

ARTIGOS

A STUDY ON THE THEMATIC PARALLELS BETWEEN THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE EXPRESSION נשא עין IS FOUND IN THE NARRATIVE OF ABRAHAM AND GENESIS 1-3

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Abstract: The present study presents a brief overview of a theologically significant expression found repeated five times amidst the chapters that portray the life of the patriarch Abraham. The recurring expression is “lift up the eyes” in the Hebrew נשא עין

The question I seek to clarify is: could there be any significance in the use of this repeated expression in the narrative of Abraham? What themes can be found in the immediate context in which the expression is inserted? Furthermore, in the chapters where the expression is located, what recurring themes already seen in the literary construction of Genesis can be identified?

The outcome is a fascinating parallel between the story of Abraham and the theological themes already present in Genesis 1-3 that in the outset shed further light into the possibility of the literary unity of the book of Genesis as a whole.

Keywords: Abraham, Creation, Genesis, Literary Unit.



Resumo: O presente estudo apresenta uma breve visão geral de uma expressão teológica significativa encontrada repetida cinco vezes entre os capítulos que retratam a vida do patriarca Abraão. A expressão recorrente é “levantar os olhos”, em hebraico

נשא עין

A questão que tento esclarecer é: poderia haver algum significado na narrativa de Abraão para a repetição dessa expressão? Que temas podem ser encontrados no contexto imediato no qual a expressão está inserida? Além disso, nos capítulos onde a expressão está localizada, quais são os temas recorrentes já vistos na construção literária de Gênesis que podem ser identificados?

O resultado é um paralelo fascinante entre a história de Abraão e os temas teológicos já presentes em Gênesis 1-3 que, a princípio, lança mais luz na possibilidade da unidade literária de Gênesis como um todo.

Palavras-chaves: Abraão, Criação, Gênesis, Unidade Literária



INTRODUCTION

Problem

The narrative of Abraham that begins in the transition between Chap 11 and 12 of Genesis is commonly appointed to be central in the development of the book and its structure.¹ Interpreters of the call of Abraham affirm that this portion is the key for the understanding of the book of Genesis and even the Pentateuch as a whole.² Even though some appoint the narrative of Abraham to be fictional³ its center in the literary corpus of Genesis remains. Amidst the chapters that portray the life of the patriarch an expression is repeated five times. The recurring expression is “lift up the eyes” in the Hebrew **נִשְׂא עֵינַי**. Could there be any significance in the use of this repeated expression in the

¹ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis*, The New American Commentary vol. 1B (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 104; Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Rev. ed., The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 159; Frank Ely Gaebelin, J. D. Douglas, and Dick Polcyn, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 111; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 87; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 281.

² Abingdon Press., *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 422; David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series, (Sheffield, Eng.: Dept. of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1978), 45-60; William A. Dyrness, *Let the Earth Rejoice!: A Biblical Theology of Holistic Mission* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1983), 49; Speiser, 87; John Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers, and Preachers*, Old Testament Studies, vol. 6 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 102-03; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 259.

³ R. N. Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 50.



narrative of Abraham? What theme can be found in the immediate context in which the expression is inserted? Furthermore, in the chapters where the expression is located, what recurring themes already seen in the literary construction of Genesis can be identified?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study can be centered in two main spheres, a hermeneutical⁴ and a theological. The former alludes to understanding the beginning of the narrative of Abraham and its triad promises made by God that consist of blessing, offspring, and land not to be the starting point of this thematic motif in Genesis but rather the continuation of it. These promises are found throughout the book of Genesis and not beginning in chap 12 as some have implied.⁵ Wenham comments “But the promises first made to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3 begins to repair that hopeless situation”⁶, even though Wenham later affirms that in regard to “blessing” the connection with the previous texts of Genesis are made relevant “this harks back to the first great blessing of mankind at creation (1:28) and its renewal after the flood (9:1)”.⁷ If in the narrative of Abraham there could be found Biblical evidence pointing back to the literary development in the creation account certainly this thematic motif (blessing, offspring,

⁴ I am greatly indebted to the personal influence of Dr. Richard Davidson. In the present study the following paper has noted significance: “Genesis 1–3 and the Theological Center of Scripture” (De Regreso al Principio: Génesis 1–3 y el Centro Teológico de las Escrituras), Paper presented at the Sixth South American Biblical-Theological Symposium, Lima, Peru, July 2004.

⁵ Speiser, 87; James McKeown, *Genesis, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 74; Bernhard W. Anderson and Steven Bishop, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 99; Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 172-73.

⁶ Wenham, li.

⁷ Ibid, 282.



and land) could be better understood and grounded. What could the context in which the expression “lift up the “eyes” is found point back to in order to provide a correct reading of the call of Abraham and the understanding of the same triad motif that dominates the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch?⁸ In relation to the theological significance of this study, can the expression “lift up the eyes” provide any theological insight into what is happening in the narrative of Abraham or is it just a literal activity marked by a “raising” of one’s eyes inserted by the author? It is this dual concern that result in the relevance of this study.

Purpose of the Study and Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to approach the narrative of Abraham following the thematic progressions and motifs that the Hebrew text has presented in its unity. Also, to seek regard to its impact on the audience that received its content drawing possible connections with the first chapters of the book.⁹ Secondly, to understand what the author of Genesis is emphasizing or pointing back to by using the expression **נִשָּׂא עֵינָי** in the

⁸ On the correct reading of Genesis the same concern was shown by James McKeown in his PhD Dissertation: Mckeown, James "A study of the main unifying themes in the Hebrew text of the Book of Genesis". Ph.D. diss., Queen's University of Belfast (United Kingdom), 1991; For more see: J. A. Emerton, "The Origin of the Promises to the Patriarchs in the Older Sources of the Book of Genesis, " *Vetus Testamentum* 32, no. 1 (Jan., 1982): 14-32.

⁹ The common fragmentation of the book of Genesis due to the "multiplicity" of its sources has been questioned in recent scholarly work. In this study I will follow the conception of the unity of the book, the traditional authorship of Moses and the dating of the 15th century b.c, for more see: Gleason Leonard Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, [Rev. and expanded]. ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2007); Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary. Doctoral Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1978); Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991); John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 1-79.



same narrative beginning with its first appearance – Genesis 13.¹⁰ To reach these goals I will provide a short survey of the repeated words of both Gen 1-3 and the chapters in which the expression **נשא עין** appears to see if the repeating ideas in the narrative of Abraham chapters echo the reality of the first chapters of the Bible.¹¹ Thirdly, I will present a review of the main ideas in each chapter where the expression appears that could reinforce the thematic connection between the narrative of Abraham and Gen 1-3.

Lastly, I will review the main positions among scholars concerning the expression's literal or theological use.

Limitations

This paper will not present an exhaustive explanation of the context in which the expression appears in the book of Genesis or in the Hebrew Bible as it relates to chap. 1-3 or all the thematic connections found in its chapters. This study will be limited to describe a some of the thematic bridges found around the expression that is used five times in the narrative of Abraham and its thematic relation with Genesis 1-3. Also, the survey of previous scholarly discourse on the topic of the usage of the expression **נשא עין** in the narrative of Abraham will center around the commentators that do give an explanation on the use of the expression to clarify the author's intention in its use as literal or theological in meaning.

¹⁰ This paper will seek to find parallels between Gen 1-3 and the narrative of Abraham. The chapters in the narrative of Abraham are coincidentally marked by the expression “lift up the eyes”. Its use is found in 3 chapters – Gen 13, 18 and 22.

¹¹ See: McKeown's PhD Dissertation mentioned earlier.



THE EXPRESSION עֵין נִשָּׂא AND THE NARRATIVE OF ABRAHAM

Introduction (The Expression)

The expression עֵין נִשָּׂא as mentioned before, is used five different times in the narrative of Abraham.¹² The combination of both the verb עֵין נִשָּׂא has been identified with widespread usage in the Hebrew Bible and its basic meaning refers to an “eager looking” as it is followed 35 times by the verb רָאָה “to see”.¹³ Furthermore, it points to veneration, cultic worship and idolatry.¹⁴ The explanation of the meaning of the expression by itself will only go so far.¹⁵ Rather than to identify the meaning of the expression “lift up the eyes” this study will attempt to understand the thematic progressions that the context around the usage of the expression in the narrative of Abraham seems to present in parallel with the first chapters of the book of Genesis.

Gen 12 in the Light of Gen 1 and 9

As mentioned before, scholars agree that the call of Abraham marks a new beginning in the book of Genesis.¹⁶ Surely the call of Abraham not only has its place in

¹² 13:10, 13:14, 18:2, 22:4 and 22:13 (other occurrences in Genesis are: 24:63, 31:12, 33:1, 33:5, 43:29. In the Hebrew Bible: Num 24:2; Deut 3:27, 4:19; Josh 5:13; Judg 19:17; 1 Sam 6:13; 2 Sam 18:24; 1 Chr 21:16; Ps 121:1, 123:1; Is 60:4, 40:26, 49:18, 51:6; Jer 3:2, 13:20; Ezek 8:5, 23:7, 32:25; Zech 5:5).

¹³ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Rev. ed., vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 38.

¹⁴ Ibid, 38.

¹⁵ For more on the term, its usage and translation see: S. C. Reif in “a Root to Look Up? A Study of the Hebrew NS’ ‘YN’” in John Adney Emerton and International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament. Congress, *Congress Volume: Salamanca, 1983*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum V. 36 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 230-44.

¹⁶ Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology : An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.:



regard to the *toledot* structure of the book¹⁷ but also in the natural progression of the book marking a pre-fulfillment of the promises of offspring, land and blessing. Even though in several instances overlooked by scholars¹⁸, what is seen in the promises of Gen 12 is also a reaffirmation of the Divine imperatives directed to Adam and Eve before sin (Gen 1:26- 2:3) and to Noah after the flood in a post-sin scenario (Gen 9). The repetition of the Hebrew words בָּרַךְ “to bless”, אֶרֶץ “earth, land”, זֶרַע “seed”, רַבָּה “to multiply”, among other terms portrayed in these texts could imply that there is an apparent repetition of ideas between the chapters.¹⁹ The following table exemplifies briefly the possible correlation between the texts:

Ideas	Genesis 1	Genesis 9	Genesis 12
Offspring	Vv 28a “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth”	Vv 1b “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth”	Vv 2a “I will make you into a great nation”
Land	Vv 28b “fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over all... the living thing that move7s”	Vv 2 and 7 “the fear of you will be on every beast... populate the earth abundantly”	Vv 1 “Go... to the land I will show you”

Zondervan, 2007), 306; McKeown, 73; J. Gerald Janzen, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12-50*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 15.

¹⁷ Concerning this particular structure of the book see: P. J. Wiseman, *Clues to Creation in Genesis*, Rev. ed., Marshalls Paperbacks (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1977), 34-45; Paul J. Kissling, *Genesis*, The College Press NIV Commentary. Old Testament Series (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 2004), 30-31; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis : Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 2-11.

¹⁸ Most only mention the first usages back to Gen 1 yet Chap 12 is still prioritized: Speiser, 87; McKeown, 74;

¹⁹ Terms and connections will be better clarified in the following section



Blessing Covenant	Vv 28a and 2:3 “God blessed them... The God blessed the seventh day”	Vv 1a and 9 “And God blessed Noah... I Myself do establish my covenant with you and with your descendents”	Vv 2b “and I will bless you”
Ideas	Genesis 1	Genesis 9	Genesis 12

Thus, the idea of blessing, land and offspring are not isolated from what the book of Genesis has already presented before reaching the 12th chapter. As seen in the table above, beginning in Gen 1:28 the series of Divine imperatives are used to allude to the same elements found in the calling of Abraham. In the 6th day of creation moving to the 7th day the establishment of this theme takes place with an order for mankind to multiply, followed by a command to subdue the earth and rule over it ending with the 7th day Sabbath that was “blessed”. Scholars have summarized these mandates in the context of the calling of Abraham in three basic categories and themes also seen, then, in the context of Gen 1 – promises concerning posterity, land, and relation to God in the covenantal context.²⁰ The same repeated words found in the calling of Abraham point back to the beginning chapters of Genesis and to the reality of Noah after the flood as affirmed by scholars and as scripture presents the repeating theme.²¹ At this stage, one could also argue, as other scholars have²², for the same thematic motif being presented in the curses of Gen 3 that focused on the posterity and offspring²³, in the Land,²⁴ and in the relation to God.²⁵

²⁰ Dyrness, 49-50; Mathews, 104; Clines, 31-43; W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis*, 1st ed., Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 144; McKeown, 197.

²¹ Further evidences for the relevance of Gen 12 interpreted in the light of Gen 1-2 will be analysed in further sections with the use of the term "lift up" and "eyes".

²² Gaebelein, 56-57; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2006), 163-64.

²³ Gen 3:16 – use of Hebrew word רבה multiply and pain in childbirth.



Following the confusion in Babel in Gen 11, the hope that was previously seen in the promise of the seed in Gen 3 and in the sign of the rainbow²⁶ in Gen 9 is now found in a man in Gen 12. It is in this context that the following chapters of the narrative of Abraham and the usage of the expression **נְשֵׂא עֵין** take place.

Repeated Words in Gen 1:24-2:3

The next step would be to identify the repeated words in the Hebrew text of Gen 1-3 if a connection with the chapters in which the expression **נְשֵׂא עֵין** appears is to be made. The pericope set in this portion has been used by several scholars²⁷ as a regular delimitation of the 6th day of creation and the 7th. It is amidst these two days that the Divine imperatives are made to Adam and Eve. The repeated words that appear in this portion of Genesis are: **אֱלֹהִים** “God”, **עָשָׂה** “to make”, **אֶרֶץ** “earth”, **בָּרָא** “to create”, **אָמַר** “to say”, some parallel words that are also used²⁸ are, **זָרַע** “seed”, **בֵּרַךְ** “to bless”, **יְהוָה** “Adonai, the LORD”, and **הָיָה** “to be”. Even though these are common words in the Hebrew language what needs to be noticed is the intense repetition of these common words in specific chapters of the book of Genesis. Also, to respect the natural progression of the themes in the unity of the book is imperative,

²⁴ Gen 3:17 – the ground becomes cursed.

²⁵ Gen 3:23, 24 in the context that both Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden.

²⁶ See: Turner, L. A. “The Rainbow As the Sign of the Covenant in Genesis IX 11-13”. *Vetus Testamentum*, XLIII.1 (1993).

²⁷ Gaebelain, 36-39; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis*, The New American Commentary vol. 1A (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 159, 176; David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 25.

²⁸ Other key words that are used in Gen 3 will also be seen in this study even though the chapter was not included in the context and background of the paper.



especially in its first chapters. The identification of the repeated words in Gen 1-2 prepares the setting for the next step in this study as it enters into the chapters in which the expression נשא עין and נשא עין appears.

The Expression in Gen 13:10 and 14

Text and Translation

Gen 13:10:

וַיִּשָׂא-לוֹט אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת-כָּל-כַּבְּר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כָלָה
מִשְׁקָה לְפָנָי שַׁחַת יְהוָה אֶת-סֹדֶם וְאֶת-עֲמֹרָה כְּגַן-יְהוָה
כַּאֲרֵץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֲכָה צֹעַר:

Then Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the plain of the Jordan, that it was irrigated (this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as you come from Zoar.

Gen 13:14:

וַיְהוָה אָמַר אֶל-אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הַפָּרֶד-לוֹט מֵעַמוּ שָׂא נָא
עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה שָׂם צַפְנָה וְנֹגְבָה וְקִדְמָה
וַיִּמָּה:

And the LORD said to Abraham, after Lot had separated from him, “lift up your eyes now and see from the place that you are, to the north and to the south, also to the east and to the west”.

Interpretations of the Text

There are three basic positions concerning the use of the expression נשא עין among commentators. The first deals with the geographical data that the text adds. The idea of



“seeing” alludes to the importance of the geographical location that the text presents.²⁹ A second understanding of the two verses is centered in its literal and physical intension behind the expression, Lot and Abraham “looked around”.³⁰

A third explanation would be to emphasize the legal aspect of possession of Land in the action of seeing.³¹

Repeated Words in Gen 13

It is important to affirm that the focus of this section will not be on the unusual and unique words that would make a direct connection with Genesis 1-2 but to understand if the repeating words in the chapter have any connection with the repeating words in Gen 1-2. Even though the repeated words of the following chapters seem to be common words in the corpus of the book, due to its contextual location and repetition a link with the first chapters of the book could possibly be made. This section will aim at this objective, therefore some of the unique words that clarify other general issues that text presents yet not in relation to this study will be left out.

The first significant word is found in Gen 13:1. The word **הוא** “he, it” is a key term in the Gen 1-3.³² This term raises the first messianic question in the Bible as to

²⁹ This is an important position due to the relevance of the location yet it is only partial in understanding the scope of the term and its usage in the narrative as a whole, some proponents of this position are: Wenhausen, 297-98; Mathews (NAC 1B), 136.

³⁰ Von Rad understands it to be a reflection of the "inner psychological process of reflection and decision completely in this outward attitude of gazing" Von Rad, 172; Hamilton, 392; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (New York,,: Scribner, 1910), 252.

³¹ NIB, 434; Von Rad, 173; this view is well presented in the following book: David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (New York,,: Ktav Pub. House, 1969), 37; Even though Daube does have a point in his arguments in the context of Gen 13 the land did not belong to Abraham or Lot, therefore, there could be no legal transaction. His point could be made in God’s request for Abraham to “lift up his eyes” as a legal transaction since to God “belongs” the land (Lev 15:23).



how the term should be translated and it paints as others have observed the first possible picture of the coming messiah. A second term found in vv. 2 and 13 is **מְאֹד**. “very, exceedingly” that is first used in Gen 1:31 in the end of the 6th day of creation.³³ A third term repeated in chap 13 is **הָיָה** “to be” used in Gen 1-3 more than any other place the word its frequency in the text is prominent.³⁴ Another repeated term is **בֵּין** “between, interval”, it is used frequently in the chapter³⁵ emphasizing the idea of division that will be discussed in the following section. A second word that is used in chap 13 and characterizes the theme of the chapter is the word **אֲרֶץ** “earth, land”.³⁶ The term **זֶרַע** “seed”, is used three times in the text³⁷ and marks another parallel with Gen 1-3 and also the theme of the book of Genesis. The last corresponding term is the term to identify God in the text, that is **יְהוָה** “Adonai, the LORD”.³⁸

Main ideas and points

This section will be dedicated to develop some of the themes that point back to the beginning chapters of Genesis found during the study of each isolated text. Each

³² Used in Gen 2:11, 13, 14, 19; 3:6, 15, 16.

³³ Also used in the flood narrative (Gen 7:18 and twice in 7:19).

³⁴ Used in Gen 1:2, 3, 5, 6, 7-9, 11, 13-15, 19, 23-24, 29-31; 2:5, 7, 10, 18, 24-25; 3:1, 5, 20, 22 and in Gen 13:3, 5-8.

³⁵ Used in Gen 13:3, 7 and 8 (8 times in the chapter) and in Gen 1.

³⁶ Used in Gen 13:6, 7, 9-10, 12, 15-17, in Gen 1:1-2, 10-12, 15, 17, 20, 22, 24-26, 28-30 and in Gen 2:1, 4-6, 11-13.

³⁷ Used in Gen 13:15 and 16 (twice); also in Gen 1:11-12, 29 and Gen 3:15.

³⁸ Used in Gen 13:4, 10, 13-14, 18; also in Gen 2:4-5, 7-9, 15-16, 18-19, 21-22; also in Gen 3:1, 8-9, 13-14, 21-23.



idea will be used to understand the context in which **נשא עין** appears and to draw possible connections with Gen 1-3. Secondly, this section and the subsequent ones will be used to attempt to understand if the expression **נשא עין** is literal or theological in meaning.

A first connection of this chapter with Gen 1 is based on the motion of the text marked by one of the repeated words in the chapter, **בין** “between, interval”. It is in the use of this word that the idea of separation that is echoed in Gen 1 becomes a reality due to its repetition. God separates light from darkness, the waters from the dry lands, and here there is a tension that leads to separation between Abraham and Lot. Furthermore, a connection between chap 13 and Gen 3 could be made also with the repeated word **בין**.

The word is repeated 4 times both in Gen 13:8 and in Gen 3:15. In chap 13 the issue is the “contention” between the pastors in the Hebrew:

אֶל־נֹא תְהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיהֶם וּבֵין רְעִי וּבֵין רְעֵיהֶם

In Gen 3:15 God establishes “enmity” between the seed of the woman and of the serpent.³⁹ In the Hebrew:

וְאִיבָה אִשִּׁית בֵּינֶךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זְרַעֲךָ וּבֵין זְרַעֶיהָ

A second idea in the text that is highlighted by commentators that emphasize the geography of the chapter⁴⁰ is the reference to the “garden of the Lord”. Some even go further to stress the wording used to describe Lot’s choosing of the land and Eve’s sin⁴¹ or even his choosing to go east with Cain being driven away to the east.⁴² Also, it is

³⁹ This connection could be an interesting question for further study.

⁴⁰ Mathews (NAC, 1B), 136; Janzen, 29; Von Rad, 172.

⁴¹ NIB, 434; Hamilton, 392.

⁴² McKeown, 84.



important to notice also that the first time the expression “lift up” and “eye” appears is in relation to Lot. This could create a problem - that the expression refers to, like some affirm, a physical reality identified in detail in the narrative. Yet the text in chap 13 shows a sudden syntactical shift as the expression is used with Abraham. In the Hebrew: **וַיִּהְיֶה אָמַר אֶל-אַבְרָם** the use of the perfect verb marks the emphasis that affects the use of the expression and how its application should be different in the context of Abraham. This shift in the level of theology has been identified by McKeown as he says “this portrayal of Lot looking out to the east and making his own choice dramatically emphasizes that, in contrast to Lot, Abram did not choose his own land; his land was chosen for him by God”.⁴³ The use of the expression “lift up the eyes” could have a connotation of Divine providence at least in the case of Abraham in the present chapter as the author observes. Another theme one could identify is the use of the expression **כָּל-הָאָרֶץ** “all the land” in the verse and its significance in the context of Gen 13 followed by its use in Gen 3. In Gen 3:1 this same construction has been used to point out the cosmical nature of the being behind the serpent, in the Hebrew **מִכֹּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה**. What does this overemphasis on the land alludes to? As the supernatural nature of the serpent, would this chosen land have cosmic significance? Even though questions such as these cannot be answered in the present study the reality of the importance of the “land” in chapter 13 needs to be emphasized. The expression in both verses of the chapter point out to the choosing of the land for Lot and the indication of the land to Abraham by God.

Lastly, the geography of the location where Lot and Abraham were as they looked to the plain where they would part ways brings insight into the discussion of the act of “seeing” being literal or theological. The text affirms that Lot and Abraham are both looking at the plain, “is not the land before thee?” Abraham argues. This privileged position allowed them to see the land as a whole yet as they look down at the plain of Jordan they “lift up their eyes”. This does not seem to be a simple description of a

⁴³ Ibid, 84.



concentrated gaze over the land but rather a theological key that identifies the quality of the action of “looking”. Certainly, at least in the present chapter, the verb would be related less to the literal action and more to the theological nature of its use by the author.⁴⁴

The Expression in Genesis 18:2

Text and Translation

Gen 18:2:

וַיֵּשׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיִּרְא
וַיִּרְץ לְקָרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה:

Then, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw and behold! three men standing over him. As he saw he ran from the opening of the tent to meet them, and he bowed himself toward the ground.

Interpretations of the Text

Concerning the usage of the expression in this unique verse in chap 18 some scholars remain silent. In the outset, the common position is that the expression portrays an abstract/significant reality, Wenhausen comments: “the pair of verbs ‘look up’ and ‘see’ indicates that what he sees will prove very significant”.⁴⁵ Mathews also indicates the same understanding of the expression by saying: “looked up and saw often signals an important imminent event”.⁴⁶ At the same time both commentators point to future occurrences of the expression and leave the previous instances of its usage aside by

⁴⁴ More on this subject is seen in the discussion of Gen 22.

⁴⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 45.

⁴⁶ Mathews (NAC, 1B), 216.



making no connection or interrelation between them outside of what it means in the text.

Repeated Words in Gen 18

The repeated words in chap 18 can be summarized in three. The first, due to the intense dialogue of the text is **אמר** “to say”.⁴⁷ The second term repeated in the chapter is **עשה** “to do, make”.⁴⁸ Lastly, once again present in the narrative of Abraham specifically in the texts in this study is the term **הוא** “he, it”.⁴⁹

Main Ideas and Points

The connections with Gen 1-3 in Gen 18 are many. At this stage the focus will be on three aspects of the parallel between the chapters. The first is found in verse 2 where the following phrase in the Hebrew appears: **וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה** “and he bowed to the ground”. The key words in Gen 18 have already identified a bridge between the chapter and Gen 1. The movement of the creation of man from the ground in some way is inverted as Abraham’s first reactions after he “lifts up his eyes” is to run and “bow himself” in the direction of “the ground”. Secondly, in vv 5 the use of the Hebrew phrase by the angels in the narrative **וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ** “make as you speak” implies the idea of creation where things came to be as God spoke.

The last connection to be made follows Matthews idea that, “in the context of Genesis this is a very special event. Since there has been no mention of God walking on earth since his appearance in the ‘Garden of Eden’, the narrator must have an important

⁴⁷ Used in Gen 18:3, 5-6, 9-10, 12-13, 15, 17, 20, 23, 26-32.

⁴⁸ Used in Gen 18:5-8, 17, 19, 21, 25, 29-30; also in Gen 1:12, 16, 25-26, 31; in Gen 2:2-4, 18; and in Gen 3:1, 7, 13-14, 21.

⁴⁹ Used in Gen 18:1, 8 and 10.



purpose for this particular passage”.⁵⁰ The Divine question “where are you” made in Eden⁵¹ echoes to Gen 18:9 when the angel asks “where is your wife?”. Both question and the word “wife” אִשָּׁה could point back to the setting of Genesis 2-3.

Even though the promise of offspring is highlighted in chap 12 and in chap 15:2 when Abraham first voices the issue “I remain childless”, the concrete promise of a son from God for Abraham comes only in chapter 18⁵² where coincidentally for the third time the expression נִשְׂא עֵין is used in the narrative of Abraham. The first instance of the expression in chap 13, as seen earlier, is immersed in a chapter that dealt with the promise of the land, now, Divine provision makes concrete the second promise where again the expression נִשְׂא עֵין appears - the promise of offspring.

The Expression in Genesis 22:4 and 13

Text and Translation

Gen 22:4:

בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם
מֵרְחֹק:

In the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.

Gen 22:13:

וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אֵיל אַחַר נֶאֱחָז בְּסֹבֵף
בְּקִרְנָיו וַיִּלָּךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַחַת
בְּנוֹ:

⁵⁰ Mathews (NAC, 1B), 103.

⁵¹ Genesis 3:9 and also 4:9.

⁵² Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers : Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 11. Westermann affirms: “the fullest development of this motif (the promise of a son) is found in Gen 18”.



And Abraham Lifted up his eyes and saw, then, Behold! a ram behind caught in the thicket by its horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and he offered it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Interpretations of the Text

Due to the richness of the text most of the commentators are silent regarding the expression **וַיִּשָׂא עֵינָיו**. Still, among those that comment on the expression, the positions are varied. Wenhausen affirms that the expression points to the significance of the object in verse 4⁵³ yet remains silent in its use in verse 13. A second position is that of Hamilton as he appoints the significance of the expression in connection to the idea of “lifting up” that would be present throughout the chapter mainly in regard to the sacrifice.⁵⁴ Hamilton also remains silent in regard to the use of the expression in verse 13. A third view on the subject points to the aspect of faith in the act of seeing, Fretheim comments “this process (of seeing) testifies to a progressively clearer seeing. Abraham places his trust in God’s seeing”.⁵⁵ A fourth position is made by Matthews as he understands the expression to be a reference to its previous uses in the narrative of Abraham yet in Gen 22 it has the purpose to tie together the events of “discovery” in the text, that is, the mount and the ram.⁵⁶ A last view proposed by Davidson indicates that the “seeing” was not just a literal action. In the first verse where the expression appears Davidson raises the issue of the literal or non literal “seeing”. Yet in the second verse Davidson affirms that the author of the text did not use the common verb form “saw”. Emphasizing Abraham’s action of “seeing” the author believes that this could point to more than just a literal sight but to a Christological sight. The text of John 8:56 where

⁵³ Wenham, 107.

⁵⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 107.

⁵⁵ NIB, 495.

⁵⁶ Mathews (NAC, 1B), 293.



Jesus reveals that “Abraham rejoiced to see my day” is used by Davidson to reinforce this theological possibility.⁵⁷

Repeated Words in Gen 22

In the last chapter in which the expression occurs the repeated words found are not new but rather a revision of other words mentioned earlier in the previous texts. The first, אָמַר “to say”,⁵⁸ is also present due to the intense dialogue between father/son and God and Abraham throughout the text. Secondly, both names of God in Gen 1-3 are used in this chapter, אֱלֹהִים “God”⁵⁹ in the first portion of the chapter and יְהוָה “Adonai, the LORD”⁶⁰ in the latter. A third term that is commonly used in the movement of the text is לָקַח “to take”.⁶¹ Two important words not only in this study but also in the overall motifs of Genesis are בָּרַךְ “to bless”⁶² and זָרַע “seed”.⁶³ Lastly, the repeated word that is traced back to every text in the narrative of Abraham that contain the expression עֵין נִשָּׂא is the term הוּא “he, it”.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Jacques Doukhan and Ji ří Moskala, *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan* (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2000), 57, 62-64.

⁵⁸ Used in Gen 22: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 (4x), 8, 9, 11, 14, 16, 20.

⁵⁹ Used in Gen 22:1, 3, 8, 9, 12.

⁶⁰ Used in Gen 22:11, 14, 15, 16.

⁶¹ Used in Gen 22:2, 3, 6, 10, 13; also in Gen 2:15, 21-23; and in Gen 3:6, 19, 22-23.

⁶² Used in Gen 22:17 (twice) and 18; also in Gen 1:22 and 28; and in Gen 2:3.

⁶³ Used in Gen 22:17 (twice) and 18.

⁶⁴ Used in Gen 22:14.



Main Ideas and Points

The first aspect of the text that is of interest to this study is centered in the first appearance of the expression “lift up the eyes” in verse 4. A small chiasmic structure can be identified in the beginning of the text as indicated in the following structure:

A God Speaks to Abraham – response: אֲבִרָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי (vv.1)

B God asks for a burnt offering - וְהֶעֱלֵהוּ שֵׁם לְעֹלָה (vv.2)

C Donkey חֲמֹר and two young men נְעָרָיו אֶת־שְׁנֵי go with Abraham (vv.3)

D וַיִּשָּׂא אֲבִרָהֶם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרְחֹק (vv.4)

C’ Donkey חֲמֹר and young men נְעָרָיו stay without Abraham (22:5)

B’ Abraham prepares the burnt offering - וַיִּקַּח אֲבִרָהֶם אֶת־עֵצֵי הָעֹלָה (22:6)

A’ Isaac speaks to Abraham – response: וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי בְנִי (22:7)

Likely, the emphasis of the chapter in which for the fourth time the expression “lift up the eyes” is used seems connected with an indication of God’s providence, God would show the place, now, he reaches the place. Another parallel to between Gen 22 and Gen 3 can be indicated by the use of the two words קוֹל and שִׁמְעָה in Gen 22:18. The “sound” of God walking in the garden was heard by Adam and Eve indicating the idea of obedience and blessing as these two words are vastly used in the Pentateuch.⁶⁵

The question at this stage is if the expression “lift up the eyes” in the narrative of Abraham so far has been inserted in chapters that indicated the first two aspects of God’s imperatives and promises to Adam and Eve and to Noah, what would be the main theme of chapter 22 as a whole? The first instance in which the expression appears in the chapter points to the location, yet the second use of the expression in the chapter appoints to the sacrificial ram. Matthews affirms that “the death of the discovered ram

⁶⁵ Gaebelein, 52.



‘instead of son’ (vv. 13) epitomizes the idea of substitutionary atonement, which characterized the Levitical system”.⁶⁶ The idea of substitutionary atonement is not absent from Gen 1-3, its presence is first observed in Gen 3:15 founding the hope that would continue at every stage of the book of Genesis centered in the seed that would only come through birth and that would eventually crush the head of the serpent.⁶⁷ The chapter relates to this context resulting in an emphasis on the aspect of relationship between God and man, namely, to the covenant. Furthermore, to the provision that God made throughout the book of Genesis to those who kept his covenant and to the possibility of the promises made in Gen 3:15 concerning the seed to continue to become a prospect and a hope.

CONCLUSION

The triad promise of Land, Blessing and Offspring is not a new progression in the book of Genesis but a reality seen from the first chapters on. The expression “lift up the eyes” is coincidentally inserted in specific chapters that are used by the author to indicate a partial fulfillment of these promises in the context of Abraham. Even though this fulfillment is not final, the promise of the continuation of the promise is seen in each chapter. The use of the expression and its use by the author could be further studied to clarify if it is used conscientiously with the intent to stress the reality of the promises of Land, Blessing and Offspring, as the context of the chapters have demonstrated so. In Gen 13 the expression points to the theme of the land as God reaffirms the promise to Abraham after asking him to “lift up his eyes” even though he

⁶⁶ Mathews (NAC, 1B), 297.

⁶⁷ For more see: McKeown, 39; Wenham (Genesis 1-15), 81; Collins, 29-30; Waltke, 281-82; John H. Walton, *Genesis : From Biblical Text ... To Contemporary Life*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2001); Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole, "The Seed in Genesis 3:15: An Exegetical and Intertextual Study". Ph.D. diss., Andrews University (2002).



was in a position where a concrete literal lifting up of the eyes was not needed to see the land. Indeed this reality could point to a theological “seeing” rather than to a literal gaze.

Secondly, the theme of offspring had been questioned by Abraham in the preceding chapters and in Gen 18 with the appearance of three heavenly beings, the promise is made concrete through the word of the angel indicating that Sarah would bear a child. Also using language of Gen 1-3 to endorse the idea that this reality is not only the fulfillment of the promises made when Abraham was called in Gen 12 but that this was God’s purpose for the human race from the beginning. The expression in this section is unclear as to whether it is a literal lifting up or a theological “seeing” yet the same question could be used, why would Abraham need to “lift up his eyes” to see the coming messengers? At the same time, the context is used to appoint to the continuation, to a partial fulfillment of the promise and of the purpose God had for humanity regarding offspring.

Thirdly, in Gen 22 the expression is used twice. The first to appoint the place which God indicated in the beginning of the chapter for the sacrifice to take place and the second as Abraham sees the offering for the sacrifice “instead” of his son. In a way both of the previous promises are summed in this chapter as we see Isaac being delivered from death, therefore making possible the future promises concerning the great nation Abraham would become and secondly regarding the land (he saw the “place”). It is after this episode that Abraham finally settles. Yet a greater purpose can be seen behind the context in which the expression is used in this final text - the idea of relationship and of covenant is seen in God’s provision of a sacrifice. Without the need to point to future fulfillment of this passage and its theological significance, the reality of God’s provision, making possible his relation to man can be identified in the text. The expression could likely be used to summarize both previous promises of land (“saw the place”) and blessing (“saw the ram of sacrifice”) in its usage but ultimately it could point to the possibility of a relationship between God and man through the covenant and through the “sacrifice”. Even though by studying the expression by itself only these possibilities can be raised, yet the theological connection intended is present in the context of its chapters.



The purpose of this paper was met in a way that it provided a clarification of the context in which the expression “lift up the eyes” is used in the narrative of Abraham and its relation to Gen 1-3. Also, the understanding of the expression among scholars has been identified even though scholars concentrate on the most discussed issues in the text leaving the usage of the expression aside. Finally, hermeneutically the chapters in which the expression are used could point to the unity of the book of Genesis as they stress the themes and wording found in the beginning of the book shedding light on the narrative of Abraham and on the continuance of the promises made to Abraham in connection to the imperatives made by God to Adam and Eve, and Noah.

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