Theology of Promise in the Patriarchal Narratives

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Scholarly discussion of the patriarchal narratives initiated by Julius Wellhausen in terms of the particularity of the religion of Israel[1] was given a new direction by Hermann Gunkel who interpreted them in relation to the wider international culture. Gunkel focused attention on the literary aspect of the patriarchal narratives and considered the theology in them to be the work of later, pious collectors and not an integral part of the narratives themselves.[2]

Albrecht Alt, by examining the tradition-history of the patriarchal religion, emphasized the importance of the theme of promise in the patriarchal narratives in relation to the cultural tension of the early pre-Israelite tribes from a nomadic culture to the sedentary culture of Canaan[3]. Alt's thesis has been developed further by later writers.

A new element is introduced into the discussion of the theme of promise in the works of Walther Zimmerli and Claus Westermann. Zimmerli observes the fivefold use of the root *brk* in Gen. 12:1-3 and points out that here a 'blessing', an unhistorical idea, is historicised by the Yahwist through associating it with the idea of promise.[4] Westermann elaborates further that the theme of promise has developed out of an original blessing concept in the patriarchal narratives.[5]

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[1] J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums, Skizzen und Vorarbeiten,* vol. iii, Berlin, 1887, p. 5. cf. O. Eissfeldt, 'Julius Wellhausen', *Kleine Schriften,* i p. 70.

[2] Indeed Wellhausen had attributed the mythological ideas to Babylonian influence during the Exilic period, but Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos,* pp. 35-55, has pointed out that the creation myths were already known to the Canaanites in the Amarna age, and that Israel had taken them over from Canaanite culture; H. Gunkel, *Genesis,*[1] Gottingen, 1910, p. lviii; *Genesis,*[3] p. lxxxv; W. Klatt, *Hermann Hunkel : zu seiner Theologie der Religionsgeschichte und zur Entstehung der formgeschichtlichen Methode,* Göttingen, 1969, p. 153.

[3] A. Alt, 'The God of the fathers', *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion,* Oxford, 1966, pp. 1-77.

[4] W. Zimmerli, 'Promise and Fulfilment', *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation,* London, 1964, pp. 89-122. See esp. pp. 90-93.

[5] C. Westermann, 'Arten der Erzählung. in der Genesis', *Forschung am Alten Testament,* München, 1964, pp. 25-26.

A survey of the promise-blessing passages in the patriarchal narratives reveals a third element in the idea of promise, namely the command of God (See appendix). Thus there results a regular promise-pattern in the patriarchal narratives in the form of 'Command—Promise—Blessing'. These three elements represent three features of the religions and cultures in relation to which Israelite religion developed, namely, the nomadic religion of the 'gods of the fathers', the Canaanite El religion and the Exodus-Sinai Yahwism.

The theme of promise could also be seen as developing within the historical circumstances of Israel in the periods during which the sources JEP are thought to have been written, that is, the Davidic-Solomonic period (J), the reign of Jeroboam I (E) and the Exile (P). Faced with the problems relating to cultural confrontation, these writers went back to the patriarchal traditions and reinterpreted them to their contemporaries, because they looked upon the patriarchal traditions as the first experience of the people of God in their encounter with other religions and cultures.

The three main elements of the promise pattern, 'Command-Promise-Blessing', have influenced each other and have thereby developed a new understanding of the God of Israel. This development is to be understood not as an evolutionary process from a lower form to a higher form of religion, but as a syncretistic process.[5a] Syncretism expresses the process of struggle between two incompatible forms of faith. It involves holding on to one's own faith and yet appreciating the contrary religious point of view in the other religion, to such an extent that there results a transformation of one's understanding and expression of one's own particular faith.[6] Nomadic religion emphasized the coming God of promise, Canaanite religion the present God of blessing, and Yahwism the command of God and the obedience of his worshippers. These three concepts were essential parts of the different cultural contexts to which these religions had originally belonged. The joining together of different traditions connected with these cultures and religions had led to an association of their particular theological concepts. This connecting together of the different traditions is expressed by the Yahwist through his promise pattern 'Command—Promise—Blessing'. The Elohist, while presenting a similar pattern, transforms the blessing-concept in it, because it was not in agreement with his particular point of view. The Priestly writer employs this promise pattern of the Yahwist in his own version of the patriarchal narratives. Thus, the theme of promise in the patriarchal narratives emerges as a comprehensive idea which takes into account these three important elements which constitute the basis of the religion of Israel.

[5a] V. Maag, 'Malkunt Jhwh', *SVT* vii (1960) p. 137, says that 'Israel achieved a syncretism between the religion of the nomad and the religion of the Canaanite peasant. It is through syncretism that it became what it was in the classical period'.

[6] J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, London, 1969, p. 96, emphasizes the positive aspect of syncretism, as opposed to the common negative understanding of it, as the absorption or blending of one religion into another.

Promises are given through divine revelations. The revelation narratives connected with different patriarchs and different contexts may be divided into at least four different groups with regard to the manner of the divine manifestations:

(*i*) Direct revelation through the word of God, with no description of the actual manner of revelation. These revelations generally begin with *amar yhwh* or *wayyomer yhwh* (Gen. 12:1; 13:14; 22:1; 31:3, 11; 35:1). This form of revelation may be understood as an inner inspiration by which the devotee becomes aware of God's presence and God's word. The expression *hayah debar yhwh*, which recalls prophetic revelation, also belongs to this section.

(*ii*) Revelation through a visual manifestation of the deity. The expression *nir'eh* (the Niph'al of *ra'āh*) is employed in such revelations (12:7; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2, 24; 35:1). It literally means that 'God showed himself to so and so'. Lindblom believes that the narrator thought of this experience as a vision of God.[7]

(*iii*) Revelation through a dream or vision (*maḥzeh* 15:1). The word *hinnēh* is employed in such narratives to indicate that it is a dream experience. This form is usually interpreted as an 'incubation dream'; in other words, revelation is experienced in a dream state while the recipient is staying at a sanctuary (28:10-15).

(*iv*) Revelation is also given through the mediation of *māl'āk Elohim* or *māl'āk yhwh* (22:11, 15).

In all of these revelations the nature of the revelation is not clearly described and the revelation itself is given in the form of a brief notice. On the other hand, there is a marked emphasis on the details of promise and blessing. Moltmann points out that Israel was interested in revelation not for its own sake, but as a medium of the divine promises. As a result, not much detail is given about the nature of the divine revelation. He says that promise points away from the revelation to the yet unrealized future about which it speaks.[8] Similarly, Zimmerli, too, observes that in the revelation accounts the importance is shifted from the sensually perceptible appearance of Yahweh to the announcement of his action.[9] The revelation accounts connected with the different patriarchs emphasize the divine promises. In Gen. 18, the appearance of God is described in anthropomorphic terms, but even there the appearance of the actual deity is obscured in the narrative, which speaks of three men amongst whom Yahweh is only vaguely identified. The revelation is in the form of a dialogue and not in the form of a visual description of the deity. The whole narrative is connected more with the revelation of the divine purpose for Abraham and his posterity than with the description of the divine appearance.

[7] J. Lindblom, 'Theophanies in Holy Places in Hebrew Religion', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, xxxii, 1961, p. 91.

[8] J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 99-100; *Hope and Planning*, London, 1971, pp. 17-18.

[9] W. Zimmerli, '"Offenbarung" im Alten Testament', *Evangelische Theologie*, xxii, (1962), p. 16.

Revelation of promise and the divine plan for Israel and for the whole of mankind are the main contents of the theophanies in the patriarchal narratives. Moltmann draws a distinction between the religion of Israel and the religions of her neighbours on the basis of promise, and he identifies the former as a promise religion and the latter as epiphany religions. Promise religion is future-orientated and has a historical perspective, in contrast to the epiphany religions which have no historical perspective and are only concerned with the present. The deity in a promise-religion is connected with people, whereas in an epiphany religion he is bound to a particular place. Thus, according to Moltmann, the Israelite God 'Yahweh' is not an 'apparitional God', because his appearance is not an end in itself but is the means of declaring promises and the future well-being of the people of God.[10] But it is impossible to maintain this distinction, because the revelation of Yahweh is also concerned with the present and with events which are not strictly historical.[11] Moltmann's conclusion may perhaps point to the fact that these two ideas originally belong to the religions of the nomadic and sedentary peoples respectively. Nomadic religion is connected with blessing and present sustenance, with growth and development. But both of these ideas are closely connected with each other in the promise passages. The future orientation of promise is related to the present through the idea of blessing, and the unhistorical blessing concept is historicized through its connexion with the idea of promise. Moreover, 'promise' historicizes the idea of blessing and gives to its cyclic view of history a progressive idea of leading to a future fulfilment. The present is seen not as a repetition of the past but as the basis for a glorious future in fulfilment of the divine promises. 'Blessing' lacks a historical perspective in that it does not look to a future fulfilment but becomes effective in unfolding its power in normal happenings from the moment of its utterance. Blessing is given as promise in the patriarchal narratives and thereby acquires a historical orientation which it originally did not possess.

The idea of promise itself is refined through its association with 'blessing'. Promise calls for obedience and expectant waiting for the acts of the coming God, whereas 'blessing' calls for active cooperation with God in his acts of creation. This is especially prominent in the fertility cults of Canaanite religion. Man is thought of as sharing in the divine activity of creation through taking part in the cultic fertility rites which ensure the divine creative power in nature. This idea turns the concept of promise into one of active cooperation between man and God. Abraham is called to cooperate with God in his promised salvation for Israel and for all the nations of the earth (*wehyeh berakah*, Gen. 12:2). This is the real purpose of the divine revelation and announcement of promise, rather than merely stating his future plans and prospects. The concept of blessing emphasizes the active participation of the recipient of promise in the promised salvation and

[10] J. Moltmann, *Hope*, p. 100.

[11] C. Westermann, *Der Segen in der Bibel und im Handeln der Kirche*, München, 1968, p. 16, objects to this distinction and says that both of these ideas are connected with Yahweh.

not mere passive reception of divine salvation. The Yahwist extends this participation to the peoples as well through employing the Niph'al of *brk*.[12] Thus, promise is not mere announcement but a call to co-operation with God in actualizing the divine purpose.[13]

The God of promise connected with nomadic religion is believed to lead and guide his people from one place to another in search of means of livelihood. This deity is not associated with the idea of creation. He is not credited with powers to change the surroundings of his people through his creative powers. The God of blessing belonging to Canaan, on the other hand, is associated with creative powers by which he renews nature and, through the change of seasons, provides means of sustenance for his worshippers in one place. He is not obliged to lead his people from one place to another as the nomadic God does. Through the association of blessing with promise, creative powers are attributed to Yahweh, and Yahweh is regarded as the creator of the whole world.[13a] The idea of guidance is also transformed, through its association with the Canaanite religion of blessing. Guidance, hitherto interpreted in terms of space, is now interpreted as guidance in the one place where the deity is supposed to dwell. The spatial term is now interpreted in a temporal sense as guidance through generations.[14] The creative activity of God also makes it possible to interpret guidance in every generation of the descendants of the patriarchs.

In view of the creative powers of God, promise itself is never limited to one generation. As God renews the seasons and replenishes the earth, so does he renew his promises for each generation. God gives the promise to each generation of the patriarchs and blesses them all. The fulfilment of promise does not exhaust it but points to a more glorious fulfilment in the future. Von Rad expresses this aspect of promise by observing that the presentation of the fulfilment

[12] H. Junker, 'Segen als heilsgeschichtliches Motivwort im Alten Testament', *Sacra Pagina*, Gembloux, 1959, vol. i, p. 553, points out that *brk* signifies not an active declaration of the blessing over oneself, but an experience of the blessing for oneself, a participation in the blessing.

[13] J. Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, p. 18 says that the revelation of promise 'is connected with calling, commission and sending into historical service in the promised future'.

[13a] cf. Gen. 14: 22 where Yahweh is identified with *El Elyon* and is given the attributes of the latter—qoneh samayin waares, Gen. 14:19.

[14] J. Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and Future*, New York, 1969, pp. 25-27, makes a similar distinction between freedom in space and freedom in time. The western nations, according to him, sought freedom in space by migrating into the New World, while those who were left behind sought freedom in time through social revolutions to find the New Age in the future and thus initiated a means of changing the present into a glorious future without moving in space. This could well be applied to the religions of nomadic and sedentary peoples. Nomads sought salvation in moving to new pastures, whereas sedentary people worked in the place where they lived and co-operated with the deity in his creative activity in changing their environment.

of a promise very often contains something that transcends what actually happened.

> 'All is in motion. Things are never used up, but their very fulfilment gives rise, all unexpected, to the promise of yet greater things. . . . Here nothing carries its ultimate meaning in itself, but is ever earnest of yet greater wonders'.[15]

This is related to the unending creative activity of God. Moltmann points out that in view of this ever widening horizon of promise, there is no 'melancholy of fulfilment' in the Old Testament.[16] This is the result of the reinterpretation of promise in relation to the idea of blessing. For example, the promise of land to the patriarchs is enlarged to include the promise of land to Israel as a nation. The settlement of Israel in Canaan did not exhaust the promise of land but pointed to a future rest which Yahweh would create for his people. Similarly, the promise of a son is enlarged to include the promise of increased descendants, and this is further enlarged to include the religious community of the people, that El Shaddai would be the God of Abraham and his descendants. Promise is not exhausted through fulfilment, fulfilment only points to a much wider and more glorious fulfilment for the people of God. Moltmann calls this an 'overspill' of promise which points to further fulfilment in the future in spite of its present partial fulfilment.[17]

Covenant, which is connected with the confirmation of the divine promises (Gen. 15), is also interpreted in terms of the creative act of God. Covenant, originally a concluding act connected with promise, is interpreted as a renewal of the recipient of promise. This is especially emphasized by P during whose time the idea of the renewal of man was a leading religious concept in Israel.[18]

The idea of blessing breaks down the narrow particularism of the ideas of promise and election. The idea of creation connected with blessing makes all men equal in the sight of God. Altmann points

[15] G. von Rad, 'Typological interpretation of the Old Testament', *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, p. 34.

[16] J. Moltmann, *Hope*, p. 105; cf. *Ibid.*, *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, p. 29.

[17] J. Moltmann, *Hope*, pp. 104-106. Cf. also G. von Rad, 'There remains still a rest for the people of God', *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays*, Edinburgh, 1966, pp. 94 ff.

[18] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Edinburgh, 1965, vol. ii, pp. 270-271, points out that ideas about a new covenant and the transformation of man were current in Israel in the Babylonian and early Persian periods the time in which the Priestly document is dated. It is possible that P incorporated this idea into his account. In Gen. 17 P does not speak of a new Covenant like Jeremiah (31: 31ff.), nor does he speak of a new heart of flesh like Ezekiel (36: 25ff.), but he emphasizes the same concept through the change of name, which represents a change in a person's character.

out that in both J and L, Israel's election is drawn against the background of the primeval history. The idea of Yahweh as the creator and judge of peoples precedes the election of Israel. The election of Israel is not described as an original part of the plan of God at the time of creation; it was only a later arrangement in view of the disobedience of man. Furthermore, the election of Israel includes blessing for all peoples. Altmann calls this 'charitable universalism' (*karitativen Universqlismus*). The Elohist has a particularistic interpretation. The Priestly writer spiritualizes the election concept in terms of religious universalism and cult.[19] This universalistic interpretation of promise is connected with mission, which calls for responsible action on the part of the recipient of promise. But the recipient of promise is free to accept, to reject or even to misinterpret the divine promise and to act according to his own personal decision. This is especially prominent in the story of Hagar (Gen. 16), where Abraham and Sarah attempt to make sure of the heir of promise.

The ideas of divine command and of demand for obedience, connected with Yahwism, are refined through their association with promise and blessing. Between the command and the obedient response of the patriarch, the promise-blessing theme is introduced, and this turns the apparently arbitrary command and demand for obedience into the gracious work of God for the salvation of man. It is because God has a glorious plan for Israel and for the whole world that he commands them. The command itself becomes the revelation of the divine purpose of salvation. Abraham is commanded to go from his home and from his people because God has a purpose of salvation for him. This gives a positive appreciation of the divine command, an appreciation which continues to be emphasized throughout the Old Testament. This is perhaps the reason why there are no specific obligations laid upon the patriarchs in relation to covenant. Moreover, the connexion of promise-blessing with the idea of the transformation of man makes the stipulation of obligations unnecessary. The command is now interpreted as the call of God to the patriarch to cooperate with him in his plan to create salvation for all men.

Promise is given as a command of God in P(35:11). The word of God is understood as a creative word bringing about salvation and well-being for man. Command, promise and blessing are seen to be influencing each other and thus developing a theology of promise which is unique in the history of religion. This has been the result of cultural confrontation between early Israel on the one hand and the nomadic and Canaanite cultures on the other. One is entitled to ask at this point how this could be interpreted as divine revelation, if it is only the result of the meeting of different religions and different cultures. If all of these ideas were connected with different cultures and religions, none of them would be able to claim a complete revelation of God,

[19] P. Altmann, *Erwälungstheologie und Universalismus im Alten Testament*, BZAW xcii, Berlin, 1964, pp. 9-15, 18-20 and 30-31. Similarly, G. H. Davies, 'The Yahwistic tradition in the Eighth Century prophets' *Studies in Old Testament Prophets*, p. 44 observes that universalism is more prominent in J than in E.

and Israel's religion would be the result only of syncretism and not of a direct revelation of God. But it may be argued, on the other hand, that this only proves that God was at work in different cultures and religions. The revelation and guidance of God to Israel may be seen in the fact that they were given the insight to formulate their theology in relation to the environment into which they had come to live, while at the same time holding on to their own God 'Yahweh'. This feature contributed to the final triumph of Yahwism over the other religions in Canaan. Israel's confrontation with other religions led them to a better understanding of their own faith and to a more positive appreciation of the depth of the divine mystery.

The promise pattern 'command—promise—blessing' makes it possible for the Yahwist to identify the three deities connected with these special doctrines as one and the same God. Thus, the name Yahweh is used in connexion with all the different traditions and the names 'El' and the 'gods of the fathers' are used as equivalent to Yahweh. On the other hand, the Elohist with his aversion to Canaan and its religion, avoids the name 'El' altogether in this account and in its place employs the term *Elohim* unknown in Canaan[20] and omits or changes the concept of blessing. P formulates a new name, *El shaddai*, to try to bring out the differences between these religions and to underline their special characteristics. However, all the three sources reflect the one fact, that Yahweh is the God of Israel and that certain features from the pre-Israelite religions have been incorporated into Yahwism.

The concept of promise, developed in relation to the ideas of blessing and divine command, has its bearing upon the idea of God in the patriarchal narratives.

1. The God of promise in the patriarchal narratives is not a narrow, partial deity but the creator of heaven and earth who is equally concerned with the salvation of all men. This feature is emphasized by prefacing the election story with the story of creation. God has chosen Israel to be co-workers with him in this plan of salvation. The other peoples also have an active role to play in obtaining salvation for themselves.

2. God is a God of promise and blessing. He acts both in historical events and in normal day-to-day happenings. In the patriarchal narratives there are no historical events recorded, but the promise passage in 15:13-16 perhaps points to the Exodus and the Settlement as historical events. By the association of the Exodus and Settlement traditions with the patriarchal narratives, the simple family stories connected with blessing are made to look forward to a future fulfilment in Israel's historical events. In this way the concept of blessing is turned into promise, anticipating a future fulfilment.

3. God is depicted as the master planner. He directs international, historical events and the lives of individual men in accordance with his plan of salvation. He also sustains his creation through

[20] A. Alt, 'The God of the Fathers', *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, pp. 28-29.

his creative powers in preserving and sustaining and in effecting growth and development. He discloses his plans to his chosen ones in order that they may intelligently cooperate with him. The revelation of his plan is with a view to inviting man to share with him in the actualizing of his plan.

4. God's command is with a view to man's salvation. It is not the despotic whim of an arbitrary ruler but the gracious concern of the benevolent creator. The summons to the patriarchs is connected with this gracious purpose of salvation for all men. God's call to the patriarchs should be interpreted in relation to these wider perspectives of promise.[21]

5. God is a God of renewal. He not only renews seasons and nature but also man. He renews the recipients of promise through the change of their names, and this represents a change in their character and destiny.[22] God also renews promises to each generation, blesses them and summons them to cooperate with him in his plan of salvation. This renewal takes away the tensions involved in relation to command and the demand for obedience. The patriarchs spontaneously obey the divine summons and obedience is the main theme of the Elohistic source.[23] This aspect of summons and obedience is also found in the promise passages in the Yahwist and in the Priestly writer.

6. Promise, as the word of God, not only announces future salvation but also creates salvation for man. Promise is given as the creative command of God (Gen. 35:11 P). The creative powers connected with the word of blessing are transferred to God's creative word of promise-blessing. The creative word of blessing is introduced in the imperative form both in the primeval history (Gen. 1:28; 9:7) and in the patriarchal narratives (35:11).

7. The promise pattern 'command—promise—blessing', is set at the beginning of the patriarchal story, and the subsequent narratives describe the patriarchs' obedient response to and cooperation in the divine plan of salvation, fulfilment of the divine promises *in nuce* and the unfolding of the divine blessings. There is repetition of terms in the call and promise narratives of each patriarch as well as repetition of events in the lives of each of them. This repetition of terms and events arises out of a repetition of the basic 'command—promise—blessing' pattern, for the patriarchal narratives, seen as a whole, are constructed on the basis of this pattern.

[21] P. Altmann, *op. cit.*, p. 11, objects to the title 'Call of Abraham' commonly used by the commentators for Gen. 12: 1-3, because he thinks that it does not contain a speech about 'the reunion of divided humanity'. It could, however, still be described as the call of Abraham in so far as it is concerned with a summons to co-operate in God's plan of salvation for all men.

[22] H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 288, quotes Heit Müller, who emphasizes that with the change of name, a person's nature and destiny are changed.

[23] H. W. Wolff, 'Zur Thematik der elohistichen Fragmente in Pentateuch', *Ev. Th.*, xxix (1969), p. 72.

Appendix

Table showing the connexion of Command—Promise—Blessing in the patriarchal narratives.

Passage	Command (Imperative)	Promise (Imperfect)	Blessing or *Heilsschilderung* (Imperfect)
12:1–3:7	Lᵉk-lᵉkā mēaraᶜeka	Weᵓe'eśka lᵉgoi gādol Wa'agaddᵉlāh sᵉmeka 'ettēn 'eth-hāāres hazzoth	Wa'abrekka
13:14–17	Śānā-'ēnēkā	ki eth-kol-hāāres lᵉka 'ettenennāh	*Heilsschilderung*
15:1–5	'al-tîrā	yese mimme 'ēka hû yîraseka	*Heilsschilderung*
15:9,18–19	qeḥāh lî 'eglah	lᵉzer'aka nāthatti	*Heilsschilderung*
17:1,6,16	hithhallēk liphnē Wᵉhyeh tāmîm	Wᵉhiphrethi 'othka ûnathattîka	ûberakti
18:10	No Command	sûb āsûb èlēka ka'eth Wᵉhinneh-bēn leśārāh	No blessing
22:2,16–17	qaḥ-n'a 'eth-bineka Welek-leka	ki bārēk 'abārekka Weharbāh'arbeh	bārēk'abārekka
26:2–3	'al tîrā miṣrāymāh gûr bāāreṣ	'ettēn eth-kòl-hā arāṣoth	Wa'abārekka
26:24	'al tîrā	Wᵉhirbēthi eth-zar'aka	ûberaktîka
28:13–14	Lxx μη φοβοῦ	hā'areṣ 'asher attah sokeb 'alēhā lᵉka 'ettenennāh ûlᵉzar'eka	*Heilsschilderung*
31:3;32: 10,12	sûb 'el-'ereṣ 'abôthēka	We'ehyeh 'immāk	32:10 ētîbah 'immāk
35:10–12	pᵉrēh ûrebēh	lᵉkah 'ettenennāh 'ettēn 'eth-hā'āreṣ	32:12 *Heilsschilderung* Blessing is reported in vers. 9 Wayᵉbarek 'othô Command itself is given as blessing.

Promise is connected with 'Command' and 'Blessing' in the patriarchal narratives. H. P. Müller observes that Imperative and Promise are connected in Gen. 12:1-3; Hos. 14:2-9 and Is. 7:4-9, (H.P. Müller, 'Imperativ und Verheissung', *Ev. Th*, xxviii (1968), pp. 557-571). But this characteristic can also be seen in other promise passages in the patriarchal narratives. Command is given both in the Imperative and as a prohibition.

al-tîrā is connected with the Holy War as an oracle of assurance, (G. von Rad, '*Der heilige Krieg im Alten Israel*', Gottingen, 1965, pp. 11 ff.) and is thus associated with Yahweh. In this way both command and prohibition make their appearance prior to 'promise' and are both connected with Yahwism. Zimmerli and Westermann point out the close connection between 'Promise' and 'Blessing' in the patriarchal narratives. It was the Yahwist who was responsible for associating 'blessing' with 'promise', thereby turning an unhistorical magical concept into a historical concept. (W. Zimmerli, 'Promise and Fulfilment', in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. by C. Westermann, London, 1963, p. 92) C. Westermann, 'Arten der Erzählung in der Genesis', *Forschung am alten Testament*, Munchen, 1964, pp. 25 f.; 'Verheissung an Israel', *Evangelisches Kirchen Lexicon*, iii, col. 1646; 'The Way of Promise through the Old Testament', *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, London, 1964, pp. 210-211.) Both 'promise and 'blessing' are given in the imperfect, pointing to a future fulfilment. In passages where the root *brk* is absent (2.3.4.10. 11) 'blessing' is still implied in the *Heilsschilderung* (portrayal of salvation) which, according to Westermann, has its roots in 'blessing' (or, more precisely, in the oracles that expand blessing) and derives from the pre-Israelite period. (C. Westermann, *Ibid.*, p. 209).

The promise of the son in 18, 10 is neither preceded by a promise nor followed by a blessing. Westermann says that this is an original promise from which all the other promises later derived, the promise of increase and of land. (C. Westermann, 'Arten der Erzählung in der Genesis', *Forschung*, p. 19). The fact that it stands alone probably confirms this observation of Westermann.

The complex 'command—promise—blessing' is most frequent in the Yahwistic source. The Priestly writing also has these elements, but the connection is not as close as in J. It is interesting to note that none of these passages are from the Elohist, who disregards completely the idea of 'blessing' because of its close association with Canaanite religion. (E avoids the theme of 'blessing' altogether except in places where it is a necessary part of the tradition, Gen. 27; Num. 23; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, Oxford, 1965, pp. 199-200). Although the story in chapter 22 is attributed to E the promise passage vv. 15-88 is generally considered to be a later addition and as such does not belong to the Elohist.