the stall’ (4:2).

Today, *ha-shem* is used for God’s name in Jewish Orthodoxy for that very reason—reverence of God’s name, which is too holy to repeat even in prayer.

The book of Jonah, thought by some to be contemporaneous to Malachi since it appears to challenge the exclusivist and nationalistic policies of Ezra and Nehemiah,⁵³² makes issue of the reluctant missionary’s self-identification as a Hebrew who ירא the creator of the world—יהוה (1:9). In other words, he describes himself as a worshipper of Yahweh, as opposed to the deities of the Ancient Near East. Lee points out that fearing

⁵³¹ H. C. Leopold. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959, 454.

⁵³² J. Craghan. *The Book of Jonah, Esther, Judith, Tobit, Jonah, Ruth*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982, 170.

God is synonymous with ‘those who assemble to worship at the Temple’ based on parallelism with other designations for the congregation, as follows: first, sons of Jacob and sons of Israel (Ps. 22:24); second, the great congregation (22:25); and third, Israel and the house of Aaron (115:9-11; 118:2-4).⁵³³ Lee points out that the most characteristic designation for the devout is ‘those who ירא Yahweh’, which is expressed mostly in the Psalms.⁵³⁴ Although, the postexilic psalmist of Psalm 119 promotes a devotion to Torah, he expresses an utter devotion to the God of *the Law* when he says, ‘I seek you with all my heart’ (v. 10a).

Another postexilic writing, Psalm 135 begins with the appeal to praise the name of Yahweh, followed by an account of the acquisition of the Land from the Canaanites (v. 12), and ending with a call to the ‘God-fearing’ Levites to praise the Lord (v. 20). Psalm 102 is the prayer of an afflicted man on his way to participate in the rebuilding of Jerusalem, who believes that after the raising of Jerusalem and the Temple from the ashes⁵³⁵ ‘The nations will revere the name of the Lord’ (v. 15). This alludes to Israel’s vocation to reveal Yahweh to the nations so that all people will reverently worship him.⁵³⁶ The theology of revering God from Chronicles to Malachi appears to be tied into the renewal of Temple worship, and the reordering of the priests and Levites. Malachi holds to the promise of salvation for those who revere the Lord and honour his name:

‘They will be mine’, says the Lord Almighty, ‘in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him’ (Mal. 3:17).

Ezra indicates that the first part of the Temple precinct to be rebuilt was the altar upon which they offered up sacrifices to Yahweh, even under the threat of those who opposed rebuilding the Temple and the resumption of ritual sacrifice (Ezr. 3:1-6; Neh. 4:2). Haggai’s motivation to finish the renovation was that the people could worship in full (2:1-9), or as he put it, to ‘revere the Lord’ (1:12).⁵³⁷ Malachi believes that it is at the rebuilt Temple that the ‘messenger of God’ will come to restore the cult and that the right kind of worship with sacrificial offering will begin to take place on Mount Zion (Mal. 1:11; 3:1-4). Fearing God as reverent worship can be said to be the very focus of the Persian Period reform movement (Neh. 8:1-12), which Brueggemann indicates was less about obedience to the Law, and more about establishing a unique identity for Yahweh worshippers.⁵³⁸

⁵³³ Lee, ‘Fear’, 289.

⁵³⁴ Lee, ‘Fear’, 289.

⁵³⁵ Leopold, *Psalms*, 706-7.

⁵³⁶ Leopold, *Psalms*, 711.

⁵³⁷ Rowley, *Worship*, 289.

⁵³⁸ W. Brueggemann. *Theology of the Old Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, 590.

Eichrodt points out that the relationship between man and God is expressed in the ‘fear of God’ as defined by ‘the right religious conduct’ expressed from Genesis to Ecclesiastes.⁵³⁹ He asserts that fearing God as defined as reverence and love for God is a Second Temple development of the return to Abraham’s way of worshipping God—loyalty, faithfulness, and most relevant to my position—reverent sacrificial worship, the original Old Testament piety.⁵⁴⁰ Yet, it is conceivable that the theology of revering God that had been introduced to Ancient Israel by E and Dtr came to the fore during the Persian Period based on the expressions of it in the writings of the exilic and postexilic period. If one concedes to the postexilic date of the forming of the Pentateuch, ‘revering God’ would have to be a postexilic period theology. In acceptance that revering God is a postexilic theology, Genesis 22 would have most certainly been used by Ezra to teach that above all else, the people must revere Yahweh.

2.3 אֶרֶץ הַמּוֹרִיָּה ‘...and go to the ‘Region of Moriah’ (v. 2)

The most challenging phrase in Genesis 22 is ‘region of Moriah’ the name of the place Abraham is sent to sacrifice Isaac,⁵⁴¹ which appears to be the only textual problem in the narrative. ‘Moriah’ is used one other time in the Hebrew Bible, by the Chronicler:

Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David (2 Chr. 3:1).

A textual variation of ‘Moriah’ is found in the LXX version where it is said that Abraham is sent to a ‘ὑψηλός ‘lofty place’,⁵⁴² which could refer to either its height or sacredness. Yet, similar to the MT, the LXX uses ἀμορία ‘Amoria’ in 2 Chronicles 3:1. Pseudo-Jubilees (4QPs-Jub 2) has the patriarch sent to Mount Moriah,⁵⁴³ while Jubilees refers to the ‘highlands’ where he sacrifices the ram on Mount Zion (17:15-18),⁵⁴⁴ and Josephus indicates that Abraham is sent to the mountain Moriah, adding that it is the mountain upon which King David later built the temple.⁵⁴⁵ Philo has Abraham sent to a ‘certain lofty hill’.⁵⁴⁶ In the Targum Onkelos, he is told לך לארץ פולנה ‘...go to the Land of Worship’, anachronistically placing the cultic centre of Israel there during the patriarchal period.⁵⁴⁷ The Samaritan Pentateuch uses ארץ המר ‘Land of Hamur’ meaning ‘the land of the Amorites’.⁵⁴⁸ The location of Abraham’s ordeal is not mentioned in the

⁵³⁹ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 268.

⁵⁴⁰ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 288.

⁵⁴¹ See *BDB*, 599.

⁵⁴² A. Rahlfs. *Septuaginta*. Stuttgart: Privilegierte württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1949.

⁵⁴³ J. A. Fitzmeyer. ‘The Sacrifice of Isaac in Qumran Literature’. *Biblica* 83, 2002, 216, 223.

⁵⁴⁴ Sparks, *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, 62.

⁵⁴⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, (224, 227).

⁵⁴⁶ Philo, *On Abraham*, (169).

⁵⁴⁷ M. Aberbach. *Targum Onkelos to Genesis*. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1982, 128, n. 1.

⁵⁴⁸ Cortese, ‘Genesis 22, 1-19’, 15.

New Testament references to the story (Jas. 2:21-3; Heb.11:17), and the Dead Sea Scrolls yield nothing in the way of either Genesis 22:2 or 2 Chronicles 3,⁵⁴⁹ with the Commentary on Genesis (4Qp252) yielding only 22:10-12 with virtually no textual difference.⁵⁵⁰

Other than the general translations offered for ארץ in Genesis 22:2—‘specific country, region, district, or tribal territory’, early on Dillmann localized ארץ המוריה to ‘neighbourhood of Moriah’.⁵⁵¹ It wasn’t until the Chronicler used the name ‘Moriah’ that it became the mountain on which Solomon built his Temple, which is otherwise referred to as הר בית-יהוה ‘the hill of the house of Yahweh’ (2 Chr. 33:15) and הר ציון ‘hill of Zion’ or ‘Zion’ by his predecessor DtrH (2 Kgs. 19:31), the Psalmists (Ps. 2:6; 48:2; 74:2), and the Prophets (Isa. 4:5; Jer. 8:19; Joel 2:32; Amos 1:2; Obad. 17; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 1:14). The aetiology of ‘Zion’ also remains unresolved. In light of this, it can be said that the Chronicler’s use of ‘Moriah’ holds intentionality, with the general consensus being that it connects the site of the Aqedah to Solomon’s Temple at a time when it needed to be legitimized. Isaac Kalimi suggests:

It seems that the Chronicler’s identification of the site of the Temple with that of the *Aqeda*, may conceal—among other purposes—a hidden polemic against the rival site holy to the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim.⁵⁵²

It can also be said that the Chronicler’s intent to link Moriah to the Temple mount follows the Deuteronomist’s insistence that Israel is limited to make sacrifices at the one particular place where God will lead them.

2.3.1 Abraham and David on Moriah

Based on the connection drawn by the Chronicler between ‘Moriah’ of Genesis 22 and the Temple David planned and Solomon built, it is plausible that the interpolation of the name had more to do with the centralization of the Temple Mount than anything else.

The Chronicler begins his account of Solomon building the Temple on Mount Zion:

Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David (2 Chr. 3:1).

Respectively, by connecting Moriah to Mount Zion, Peter Richardson and John Hurd argue that the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem was established,⁵⁵³ or in the case of the

⁵⁴⁹ Only Genesis 22:13-15 has been recovered.

⁵⁵⁰ M. Wise, M. Abegg, Jr. and E. Cooke. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: a New Translation*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1996, 276.

⁵⁵¹ See *BDB*, 75-76.

⁵⁵² I. Kalimi. ‘Zion or Gerizim? The Association of Abraham and the *Aqeda* with Zion/Gerizim in Jewish and Samaritan Studies’. *JSOTS* 273. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 443.

⁵⁵³ P. Richardson and J. C. Hurd. *Jesus, Paul, and the Aqedah: From Jesus to Paul. Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984, 173.

postexilic period—re-established. Levenson recognizes that Abraham's sacrifice of the ram on Mount Moriah is the first of innumerable sacrifices to be offered up to Yahweh on that site.⁵⁵⁴ It thereby functions as a foundational narrative for the new Temple community. He concludes:

What rests upon it (Genesis 22) is the elaborate and incalculably important system of divine worship in the Temple on which the religious life of the people Israel increasingly centred.⁵⁵⁵

Hence, Israel could rest assured that the execution of burnt offerings to Yahweh at the place God tested Abraham (Moriah/Mount Zion), would result in the God's favour.⁵⁵⁶

Further, Ronald Clements points out that David was closely associated with the people who maintained the Abraham tradition.⁵⁵⁷ Since David's political career was initially centred in Hebron, where he had been anointed king of Israel and headquartered for the first seven and a half years of his leadership, relocating Israel's administration centre to Jerusalem would have required some connection to Ancient Israel's patriarchal foundation.⁵⁵⁸ This is particularly the case since Hebron held great cultic significance as the home-base and altar site of Abraham, and the burial site of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Leah (Gen. 13:18; 23:2, 19; 25:9; 49:31; 50:13). To this day, Hebron stands as a sacred city, where both Jews and Muslims pay homage to the patriarchs. Clements suggests:

By this close association with Hebron, David was brought into a relation with the ancient tradition of Abraham, the ancestor of the Judahite federation. The circumstances arose in which, with David's success against the Philistines and the new eminence that Judah attained, the old promise of land to the patriarch could be regarded as foreshadowing the greatness which Judah was to attain under David. The close geographical link between David and Hebron, and the fact that the shrine of Mamre was the focus of the tradition of the covenant with Abraham, therefore provides a basis for recognizing that a connection was seen in Israel between David and the ancestral figure Abraham.⁵⁵⁹

Although David's relocation to Jerusalem would be politically advantageous in uniting the northern and southern regions of Israel, it created a cultic problem, since Jebus was a pagan city with no association with Israel's forefathers. Therefore, this would call for creative measures, such as might be the case with DtrH and Chronicles (2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chr. 21:16), where it is said that the angel of the Lord engaged with David on the threshing floor, which harks back to the encounter Abraham had with the angel of the Lord in Genesis 22. In both scenarios, death and destruction are divinely aborted,

⁵⁵⁴ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 74.

⁵⁵⁵ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 74.

⁵⁵⁶ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 74.

⁵⁵⁷ R. Clements. *Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967, 47.

⁵⁵⁸ Clements, *Abraham and David*, 47.

⁵⁵⁹ Clements, *Abraham and David*, 51.

which establishes a strong connection between the patriarch and the King of Israel.

Abraham and David are further connected by the covenants God establishes with them (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chr. 17:1-15). Firstly, there is no mention of God's Law in either covenant, which in the case of the Abrahamic Covenant is as it should be since he precedes Moses; whereas, in the case of David, the Law is conspicuously absent. Whether this indicates that David did not have the Law or that he chose to revert back to the covenant relationship God had with Abraham is unknowable. Whatever the case, the main parallels between the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants are as follows: one, promise of fame (Gen. 12:2b and 2 Sam. 7:9b); two, superiority over enemies (Gen. 12:3; 22:17b and 2 Sam. 7:10b-11); three, land possession (Gen. 12:7; 15:7; 18 and 2 Sam. 7:10); and four, successors from their own seed (Gen. 15:4 and 2 Sam. 7:12). In regard to the possession of the Land, Abraham is assured that his heirs will possess the land mass from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates River (15:18), all of which David and Solomon are said to have dominated (2 Sam. 8:3; 1 Chr. 18:3). Donald Wiseman comments:

David, in emphasizing the continuity of his family, dynasty, and covenant with his ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (1 Chr. 16:16; 29:18) finds echoes with each succeeding generation concerned with their title to the land, Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 7), Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:6 cf. Isa. 29:32; 41:8) and Jeremiah (33:26). Of these ancestors Abraham, both as the first and as the reputed original recipient of the promissory oath, was the most frequently named. This tradition continued through the Exile (Ez. 33:24; Neh. 9:7), through the Intertestamental times, and into the New Testament when it was customary in thinking of ethnic and religious origins to 'look to Abraham the father' (Mt. 3:9; Lk. 3:8; cf. Isa. 51:2) and affirm that 'Abraham is our forefather' (Jn. 8:39; Rom. 4:1).⁵⁶⁰

Centralization of worship on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was an intermittent concern from the time of David to Josiah, when the high places were demolished as far as Bethel, with the Jerusalem Temple proclaimed as the only legitimate place where Yahweh dwelt and therefore, would be worshipped by all of Israel. However, there was an even greater need during the Second Temple Period to centralize the cult, since most of the returning exiles had never worshipped at the Jerusalem Temple and could have easily ventured to other shrines where their ancestors had worshipped, namely at Shechem.

The competition between the Jerusalem Temple and Shechem is not explicated in the postexilic writings, but implicit in the book of Ezra where it names their opposition as the 'enemies of Benjamin and Judah', who sabotaged the reconstruction of the Temple in order to maintain Israel's centralized place of worship in Samaria (Ezr. 4). The enduring competition is apparent in the New Testament story of the Samaritan woman

⁵⁶⁰ D. J. Wiseman. 'Abraham Reassessed', *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980, 150.

(Jn. 4:20), who feels justified in worshipping on Gerizim instead of Jerusalem since the ‘fathers’ had done before them (Gen. 12:6; Deut. 11:29; Jos. 8:33; 24).

The importance to the exiles of rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple in regard to their survival as a religious entity in the Persian Empire had to have been great. Mullen points out that the Temple, along with its priesthood and religious activity, was central to the identity of the Jews, until its destruction in the Great War against Rome during the Christian period.⁵⁶¹ The rebuilding of the Temple and re-establishing the cult represented the eternity of Israel’s divine election and covenant relationship with Yahweh. Rejoicing came way before its completion:

With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: ‘He is good, his love to Israel endures forever’. And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid’ (Ezr. 3:11).

Hugh Williamson adds that the importance of rebuilding the Temple was that it provided continuity with Israel’s monarchic period, apparent in setting the altar and temple on its original site.⁵⁶²

Maintaining the tradition of David’s altar on the Jebusite mount (2 Sam. 24:24-25), upon which Solomon’s Temple was built (1 Kgs. 6), allowed for no alternative locations. This is particularly true, as Samuel Balentine comments, Solomon’s Temple was believed to be a replica of the heavenly sanctuary the abode of God, as was the case with its prototype, Moses’ Tabernacle (Exod. 25:40), from which blessings flowed and the world’s chaos was reordered.⁵⁶³ God instructs Moses:

See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain (Exod. 25:40).

This is reiterated by the writer of the book of Hebrews, maintaining that the Temple high priests:

... serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’ (Heb. 8:5).

Therefore the Temple had to be built and then rebuilt accordingly, for as Ackroyd points out, it was the most potent symbol of the outward sign of the manifestation of the presence and power of God.⁵⁶⁴ While in exile, Ezekiel clarifies that God’s presence in the Temple is most essential to Israel’s holiness, for without the Temple they are without the proper place for sacrificial offering meant to cleanse the people, as well as being part of their identification as the people of Yahweh:

⁵⁶¹ Mullen, *Ethnic Myths*, 16.

⁵⁶² Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 82.

⁵⁶³ Balentine, *Torah’s Vision*, 39-49.

⁵⁶³ Balentine, *Torah’s Vision*, 21.

⁵⁶⁴ Ackroyd, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 248.

My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. The nation will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever (Ezek. 37:26-28).

It was not due to the lack of a shrine that the exiles were unable to observe the sacred feasts, but as Kraus points out, the absence of Yahweh's presence, who would only dwell in the place he had chosen for himself—the Jerusalem Temple.⁵⁶⁵

Although exiles gathered at Ezekiel's house for teaching on the River Chebar, the sacred feasts could not be observed in the absence of the Jerusalem Temple and the priests and Levites to carry out the sacrifices.⁵⁶⁶ Yahweh appears to Ezekiel on a suspended chariot, which Kraus understands allowed for a limited worship on foreign soil in the form of the spiritual and intangible.⁵⁶⁷ It is evident that Temple ritual and sacred feasts were substituted with that lament feasts, Sabbath observance, and scripture reading.⁵⁶⁸ Haggai understands that without the Temple being rebuilt and the 'glory' returned to it (Hag. 2:9), God cannot be honoured (1:8), nor his people made holy; therefore, Israel cannot be blessed. The urgency to rebuild the temple is expressed here:

These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built' ... Is it time for yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains in ruins? ... What you brought home, I blew away. 'Why?', declares the Lord Almighty. Because of My house that remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields on and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labour of your hands (Hag. 1:3-11).

Haggai uses an apparent economic slump in the Temple community to show that Yahweh has held back from blessing them from the time they put the building of their own dwellings before God's (1:7-11). Then the people repented and completed the Temple, which, of course, resulted in the release of blessing:

From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid. Give careful thought. Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and olive tree have not born fruit. From this day on I will bless you (Hag. 2:18-9).

Jensen recognizes a shift from the earlier prophets' disdain for the external aspects of Yahwism, to those of the postexilic period whose emphasis on externals, particularly the Temple, since it was crucial to the cohesion and survival of the people as a prosperous religious community.⁵⁶⁹ Zechariah preached:

⁵⁶⁵ H. J. Kraus. *Worship in Israel: a cultic history of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966, 229.

⁵⁶⁶ Kraus, *Worship*, 229-30.

⁵⁶⁷ Kraus, *Worship*, 229.

⁵⁶⁸ Kraus, *Worship*, 230.

⁵⁶⁹ J. Jensen. *God's Word to Israel*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1988, 210.

Therefore, this is what the Lord says: 'I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'Proclaim further: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem' (Zech. 1:16-17).

Both the writer of *Chroniclers* and the book of *Ezra* would have it known that it was due to Yahweh's desire that the Jerusalem Temple be rebuilt that the exiles were released by Cyrus in 538 BCE (2 Chr. 36:23; Ezra 1:2-3). Yet, the king surely had Persia's interest in Yehud in mind, with supporting the rebuilding of the Temple being most likely business as usual since the kings of the Ancient Near East established administrative centres at cultic sites throughout the newly acquired empire within their first year of takeover.⁵⁷⁰ In Paula McNutt's recreation of Persian Period Judah, she presumes that the Jerusalem Temple was more than a shrine for Yahweh, or a centre of elite religion, but functioned in other major roles.⁵⁷¹ Not only would it symbolize the unity of the people, but it would stand as a locus for collecting and redistributing tax revenue and the cultural centre of the educated people of Persian Period Judah.⁵⁷² In a purely political sense, McNutt understands that the Temple was a symbolic 'legitimization' of the relationship between Persia and Judah, with Persia's support in rebuilding the Temple having a stabilizing effect on the people.⁵⁷³

Balentine points out that Darius I (522-486 BCE) continued to make formative changes in organizational and administrative matters to maximize Persia's colonial revenue, which meant that the rebuilding of the Temple needed to be finished.⁵⁷⁴ He points out that during the fifth century the financial support of Judah was generous due to the fortification of the colony to ward off Persia's enemies, Egypt and Greece.⁵⁷⁵ Therefore, the Temple as an institution benefited not only the cult, but the patron of the cult Persia, which necessitated the rapid completion of the Temple. After the Temple had been restored, Ezra's commission to teach and enforce God's Law would have further stabilized the cult benefiting not only Persia, but Judaism. Thus, the *Chronicler's* connection of the rebuilt Temple to Abraham through Genesis 22 would have had a profoundly stabilizing influence on Judaism at any time in Ancient Israel, but given the postexilic dating of the *Chronicler*, it would have benefited the cult during the Persian Period. The association of Abraham to David would therefore legitimize the Jerusalem Temple as the central place for Israel to worship in the face of Samaritan opposition.

⁵⁷⁰ Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 42.

⁵⁷¹ McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 210.

⁵⁷² McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 210.

⁵⁷³ McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 210.

⁵⁷⁴ Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 45.

⁵⁷⁵ Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 46.

2.3.2 Corruption of ‘Moriah’

Moriah is not the first geographical location in the Hebrew Bible said to be in Judah, but which was originally situated in the Northern Kingdom. For instance, it is thought that Melchizedek’s שֶׁלֶם ‘Shaleem’ or ‘Shalem’ (Gen. 14:18) might actually be located in Shechem based on evidence preserved in the LXX, where the city is referred to as Σαλημ ‘Shalem’ (33:18). Epiphanius of Salamis of the fourth century CE wrote about a tradition of Melchizedek’s kingdom being located near Shechem, where the modern village of Salim is situated.⁵⁷⁶ Emerton notes that the Targums Onkelos, Psuedo-Jonathan, and Neofitti I, also indicate that Shalem is a northern location.⁵⁷⁷

Emerton argues that the Melchizedek narrative (14:17-20) is a Yahwist interpolation, which was meant to associate Shalem with Jerusalem, and Abraham with Jerusalem instead of Shechem.⁵⁷⁸ He points out that archaeology substantiates that Shechem was inhabited during the patriarchal period of Ancient Israel, and that Abraham and Jacob would have built altars there.⁵⁷⁹ For this reason, this location remains sacred to the Samaritan Jews at the time of Jesus, who is reminded of this by the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:5). In light of this, it is conceivable the Moriah in Genesis 22, where Abraham is said to have taken Isaac to sacrifice him, was originally located in Shechem.

2.3.3 Alternative Names and Locations of ‘Moriah’

The Samaritan Pentateuch has Abraham going to the ‘Land of the המרי ‘Amorites’, which Skinner found to be logical place name given E’s northern association (Gen. 48:22; Num. 21:21, 31).⁵⁸⁰ Furthermore, since the Elohist is not known to have created place names, but to refer to identifiable locations,⁵⁸¹ it is unlikely that he would use a fictitious name in his most salient work; from this it can be drawn that the original name was altered at some later time. Based on E having Joshua invading the Land of the Amorites (Jos. 23:8) (always assuming that Wellhausen’s ascription of Joshua 23 to E is correct), it is more likely the case that the Aqedah was set in that region at one of the Amorite shrines.⁵⁸²

Jerome’s Latin Vulgate has Abraham directed to *terram Visionis* ‘Land of Vision’ or ‘Clear Seeing’, suggesting an association with prophecy; although he situates

⁵⁷⁶ Emerton, ‘Site of Salem’, 48-49.

⁵⁷⁷ J. A. Emerton. ‘The Site of Salem, the City of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18)’. *Studies in the Pentateuch*, Leiden: Brill, 1990, 53.

⁵⁷⁸ Emerton, ‘Site of Salem’, 53.

⁵⁷⁹ Emerton, ‘Site of Salem’, 63.

⁵⁸⁰ Skinner, *Genesis*, 329.

⁵⁸¹ E.g. Damascus (Gen. 15:2); Negev, Kadesh, Shur, and Gerar (20:1); Beersheva (22:19); Gilead (31:25); Mahanaim (32:2); Bethel (35:1); Egypt (37:36).

⁵⁸² Wellhausen, Dillman, and Cornill ascribed Joshua 23 to D, who is also thought to have come from the Northern Kingdom. Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 12.

Solomon's Temple on *monte Moria* (2 Chr. 3:1).⁵⁸³ Spurrell suggested that this translation assumes that *מראיה* is derived from *ראה* 'to see', and therefore, meaning either 'seen of Yahweh' or 'vision of Yahweh'.⁵⁸⁴ Dillmann and Wellhausen agreed with Spurrell and proposed that v. 2 was interpolated by R^{je} with the intent to connect Moriah to *ראה* 'he will see/provide' (v. 14a).⁵⁸⁵ *ראה* in vv. 8 and 14 is often translated 'to see' in the sense of vision, understanding, or giving attention.⁵⁸⁶ From this many have taken 'Moriah' to be a play on words of *ראהים אלהים* (22:8) or *יהוה יראה* (v. 14), with the intention being either to convey that it is the place where 'Elohim/Yahweh will see to it/provide', or 'seeing where God supremely sees' and where 'God is seen' (14b).⁵⁸⁷ Wenham understands, therefore, that 'the region of Moriah' is essential to the narrative from the perspective of being the 'Land of Vision', which anticipates Abraham's experience that 'the Lord will see to it' (v. 14) based on *ראה-לו אלהים* (the *niphal* form of *ירא*) used elsewhere when God appears to Abraham (12:7; 17:1; 18:1). This connects the patriarch's past encounters with God to the Aqedah, as well as linking the 'Mountain of the Lord' (v. 14) to the place where his descendants will eventually worship.⁵⁸⁸ Most notable is the parallel recognized between *ירא-לו* '[God] will see to it himself' (v. 8) and *בהר יראה יהוה* 'on the Mount of Yahweh it shall be provided' to the *באר לחי ראי* 'the well of the Living One who sees me' in Genesis 16:13 (AKOT).⁵⁸⁹

Since 'The Lord will provide' (v. 14a) mimics the verb used in Abraham's reply to Isaac, 'God himself will provide the lamb' (v. 8), the repetition emphasizes that after God tests he provides. Nicholson understands that v. 14a is Abraham's expression of gratitude in remembrance of his former response to Isaac's query '...but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' (v. 7b).⁵⁹⁰ He suggests that Abraham's sentiment was, 'Here at this site, I have learned that God provides for himself what he wants!'⁵⁹¹ Yet, I am not convinced that the name of 'Moriah' refers to seeing or providing as much as it does to its original geographic location. I am also not persuaded as some suggest that 'Moriah' is not the name of the place where Abraham is sent, but a designation of God—'Yahweh will see', as is the case of '...El who sees me', the name given by Hagar (16:13-14), *Bethel* 'House of God', the place named by Jacob following his encounter

⁵⁸³ H. F. D. Sparks and W. Thiele (eds.). Latin Vulgate: *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem. Genesis-Psalmi*. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1998.

⁵⁸⁴ Skinner, *Genesis*, 330-31.

⁵⁸⁵ Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 3.

⁵⁸⁶ See *BDB* 907, 908.

⁵⁸⁷ Moberly, *Genesis and Exodus*, 129, 'Earliest Commentary', 306, and Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 362.

⁵⁸⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 111.

⁵⁸⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 100.

⁵⁹⁰ Nicholson, *Pentateuch*, 236.

⁵⁹¹ Nicholson, *Pentateuch*, 236.

with God (28:17) and *El berit* where covenants are sworn to or by God (Jdg. 8:33; 9:4, 46). I rather take it that the similarity of מריה to ראה is coincidental and has no bearing on the name of the Temple Mount, based on the lack of evidence in the Hebrew Bible and beyond that 'Moriah' was a popular designation for the Temple Mount as is the case with the place name 'Mount Zion'. Based on this I take it that 'Moriah' is a corruption. If 'Moriah' is a play on words, it would more logically convey the idea of fearing God based on the similarity to the noun derivative of ירא (מורא 'fear, reverence'), since it is also a major theme and more significantly, the object of Abraham's testing.

The closest in spelling to מוריה is another proper noun, מורה as in the אלון מורה 'Oak of Moreh' at the Shechem shrine where Abraham built an altar to Yahweh (12:6-7). Skinner was the first to point out the probability that מוריה was the corruption of 'Moreh', with the only spelling difference being a *serig yod* in מוריה.⁵⁹² Although the 'Land of Moreh' is equally unidentifiable, it can be easily tied to the 'Oak of Moreh' (12:6; Deut. 11:30) since it is the Amorite shrine where God appears to Abraham and he erects his first altar to God.⁵⁹³ As the original site of the Aqedah, it is in keeping with the Samaritan tradition of Moriah located in Shechem, modern Nablus, which is nestled between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, not only where Abraham has his first encounter with Yahweh (12:6),⁵⁹⁴ but where the Israelites are led to proclaim the curses and the blessings after entering the Land of promise (Deut. 11:29). It stands to reason, therefore, that the Israelites upon entering the Land after four-hundred years in captivity, which had been prophesied to Abraham (Gen. 15), would worship at the place of Abraham's testing, where God swears an oath to bless his heirs. Although, from the story of Abraham's testing, Israel should have learned that blessings are no longer unconditional and guaranteed by Abraham's faithfulness, but by revering their God.

Sarna suggests that the Shechem shrine with its sacred oak was so well known that it served as a landmark for Abraham as he travelled through the Land.⁵⁹⁵ Furthermore, as Henning Reventlow comments, there are too many parallels between Genesis 12 and 22 to be considered coincidences,⁵⁹⁶ indicating that the Oak of Moreh is the more likely place where the writer would have Abraham sent to sacrifice Isaac.

Wenham stresses the importance of Shechem at the time of Abraham, being the geographical and cultic centre of Canaan,⁵⁹⁷ thereby considered the 'navel' of the world

⁵⁹² Skinner, *Genesis*, 329.

⁵⁹³ A. Tal (ed.). *The Samaritan Pentateuch*. Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv. (MS 6 [c], Shekhem Synagogue, 1994).

⁵⁹⁴ Skinner, *Genesis*, 329.

⁵⁹⁵ Sarna, *Genesis*, 91.

⁵⁹⁶ H. Reventlow. *Opfere deinen Sohn*. Biblische Studien 53; Neukirchen-Vluyen: Neukirchener, 1968, 30.

⁵⁹⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 279.

by the Shechemites.⁵⁹⁸ Patai suggests that the sacred oak was believed to be a bridge that connected them to their gods and a medium for receiving oracles.⁵⁹⁹ In light of this, the great Oak of Moreh in Shechem is significantly important in the history of Ancient Israel since it was the place where Abram first received the promises of blessings. Therefore, it stands to reason that Abraham would return to the Oak of Moreh for such an event as his testing. Just from a literary point of view, it would make sense that the covenant promises of Genesis 22 are reiterated where they were first received (Gen. 12).

Shechem continues to be part of Ancient Israel's history since it is the place where Jacob purchases a plot of land and builds an altar to Yahweh (33:18-3), Joseph's bones are buried (Josh. 24:1)), and Joshua renews the Mosaic Covenant (v. 32).⁶⁰⁰ Nicholson comments:

No text has been more significant in the discussion of the origin and nature of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel than Joshua 24, with its record of making of a covenant by Joshua at Shechem upon the completion of the conquest and settlement of the land.⁶⁰¹

It is at Shechem where the events of Israel's founding are recalled (vv. 2-13), concluding with Joshua's ultimatum—choose the Amorite or Mesopotamian gods, or choose Yahweh (24:15). Nielsen suggests, however, that the pagan association with the Canaanite gods *El berit* and *Baal-berith* (Jdg. 8:33; 9:4) led DtrH to substitute 'Ebal' for 'Shechem' in Joshua (8:30, 33), while using 'Shechem' in the accounts of the notorious kings, Rehoboam and Jeroboam I (1 Kgs. 12:1, 25).⁶⁰²

Although it is indicated that Abimelech destroyed Shechem (Jdg. 9), it was rebuilt as an administrative centre for Israel, where Rehoboam was inaugurated as king of Israel prior to the schism of the Monarchy (1 Kgs. 12:1). Shechem is mentioned in the Amarna correspondence (185:10), signifying to Gunkel that it was the major city in central Canaan.⁶⁰³ Nicholson mentions the Shechemite tradition held by the Samaritan Jews, in which the Mosaic Covenant was received in Shechem previous to the Sinaitic tradition.⁶⁰⁴ He also makes reference to *Baal berit* and *El berit* of Shechem, indicating that it was the sacred place where Canaanite covenants were renewed/ratified; hence, becoming the place where their God would establish a covenant with Israel.

During the Second Temple Period, the proto-Hebrew Samaritan Pentateuch underwent revision, with modifications made with the intention of defending Mount

⁵⁹⁸ Sarna, *Genesis*, 91.

⁵⁹⁹ R. Patai. *Man and Temple*. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1947, 107-9.

⁶⁰⁰ E. Nielsen. *Shechem: a traditio-historical investigation*. Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1959, 16.

⁶⁰¹ E. W. Nicholson. *God and His People*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, 151.

⁶⁰² Nielsen, *Shechem*, 17.

⁶⁰³ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 165.

⁶⁰⁴ Nicholson, *God and His People*, 151.

Gerizim as the cultic centre for Yahweh.⁶⁰⁵ In fact, establishing Shechem as the cultic centre was so essential to the Ancient Samaritans, as it remains today, that the last commandment in their Decalogue requires that the altar be built on Mount Gerizim.⁶⁰⁶ Isaac Kalimi points out that the schism had implications for both the Samaritans and the Jerusalem cult; thereby, an association with Abraham would validate the legitimacy of both shrines.⁶⁰⁷

Janzen points out that 'Moreh' is derived from ירה 'to direct, to show, point out, teach',⁶⁰⁸ possibly referring to the 'directing or teaching terebinth' at Shechem or seers from the shrine on the Hill of Moreh. In light of this, the translation of 'Moriah' being 'Yahweh is my Teacher' is most plausible. Driver recognized that 'Moreh' is the participle of *horah*, which is used for the authoritative direction or teaching of the Levitical priests (Deut. 33:10; Mic. 3:11).⁶⁰⁹ Wenham comments that 'Moreh' defined as 'teacher' substantiates that it was a place where divine oracles were received, which for the patriarchs is the place where the Lord will appear to give them direction.⁶¹⁰ This accords with the idea that Moriah in Genesis 22:2 and the 'mountain of the Lord' in v. 14 are linked to Mount Zion where God's word is meant to be taught:

All the nations shall come streaming to it,
and many peoples shall come and say,
'Come, let us climb up on to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and we may walk in his paths.'
For instruction issues from Zion,
and out of Jerusalem comes the word of the Lord (Isa. 2:3).

Since המרי and המורה have been preserved in the Syriac Peshitta and the Samaritan Pentateuch respectively, the most logical conclusion is that 'Moriah' is a corruption of the northern location taken from the 'Oak of Moreh', in the effort to place Abraham in the South. This might also be reason for the twice-mentioned southern home-base 'Beersheba', where Abraham returns to after his testing (v. 19).

Additionally, the Oak of Moreh in Shechem is not on a mount, but situated between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. Therefore, a more likely location would be the Hill of Moreh, which is situated at the eastern edge of the Jezreel Valley. This would be a more logical location since Abraham is sent to an unfamiliar place, which would not

⁶⁰⁵ B. K. Walke. 'Samaritan Pentateuch'. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 933, 938.

⁶⁰⁶ Walke, 'Samaritan Pentateuch', 938.

⁶⁰⁷ Kalimi, 'Zion or Gerizim?' 442.

⁶⁰⁸ J. Janzen. *Genesis 12-50*. International Theological Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993, 22, 78.

⁶⁰⁹ Driver, *Genesis*, 146.

⁶¹⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 279.

have been the case with the Oak of Moreh. From what can be determined about the Hill of Moreh, it appears to have been a place of Amorite prophetic activity based on Saul's visit to a medium in Endor (1 Sam. 28), modern Endur, which is located at the base of the Hill of Moreh. Given this, it is likely that there would have been a shrine located there, where Abraham could have built his altar to sacrifice Isaac.

The Hill of Moreh is the Amorite settlement located ten miles east of Megiddo, where archaeologists have recovered remains that indicate child sacrifice took place at that site.⁶¹¹ In light of this, the Hill of Moreh would be the most likely place for the near-sacrifice of Isaac, since Abraham had not been there before, it is a mountain, and there is evidence that suggests that child sacrifice might have taken place at that site.

In regard to shifting the location of the Aqedah another consideration is that the journey from Shechem, where Abraham would have been based, to the Hill of Moreh is a three-day journey, as is said of the journey from Beersheba to the place God sends him in Genesis 22.⁶¹² Additionally, the Hill of Moreh would be a more correct location since it can be 'seen from afar', that is from Mount Gilboa as is mentioned of Moriah in v. 4, which would not be the case with the mount of Jerusalem. In the approach to Jerusalem from Beersheba, the Mount of Jerusalem would not be visible to Abraham since the road he would have taken, (now called the Patriarch's Highway), runs along the western ridge of the city, which is 773 metres in height, that is to say thirty metres higher than the Temple Mount.⁶¹³ Abraham would have approached Jerusalem from the south along a lengthy and gradual incline where Mount Zion would have been obscured until he was almost at its base. As it stands today, the elevation of Mount Zion measures 743 metres, considerably lower than the surrounding mountains, such as the Mount of Olives (811 m.).⁶¹⁴ In fact, Mount Zion is so unimposing that it would take an average person ten minutes to climb with relative ease. The inferiority of height of Mount Zion might be alluded to by the Psalmist when he says, 'As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people' (125:2).

In consideration of this and the fact that 'Moriah' is never referred to outside of Genesis 22 and 2 Chronicles 3:1, it most likely is a redactional addition and/or the corruption of a northern place name, which served a particular purpose. The name 'Jebus' is used for Jerusalem previous to it becoming David's administrative centre (Josh. 18:16, 28; Jdg. 19:10, 11) and 'Jerusalem' and 'Zion' thereafter,⁶¹⁵ indicating that

⁶¹¹ T. H. Gaster. 'Sacrifice in the Old Testament'. *IDB*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962, 154.

⁶¹² A. Rainey and Z. Safrai. *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*. Jerusalem: Carta, 1993, 63.

⁶¹³ J. Pritchard. *Harper Collins Atlas of the Bible*. London: Harper Collins Publishing, 1989, 125, 149.

⁶¹⁴ H. Geva. *Ancient Jerusalem Revisited*. Jerusalem: Israel Excavation Society, 2000, 23.

⁶¹⁵ Moberly, *Genesis and Exodus*, 129.

‘Moriah’ was not known as the region or the city of Solomon’s Temple. Furthermore, ‘Moriah’ is not used in the texts regarding the monarchic period, nor the exilic period when the Temple lay in ruins, but it is the site of an up and running shrine in Chronicles, which supports a Persian Period date for the interpolation of ‘Moriah’ in Genesis 22.

In acceptance of a postexilic interpolation of ‘Moriah’, it is plausible that the corruption of ‘Moreh’ was meant to obscure the narrative’s northernness, in light of the Samaritan opposition to the rebuilding of the Temple and city walls (Neh. 4:1-5). Based on this, there might have been a competition with the northern shrines at that time, necessitating the legitimizing of Mount Zion as Israel’s central shrine, to which the altered story of Abraham’s testing could very well contribute.

2.4 שַׁעַר אִיבָיו ‘gate of his enemies’ (v. 17)

The last phrase to be examined in Genesis 22 is שַׁעַר אִיבָיו, which if taken from the *Qal* active participle masculine plural with a third masculine singular suffix translates to ‘gate of the one being his enemies’.⁶¹⁶ However, it is often translated ‘the gates of *their* enemies’ since the ‘his’ refers to the people of Israel.⁶¹⁷ A similar expression is found in Genesis where Rebekah is blessed by her kin as she leaves to marry Isaac:

Our sister, may you increase
to thousands upon thousands;
may your offspring possess the
gates of their enemies (24:60) (NIV).

The Samaritan Pentateuch complies with שַׁעַר אִיבָיו, while the LXX has *τὰς πόλεις τῶν πτεναντιῶν* ‘cities of their enemies’. In keeping with the LXX, the book of Jubilees uses ‘cities of their enemies’ (16.16). Josephus ignored the new information in v. 17 by referring back to the original promises God made to Abraham, which is that his descendants would possess the entire Land of the Canaanites (12:7, 13:17, 15:18-21, 17:8) (*Ant.* 1 13:235).

The English translations vary, as follows: first, ‘cities of their enemies’ (NIV); second, ‘gates of their enemies’ (KJV, RSV); third, ‘gate of its enemies’ (JB); fourth, ‘gate of their enemies’ (NASB); and fifth, ‘gate of his enemies’ (SDHS).⁶¹⁸ Since שַׁעַר is in the singular form it cannot mean ‘gates’ or ‘cities’, and since there are no instances where שַׁעַר is used for ‘city’ in the Hebrew Bible, the literal translation is ‘gate’. Therefore, the translation (gate of his enemies) should stand.

In the Hebrew Bible, שַׁעַר is used to denote an entrance to a palace or the

⁶¹⁶ See *BDB*, 33.

⁶¹⁷ See *AKOT*, 88.

⁶¹⁸ The Holy Scriptures Hebrew and English Translation. The Society for Distributing Hebrew Scriptures Middlesex, England.

Temple,⁶¹⁹ the physical gate of a walled city where the water well and marketplace are usually set,⁶²⁰ the space inside the gate of the city where kings sit in times of war (2 Chr. 18:9), or judges and elders meet to settle civil disputes, oversee contract proceedings, and witness oaths.⁶²¹ There are four notable cases in the Hebrew Bible, in which ‘gate’ denotes an administration centre, as follows: one, Lot sits at the city gate of Sodom most likely fulfilling his role as a city elder (Gen. 19:1); two, in regard to the law of Levirate marriage disputes being settled by the elders at the gate (Deut. 25:7); three, where Boaz redeems Naomi’s property and commits to marry Ruth (Ruth 4:1, 10, 11); and four, where justice has been denied the poor (Amos 5:12).

In consideration of the diminished size of the inheritance of Abraham’s heirs in Genesis 22, ‘from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites’, to ‘the gate of his enemies’, v. 17 can only indicate that the land mass promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:6; 13:17; 15:18-21; 17:8 was no longer feasible. As Wenham comments, it is a more realistic picture of what Israel would acquire compared to the scope of acquisition found in the previous covenant statements.⁶²²

Gunkel translated שַׁעַר to mean ‘city’, and in the case v. 17, it is where the people are ‘*erobern und besetzen*’ ‘conquered and occupied’.⁶²³ Speiser understood that possessing the gate of Israel’s enemies meant taking over the opposition’s administrative centres.⁶²⁴ Since ‘gate’ refers to the local seat of government where elders, magistrates and governors were headquartered, it can be argued that v. 17 points to the time when Judah’s rule was limited to local governance, which we know was during the time Persia ruled Israel. Jean Louis Ska suggests that ‘gate of his enemies’ reflects the fear of enflaming Persian authorities, who would see the promise of land mass of the former covenant as a threat.⁶²⁵

Therefore Israel’s inheritance of the ‘gate of his enemies’ would have logically come later than the monarchic period when for the most part Israel maintained their sovereignty, and certainly during the exilic period, when any form of governing Israel was a forlorn dream. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain the huge reduction from all of Canaan to a magistrate’s office, unless one takes ‘gate of his enemies’ as a metaphor for

⁶¹⁹ See 1 Chr. 9:23; 2 Kgs. 9:31; Jos. 22:2, 4.

⁶²⁰ See 2 Sam. 23:15-16; 2 Kgs. 7: 1, 18.

⁶²¹ See Gen. 19:1; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 2 Sam. 18:24; 2 Kgs. 7:1, 18; Isa. 29:21.

⁶²² Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 112.

⁶²³ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 294.

⁶²⁴ Speiser, *Genesis*, 164.

⁶²⁵ Ska, ‘Persia Imperial Authorization’, 169.

possessing the entire Land of Canaan, or to a greater extent, having an imperial monarchy, as had Israel's neighbours Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon.⁶²⁶ Yet, since even Solomon barely pushed the boundaries of Canaan, this is highly unlikely.⁶²⁷

Although Persia exercised ultimate rule over Israel, the northern opposition to the Temple reconstruction posed a local threat to the Temple cult and community. Even though Persian hegemony was 'friendly' in comparison to subsequent occupations, allowing Jews local self-governance was more of a matter of maintaining tight controls over the people and ensuring that taxes were collected. Between the Samaritan opposition and Persian rule, 'enemies' could be the collective representation of Persian hegemony and the opponents of Temple community, as was the case with Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, Geshem the Arab, and their cohorts from Ashdod. It appears that Nehemiah replaced Sanballat as governor in Jerusalem, which might have been the source of contention and the near sabotage of rebuilding the city walls (Ezr. 4:1-4; Neh. 2:10; 19; 4:7, 11; 6:1-14). Whatever the case, it is most plausible that 'gate of his enemies' is consistent to the situation in Judah at the time when their sovereignty was greatly reduced to local governance, that is to say the Persian Period, when governors such as Nehemiah would preside over local magisterial affairs at the city gate (Neh. 4). Since 'gate of his enemies' would not suit the monarchic period, nor would it suit the exilic period when the exiles would not know that they would be limited to local governance upon their return to Judah, this firmly places Genesis 22 in its final form in the Persian Period.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, there is sufficient relevance of 'testing', 'fearing God', 'Moriah', and 'gate of his enemies' to the situation of the Second Temple community to add further support to the argument that Genesis 22 was specifically edited and used to benefit the reform efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah. To begin with, God testing Abraham by ordering him to sacrifice his son Isaac is akin to Ezra's mandate that the men send away their foreign wives and children. Secondly, the theology of fearing God is most important to Nehemiah and although not mentioned by Ezra, is assumed of him by his reaction to the spiritual waywardness of the leadership, as well as his reverent attitude towards God (Ezr. 9-10). Revering God is also apparent in the late prophets and the postexilic Psalms, showing that it was a prominent postexilic theology. Since the object of Genesis 22 is to see if Abraham reveres God, it places the narrative as it exists today in the postexilic

⁶²⁶ Van Seters, *Abraham in History*, 245-47.

⁶²⁷ Van Seters, *Abraham in History*, 245-47.

period. Thirdly, since 'Moriah' is used one other time by the Chronicler, the place name can be taken as postexilic redactional addition, which appears to have been a corruption of an original location of the story of Abraham's testing. Since 'Moriah' could well be a corruption of 'Moreh', as in the northern shrines of the Oak of Moreh or, even more so, the Hill of Moreh, it is plausible that the modification was done to obscure the northernness of the name, and/or its affiliation with either a competing or pagan cultic centre. And lastly, the phrase, 'gate of his enemies' points to the time when Israel's rule had been greatly diminished, which could only be during the Persian Period when Jewish governors, such as Nehemiah were allowed only local governance in Israel.

CHAPTER III SOCIO-RELIGIOUS SEPARATENESS AND GENESIS 22

3.0 Introduction

In order to defend the hypothesis that Genesis 22 was formed to inculcate socio-religious separateness in the fifth-century reforms of the Temple community, it needs to be shown where the text alludes to that ideology. I have identified four indicators in Genesis 22 that support the premise that the narrative has much more to do with separateness than any other conceived purpose, as follows: one, divine testing of God's righteous servants (v.1); two, the repetition of 'your son, your only son' (vv. 2, 12, 16); three, the reinforcement of the covenant statement with a divine oath; and four, the genealogy of Nahor's legitimate and illegitimate offspring.

1. The first indicator is found in the introductory statement of Genesis 22, where it is announced that Abraham is to be tested by God. As mentioned above, the idea of God testing Abraham is consistent to what the writers of the Hebrew Bible would have understood was a fundamental part of Israel's relationship with God. Since E indicates in the Sinai narrative that God tests his elect to see if they will revere him and obey his Law (Exod. 20:20) (E) and that central to the Law received at Sinai is that Israel remains separate from all other people and their gods (vv. 1-4), it is plausible that the story of Abraham's testing would have as much to do with the separateness as it does with obedience to God's directives. In support of this premise, Moberly points out that it is in Genesis 22:1, 12, (where Israel's language of testing in view of Torah is applied to Abraham, despite the bolder allusion to Mosaic Law in Genesis 26:5), where it is stated that Abraham obeyed God's requirements, commandments, decrees and laws.⁶²⁸

2. The second indication is the emphasis on Abraham having only one son (Gen. 22:2, 12, 16), in spite of him having two at that time, which indicates an intentionality of the writer. This becomes apparent in the repetition of the phrase, 'your son, your only son'. If Moberly is correct in saying that the most important points of the Old Testament authors are usually conveyed through repetition and speeches made by the main characters at crucial times in the narrative,⁶²⁹ God's reiteration to Abraham of Isaac being his only son, can be taken as a main point of the narrative. Therefore, the affirmation of the legitimate sonship of Isaac against the dispossession of Ishmael assumes separateness, at least in regard to the defunct relationship of the half-brothers, and more significantly, their future heirs.

The estrangement of Ishmael and Isaac is apparently not as extreme as the Elohist would have it understood from Genesis 21 and 22; based on P's account of Abraham's

⁶²⁸ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 42.

⁶²⁹ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 40.

burial when both Ishmael and Isaac are present (Gen. 25:9).⁶³⁰ Further, J indicates that Isaac, Ishmael and Abraham's sons from his concubine Keturah were given gifts from Abraham (25:6), which acknowledges, although in a limited way, their filial relationship to him.⁶³¹ Yet, J is quick to point out that Keturah's sons are sent far away to the East from Isaac (v. 6), in support of the idea that Isaac as the child of promise is to be the sole occupier of the Land of promise.⁶³²

In addition, the phrase 'your son, your only son' is strategically placed at dramatic points in the narrative. For instance, the first placement is in the introduction where it is said that Abraham is directed by God to sacrifice Isaac. The phrase is repeated in another emotionally intense section—the rescue of Isaac—and lastly in the covenant statement, which is uniquely and powerfully framed in a divine sworn oath (v. 16), the first and last sworn oath by God in Genesis. The repetition in these particular sections suggests that the preoccupation of the editor of Genesis 22 was that Isaac is not only Abraham's legal heir and the inheritor of his estate, but his successor as the carrier of the 'holy seed' the nation of Israel. This becomes all the more apparent when the covenant promises are reiterated to Isaac after Abraham's death (26:3b-5).

3. The third indicator involves the restatement of the covenant in vv. 15-18, bearing more significance than the previous covenant statements (15:18-21; 17:3-10), since God now swears an oath to Abraham to keep his promises to his descendants, which hints at two essential elements in the covenant of the Ancient Near East—self-cursing and witness.⁶³³ Gene Tucker points out that oath making was essential in the covenant and the oath form was at the heart of the covenant form.⁶³⁴ In light of this, the covenant material in Genesis 22 was more than a reiteration of the previous covenant statements to Abraham, but as T. Desmond Alexander argued, it was the ratification of it.⁶³⁵ Since covenant presumes exclusivity for the members of that covenant, the inclusion of the covenant material in Genesis 22, generally conceded to be a J redaction, presumes exclusivity, or separateness. Although Abraham's Covenant does not explicate that the elect must remain separate as does Mosaic Law, nevertheless the message that God has separated out a people for himself from all other peoples beginning with Abraham becomes unmistakable, as well as paramount to his plan that the heirs of the covenant reveal him to the nations as the one true God of creation. This is supported by the

⁶³⁰ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 260.

⁶³¹ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 261.

⁶³² Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 261.

⁶³³ G. M. Tucker. 'Covenant Forms and Contract Forms'. *VT* 15, 1965, 492-93.

⁶³⁴ Tucker, 'Covenant Forms and Contract Forms', 501.

⁶³⁵ Alexander, 'Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision', 17-22.

development of the Mosaic Covenant, in which is explicated that socio-religious separateness is the prescribed lifestyle for God's people Israel.

In addition, covenant and promise become the dominant focus of Judaism, and most likely due to Genesis 22. Gene Tucker points out:

Old Testament tradition continued to remember Yahweh's covenant with the patriarchs as a promissory oath, wherein 'to swear' was synonymous with 'to promise'.⁶³⁶

In view of the fact that the first oath swearing recorded in the Hebrew Bible by God is in Genesis 22, its covenant statement sets the story of the testing of Abraham theologically above the former narratives where covenant promises are made to the patriarch. Moberly states that the previous promise of blessings made to Abraham 'was grounded solely in the will and purpose of Yahweh', but in Genesis 22:15-18, '...it is now grounded *both* in the will of Yahweh *and* in the obedience of Abraham'.⁶³⁷ In this way, Genesis 22 can be taken to bridge the former covenant statements in Genesis to the Mosaic Covenant, which emphasizes obeying God's Law and remaining separate from the indigenous people of the Land. In spite of Abraham not possessing the Law, he appears to be fulfilling it. Moberly concludes:

...what we have in Genesis 22 is a remarkable story of Abraham as a model of Israel's Torah-shaped obedience to God.⁶³⁸

The fact that it is not stated in the Abraham cycle, or in the previous narratives in Genesis for that matter, that God's servants are to live separately from all other people, and that Abraham is said to have married endogamously and insists that Isaac does as well, indicates that the editors intended him to be an exemplar of obedience to the Law, which his future heirs under the leadership of Moses would be commanded to embrace. Therefore, the Abraham cycle and Genesis 22 in particular, could well function to instil a sense of socio-religious separateness in those who were found guilty of mingling with foreigners, even the elders and chief priests of Persian Period Judah.

4. The fourth indication is Nahor's genealogy, which has been overwhelmingly accepted to be a redactional addition, and therefore also assumes intentionality. Yet, as mentioned above in Chapter I, little consideration is given to the genealogy, with some giving it none at all, even disconnecting it from the story of the testing of Abraham altogether. Robinson comments that this comes from the notion that the Genesis genealogies merely function as connectors of narratives,⁶³⁹ as in the case of Coates, who

⁶³⁶ Tucker, 'Covenant Forms and Contract Forms', 493. See for instance, Gen. 26:3; 50:24; Exod. 13:5; 33:1; Num. 11:12; 32:11; Deut. 1:8; 6:10, 18.

⁶³⁷ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 48.

⁶³⁸ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 49.

⁶³⁹ R. B. Robinson. 'Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis'. *CBQ* 48, 1978, 596.

understands that Nahor's genealogy functions as a transition piece between Genesis 22 and Chapter 24.⁶⁴⁰ In contrast, Robinson argues that although some denigrate them as being primitive or incomplete genres in conveying reality, they are genres in their own right, which express the fundamental elements of humanity—marriage, death, and the continuation of family lines.⁶⁴¹ With Isaac's life spared, it is the genre of genealogy that confirms the continuance of the chosen line, which makes vv. 20-24 a theologically significant addition to the narrative. Robinson recognizes the subtle relationship between narrative and genealogy, '...in retrospect that the last member of a line emerges as the de facto goal of the genealogies',⁶⁴² which in regard to Nahor's line through Milcah is Rebekah. Since the point of Nahor's genealogy appears to be more than anything else that Isaac's offspring from his future wife are legitimized, (generally the concern of P), at least v. 23 is a redaction, if not the entire genealogy.⁶⁴³ If this is the case, the intention of the redactional interpolation would have more to do with socio-religious separateness than anything else.

The accounting of Nahor's line through his concubine Reumah also functions to distinguish his legitimate sons from his illegitimate, which Skinner aptly described as making a distinction between the 'pure blood stock and hybrid from the alien and subjugated'.⁶⁴⁴ In light of this, the intention of adding the genealogy to vv. 1-19 conceivably was to show that the true Israelites were from the exclusive lineage of Isaac and Rebekah. Another way of defending the premise that Nahor's genealogy points to the essential matter of Israel's separateness is to examine the contradictory hypothesis of Mark Brett, who is one of the few commentators to deal with this issue.

It is argued by Brett that although Genesis 22 could have benefited Ezra's intent to impose the ideology of separateness on the Temple community, Nahor's genealogy actually points to the universal grace of God, particularly in connection with verse 18, where Abraham is promised that all his descendants, which can be taken to refer even to those born of Ishmael, will be a blessing to all nations.⁶⁴⁵ Yet, the assumption of Genesis 22 is that since Abraham has only one son, Isaac, his descendants can only refer to Isaac's progeny, the heirs of the covenant.

Brett continues to argue that since Ishmael, like Isaac, was rescued by God and promised nationhood (21:18), the covenant blessings promised to Abraham's

⁶⁴⁰ G. W. Coates. *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983, 163.

⁶⁴¹ Robinson, 'Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis', 598.

⁶⁴² Robinson, 'Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis', 595.

⁶⁴³ Vawter, *On Genesis*, 259.

⁶⁴⁴ Skinner, *Genesis*, 332-33.

⁶⁴⁵ Brett, *Genesis*, 49, 52, 84-85.

descendants are universal.⁶⁴⁶ Yet, he fails to be convincing, given that the nation founded by Isaac's grandsons through Jacob were destined to be a holy people for Yahweh with a particular vocation, which cannot be said of the nation founded by Ishmael, the people who become perpetual antagonists of Israel. Since Ishmael marries exogamously, he is eliminated from the lineage of the nation of Israel. This is most likely the intent of E in the account of the divine promise made to Hagar that Ishmael will also father a great nation (Gen. 21:18), one separate from the descendants of Isaac through his son Jacob. This is also the case with Esau, of whom it is said that he marries a Canaanite woman (28:8), which would also eliminate himself from membership in the nation of Israel.

Although Brett is correct in saying that the blessings are universal, he does not take into consideration that the people from whom the blessings would come were limited to a particular bloodline. What has been thought to be a Dtr interpolation in a JE passage in Exodus explains the utter necessity for Israel to remain separate:⁶⁴⁷

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:5-6a).

It is more likely the case that the writers of the Pentateuch understood that the blessing of possessing the Land was not meant to be universal, but for the Israelites as a secure geographic base advantageously situated between three continents for the propagation of Torah. This is not to deny that God's ultimate objective was to extend his grace to all nations (v. 18), but that Israel was elected from the nations, separated out to be a holy people and, thereby, effective representatives of the Grace-giver. In order to teach the nations, a holy people with a purified faith and a standardized teaching would have to be established and maintained for all the people of the world to be blessed. This would take a people willing to embrace socio-religious separateness, which I assert the Abraham story with Genesis 22 in particular was meant to illustrate.

Although Brett agrees with the consensus that the Pentateuch was finalized during the postexilic period when the ideology of separateness was a major concern,⁶⁴⁸ he does not take into consideration that it was a priestly group who edited the corpus, whose greatest concern like Ezra and Nehemiah was that Israel remain separate from foreigners for the sake of the survival of Judaism, if only to create a strongly unified people through whom God could reveal himself to the nations.

Brett continues to argue his point by noting Abraham's amicable relationships with foreigners, particularly with the Hittites. He points to the account of Abraham's

⁶⁴⁶ Brett, *Genesis*, 85

⁶⁴⁷ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 270.

⁶⁴⁸ Brett, *Genesis*, 51.

purchase of the cave of Machpelah for Sarah's burial from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 2).⁶⁴⁹ However, the patriarch's interaction with the Hittite can only be described at best as being polite, when Abraham refuses Ephron's offer of the cave as a gift and insists on purchasing it himself. The refusal of the cave as a gift implies that Abraham did not want to incur any reciprocal dealings with the Hittite, for no other apparent reason than to avoid entering into a relationship with him.

Taking into consideration the indicators found in the rest of the Abraham story, I begin with the endogamous and consanguineous marriage of Abraham to Sarah. Consanguinity was also practised by Nahor, who married his niece (Gen. 11:29), and Moses' father Amram, who married his aunt (Num. 26:59), which Kevin MacDonald argues had become a normative practice in Ancient Israel.⁶⁵⁰ Separateness is apparent in another sense, as in the case of the parting of ways of Abraham and his nephew Lot. Although Abram and Lot agree to go their separate ways due to a lack of grazing pasture (13:5-9), there is more to be seen beneath the surface of the agreement. For instance, Larry Helyer understands that the point of the story is to explain how Lot eliminated himself from being Abram's legitimate heir, and that their parting was an extension of Abram's separation from his clan in Haran.⁶⁵¹ Certainly, there is no indication that Lot knew Abram's God, which is evident in his decision to settle near the infamous city of Sodom (v. 13). Gershom Hepner understands that 'Lot' is cognate with the Aramaic term for 'curse' and therefore, he is a paradigm of those who are cursed, in contrast to Abraham who is blessed.⁶⁵² He adds that although Abraham rescues Lot from the destruction of Sodom, Lot cannot be blessed, and therefore has no title to Abraham's blessing of title to the Land.⁶⁵³ R. Christopher Heard suggests that the separation of the Patriarchs from their closest relations was meant to prevent any complication from those who have not been elected as the founder of the people of Yahweh:

The pairs Lot/Abraham, Ishmael/Isaac, and Esau/Jacob can be imagined as forks in the family tree. In Genesis 12-36, wherever such forks appear, the tree is pruned so that only one fork remains (becoming the trunk).⁶⁵⁴

Separateness in Abraham's life develops in the account of the mysterious visitors, who announce that Sarah will bear a child in her old age (Gen. 18:10-11). This episode

⁶⁴⁹ Brett, *Genesis*, 79.

⁶⁵⁰ K. MacDonald. *A People that Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy*. London: Praeger, 1994, 38.

⁶⁵¹ L. R. Helyer. 'The Separation of Abram and Lot: its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives'. *JSOT* 26, 1983, 79-80.

⁶⁵² G. Hepner. 'The Separation Between Abram and Lot Reflects the Deuteronomic Law Prohibiting Ammonites and Moabites'. *ZAW* 117, 2005, 36.

⁶⁵³ Hepner, 'The Separation Between Abram and Lot', 37.

⁶⁵⁴ R. C. Heard. *Dynamics of Dilection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and the Ethnic Boundaries in Postexilic Judah*. SBL Symposium Series, 2001, 3.

forms the beginning of the account of Ishmael's dispossession, since Sarah's son is assumed at this point to be the more acceptable heir. After Isaac's birth, the story takes a cruel turn when Hagar and Ishmael are expelled from Abraham's household (21:10). Despite the father's distress over the matter, and rightly so, given that Hagar is not merely a פילגש 'concubine', but a אשה 'wife' (16:3), he obeys God's directive to listen to Sarah's demands. While defending the necessity of consanguinity and endogamy in the Pentateuch, MacDonald argues that Sarah is correct in replacing Ishmael with Isaac, as well as is God by encouraging Abraham to listen to her:

Thus, Abraham practiced the optimal evolutionary strategy of unigeniture, while favouring a child with a closer genetic relationship to one more distantly related.⁶⁵⁵

This theme continues in Genesis. Following Sarah's death, Abraham marries Keturah, whose offspring are separated from Isaac and sent off to a land to the east of Canaan (26:5). Abraham's concern that Isaac separate from his half-brother and that he marry endogamously (24:1-4), and Rebekah's apprehension that Jacob would marry a Canaanite as Esau had done (28:1-2) certainly betray an emphasis on God's servants remaining separate from the people of the Land.

The theme continues in the Jacob story in the announcement of the conception of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, who are deemed separate *in utero*:

Two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger (Gen. 25:23).

Jacob and Esau are distinguished by the women they marry, with Esau choosing Hittite and Canaanite women (Gen. 26:34; 28:9), while Jacob marries his cousins, Leah and Rachel (29). It is to be understood, therefore, that Esau eliminates himself from the covenanted people of Yahweh by his exogamous marriages, while Jacob's endogamous marriages firmly place him in the role as the carrier of the holy seed and inheritor of the covenant blessings. The separation of Esau and Jacob forms a part of the overall theme of the founding of Israel through a particular genealogical branch, when Jacob's twelve sons are recognized as the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel, while Esau's progeny are forever considered outsiders.

MacDonald indicates that the importance of endogamy to the redactors of the Hexateuch is demonstrated in the policy of the treatment of the Canaanites detailed in the accounts of displacing the people of the Land in Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua, wherein genocide was recommended as the means to prevent intermarriage.⁶⁵⁶ It should be no coincidence that the Hebrew Bible begins with an emphasis on endogamy in the

⁶⁵⁵ MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 38.

⁶⁵⁶ MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 39.

Abraham story that eventuates in the forming of the nation of Israel, and ends with the preoccupation in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Abraham's lifestyle holds particular relevance to the reform of the fifth-century Jerusalem Priesthood since the patriarch virtually functions as a pre-Aaronite priest for his clan (building altars for sacrifice to God and circumcising the males of his clan), unofficial as that may have been. Origen sees Abraham as being a priest, perhaps since the provider of the wood for the burnt offering must have been born of the office of priest (*Hom. In Gen.* 8.6).⁶⁵⁷ Philo sees Abraham from a priestly perspective:

But here we have the most affectionate of fathers himself beginning the sacrificial rite as priest with the very best of sons for victim.⁶⁵⁸

In Midrash Aggadah literature, Abraham became a priest after the priesthood was taken from Melchizedek (Ned. 32b; Gen. Rab. 46:5).⁶⁵⁹ Kessler comments that the ancient rabbis were concerned whether or not Abraham had the authority to carry out the sacrifice of Isaac, and depict him asking God:⁶⁶⁰

Sovereign of the universe, can there be a sacrifice without a priest?

To which God answers Abraham:

I have already appointed you a priest... as it is written, you are a priest forever (Ps. 110:4) (Gen. Rab. 55:7).

It can be said that Abraham meets the criterion of the Aaronic priest in regard to marriage, as is outlined in Leviticus 21(P):⁶⁶¹

The woman he marries must be a virgin. He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people, so he will not defile his offspring among his people. I am the Lord, who makes him holy (vv. 13-15).

In view of Abraham's status of righteousness, his function as priest in his clan, and his lifestyle of separateness from those outside his clan, the Abraham story on the whole would undoubtedly have been indispensable to Ezra in his efforts to render God's 'righteous servants' fit for their vocation as the teachers of Torah. According to Malachi, the priests of the Persian Period had been woefully unfit in upholding and teaching God's Law (Mal. 2:7). Accepting that Genesis 22 stands as the apex of the Abraham story, based not only on its dramatic style and theological import, but its significance of being the account of Abraham's last encounter with God, the narrative could well have served to inculcate a sense of separateness in what should have been God's righteous servants.

⁶⁵⁷ Kessler, *Bound*, 53. Origen. *Homélie sur la Genèse*. L. Doutreleau SC 7. Paris, Cerf., 1976.

⁶⁵⁸ Philo VI, 'On Abraham', 198.

⁶⁵⁹ I. T. Stein. 'Abraham', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 2, 115.

⁶⁶⁰ Kessler, *Bound*, 52. *Genesis Rabbah*. H. Freedman and M. Simon (eds.). London: Soncino Press.

⁶⁶¹ Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, 224.

In light of the connection of endogamous marriage to covenant blessings, the patriarchal narratives would certainly have benefited the cause of ridding the Temple community of foreigners. The distinctions made between Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau, would support Ezra's cause to eradicate intermarriage from the Temple community. In consideration that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac eventuated in the establishment of the nation of Israel, so too could that degree of personal sacrifice of the Temple community secure their existence and distinct identity as a religious entity under Persian rule. For Moberly, Genesis 22 is a story important to Israel's self-understanding and identity, as well as exemplifying what a life of faith in God offers to Israel.⁶⁶²

The Sodom and Gomorrah narrative would hold particularly relevance to the Temple community in the respect that removing oneself from the unrighteous results in salvation. In addition, a strong point is made in respect to not looking back to the place and lifestyle of the unrighteous (Gen. 19:17, 26). Not only does Lot's wife perish by being turned into a pillar of salt (salt being the symbol of curse in the Hebrew Bible),⁶⁶³ but the aftermath of the resultant incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters holds dire consequences for Ancient Israel, since their offspring Moab and Ammon, the **ממזרים** (23:3) 'children born from incest', are forever considered enemies (Zech. 9:6).⁶⁶⁴

The near impossibility of maintaining socio-religious separateness of a large sector of devotees over a long period in the face of Judah's multi-cultural population indicates the extent to which Ezra and Nehemiah were challenged. Due to this the reformers would have utilized everything available to them in their efforts to bring Jews to the place where they would accept abstain from a syncretized Yahwism and embrace a lifestyle of socio-religious separateness. The Abraham story, with Genesis 22 in particular, in which the elements of devotion, radical obedience, faithfulness, vocation, and socio-religious separateness merge to set the standard of the God-fearing Jew, would convey that engaging with 'foreigners' would threatened the very survival of the Temple community and the faith. Thus, survival depended on a genuine observance of the Laws of God, the most fundamental being—**לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על-פני** 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exod. 20:3). When Ezra's mission to teach God's Law shifted to reform, the Abraham story in which Israel's divine election and vocation are emphasized, could well have functioned to inspire repentance and submission to the extreme reform measures imposed upon them.

⁶⁶² Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 55-56.

⁶⁶³ F. C. Fensham. 'Salt as Curse in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East'. *BA* 25, 1962, 48-50.

⁶⁶⁴ See *BDB*, 561.

Inspiring the Temple community to submit to the radical measures of reform would have had to happen before true reform was achievable. However, inspiration to change can hardly come from hearing or even memorizing law codes, but instead, as the biblical writers appear to have understood, from the idealized stories of Ancient Israel's forefathers, who we are told had been proven loyal and faithful to Yahweh and had accepted their vocation to serve him with reverence and humility. Mullen comments:

The narrative accounts of the past, containing as they do the instructions from Yahweh that provide divinely established boundaries for the people, constitute the idealized boundaries by which 'Israel' was to understand its role in the midst of the nations.⁶⁶⁵

The Psalmist says that laws can be recited, while at the same time ignored (Ps. 50:16-17), and Hosea understands that they can be accepted, but later dismissed and forgotten (Hos. 4:6); however, it is difficult to ignore the stories of Israel's patriarchs, particularly the compelling story of the Aqedah. Assuming that religious laws need illustration, in order to impact those on whom the law is imposed, there could be no other body of literature than the Abraham story with the power to inspire people to commit to a life consecrated to God. Certainly, the gripping story of the testing of Abraham, in which election, mission, and covenant relationship coalesce and culminate in a reaffirmation of the promises made to Abram at Shechem (Gen. 12:2-3, 7), and again at Hebron (15:18-21), assured the struggling community in Jerusalem that their position as the inheritors of the covenant was restored to them. At the same time, the narrative would assure them that covenant blessing comes with covenant responsibility, particularly in regard to remaining separate from all non-Yahwists. Abraham's adherence to a lifestyle of separateness along with a devotion demonstrated in his willingness to give up his most treasured relationship at the call of God portrays him as the quintessential servant of God, and worthy of the promises made to him. Therefore, if there was ever a hope that the Jews would regain God's favour and thereby their security in the Land, and even their independence from Persia, it would depend on their willingness to imitate Abraham's faithfulness. Nehemiah recalls:

Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name' (Neh. 1:8-9).

Taking the text at face value, agreeing to send their foreign wives and children away reveals the extent Ezra's 'remnant' would go to in proving their worthiness (Ezr. 10). In remembrance of Abram's righteousness that resulted in God binding himself to a

⁶⁶⁵ Mullen, *Ethnic Myths*, 330.

covenant with Abraham and his heirs, and in recognition of God's righteousness (Neh. 9:8b), the Temple community bind themselves with a curse in a covenant promising to abide by God's Law (10:28-39). Following the practice of endogamous marriages of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the people declare:

We promise not to give out daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons (Neh. 10:30).

3.1 Separateness as a Postexilic Ideology

The extent of allusions to socio-religious separateness in the Hebrew Bible suggests that the ideology of separateness was the main preoccupation of its writers. These allusions are found in the accounts of the reformers of Ancient Israel, be they kings, prophets, or priests. MacDonald comments:

Many of the statements encouraging separatism were inserted into the earlier passages by redactors during and after the Babylonian exile, and, indeed, recent scholars have emphasized that the entire Pentateuch must be seen as a statement of the priestly group writing during the Babylonian exile.⁶⁶⁶

MacDonald notes that there was an increased emphasis on separateness during that period based on P's contribution of regulations concerning circumcision and Sabbath observance, as is the case with the book of Leviticus with its elaborate rituals that convey the ways in which Jews are to maintain separateness.⁶⁶⁷ He quotes Neusner:

The net effect of the Pentateuchal vision of Israel...was to lay stress on the separateness and the holiness of Israel while pointing to the pollution of the outsider.⁶⁶⁸

Early on, Wellhausen understood that 'holy' almost meant 'exclusive', and exclusive meant embracing the tenets of separateness, which regulated every aspect of their lives:

Inwardly, the ideal of holiness governs the whole of life by means of a net of ceremonies and observances which separate the Jew from the natural man... Originally the term was equivalent to divine, but now [postexilic period] it is used chiefly in the sense of religious, priestly, as if the divine were to be known from the worldly, the natural, by outward marks.⁶⁶⁹

Wellhausen understood that what the prophets preached became a reality during the postexilic period:

The whole of life was directed in a definite sacred path; every moment there was a divine to fulfil, and this kept a man from following too much the thoughts and desires of his own heart. The Jews trained themselves with an earnestness and zeal which have no parallel to create, in the absence of all natural conditions, a holy nation which should answer to the law, the concrete embodiment of the ideals of the prophets.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁶ MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 44.

⁶⁶⁷ MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 44.

⁶⁶⁸ MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 44. from J. Neusner. *Self-fulfilling Prophecy: Exile and Return in the History of Judaism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, 36.

⁶⁶⁹ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 415, 499-500.

⁶⁷⁰ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 500.

Central to socio-religious separateness was Israel's monotheistic faith, which MacDonald points out was the only monotheistic religion at the time of the writing of the Pentateuch; therefore, the function of promoting separateness would have been an aspect of preserving the monotheistic faith in Israel.⁶⁷¹ In light of this, it would have been utterly imperative that the overseers of the religious life of the Jews, the priests and Levites, adhere to a strict lifestyle of socio-religious separateness. Aside from priestly duties at the Temple, they were the caretakers of the covenant, guardians of the 'true Israelites', preoccupied with maintaining the holiness of the people and the Temple. Since Yahweh would not dwell in a defiled Temple, then the people could not be blessed, and if the people were not blessed, they could not survive their detractors. For this reason, much more of the Hebrew Bible has to do with maintaining the integrity of the Jerusalem Priesthood, the Temple and the people than any other concern. Regulations governing ordination, dress and decorum, ritual protocol and duty take up much of the text in Exodus through to Deuteronomy.

Although socio-religious separateness was the dominant ideology of the Pentateuch, it must be said that it was not an innovation of Israel since it is the universal means by which people groups create and maintain national identity in their struggle against foreign interference and dominance.⁶⁷² Perhaps it can be said that the origin of separateness in Ancient Israel began at their very beginnings, even as far back as the time of Terah and his sons Abram and Nahor in Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:27).

In John Sassoon's reconstruction of the migration of Terah and his family to Canaan, he casts them as Sumerians, descended from non-Semitic people who migrated from the Indus River Valley to Southern Mesopotamia during the Fifth Millennium.⁶⁷³ By reason of the known frequency of floods and earthquakes in the Indus Valley, Sassoon proposes that a tightly knit group of refugees migrated east of the Zagreb Mountains to Southern Mesopotamia, becoming the founders of what later became the highly cultured nation of Sumer.⁶⁷⁴

Sumerologists generally agree that the Sumerians were a highly skilled people, known to have developed a script used in various genres during the Third Millennium, including legends and epics presented in narrative poetry and wisdom compositions of

⁶⁷¹ MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 44, 45.

⁶⁷² P. D. Miller, Jr. 'Faith and Ideology in the Old Testament'. *Magnalia Dei – The Mighty Acts of God*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976, 464-66. Miller quotes J. L. Adams. 'Religion and Ideologies'. *Confluence* 4, 1955, 18.

⁶⁷³ J. Sassoon. *From Sumer to Jerusalem: the Forbidden Hypothesis*. Oxford: Intellect Books, 1993, 14-16; 89f.

⁶⁷⁴ Sassoon, *Sumer*, 17.

essays and proverbs.⁶⁷⁵ However, when King Hammurabi (18th c BCE) imposed Babylonian culture on the Southern Mesopotamians, there was a shift to the Semitic tongue,⁶⁷⁶ when ‘to all intents and purposes the Sumerians ceased to exist as a political, ethnic, and linguistic entity’.⁶⁷⁷ Such a political catastrophe would have compelled some to migrate beyond the reach of Babylonian control, which is consistent with the Priestly account of Terah’s decision to relocate to Canaan (11:31).⁶⁷⁸ For some undisclosed reason, however, Terah went no further than the northwest limits of the Empire, to the city-state of Haran, perhaps finding it culturally and economically comparable to Sumer.

With regard to the beginnings of Ancient Israel’s ideology of separateness, Sassoon claims that Terah and his household would have made a commitment to remain apart from all non-Sumerian groups they would encounter, in order to maintain solidarity for the sake of preserving their cherished culture.⁶⁷⁹ Sassoon recognizes that after Terah’s death, Abram swore an oath to worship a personal god, entering into a covenant relationship with his God.⁶⁸⁰ Sassoon comments:

The refugees had abandoned the great gods of the pantheon because, when the crisis came, the gods had abandoned them. Without its gods the pantheon was meaningless. But the personal god was by birth part of the nature of each one of them forever, the one god they could never abandon, and that in the end was the God they kept.⁶⁸¹

Therefore, Abram’s reason to relocate to Canaan would have been to re-plant Sumerian culture in a Land beyond the reach of Babylonian rule, and according to the divine promise of countless progeny, it would have been done on a staggeringly grand scale. Yet, however compelling this hypothesis might appear, it is generally conceded that the ideology of separateness was a late development brought on by the realization that the reluctance to remain separate from foreigners had caused the Jews to lose their sovereignty over the Land. Although, it is to wonder if the roots of socio-religious separateness in Ancient Israel were as Sassoon hypothesized from a more ancient time.

Kevin MacDonald understands that Judaism was profoundly influenced by the invention of a hereditary or tribal priestly class, who were strongly motivated to preserve the integrity of the group.⁶⁸² This undoubtedly points to the priests of the exile, who thrived despite the privation of captivity, one of whom was Ezra the priestly scribe,

⁶⁷⁵ S. N. Kramer. *The Sumerians: their History, Culture, and Character*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, 43; 170-1; 217-18.

⁶⁷⁶ Kramer, *Sumerians*, 288.

⁶⁷⁷ Kramer, *Sumerians*, 32.

⁶⁷⁸ Campbell and O’Brien, *Sources*, 260.

⁶⁷⁹ Sassoon, *Sumer*, 95.

⁶⁸⁰ Sassoon, *Sumer*, 96.

⁶⁸¹ Sassoon, *Sumer*, 96.

⁶⁸² MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 28.

⁶⁸² E. Berkovits. ‘The Concept of Holiness’. *Essential Essays on Judaism*. D. Hazony (ed.). Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2002, 280.

whose commission to teach God's Law to all people of the Trans-Euphrates evolved to the reform of apostate priests and Levites in Jerusalem. Having realized that the demise of Judah in the 587 BCE was the result of apostasy, the Deuteronomist and those like Ezra and Nehemiah who depended on his theology, saw separateness as the ideology to be embraced if they were to survive and to thrive as a religious entity under foreign rule in the Land of Promise:

Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other. Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time (Deut. 4:39-40).

Central to those decrees and commands is that they be holy (5:7-8), and holiness required that they not mix with foreigners. From their beginnings, Israel was commanded to do more than simply avoid foreigners, but to be proactive to the extent of destroying the foreign cults of Canaan and those who refused to submit (v. 5). Hence, Ezra's infuriation at the report that even the priests and Levites had married exogamously is justifiable given that their wives were descendants of the people Joshua had been commanded to destroy in order to take possession of the Land:

After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, 'The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighbouring people with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness (Ezr. 9:1-2).

It must be said, however, that there is an exception to the law governing exogamy found in Deuteronomy 21:10-14, that allows an Israelite to marry a woman taken captive if he chooses to. Thus, the priests and Levites *could* defend their marriages to foreign women unless of course, they divorced their Jewish wives to do that, against which Malachi protests:

You ask why? It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14).

Ezra does not acknowledge the exemption, but finds the intermarriages so extreme a violation that he mandates the guilty men to divorce their foreign wives, and worst, to send them and their offspring away (Ezr. 10:11). His mandate was non-negotiable, since as Eliezer Berkovits stresses, separation is an absolute prerequisite for sanctification,⁶⁸³ and in light of their past woes, sanctification was necessary for God's favour, which for the Temple community meant survival. Without reform, the Temple

⁶⁸³ McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 207.

community would have continued to deteriorate, and without Ezra having established an elite sanctified priesthood, it might have collapsed altogether.

Asserting that the use of ‘ideology’ is equally applicable to the Hebrew Bible as it is to social and political science, Winston White defines it as ‘a selective interpretation of the state of affairs in society made by those who share some particular conception of what it ought to be’.⁶⁸⁴ For instance, the Pentateuch clarifies what Yahweh’s people, particularly his servants (elders and clergy), ought to be—loyal, reverent and faithful to Yahweh and the Torah. Given the ample allusions to socio-religious separateness in the Pentateuch narratives and legal material, it is apparent that the writers thought that the Jews ought to remain separate from the indigenous people of the Land and their detestable practices. The Deuteronomist asserts that involvement with the religious practices of the Canaanites, some of which included child sacrifice, would not be tolerated by Yahweh:

You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods (Deut. 12:31).

Certainly, the account of the illicit sexual relationships between the Israelites and the Moabite women, which incited God’s wrath in the form of a plague, indicates how easy it was for Israel to stray to intermingling with foreigners, and how deadly the consequences of that were (Num. 25:1-9). This is another valid reason for Ezra to be thought of as the ‘second Moses’ since he also actively condemned relationships with foreigners.

The ideology of separateness is articulated outside the Pentateuch in Moses’ successor Joshua’s farewell address to the elders:

Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now (Jos. 23:6-8).

Socio-religious separateness is dealt with in Kings, wherein DtrH blames the fall of Samaria and Judah on their wicked monarchs, who signed treaties with foreign nations, intermarried with them, and worst of all worshipped and sacrificed their children to foreign gods. The post-monarchy preoccupation to live apart from foreigners and their cultic practices is taken up by the exilic prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the postexilic reformers Ezra and Nehemiah, whose reform movement excluded those who would have refused to commit to a lifestyle of separateness:

⁶⁸⁴ W. White. *Beyond Conformity*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961, 75.

Now make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will.
Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives
(Ezr. 10:11).

Out of this reform movement undoubtedly evolved an elitist group of clerics, who were the likely predecessors of the *Hasidim* and the Pharisees of the late Second Temple Period. One such Pharisee is Paul, who was fully absorbed in the ideology of separateness, evident in his use of Isaiah's admonition to the Corinthian church that priests and Levites not yoke themselves to unbelievers (Isa. 52:11):

'Therefore come out from them and be separate', says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you' (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

Although it can be taken from the writings of the exilic prophets that the ideology of socio-religious separateness grew out of the ordeal of the Babylonian Exile, the biblical witness indicates that it was not until Ezra imposed reform on the Temple community that it was embraced. Given the diversity of nationalities in Jerusalem at that time, in order for the Temple community to survive, ideological solidarity was crucial. Fortunately, Ezra's objective was met:

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. They stood where they were and read from the book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the Lord their God (Neh. 9:1-3).

If the commitment to the ideology and lifestyle of socio-religious separateness demonstrated in the lives of Ancient Israel's forefathers ultimately led to the conquest of Canaan and the founding of the nation of Israel, then a renewal and maintenance of that commitment by the fifth-century Temple community would ensure the security and survival of the Jews, as well as their faith.

In addition to defining the state of affairs of a nation, Patrick Miller understands that national ideologies articulate a myth of origin and mission.⁶⁸⁵ Indeed, there would be no better time for Israel's myths of origin and mission to be absorbed than during both the exilic and postexilic periods when their identity as the covenanted people of Yahweh was debatable. In light of Israel's prophets, who understood that the covenant relationship with Yahweh could not hold up under centuries of violation,⁶⁸⁶ it is conceivable that in view of the Babylonian invasion, the covenant would generally have been assumed to be null and void. However, when Israel's vassalage to Babylon had been ceded to Persia and Cyrus allowed the exiles to return to Judah to rebuild the Temple, surely the exiles would have been encouraged to reinstate their covenant

⁶⁸⁵ Miller, 'Faith and Ideology', 466.

⁶⁸⁶ See Isa. 24:5; 33:8; Jer. 11:10; 34:18; Ezek. 16:59; 44:7; Hos. 4:6; 6:7; 8:1.

relationship with Yahweh; otherwise, rebuilding the Temple and re-establishing the cult would have been pointless. The return would also have motivated the priests to update religious texts, assuming that it had not already been achieved by the previous generation of priestly scribes in the anticipation of the return to Judah. Given their situation, the scriptures would have been revised primarily with socio-religious separateness in mind, evident number of regulations of separateness along with the supportive narratives which illustrate how Israel could successfully live apart from foreigners and their religions.

Miller quotes James L. Adams, who adds that in myths of origin that are meant to distinguish nations apart from outside groups, the goals and the justification for them are typically articulated.⁶⁸⁷ This is evident in the Pentateuch narratives where emphasis is placed on the formation of Israel and a distinct identity as the people of Yahweh, thereby justifying the means by which their goals were accomplished. For instance, the brutal displacement of the indigenous peoples of Canaan is to be taken as acceptable in light of God's promise to Abraham that his heirs (the twelve tribes of Israel) would possess the Land. Hence, the writer of Joshua would have it understood that if land possession could only be actualized by carnage, then so be it. This is expressed in Rahab's response to the Hebrew spies, when she acknowledges Yahweh's means of securing the Land of Canaan for his people (Jos. 2:8). Her expectation of bloodshed is actualized when Jericho refuses to surrender to the Hebrews:

They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, and donkeys (6:21).

DtrH indicates that it is God who orders Israel to kill in that manner,⁶⁸⁸ even hardening the hearts of the Canaanite kings to wage war against Israel, so that Israel would exterminate them without mercy 'as the Lord had commanded Moses' (Exod. 8:32; 9:12; Jos. 11:20). It can be said therefore, that bloodshed served to unify and solidify the Israelites into a nation for Yahweh. Otherwise, on the whole they would have assimilated into Canaanite tribes. Nehemiah accepts that the brutality against the Canaanite tribes was a matter of divine intervention:

Their sons went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you handed the Canaanites over to them, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased. They captured and fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished. They revelled in your goodness (Neh. 9:24-25).

The postexilic Psalmist recalls that they had not been brutal enough, since the Israelites intermingled with Canaanites, perhaps a veiled allusion to Second Temple priests:

⁶⁸⁷ Miller, 'Faith and Ideology', 466.

⁶⁸⁸ See Josh. 8:10:28, 30, 33, 35, 39, 40; 11:11, 14.

They did not destroy the people round about,
as the Lord had commanded them to do,
but they mingled with the nations,
learning their ways;
they worshipped their idols
and were ensnared by them (Ps. 106:34).

George Mendenhall recognizes that ‘civilization itself as we know it is dependent upon the dominant ideology of its citizenry’.⁶⁸⁹ Ezra and Nehemiah understood that without the ideology of separateness being fully upheld by the Temple community, they could not survive as Yahweh’s servants in a city that had become culturally diverse due to not only the Babylonian and Persian occupations, but to the infiltration of various other groups who passed through the Land in caravans to sell their wares.⁶⁹⁰ For Ezra, intermarriage was the main obstacle in maintaining socio-religious separateness in the elite Temple community, and sending away foreign wives with their offspring was the means of removing that obstacle. Ezra understood that in abiding by the tenets of separateness, they would have God’s favour, and again stand in his presence. He prays:

Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence (Ezr. 9:14-15).

Although this was an extreme measure, John Bright comments that the increase of offspring from such unions might have become an increasingly serious threat to the integrity of the Temple community.⁶⁹¹ Although it is not clarified, it is plausible that the men had divorced their Jewish wives to marry non-Jewish women, simply based on the cultural norm that Jewish men were betrothed to Jewish women in their youth by parents. McNutt agrees with the consensus that the appeal of marrying foreign women was in their dowries of land holdings.⁶⁹² The Prophet ‘Malachi’, a likely contemporary to Ezra and Nehemiah based on the shared concerns of withholding tithes and offerings, inferior offerings, and intermarriage with foreign women alludes to this when he says that God hates divorce and treachery (Mal. 2:14-16).⁶⁹³ Schmidt points out that since Malachi protests against the abuses of the priests (1:10; 3:1, 10), mentions a governor (1:8), the

⁶⁸⁹ G. E. Mendenhall. ‘The Monarchy’. *Int.* 29, 2, 1975, 156.

⁶⁹⁰ Nehemiah struggles with merchants who are too eager for the Sabbath rest to end in order to sell their wares (Neh. 13:19-21). Whether or not they are foreign traders is not explicated, however, if they were it would explain the availability of foreign women from the multitude of nations who traded with Israel, who had remained in the Land and had married Jews (Ezr. 9:1). From the time of Solomon (2 Chr. 9:13), Judah was always welcoming to spice merchants from the east (1 Kgs. 10:15), metals from Tarshish, slaves and bronze from Greece, horses and mules from Togarmah, ivory and ebony from Rhodes, gems and fabrics from Aram, and coloured fabric from Mesopotamia (Ezek. 27:12-24). Geographically speaking, Israel was a convenient land bridge for merchants coming from Africa, Asia, and the West.

⁶⁹¹ Bright, *History of Israel*, 362.

⁶⁹² McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 204.

⁶⁹³ A. E. Hill. *Malachi*. The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1998, 51.

need for marriage regulation, and the payment of tithes, he can roughly be dated to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁶⁹⁴ Malachi preaches:

Another thing you do: you flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, 'Why?' It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, with wife of your marriage covenant (Mal. 2:13-14).

Malachi believes that the purpose of endogamous marriage is that God has זרע אלהים 'Godly seed', descendants of Abraham who love justice, hate wrongdoing, and act faithfully (2:15).⁶⁹⁵ MacDonald comments on the use of 'holy seed' in Ezra and Nehemiah:

The use of the phrase 'holy seed' is particularly striking—a rather unvarnished statement of the religious significance of genetic material and the religious obligation to keep that genetic material pure and untainted.⁶⁹⁶

He points out that the genealogies in Ezra were used to deny access to the priesthood to some men due to questions regarding the racial purity of their marriages, from which was formed a hierarchy based on purity of bloodline, whose members married into priestly families and became socially dominant in the Temple community.⁶⁹⁷

During an assembly, the Levites recall various incidents in Israel's past when they were called out from among the peoples of the Ancient Near East, beginning with Abram's call to leave Mesopotamia to the Land where his descendants would become a great nation for God (Neh. 9:7). Centuries later, his descendants were delivered from Egypt to Sinai, where God's Law was imposed on them, in which was prescribed a lifestyle of separateness from those they would displace in Canaan (9:13-14):

Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land: for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same (Exod. 34:11-14).

Yet the history of their sojourn in the Land outlined in Nehemiah is punctuated with references to their ancestor's defiance to God's Law, not to mention the murder of his prophets (vv. 16f, 26, 28-30), reminding them that like their rebellious predecessors they intermingled with foreigners, which resulted in foreign oppression (Neh. 9:27).

It appears that the editors of the Pentateuch believed that socio-religious

⁶⁹⁴ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 281.

⁶⁹⁵ Hill. *Malachi*, 246-48.

⁶⁹⁶ MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 41.

⁶⁹⁷ MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*, 42.

separateness is the theological foundation on which Judaism develops, a foundation built upon the laws and regulations that govern how Israel is to live for a holy God. By meeting the requirements of the Law, Israel's inheritance is secured, particularly with respect to possessing the Land of promise. This is confirmed by DtrH in the accounts of Israel's kings from Saul to Zedekiah, who clarifies that sovereignty over the Land is granted by God contingent on Israel obeying God's Law. However, due to the religious syncretism espoused by most of Israel's monarchs, which was periodically corrected in royal reforms (short-lived as they were), the ideology of separateness was never embraced by Israel. This should not be surprising, for as Gary Knoppers points out, there was much intermarriage among Israel's legendary forefathers.⁶⁹⁸ For instance, Jacob's son Judah married a Canaanite woman named 'Bath-shua' (1 Chr. 2:3),⁶⁹⁹ and David married Maacah, the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3). King David's exogamous marriages were due, as Jon Levenson understands, to strategic diplomatic reasons (2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chr. 3:2).⁷⁰⁰ Then again, David's great-grandmother was Ruth the Moabitess. His son Solomon married countless foreign women, also for political reasons (1 Kgs. 11:1-6). Although the royal reformers and prophets understood that exogamy was a reckless practice, which culminated in religious syncretism and resulted in the fall of the nation to Assyria and then Babylon, the Second Temple Jews were oblivious to those consequences.

Mendenhall mentions the truism that national ideologies shift, which he argues was the case in Ancient Israel beginning with the change in social organization by the establishment of the House of David.⁷⁰¹ He posits that although David's government was widely accepted, there were some who anticipated the ultimate collapse of the monarchy due to what he calls his 'sacred politics', when kings use religion to benefit their politics instead of the other way around.⁷⁰² King Josiah realized from the recovered ספר הברית 'Book of the Covenant' (2 Kgs. 23:2-3) that Israel's past leadership had failed them by suppressing God's Law, particularly that which governed their relationship with foreigners (v. 13). It was in this document, taken by Weinfeld to be the core text of Deuteronomy (4:44-28:68),⁷⁰³ that prohibitions against mingling with foreigners and their religions are explicated (7-8). In light of the possibility that the Temple leaders and clergy possessed a written version of the Law, presumably the document that impelled

⁶⁹⁸ Knoppers, 'Intermarriage', 19.

⁶⁹⁹ Knoppers, 'Intermarriage', 19.

⁷⁰⁰ Levenson and Halpern, 'David's Marriages', 507-18.

⁷⁰¹ Mendenhall, 'Monarchy', 155-56.

⁷⁰² G. E. Mendenhall. *Ancient Israel's Faith and History*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 116.

⁷⁰³ M. Weinfeld. 'The Book of Deuteronomy'. *ABD* Vol. 2, 1992, 171.

Josiah to implement reform (the Book of the Covenant), they were culpable for ignoring the tenets of separateness. Yet having an ideology is not the same as embracing it, as Mendenhall comments:

But, as the prophets and Jesus of Nazareth constantly reiterated, ideologies of mere words, and ideologies that actually determine the choices made by individuals in the process of living may be two radically different things. The gap between the two is described in the New Testament as ‘hypocrisy’, and in the Old Testament probably by the Hebrew term usually translated as ‘deceiver’.⁷⁰⁴

It stands to reason that although priests in the exile could not function fully in the absence of the Jerusalem Temple, priestly circles would have continued there if only to preserve the faith. Eight decades after Ezekiel was taken into captivity, Ezra the priestly scribe engaged with such a group—the Levites from Casiphia, a substantial number of whom returned with Ezra to Jerusalem to serve at the Temple (Ezr. 8:1-20). From this it appears that in spite of Ezra’s reaction to the report of the waywardness of the Jerusalem clergy, he already knew the situation, and that the Casiphian priests would be replacements during the reordering of the clergy. If Ezra had a prior knowledge of the situation in Jerusalem, it is conceivable that the Pentateuch did not just happen to be used in his reform movement because of its emphasis on separateness, but that he revised it for the express purpose of inculcating socio-religious separateness in those who had not kept themselves separate.

3.2 The Priestly Writer and the Ideology of Separateness

As mentioned above in Chapter I, it has been widely accepted that J and E were placed within a framework mostly consisting of the genealogical and legal material of P. Whether this work was accomplished during the exilic period or postexilic period has not been sufficiently determined. Yet, it can be argued that the origin of the ideology of separateness in Ancient Israel, although it might have been anticipated in Deuteronomy, rests with the Priestly Writer and his successors.

What had been determined early on to be P’s genealogies beginning with Adam to Abram (11:10-31), and thereafter continuing to narrow down to Jacob’s sons (35:23-26),⁷⁰⁵ assumes an ideology of socio-religious separateness. Perhaps inspired by the Akkadian epic *Enuma eliš*, the Priestly Writer traces the origin of the Jews back to the creation of mankind,⁷⁰⁶ and to the first member of the human race, whom God entrusts with dominion over the creatures of the earth (1:26-2:4a). Although not P material, but J

⁷⁰⁴ Mendenhall, ‘Monarchy’, 156.

⁷⁰⁵ Vawter, *On Genesis*, 25-26. See Gen. 5:1-28, 30-32; 10:1-7, 20, 22-23, 31-32; 11:10-27, 31-2; 25:12-18; 35:22b-26; 36; 49:28.

⁷⁰⁶ This is assuming that he produced his document during the exile and drew from Babylonian literature to produce the creation narrative, as Peter Ackroyd suggests in *Exile and Restoration*, 94.

set in P's framework,⁷⁰⁷ there is the story of Adam and Eve's fall that resulted in expulsion from the garden of Eden, the implication being מלפני יהוה 'from the presence of God' (3:6ff). Their expulsion from the garden where they enjoyed God's presence undeniably speaks to the situation of the exiles, whose widespread and long-term apostasy is said to have resulted in the Babylonian deportation, which meant in the absence of the Temple, Jews could no longer enjoy standing before God's presence. As the first couple's violation was irreversible, so was Judah's. As Adam and Eve were expelled to the east of Eden, Judah was expelled eastward to Babylon.

What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us far less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this...O, Lord, God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence (Ezr. 9:13, 15).

P tells us that 'Enoch walked with God' (Gen. 5:24), as did his son, Noah, who was 'a righteous and faultless man of his generation' (6:9), the Priestly Writer's understanding of what God expects of Israel. In agreement with Gottwald's postexilic time frame for P, based on its suitability as a charter for the re-established Temple,⁷⁰⁸ P's emphasis on Enoch's and Noah's righteousness suggests that the Jews did not 'walk with God'; in terms of the Law, which meant that they had not kept themselves separate from non-Jews.

The Priestly Writer's emphasis on male circumcision, as the sign of covenant membership (Gen. 17:10, 23; 21:4), points to a time when the Jews had neglected the most fundamental requisite of the faith. Perhaps the account of the covenant of circumcision was used as a corrective for those returning from exile, where in the absence of Jerusalem Temple the practice was considered to be pointless. Further, P's description of Abraham as 'an alien in the Land of Canaan' is consistent with Judah's status as a vassal state of Persia, plausibly referring to the returning exiles, who like Abraham would have hoped to actualize the promise of possessing the Land. In identifying with Abraham and the covenant promises made to him, they could reap the promised blessings, if only they would conform to his faithfulness. Holmgren states:

If the Exiles are to recover fully Abraham's land, then there must be a return to Abraham-faithfulness—a sincere return to Abraham's God. The Exiles must live once again as Abraham did—must become, in reality, children of Abraham. Such a decision appears to be in the hearts of the princes, priests, and Levites, who put their signature to this.⁷⁰⁹

According to Ezra, God's blessing depended on obedience to the laws of separateness, which clearly originated in P; hence, it is plausible that P was the source of the ideology

⁷⁰⁷ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 260.

⁷⁰⁸ Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, 479.

⁷⁰⁹ Holmgren, 'Faithful Abraham and the ^a*mānā* Covenant Nehemiah 9,66-10,1', 253.

of separateness, whether P can be dated to the exile or to the Persian Period, when separateness was the preoccupation of the devout Yahwists.

In addition to the clarification in Genesis 21 and 22 that Isaac is the inheritor of the covenant promises as opposed to Ishmael, P produces a list of Ishmael's twelve sons (25:12-17), drawing a distinction between the members and the non-members of the covenant. The Priestly Writer follows this with the report of Esau's exogamous marriage to Hittite women (26:34) and lists both Jacob's twelve sons (35:23-26) and Esau's offspring (36:1-14), which again indicates the intention to distinguish the chosen bloodline from those outside of covenant membership.⁷¹⁰ If this was not enough to validate Jacob's offspring as the founders of Israel, certainly P's list in Numbers of the 'whole Israelite community' would (Num. 1-4). P builds upon the pure bloodline from Shem, narrowing it down to Jacob's sons, and in particular, the descendants of Levi, Moses and Aaron. Apart from the genealogies, P's extensive legal material found in Exodus through to Numbers assumes an ideology of socio-religious separateness in Israel, particularly for those who would oversee the Torah, presumably the target audience of the legal texts—the priests and Levites.⁷¹¹

The Priestly Writer's synthesis of law code, chronology, genealogy, and narrative in the Pentateuch has been esteemed over the centuries, as it certainly would have been for the Temple community as a brilliant blend of genres that have influenced the lives of untold millions. This literary structure of the Pentateuch suggests that it was a didactic work, as it remains to this day for both Christians and Jews. Blenkinsopp understands that the combination of law and narrative resulted from the need of the Jewish community to re-establish a sense of identity and continuity with the past.⁷¹² Apparently this need was recognized by P, whose legal compositions were purposed to instruct the elect on how to live for a holy God, which above all was to remain separate from all non-members of the covenant Yahweh made with Abraham, and later with Moses. Having said this, it is fitting that as a priestly reformer Ezra would have upheld the ideology and imposed it on the people of the Temple community. Hence, although the ideology of separateness began with P, it came to the fore with Ezra, who I maintain used it to support his reform measures. Accepting this to be the case, and going with Friedman's hypothesis that Ezra was the final editor of the Pentateuch, socio-religious separateness would logically have been the dominant ideology of the Pentateuch, with its narratives

⁷¹⁰ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 260.

⁷¹¹ Ackroyd, *Exile*, 96.

⁷¹² Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 241.

recast for the sake of inculcating the tenets of socio-religious separateness in the Temple community.

3.3 The Terminology of Separateness in the Hebrew Bible

Although the Abraham story is practically devoid of terminology of separateness, the ideology can be said to have been assumed by its writers. Separateness becomes evident in the phrase יחיד 'your only [son]'. Given that Abraham *does* have another son, a firstborn son no less, who in the Chapter 21 has been disinherited and excluded from his household (Gen. 21:1-14), the term יחיד most likely holds a special status, which has more to do with the election of Israel through Isaac's progeny than his inheritance rights to Abraham's estate. Hence, the term יחיד would significantly factor into a theme of the Pentateuch—the divine election of Israel. Based on Ishmael's dispossession in Chapter 21, and Isaac's affirmation of election in Chapter 22, 22 has more to do with separateness than any other purpose proposed by exegetes.

The term יחיד is used only twelve times in the Hebrew Bible, and mostly in regard to an only son, either in the context of one about to die or one who has died. Levenson remarks that it is suggestively prominent in stories of child sacrifices, as is the case with the testing of Abraham and the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter (Jdg. 11:34).⁷¹³ יחיד is also found in Jeremiah, Amos and Zechariah, where it is used analogously in regard to mourning over the judgment inflicted on God's son Israel.

...mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us (Jer. 6:26).

I will make that time like mourning for an only son
and the end of it like a bitter day (Amos 8:10b).

...and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly
for him as one grieves for a firstborn son (Zech. 12:10b).

יחיד is also used in Proverbs 4:3 in the context of an only child said to have been instructed in wisdom by his father. It is used three times in the Psalms, twice in regard to a precious life at risk of perishing (Ps. 22:21; 35:17) and once more in regard to loneliness (25:16).⁷¹⁴ Although the term is used infrequently, it is found in the Pentateuch, DtrH, Wisdom Literature and Prophets, which in most cases carry some sense of election.

The most prominent term used in the Hebrew Bible representing separateness is

⁷¹³ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 27.

⁷¹⁴ See, *BDB*, 402.

בדל 'to be divided, separated'.⁷¹⁵ It is used in the sense of separating what does not belong together, separating for a specific task, and in regard to a state of mixture to an ordered state of creation according to the Creator's design.⁷¹⁶ The term is used in regard to separating the clean from the unclean, the Israelite community from others and the expulsion of transgressors of the Law.⁷¹⁷

The term בדל is used in the context of separating the holy from the profane, whether pertaining to human beings or objects. For instance, the term is used in Deuteronomy regarding the Levitical priest:

At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today (Deut. 10:8),

and by DtrH most poignantly in Solomon's dedicatory speech:

May your eyes be open to your servant's plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you. For you הבדלתם from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, O Sovereign Lord, brought our fathers out of Egypt (1 Kgs. 8:52-53).

בדל is used in regard to the priests who are called out of the community, and as would be expected, it is used by the Priestly Writer in regard to priestly vocation:

Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the work at the Lord's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? (Num. 16:9).

Further, it is used to denote consecration, as in the case of Aaron and his sons (1 Chr. 23:13), and Korah and his sons in regard to priestly vocation (Num. 16:9), and similarly, the tribe of Levi is called apart for a particular vocation (8:14).

References to separating holy objects from the profane are found in Leviticus 10:10; 11:47, 20:25, as it is in Ezekiel:

Her priests have done violence to my Law and have profaned my holy things and the common they have לא הבדילו 'they have made no distinction' (22:26; 42:20).

The Chronicler uses בדל in regard to both people and objects:

The sons of Amram Aaron and Moses were set apart, he and his descendants forever, to consecrate the most holy things, to offer sacrifices before the Lord, to minister before him and to pronounce blessings in his name forever (1 Chr. 23:13).

The term appears to have been borrowed from the Arab term *badala* at a rather late period and assumed to have been used in priestly circles having a technical

⁷¹⁵ C. Van Dam. 'בדל' *New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. W. A. Van Gemeren (ed.). Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997, 604.

⁷¹⁶ Van Dam, *NIDOTTE*, 604.

⁷¹⁷ B. Otzen. 'בדל' *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. G. J. Botterwick and H. Ringgren (eds.). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975, 3.

connotation.⁷¹⁸ In fact, **בדל** first appears in the P's creation narrative when God separates elements of nature—light from darkness, water from water, day from night (Gen. 1:4, 6-7, 14, 18), signifying that the Creator of the universe is the God of order, as opposed to a mythological procreator.⁷¹⁹ **בדל** is found thirty-one times in the Priestly legal material in the hiphil, in the context of sacral matters.⁷²⁰ It is further indicated that the Priestly use of **בדל** is used in the context of setting apart the priesthood from the laity (Num. 8:14; 16:9, 21).⁷²¹ Thought by Noth to be an addition to the Priestly Document,⁷²² the text below pronounces that remaining separate from foreigners will secure the Land for Israel:

You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. But I said to you, 'You will possess the Land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the Lord your God, who has **הבדלתִי** set you apart from all the nations.' You must therefore make a **הבדלתֶם** distinction between clean and unclean animals and between clean and unclean birds (Lev. 20:24-25).

בדל is also used in Ezra, Nehemiah, and particularly in Chronicles, where it is used ten times in the niphil. In regard to separating Israel from foreigners, it is said:

So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it (the Passover meal), together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbours in order to seek the Lord (Ezr. 6:21).

The concept of separating expressed with the term **בדל** in reference to separating the holy from the profane becomes evident in Ezra, when it is said that the first exiles to return to Jerusalem ate together with those who had remained in the land, who had 'separated themselves' out from the Gentiles living amongst them (6:21). The reformer appears to use the term as does P, whose concern it is that the pure be separated from the impure.⁷²³ The issue of separateness becomes concrete in Ezra, when the priests are ordered to divorce their foreign wives (9:1; 10:11), and in Nehemiah, where reform has proven effective:

The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighbouring peoples for the sake of the Law of God ...(10:28).

In the last chapter of Nehemiah it is reported that the guilty men had committed themselves to separating from foreigners:

On that day the book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. When the people heard this law, they **ויבדילו** from Israel all who were of foreign descent (Neh. 13:1-3).

⁷¹⁸ Otzen, *TDOT*, 1.

⁷¹⁹ Otzen, *TDOT*, 2.

⁷²⁰ Otzen, *TDOT*, 1.

⁷²¹ Otzen, *TDOT*, 2.

⁷²² Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 272.

⁷²³ D. L. Smith-Christopher. *A Biblical Theology of Exile*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002, 157.

The Chronicler uses the term **בדל** in the case of the Gadites, who in a show of fidelity to David part company with their kin to join in with David's militia (1 Chr. 12:9). It is also used in a negative sense, when idolaters are said to be separated out for judgment (Deut. 29:21), as well as with the excommunicated in Ezra:

Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles (Ezr. 10:8).

Trito-Isaiah uses **בדל** in regard to sin separating God from his people:

The Lord's arm is not so short that he cannot save
nor his ear too dull to hear;
it is your iniquities that (**מבדלים**) raise a barrier
between you and your God,
because of your sins he has hidden his face
so that he does not hear you (Isa. 59:1-2).⁷²⁴

B. Otzen recognizes that the theological weight of **בדל** is in election and apostasy. This is expressed by DtrH:⁷²⁵

For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, O Sovereign Lord, brought our fathers out of Egypt (1 Kgs. 8:53),

as well as in Leviticus:

But I said to you, "You will possess their land: I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the Lord your God who has set you apart from the nations (20:24, 26).

Although Genesis 22 does not use the term most used in the Hebrew Bible to denote separateness, separateness does factor into the narrative based on the elements of election and inheritance of the covenant promises to Isaac.

Another relevant term to be examined is **פרד**, used figuratively as in the case of the parting of friends (Prov. 16:28; 17:9), or as in distinguishing rich neighbours from poor (19:4). **פרד** is used when Abraham parts company with Lot on amicable terms (Gen. 13:14), in regard to individuals, who separate on not so friendly terms (Prov. 16:28; 17:9; 18:18; 19:4), and when Rebekah's twins are said to be destined to separate into two nations (Gen. 25:23). In this context the term has socio-religious implication, as is the case with the term **בדל**, in the sense that Jacob becomes the carrier of the holy seed, while Esau and his progeny remain outside the realm of Yahweh's chosen people. Most significantly, **פרד** is used in the context of God separating the nations into specific areas.⁷²⁶

⁷²⁴ *NEB*

⁷²⁵ Otzen, *TDOT*, 3.

⁷²⁶ R. Hess. **פרד**. *New Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996, 680.

In light of the use of terms that represent socio-religious separateness found throughout the Hebrew Bible, it is highly conceivable that the main concern of its writers was to inculcate that ideology in people who had not embraced it. Therefore, the legal, narrative, genealogical, oracular and poetic material of the Hebrew Bible would have been intended to work together for that cause, which in the case of Genesis 22 was to emphasize that God's elect would come from one particular branch in Abraham's lineage, and that there was purpose and urgency in Ancient Israel embracing a lifestyle of separateness. Having said this, I close by suggesting that although Genesis 22 is short on terminology denoting separateness, **יחיד** can be tied to the more concrete terms **בדל** and **פרד**, and in that respect Genesis 22 plausibly speaks to the issue of separateness.

3.4 Separateness from what?

With regard to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they were to remain separate from the indigenous people of the Land, evident in Abraham's and Rebekah's insistence that their sons marry endogamously. Although it is not said why they must not intermarry exogamously, God's plan for a pure blood lineage of his people Israel can be assumed. It is probable that the ancient editors of the Pentateuch would have justified the Mosaic law that forbid intermarriage with foreigners through stories of the endogamous lifestyle of Israel's forefathers to strengthen the case for strict adherence to the law.

When Ezra hears the report that the elders, priests, and Levites have married foreign women, his reaction was nothing less than radical:

When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled...and I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice (Ezr. 9:3-5).

As maintained above, Ezra's behaviour is justifiable in light of Judah's long history of defiance to remaining separate and the dire consequences of it. For instance, the most astonishing commentary on the spiritual condition of the priests of Judah during the exile comes from Ezekiel in Babylon, who sees in a vision the rampant idolatry of the priests at the Jerusalem Temple prior to its destruction. The prophet encounters a statue of a foreign god in the Temple, priests burning incense to idols, women mourning for the Babylonian deity Tammuz and men worshipping the sun god Shemesh (Ezek. 8). In spite of the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of many Jews to Babylon, Ezekiel indicates that not only did they continue to worship idols in the sanctuary, but they sacrificed their children to them:

...They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children, whom they bore to me, as food for them. They have also done this to me: At the same time they defiled my sanctuary and desecrated my Sabbaths. On the very day they sacrificed their children to their idols, they entered my sanctuary and desecrated it. That is what they did in my house (Ezek. 23:37-39).

To immolate children, שפך דם נקי 'to shed innocent blood' (Deut. 19:10; Ps. 106:38; Jer. 7:6), was most heinous, the 'bloodguilt' which, Weinfeld points out, pollutes and defiles the Land,⁷²⁷ and results in divine judgment.⁷²⁸ Either in anticipation of the fall of Judah, or having witnessed it himself, Dtr preaches:

When you enter the land your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord (Deut. 18:9-13).

Although it is not stated that the Temple community practised child sacrifice, as mentioned above, it is plausible based on the ethnic backgrounds of the foreign wives listed in Ezra 9:1, the most notable being the Ammonites who worshipped Molech, and the Moabites who worshipped Chemosh (Ezr. 9:1). It is evident from Levitical Law that children were sacrificed to Molech (Lev. 18:21), and from DtrH that Solomon built high places to Molech and Chemosh on the same site (1 Kgs. 11:7), most likely due to the shared practice of child sacrifice. Yet, it must be said here that according to John Day, the Canaanite Molech in this text refers to the Ammonite deity Milcom, the deity also thought to have required child sacrifice.⁷²⁹ DtrH recounts the sacrifice of Moab's King Mesha, in which his oldest son is sacrificed to Chemosh when military defeat by Israel was imminent (2 Kgs. 3:27). In light of Ezekiel's awareness that Judah sacrificed children during his time, coupled with Ezra's harsh preventative measure in sending away the foreign wives and children, it is plausible that child sacrifice was practised as late as the Persian Period. Based on the element of child sacrifice in Genesis 22, it is worthwhile to examine Ancient Israel's involvement with the practice and their connection to the Baal cults that required child sacrifice. This will be discussed at length below after the prevalent *baalim* cults that required child sacrifice will be examined.

3.4.1 The *baalim* and the Fertility Cults of Ancient Israel

From the preaching of the Deuteronomist and the protests of the prophets of Israel, it can be said that Yahwism competed against Baalism in the religious life of Ancient Israel, as dramatized by the Prophet Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:20-46). However, their involvement with the *baalim* began in the pre-monarchic period, as indicated in the book of Judges:

⁷²⁷ M. Weinfeld. *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist School*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, 225.

⁷²⁸ See Jer. 3:24; 7:31; 19:5; Ezek. 16:36; 23:37.

⁷²⁹ J. Day. *Molech: a God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 32.

They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths (2:12b-13; 3:17; 6:31, 2; 8:33; 10:6, 10).

Under the leadership of the last judge of Israel, Samuel, the people promised to abandon their Baals and Ashtoreths (1 Sam. 7:4); but within a short time following Samuel's death, Baal worship was revived among the Israelites (12:10). During the ninth-century, King Ahab of Samaria and his son Ahaziah are said to have worshipped the Baal of Tyre (1 Kgs. 16:31; 22:52-2 Kgs. 1-2), while Queen, Jezebel, worshipped Baal and Asherah (1 Kgs. 18:19). At that time, Elijah is called by Yahweh to destroy the royal cult, which despite the slaughter of a hundred and fifty Baal priests (18:18; 40) remained popular in Samaria. With the aid of King Jehu, Elijah's mission was fulfilled; yet according to references to Baal worship made by DtrH, Jeremiah, Hosea, Zephaniah, and the Chronicler, it was never completely eradicated from the religious life of the Jews. Even in Judah in the ninth-century, the *baalim* were promoted by Athaliah, who ruled over the Southern Kingdom for seven years (2 Kgs. 11).

Frank Eakin recognizes that out of Elijah's ultimatum, 'If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him', the distinctiveness of Yahwism was established, and thereby, the gradual extinction of Yahwism through absorption into Baalism was prevented.⁷³⁰ This being the case, those who had venerated the *baalim* just prior to the Babylonian invasion, were making an informed but defiant choice:

The Babylonians who are attacking this city will come in and set it on fire; they will burn it down, along with the houses where the people provoked me to anger by burning incense on the roofs to Baal and by pouring out drink offerings to other gods (Jer. 32:29).

Eakin further points out that it should have been understood that the destruction of 587 BCE was due to Judah's disloyalty to Yahweh and their affinity to the *baalim*.⁷³¹

George Wright indicates that 'Baal' was not originally a name, but a title attached to a name, such as Baal Hadad and Baal Zebub, later becoming the name of the deity.⁷³² John Day adds that contrary to the idea of different *baalim* having separate local identities, according to the Ugaritic pantheon, Baal is the epithet of the Canaanite deity, Hadad.⁷³³ From this he takes it that the various Baal references are manifestations of Hadad, as is the case with the Canaanite Molech, the 'detestable god' that plagued Ancient Israel.⁷³⁴ This can also be said of the fertility goddesses Anat, Astarte, and Asherah, which tended to assimilate into one head goddess, at least in the case of

⁷³⁰ F. E. Eakin Jr. 'Yahwism and Baalism Before the Exile'. *JBL* 84, 1965, 414.

⁷³¹ Eakin, 'Yahwism and Baalism', 413-14.

⁷³² G. E. Wright. *Biblical Archaeology*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957, 107.

⁷³³ J. Day. *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*. JSOTS 265. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002, 68-9.

⁷³⁴ Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 68.

Asherah, who was represented by sacred poles erected at Israelite shrines.⁷³⁵ Josiah is said to have eradicated these fertility cults from the Land:

The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption—the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon. Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones (2 Kgs. 23:13-14).⁷³⁶

Yet Deutero-Zechariah's condemnation of the Baal-Hadad cult of Megiddo (12:11) indicates that the Josian reforms proved ineffective in eradicating Baalism in the long term. DtrH adds another deity מלכּם 'Milcom', who is closely associated with the Phoenician/Canaanite Molech, to the list of abominable cults introduced to Israel by Solomon, later destroyed by Josiah, but revived by his successors.⁷³⁷

Vriezen points out that the *baalim* were tied to agriculture and specific cycles of rising and the seasonal cycles.⁷³⁸ Since the economy of Israel depended on agriculture, Baal and Asherah worship reformers would have been hard pressed to expunge them from the religious life of the people. Eakin points out:

Baal definitely had the advantage over Yahweh in this confrontation: Baal was the indigenous deity of the Canaanites who exercised control over the realm of nature, always an area of primary concern in an agrarian culture; and Baal had the additional attraction of being worshipped with sensual ritualism.⁷³⁹

Yet noticeably, Baal worship is absent from Genesis, which Vriezen suggests is intentional, based on it becoming anathematic in the Law of Moses. He proposes that any element that incorporated fertility rituals of the *baalim* was eliminated from the religion except that which could be neutralized, as in the case of the agricultural feasts.⁷⁴⁰ Vriezen concludes that certainly Yahwism had so much more to offer than the *baalim*:

With Yahweh nothing of this is so much as hinted at. He is the living God, not the dying and rising one; the God of the here and now, of the onward march of history, who by word and action wields control over the world (of men).⁷⁴¹

Although endowed with remarkable wisdom (1 Kgs. 3:12), Solomon is said to have engaged in foreign fertility cults, some of which engaged in child sacrifice (11:4-11). Yet

⁷³⁵Vriezen, *Faith and Religion*, 51.

⁷³⁶Milcom is translated Molech in the NIV, and it is most often thought to be the same deity. Joan Comay indicates that Molech is also known by the variant names of Melech, Milcom, and Malcam (*Who's Who*, 268). However, Day disagrees, since the high places of Milcom and Molech are in different locations, with the Molech cult located in the Valley of Ben Hinnom where the topheth stood and Milcom located on the hill east of Jerusalem (23:10; 13) (*Yahweh and the Gods*, 213). However, Smith asserts that Molech known as Milku in Ugaritic texts, is related to the Ammonite Milcom (M. S. Smith, 'Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel', J. M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the ANE*, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000, 2054).

⁷³⁷G. C. Heider. *The Cult of Molek: a Reassessment*. JSOTS 43, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1985, 128, and J. Day. *Yahweh and the Gods*, 213.

⁷³⁸T. H. C. Vriezen. *The Religion of Ancient Israel*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1967, 42.

⁷³⁹Eakin, 'Yahwism and Baalism', 413.

⁷⁴⁰Vriezen, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 42-43.

⁷⁴¹Vriezen, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 42.

ancient agriculturists would naturally choose a god who was active in and beneficial to crop production, such as a personification of the sun, without whom there would be no harvest, and the moon, without which there would be no seasonal stories. DtrH indicates that as late as Josiah's reign, שמש 'Shemesh', although not the actual name of the sun-god but the name of the sun itself, was worshipped in Judah:⁷⁴²

He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high Places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts... He removed from the entrance to the temple of the Lord the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun... Josiah then burned the chariots dedicated to the sun (2 Kgs. 23:5, 11).

The sun-god cult was prominent amongst the Canaanites, and was adopted into the religious life of Ancient Israel.⁷⁴³ In spite of Josiah's eradication of the cult and Judah's exilic ordeal, the sun-god continued to be worshipped at the time of Ezekiel, even in the Temple sanctuary (Ezek. 8:16). The prohibition of the worship of luminaries, which was punishable with death, shows clearly that Israel did indeed venerate them:

And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven (Deut. 4:19; 17:3).

If it [violation of astral worship] is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death (17:4-5).

Although we know from DtrH that the people worshipped כל צבא השמים 'all the hosts of heaven', the stars, planets, and the moon (2 Kgs. 23:5), and from Ezekiel that they worshipped Shamash, the Hebrew Bible does not explicitly mention the moon-god Sin, the most prominent deity throughout the Ancient Near East. The moon-god Sin, otherwise called 'Nanna', was worshipped in Haran from at least the Third Millennium BCE to the Achaemenid Period, when Persian soldiers left the city unscathed believing it to be occupied by people of the 'old religion', or the Sin cult. This included the worship of the deity's offspring Shamash the sun-god, Nusku the fire-god, along with the unrelated Baal *Shamin* 'the god of the heavens'.⁷⁴⁴ Based on inscriptions unearthed in Haran, moon-god worship continued in Babylon to the exilic period, when King Nabonidus (556-539 BCE) and his mother (a priestess of Sin),⁷⁴⁵ restored the cult to its proper place—Sinai.⁷⁴⁶ In addition, the temple dedicated to Sin in Haran is known to

⁷⁴² E. Lipinski, 'Shemesh'. *DDD*. K. Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst (eds.). Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995, 1445.

⁷⁴³ Lipinski, 'Shemesh', 1445.

⁷⁴⁴ S. Dalley. *The Legacy of Mesopotamia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 153.

⁷⁴⁵ O. Keel and C. Uehlinger. *Göttinnen, Götter, und Gottessymbole*. T. H. Trapp (tr.). Fribourg: Herder Verlag, 1992, 306.

⁷⁴⁶ J. Lewy. 'The Assyrio-Babylonian Cult of the Moon and Its Culmination at the Time of Nabonidus'. *HUC* 19, 1945-6, 441.

have been active in the fourth-century CE, when Julian the Apostate visited the shrine. In consideration of the status and longevity of the cult in Mesopotamia, unless Terah's clan were nonconformist, they would have worshipped Sin.⁷⁴⁷ Hence, from Ancient Israel's very beginnings, the worship of Sin the moon-god was prominent. In light of this, the foreign wives from the East could well have engaged in Sin worship.

Sin was represented by a bull-calf with crescent shaped horns.⁷⁴⁸ The one-year-old bull-calf was the most venerable, being at the height of its strength and potency, and representing power in government, abundant harvest and numerous progeny. Sin is described in a Sumero-Akkadian hymn as:

Ferocious bull, whose horn is thick,
whose legs are perfected, who is bearded in lapis,
and filled with luxury and abundance.⁷⁴⁹

From the findings of Julius Lewy, Andrew Key mentions that bull worship was universally representative of a chief deity⁷⁵⁰ and according to inscriptions of Assyrian Kings, Sin was thought to bestow political power on rulers who worshipped his image.⁷⁵¹

The prayer of Nabonidus reveals his dependence on Sin for his ascension to the throne:

Sin, the lord of all gods and goddesses residing in heaven, have come down from heaven to (me) Nabonidus, King of Babylon! ... called me to kingship ... and said (in a dream) "Rebuild speedily Elulhul, the Temple of Sin in Haran, and I will hand over to you all the countries".⁷⁵²

Sin is a witness and judge in the seventh-century Akkadian vassal treaties of Esarhaddon:

May Sin, the luminary of heaven and earth, clothe you in leprosy and thus not allow you to enter the presence of god and king; roam the open country as a wild ass or gazelle!⁷⁵³

Thus, the Samaritan deportees would have become familiar with the cult. Interestingly, Nehemiah's opponent Sanballat's (*Sinuballit*) name means 'the god Sin gives life',⁷⁵⁴ although it must be said that he is considered to have been a Yahwist based on his sons' Yahwistic names.⁷⁵⁵

Representations of Sin, whether they be bull figurines or crescent horns on cylinder seals and scarabs, have been recovered from the excavation of the Canaanite

⁷⁴⁷ Dalley, *Legacy*, 153.

⁷⁴⁸ Lewy, 'Assyrio-Babylonian', 434.

⁷⁴⁹ J. Pritchard. *ANET: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, 385.

⁷⁵⁰ A. F. Key. 'Traces of the Worship of the Moon God Sin Among the Early Israelites', *JBL* 84. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1965, 21.

⁷⁵¹ Dalley, *Legacy*, 154.

⁷⁵² A. L. Oppenheim. 'Nabonidus and His God'. *A New Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. J. B. Pritchard (ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, 109.

⁷⁵³ A. Goetze. 'The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon'. *A New Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. J. B. Pritchard (ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, 63.

⁷⁵⁴ A. Parrot. *Samaria: the Capital of the Kingdom of Israel*. London: SCM Press, 1958, 92 n. 1.

⁷⁵⁵ Bright, *History of Israel*, 365-66.

temple at Hazor, and also from sites at Dothan, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.⁷⁵⁶ However, it is difficult to know exactly when and by whom the artefacts were taken to Canaan. Yet, it is certain that the Judahites were familiar with the cult, and given their propensity to worship idols, they were probably involved to one degree or another with the prominent moon-god cult, particularly in the case of the Babylonian exiles, who knew that Nebuchadnezzar depended on the ‘divine crescent’ for gaining victory in the invasion of Judah, and conceivably the defeat of Yahweh:

Whenever I armed myself with weapons and set my mind to battle, it was [solely] to execute the command of the Divine Crescent. Whoever you be whom Sin will name to kingship and whom he will call ‘my son,’ [do visit] the sacred places of Sin, who dwells in heaven [whose command cannot be changed] and whose order needs no [repetition] and [he will assist you] with his weapon in [battle...].⁷⁵⁷

The Sin cult did not disappear after Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, and therefore the returning exiles would have been exposed to the cult both in exile and again in Judah, given the Babylonian governance and enculturation.

Although there is no specific issue made of Sin worship in the Hebrew Bible beyond a reference to burning incense to the moon in 2 Kings, there is much opposition raised about the veneration of its representation—the bull-calf. For instance, DtrH considered bull-calf statues to be utterly detestable, expressed in the account of the ‘molten calf’ at Sinai (Deut. 9:7-21), and those erected by Jeroboam I at the Dan and Bethel shrines (1 Kgs. 12:28-32; 13:1-3). Perhaps the use of ‘Horeb’ for ‘Sinai’ in DtrH is due to Sinai’s association with Sin and its connection to the ‘molten calf’ debacle.

Key suggests an alternative to the Sinai story, in which, contrary to the event being a revelation of Yahweh, it was actually a revelation of Sin the moon-god.⁷⁵⁸ He bases this on the name ‘Sinai’ itself, the connection with the golden calf event (Exod. 32:1-5a) and Jeroboam’s creation of the golden calves (1 Kgs. 12:26-8). The cult was so pervasive that Jehu’s accomplishment in destroying the Baal cult in Israel was overshadowed by his resistance to give up the ‘sins of Jeroboam’:

So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel. However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit—the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan (2 Kgs. 10:28-29).

Key argues that ‘ai’ of ‘Sinai’ should be pointed as an adjective of appurtenance with the Aramaic Gentilic ending, which literally reads ‘Mountain of Sin’.⁷⁵⁹ He concludes that Sin from a more ancient Sinai tradition was later recast as Yahweh by E and Dtr.

In support of a revelation of Sin at Sinai is a recovered stele from Tema, which

⁷⁵⁶ Keel and Uehlinger, *Göttinnen*, 51, 296, 298, 300, 304.

⁷⁵⁷ Oppenheim, *ANET*, 112.

⁷⁵⁸ Key, ‘Traces of the Worship’, 22-23.

⁷⁵⁹ Key, ‘Traces of the Worship’, 23-24.

Lewy suggests marks the site of the Sinai event, since it is inscribed with a young bull upon a pile of stones similar to other images of Sin that have been unearthed in Mesopotamia.⁷⁶⁰ In answer to the question of when the tradition of Yahweh actually began, Key states that Kadesh is the best choice based on the account in Judges, wherein it is said that the Israelites settled there without any mention of Sinai (11:16-17).⁷⁶¹ He explains that there are two traditions, in which Sinai was the site of revelation for the Northern Kingdom with the primal worship of Sin, and Kadesh of the Southern Kingdom with Yahweh.⁷⁶²

In spite of the close parallels and archaeological evidence, Day does not associate the bull worship of Ancient Israel with the moon-god of Mesopotamia, but that instead it is a symbol of the Canaanite El.⁷⁶³ Jeroboam's use of them, whether to symbolize Yahweh or as pedestals for Yahweh, indicates that they had been borrowed from an earlier ritualistic Canaanite tradition that was exercised at Dan and Bethel prior to the establishment of the Northern Kingdom. Yet it should be considered that the exiles had been acquainted with the prominent bull-calf Sin cult in Babylon much later than the early monarchic period; hence, any involvement with bull-calf worship would have been associated with Sin and not the earlier Canaanite El tradition.⁷⁶⁴ Having said this, the problem of resolving this issue is that the bull was a universal symbol of political power and strength throughout the Ancient Near East, not only in Persia, but in Greco-Roman world with its Mithras cult.

Related to the worship of the sun, moon, and stars and their animal representations is the forbidden practice of consulting אַשְׁפִּים 'astrologers' (Dan. 5:7), those who הִבְרִי שָׁמַיִם 'divide the heavens' and who הִחֲזִימוּ בַכּוֹכָבִים 'gaze at the stars' (Isa. 47:13). The Deuteronomist prohibits all such forms of astral divination (Deut. 18:14), and commends Josiah for doing away with the priests who offered incense to astral deities (23:5). Jeremiah condemns Judah for any involvement associated with the astral bodies (10:2, 10-13), the danger being a lack of dependence on Yahweh for direction:

They will be exposed to the sun and the moon, and all the stars of the heavens,
which they loved and served and which they have followed and consulted and
worshipped (Jer. 8:2).

Judah was warned not to listen to star-gazers and diviners, the counsellors who would tell them what they wanted to hear, e.g. 'You will not serve the king of Babylon', which unfortunately was the case (27:9). Putting things in right perspective, a postexilic

⁷⁶⁰ Lewy, 'Assyro-Babylonian', 447.

⁷⁶¹ Key, 'Traces of the Worship', 25.

⁷⁶² Key, 'Traces of the Worship', 25-26.

⁷⁶³ Day, *Molech*, 71.

⁷⁶⁴ Day, *Molech*, 36.

Psalmist commands what Israel had been venerating—the sun, moon, and stars—to praise the Lord (Ps. 148:3).

In addition, there is much discussion about Yahweh having been the Baal of the Ancient Israelites, who like his Canaanite counterpart El has a consort, Asherah, the female principle in the fertility cult. The Asherah cult appears to have been popular in Ancient Israel, evident in the numerous prohibitions and references in the Hebrew Bible to destroying her representative poles. For instance, Gideon is told to tear down his father's Asherah pole and altar to Baal (Jdg. 6:25), King Asa is said to have destroyed his grandmother's Asherah pole (1 Kgs. 15:13), the Elohist indicates that Yahweh commanded Israel to cut them down upon entering the Land (Exod. 34:13), Micah predicts that Yahweh will uproot them (5:14), the book of Isaiah anticipates that Judah will atone for worshipping them in exile (27:9), Josiah destroys them in his reform (2 Kgs. 23:14), and Jeremiah condemns them (17:2). The fertility cult was impossible to eradicate in Judah, evidenced by Josiah's successor Jehoahaz having erected Asherah poles where his father had torn them down (24:18).

In the 1970s, two storage jars dated to the eighth-century BCE were recovered from the excavation at Kuntillet Ajrud, located fifty miles south of Kadesh-Barnea, on which the name Yahweh is inscribed, perhaps the oldest such inscriptions of 'Yahweh' to date.⁷⁶⁵ They read as follows:

I have blessed you by Yahweh of שַׁמְרֹן 'Samaria'.⁷⁶⁶

Thus says Amaryau: 'Say to my lord: Is it well with you? I bless you [or have blessed you] to/before Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah. May He [i.e. Yahweh] bless [you] and keep you and be with my lord'.

...by/before Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah... Whatever he shall request of anyone, may he [i.e., Yahweh] grant it... and may Yahweh give him according to his intention...⁷⁶⁷

Like Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible, the Samaritan and Teman Yahweh appear to be benevolent deities; however, based on the inscriptions, it is not clear if they were connected to the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible. Emerton mentions that Teman might not be the name of a town since it has been used synonymously with Edom, which eliminates the Teman Yahweh from the religion of Ancient Israel. Yet, this would not be the case with the Yahweh of Samaria.⁷⁶⁸

What raised even more excitement was the crude drawing of a male figure arm-

⁷⁶⁵ Keel and Uehlinger, *Göttinnen*, 56, 59-60.

⁷⁶⁶ Keel and Uehlinger, *Göttinnen*, 226. n. Inscription found on Pithos B, 232.

⁷⁶⁷ Keel and Uehlinger, *Göttinnen*, 227.

⁷⁶⁸ J. A. Emerton. 'New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud'. *ZAW*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982, 2-20.

in-arm with his female partner.⁷⁶⁹ Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger describe the couple as *Bes* figures, originating from Egypt where the demigod was thought to protect pregnancies and children, but was later used to ward off all kinds of disasters.⁷⁷⁰ Large numbers of *Bes* amulets have been excavated throughout Palestine, yet it has not been determined if they were imported, or had been crafted locally.⁷⁷¹ Whatever the case, the *Bes* figures led to the idea that they represented Yahweh and his consort Asherah, particularly since the accompanying inscriptions are in Hebrew. Hence, the possibility that a Baal-Yahweh cult existed in Ancient Israel, which included a consort for Yahweh, following after the Canaanite El and his consort Asherah. Yet, scholars like Emerton are cautious to assume from the inscriptions that there was a widespread belief that Yahweh had a consort.⁷⁷² This is maintained in spite of internal evidence provided in DtrH, where it is indicated that Asherah poles were constructed beside altars built for Yahweh, which suggests that the belief was ubiquitous in Ancient Israel:

He (Josiah) took the Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there... Even at the altar at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam... he burned the high place and ground it to powder, and burned the Asherah pole also (2 Kgs. 23:4-6, 15).

Yahweh as Ancient Israel's Baal might be presumed by Hosea:

On that day she shall call me **אִישִׁי** 'My husband'
you will no longer call me **בַּעֲלִי** 'My Baal';
and I will I wipe from her lips the very names of the Baalim;
never again shall their names be heard (Hos. 2:16-17).⁷⁷³

Wright points out that as El was used for names of Yahweh, such as *El-Shaddai*, so was Baal, apparent in the Baal names of Saul's and David's children, *Ishbaal* 'man of Baal' or 'Baal exists' (1 Chr. 8:33, 9:39) and *Beeliada* 'May Baal know' (1 Chr. 14:7).⁷⁷⁴ Even more provocative is the name of one of David's Benjaminite warriors *Bealiah* 'Yahweh is Baal' (1 Chr. 12:5).

All in all, the biblical writers admit to Ancient Israel's weakness for the *baalim* from their beginnings, as in the case of the Priestly Writer regarding the Baal-Peor debacle:

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. The Lord's anger burned against them (Num. 25:1-3).

⁷⁶⁹ Keel and Uehlinger, *Göttinnen*, 210-1.

⁷⁷⁰ Keel and Uehlinger, *Göttinnen*, 219-20.

⁷⁷¹ Keel and Uehlinger, *Göttinnen*, 206.

⁷⁷² Emerton, 'New Light', 2-20.

⁷⁷³ *NEB*

⁷⁷⁴ Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 108.

3.4.2 Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel

If the Israelites had incorporated Yahweh worship into the fertility Baal cults, then it would not be a radical jump to associate Yahweh with ‘Molech’, the detestable god of the Moabites, who was thought to require child sacrifice. Otto Eissfeldt argued that sacrificing children to Molech was substituted for sacrificing them to Yahweh, which was legitimized through the option of animal substitution in the sacrifice articulated in the redemption clause of Exodus 13:12-15 (Dtr)⁷⁷⁵ and 34:19-20 (J),⁷⁷⁶ although absent in Exodus 22:29(E).⁷⁷⁷ Based on the option of animal substitution, it confirms that children were sacrificed to Yahweh, and moreover, that the practice was a cultural norm in Ancient Israel.

Furthermore, that children were sacrificed directly below the Temple Mount as late as Josiah’s reign (2 Kgs. 23:10) lends weight to the argument that the practice was tolerated if not legitimized, suggesting that Yahweh worship was tied into it. The Priestly Writer seems to be saying that firstborn males are to be sacrificed to Yahweh, from the time the Hebrews were to be set apart for him after he struck down the Egyptian firstborn (Num. 3:11-13).⁷⁷⁸ This is difficult to challenge since v. 13 indicates that both firstborn humans and animals belong to Yahweh, and since firstborn animals were to be sacrificed, so too presumably were firstborn humans.

In view of the biblical story of Israel’s Judge Jephthah, who inadvertently swears an oath to Yahweh to sacrifice his daughter, it substantiates that child sacrifice to Yahweh was normative in Ancient Israel, at least during the period of the Judges (Jdg. 10-11). Additionally, DtrH does not fault Jephthah for sacrificing his daughter as he does with Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:3) and Manasseh (21:6), who are condemned for sacrificing their children. It appears from Jephthah’s story that fulfilling oaths held more weight than the life of one’s child, evident in the response of Jephthah’s daughter, who agrees to be sacrificed for the sake of fulfilling the oath (Jdg. 11:36), which as Levenson points out, was done in observance of the ordinance on oath keeping (Num. 30:3).⁷⁷⁹ Unfortunately, since Jephthah’s victory depended on his willingness to fulfil his oath, his daughter is unredeemable; otherwise, as Levenson mentions, it would have been another opportunity for God to abort the sacrifice of the beloved daughter of this courageous warrior.⁷⁸⁰ In

⁷⁷⁵ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 269.

⁷⁷⁶ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 271.

⁷⁷⁷ O. Eissfeldt. *Molk als Opferbegriff im Punischen und Hebräischen und das Ende des Gottes Moloch, Beiträge zur Religionsgeschichte des Altertums*. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1935, 63-64. Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 270.

⁷⁷⁸ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 273.

⁷⁷⁹ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 16.

⁷⁸⁰ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 16.

fact, he questions whether Yahweh might have not been responsible for the daughter being the first to come out of the house so that the oath could be fulfilled.

Others like Campbell and O'Brien understand that the first-born male was redeemed by means of temple servitude in the Levitical order (P),⁷⁸¹ which would indicate that the reform of sacrificing the firstborn males to Yahweh came during the late monarchic period or beyond (depending, of course, on the dating of P). According to the ethics of P, sacrificing children to Molech was most heinous:

The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites: Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy Name. If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail to put him to death I will set my face against that man and his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech' (Lev. 20:2).

Jeremiah was concerned that Judah not sacrifice children to Molech, suggesting that they had engaged in the practice and that it had become popular. The prophet corrects the misconception that they had been commanded to do it:

They built high places for Baal in the Valley of ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin (Jer. 32:35).

Ezekiel condemns the hypocritical Judahites, who alternate between worshipping Yahweh and sacrificing children to Molech (Ezek. 23:38-39).⁷⁸² Although this is difficult for many to comprehend today, Raymond Ortlund remarks that because Israel made light of their former idolatries, they sank so far into pagan religion practices that they failed to recognize the severity of immolating infants to idols in the distorted belief that it would bring them prosperity.⁷⁸³

The repugnance felt to the practice has led some to maintain that children could not have been actually burned in the fire of the *topheths* (incinerators), but that they were merely turned over to cult priests for whatever purpose. For instance, Weinberg maintains that the children were not immolated, but 'februated' from עבר באש 'to pass through the fire', meaning that they were symbolically passed over a flame to pagan priests.⁷⁸⁴ The argument rests on the use of the Hebrew verb נתן 'to give' (Mic. 6:7), or לנתן להעביר 'to give to pass' (Lev. 18:21) in passages that have been taken to mean actual child sacrifice.⁷⁸⁵ He argues that to sacrifice something is to return it to God and that the

⁷⁸¹ Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources*, 71 n. 86. They take this to be an addition to P.

⁷⁸² R. C. Ortlund, Jr. *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, 132.

⁷⁸³ Ortlund, *Whoredom*, 107.

⁷⁸⁴ Weinfeld, 'Worship of Molech, 133-54.

⁷⁸⁵ Weinfeld, 'Worship of Molech, 141-48.

Israelites had done so by turning infants over cult priests, perhaps for cult prostitution.

This has been challenged by Francesca Stavrakopoulou, who points out that the Hebrew verb שחט, which is used in regard to child sacrifice, means ‘to slaughter’ (Ezek. 16:20-21), and that שרף means ‘to burn with fire’ (Jer. 7:31).⁷⁸⁶ In agreement, Green states that to return something to God, particularly in association with atonement (Exod. 29:36), or in the case of purifying an object (Num. 31:23), would entail burning by fire.⁷⁸⁷ He further argues that the Molech shrine in the Valley of ben Hinnom was an incinerator,⁷⁸⁸ which is substantiated in DtrH:

He (Josiah) desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech (2 Kgs. 23:10).

Green points out that Molech was the god of the underworld, signifying death and dying, not cult prostitution, and that he was one of a series of Baals that required child sacrifice.⁷⁸⁹ The Psalmist qualifies this:

They yoked themselves to Baal of Peor
and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods...
they did not destroy the peoples
as the Lord had commanded them,
but they mingled with the nations
and adopted their customs.
They worshipped their idols,
which became a snare to them.
They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to demons.
They shed innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,
and the land was desecrated by their blood (Ps. 106:28, 34, 36-38).

This is not a new defence, since Josephus understood that child sacrifice was practiced in Ancient Israel and Philo did not consider Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac to be anything special.⁷⁹⁰

George Heider and William F. Albright argue that Molech worship was part of the ‘cult of the dead’, and that the *במות* ‘high places’ (used no less than 85 times by P and DtrH) were predominantly mortuary shrines.⁷⁹¹ Stavrakopoulou identifies three cults of the dead in Ancient Israel that involved child sacrifice, as follows: one, the firstborn of Yahweh cult; two, the royal *מלך* sacrifice to Yahweh in Jerusalem; and three, the sacrifice to the *שדי* ‘demons’.⁷⁹² Further, she asserts that the practice was not borrowed by Ancient Israel from her neighbours as the biblical writers would have it understood:

⁷⁸⁶ F. Stavrakopoulou. *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*. BZAW 338, 2004, 142-47.

⁷⁸⁷ M. A. Green. *Dying for the Gods*. Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd., 2001, 74.

⁷⁸⁸ Green, *Dying for the Gods*, 75.

⁷⁸⁹ Green, *Dying for the Gods*, 75.

⁷⁹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities*, (I.233), and Philo, *On Abraham*, (191).

⁷⁹¹ Heider, *Cult of Molek*, 383-84.

⁷⁹² Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 149-57, 293-99.

... a closer inspection of this biblical portrayal instead locates child sacrifice within the mainstream of its presentation of Yahweh.⁷⁹³

Alberto Green recognizes that there is a strong indication that human sacrifice was practised by the Israelites during the formative federation period.⁷⁹⁴ This is in line with the early determination of Otto Eissfeldt, who argued that child sacrifice had taken place in Ancient Israel all along, and that there had been an increase of the practice during the seventh-century in and around Jerusalem.⁷⁹⁵ If this is the case, Judah's leadership at that time would at least have been aware that children were being sacrificed, or even more seriously, they participated in it. Thus, DtrH is not out of line in singling out King Manasseh (697-642 BCE) as the most wicked of the monarchs:

Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end—besides the sin that he caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the Lord... Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger. So the Lord said, 'I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city that I chose, and this temple, about which I said, 'There shall my Name be' (2 Kgs. 21:16, 23:26-27).

To blame Manasseh for the demise of Judah is unwarranted, as Stavrakopoulou rightly contends, recognizing it to be a distortion of the reality of child sacrifice since the practice was neither forbidden nor deviant at that time.⁷⁹⁶ She points out that the writer of Kings condemns foreigners like King Mesha, disobedient Yahweh worshippers, and apostate Judahites for sacrificing their children to Molech,⁷⁹⁷ while at the same time Yahweh is portrayed as being a willing recipient of non-Molech human offerings. From this, Stavrakopoulou argues that labelling child sacrifice as 'foreign' is a distortion of the historical reality.⁷⁹⁸ Since there is no articulated distinction between firstborn human and animal in the context of offerings in Exodus 13:2 and 22:29, and no redemption clauses, Stavrakopoulou boldly concludes, 'Indeed, it can even be claimed that Yahweh is portrayed as a god of child sacrifice'.⁷⁹⁹ Levenson backs her claim when he states, 'The existence of the redemption clause in other places, such as Exodus 13:13 and Numbers 18:15, simply emphasizes by contrast the absence of any such clause within the law of firstborn',⁸⁰⁰ implicating that children were sacrificed to Yahweh in Ancient Israel. Unfortunately, we have no archaeological evidence to support that child sacrifice was practiced below the Temple Mount in the Valley of Ben Hinnom.

⁷⁹³ Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 318.

⁷⁹⁴ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice*, 199.

⁷⁹⁵ O. Eissfeldt. *Ras Schamra und Sanchunaton, Beiträge zur Religionsgeschichte des Altertums*; Heft 4. Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1939, 69-70.

⁷⁹⁶ Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 283-85, 318.

⁷⁹⁷ Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 124.

⁷⁹⁸ Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 148-49.

⁷⁹⁹ Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 206.

⁸⁰⁰ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 4-7, 140-41.

It appears that Micah understands that Yahweh accepts the offering of the firstborn son, when he asks, ‘Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression?’ (Mic. 6:7b). In addition, P’s punitive policy on child sacrifice (Lev. 20:2-3) signifies that it was practised by the Judahites just prior to the exile, or during the exile, depending, of course, on the dating of P. Since Genesis 22 lacks any sense of morality in regard to child sacrifice, it might indicate that the practice was normative as at the time of the writing. Noteworthy is the fact that Abraham does not argue against the command to sacrifice Isaac, nor does he hesitate to do so, as if child sacrifice was customary at that time; therefore, perhaps customary at the time Genesis 22 was finalized. Isaac is set on an altar to be sacrificed; the biblical imagery that represents the table of God.⁸⁰¹

It is suggested by Moberly that disposing of unwanted children by means of ritual slaying was customary in the Ancient Near East, where children were valued insofar as they enhanced the worth of the father.⁸⁰² He points out that although such practice is appalling to those of us in the modern world where children are greatly esteemed, in the ancient world the father had the right to take the life of his children, as is apparent in the case of Judah with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Gen. 38:24), or Reuben with his two sons (42:37), as well as to exploit children, which is apparent in the law that allows selling children into slavery (Exod. 21:7).⁸⁰³ Moberly comments that Isaac’s value to Abraham was in his heir-ship, which might explain why he is portrayed as lacking emotional response to God’s directive to sacrifice his son.⁸⁰⁴

On a practical level, Mendenhall suggests that child sacrifice was a means of population control, when there were no dependable methods of birth control or abortion.⁸⁰⁵ It was the means of eliminating the financial burden that unwanted children created, particularly in the case of aristocratic families ‘making their sons and daughters pass through the fire’, in order that estates would not be divided among too many heirs. Mendenhall added that not only was it economically advantageous for them to dispose of unwanted children, but it would have given them the appearance of being religious.⁸⁰⁶

Moberly points to the widespread belief in Ancient Israel’s religion that the firstborn belonged to God, and that God had absolute rights over human life.⁸⁰⁷ This is apparent in Genesis 22 since the narrator does not question the practice, but presupposes God’s absolute right to require a life, as is assumed from Exodus (13:2; 22: 29-30) and

⁸⁰¹ T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker. ‘Altar’. *IDB*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1998, 21.

⁸⁰² Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 43-44.

⁸⁰³ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 44.

⁸⁰⁴ Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 44.

⁸⁰⁵ Mendenhall, *Faith and History*, 162-63. See also L. E. Stager and S. R. Wolff. ‘Child Sacrifice at Carthage—Religious Rite or Population Control?’ *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10, 1, 1984, 31-51.

⁸⁰⁶ Mendenhall, *Faith and History*, 162-63.

⁸⁰⁷ Moberly, ‘Earliest Commentary’, 305.

Numbers (3:13a). However, Moberly understands that although Yahweh had the right over human life, he did not in practice have to exact his right, and was prepared to forgo it by allowing an animal substitute instead, as is expressed in the Passover tradition.⁸⁰⁸ It is not until the creation of Deuteronomic Law that child sacrifice is condemned as a detestable foreign practice, which as Stavrakopoulou argues was part of inculcating an ideology of separateness from all foreign people and the Northern Kingdom in response to the Babylonian invasion.⁸⁰⁹ From this it can be understood that criminalizing the practice of child sacrifice was a matter not of ethics, but of politics.

3.4.3 The ‘Wicked’ Kings and Child Sacrifice

After the death of Joshua during the period of the Judges, DtrH indicates that the Israelites no longer worshipped Yahweh, but instead served the *baalim* (Jdg. 2:11-12), particularly the Ammonite deity Molech. DtrH further indicates that because the Israelites served Baal and Asherah, ‘the Lord handed them over to the raiders who plundered them’ (vv. 13-14). Instead of Israel driving out the people of Canaan, they intermarried with them (Jdg. 3:6); therefore, God allowed the indigenous people to remain and used them ‘to test’ his people, who had repeatedly violated the Mosaic Covenant by ‘prostituting themselves to Canaanite gods’ (Jdg. 3:17, 20-23). Due to that, they were turned over to and oppressed by Cushan-Rishathaim of Aram for eight years (v. 8), Eglon of Moab for eighteen years (v. 14), Jabin of Canaan for twenty years (v. 3), and the Midianites for seven years until Gideon defeated them (6-7). Yet, after his death, Israel returned to their idols, and fell into the hands of the Philistines for fifty-eight years (10:8; 13:1) until they were subdued during the monarchic period.

Israel’s unfortunate history did not dissuade Solomon from venerating the ‘detestable one’ (Molech) (1 Kgs. 11:7). Even though DtrH does not indicate that he sacrificed his sons to Molech, and/or Chemosh, as mentioned above, it is likely that he did. Indeed, with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, there would be no lack of children to ‘pass through the fire’ (vv. 3-10). The term DtrH uses to describe the foreign gods Solomon venerated, שקוק ‘abominable, detestable thing’ (vv. 5, 7), he also uses to describe the practice of child sacrifice (Deut. 12:31; 18:9-10; Jer. 32:35):

On the hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the שקוק god of Moab, and for Molech the שקוק god of the Sons of Ammon (1 Kgs. 11:7).

There is much dispute about the name ‘Molech’ with some arguing that it is not the name of a deity, but a royal cult taken from the Hebrew term ‘מלך’, in which

⁸⁰⁸ Moberly, ‘Earliest Commentary’, 306. E.g. Exod. 34:19-20; Num. 3:11-13.

⁸⁰⁹ Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 74-88, 312.

monarchs sacrificed their children. Stavrakopoulou suggests that Molech is in the class of *'shadday'* gods worshipped by rulers for the sake of averting political and military disaster, which explains why Solomon would have participated in Molech worship in the first place, even apart from its being the cult of some of his wives.⁸¹⁰ Averting disaster was later witnessed by Israel during their assault on Moab under the direction of King Joram of the Northern Kingdom, when in desperation King Mesha sacrificed his oldest son to Chemosh (2 Kgs. 4:27). The Israelite soldiers' reaction to retreat could only have been rooted in their belief that deities responded to child sacrifice by granting military victory. It certainly could not have been due to the bloodshed, as has often been suggested, given their familiarity with carnage.

Perhaps the soldiers were familiar with the story of Jephthah, recalling how he had subdued the Ammonites as a result of a vow he made to Yahweh, that if he won the battle he would sacrifice 'whatever' came out to greet him on his return home (11:30-31). However, it might have been Jephthah's familiarity with Chemosh (11:24) and the war rites of the Ammonites and Moabites that influenced him to make such an oath. Whatever the case, the fact that he sacrifices his daughter should demonstrate that child sacrifice was customary at the time, particularly since it is said that his vow was made under the power of the רוח יהוה 'the Spirit of Yahweh', which challenges any notion that the vow was rashly made. It is likely that Jephthah knew that 'whatever' would first greet him upon his arrival home was a human being; otherwise, the vow would have been of little value in regard to achieving victory. Tony Cartledge recalls the Ancient Near East tradition of girls coming out to greet the victors of war,⁸¹¹ which suggests that Jephthah knew that his daughter would be the first to greet him; thus, his emotional reaction to having to carry out his vow would have been disingenuous.

Assuming that Yahweh did not require such sacrifice, Phyllis Tribble suggests that the act revealed Jephthah's lack of faithfulness in God to bring victory to Israel as was the case with the Hebrews who entered the Land and defeated the Canaanite tribes.⁸¹² If Jephthah was empowered by the Spirit of God, it would naturally follow that he would have exercised wisdom in the making the vow, as he had in defeating the enemy. It is more likely the case that this judge was motivated by power with the enticement to lead Israel after heroically defeating the Ammonites (Jdg.11:1-11); particularly in

⁸¹⁰ Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 265.

⁸¹¹ T. W. Cartledge. *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*. JSOTS 147, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, 178.

⁸¹² P. Tribble. *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, 97.

consideration of his low status as a son of a harlot, this victory would have been an irresistible opportunity.

Furthermore, Ancient Near East vows made to deities were not mere promises to be broken, given that they were conditional.⁸¹³ Vows would have to be fulfilled exactly as stated at the time in order to acquire the reward.⁸¹⁴ Repercussions would be expected, which would have been thought to be more costly than the fulfilment of the vow. DtrH indicates that Jephthah's daughter's willingness to submit to being sacrificed is based on the inescapable obligation of fulfilling the vow:

My Father, she replied, you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites (11:36).

Additionally, the narrator would have it understood by her response that it was an honour and privilege for her to die for such a worthy cause. Based on the amount of military opposition at that time, it can be taken that the sacrifice of children for the sake of military victory was customary during the period of the Judges.⁸¹⁵ Heider concluded that based on the duration of the complaints of the prophets against child sacrifice, the practice was well established by the time of Ahaz (735-715 BCE) and that it was just as popular in Judah as it was in Samaria:⁸¹⁶

...walked in the way of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites (2 Kgs. 16:3).

Child sacrifice is not mentioned in the royal reforms of Asa and Hezekiah, which might indicate that it was tolerated during their reigns. Although Hezekiah is said to have destroyed the high places, there is no mention of destroying the *topheths*, particularly the one in the Valley of ben Hinnom (2 Kgs. 18:4), where his son, Manasseh, most likely had sacrificed his children:

He sacrificed his own son in the fire (21:6); Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end... (v. 16).

The same term used to describe the sins of Manasseh תועבה, 'abomination',⁸¹⁷ is also used in Ezra to describe the religious practices of the foreign wives of the Temple leaders and clergy, which lends to the plausibility that the Moabite wives continued to venerate Chemosh and the Ammonite wives Molech with child sacrifice (Ezr. 9:1). It is likely that DtrH's anticipation that Israel would adopt Canaanite practices into Yahwism

⁸¹³ See Gen. 28:20-22; Num. 21:2; Jdg. 11:30-31; I Sam. 1:11; 2 Sam. 15:8.

⁸¹⁴ Cartledge, 'Vows', 14-17; 32.

⁸¹⁵ Moltz, 'God and Abraham', 64.

⁸¹⁶ Heider, *Cult of Molek*, 283.

⁸¹⁷ See *BDB*, 1072.

from intermingling with foreigners impelled Ezra into swift and radical reform, in which all foreign relationships were forbidden to the people of the Second Temple community:

But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by enquiring about their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.' You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods (Deut. 12:29b-31).

3.4.4 The Prophets and Child Sacrifice

Although there is no mention of destroying the *topheth* in Jerusalem during the reforms of Hezekiah as was the case with the high places surrounding the city, sacred stones, Asherah poles, and the bronze snake of Moses (2 Kgs. 18:4), a contemporary of Josiah, Zephaniah prophesies that Judah will be punished for idolatry including Molech worship:

I will stretch out my hand over Judah
and all who live in Jerusalem;
I will wipe out from this place the last remnant of Baal
and every name of the heathen priests,
those who bow down upon the house-tops
to worship the host of heaven
and who swear by Milcom,
those who have turned their backs on the Lord,
who have not sought the Lord or consulted him (Zeph. 1:4).

DtrH indicates that Josiah did destroy the *topheth* in the Valley of ben Hinnom (23:10), which Hezekiah had left standing. Contemporaneous to Josiah (640-609 BCE) was Jeremiah (626-585 BCE) (Jer. 1:2; 2 Chr. 35:25), who is conspicuously not mentioned in the chronicle of Josiah, though Josiah is mentioned in the book of Jeremiah. Based on Jeremiah's fierce protest against child sacrifice (Jer. 22:3), it would not be difficult to argue that Josiah's vehemence against the child sacrificing cults was influenced by the prophet. Within nineteen chapters of the book of Jeremiah there are at least forty allusions to child sacrifice, including the worship of Baal, Chemosh, Molech, the Valley of ben Hinnom Topheth, burning sons and daughters and shedding innocent blood. Jeremiah, like DtrH, has a particular abhorrence of Molech:

You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem (11:13).

The situation worsens to the point that Judah is finally condemned (v. 10), and Jeremiah is told to cease interceding for them (v. 14), for divine judgment is forthcoming (v. 11):

So beware, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room (7:32).

Not all of those whom Jeremiah calls 'very bad figs', which refers to those left in the Land after the deportation and condemned to perish (Jer. 24:9-10), did actually succumb to famine and sword when Babylon returned to destroy the city as he predicted.

This being the case, it is conceivable that the survivors would have continued to sacrifice children. What is known is that the descendants of what Jeremiah refers to as the ‘very good figs’ (the exiles who relocated to Judah with Zerubbabel) (24:2) became apostate as well, which for Ezra and Nehemiah was by marrying foreign women from cultures where child sacrifice was customary. Therefore, it is plausible that the women sacrificed children to the gods of their people, whether or not with the consent of their husbands.

In addition to the condemnations of child sacrifice expressed by DtrH (1 Kgs. 11:5-6; 2 Kgs. 17:17; 21:6; 23:10), and P/H (Lev. 18:21, 28),⁸¹⁸ Ezekiel castigates Judah for having sacrificed their sons to idols. He portrays Israel as an unfaithful wife, who used the gracious gift of offspring from Yahweh to venerate idols:

And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols (Ezek. 16:20),

and condemns them for continuing to sacrifice children during the exilic period:

Therefore say to the house of Israel: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Will you defile yourselves the way your fathers did and lust after their vile images? When you offer your gifts—the sacrifice of your sons in the fire—you continue to defile yourselves with all your idols to this day (20:30-31).

Whether Ezekiel is addressing those in exile, and/or those left behind in the Land, or both is not clarified; however, it is apparent that the practice remained popular among the Jews. It is more likely the case that he is referring to those left behind in the Land, whom he predicts will suffer death and destruction due to the detestable things they have done (33:27-29). Again the prophet announces that judgment is forthcoming due to the children sacrificed to idols:

But righteous men will sentence them to punishment of women who commit adultery and shed blood, because they are adulterous and blood is on their hands. This is what the sovereign Lord says, ‘Bring a mob against them and give them over to terror and plunder. The mob will stone them and cut them down with their swords; they will kill their sons and daughters and burn down their houses’ (23:45-47).

Trito-Isaiah addresses the issue of child sacrifice. He speaks of the offenders in the present tense:

...burning with lust under terebinths,
under every spreading tree,
and sacrificing children in the gorges,
under the rocky clefts? (Isa. 57:5, 9).

Indeed, his condemnation alludes to the Valley of ben Hinnom in Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 23:10; Jer. 7:23) implying that child sacrifice was also popular during the postexilic period. Although said in the context of the Hebrews about to enter Canaan where the indigenous people practised human sacrifice, the postexilic Psalm 106, in which the

⁸¹⁸ Pfeiffer argues that the Holiness Code is an exilic work. *Introduction*, 241-45.

Israelites are castigated for engaging in the child sacrifice to the idols of Canaan,⁸¹⁹ might be a veiled allusion to that practice by the Jews who returned to the Land under the so-called edict of Cyrus. The Psalmist's language is reminiscent of Ezekiel's protest against idolatry (Ezek. 6:13), which substantiates the premise that the Judahites practised child sacrifice from the monarchic period to the postexilic period. Bearing in mind the long-term practice of child sacrifice throughout the monarchic period and beyond (23:36-39), it is plausible that child sacrifice remained a problem as late as the fifth-century in Persian Period Judah, in spite of the practice not being mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah. Yet in light of the harsh mandate that the people send away their foreign wives and offspring from those unions, who came from cultures where children were sacrificed to deities, it is plausible that they had been involved in the practice. If this was the case, socio-religious separateness would have been essential.

3.5 Ezra and Nehemiah on Separateness

Although separateness is expressed throughout the Hebrew Bible as the ideal prescribed lifestyle of Israel, it does not come to the fore until Ezra's reform movement when the remnant, those descended from the exiles, whom the reformers considered to be the 'true Israelites', were mandated to dissociate from anything or anyone foreign (Ezr. 10:10-11). In spite of the severity of the measure, Ezra met with little resistance.

Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, 'We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law' (Ezr. 10:2-3; Neh. 9:1-2).

Yet there was a little resistance from two of the men—Jonathan, the son of Asahel, and Jahzeiah, the son of Tikvah (v. 15).

Although Ezra appears to exceed the bounds of the godly ethics, his actions were in keeping with God's Law (Exod. 34:16; Dt. 7:3-4), because he understood that divorcing the foreign wives was a sure means to ending religious syncretism, at least in the Temple community. Having cleansed the community of foreigners, the people would have been ready to embrace the Torah (Neh. 8). As Ezra began to read from the Law of God, the people broke out into ecstatic worship (8:5-6), then returned day after day to hear the Law they had rebelled against (vv. 7-8). After eight days they made a 'binding agreement' to separate from that which was forbidden to them (Neh. 10:1).

⁸¹⁹ M. D. Goulder. *The Psalms of the Return: Book V Psalms 107-150*. JSOTS 258, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 15.

Unlike Ezra, Nehemiah's approach to the problem was to inflict both verbal and physical abuse on those who had married foreign wives (Neh. 13:25); yet, consistent with his nature, he exercised compassion by not mandating the offenders to send off foreign wives with their children, but merely preventing any new mixed marriages.⁸²⁰

I made them take an oath in God's name and said: 'You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves (v. 25b).

The book ascribed to Nehemiah reads like a treatise on socio-religious separateness. Apart from the obvious admonishments concerning intermingling with foreigners, even the rebuilding of the walls of the city might have been a measure to separate the remnant from outsiders, as if the intent was to make Jerusalem an enclave for the holy and devout. As Grabbe comments:

His goal seems no less than to make Judah into an isolated puritanical theocratic state.⁸²¹

He further suggests that the function of city walls apart from military security, served to enclose communities for the sake of cohesiveness, as well as being the means by which they could be controlled.⁸²² Williamson comments that to some extent Nehemiah's wall symbolizes Jewish separateness.⁸²³

Ezra and Nehemiah are not alone in their abhorrence of intermarriage, as the Prophet called 'Malachi' rebukes the men for divorcing their Jewish wives to marry foreign women:

Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty (Mal. 2:11-12).

In regard to the 'he' in 'whoever he may be', could plausibly refer to those who should have known better, such as the elders and clergy who deviated from the basic teaching of the Law on marriage:

Do not intermarry with them [Canaanites]. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you (Deut. 7:3-4).

Based on the ethnic diversity of Yehud, the teaching and enforcement of socio-religious separateness outlined in the Law codes and demonstrated in the Patriarchal narratives would be an utter necessity. F. Charles Fensham points out:

But one must keep in mind that the Jews were at that moment in history the carriers of the Lord's revelation. Contamination of their religion with foreign

⁸²⁰ See Neh. 5, where Nehemiah is said to help the poor who have subjected their children to slavery (v. 5).

⁸²¹ Grabbe, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 175.

⁸²² Grabbe, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 175.

⁸²³ Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 396.

elements, which could alter considerably the orthodox conceptions, was regarded as such a danger that everything possible was done to combat it.⁸²⁴

The emphasis on endogamy in Genesis could have certainly benefited the reform of intermarriage, particularly in regard to the elders and clergy since as mentioned above, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob functioned in those roles in their own clans. The preoccupation with socio-religious separateness expressed in the genealogical lists of Ezra (2, 8, 10; Neh. 7, 10, 12), which distinguish the הגולה, 'the true exiles', parallels the genealogies of the Pentateuch that distinguish Abraham's heirs, the בני-ישראל, 'sons of Israel' (Num. 1:2), from the גוים 'foreigners' (Exod. 34:24) (Num. 24:8). If Abraham's demonstration of radical obedience in Genesis 22 was not enough to inspire the Temple community to commit to a lifestyle of separateness, perhaps the story of the problematic relationship between Abraham and Hagar would, since it caused the patriarch much personal and the nation of Israel enduring political grief. The amelioration of Abraham's situation through the divine promise that Ishmael would also be the father of a great nation (Gen. 21:13, 18) would offer those who sent away their wives and offspring some consolation, particularly since what they were being asked to do was also for the ultimate good of the people of God. It goes without saying that the story of eliminating Hagar from the reproductive life of the 'Father of Israel' would have supported Ezra's objective to remove foreigners from the reproductive life of the men of the Temple community. The obvious parallel between Abraham's ordeals of sending away his foreign 'wife' and son, then almost sacrificing the other, and the community who venerated this patriarch, strongly suggests that the Abraham story on the whole was most useful in inculcating in that community a commitment to obey God's Law, with Genesis 22 as the most powerful influence on the elders and priests who had rebelled against God's Law by for one indulging in forbidden foreign interrelationship.

3.6 Separateness and the Sabbath

John Barton presents the imitation of God as one of the three models of Old Testament ethics. Imitating God should come naturally to Israel since they believed that they were created in God's image (Gen. 1:26), which according to the writers of the Pentateuch is holiness, righteousness, and justice.⁸²⁵ For instance, following an outline of the priestly laws regulating clean and unclean food, it is said:

I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy (Lev. 11:44).

⁸²⁴ F. C. Fensham. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, 18.

⁸²⁵ J. Barton. *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, 47.

The idea of imitating God is introduced by P in the creation story, wherein God's six day formation of the universe culminates with a day of שבת 'cessation of work', the basis of the institution of Sabbath rest (Gen 1:1-2:2). Balentine comments:

Genesis 1-2 is but the overture to the Sabbath institution, the constitutive vision that understands Sabbath to be rooted in God's cosmic design.⁸²⁶

Since God created in six days and rested on the seventh day, which was blessed and made holy, likewise, mankind is to labour for six days and like God is to rest (Exod. 20:9). Terence Fretheim comments:

Sabbath-keeping is an act of creation-keeping... To keep the Sabbath is to participate in God's intention for the rhythm of creation.⁸²⁷

Furthermore, keeping God's Sabbath holy was meant to ensure that the Temple and the Land, which God had deemed holy, would remain unpolluted and undefiled, and therefore, subject to divine chastisement.⁸²⁸ According to the Law Moses received on Sinai, Sabbath rest is a most crucial part of Ancient Israel's covenant obligation. The fifth commandment is the longest of the ten (Exod. 20:8-11 [E]; Deut. 5:12-15), and the most explicit. Sabbath regulation is referred to in the Hebrew Bible more than twice as frequently as the prohibition against murder, adultery, and theft. As clear as this was made, Ancient Israel never really embraced this tenet, which was meant in part to distinguish them from all other people and their religions. Prior to and following E's Decalogue, P has Moses admonishing the Israelites to keep the Sabbath holy (Exod. 16:23-26; 31:13-16; 35:2-3), and more so in Leviticus and Numbers.⁸²⁹

The Prophets of Judah have much to say about Sabbath violation. For example, Hosea rebukes the people for observing the Sabbath while venerating idols (Hos. 2). Amos reprimands those who yearn for the Sabbath to end, in order to return to business as usual and the exploitation of the poor (Amos 8:4-6). Jeremiah preaches:

But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses (Jer. 17:27).

Surely Jeremiah realized that God's judgement had fallen on Judah:

... of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burnt down. The whole Babylonian army, under the commander of the imperial guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 25:8-10).

⁸²⁶ Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 92.

⁸²⁷ T. E. Fretheim. 'Creator, Creature, and Co-Creation in Genesis 1-2', *Word and World Supplement* 1, 1992, 18.

⁸²⁸ See Exod. 16:23; 20:8-11; Dt. 5:12-15; Lv. 19:3; 23:3.

⁸²⁹ See Lev. 16:31; 19:3, 30; 23:3, 11, 15-16, 32-38; 24:8; 25:2, 4, 6, 8; 26:2, 34-35, 43; Num. 15:32; 28:9-10.

According to Ezekiel keeping the Sabbath holy is a most essential part of the Law, and when violated the wrath of God is evoked. Bernard Gosse points out that Ezekiel connects Sabbath violation to the demise of the Hebrews in the desert (20:13, 20), explaining why only the fugitives' children survived the forty-year wilderness ordeal to take possession of the Land.⁸³⁰ It is said that if it were not for God's mercy and the preservation of his name (v. 22), no one would have survived, for even the children violated the Sabbath (v. 21). Eichrodt comments:

It forms an emphatic reminder that God is the Lord of Time, and that no business, however pressing, must be allowed to keep men from regularly seeking his fellowship; but the joyful character of the day of rest also brings home to the worshipper that his God is a kindly Master, who does not lay on men a yoke too heavy to bear.⁸³¹

Gosse notes that the Sabbath as a means of salvation is mentioned once in Isaiah and in Deutero-Isaiah, but three times in quick succession in Trito-Isaiah (52:2, 4, 6) suggesting that keeping the Sabbath was a major religious concern during the postexilic period:⁸³²

Happy is the man who follows these precepts,
happy the mortal who holds them fast,
who keeps the Sabbath undefiled,
who refrains from all wrong-doing! (Isa. 52:2).⁸³³

Even the eunuchs who observe the Sabbath are now welcomed into the Temple (v. 4) contrary to the Deuteronomic exclusion of men who are castrated from entering the 'assembly of the Lord' (Deut. 23:1):

For these are the words of the Lord:
The eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose to do my will and hold fast to my covenant,
shall receive from me something better than sons and daughters,
a memorial and a name in my own house and within my walls;
I will give them an everlasting name,
a name imperishable for all time (vv. 4-5).

Isaiah 66:23 prophesies that the nations will come to observe the Sabbath as part of the worship of Yahweh, which speaks to Ancient Israel's divine vocation of revealing Yahweh and his Law to the nations.

Not only is keeping the Sabbath holy an imitation of God par excellence, but it harmonizes with the natural order of life that is sustained with a period of rest. Even the land is said to require a twelve month rest every seventh year (Exod. 23:10-12). Balentine understands that the Sabbath rest is a day set apart from the ordinary to the holy, from the mundane to the sublime:

⁸³⁰ B. Gosse. 'Sabbath, Identity and Universalism Go Together after the Return from Exile'. *JSOT* 29, 2005, 363.

⁸³¹ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 133.

⁸³² Gosse, 'Sabbath, Identity and Universalism', 362-63.

⁸³³ *NEB*

But the Sabbath reminds us that by God's grace the everyday is not all there is...
 From this place, in this enchanted world of Sabbath observance, those who
 embrace the invitation to share in what is eternal are wondrously empowered
 to turn 'from the world of creation to the creation of the world'.⁸³⁴

Eichrodt points out that Sabbath observance would have been a distinct mark of separateness of the pious Jew apart from the heathen community from the time of the exilic period to the Second Temple Period.⁸³⁵ This is expressed in Ezekiel:

Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so that they would know that I the Lord made them holy (Ezek. 20:12-13).

Besides the strict observance of Sabbaths, attending the Feasts and giving of firstfruits offerings and tithes in accordance with Mosaic Law were distinguishing practices of the remnant (Ezr. 10:31-9; Neh. 9:14; 10:31-9; 13:15-22).⁸³⁶ In spite of the absence of dietary restrictions in Ezra-Nehemiah and the Prophets, which factor significantly in the laws of clean and unclean (Lev. 18:24-27), it is probable that these restrictions were enforced along with Sabbath observance, and were part of what distinguished the Temple community. Not only did it distinguish the Jews from all other people, but practically speaking, Sabbath observance and dietary regulation made interaction with foreigners virtually impossible. Jews were prohibited from even travelling on the Sabbath:

If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot,
 and keep my holy day free from your own affairs,
 if you call the Sabbath a day of joy
 and the Lord's holy day a day to be honoured,
 if you honour it by not plying your trade,
 not seeking your own interest
 or attending to your own affairs,
 then you shall find your joy in the Lord,
 and I will set you riding on the heights of the earth,
 and your father Jacob's patrimony shall be yours to enjoy;
 the Lord himself has spoken (Isa. 58:13-14).

In light of the importance of Sabbath keeping during the postexilic period, there might be a lesson in Abraham's three-day journey to the region of Moriah and his three-day return to Beersheba, since it would give him just enough time to observe the Sabbath rest upon his arrival home. Although the Sabbath was not instituted until Moses, Genesis 22 could function as a demonstration of the commitment not to travel on the Sabbath so that the commandment could be properly observed.

Sabbath rest was enforced by Nehemiah, who met violators with sure and effective reform (Neh. 9:14; 10:31; 13:15-22). Recognizing the necessity to cease from all work and travel on the Sabbath, as well as the inevitability of God's judgment that

⁸³⁴ Balentine, *Torah's Vision*, 252.

⁸³⁵ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 133.

⁸³⁶ See Exod. 23:14-19; 35:1-3, Lev., Dt. 12:4-6; 15:19-23; 17:13; 26:1-15.

would ensue from violating and defiling the Sabbath, Nehemiah rebukes foreigners for working the winepresses and bringing goods through the gate from sun-down on Friday evening to sun-down on Saturday evening and even more so the Judahite nobles:

What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath (Neh. 13:17-18).

Nehemiah does not indicate if the members of the Temple community violated the Sabbath, but that judgment would come to Jerusalem regardless of who violated the Sabbath rest. Although, Grabbe questions Nehemiah's motive, suggesting that the reformer's objection to bringing goods in on the Sabbath was aimed more at the exclusion of foreigners than at Sabbath violation,⁸³⁷ Williamson also points out that nothing is said about other types of labour that had not ceased on the Sabbath.⁸³⁸ Based on the waywardness of the Temple community, it is likely that they had violated the Sabbath rest. However, as the result of the religious reform begun by Ezra and enforced by Nehemiah, the people of the Temple community swore an oath to obey God's Law, in the particular regard to endogamous marriage and keeping the Sabbath holy:

The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighbouring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—all these now join themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord. We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons. When the neighbouring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day (Neh. 10:28-31).

3.7 Sonship, Separateness, and the *Hagallot*

Martin Hengel points out that the Hebrew term בן or the Aramaic בר, which he numbers at 4,850, is the most common term that represents relationship in the Hebrew Bible.⁸³⁹ It is used in regard to kinship, subordinates, heavenly beings, God's people on the whole or as a chosen individual.⁸⁴⁰ The father/son references made in regard to Yahweh and Israel are metaphorical expressions having no biological implication, as in the case of the deified kings of the Ancient Near East.⁸⁴¹ God expresses his filial relationship to Israel:

Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go so that he may worship me". But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son (Exod.4:21b-23).

John McKenzie indicates that Israel's covenant is based on filial relationship to Yahweh:

⁸³⁷ Grabbe, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 174.

⁸³⁸ Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, n. 15.d, 392.

⁸³⁹ M. Hengel. *The Son of God*. London: SCM Press, 1975, 21.

⁸⁴⁰ See Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 38:7; Ps. 29:1; 89:7.

⁸⁴¹ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 40. See Exod. 4:21b-23; 2 Sam. 7:13-4; Hos. 11:1-3; Isa. 64:8.

The title is applied to the people Israel as a whole... In this use the title is another way of expressing the covenant relationship with Yahweh and Israel and signifies the adoption of Israel by Yahweh.⁸⁴²

More than simply son, Israel is the בְּכֹרִית 'the firstborn' of Yahweh. The biblical sources indicate that although Israel was not the first people to be founded by God, they become his firstborn son in status, simply because he loved them over all other peoples and set them apart for a particular purpose.⁸⁴³ God did not love them because they were righteous or powerful, because they were neither, but it is simply understood that he chose them out of love for them to be a blessing to all the nations. Hosea indicates, however, that Israel had rejected that relationship:

When Israel was a boy, I loved him;
I called my son out of Egypt;
But the more I called, the further they went from me;
they must needs sacrifice to the Baalim
and burn offerings before carved images (Hos. 11:1-2).⁸⁴⁴

This is reiterated by DtrH:

They have acted corruptly toward him; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation. Is this the way you repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you? You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth (Deut. 32:6, 18).

Yet Deutero-Isaiah conveys that God has not disowned them:

I will say to the north, 'Give them up',
and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.
Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from afar,
bring them from the ends of the earth;
bring everyone who is called by my name,
all whom I created, whom I have formed,
all whom I have made for my glory' (Isa. 43:6-7).⁸⁴⁵

As does Trito-Isaiah:

But you are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us
or Israel acknowledge us;
you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your
name (63:16).

The title 'son' is also applied to individuals in the Hebrew Bible:

The title in later usage signifies the devout Israelite, even as an individual person (Ps. 73:15; WS 2:13, 18; 5:5f). Divine adoption in a unique sense, based also upon a covenant and promises, was attributed to the Davidic King (I S 7:14; I Ch 22:10; Ps 2:7; 89:28). Adoption signifies acceptance by Yahweh. His peculiar love and care, and responsibilities and obedience imposed upon Israel, the devout Israelite, or the king.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴² J. L. McKenzie (ed.). 'Son of God', *Dictionary of the Bible*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1965, 830-31.

⁸⁴³ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 37-40.

⁸⁴⁴ *NEB*

⁸⁴⁵ *NEB*

⁸⁴⁶ McKenzie, 'Son of God', 830.

Yahweh's paternal relationship to individuals is first expressed in the story of Israel's forefathers, wherein blessing is transmitted from the father to the son.⁸⁴⁷ Similarly, daughters received blessing from their mother and siblings as is said of Rebekah (Gen. 24:60). Abraham's sonship to Yahweh is assumed from his blessing:

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore (Gen. 22:17).

In this way, Yahweh's 'firstborn sons' are not necessarily the sons who are born first, but late born sons, who are beloved and elected over others to inherit the blessings promised to Abraham. This trend is found in the Patriarch narratives beginning with Isaac, who succeeds his older brother Ishmael, followed by the eleventh son of Jacob, Joseph, who is the beloved son born of his favourite wife Rachel. Levenson understands that the ornamental robe Joseph receives from his father is an expression of 'belovedness', implying that Joseph is elected over his brothers to have firstborn rights. Beyond the Patriarchal narratives, David is chosen over all his older brothers to rule Israel, as is the case with his beloved son, Solomon, who is said to become God's son:

He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son (2 Sam. 7:13-4).

In a structural study of Genesis 22, in which it is assumed that Isaac is actually sacrificed, Seth Kunin understands that he is of natural birth before the attempted (or actual) sacrifice, but as the result of his ordeal he is divinely reborn, becoming the carrier of the divine seed,⁸⁴⁸ thus, becoming the son of God. The problem with this is that Abraham and Isaac cannot carry the divine seed simultaneously.⁸⁴⁹ This is resolved with the death of Sarah (Gen. 23) and Abraham's marriage to Keturah (25:1-6),⁸⁵⁰ whose unspecified ethnicity (perhaps Arabian) and offspring imply that their marriage is bi-racial; through which union Abraham can no longer produce legitimate heirs. Hence, Isaac's redemption in Genesis 22 results in him being more than Abraham's beloved firstborn son, but his successor as the progenitor of Israel, the people whom Yahweh calls, בני בכרי ישראל 'My firstborn son Israel' (Exod.4:22-23).⁸⁵¹

Not long after Israel is established as God's son (Deut. 32:6, 18), the role shifts back to the individual—Israel's Monarch. David, or more likely Solomon, is depicted as God's son by the psalmist:

'You are my son,' he said;

⁸⁴⁷ See Gen. 27:27 wherein Isaac blesses Jacob and 49:1-27, wherein Jacob blesses his sons.

⁸⁴⁸ S. D. Kunin. 'The Death of Isaac: Structuralist Analysis of Genesis 22'. *The Pentateuch*, J. W. Rogerson (ed.). Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, 326.

⁸⁴⁹ Kunin, 'Death of Isaac', 326.

⁸⁵⁰ Kratz, *Composition*, 274. Kratz categorizes Gen. 25: 1-6, 18, 21-34 as a source before or after P, 274.

⁸⁵¹ Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 268. Although there was no consensus to this earlier, Holzinger, *Einleitung*, 6.

‘this day I become your father’ (Ps. 2:7).

Nehemiah recalls that Solomon was indeed loved by God:

...Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all of Israel... (Neh. 13:26b).

Nehemiah’s understanding appears to be derived from DtrH:

Then David comforted Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah ‘beloved of God’ (2 Sam. 12:24-5).

Divine sonship is extended to Solomon’s successors. Fohrer comments:

Just as a father (or his principal wife) could recognize as legitimate the child of a concubine or slave, Yahweh goes beyond the dynastic principle to legitimize each individual king by designating him his son, granting him a share in the sovereignty that is rightfully his as a father.⁸⁵²

George Fohrer points out that Israel’s monarchs’ sonship to Yahweh is expressed in the coronation’s anointing ritual, where the successor is established as משיחו ‘his anointed one’ (Ps. 2:2), emphasizing the successor’s dominance directed against the claims of others.⁸⁵³ Possibly used in coronations beginning with Solomon, the king is depicted as being God’s son through adoption as expressed in Psalm 2:7, a customary legal statement in the Ancient Near East made by the wife at the adoption of a child born to a slave.⁸⁵⁴ Since the king is not God’s biological son, the adoption statement is an appropriate metaphor of the king becoming God’s son in his succession to the throne. Ascribed to Ethan the Ezrahite of the tenth-century, Psalm 89 might refer to Solomon, who will become Yahweh’s firstborn when he acknowledges him as his father:

He will say to me, ‘Thou art my Father, my God,
my God, my Rock and my safe refuge.’
And I will name him my firstborn,
highest among the kings of the earth (Ps. 89:26-7).⁸⁵⁵

As a royal son of God, Israel’s king receives a portion of God’s dominion, property, and heritage, even the nations as his inheritance (2:8-9).

Unfortunately, Solomon fell short by not ‘walking before God in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David [his] father did...’ (1 Kgs. 9:4-5). Most of his successors were no better, except for a few who attempted unsuccessfully in the long term to reverse the waywardness of their predecessors. This resulted in foreign invasion and exile, after which the divine sonship reverted to a non-Jew, King Cyrus of Persia, who is referred to

⁸⁵² G. Fohrer. *History of Israelite Religion*. D. E. Green (tr.). London: SPCK, 1973, 145-46.

⁸⁵³ Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, 146.

⁸⁵⁴ Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, 147.

⁸⁵⁵ NEB

as ‘God’s anointed’ (Isa. 45:1). Yet, after the return and reconstruction of Jerusalem, Trito-Isaiah indicates that the ‘true Israel’ reclaims their status as God’s son:

But now, Lord, thou art our father;
we are the clay, thou the potter,
and all of us are thy handiwork (Isa. 64:8).

Being God’s son no longer meant that Israel would attain sovereignty over the Land of promise, in spite of Haggai’s and Zechariah’s vision of a revived monarchy. They only had to refer back to the oracles of Jeremiah to understand why:

I said, ‘How gladly would I treat you as a son,
giving you a pleasant land,
a patrimony fairer than that of any nation!’
I said, ‘You shall call me Father
and never cease to follow me’ (Jer. 3:19).⁸⁵⁶

Haggai’s approach to socio-religious reform was through the restoration of the Temple and Monarchy, which to him would have corrected Judah’s problems that developed as the result of the absence of both institutions. This might be a case of naiveté since apostasy was also rampant throughout the monarchic period when the Temple was intact. In the fifth-century, Ezra and Nehemiah realized that the survival of the ‘true Israel’ in the form of the tight elite Temple community, as well as Judaism, could only survive and flourish through an adherence to socio-religious separateness. Hence, passing on Israel’s identity as the only beloved son of God to the Temple community would have provided the impetus for solidarity in committing to religious separateness. Certainly, the ‘begottenness’, ‘belovedness’, and ‘chosenness’ afforded Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bestowed on the Temple community would have benefited Ezra and Nehemiah’s reform efforts. The theology of filial relationship was so central to Judaism that it impacted Christianity. Paul preaches that those who are led by the Spirit of God are his sons who receive the Spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:14-5). John tells us:

He who overcomes will inherit all things, and I will be his God and he will be my son (21:7).

3.8 Conclusion:

I conclude that the origin of the ideology of socio-religious separateness in Ancient Israel rests with the Priestly Writer, who took the ancient texts in his keeping and set them in a framework of genealogies, law codes, and narratives, in order to form a didactic on separateness. Yet, I have not ruled out the possibility that the ideology had its roots in the culture from which Abraham emerged. In addition, the aim of P, as well as his successors, was to maintain the holiness of the Temple, the Priesthood, and Land. Yet there could be no more crucial time for the ideology to come to the fore than the Persian

⁸⁵⁶ *NEB*

Period, when Ezra discovered the laxity of adherence to God's Law, particularly in regard to intermingling with foreigners. If we accept this, then it can be said that as late as the mid fifth-century BCE, socio-religious separateness became the ideology of the Jews of the elite Temple community.

Further, it can be said that the most notable of the priestly successors was Ezra, who was either part of the scribal community who revised the Book of the Law of Moses, or as Friedman proposes, was the sole and final redactor of the corpus. In light of the argument that the Book of the Law of Moses, which Ezra imported to Jerusalem was the Pentateuch, it can be argued that the Temple community were indoctrinated not only with the laws, statutes and regulations found in the law codes of the Pentateuch, but with the Patriarchal narratives, which demonstrate how the Jews were to live for a holy God.

Genesis 22 would best function in the fifth-century reforms due to its allusions to separateness, which are apparent in Isaac's succession as Abraham's firstborn heir ahead of Ishmael, whose descendants remain at enmity with Israel, and from whom Israel must always remain apart. Abraham's demonstration of reverence and radical obedience to Yahweh in Genesis 22 is particularly applicable to the situation of the Temple community, since the people are made to commit to the teachings of God's Law, throughout which the tenets of socio-religious separateness are dominant. Since Abraham's demonstration of faithfulness resulted in the founding of the nation of Israel, the Temple stood to regain all that had been lost to them—particularly, the nationhood promised to them in the Abrahamic covenant, if only they would emulate their father Abraham. As the result of Ezra's reform, the Temple community survived as a distinct religious entity in the ethnically diverse culture of Persian Period Judah, and the ideology of socio-religious separateness took hold in Judaism.

Four allusions to socio-religious separateness in Genesis 22 were identified, beginning with the idea that divine testing of God's righteous elect is an essential part of Israel's relationship with him. Since the Temple community underwent a similar test of faith as does Abraham in Chapters 21 and 22, where he is asked to give up his foreign wife and Ishmael and later, to give up Isaac, separateness has as much to do with the interpretation of Genesis 22 than any other issue. This is compounded with the second allusion to separateness discussed above—the repetition of 'your son, your only son'—used in notable places in the narrative indicating that separateness has much to do with the overall message of the story of the testing of Abraham. Since the audience knows that Abraham has another son, a firstborn son nonetheless, it can only be taken that Isaac has displaced him as God's elect for a particular purpose. The election of Isaac and the disinheritance of Ishmael, certainly implicates the separation of the half-brothers.

Separateness of the half-brothers is confirmed when each is promised to be the father of a great nation, Ishmael in Genesis 21 and Isaac in Genesis 22.

The third allusion to separateness is found in the reinforcement of the covenant statement with the introduction of a divine oath. Covenant agreement in itself alludes to separateness in that members of the covenant are distinguished from non-members. Since Isaac is now elected as Abraham's only son and even more important his successor as the carrier of the 'holy seed', it becomes certain that Ishmael and his progeny are not the heirs to the covenant sworn by Yahweh to Abraham; thus, exclusion becomes a matter of separateness.

The last indicator is found in Nahor's genealogy, where his legitimate and illegitimate offspring are distinguished. It is in that genealogy where atypically the future wife of Isaac is identified. Like Sarah was to Abraham, Rebekah is blood related to Isaac, a continuance of the main theme of Genesis that the Nation of Israel is founded on a particular branch of Abraham's progeny elected by God for a particular purpose.

CHAPTER IV REFORM IN THE SECOND TEMPLE COMMUNITY

4.0 Introduction

If the consensus is accepted that the last editorial stage of the Pentateuch was carried out during the Persian Period,⁸⁵⁷ then it follows that both its law codes and narratives would reflect the interests and concerns of the editor/s. The emphasis of the Pentateuch, that God's people are to worship him solely and reverently, indicates that there had been a departure from that most basic theology. Since the exilic and postexilic prophets and reformers vehemently objected to the syncretizing of Yahwism and/or outright apostasy,⁸⁵⁸ while encouraging the people לדרש or לבקש 'to resort to, seek, inquire of the Lord',⁸⁵⁹ as well as 'to revere, honour, stand in awe' of him,⁸⁶⁰ it stands to reason that the catastrophe of the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem and the exile of the city's elite did not change the hearts of the Jews on the whole.

Ninety years after the first exiles returned to the Land to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, their descendants, the clergy and laity of the fifth-century Temple community, were found to have transgressed God's Law (always assuming they had some form of it) by intermarrying with Gentiles referred to in the book of Ezra, עמי הארצות כתועבתיהם 'the peoples of the lands with their abominations' (Ezr. 9:1). Being in direct violation of Mosaic Law, which forbids any relationship with foreigners (Deut. 7:3), some pious members of the community informed Ezra of the situation, whose extreme consternation led to exercise radical reform measures at that time and place. The report included Ammonite and Moabite women, people the Deuteronomist forbade from ever entering the 'assembly of the Lord', because they did not offer hospitality to the Israelites on their way out of Egypt (23:2-9).⁸⁶¹ Even the Hittites and Jebusites, who allied with and served David, were considered to be foreigners (Ezr. 9:1).

Underlying Mosaic Law is the belief that Israel is called by Yahweh to a vocation requiring moral and spiritual excellence. In this way God's servants would maintain a standard of holiness enabling them to function effectively in their vocation first revealed to Abraham—to be a 'blessing to the nations' (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). Although not explicated to the patriarch, Deutero-Isaiah understood that blessing the nations meant being a אור גוים 'light to the Gentiles' the (spiritually) blind (Isa. 42:6-7), that is to say,

⁸⁵⁷ H. Hayes. *Introduction to the Bible*. London: SPCK, 1973, 244-45.

⁸⁵⁸ See Persian Period writings that deal with abominations, idols, unfaithfulness to God - DtrH (Deut. 7:25-6; 4:15-20; 1 Kgs. 7:8; 2 Kgs. 15:8; 17:12; 21:2, 11), 2 Chr. (5:8), Ezra (9:1-3, 11, 14), Ps. 5:15; DI 43:10-12), TI 7:5), Jer. 7:9-10, Ezek. 6:4-5; 15:62, Hag. 2:14, I Zec. 1:2-6, Mal. 2:11.

⁸⁵⁹ See *BDB*, 134, (Ezr. 8:22; Isa. 45:19; Jer. 29:13); *BDB*, 205, (Ezr. 6:21).

⁸⁶⁰ See *BDB*, 431, (Gen. 22:12). See Isa. 45:19; 50:10; 55:6; Jer. 5:22, 24; 10:21; 29:13; Hag. 1:12; Mal. 2:5; 4:2.

⁸⁶¹ J. Blenkinsopp. 'The Social Context of the "Outsider Woman" in Proverbs 1-9'. *Biblica* 72, 1991, 458-59.

revealing the one true God of creation and his Torah to the nations.

At the time of Ezra's arrival, even the priests had not reached that standard of holiness. Beyond the offence of intermarriage, Malachi complains that they accepted blemished and damaged offerings (1:6-14), failed to collect tithes (3:6-12), and worst of all, were guilty of false teaching (2:1-9):

For men hang on the words of the priest and seek knowledge and instruction from him, because he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts. But you have turned aside from that course; you have caused many to stumble with your instruction; you have set at naught the covenant with the Levites, says the Lord of Hosts. So I in my turn shall make you despicable and degraded in the eyes of all the people, inasmuch as you disregard my ways and show partiality in your interpretation of the law (Mal. 2:7-9).

John Bright comments that the lowered morale of the community resulted from disappointment that led to disillusionment, which caused the religious and moral laxity witnessed by Ezra and Nehemiah.⁸⁶² Community cohesiveness was threatened by a schism between the rich and the poor, with some having to mortgage their properties, and even worse, give their children up to servitude to pay taxes to Persia (Neh. 5:1-5)—all in direct violation of God's Law (Lev. 25:35-37, 39-43). With so much disorder, the Temple community might have been on the brink of total collapse. Bright adds:

The danger, in short was real that if the community could not pull itself together, regain its morale, and find direction, it would sooner or later lose its distinctive character, if not disintegrate altogether. Drastic measures were needed, for the community could neither continue in its present ambiguous situation, nor could it re-create the order of the past. Some new path would have to be found if Israel was to survive as a creative entity.⁸⁶³

The prayers of Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9, where it is lamented that they are slaves to Persia, suggests that the reformers feared that the spiritual waywardness of the people would not only cause delay in reclaiming their sovereignty over the Land as promised to their forefathers by God, but it would threaten their very existence as the sanctioned religious entity in the Persian-dominated Israel. After all, it was Artaxerxes who commissioned Ezra to investigate the situation there, which suggests that the king knew of the condition of the Temple community. Therefore, it is no wonder that Ezra imposed swift and seemingly harsh reform measures on those who had married foreign women, which included the threat of excommunication and property confiscation for those who refused to reform. Daniel Smith-Christopher comments:

... the threat to those who do not participate in the community reformation is serious—they are to be banned *h-r-m* (using the strong term of total annihilation from the period of conquest) and forfeit their *rēkūš* (property).⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁶² Bright, *History of Israel*, 362.

⁸⁶³ Bright, *History of Israel*, 362.

⁸⁶⁴ Smith-Christopher, 'Ezra-Nehemiah', 318.

4.1 Terminology of Apostasy and Reform

To begin with, it would be worthwhile to examine the terminology that expresses apostasy and reform in the Hebrew Bible. Surprisingly, however, for the most part the DtrH accounts of the royal reforms and those of Ezra and Nehemiah have few specific terms that denote apostasy and reform. For instance, apostasy defined in the English ‘to defect from one’s faith’,⁸⁶⁵ is represented in the Hebrew Bible with סור ‘to turn aside, apostatize’, although it is used much more in the sense of physically turning aside or departing from a place.⁸⁶⁶ Used in the context of apostasy, God tells Moses on Sinai:

They have סרו ‘turned away’ quickly from what I commanded them and have made a cast idol for themselves (Deut. 9:12),

whilst the Psalmist assures the Lord that:

סרתִי ‘I have not departed’ from your laws... (Ps. 119:102).

Other relevant terms for apostasy might be מרד ‘to rebel’ (Num. 14:9),⁸⁶⁷ חטא ‘to sin’ (Neh. 1:6),⁸⁶⁸ פשע ‘to transgress’ (Jer. 3:13),⁸⁶⁹ and מעל ‘to act unfaithfully and treacherously’, the last of which is closest to the sense of apostasy and used in Ezra-Nehemiah in regard to the Temple community breaking faith with God (Ezr. 10:2, 10; Neh. 1:8; 13:27).⁸⁷⁰

Breaking faith with God generally meant that Yahweh’s elect worshipped other gods alongside or instead of him. Yet, in the context of the fifth-century Temple community, for pious Yahwists it meant mingling with foreigners, which they knew had led Israel to worship foreign gods in the past. It can be said, therefore, that apostasy is expressed in the terminology of idol worship, such as אליל ‘idol’ (Lev. 19:4),⁸⁷¹ ציר ‘large rolling idols’ (26:30);⁸⁷² ציר ‘image’ (Isa. 44:8);⁸⁷³ און ‘idolatry’ (66:3),⁸⁷⁴ אימה ‘object of terror’ (Jer. 50:38);⁸⁷⁵ מפלצת תרפים ‘household idols’ (1 Sam. 15:23);⁸⁷⁶ ממלצת ‘a horror’ (1 Kgs. 15:13),⁸⁷⁷ שקוץ ‘detestable thing’ (2 Chr. 15:8);⁸⁷⁸ סמל ‘image of an idol’ (33:7),⁸⁷⁹ and פסלים ‘images’ (of the sun): (34:7).⁸⁸⁰ Apostasy is also

⁸⁶⁵ *Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1996.

⁸⁶⁶ *BDB*, 693.

⁸⁶⁷ *BDB*, 597.

⁸⁶⁸ *BDB*, 306-7.

⁸⁶⁹ *BDB*, 833.

⁸⁷⁰ *BDB*, 591.

⁸⁷¹ *BDB*, 47.

⁸⁷² *BDB*, 165.

⁸⁷³ *BDB*, 849.

⁸⁷⁴ *BDB*, 19-20.

⁸⁷⁵ *BDB*, 33.

⁸⁷⁶ *BDB*, 1076.

⁸⁷⁷ *BDB*, 814.

⁸⁷⁸ *BDB*, 1055.

⁸⁷⁹ *BDB*, 702.

metaphorically expressed throughout the Hebrew Bible with terms derived from זנה 'whoredom'.⁸⁸¹

And the Lord said to Moses: 'You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon זנה 'prostitute' themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them (Deut. 31:16).

Apostasy in the Hebrew Bible is specifically linked to the terms for 'abomination' or 'detestation', שְׁקוּץ, פְּגוּל, and תּוֹעֵבָה, being most often used in regard to the deities of the Gentile nations, such as דַּגּוֹן 'Dagon' of the Philistines (Jdg. 16:23), מִלְכָּם 'Milcom' of Ammon (Amos 1:15), מֹלֵךְ 'Molech' of Canaan (Jer. 32:35), כְּמוֹשׁ 'Chemosh' of Moab (2 Kgs. 23:13), תַּמְמוּז 'Tammuz' of Mesopotamia (Ezek. 8:14); עֲשֵׂתָרָה 'Astarte' of Ugarit, Canaan, and Egypt (1 Kgs. 11:5, 33), אֲשֵׁרָה 'Asherah' of Canaan (Jdg. 3:7; 1 Kgs. 15:3), and the בְּעֵלִים *baalim* of Canaan and Phoenicia.

Although there is no precise term in Biblical Hebrew for 'reform', it is expressed with the Hebrew terms יָסַר 'to discipline, punish, correct'⁸⁸² and שׁוּב 'to turn back'.⁸⁸³ יָסַר is used once in Job (36:10), but liberally in regard to God's response to Israel's apostasy first expressed in Leviticus:

If after all of this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over (Lev. 26:18).

During the early stages of Israel, divine discipline is retributive, taking the form of agricultural failure and starvation (26:20), and accompanied by the threat of worse reprisals if the people breach their covenant with Yahweh:

And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw from your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into the enemies' hands (26:25).

This form of discipline is apparent in Moses' ad hoc reform of the golden calf cult, in the execution of 3,000 offenders (Exod. 32:27-28), which was followed by a deadly plague, meant to be taken as God's response to idol worship (v. 35). Indeed, it is from this illustration that Israel learns, or should have learned, that Yahweh will not compete with the gods of the Ancient Near East. According to DtrH and the Prophets, Israel did not learn and continued to engage in foreign religious practices; therefore, they suffered at the hands of foreign invasion, destruction and deportation as was experienced in the fall

⁸⁸⁰ BDB, 820.

⁸⁸¹ See Exod. 34:15; Lev. 17:7; 20:5, 6; Deut. 31:16; Jdg. 2:17; 8:27, 33; 2 Kgs. 9:22; 1 Chr. 5:25; 2 Chr. 21:13; Ps. 73:27; 106:39; Isa. 57:3; Jer. 3:2, 9; 13:27; Ezek. 6:9; 16:28; 20:30; 23:11, 27; Hos. 1:2; 4:12; 5:3; 6:10; 9:1; Nah. 3:4.

⁸⁸² BDB, 415-416. Hebrew synonyms for יָסַר, יָכַח 'correct', חָשַׁךְ, נָקַם, and נָכַח 'to punish', do not appear before Leviticus, except for עָוֶן used to denote repenting (Gen. 4:13) and נָקַם to avenge (Exod. 21:20-1).

⁸⁸³ BDB, 997.

of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE and the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE (2 Kgs. 22:16-17; 23:27-24). Hosea anticipates this:

I have come against the rebels to chastise them,
and the peoples shall mass against them
in hordes for their two deeds of shame (Hos. 10:10).⁸⁸⁴

The threat became reality for Judah:

The Lord had done what he planned to do,
he has fulfilled his word,
which he decreed long ago.
He has overthrown you without pity,
he has let the enemy gloat over you,
he has exalted the horn of your foes (Lam. 2:17).⁸⁸⁵

As Israel matures, God's discipline evolves from foreign assault and domination, which Israel experienced intermittently from the period of the Judges to the end of the monarchic period, to instruction in the Torah, which apparently began in one's youth through memorization:

I will praise you with an upright heart
as I learn you righteous laws. (Ps. 119:7-8).

I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.
Praise be to you, O Lord;
teach me your decrees (vv. 11-12).

This apparent shift in discipline is marked by DtrH, after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, during Josiah's reign, when the 'Book of the Covenant' is discovered (2 Kgs. 22:8-23:3). Weinfeld understands that Josiah's "Bible" was a version of Deuteronomy (4:44-26:68),⁸⁸⁶ wherein is outlined Israel's obligation to Yahweh for delivering them from Egyptian bondage (4-9). The very core of this version is that Israel is obligated to love their God with all their being, that is to say, if they are to reap the blessings promised to them in the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 10:12-13). In fact, they live under a curse if they do not fulfil the covenant stipulations. For instance, Moses declares:

The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess... the Lord will cause you to be defeated by your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven. Your carcasses will be food for all birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away... A people you do not know will eat what your land and labour produce, and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days (Deut. 28:21-33).

John Bright comments:

⁸⁸⁴ *NEB*

⁸⁸⁵ *NEB*

⁸⁸⁶ Weinfeld's claim is supported by the fact that Josiah disposed of pagan shrines and paraphernalia by burning them (2 Kgs. 23:4), in accordance with the directive unique to Deuteronomy (7:5, 25). See 'Deuteronomy', 171.

Deuteronomy places the nation's very existence under the stipulations of the covenant. It knows nothing of unconditional promises! Even the promise of the land is laid under a warning and a threat.⁸⁸⁷

Regardless, Judah's propensity to worship idols was not curbed, perhaps because as Habakkuk protested, their punishment had not been proportionate to the degree of wickedness that had gone unpunished for far too long. The prophet cries for justice:

How long, O Lord, have I cried to thee, unanswered?
I cry, 'Violence!', but thou dost not save.
Why dost thou let me see such misery,
why countenance wrongdoing? (Hab. 1:1-3).

God's response to Habakkuk is immediate and grave:

Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honour...they fly like a vulture swooping down to devour; they all come bent on violence (vv. 5-8).

As the resistance to obeying God's Law persists with Jehoahaz's successors, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, God's discipline revisits Judah once again with brutality on a grand scale with the Babylonian invasion of Judah and the deportation of their nobles and religious elite (23:31ff). While in exile, this sensibility was expressed by the psalmist:

Happy the man whom thou dost תִּסְרְנוּ [instruct], O Lord,
and teach out of your law,
giving him respite from adversity
until a pit is dug for the wicked (Ps. 94:12-13).⁸⁸⁸

It has to be said at this point that Jeremiah considered Judah's banishment to Babylon as God's means of reforming Judah. While grieving over God's means of discipline, the writer of the book of Lamentations understands that it is a manifestation of Yahweh's compassion:

He may punish cruelly, yet he will have compassion
in fullness of his love;
he does not willingly afflict
or punish any mortal man (Lam. 3:22-33).

It was always understood by the biblical writers that the objective of God's discipline is that Israel repents, which is expressed with the term שׁוּב 'to return' in the sense of turning back to God and seeking him penitently. Surprisingly, שׁוּב is not found in the Pentateuch or Ezra-Nehemiah, at least not in the context of Israel repenting to God.⁸⁸⁹ שׁוּב first appears in the Hebrew Bible in Solomon's prayer of repentance, in which he anticipates the need for his subjects to repent in anticipation of foreign invasion

⁸⁸⁷ J. Bright. *Covenant and Promise*. London: SCM Press, 1977, 129.

⁸⁸⁸ *NEB*

⁸⁸⁹ See 1 Kgs. 8:33, 48; 2 Chr. 15:4; 30:9; Job. 22:23; Ps. 51:15; Isa. 10:21; Jer. 3:7; Hos. 5:4; 6:1; 7:10; 14:3; Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11.

due to Israel's apostasy (1 Kgs. 8:47). The term is used again in regard to Jeroboam, of whom it is said he לא-שב 'did not repent' (13:33). Jeremiah uses נחם:

After I strayed, נחמתי [I repented] (Jer. 31:19).

Yet, remarkably there are no terms in Ezra and Nehemiah that denote reform, admonishment or repentance, in spite of their overall relevance to reform, with a possible exception in Ezra—חשך 'to punish':⁸⁹⁰

...you have חשכת [punished] us less than our sins deserve and given us a remnant like this (9:13b).

However, reform in Ezra-Nehemiah appears to be rooted in the term למד 'to teach' (7:10),⁸⁹¹ ידע 'to instruct' (7:25),⁸⁹² and בין 'teach, make understood' (Neh. 8:9).⁸⁹³ Yet, since the objective of reform in Ezra-Nehemiah is that the Jews remain separate from foreigners, בדל 'to separate'⁸⁹⁴ (Ezr. 9:1; 10:11; Neh. 9:2; 10:29) would best represent reform at that time and place. Ezra and Nehemiah know from the Book of the Law how the פליטה 'remnant' (Ezr. 9:13-14) or זרע ישראל 'seed of Israel' are to be holy [separate] for a holy God (Neh. 9:2):

You shall be holy to me; because I, the Lord, am holy, and ואבדל [I have set you apart] from the nations to be my own (Lev. 20:26).

It goes without saying that Genesis 22 offers nothing in regard to terms that denote apostasy and reform; yet, the antithesis of apostasy and the objective of reform is profoundly demonstrated in the story of Abraham's testing—that God's servants reverence him exclusively and obey his directives. In this way, the Aqedah would have been more inspirational than any other biblical narrative for those in the fifth-century Temple community, who sincerely wanted to repent. Although devoid of terminology that expresses apostasy and reform, it can be said that Genesis 22 would have been a most effective catalyst in Ezra's reform of the apostate elders, priests and Levites.

4.2 The Royal Reforms

The Persian Period would not be the first era when the Jews had become apostate, since the biblical writers of the period of the Judges of Israel to the monarchic period indicate that Israel had engaged with Gentiles and venerated the deities of the indigenous population and the neighbouring nations. Soggin points out that Yahweh was worshipped along with foreign gods even at Solomon's Temple, where vessels were dedicated to

⁸⁹⁰ BDB, 362.

⁸⁹¹ BDB, 540.

⁸⁹² BDB, 1095.

⁸⁹³ BDB, 106.

⁸⁹⁴ BDB, 95.

Baal, Asherah and the stars (2 Kgs. 23:4).⁸⁹⁵ In spite of the efforts of the Prophets and reformers of Yahwism, it cannot be said that Yahweh was embraced as ‘the God of Israel’ by the majority of Israelites at any one time and place in the Land.⁸⁹⁶

Furthermore, it cannot be said that Ezra’s efforts were the first attempt at socio-religious reform, for DtrH reports that there were a few faithful Monarchs of Israel and Judah who took some drastic reformatory measures. The first attempt at reform was by King Asa of Judah (910-869 BCE), who is said to have expelled all the male shrine prostitutes (1 Kgs. 15:12). Asa even deposed his queen mother for having an Asherah pole, which he burnt down with all the others in the land (15:13). The Chronicler adds that after Asa removed the idols from Judah and Benjamin and the towns he captured in Ephraim, he assembled all the people in order for them to enter into a covenant to ‘seek the Lord...with all their heart and soul’ (2 Chr. 15:8, 12-15). He is one of a few monarchs who is not condemned for apostasy, as is the case with his son and successor Jehoshaphat, of whom it is said that although he continued in his father’s steps to rid the land of male prostitutes, and ‘did what was right in the sight of the Lord’, he made no effort to remove the high places (1 Kgs. 22:43-46).

A century later, a major reform movement was begun by the Prophet Elijah in the Northern Kingdom with the aid of his successor Elisha and newly-anointed King of Israel, Jehu, who waged a bloody campaign against Baalism, the royal cult of King Ahab and his queen Jezebel, (1 Kgs. 19:16), which was imported to Judah by their daughter Athaliah (1 Kgs. 18:18 - 2 Kgs. 9). This apparently is a main concern of DtrH, given that fourteen chapters are devoted to the eradication of Baalism from Israel. Although Jehu is responsible for destroying the house of Ahab (10:28), DtrH indicates that he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam I (vv. 29-31), possibly referring to support of the bull-calf shrines left in Bethel and Dan by King Jeroboam I a century before. It was Jeroboam’s intent to discourage the people from making pilgrimages to the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kgs. 12:25-33), which for DtrH violated God’s plan that all Israelites worship in one place (Deut. 12:5). The same is said of Jehu’s son and successor Jehoahaz, which according to DtrH resulted in the Northern Kingdom becoming a vassal state of King Hazael of Aram and his son Ben-Hadad (2 Kgs. 13:3). When the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians, DtrH blames the seditious actions of King Hoshea, who violated his vassal treaty with Assyrian King Shalmaneser (17:2-6). Even more so, DtrH blames the nation’s spiritual wickedness for the fall of the Northern Kingdom:

All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They

⁸⁹⁵ Soggin, *Israel in the Biblical Period*, 43-44.

⁸⁹⁶ Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, 21.

worshipped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced (vv. 7-8).

Following the northern campaign against the Baal cult, King Hezekiah of Judah (715-686) destroyed the high places, which apparently had been dedicated to Assyrian deities (2 Kgs. 18:4; 2 Chr. 31). Yet, it is uncertain if his objective was truly to exact religious reform of the high places since it coincides with his defiance of Assyrian suzerainty (2 Kgs. 18:7).⁸⁹⁷ Whatever the case, his efforts had no impact on his son and successor, Manasseh, who is said to have reversed his father's reform accomplishments (21:3). In fact, DtrH condemns Manasseh as being the most wicked king of them all, even more evil than the Amorites due to shedding innocent blood, an allusion to child sacrifice (vv. 6, 16). Yet, it is said that his evil influence on Judah was counteracted by his son and successor Josiah, who implemented comprehensive reforms in the Land (2 Kgs. 23; 2 Chr. 34). Predictably, his achievements were reversed by his successors, which according to DtrH resulted in the fall of Judah (2 Kgs. 25). Mendenhall comments that Josiah's reform accomplishments were readily reversed since they were politically motivated and purely meant to expunge Assyrian culture from Israel as a means to consolidate the nation.⁸⁹⁸ Whatever the case, he rightly asserts:

Political reforms can only establish sanctions to alter external behaviour.⁸⁹⁹

It must be said, that Josiah's tolerance of Molech worship with its practice of child sacrifice that was evidently taking place just below the Temple Mount in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, contradicts the righteous persona granted to him by DtrH. That his moral character should have done away with the forbidden cult, even before reading the Book of the Covenant and receiving Huldah's oracle of the dire consequences of Judah's apostasy (22:11-18), calls his motivation for religious reform into question. James Newsome suggests that he was not religiously motivated in destroying the Molech shrines, but merely 'twisting the tail of that old tiger, Assyria'.⁹⁰⁰ That Josiah originally turned a blind eye to the pagan activity, suggests that child sacrifice was customary at that time and perhaps acceptable to the king.⁹⁰¹ Predictably, Josiah's successors reversed his reform measures, which led to the Babylonian assault and deportations (2 Kgs. 24-25). Jeremiah doubts Judah's sincerity on the whole:

'I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and

⁸⁹⁷ L. K. Handy. 'Hezekiah's Unlikely Reform'. *VT* 100, 1988, 111-15.

⁸⁹⁸ Mendenhall, *Faith and History*, 158.

⁸⁹⁹ Mendenhall, *Faith and History*, 173.

⁹⁰⁰ J. D. Newsome, Jr. *By the Waters of Babylon: An Introduction to the History and Theology of the Exile*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980, 31.

⁹⁰¹ On Molech worship see J. Day. *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*. JSOTS 265, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002, 213.

committed adultery... In spite of all of this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretence', declares the Lord (Jer. 3:8, 10).

4.3 Ezra's Reform Movement

Based on the lack of a long-term success of the royal reforms, in which the method was to destroy the foreign cults in the Land, Ezra's approach was to rid the Temple community of foreign relations so as to avoid the temptation to worship their foreign gods. Ezra's belief that the survival of God's 'holy seed' depended on living apart from all foreign people, even if that meant their own wives and children, impelled him to such extreme measures. After the 'cultural cleansing', Ezra introduced the Book of the Law—the Pentateuch, with its commandments, statutes, and regulations that governed every aspect of their lives, and surely the stories of their forefathers, who remained faithful to the God of Israel by keeping themselves separate from the people of the nations.

It was at this time that the sacred writings Ezra imported to Judah became 'holy writ', remaining central to the religious life of the Temple community and devout Jews dispersed throughout the Land and the Diaspora from that time forward. It would be from those scriptures that the Jews would accept the theological development introduced in Genesis 22 (meritorious theology), in which Israel on the whole could no longer be inevitably considered Yahweh's servants, but as the exilic prophet acknowledged that only those who do not forsake the Lord by worshipping idols will be his blessed servants (Isa. 65:11-17). Trito-Isaiah declares:

These are the words of the Lord:
 'as there is new wine in a cluster of grapes
 and men say, 'Do not destroy it; there is a blessing in it',
 so will I do for my servants sake:
 I will not destroy the whole nation.
 I will give Jacob children to come after him
 and Judah heirs who shall possess my mountains;
 my chosen shall inherit them
 and my servants shall live there' (65:8-9).⁹⁰²

This is easily applicable to the survivors of the exile, the reformed remnant of the Temple community, who after repenting swore an oath to serve Yahweh, primarily by living apart from foreigners, marrying endogamously, strictly observing the Sabbath and tithing (Neh. 9:38-10:39).

4.4 The Issue of Foreignness in Ezra-Nehemiah

What constitutes being 'foreign' for Ezra and Nehemiah appears to fall into three categories; one, Jews who were not descended from the Babylonian exiles (Ezr. 2; Neh.

⁹⁰² NEB

7:6-65); two, Samaritan Jews who were interbred with Assyrians who were relocated to the Northern Kingdom after its fall (2 Kgs. 17:24); and three, all non-Jews from the land and neighbouring nations, even those married into Jewish families (Ezr. 9:1). The common denominator of all three categories was that they were thought by devout Yahwists to impoverish and defile the זרע הקודש 'holy seed' (Ezr. 9:2; Neh. 9:2). This is expressed by this postexilic psalmist:

Deliver me and rescue me
from the hands of foreigners
whose mouths are full of lies,
whose right hands are deceitful.
Then our sons in their youth
will be like well-nurtured plants,
and our daughters will be like pillars
carved to adorn a palace.
Our barns will be filled
with every provision.
Our sheep will increase by thousands,
by tens of thousands in our fields;
our oxen will draw heavy loads.
There will be no breaching of walls,
no going into captivity,
no cry of distress in our streets (Ps. 144:11-14).

Whether foreignness for Ezra and Nehemiah was a matter of ethnicity, religion, class, or all of these combined is not exactly certain. At least it is certain from Ezra-Nehemiah that (as Grabbe points out) all Judahites who were not descended from the exiles were considered to be foreign.⁹⁰³ Therefore, although Ezra makes a sharp distinction between 'Israel' from the 'people of the land/s', they might all in fact be Judahites.⁹⁰⁴ For instance, the absence of any mention of the Jews who were left behind in the Judean hills to tend the vineyards during the exile (2 Kgs. 25:12) suggests that they were rejected by the Temple leadership. Since there is no indication that these farmers supported the exiles in the struggle against the Samaritan opposition to rebuild the Temple and city walls from the time of Cyrus to Darius (Ezr. 4:1-5), it is likely that they were considered to be no better than the Samaritans, and therefore, foreign, thereby widening the gap between the elite Temple community and all other Jews in Israel and the Diaspora.

Then again, foreignness had to do with being Samaritan, those considered to be the יצר יהודה 'adversaries of Judah' (Ezr. 4:1, 4). Although they claimed to worship Yahweh, they were considered by Judah to be half-breeds, who had a long history of idol worship, and never considered to be 'true Israelites'. Conflict with foreigners escalated during the reconstruction period when Samaritan officials and Arabs tried to sabotage the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezr. 4-5) and the walls (Neh. 6). More will be said on the

⁹⁰³ Grabbe, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 174.

⁹⁰⁴ L. L. Grabbe. *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* London: T&T Clark, 2007, 19.

Samaritans below in regard to the competition between the Jerusalem Temple and the northern shrines.

The most obvious group of foreigners are the wives and their offspring from the list of indigenous non-Jews and Gentile nations mentioned by Ezra's informants (Ezr. 9:1). Accepting foreign wives in the Temple community would not only cause economic disadvantage, such as would be the case with inheritance when property would end up in the hands of a foreign wife, but in the cultic sense, as Blenkinsopp points out, have a defiling effect on the Temple and the Land.⁹⁰⁵ In the worst-case scenario, if the father was a priest, his son from an exogamous marriage could claim his rights to the priesthood. As intermediaries between Yahweh and the people, priests had to be careful in their marriages, as well as other aspects of their lives, and that what was permissible for the laity, was not always allowed the priests.⁹⁰⁶

Levirate marriage law, in which a deceased brother's wife was taken in marriage by a brother-in-law, was meant to prevent access to the priesthood and the economic privileges that came with the office to non-priestly heirs, which certainly included foreigners.⁹⁰⁷ Therefore, if a foreign wife outlived her priestly husband, she would have the right to marry his brother and their offspring could again claim his right to the priestly office (Lev. 22:12-13).⁹⁰⁸ In light of these implications, the harshness of Ezra's threat to excommunicate and confiscate property of the men who refuse to divorce their foreign wives becomes understandable. Thus, it would be better for the men to exile their foreign women and children than to be exiled themselves. Blenkinsopp concludes that Persian social customs encouraged endogamy for the sake of preserving the material patrimony of the family; therefore, Ezra's mandate that the men divorce their foreign wives would not have been opposed by Persia.⁹⁰⁹

Although it is not explicated, having married foreign women with detestable practices suggests that the elders, priests and Levites had involvements in the religions of their foreign wives. This would not be inconceivable, since as Nehemiah warns:

Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned?
... He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even
he was led into sin by foreign women (Neh. 13:26).

Since Solomon had participated in cults that practised child sacrifice, תועבתיהם 'their detestable practices' might include child sacrifice, which was customary in the cultures of their foreign wives, particularly the women from Moab and Ammon (Ezr. 9:2).

⁹⁰⁵ Blenkinsopp, 'The Social Context of the "Outsider Woman" in Proverbs 1-9', 468.

⁹⁰⁶ A. J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 173.

⁹⁰⁷ Blenkinsopp, 'The Social Context of the "Outsider Woman" in Proverbs 1-9', 470.

⁹⁰⁸ Blenkinsopp, 'The Social Context of the "Outsider Woman" in Proverbs 1-9', 469-70.

⁹⁰⁹ Blenkinsopp, 'The Social Context of the "Outsider Woman" in Proverbs 1-9', 473.

Although it is hard to comprehend that even the priests participated in the child sacrifice, according to DtrH, children were sacrificed during the divided monarchic period in Jerusalem, just below the Temple Mount in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, with the full knowledge of the chief priests.⁹¹⁰ As mentioned above, Jeremiah and Ezekiel protest against the practice, as does Trito-Isaiah,⁹¹¹ which indicates that as late as the exilic and postexilic periods, children were being sacrificed by Judahites.

Besides the religious ramifications of marrying foreign women, McNutt points out that there would have been class and economic considerations as well, since foreign women were able to inherit their husband's family's land holdings.⁹¹² The most threatening aspect of the mixed marriages is that the offspring would stand to inherit land that had been owned by Jewish families for centuries.⁹¹³ It was the intention of the Israelites never to sell their land to non-Israelites. In fact, the law of the year of Jubilee was created so that if any property had been leased out or transferred to someone outside of the family, it would have to be returned to the original land owner on the forty-ninth year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:10).

4.5 Religious Parties in the Persian Period

Morton Smith points out that syncretism of Yahwism was brought into Babylon by the deportations and continued to flourish there, where it can be said a 'syncretized Yahwism' party developed.⁹¹⁴ Further, it is evident from Ezekiel's witness of women venerating the Babylonian deity Tammuz and bowing down to the sun at the Jerusalem Temple (Ezek. 8:14)⁹¹⁵ that the Babylonian occupation in Judah influenced the Jews left behind during the exile, who had already syncretized Yahwism with the religious practices of the Canaanites. It is likely then that Ezra returned to find not only Canaanite Baal cults flourishing in Judah, but the ones he shunned in Babylonian. Therefore, it can be understood that it was not just the Temple community in Jerusalem who were in need of religious reform, but Jews throughout the dispersion, who incorporated the religious practices and beliefs of the indigenous people into an already syncretized form of Yahwism. For instance, Jeremiah encountered Jewish fugitives in Egypt, who were worshipping the *מלכת השמים* 'Queen of the Heavens' in defiance of his admonishment to abstain from such idolatry (Jer. 7:18). Given the extent of syncretization of Yahwism

⁹¹⁰ See 2 Kgs. 21:6; 23:10.

⁹¹¹ See page 9.

⁹¹² McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 203.

⁹¹³ Smith-Christopher, 'Ezra-Nehemiah', 318.

⁹¹⁴ Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, 62.

⁹¹⁵ Dalley, *Legacy*, 78. The women were following a Babylonian tradition in which the people would grieve over the deity in his seasonal descent to the underworld.

throughout the Diaspora, socio-religious reform would have been most crucial to the survival and standardization of monotheistic Judaism. Furthermore, influences from western cultures were filtering into Yehud, perhaps thought to be even more threatening and enduring to the pious Yahwists, as in the case with Hellenism. Grabbe mentions that long before the second-century efforts to purify Judaism of Hellenism, Judah was exposed to it from trade relations with Greece.⁹¹⁶

Besides the syncretized Yahwists (what will be called the ‘syncretist’ party), Smith points out that pious Yahwists were developing alongside them the ‘Yahweh only’ party,⁹¹⁷ whom Mulder argues originated from the Deuteronomist movement during the Josian reforms before being deported to Babylon.⁹¹⁸ Blenkinsopp understands that the ‘Yahweh only’ party would have developed during the Babylonian Diaspora, in response to competition with the chief god Marduk, who was believed to have claimed, ‘I am, and there is none besides me’ (Isa. 47:10).⁹¹⁹ From that time forward into the Persian Period, the God of Israel’s claim, ‘I am, and there is none besides me’, becomes the most characteristic feature of Judaism.⁹²⁰

McConville describes the postexilic ‘Yahweh only’ party as ‘exclusivist in particular, anti-Samaritan, anti-eschatological and pro-Persia’.⁹²¹ These righteous Jews were the ones responsible for the scriptures, which were purposed to teach Yahweh worshippers what they should do and how to do it better.⁹²² They deserve the pre-eminence they have received in Jewish Orthodoxy for preserving monotheistic Judaism through producing and editing the literature of most of the books that comprise the Hebrew Bible.⁹²³ Nehemiah alludes to belonging to the ‘Yahweh only’ party and Smith places him at the head of it (2:9; 5:8).⁹²⁴ Like others of that elite group in Babylon, he gained favour and high position in the Persian court,⁹²⁵ as did Ezra, which afforded the priestly scribe the royal commission to enforce the Law of God west of the Euphrates River, as well as the opportunity to promote monotheistic Yahwism.

As soon as Ezra arrives in Jerusalem, he is informed of the waywardness of the clergy (Ezr. 9:1). His informants are called השרים ‘the officials’, plausibly members of the ‘Yahweh only’ party. Since there is no indication that Eliashib or any other high

⁹¹⁶ Grabbe, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 181.

⁹¹⁷ Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, 11, 61.

⁹¹⁸ M. J. Mulder. ‘Solomon’s Temple and the YHWH’s Exclusivity’. *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament*. Leiden: E J. Brill, 1989, 56.

⁹¹⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Age of the Exile*, 429.

⁹²⁰ Blenkinsopp, *Age of the Exile*, 429.

⁹²¹ McConville, ‘Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy’, 205.

⁹²² Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, 11.

⁹²³ Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, 62.

⁹²⁴ Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, 98.

⁹²⁵ Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, 62.

priest participated in the reform movement in any way, it might be that he was amongst the ‘syncretized party’ and resistant to the reform movement. Since the elders, priests and Levites were culpable of marrying foreign wives, they could also have been members of the ‘syncretized’ party, which makes their surrender to Ezra’s reform measures remarkable.

It is unknowable which party the high priest belonged to at that time, or who he was, since Ezra avoids mentioning one. Nehemiah complains about the high priest Eliashib’s son’s exogamous marriage, which assumes that he was in office during Nehemiah’s second trip to Jerusalem. Yet Koch proposes one other possibility, which is that Ezra took over the role of the high priest since he appears to be officiating at the Feasts.⁹²⁶ This can be based on I Esdras, where as mentioned above is emphasized that Ezra was the high priest (I Esd. 9:39-40).⁹²⁷

4.6 Competition with the Northern Shrines

The issue of competition between the Jerusalem Temple and the northern shrines of Gerizim and Bethel factor into the need for reform during the Persian Period. If the Jerusalem Temple was not established as the centralized place of worship for all of Israel, as well as Judaism reformed and standardized, that lack of unity would always be a threat to the security and survival of the Temple community and the faith. While life in Judah under Persian rule could have made for peaceful and prosperous living conditions from the time of the first return, since Persia supported the rebuilding efforts, the reality was that the exiles found themselves in conflict with those left behind in the deportations.

Kalimi understands that the Temple community were frightened by the existence of the Gerizim shrine.⁹²⁸ It can be taken that their fear would be based on the potential threat of Persia relocating their administration centre from the Jerusalem Temple to the Samaritan shrine due to the conflict over the rebuilding of the Temple and city walls. It is recalled in Ezra that condemning letters sent to the Persian kings by the Samaritan officials undermined the rebuilding of the Temple until Haggai pressured the leaders to resume in the face of violent opposition (Ezr. 4-5). Although not explicated, the plausible intention of these Samaritans was to have Persia’s administration relocated to Samaria, where it had been during the Babylonian domination.

The Shechem shrine on Mount Gerizim would hold significant cultic importance

⁹²⁶ Koch, ‘Ezra and the Origins of Judaism’, 190-93.

⁹²⁷ See page 58.

⁹²⁸ Kalimi, ‘Zion or Gerizim?’ 442-43.

to the Samaritans due to its association with Abraham, whose first destination in Canaan was the great tree of Moreh at Shechem (Gen. 12:6), where he first receives the promise of blessings of nationhood, renown and security (vv. 2-3). It is also the destination of Joshua and the Israelites in their conquest of the Land and the first residence of the ten tribes of Israel where they are solemnly blessed (Deut. 11:29; 27:12), as well as its status as a Levitical city and a city of refuge (Lev. 25:33; Num. 35:6-32).

During the period of the Judges of Israel, Shechem is said to be the *טבור* 'highest part, centre, navel' of the Land (Jdg. 9:37).⁹²⁹ To the Canaanites, it had been their holy mountain, the place of intercommunication between God and man, and was undoubtedly for that reason supplanted by the Israelites.⁹³⁰ Wright recalls that Abimelech was made King of Israel in Shechem (Jdg. 9:6), and Rehoboam would have been as well had he not lost favour with the people for his lack of diplomacy (1 Kgs. 12).⁹³¹ Due to all of this, the Shechem shrine was considered by the Temple community to be a serious competitor for the central place of worship for all of Israel. Although it is never said that a temple had been built there, it is evident that there was some form of a shrine on Mount Gerizim.

Equal to the Shechem shrine on Mount Gerizim is the Bethel shrine, deriving its importance as a cultic centre from its association with Abraham (Gen. 12:8) and Jacob, who named the place after his mystical dream and built a pillar (28:19; 35:14-15). Later it became the central shrine of the twelve tribes of Israel (Jdg. 20:1, 18; 21:5, 8), and the place where the Ark of the Covenant had been housed at one time (20:27-28).⁹³² It was, also, part of the tri-city circuit (Bethel-Gilgal-Mizpah), where Samuel ministered as a judge over Israel (1 Sam. 7:16), and on one occasion he assembled Israel to fast, confess and sacrifice to God at that site (1 Sam. 7:5-6, 9-10; 10:17).⁹³³ There is no material evidence that a temple existed in Bethel apart from its name meaning 'House of God',⁹³⁴ however, Kraus points out that since Jeroboam put icons at Bethel and Dan, temples already existed at those sites.⁹³⁵

As Bethel was an important cultic centre for Israel, the nearby city of Mizpah was an important political centre after the fall of Jerusalem, replacing it as the administrative centre and residence of the Babylonian-appointed governor.⁹³⁶ Although Jerusalem was destroyed, Blenkinsopp points out that no evidence has been found to show that Bethel

⁹²⁹ *BDB*, 371.

⁹³⁰ G. R. H. Wright. 'Mythology of Pre-Israelite Shechem'. *VT* 20, 1970, 79.

⁹³¹ Wright, 'Mythology of Pre-Israelite Shechem', 81.

⁹³² Kraus, *Worship*, 146-47.

⁹³³ J. Blenkinsopp. 'The Judaeen Priesthood during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods: A Hypothetical Reconstruction'. *CBQ* 60.1, 2006, 29-30.

⁹³⁴ Kraus, *Worship*, 148.

⁹³⁵ Kraus, *Worship*, 149.

⁹³⁶ Blenkinsopp, 'Judaeen Priesthood', 27.

and Mizpah suffered ruin.⁹³⁷ However, based on archaeological evidence, there was a changeover in Mizpah from a border fortress to a prosperous administration centre.⁹³⁸ Since the Bethel shrine was in close proximity to Mizpah, it would have been the most likely religious centre north of Jerusalem.⁹³⁹ This being the case, fugitives from Judah in the wake of the Babylonian invasion would naturally have fled there given the prominence of the shrine and the opportunity to prosper. Kraus comments that this had been the case after the Assyrian assault in 722 BCE, when Bethel became the favoured shrine for northern pilgrims, which he bases on Amos 4:4:⁹⁴⁰

Go to Bethel and sin;
go to Gilgal and sin yet more.
Bring your sacrifices every morning,
your tithes every three years.

Bethel would have been the natural place to re-establish the cultic centre in the absence of the Jerusalem Temple, even though as Ackroyd argues, worship continued in Judah during the exile. He bases this on Jeremiah 41,⁹⁴¹ where it is said that 80 men made a pilgrimage from Samaria to offer grain and incense on Mount Zion.⁹⁴² Seventy men out of the 80 are murdered by the same assassins of the Babylonian-appointed governor Gedaliah, with the remaining ten surviving by bribing the assassins (41:4-8). Given that level of danger, it is unlikely that many Bethelites strayed from their own shrine during the exilic period. This lament might substantiate this:

The approaches to Zion mourn, for no pilgrims attend her sacred feasts... (Lam. 1:4).

It can be said that Bethel remained intact during the postexilic period based on the report that descendants of exiled Bethelites returned to claim their ancestral property (Ezr. 2:28; Neh. 7:32; 11:31). Cause for concern could have been that the Bethelite exiles might, out of convenience, sacrifice at the Bethel shrine. In light of the backsliding Nehemiah refers to in Chapter 13, it is plausible that they too could have compromised their position that the Jerusalem Temple is the only place where Israel is to sacrifice to Yahweh.

There would be no suspicion of competition between the Bethel and Jerusalem shrines during the Persian Period if there had not been the socio-political conflicts reported in Ezra-Nehemiah. Conflict began in the early reconstruction period, when Persian-appointed officials Bishlam, Mithredath and Samaritan leader Tabeel sabotaged the rebuilding of the Temple by writing to Artaxerxes accusing Zerubbabel of rebelling against the king in the worst possible way (Ezr. 4:7):

⁹³⁷ Blenkinsopp, 'Judaean Priesthood', 27.

⁹³⁸ Blenkinsopp, 'Judaean Priesthood', 28.

⁹³⁹ Blenkinsopp, 'The Age of the Exile', 426.

⁹⁴⁰ Kraus, *Worship*, 152.

⁹⁴¹ Alibert, *Exile*, 321. He attributes this to whom he refers to as JerD2 (545-540 BCE).

⁹⁴² Ackroyd, *Exile*, 25.

The king should know that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations. Furthermore, the king should know that if the city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and the royal revenues will suffer.

The conflict continued at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah with Sanballat the Horonite, Geshem the Edomite, Tobiah the Ammonite, with unnamed Arabs and men from Ashdod, who attempted to thwart Nehemiah's rebuilding of the city walls by threatening him with violence (Neh. 4). Nehemiah deals with the conflict not only by resisting their threats and arming the builders, but also, as Jacob Myers suggests, he reminds the exiles that the Ammonites and Moabites had always been enemies of Israel (13:1-2).⁹⁴³

...no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them (Num. 21:23-22:11).

Certainly, the Samaritans resented Persia relocating the administration centre to Jerusalem, after having prospered from the Babylonian administration centre in Samaria from the time of the exile. By slandering the Judahites (Ezr. 4-5), the Samaritan conspirators hoped to win over Persia's confidence, so that they would relocate their administration centre back to Samaria.

Another competitive edge of the Bethel Shrine is that the Bethelites embraced the Abraham tradition (Eze. 33:24), which might have been far less demanding than the requirements of Mosaic Law imposed on the Temple community by Ezra and Nehemiah. Based on the unconditional promise of nationhood in the Abraham tradition originating from his encounter with God at Bethel (Gen. 12:5), the shrine would be an attractive alternative to the Jerusalem Temple, for the Judahites who found the Temple reform measures intolerable.

Not only would the competition between the northern shrines and the Jerusalem Temple have posed a substantial threat to the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem, but if Sanballat had managed to persuade Persia to relocate the administration to the Samaria, the Temple leadership would stand to suffer financially and in regard to security from those who resented their radical socio-religious views. Hence, reform that effectively established and thereafter maintained the unity, integrity and stability of the Jerusalem Temple and its status as the central shrine of Yahweh and Persia's administration centre would be welcomed by the Temple community, and would make any sacrifice they had made hugely worthwhile.

Although the competition with Bethel and Samaria was appreciably significant

⁹⁴³ J. M. Myers. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. AB. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965, 207.

due to their cultic association with Israel's past, Genesis 22 establishes Mount Zion as the place where Israel is to worship by virtue of the greatest attempt at sacrifice ever required by God of any one of his servants. This, together with the idea that the Lord moved Cyrus to set the Jews free to return to Jerusalem, meant that Mount Zion becomes the one and only place where the Israelites would be led to worship by their God (Deut. 12:5). So in addition to its reformative value, from which the Jews learn that they must revere God and obey his Law, Genesis 22 through the connection of the Chronicler's 'Mount Moriah' establishes Jerusalem as the central place of worship for all of Israel, as much as it benefits the socio-political contest of maintaining the Jerusalem Temple as the administration centre of Persia in the Land.

4.7 Reform and Identity

It is understood by DtrH that Israel's identity is rooted in Divine election, covenant relationship and the gift of the Land:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the people on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it is because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut. 7:6-8).

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers (8:1).

On the whole, the exiles would have suffered the long-term effect of identity loss while in Babylon. Newsome comments:

...the loss of their land and their deportation to this alien and inhospitable terrain implied the loss of their identity as Jews and their forfeiture of the spiritual traditions of Abraham, Moses, and David. The God of Israel who was supposed to shape nations and events, now seemed puny and remote, a Deity holed up in the far-off Jerusalem Temple who was either unable or unwilling to blunt the sword of Nebuchadnezzar and save His own people.⁹⁴⁴

Although Yahweh did eventually 'blunt the sword of Nebuchadnezzar', they were ceded to Persia with nothing in the way of self-rule other than local governance upon their return to Israel. Without having to deal with socio-political concerns, the devout Yahwists could focus on cultic matters, particularly teaching and enforcing the regulations outlined in God's Law. Although they could not rule Israel, they could impose socio-religious restrictions on themselves. It can be said then that the state of affairs of the Temple community was fortunate in that they could finally focus on the faith without political and military distraction. With instruction in the Book of the Law,

⁹⁴⁴ Newsome, *Waters of Babylon*, 71.

they could again root their identity in divine election and covenant.

While being under the domination of Persia, they could no longer identify themselves with the Land as they once had, but could at least be sanctioned and relatively secured by Persia in the Temple quarter, where they could nurture the hope of regaining their sovereignty over the Land at some point in the future. However, the form of government of the Temple community could now be a true theocracy. Küng points out that while God could not exercise his rule over the state, he could rule over the Temple community by means of the Law and the hierocracy of the clergy.⁹⁴⁵ Therefore, on this alone could it be said that the reform of the Second Temple community was utterly necessary.

The Land that advantageously bridged Asia with Africa was coveted by foreign potentates for military and trade advantage, always presenting a military threat to the Jews. However, under the security of Persian rule, national defence would no longer rob them of a relatively secure existence, and in which they could devote themselves to the teaching of Torah to the Jews and ultimately to the nations. Bright comments:

The distinguishing mark of a Jew would not be political nationality, nor primarily ethnic background, nor even regular participation in the Temple cult (impossible for Jews in the Diaspora), but adherence to the law of Moses. The great watershed of Israel's history had been crossed, and her future secured for all time to come.⁹⁴⁶

Trito-Isaiah anticipates the resumption of their vocation:

I will spare some of them and send them to nations,
to Tarshish, Put, and Lud,
to Meshek, Rosk, Tubal, and Javan,
distant coasts and islands which have never yet heard of me
and have not seen my glory;
these shall announce that glory among the nations (66:19).

Eichrodt comments:

The hope which finds expression in the blessings in Genesis is clothed in different forms. Here, above the level of those benedictions which promise merely national prosperity, rise others which reach out to the declaration that Israel's role is to be the mediator of blessing to the whole world.⁹⁴⁷

Although there is little in Ezra-Nehemiah, Zechariah or Malachi, which would indicate that the Temple community had been concerned about being Yahweh's 'light bearers' to the world, it was certainly presumed, but put aside for the crisis at hand, which was to reform those who would be the caretakers and teachers of Torah—the priests and Levites of the Jerusalem Temple. The reality was that the Temple community were not fit to bless each other with true teaching let alone the nations with the revelation of God they appear to have never fully embraced themselves. Thus the immediate need

⁹⁴⁵ Küng, *Judaism*, 105.

⁹⁴⁶ Bright, *History of Israel*, 365.

⁹⁴⁷ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 476.

would have been to return to the very basics of the faith, through the teaching of the scriptures, which held the revelation of the God of Israel. This unmistakably was the aim of Ezra in reciting the Torah to the people of the Temple community. It was through this teaching that the Jews could begin to identify themselves, as did their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the God of Israel and the covenant relationship he established with them, as well as with the revelation received on Mount Sinai by Moses, by which they could know precisely how to live for their God.

Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah maintain that God's covenant established with Israel was an everlasting covenant (Isa. 55:3b; 59:21). Perhaps, Ezra's recital of the scriptures might have marked a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant (Neh. 8), becoming as Bright understood the constitution of the Temple community.⁹⁴⁸ Although in this case, it is the people who swear an oath:

...all these now join their brothers and nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord. (Neh. 10:29).

The first regulations they swear to obey are in regard to endogamous marriage and the strict observance of the Sabbath rest (v. 30), the two tenets that most identify the Jews with their faith.

Mullen points out that the objective of establishing group identity and solidarity is met by reorganizing the leadership, transforming ritual and developing folklore traditions.⁹⁴⁹ In the case of Ancient Israel, he indicates that the folklore traditions preserved in the Pentateuch would effectively establish and maintain their identity, particularly since gaining authoritative and acceptance as scripture, which can be said to have been the result of Ezra's fervour for the Torah and his reform movement.⁹⁵⁰ Mullen asserts that the events of the postexilic period provide an historical context for the initiation of the composition of the Pentateuch. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the Pentateuch was created with the objective of recreating and maintaining the status of Yahweh's people as defined through God's Law, which reasonably was built on the foundation of the covenant traditions of both Abraham and Moses.⁹⁵¹ Mullen proposes that the Temple community in Jerusalem composed the Tetrateuch and combined it with DtrH forming a 'primary history', which would serve to define them as a distinct ethnic and spiritual entity.⁹⁵²

⁹⁴⁸ Bright, *History of Israel*, 374.

⁹⁴⁹ Mullen, *Ethnic Myths*, 10, 12.

⁹⁵⁰ Mullen, *Ethnic Myths*, 12.

⁹⁵¹ R. Mason. *Jeremiah: A Bible Commentary for Everyday*. Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002, 8.

⁹⁵² Mullen, *Ethnic Myths*, 15.

...the Tetrateuch/Pentateuch is directly related to the formation of a distinctive Judahite ethnic identity that was recreated during the Second Temple period. During this period a variety of traditions were reapplied to the community of the restoration in an effort to forge an enduring identity, the boundaries for which can be traced in the literature that came to be regarded as 'scripture'.⁹⁵³

In acceptance of this, it can be said that the Pentateuch functioned in a reformatory way not only to restore the confused or lost identity of the Temple community as the people of Yahweh, but to clarify their vocation as the caretakers and disseminators of Torah. Since the themes of election, covenant relationship and the establishment of the nation Israel are expressed in the Abraham cycle, and culminate in the story of the Aqedah, it can be said that more than any other biblical narrative, Genesis 22 could appreciably function to restore the identity of the Temple community as God's chosen and covenanted people. The scriptures would clarify and inspire them how to live for a holy God, the results of which would produce a strong core of leadership at the Temple, whose mission it would be to maintain the holiness of the Temple community and their distinct identity as the people of Yahweh. Day by day the scriptures are said to have been read to the assembly, from which the people would have learned about Abraham's legacy of blessing to his descendants. Centuries later, Moses receives the Law on Sinai, in which is detailed how they were to live as Yahweh's elect (9:7-15). They were reminded of their forefathers' persistent resistance to obey the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant, but also of Yahweh's patience and compassion for his rebellious people (vv. 16-37). That history provided a solid foundation on which to build and then maintain their new-found devotion and identity to their God.

4.8 Genesis 22 and Reform

It is at that time, I propose, that not only did Genesis 22 set a precedent for God testing Israel, and such testing becoming an essential part of their relationship to him,⁹⁵⁴ but it also established their identity as Yahweh's servants and set the standard for the God-fearing Jew, who would be willing to forfeit that which was most dear at God's command. In this way, Genesis 22 would have been an indispensable tool for Ezra in his reform of the Temple community. Although it can be said that the Aqedah could have benefited any reform effort, it is less likely that the narratives of the Pentateuch were available to the pre-exilic Israelites, and since we know of no other reform movement from the time of Josiah's to Ezra's, the fifth-century Temple community would be the most likely audience for the story of Abraham's testing.

While attempting to connect the Aqedah with Ezra's reform movement, it must

⁹⁵³ Mullen, *Ethnic Myths*, 11-12.

⁹⁵⁴ See Exod. 16:4, Deut. 8:2; 13:3; 33:8-9, and Jdg. 2:22; 3:4.

be said at this point that there is nothing in the narrative that directly addresses the issues of apostasy, idolatry, or reform. In fact, the whole of Genesis does not deal with these issues, with the one exception of the Elohist's account of Jacob ridding his household of the teraphim acquired at Paddam-Aram (Gen. 35:2, 4).⁹⁵⁵ Yet, as asserted above, it can be said that the alternative to apostasy and idol worship is well demonstrated in Genesis 22. Abraham's demonstration of utter reverence and radical obedience is what the reformers struggled to instil in the Temple community,⁹⁵⁶ making the narrative a most inspirational and indispensable literary tool.

Although the reconstruction of Jerusalem takes up much of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Second Temple reforms were meant to correct the form of waywardness that led to the destruction of the Temple and city walls in the first place—mingling with foreigners and their detestable practices. For this reason reform was implemented without delay, not only to prevent further divine retribution, but to win God's favour and deliverance from Persian bondage (Neh. 9:36-37). After all foreigners were eliminated from the Temple community, indoctrination in God's Law followed. Most central to the Pentateuch would be the patriarchal narratives that would reconnect the people to their forefathers, beginning with the Abraham cycle, in which was demonstrated the idealized lifestyle of socio-religious separateness of the Persian Period reformers (Ezr. 9-10; Neh. 9-10, 13:23).

It should be reiterated at this point that early scholarship proposed that Genesis 22 in its latest form was used to effect reform of child sacrifice. More recently, Gunkel, Noth, Westermann, and H. J. Kraus understood that Genesis 22 explains the ancient custom that took place at a particular sacred site where the firstborn would have been laid on the wood, but would have been spared by the substitution of an animal at the last moment.⁹⁵⁷ However, John Rogerson comments that contrary to the idea that the narrative was created at a time when the rights of the individual had not been fully recognized by Israel and when it was realized that God rejected human sacrifice, there would have been another purpose for the narrative.⁹⁵⁸ As Rowley and Speiser concede, it is much more likely the case that Isaac's near death had less to do with child sacrifice,

⁹⁵⁵ Friedman, *Bible With Sources Revealed*, 89.

⁹⁵⁶ See Ezr. 7:12, 14, 25-6 and Neh. 8:1, 3, 5, 8, 18.

⁹⁵⁷ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 236-37, Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 114-115, C. Westermann. *Forschung am Alten Testament: gesammelte Studien*: Munich: C. Kaiser, 1964, 71, H. J. Kraus. *Worship in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966.

⁹⁵⁸ J. Rogerson. *The Supernatural in the Old Testament*. Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press, 1976, 32-33.

and everything to do with the ever-present threat against the founding of God's people through Abraham's seed.⁹⁵⁹ Even Abraham attempts to thwart God's plan:

Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir'. He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them'. Then he said, 'So shall your offspring be' (Gen. 15:4-5).

It was posited by von Rad that although its earliest function was to reform human sacrifice, the narrative in its latest form has a different meaning.⁹⁶⁰ Brueggemann adds, 'It is of no value to find in this story an exchange of animal sacrifice for human sacrifice, as it addresses much more difficult issues'.⁹⁶¹ The more difficult issues would have been, one, why Israel suffers trials and tribulations; two, what God's expects of his servants; three, covenant relationship with God; and four, Isaac's succession of Abraham as the progenitor of Israel.

Rogerson suggests that the focus of the narrative should be taken away from Abraham and Isaac altogether, and placed on Yahweh, who demonstrates that he can choose to assert his absolute sovereignty over them and has the right to change his plans.⁹⁶² In light of Israel's inclination to stray to false gods, perhaps they needed to know that they could no longer assert their right to the Land based on Abraham's faithfulness, but that God's blessing would result from their own demonstration of faithfulness. This certainly would have been the interest of a Persian Period editor of Genesis 22, than the reform of child sacrifice.

4.8.1 The Uniqueness of Genesis 22 during the Persian Period

The uniqueness of the story of Abraham's testing is based on the idea that it was the only legend available that could have influenced religious reform at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. This is based on the general consensus that legends of the other heroes of faith, such as with Daniel, Job, Esther and Ruth, all of whom demonstrated a tenacious loyalty to God during their ordeals, were not produced before the fifth-century reforms.⁹⁶³ This is not to say that oral traditions of these legends were not in circulation, but that they had not been put into writing and incorporated into the Second Temple sacred texts. This can be presumed due to the lack of any mention of them in Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, or the postexilic prophets. However, due to Nehemiah's mention of Abram (Neh. 9:7-8), we know that they were at least familiar with the Abrahamic

⁹⁵⁹ Rowley, *Worship*, 27. Speiser, *Genesis*, 165.

⁹⁶⁰ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 239.

⁹⁶¹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 186.

⁹⁶² Rogerson, *Supernatural*, 33.

⁹⁶³ Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 7.

narratives; therefore, it is plausible that they knew the most compelling and inspirational of them all—the Aqedah.

Although Genesis on the whole advocates a lifestyle of righteousness for all human beings in the creation and flood narratives, Genesis 22 demonstrates that God’s chosen people can successfully remain righteous, even when all other people around them do not. Even though the Babel narrative advocates that all mankind are to stand in humility and reverence before the God of Creation, it is not until Genesis 22 that it is demonstrated to what extent Israel is to stand humbly and reverently before God.

Furthermore, Abraham is the only patriarch mentioned in Nehemiah in regard to the themes of election, faithfulness, covenant relationship, and the fulfilment of the promises to his heirs, which are all present in Genesis 22. The Levite prays:

You are the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous (Neh. 9:7-8.).

This is not to say that there were no other exemplars of faithfulness before Abraham, since Abel, Enoch, and Noah were also said to be righteous before God. Abel won God’s favour by offering up the better sacrifice (Gen. 4:4), as did Enoch, of whom it is said ‘walked with God’ (5:24), and Noah, who was the only righteous man left on the earth at the time God destroyed the world with a flood (6:9). The Noah story would have been included in Ezra’s Bible since it was known decades before by Ezekiel (14:14, 20) and Deutero-Isaiah (54:9). However, Noah’s story pales in contrast to the Aqedah, in which the most essential concerns of the postexilic reformers are brilliantly addressed. Although the flood story clearly deals with separateness in the sense that Noah and his family are forcibly separated from all other people to be a generation who chooses to ‘walk with God’, perhaps they would not have been considered separate enough by the fifth-century reformers, based on them being uncircumcised foreigners from the all-too-distant past.

Another notable biblical hero is Joseph, who is portrayed as remaining loyal to God in spite of his tragic circumstances, beginning with being rejected by his own brothers. Levenson devotes much of his study on the ‘beloved son’ motif of the Hebrew Bible to Joseph, in which he points out that he stands out as a man of enduring good character and superlative moral behaviour throughout his ordeals and emerges as a most accomplished man, who maintains his reverence for his God.⁹⁶⁴ Joseph resists the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife by asserting:

⁹⁶⁴ Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 167-68.

How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?

He later affirms his faith by telling his brothers that **אֶת-אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יִרָא** ‘I fear God’ (42:18). However, as for Ezra and Nehemiah, Joseph’s marriage to Asenath, the daughter of the Egyptian priest Potiphara, would rule him out as a model of socio-religious separateness, in spite of having saved Israel from extinction.

Having said this, in order to argue that the Abraham cycle and the Aqedah in particular functioned as a literary instrument in Ezra’s reform movement, there should be a link between the institutions of the Persian Period and those alluded to in the narrative, such as the Temple, Priesthood, covenant, city gate, and endogamy. As discussed above, Genesis 22 is tied to the Jerusalem Temple through the Chronicler’s place name ‘Moriah’, Abraham functions as a prototype of the Aaronite priest by sacrificing burnt offerings to God, the former covenant established between Abraham and Yahweh is ratified with a solemn oath, his heirs are promised the possession of the ‘gate of his enemies’, and endogamy is demonstrated by Abraham in his marriage to Sarah, as well as with Isaac, whose endogamous marriage to Rebekah is alluded to in Nahor’s genealogy.

Abraham’s faithfulness demonstrated in Genesis 22 is what Ezra and Nehemiah hoped to instil in the apostate Jews. Therefore it is most likely that the Aqedah was introduced at that time to set the standard of the God-fearing Jew, becoming effective in the capacity for which they were created—to be a holy people for Yahweh set apart to ‘bless all nations’ (v. 18). Holmgren points out that the exiles are considered by Deutero-Isaiah to be the descendants of Abraham, who are expected to be as faithful as their forefather. He concludes that since their return to the Land of Promise, the postexilic writers put an emphasis on following Abraham, in order that they can repossess the Land promised to Abraham’s heirs.⁹⁶⁵ The Chronicler hints at this in the prayer of Jehosaphat at the time of an Edomite attack on Judah:

O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? (2 Chr. 20:7).

This Psalmist preaches:

He remembers his covenant forever,
the word he commanded, for a
thousand generations,
the covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath he swore to Isaac.
He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant.
to you I will give the land of Canaan
as the portion you will inherit (Ps. 105:8-11).

⁹⁶⁵ Holmgren, ‘Faithful Abraham and the *mana* Covenant Nehemiah 9, 6 – 10, 1’, 254.

A Levite recalls God's promise to Israel of possessing the Land of Canaan:

You found his [Abraham's] heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous (Neh. 9:8).

There is no indication that the narrative was used in reforms beyond the time of Ezra and Nehemiah when the Jews were faced with even greater political turmoil, such as during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV when Hellenism was imposed on the Jews and Judaism once again threatened with extinction. Although the writer of Maccabees remembers Abraham for his 'steadfastness under trial' (1 Macc. 2:52), there is nothing to say that there was a reform during the Hasmonean Period. It is certain that Genesis 22 would have been used in the liturgy at that time, but although the Temple was cleansed of idols during the Hasmonean takeover of Jerusalem, there is no indication of a consequential systematic reform when the narrative would have been used for that cause.

Although Ezra's reform movement did not affect the masses, but instead only a small and elite group of Yahwists, who comprised the Temple community, it can be said that from it emerged a pious group, from whom evolved priestly groups like the *hasidim*, 'the holy ones' and the Pharisees, those credited with having steadfastly held to the strict observance of the Torah and maintaining monotheistic Judaism in the face of various persecutions and political upheavals.

Furthermore, it can be argued that Ezra's mission to reform the wayward Jews was the crucible in which the Book of the Law of Moses—the Pentateuch—was established as holy writ, and it was that holy writ that changed the hearts of the apostate members of the Temple community. Although it cannot be known what part of the Pentateuch Ezra and the Levites read to the assemblies, it is unlikely that the Abraham cycle, with Genesis 22 in particular, would have been omitted. Always maintaining that it was not omitted, the response to commit to a lifestyle of socio-religious separateness following Ezra's reading of the texts is predictable—they bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God (Neh. 8:18; 10:29).

4.9 Genesis 22 and Patrilineal Descent

There is another possible rite of passage connected to the Aqedah as proposed by Nancy Jay, who points out that Isaac's birth status is that of a 'mother's son' (matrilineal descent) before his near-death experience, which is transformed into a 'father's son' (patrilineal descent) through the blood sacrifice of the ram. This ritual was evidently done for the sake of maintaining the preferred intergenerational continuity between

males.⁹⁶⁶ In other words, the blood shed in the birthing process, which results in a matrilineal descent, is replaced by the blood of the sacrifice at the hands of the father, thereby establishing patrilineal descent. Jay's premise comes from a sociological study of a broad range of cultures, from the Ancient Romans to contemporary West African agrarians and East African herdsmen.⁹⁶⁷ In these cultures sacrifice and dedication of a child to a deity is a means of 'destructuring' the matrilineal bonds allowing for the patrilineal descent of the child. Jay suggests that this practice might have been exclusive to certain groups in the ancient world, even in the case of the ministers of ritual sacrifice in Ancient Israel, in order to ensure genealogical purity and eternity.⁹⁶⁸ She points out that for the sake of purity, those with matrilineal descent would have been excluded from the priesthood.

Patrilineal descent was maintained in Ancient Israel through endogamy, the practice of sons marrying their father's brother's daughters, or through brother-half-sister marriages, such as with Abraham and Sarah, who had the same father, but different mothers.⁹⁶⁹ In this case Isaac would have had a bilateral descent since Sarah and Abraham were begotten by the same father. Although Ishmael qualifies as a father's son since he is born independent of Sarah through her Egyptian slave Hagar, due to his Egyptian blood meant he could not succeed Abraham. Therefore, Isaac offers a better blood lineage, only if his bilateral descent is corrected, which Jay maintains is accomplished in the ritual act of sacrifice in Genesis 22. Since Sarah is not part of the 'rebirthing', Abraham ritually becomes the 'begetter', and thereby, Isaac becomes a 'father's son'.⁹⁷⁰

Apparent in this ritual is the observance of the law of redemption, whereby in the case of the Aqedah, the fortuitous ram is sacrificed in place of Isaac (Exod. 34:20b).⁹⁷¹

H. Zоргdrager articulates the importance of descent in Ancient Israel:

In the case of the patriarchal narratives, the issue of the prevailing rule of descent is of extreme importance—especially from a religious point of view—because the line of descent is the means, the 'channel' by which the divine promise in history is fulfilled, by which the blessing is transmitted from generation to generation.⁹⁷²

However, she does not see descendancy corrected in Genesis as Jay does, since rival descendants form an ongoing conflict throughout the patriarchal narratives, from which

⁹⁶⁶ N. Jay. 'Descent, and the Patriarchs.' *VT* 38, 1988, 52-70. Also, in 'Sacrifice for Having Been Born a Woman', *Immaculate and Powerful*, by C. W. Atkinson. Wellingborough: Crucible, 1987, 2.

⁹⁶⁷ Jay, 'Sacrifice as Remedy', 54-55.

⁹⁶⁸ Jay, 'Sacrifice as Remedy', 55.

⁹⁶⁹ Jay, 'Sacrifice as Remedy', 56-57.

⁹⁷⁰ H. Zоргdrager. 'A Gender-Motivated Reading of Genesis 22', *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar (eds). Leiden: Brill, 2002, 195.

⁹⁷¹ Jay, 'Sacrifice as Remedy', 60.

⁹⁷² Jay, 'Sacrifice as Remedy', 191.

she concludes no definite resolution had been reached.⁹⁷³ For Zоргdrager, Isaac remains Sarah's son and Abraham's paternity is left ambiguous.⁹⁷⁴ She bases this on the continuance of the descent conflict in Isaac's return with Rebekah to Sarah's tent, where he is said to be comforted (24:67). Whether he is comforted by Rebekah, or by being in his mother's tent or both is not clarified; although, Zоргdrager suggests that he is comforted by being in his mother's tent due to his preference of matrilineal descent.⁹⁷⁵ Yet, the immediate announcement of Sarah's death after Isaac's ordeal might further signify that Isaac had evolved from matrilineal to patrilineal descent.

In summary, socio-religious reform was critical to the survival of the fifth-century Temple community as a religious entity in the Persian Empire due to the disunity of the Temple community, the competition with the 'syncretist' party and the Samaritan shrines, and the political conflicts instigated by Sanballat and his co-conspirators. Not only could they lose God's favour and bring upon themselves his chastisement as the history would remind them, the conflict with the Samaritan agitators threatened their status as the administrators of Persia, which necessitated immediate and rigorous reform.

It was the Book of the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch, which was the heart and soul of Ezra's reform movement, which according to Nehemiah moved the assembly to commit to a strict observance and performance of God's commandments, particularly in regard to socio-religious separateness, with a covenant guaranteed with a curse. Furthermore, the story of Abraham's testing, was most plausibly used to inspire the Temple community to sacrifice (as Abraham was willing to do that which was most dear to them), their foreign wives and offspring, for the sake of their God, the security of the Temple community and their distinct identity as the people of Yahweh and the state sanctioned religious institution in Israel during the Persian Period.

⁹⁷³ Zоргdrager, 'Gender-Motivated', 194.

⁹⁷⁴ Zоргdrager, 'Gender-Motivated', 194.

⁹⁷⁵ Zоргdrager, 'Gender-Motivated', 196.

CONCLUSION

My objective in this research project was to form a persuasive argument for the hypothesis that Genesis 22 was used in the fifth century BCE to benefit the reform efforts of Ezra the priestly scribe by inspiring the apostate elders, priests and Levites of the Jerusalem Temple to revere Yahweh and to obey his Law to the extent Abraham demonstrates in the narrative. At the heart of the Law is the requirement that God's servants are to remain separate from all foreigners and their detestable religious practices, at least for Ezra and Nehemiah whose reform efforts were aimed at keeping the Temple community separate from all outsiders, even from their foreign wives and offspring.

In order to inspire the elders, priests and Levites, whom Ezra found to have not kept themselves separate from foreigners, to submit to the personal sacrifice of sending away their foreign wives and children, it was asserted that not only would it take knowledge of and commitment to the tenets of separateness in God's Law, but compelling folklore to support the laws, statutes and regulations imposed upon them. In this way, the story of Abraham's life and covenant relationship to his God, which climaxes in Genesis 22, would have been utterly indispensable to Ezra's reform efforts. Not only would Abraham serve as an exemplar of faithfulness and obedience to God's directives to those in the Temple community, but having been coerced into sending away his foreign wife Hagar and their son Ishmael and later directed to sacrifice his only remaining son Isaac, justification and courage could be found by the elders and priests to send away their foreign relations. Therefore, my aim was to show how Genesis 22, against the backdrop of the remaining Abraham narratives, would have inspired the men to not only submit to Ezra's mandate to send away their foreign relations, but to commit to a lifestyle prescribed in Ezra's Book of the Law of God, or what is maintain to be the Pentateuch.

1. Contribution to Scholarship

In defence of this argument several methods were used, beginning with a redaction critical analysis of Genesis 22; secondly, a lexical study of words and phrases; thirdly, an examination of the postexilic ideology of socio-religious separateness; and lastly, a study on the royal reforms of Ancient Israel that led up to the reform of the Second Temple community. In doing that I have examined Genesis 22 in a way unlike any other research so far by reaching deep into the theological heart and soul of the story of Abraham's testing. Through the review of older determinations, new insights were offered in regard

to the postexilic function of Genesis 22. Although I am dealing with an area of biblical research that is speculative, I have taken the research on Genesis 22 up to this date, from which I have constructed persuasive arguments to support the hypothesis that Genesis 22 functioned to benefit the reform efforts of Ezra, by inculcating a sense of commitment to God's Law, in which is overwhelmingly advocated the socio-religious separateness of Israel.

In agreement with the consensus that the Pentateuch was written by priests for priests, it was argued that since the Aqedah addresses the issue of God testing his servants, that the target audience for the narrative would logically be the elders, priests and Levites, who were similarly tested through Ezra's mandate to forfeit their loved ones of foreign descent. In this way, like their father Abraham, they would prove their reverence for God and obedience to his directives, which for them was the Torah. In researching Genesis 22 in this way, I feel that I have contributed something unique to biblical scholarship, not by taking Genesis 22 out of the hands of Moses (certainly not original), and the hypothesized documentary sources and the scribal schools, but to ultimately place it in the hands of Ezra the priestly scribe, whose intent it was to indoctrinate the Jews with the revelation of the one true God and his Law.

2. Conclusions

Based on the general consensus of scholars today that the oral and written traditions of Ancient Israel were compiled, updated and formed into the Pentateuch during the Persian Period, a line of reasoning was formed from a combination of a redaction critical analysis, to show the extent of editing done on the narrative that would place its final editing in the Persian Period. It was illustrated on pages 31 and 32 the extent of the narrative's fragmentation and the variance of scholarly ascription to J, E, R^{je} and R and the combinations thereof, which substantiate that an extensive amount of adaptation and revision had been done on the narrative as late as the postexilic period.

2.1 After setting the ground work, due to the overwhelming determination that Nahor's genealogy (vv. 20-24) was attached to the story of the testing of Abraham after the eighth century when it is theorized that E introduced the story in Judah, or as Friedman proposed the story of Abraham's testing was attached to Nahor's genealogy, it was the first passage to be examined. It was first acknowledged that based on the obvious incongruity of vv. 20-24 to the rest of the narrative, hardly anyone argued that the genealogy was a part of the original story of the Aqedah, indicating intentionality on the part of the final editor of the narrative. Further, it was maintained that the genealogy

was artificially attached to the story of Abraham's testing based on the highly unusual addition of a female name (Rebekah) (v. 23) to the genealogy. It was concluded that Abraham's preoccupation with Isaac marrying endogamously (24), followed by Rebekah's concern that Jacob marry endogamously (28) suggests that the purity of the blood lineage of Ancient Israel's forefathers was of great concern at the time of the finalizing of the Genesis 22. In agreement with Sarna, who argues that the intent of including the announcement of Rebekah, the granddaughter of Abraham's kin Nahor and Milcah, was to legitimize Isaac's forthcoming wife, the future mother of Jacob, whose sons become the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Although the issue of pure blood lineage is of great importance to the anonymous editor known as the Priestly Writer, apparent in his liberal use of genealogies in the Pentateuch is recognized that his priestly successors would have shared the same concern, which is understood in the case of Ezra, whom I defend as being the most plausible candidate for adapting Nahor's genealogy to the story of Abraham's testing. Since Ezra's and Nehemiah's concerns are represented in Genesis 22 in regard to the fear of God (v. 12), obedience to God's directives (vv. 1-14) and socio-religious separateness (vv. 20-24), the likelihood that the final form of Genesis 22 is a product of the Persian Period reforms became all the more plausible.

While attempting to show that the genealogy could not have been part of the original story of the Aqedah, it was illustrated that the genealogies ascribed to J and P consistently follow after accounts of deaths or expulsions, while Nahor's genealogy follows neither, substantiating that the text had been displaced from another narrative. It was suggested that a more appropriate place for Nahor's genealogy would be between P's account of Sarah's death and burial (23) and the beginning of the narrative of the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah (24). Bearing this in mind along with the view that the separateness is a postexilic ideology apparent in Ezra-Nehemiah, Nahor's genealogy was plausibly relocated between Genesis 21 and 23 to emphasize that ideology.

Furthermore, it was recognized that the use of the introductory phrase of Nahor's genealogy, 'And it was after these things', was found to be used sparingly in the Pentateuch by J (15:1; 39:7; 40:1), even less by E (22:1; 48:1), never by Dtr or P, rarely in DtrH (1 Kgs. 17:17; 21:1), and the postexilic texts (2 Chr. 32:1; Est. 2:1; 3:1), and interestingly, it is used in Ezra's own genealogy, in which he traces his ancestry back to Aaron (Ezr. 7:1-5). Since the phrase is only used twice to introduce genealogies in the Hebrew Bible, the ancient hypothesis that Ezra was the final redactor of Genesis 22 gains support. Therefore, the hypothesis that Nahor's genealogy would have been used by the reformer to impress upon those he considered to be the 'true Israel', the descendants of

the Babylonian exiles, Yahweh's servants the elders, priests and Levites are to remain separate from all foreigners, gains plausibility.

2.2 After examining Nahor's genealogy, vv. 1 through 10 were studied, particularly in regard to the place name 'Moriah' (v. 2), which has been widely determined to be a redactional interpolation linked to the Chronicler of the postexilic period. This is probably the most compelling substantiation of the Persian Period finalization of Genesis 22. After exploring the various positions of the Chronicler's intent to add 'Moriah' to the narrative, it was determined that it was a device to legitimize the Jerusalem Temple and Priesthood by tying Abraham to the institution, despite it being later established by Moses with the appointment of Aaron as Israel's chief priest. It was pointed out that since Moses could not be linked to Mount Zion, because he never was there is said about Abraham, the story of Abraham's testing on Moriah can be used to justify the Temple's situation in Jerusalem. From this it was suggested that Abraham represents the prototype of Yahweh's high priest, God's righteous and obedient servant who offers up acceptable sacrifices to him, the ram caught in the thicket on the 'mountain of the Lord', where the Temple of God is later constructed and the priesthood established. This places the Aqedah in the Persian Period reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the priests and Levites were found to be utterly unfit for their vocation.

In addition, the phrase 'your son, your only son' (v. 2), which is maintained as being intended to confirm Isaac's firstborn status and Ishmael's dispossession, indicates that Genesis has more to do with inculcating a sense of separateness from the descendants of Ishmael. That the son of Abraham's Egyptian wife Ishmael is dispossessed from Abraham's household, later becoming the progenitor of the non-Israelite tribes who settled in the wilderness of Paran (Gen. 21:21), the Arabian people who remain at enmity with Israel to this day, further substantiates the premise that socio-religious separateness was the main concern of the writer of Genesis 21, which leads up to Genesis 22 where Ishmael's dispossession is confirmed. Since certain Arabs join forces with Sanballat to sabotage Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the city walls (Neh. 2:19; 4:7; 6:1), Genesis 21 and 22 become all the more relevant to the situation of the fifth-century Temple community.

From an examination of the ram caught in the thicket episode, it was argued that it is also a redactional interpolation, based on an earlier tradition wherein Isaac is actually sacrificed by Abraham, but later resurrected. The aborted sacrifice and the substitute of the ram caught in the thicket in Genesis 22 becomes a corrective to the older tradition (assuming there actually was one). Yet a more compelling theory was introduced that the sacrifice of the ram signifies a type of rite of initiation for Isaac, by

which he becomes Abraham's successor as the carrier of the 'holy seed' and the guardian of the covenant. The Exodus and Leviticus ritual of ordination was briefly outlined, from which was argued that the ram of sacrifice was not instead of Isaac, but *for* Isaac. Relevance to the Temple community was found in that after they repented and made a covenant to obey God's Law, each priest offered up a ram. Although it could have been a sacrifice of guilt offering, or done in regard to the covenant they made guaranteed with a curse, it was argued that it symbolized a renewal of vocational vows to serve God in reverence and obedience as demonstrated by Isaac in his willingness to give up his life in honour of his father and his God. Having said this, it was concluded that all of verse 14 is a postexilic redaction, since centralizing worship at the Jerusalem Temple during that period was most critical to the survival of the Temple community as well as monotheistic Yahwism. It was further argued that due to the tiny size of the fifth century Temple community, centralization of the cult on Mount Zion would have been more critical than it had ever been before, particularly since there was no local monarch to protect the cult from the hostile opposition that threatened the stability of the Temple community.

Another relevant issue was the 'it' in v. 14b, that which is seen/provided on the mountain of the Lord. It was defended as bearing relevancy to Ezra's reform measures, based on the provision of the Book of the Law he brought to indoctrinate the people. Although the 'it' in 14b has been traditionally likened to Moses bringing the Law to the Hebrews at Sinai, the account of which has also been predominantly ascribed to E (Exod. 19:14-17, 19; 20:1-21-23:32), it might have been intended to point to the Book of the Law Ezra recited to the assembly. That v. 14b has drawn the most varied source assessments (E, J, R^{je}, J², and R), it was confidently concluded that it was a postexilic interpolation by someone whose interest it was to establish the Jerusalem Temple as the place from where Israel's sacred scriptures would be received, which it can be said apart from Josiah's Book of the Covenant, was Ezra's introduction of the Book of the Law to the Temple community.

Conclusions were drawn on the last redaction analysis of vv. 15-18 the 'second speech' or what is alternatively called the 'reward clause', which the early source critics determined is a redactional interpolation expressing a theological development referred to as 'meritorious theology' of the Deuteronomist. Since Dtr taught that Israel can no longer rely on Abraham's righteousness to reap the promised blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, but is contingent on their adherence to the stipulations outlined in God's Law received by Moses on Mount Sinai, it was maintained that the reward clause was intended to correct the former theology that Israel is blessed only because Abraham obeyed God. Robert Alter aptly states that what had been unconditional and infeasible

could now be annulled through Abraham's last encounter with his God.

Through William Johnstone's research of the Deuteronomist's revision of the Exodus (Dtr-Exodus) and the recognition of the sizeable amount of transpositions in the Pentateuch from Dtr during the postexilic period by a priestly redactor, it was argued that Dtr would also have modified the patriarchal narratives to conform to the theological development. In addition, based on the use of both 'Elohim' and 'Yahweh' for God's name in Genesis 22 and in Deuteronomy where the names are used interchangeably and simultaneously, supports the premise that Genesis 22 was influenced by Dtr. It was concluded that although Genesis 22 shows Dtr influence, the modification could have been done by a redactor who depended on Deuteronomic theology, which can be said for Ezra, further substantiating the premise that he was the final redactor of Genesis 22.

Chapter I concluded with a discussion on Ezra to strengthen the argument that he is the final redactor of the Pentateuch. Based on Ezra's portrayal in the book that bears his name as one being endowed not only with the ability and priestly authority to revise ancient texts and to form them into the Pentateuch, but the impetus to absolutize and promulgate his corpus, he becomes the most logical candidate for the redactor of the Pentateuch. Although this is an ancient hypothesis first proposed by Benedict Spinoza, which has been maintained throughout the centuries in Rabbinic circles, it has recently been defended by Richard Friedman, whose argument has persuaded me to defend the hypothesis.

Although the documentary source writers J, E, D, and P remain anonymous, Ezra is identified as the priestly scribe, who as Artaxerxes is reported to have indicated had the Book of the Law in his hand, perhaps signifying that he had his hand in the forming of the corpus. It was concluded that Ezra's preoccupations, abilities, and position indicate that he at least was involved with the editing of the texts, or as Friedman argues, Ezra was the editor of the Abraham cycle, with Genesis 22 in particular, which accounts for the emphasis on socio-religious separateness of Israel's forefathers.

3. The redaction critical analysis of Genesis 22 yielded enough reason to substantiate that Genesis 22 is a Persian Period work; yet, this study is not enough to sufficiently argue my case. Therefore, I engaged in a lexical study of key terms and phrases in Genesis 22, the first of which is the Hebrew noun נִסָּה 'to test', perhaps the most salient term in the narrative, given that the writer indicates in the introductory verse that the narrative is about Abraham being tested by God. It was established that according to the Deuteronomist, divine testing would be imposed on Israel to see what is in their hearts concerning their faithfulness and reverence for the God of Israel, and that it is a vital part of their relationship with him. Since the men of the Temple community

are subjected to an ordeal similar to that of Abraham by also being challenged to forfeit beloved relationships, it indicates that the writer of Genesis 22 was in accord with Dtr theology in that respect. Therefore, it can be said that Genesis 22 was finalized no earlier than the sixth century BCE, when it is thought that Dtr wrote the book of Deuteronomy, while always maintaining that it could have been used any time thereafter by one who adhered to Dtr theology. This would be the devout Yahwists at the Temple community, and/or Ezra, who betrays Dtr theology with his emphasis on endogamous marriage.

From the story of the testing of Abraham, it was suggested that the fifth-century Temple community could appreciate that as recipients of the covenant promises they too would face extreme testing. Since the concept of testing arose out of God's action in history, that is to say Israel's experience of recurrent foreign oppression resulting from their rebellion, testing should have been expected after Judah's deportation to Babylon, and even more so during the Second Temple reforms when even the leaders were found to be so completely spiritually wayward. In spite of the imposition of testing, the belief that God's provision follows testing would have rekindled a hope of reclaiming all that had been lost to them, particularly sovereignty over the Land.

3.1 The next term to be discussed is the place name 'Moriah' in v. 2. Although touched upon in Chapter I in respect to it being an interpolation, the possible origins of the place name were explored, in order to find relevancy to the situation of the fifth century Temple community. I offered two possibilities of a corruption of an original name (presumably by E) of the site where Abraham is directed to go—one being the 'Hill of Moreh', the other the 'Oak of Moreh'. It was concluded that it was more likely the Hill of Moreh located in the Jezreel Valley, which unlike Mount Zion can be seen from afar, since it is a three day journey from another place Abraham is connected to, that is to say Shechem. Perhaps the intent behind modifying 'Moreh' to 'Moriah' was to conceal the Samaritan connections of Moreh, due to the conflicts instigated by Samaritans over the rebuilding of the Temple and city walls. In agreement with the arguments that 'Moriah' is either a corruption of the original place name in Genesis 22 or a totally fictionalized name, it was decided that it was a postexilic addition to the Aqedah by an editor whose interest it was to eliminate the competition with the northern shrines, in order to secure the Jerusalem Temple as the central place for all Jews to worship.

3.2 The first phrase examined was 'fearing God', or better translated 'revering god'. It was argued that 'fearing/revering God' is a central concept of Old Testament religion and a postexilic theology, due to its importance to Nehemiah (1:11; 7:2), Haggai (1:12; 2:5), Malachi (3:16; 4:2) and the writers of Psalms 119, 130, and 135, all of whom can be safely dated to the Persian Period. After distinguishing 'fearing God' as reverence

from the terror and dread of God, I agreed with Rowley that latter has nothing to do with Israel's relationship with Yahweh, as his relationship is based on intimacy and friendliness with promise. Although Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac has been taken to have been done out of fear or blind obedience, it was argued that it was done in the spirit of absolute trust in and dedication to Yahweh. This bears substantial relevance to the Temple community since it was the aim of Ezra and Nehemiah that God's servants the elders, priests and Levites revere and love their God with all their beings, through reverent worship, from which evolved a commitment to abide by God's Law.

Since the Aqedah is the longest narrative on sacrifice, it was defended as having more to do with reverent worship than obedience. Abraham tells his servant that he is going to שחָה 'to bow down oneself' with Isaac (v. 5), from which was taken that Abraham's sacrificial offering of Isaac *is* worship, and given the nature of the sacrifice it is the most reverent and sacrificial form of worship, at least this would be the case with the ancient way of thinking. Since this is the first time שחָה is used in the Pentateuch and it is rarely used thereafter (24:26, 52), the message of Genesis 22 being that God requires his people to revere him through heartfelt worship was further defended. That Abraham tells his servants and Isaac that they are going to worship, paired with the object of his testing (to see if he reveres God), substantiates that fearing God has all to do with the reverent worship of God, and less to do with obeying God's commands.

It was argued that in spite of the emphasis on obeying God's Law throughout the Hebrew Bible, the Decalogue is essentially about Israel's requirement to reverently worship God over all other gods, which results in honouring his creation—parents and neighbours. Without truly revering God, obedience to his commandments is improbable, which Israel proved with their propensity to worship idols. It was concluded that revering God results in a steadfast trust in God and eager and enduring submission to his Law, even the most extraordinary kind that is demonstrated by Abraham in Genesis 22.

I particularly drew from Erhard Gerstenberger's understanding that revering God is 'the sole orientation of believers to Yahweh' and Samuel Driver's assertion that revering God is Israel's primary duty, at least according to the Deuteronomist (Deut. 6:13; 10:12; 20; 28:58), which would have been central to Ezra's teaching, since it is evident that he leaned on Dtr theology. It was concluded that the essence of worship that pleases God is not in its form, but in the heart of the worshipper, which Abraham demonstrates in humility throughout his story and most profoundly in Genesis 22.

Although revering God is not mentioned by Ezra as it is Nehemiah, it was conveyed that the priestly scribe certainly demonstrates a reverence for God in his prayers (Ezr. 9) and eagerness to turn the remnant into a Yahweh centered community

(10). However, it was pointed out that Nehemiah is said to have warned offenders to ‘walk in the reverence of God’, which led to social reform in which property and money were returned to the poor who gave them to secure loans. It was noted that this is where sincere reverence of God results in respecting his creation, particularly God’s people. Nehemiah indicates that because he reveres God, he does not burden the people with heavy taxation (Neh. 9:15), appoints leaders over the people who also revere God (7:2), and he reveres God’s name (1:9; 9:5). This was shown to be a late formality, also liberally expressed in Chronicles, used in Malachi’s admonition to priests to revere God’s name (Mal. 2:1-2), and by the writer of Jonah, who describes the reluctant prophet as a ‘God-fearer’ (Jon. 1:9). It was pointed out that the most characteristic designation for the devout is ‘those who ירא יהוה Yahweh’, which is expressed mostly in the Psalms. The postexilic Psalm 135 ends with a call to ‘God-fearing’ Levites to praise the Lord (v. 20).

It was discussed that the theology of revering God from Chronicles to Malachi appears to be tied into the renewal of Temple worship, and the reordering of the priests and Levites. Malachi holds to the promise of salvation for those who revere the Lord and honour his name (Mal. 3:17). Haggai’s motivation to finish the renovation was that the people could ‘revere the Lord’ (1:12). In this way, it was shown that fearing God in the form of reverent worship can be said to be the very focus of the Second Temple reform movement (Neh. 8:1-12), which in agreement with Walter Brueggemann, was less about obedience to the Law, and more about creating an identity for Yahweh worshippers.

Also in agreement with Eichrodt, who points out that the relationship between man and God is expressed in the ‘fear of God’, it was defended that fearing God as defined as reverence and love for God is a Persian Period development of the return to Abraham’s way of worshipping God, with loyalty, faithfulness, and most relevant to my position—through reverent sacrificial worship, the original Old Testament piety. It was concluded, therefore that in acceptance that revering God is a postexilic theology, Genesis 22 would have most certainly been used by Ezra to teach that above all else, the people must revere Yahweh.

3.3 The last phrase to be discussed was ‘gates of his enemies’, which I concluded was a postexilic redaction based on it being a veiled allusion to the diminished size of the Jews sovereignty in Persian Period Jerusalem, which at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah amounted to mere local governance situated at the city gate. It was pointed out that the gate of the city was the seat of local government, the place where elders and magistrates gathered to judge civil cases, witness oaths and pledges, and other legal issues, which gave the Jews at least control over local non-military matters. The fact that the land mass from the Euphrates River to the Brook of Egypt promised to Abraham’s heirs in Genesis

15:18-21 and actualized during Solomon's reign, could only be dreamt about by the exiles, further substantiated the premise that the 'gate of his enemies' could only refer to the Persian Period. Along with the place name 'Moriah' the 'gate of his enemies' strongly indicates that Genesis 22 was produced during the Persian Period.

4. Chapter III was dedicated to the ideology of socio-religious separateness, which Ezra and Nehemiah would want to be understood became the dominant ideology of the fifth century Temple community. Four allusions to socio-religious separateness in Genesis 22 were identified, beginning with the idea that divine testing of God's righteous elect is an essential part of Israel's relationship with him. Since the Temple community underwent a similar testing as does Abraham in Chapters 21 and 22, where he is asked to give up his foreign wife and Ishmael and later, to give up Isaac, separateness has as much to do with the interpretation of Genesis 22 than any other issue.

This is compounded with the second allusion to separateness discussed above—the repetition of 'your son, your only son'—used in notable places in the narrative indicating that separateness has much to do with the overall message of the story of the testing of Abraham. Since the audience knows that Abraham has another son, a firstborn son nonetheless, it can only be taken that Isaac has displaced him as God's elect for a particular purpose. The election of Isaac and the disinheritance of Ishmael, certainly implicates the separation of the half-brothers. Separateness of the half-brothers is confirmed when each is promised to be the father of a great nation, Ishmael in Genesis 21 and Isaac in Genesis 22.

The third allusion to separateness is found in the reinforcement of the covenant statement with the introduction of a divine oath. Covenant agreement in itself alludes to separateness in that members of the covenant are distinguished from non-members. Since Isaac is now elected as Abraham's only son and even more important his successor as the carrier of the 'holy seed', it becomes certain that Ishmael and his progeny are not the heirs to the covenant sworn by Yahweh to Abraham; thus, exclusion becomes a matter of separateness.

The last indicator is found in Nahor's genealogy, where his legitimate and illegitimate offspring are distinguished. It is in that genealogy where atypically the future wife of Isaac is identified. Like Sarah was to Abraham, Rebekah is blood related to Isaac, a continuance of the main theme of Genesis that the Nation of Israel is founded on a particular branch of Abraham's progeny elected by God for a particular purpose. It was emphasized that the vulnerability of the elite community to outside forces, as well as the discipline of God, led to reform, which resulted in the Temple community committing to a lifestyle of separateness with a covenant sworn under a self-imposed curse. The Book

of the Law of Moses, which is embedded with the tenets of socio-religious separateness, was central to Ezra's reform movement, where it was used to indoctrinate the elders, priests and Levites who had not kept themselves separate from foreigners.

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From the Deuteronomist's understanding that the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem resulted from their involvement with foreign religions, the ideology of separateness was imposed in the Persian Period not only to prevent further divine retribution as experienced in 587 BCE, but for the sake of the survival of the Temple community as a religious entity in Persian Jerusalem. This was most crucial given that Jerusalem had become widely diverse and at times hostile towards Yahwism and the reestablishment of the cult. In addition, it was emphasized that it is the Abraham cycle in particular that demonstrates more than any other segment of the Pentateuch how God's servants can successfully live apart from all those who reject him, and in doing that the priests and Levites could effectively function in their vocation to bless the nations with the revelation of Yahweh—the Torah.

Just what the Temple community was to remain separate from was discussed, in order to show how deep rooted apostasy and idol worship was in the religious life of Ancient Israel from their very beginnings. It was shown how Baalism persistently posed a threat to Yahwism, and that being an agrarian people, fertility cults were popular, normative and extremely hard to eradicate from the religious life of the Jews, even as late as the exilic and postexilic periods. This is at least according to the protests of the prophets, who rebuked Israel for 'whoring after other gods'.

The worst Baal cults were those like Molech, requiring child sacrifice, which was determined to have become normative in Ancient Israel, becoming increasingly popular a century before the invasions of Assyria and Babylon, with the probability that it continued through to the postexilic period. In regard to the redemption of Isaac functioning in the reform of child sacrifice, I concluded that the narrative could in part do that, especially since child sacrifice could have been a problem for the Temple community based on the backgrounds of the foreign wives. However, it was maintained that Genesis 22 had more to offer in regard to reform, since child sacrifice would have been part of a greater problem—apostasy. It was pointed out that this would particularly

be the case since God never intended that Isaac be sacrificed.

Other gods, like Shemesh and Sin, although the latter is never identified as a source of idol worship in Ancient Israel, were incorporated into Yahwism for both royals and subjects, given their supposed benefit to agricultural and military endeavors. It was recognized that Shemesh and Tammuz were worshipped openly in the Temple during the exile, which indicates how pervasive idolatry was in Jerusalem, and that even the priests were apostate. Due to idol worship being a colossal challenge to the reforming kings and prophets, who fully understood the consequences of such blatant apostasy, there arose a need for folklore that would inspire Israel to abandon their idols and to reverently worship Yahweh exclusively.

5. The royal reforms of Ancient Israel were discussed in Chapter IV, in regard to their failure to effect permanent reform, which culminated in the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem. Reform is defended as being necessary for four main reasons; one, the Temple community were at risk of losing their security in the Land through divine discipline that last visited Judah in 587 BCE; two, there were two parties, the syncretists and the Yahwism only parties, the former of which appears to have been overwhelmingly larger and threatening; three, there was an apparent competition between the Jerusalem Temple and the Samaritan shrines not only for members but as the Persian administrative centre; and four, the loss of identity as the people of Yahweh and their vocation as the disseminators of Torah. Due to the criticalness of the situation, Ezra's radical reform measures imposed on the people were determined to be justifiable.

Further research potential

It would be beneficial to go back to the beginning of the Abraham cycle to see how each episode in the life of Abraham, Sarah and Lot also potentially addresses the issues of apostasy and reform in the context of the Persian Period Temple community. For instance, Abraham's and Lot's relocation from Mesopotamia could be argued as a parallel to the release of the exiles from Babylon by Cyrus, some of whom like Abraham were devout Yahwists, while the faith of others was questionable, as is the case with Lot. There has been a like comparisons made with Moses' deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt to Zerubbabel's release from Babylon. It would be most interesting to unpack the Abraham and Lot narratives, as well as the mysterious story in which Abraham is portrayed as a man of war and encounters the enigmatic priestly king Melchizedek in Genesis 14, to see how these narratives could allude to the situation in Persian Period Jerusalem, whether addressing the social, political or religious circumstances at that time.

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