
Introduction

I.

Visited with the wonderful revelation that God will bless Sarah with a son, Abraham responds in an unexpected way, exclaiming “Let Ishmael live before you!” (Gen. 17:18). It is peculiar that Abraham’s focus should be on Hagar’s son at such a time. It is odd, too, that Genesis 17, a chapter detailing the Abrahamic Covenant which belongs in the first place to Isaac, should devote so much space to answering Abraham’s concern for Ishmael.

The intention of this study is to investigate the significance and function of Ishmael in the patriarchal traditions of Genesis, and particularly in those traditions reflected by the Priestly source (P), to which source critics have attributed Genesis 17. I argue that Ishmael’s role is, for P, much more than incidental, that he figures into P’s larger theological outlook as a special representative of those whom God favors, even outside of the direct line of the Abrahamic covenant.¹

1. I am assuming as a tentative framework Joel Kaminsky’s three levels of election in the Hebrew Bible: the elect, non-elect and anti-elect. One of his central points, to be tested here, is that divine favoritism does not necessitate alienation of the non-chosen from God or exclusion from his blessings (*Yet I Loved Jacob* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2007], esp. 16, 34).

The expression of P's version of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17 calls for special consideration in a study of Ishmael because of its curious treatment of that non-elect son. Here, in contrast to the accounts of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16 and 21) often attributed to the Yahwist (J) or Elohist (E), there is no expulsion scene, nor any other hostility toward Ishmael. In fact, in P, Ishmael remains on the horizon long enough to bury his father Abraham (Gen. 25:9, 13-18), and has his own genealogy. It is perhaps most intriguing, though, that Ishmael enjoys very similar promises to those that the deity bestows on Abraham himself in the same passage (17:4-6). God assures Abraham that he will bless the patriarch's first offspring, that he will make that son fruitful and very numerous, that Ishmael will father twelve "chieftains" or "princes," and that God will make of Ishmael, too, a great nation (v. 20). The preceding line, verse 19, makes it clear that the divine covenant is with Isaac, yet the passage also explicitly mentions Ishmael's participation with Abraham in the sign of the covenant, circumcision, along with all the other males in Abraham's household. The question of Ishmael's status before God is thus ambiguous, and is especially at issue in the theology of P.

The relationship between Genesis 9 and 17, two P passages that describe covenants of God with Noah and Abraham, respectively, serves as the backdrop for this study: in the first of these two covenants, the terms are universally applied to Noah, his sons and their descendants, and even every living creature with them (9:9-10). According to the covenant established with Abraham, on the other hand, terms are only extended to this one individual and his seed—out of all of the descendants of Noah—and the seed that receives the covenant is restricted to that of the promised son, Isaac (17:19). The reader observes here a movement from the universal to the particular as the divine interests are narrowed or specified.

II.

Previous research relating to this thesis may be considered primarily within two categories: election in the Abrahamic cycle, and

particularly in the Priestly source; and interpretations of Ishmael in the tradition of Genesis 17.

On Universalism and Election in the Abrahamic Cycle and P

The issue of God's favor for Isaac and (to some degree) Ishmael is part of a broader discussion of Abraham's own election, and bears also on the chosenness of Israel. Therefore its relevance is not only for our understanding of the complexities of universalism in P specifically, but also for our reading of the Abrahamic Cycle.²

The point of departure for any consideration of Abraham's election is Gen. 12:1-3, a J passage that details YHWH's promise to Abram that he will make of him a great nation, that he will be a blessing, and, ultimately, that in him all families of the earth will either "bless themselves" (through the use of Abraham's name as a positive example), or "be blessed" (נִבְרָכוֹ).³ What seems to be at stake is the scope of YHWH's favor, which extends primarily to Abraham and his descendants on the one hand, or to all the families of the earth on the other hand.

Both the Septuagint and the New Testament (Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8) understand that the nations are *blessed*, and it is not difficult to produce other interpretations that take Gen. 12:3 to be the basis for Israel's role as mediator of blessing to the world.⁴ Two scholars in particular, Gerhard von Rad and Hans Walter Wolff, understand this text to be the Yahwist's point of connection between the primeval and patriarchal stories, and, ultimately, the joining of *Heilsgeschichte*—the particular history of Israel and God's promises to them—with broader human history.⁵ The Tower of Babel ends without grace (11:7-9), says von Rad,

2. On "chosenness" and "universalism," see Jon D. Levenson, "The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism," in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 143-69.
3. The construction in Gen. 12:3 is *niphal*, as also in Gen. 18:18 and 28:14; other instances, however, including Gen. 22:18 and 26:4, are *hithpael*, leading many to translate the verses differently, and to render 12:3 in particular as "be blessed." There are other verbs, however, for which the *niphal* and *hithpael* stems can be interchanged, which suggests that "bless themselves" is also a possibility for Gen. 12:3.
4. For a list of recent studies, see Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations* (New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 2n8. Other similar passages include Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14.
5. Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966),

and so the Yahwist takes up in chapter 12 the main question that the primeval history raises, that of the further relationship between God and the nations.⁶ (The Priestly school's coordination of primeval history and patriarchal history, by contrast, has received less attention; I will return to this below.)

Other commentators following Rashi, however, have recognized the compelling evidence that the families of the earth are merely blessing themselves by invoking Abraham (12:3)—an idiomatic means of demonstrating the greatness that God would bestow upon the patriarch.⁷ This second reading, if correct, would seem to diminish the scope of YHWH's Abrahamic project, making Abraham the primary beneficiary of any real blessing. Jon D. Levenson has found other indications, however, that the idea that Abraham's blessing was also for the benefit of the nations was intact in Late Antiquity and has relevance for the biblical text itself.⁸ For example, *Gen. Rab.* 39:12 enumerates several cases of Gentiles who are blessed because of the Jews: Joseph's Egyptian pharaoh, Daniel's Babylonian king, and Esther's Persian king. In these instances, Gentiles are delivered from destruction or otherwise benefit through the agency of Abraham's descendants.

I would add to this several attestations of the same pattern in the Abrahamic cycle itself. There we have, first, Abraham's nephew and associate, Lot, receiving the Jordan plain, a land "like the garden of YHWH" (Gen. 13:10), and Abraham later delivering Lot and others from Chedorlaomer and his coalition of kings (14:14-16). As a member of Abraham's family, the person of Lot may not be "the nations," perhaps, but it should not be overlooked that he is to become the ancestor of

65-67; *Old Testament Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), 1:161-65; *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 155-56; H. W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," *Int* 20 (1966): 138-40.

6. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:163-64.

7. See the list of studies in Grüneberg, *Abraham*, 2n11; cf. the NJPS: "And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you" (12:3b). Rashi cites the similar example of Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:20), whose names also serve as bywords of blessing. R. W. L. Moberly (*The Theology of the Book of Genesis* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 152-53) includes Zech. 8:13 as another positive instance, and Jer. 24:8-9 and 29:21-23 as negative instances of the construction.

8. Jon D. Levenson, "Jews and Christians as Abrahamic Communities" (Hay of Seaton lecture, University of Aberdeen, February 16, 2010, unpublished), 17-19; also, idem, *Inheriting Abraham* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 18-35.

the Moabites and Ammonites (Gen. 19:37-38). It is worth noting that the patriarch's benevolence devolves upon Lot even though he is not to become the all-important heir.

Moreover, after Abraham's rescue of Lot, Abraham gives "one tenth of everything" to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20) and forswears, on the basis of his oath to YHWH, any goods from the king of Sodom (vv. 21-24); Abraham negotiates with God on behalf of Sodom (ch. 18); God rescues Lot *because of Abraham* (19:29 [P]); and Abraham pays Ephron the Hittite the liberal sum of 400 silver shekels (ch. 23). It is in this context that God shows compassion to Hagar and Ishmael (chs. 16 and 21), and promises Abraham that Ishmael will enjoy generous blessings (17:20 [P]).⁹ It appears that P's presentation of Ishmael in Genesis 17 fits very well within the greater cycle, which raises questions about conceptual continuity in source redaction.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the idea that there is a trajectory in the Hebrew Bible toward salvation or blessing for the world, whether through the Abrahamic tradition or other texts, hardly represents a consensus. For many, such a theme is excluded especially in P. Harry Orlinsky, referring to the Priestly element that controlled Judah in the post-exilic period, roundly dismisses the notion that this school had any concern for the interests of the Gentiles:

[This group] manifested . . . narrow political, social, and cultural views, an attitude of superiority toward the nonclerical elements of the population, the kind of arrogance that comes from a belief that the priestly authority derives directly and exclusively from God himself, a ready reinterpretation and rewriting of history and law codes to provide antiquity and justification for what is really but contemporaneously priestly innovation and revision. . . . There was no universalistic—not to speak of internationalistic—ideology present in the priestly outlook . . . [but rather a] vigorously nationalistic attitude toward non-Judeans, precisely the attitude against which the authors of Ruth and Jonah wrote so forthrightly and eloquently.¹¹

9. Levenson (*ibid.*, 18–19) notes the connection made by Abarbanel between Abraham's journeys, imparted in God's initial command to go (Gen. 12:1), and the blessing that encompasses all the world (v. 3).

10. See Jean-Louis Ska, "Quelques remarques sur Pg et la dernière rédaction du pentateuque," in *Le Pentateuque en question* (ed. Albert de Pury; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1989), 95–125; Sean McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971), 149–55.

Negative evaluations of the priesthood go back at least to the Protestant Reformation with its emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, and Julius Wellhausen most famously besmirched the Priestly source in his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*:

The law is the key to the understanding even of the narrative of the Priestly Code. All the distinctive peculiarities of the work are connected with the influence of the law: everywhere we hear the voice of theory, rule, judgment. What was said above of the cultus may be repeated word for word of the legend: in the early time it may be likened to the green tree which grows out of the ground as it will and can; at a later time it is dry wood that is cut and made to a pattern with compass and square. . . . What great genius was needed to transform the temple into a portable tent? What sort of creative power is that which brings forth nothing but numbers and names?¹²

Walter Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament*, then, sounds a familiar note: "A rapid florescence of the Priestly class . . . [causes it] to separate itself from the community at large, and become a caste . . . and proving instead of a mediator more of a hindrance to direct intercourse with God."¹³ Von Rad concedes that the Priestly document also contains an element of the tradition that one finds in J, which joins Abraham's call with a universal extension of God's salvation beyond Israel (Gen. 12:3). "P's real theological interest," nevertheless, "is much more in the inner circle of Israel's cultic regulations."¹⁴ It is apparently for some similar reason, at least in part, that Michael Fox assesses the tradition-history of Gen. 17:2-6 (P), which details God's promise to Abraham that he would become ancestor to a *multitude of nations*, to be an ancient posterity promise of the Abrahamic tribes, but not original to the Priestly school: "for P has little interest in foreign nations."¹⁵

11. Harry M. Orlinsky, "Nationalism-Universalism and Internationalism in Ancient Israel," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of H. G. May* (eds. Harry T. Frank and William L. Reed; New York: Abingdon, 1970), 222-23.
12. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885; repr., Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 361; cf. 509 (reprinted in the English translation of *Prolegomena*, but originally from the 9th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1881]).
13. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:405; also 2:315, 2:442; see also Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:259-60.
14. Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis*, 195.
15. Michael V. Fox, "The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in Light of the Priestly 'ôt Etiologies." *RB* 81 (1974): 589.

More recently, James Kugel, in a section of his book entitled “A Cold and Indifferent God,” comments on the theological perspective of P. Kugel speaks for many who understand P to possess “the most chilling conception of the deity” because of P’s rather impersonal representation of God—a deity who does not speak to Moses in the first person in the Priestly part of Leviticus, does not *personally* forgive or punish, and for whom prayers are unnecessary and festive hymns without practical effect: He is a God “enthroned in splendid isolation.”¹⁶ The implications are significant for P’s theology:

[T]his divine presentness was the only reality that counted, and his priestly gaze never contemplated anything beyond the temple precincts and their immediate environs; even the rest of the land of Israel existed only insofar as it supplied tithes and produce and pilgrims to the temple. As for other nations, they did not play any significant role in P’s thinking.¹⁷

These appraisals are overstated at best, and fail to take into account important elements of anthropological and literary contexts. It is certainly the case that many of the Priestly regulations reflect self-interest; yet self-protective measures are employed in every professional vocation down to the present day.¹⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp urges a reconsideration of P’s “legalism” and “ritualism” in light of our better understanding of the societal functions of such,¹⁹ and insists that the priest-author actually exhibits a universalist point of view not found in other parts of the Pentateuch, notably Deuteronomy.²⁰ He cites as evidence P’s responsibility for the creation narrative of Gen. 1:1-2:4a, including the rather egalitarian declaration of the *imago Dei* (vv. 26-27), as well as the covenant between God and all humanity by

16. James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible* (New York: Free, 2007), 305–6.

17. *Ibid.*, 312.

18. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest and Prophet* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 67.

19. *Ibid.*; cited is cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, whose research in ritual law bears directly in some cases on Priestly writings. See *idem*, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975); “The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus,” *JSOT* 59 (1993): 3–23; also, Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

20. *Ibid.*; cf. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (repr., Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 179–89.

extension through Noah (Gen. 9:1-17), whence the rabbinic tradition of the seven Noahide laws.²¹ Joel Kaminsky also adduces such data in his claim that P manifests one of the deepest expressions of biblical universalism, adding that the universal outlook comes as a *result* of P's unique sense of Israel's election, and not in spite of it; that is, in P, Israel's chosenness leads to the mediation of God's blessing to others.²² If so, P's theology would seem to be aligned with the common interpretations of Gen. 12:1-3 attributed to the earlier J source. Further investigation is called for in this case.

Ishmael and the Abrahamic Covenant

A second part of Genesis 12 has some bearing on this investigation. According to verse 7, YHWH promises to give the land (Canaan) to Abram's unspecified seed. Jean-Louis Ska, describing the two main themes of land and posterity in the story of Abraham, underscores the repeated emphasis of the land promise for Abraham's *posterity* rather than for the patriarch himself.²³ The point is not that Abraham is never mentioned as a recipient of the land, but rather "that the very first promise of the land is destined for the patriarch's posterity and not for Abraham himself."²⁴ For Ska, the question becomes which of Abraham's seed will become *the heir*.

Several candidates are presented throughout the Abraham cycle, and each is turned away before Sarah's son, Isaac, is established as the son of the promise.²⁵ Lot parts ways with the family of Abram in chapter 13; and Eliezer of Damascus comes into question in 15:2-3, only to be rejected by YHWH himself in verse 4. Then Abram bears a son through Hagar, at the suggestion of his wife Sarai, no less. But this one,

21. See b. *Sanh.* 56a.

22. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved*, 95–99. Konrad Schmid comments on P's expansive outlook: "The one God . . . rules over the whole world created by him, within which the nations, each in its own place, with its own language and cult, live together peacefully forever" (*The Old Testament: A Literary History* [trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012], 151).

23. Jean-Louis Ska, *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 28–30.

24. *Ibid.*, 30. Ska notes that "posterity" is mentioned in 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; and 24:7. Abraham, on the other hand, is specifically mentioned as a recipient in 13:15; 15:7; and 17:8.

25. See Larry Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives," *JOT* 26 (1983): 77–88.

too, is not the son of promise (17:18-20; 21:8-21). The true inheritor of the land will be Isaac, born finally in Gen. 21:1-7. After this, as Ska explains, the last chapters of the Abraham cycle (chs. 22–25) will “make explicit with all the needed clarity to which posterity the land to which Abraham came to settle in will belong.”²⁶

Ska’s exposition, which is typical of so many interpreters, may be true enough, but this account of the Abrahamic cycle does not give sufficient attention, in my view, to the emphasis given to Hagar’s son. He is, after all, Abraham’s own “issue” (יצא ממעיד) in the language used by YHWH himself (Gen. 15:4). It may be the case that Ishmael is only one out of a list of rejected heirs to YHWH’s covenant with Abraham, but I will argue that he is more than the first runner-up, and that there are some important differences between the passages that relate to Ishmael and those that describe the other potential heirs.

It is telling that Ska’s brief summary of the end of the Abrahamic cycle skips from the narrative of Isaac’s birth in Gen. 21:1-7 to his near sacrifice in Gen. 22:1-19, leaving out the expansive narrative of Ishmael’s own near death in 21:8-21. Ishmael’s story is largely neglected not only by readers of P but by those who study the Abrahamic Cycle as a whole. One obvious reason for this, I would argue, is that he is unclaimed by the two major religious traditions that dominate biblical scholarship, Judaism and Christianity. I wish to point out that Ishmael has an important role to play in the whole of the Abrahamic cycle. But more than that, he has a critical function in the Priestly covenantal architecture.

The studies of Blenkinsopp and Kaminsky signal a growing awareness of P’s concern for others; nevertheless, that so few have acknowledged this aspect of the source is reflected in the vast commentary on Abraham’s covenant in Genesis 17, which, on the whole, allows little consideration of the possible connection with Priestly universalism, and even less of Ishmael’s function within such a program. Ishmael is most often treated as Isaac’s foil in the service of Abraham’s domestic testing, it seems, and as an incidental figure in

26. Ska, *Exegesis*, 31.

the subplot of Hagar the Egyptian handmaid.²⁷ Those who do examine the question of Ishmael's role in the covenant of chapter 17 are flummoxed: Hermann Gunkel declares that P has erred by having Ishmael circumcised since he is supposed to be excluded from the covenant;²⁸ Bruce Vawter concludes that the covenant found in verse 19, naming Isaac as the express recipient, is of a different kind from the covenant of circumcision that is found elsewhere in the chapter and includes Ishmael;²⁹ and Christopher Heard proposes that the circumcision of Ishmael may be, paradoxically, Abraham's attempt to circumvent Ishmael's exclusion through meticulous observance of the covenant's stipulation (v. 13).³⁰ It is finally in the study of Gerald Janzen that one finds a movement toward a principal desideratum for the present study:

[Chapter 17] belongs to the Priestly tradition, which gave us the Creation story in 1:1-2:4a and the story of the covenant through Noah in 9:8-17. If the first two stories are universal, including all humankind and indicating the general human vocation on earth before God, this story focuses on the community of Abram as distinguished from all other peoples by circumcision (17:14). The question arises: What is the relation between the universal human vocation to be God's image on earth (1:26-28) and the particular vocation that comes through Abraham? The tension at the end of ch. 16 becomes the context for the treatment of this larger question in ch. 17.³¹

Commenting on Ishmael, Janzen points out that the universal vocation prescribed in Gen. 1:28—"God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply'"—is most fully reiterated to *this* son (17:20); and that the same verse precisely echoes God's promise to Abraham (12:2), "I will make of him a great nation," again with reference only to Ishmael.³² Blenkinsopp also discusses Ishmael's importance in P's

27. E.g., only limited analysis, if any, of Ishmael's function in the covenant is provided in the treatments of Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); von Rad, *Genesis*; J. Alberto Soggin, *Das Buch Genesis* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche, 1997); Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964); Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*; and Walther Zimmerli, *1 Mose 12-25: Abraham* (Zürich: Theologischer, 1976).

28. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 267.

29. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 224.

30. R. Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Dislocation* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 77.

31. J. Gerald Janzen, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 47-48.

covenant, implying that Gen. 17:15-22 may have been added to underscore what would otherwise have been ambiguous, Isaac's ascendancy over the line of Ishmael.³³

Two other works are directly relevant to a study of Ishmael and election: Levenson's *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* and Kaminsky's *Yet I Loved Jacob*.³⁴ Levenson draws attention to several characteristic features of the firstborn son, including a near death experience and servant-rulership, both of which correlate significantly to Ishmael. Levenson also highlights various features of Ishmael's narratives that parallel those of two of the primary elect sons in Genesis, Isaac and Joseph. From my point of view, there is a remaining need to explain Ishmael's ambiguous status as an elect or non-elect son who, though explicitly excluded from the covenant in Gen. 17:19, nevertheless bears at least some of the characteristic markings of chosenness.

Kaminsky's work is very useful in this respect. According to his comparison of a number of examples of the non-elect, particularly from among the siblings mentioned in Genesis, divine favoritism toward an elect individual does not necessitate alienation of the non-elect counterpart from God. Kaminsky gives Ishmael as an illustration that there are *degrees* among the non-elect, that some non-elect are closer to the elect than others, and even receive promises of special divine blessing.³⁵ One concern with Kaminsky's assessment is that Ishmael appears to be the best and perhaps only real example of the non-elect receiving substantial divine blessing, at least from among the Genesis siblings in his study.³⁶ Is it the case that Ishmael is representative of the non-elect, so that we may extrapolate principles

32. *Ibid.*, 52. Walter Brueggemann ("The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers," *ZAW* 84 [1972]: 400, 404) identifies Gen. 1:28 as a focus for understanding the kerygma of the entire Priestly tradition. In contrast with Janzen, however, Brueggemann perhaps overemphasizes the priority of Isaac over Ishmael in 17:20.

33. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Abraham as Paradigm in the Priestly History in Genesis," *JBL* 128 (2009): 237-38.

34. Jon D. Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved*.

35. *Ibid.*, 34-35.

36. Cf., however, Gen. 27:39-40.

about biblical non-election from his situation? Or is this son of Abraham somehow special in his own right, *sui generis* among the non-elect, if that is indeed what he is? Does P have some other theological purpose for Ishmael, one that includes some of Abraham's promises even if it excludes the privilege of carrying the covenant? This is an open question that calls for further study.

III.

Implicit in the examples of scholarship cited above is the need for a more thorough treatment of Ishmael in the Abrahamic cycle and particularly in the covenant of Genesis 17. There are indications that Ishmael may be of more central importance than commentators have often realized, and it seems likely that his function in P may be related to a kind of universal outlook that has been only recently acknowledged, though perhaps is still not fully understood. If so, this subject could have significant implications for our comprehension of P's use of sources in the Abrahamic cycle, and may result also in a better perspective on P's covenantal landscape.

This investigation proceeds with the assumption that P is an independent source writing after and at least partly in response to the formation of the Hagar-Ishmael traditions represented in Gen. 16:1-2, 4-14 (J) and 21:8-21 (E).³⁷ Nevertheless, the observations made here are not dependent, for the most part, on these conceptions, and much of

37. See the survey of discussion in Sarah Shectman and Joel Baden, *The Strata of Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions* [Zürich: Theologischer, 2009]). Here I assume the sources of the Documentary Hypothesis, most recently described by Joel Baden (*The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012]), but maintain that P is sometimes responsive to Non-P (but cf. *Composition*, 188–92); see, e.g., Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (trans. John Bowden; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 244–45.

This traditional documentary model has been questioned, of course, in the last several decades following the publications of John Van Seters (*Abraham in History and Tradition* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975]; idem, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* [Louisville: Westminster, 1994]); Hans Heinrich Schmid (*Der sogenannte Jahwist* [Zürich: Theologischer, 1976]); Rolf Rendtorff (*The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* [JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990]); Erhard Blum (*Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1983]; idem, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* [BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990]); Joseph Blenkinsopp (*The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* [New York: Doubleday, 1992]); and several others.

what I conclude could be applied with profit also to other models of the biblical sources.

IV.

Ishmael in the Abrahamic Cycle

Using a comparative approach, I begin by demonstrating Ishmael's prominence throughout the Abraham narratives. First, I compare Ishmael and the other non-elect counterparts in the sibling narratives of Genesis, material derived primarily from the traditions ascribed to J and E.³⁸ In addition to Ishmael's characteristic features of election including a near-death experience and servant-rulership, as well as his narrative parallels with the elect sons Isaac and Joseph, I note here that Ishmael's mother, Hagar, is privileged with a form of birth annunciation (Gen. 16:10-12) that puts her in the elect company of Sarah (Genesis 18), Rebekah (Gen. 25:22-23), Manoah's wife (Judg. 13:9-11), and Hannah (1 Samuel 1), whose sons all constitute some of the leading figures of the biblical stories.³⁹ Going further, Hagar is the only woman—indeed, the only person apart from the patriarchs themselves—to experience a theophany in the patriarchal narratives.

Ishmael and the Abrahamic Covenant

Having considered the prominence of Ishmael within the Abrahamic cycle overall, I focus next on the question of Ishmael within the specific context of Genesis 17. With so many data to consider, the chapter will require a thorough exegetical treatment. Issues to examine include the following: (1) Abraham's fate to be the "ancestor of a *multitude of nations*" and the resulting name change (vv. 2-6); (2) the related concern regarding God's establishment of an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his offspring after him (v. 7), which is apparently the same offspring who will inherit the land of Canaan (v. 8); (3) the

38. Here I draw significantly on the works of Levenson (*Death*) and Kaminsky (*Yet I Loved*).

39. Cf. also Exod. 2:1-10.

emphasis on circumcision as the sign of the covenant (vv. 10-14) juxtaposed with a matching emphasis on Ishmael's own circumcision (vv. 23-27); (4) Abraham's plea that Ishmael would "live before you" and God's response, including a very generous concession (v. 18-20).

I will include here a discussion of the relationship between P and its sources and antecedents (J, E, etc.) in an attempt to determine the extent to which P has reworked them, if at all; and if so, what is the overall effect.⁴⁰ This will necessitate some further consideration and discussion of the structure of the Abrahamic cycle. An explanation of P's intention for Ishmael will be suggested at this point.

Ishmael's Place in the Priestly Covenantal Structure

If I have made progress in defining the function of Ishmael in P, the next objective will be to describe P's comprehensive covenantal architecture. I am interested particularly in the relationship between the covenants of Genesis 17 and Genesis 9, both of which seem to prioritize some kind of concern for those outside of Israel. How do these passages fit together, and what is the overall covenantal structure within P? Does P have its own theology of a distinctive covenant for Israel? Does the Abrahamic covenant "nest" within the Noahic covenant, and does the covenant with Phinehas (Numbers 25) fit, in turn, within the Abrahamic covenant according to P?

Ishmael in Israelite History and Tradition

Finally, in order to assess more fully the motivation underlying P's concern for Ishmael, I will survey the available ethnographic and archaeological data pertaining to the identity of the Ishmaelite groups in the various stages of Israel's history. The question is whether P has a specific geopolitical basis for its representation of Ishmael, or only regards Ishmael in an antiquarian or notional sense, so that historical

40. This investigation will focus primarily on narrative material of P in Genesis, but insofar as P's universal scope is at issue, there may be implications for the rest of P as well.

parallels between the Ishmael of Genesis 17 and the contemporary groups of P's era are not to be found.