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Abraham: First Patriarch, First Prophet Genesis 12-23 as Motive and Model for the Hebrew Prophetic Voice

Eleanor Swensson

As a creative writer and a faithful believer, I put a great deal of value in the human desire for expression and the universal community building power of stories. The book of Genesis, therefore, stands for me as a strong example of both these phenomena. Genesis is the story not only of the specific families it follows through the ages, but also is, above all, a tale of the family of the human race. As Devora Steinmetz states in her analysis of family in Genesis, “it is a story about the struggle to create a family whose members can live together and share a common destiny, a family which can be the foundation of the future nation” (Steinmetz 11). Through its many investigations of what it means to be human -- and further what it means to be a human in relationship with God -- Genesis shows how the art of storytelling can construct deeper understandings of the self as well as the world as a whole. The emergence of this narrative voice that can strengthen both the individual and the community, however, is not unique to Genesis alone. In fact, a similar effect is achieved later in the scriptures by the prophetic voice, the poetic anti-institutional speeches to the masses that challenge the community to rise to its true purpose: a close relationship to each other and to God.

The base narrative used in Genesis to get to these human truths is the story of Abraham, Sarah and their lineage. As the first father in the long line of the Biblical patriarchal tradition, Abraham is truly the foundation for our understanding of human relationships both with each other and with God. Abraham’s story, as “the patriarch whose quest most clearly is shaped by the word ‘go’ (*lek*)”, reveals the basic nature of a faithful human existence as one of constant wandering, of setting out into unknowns and putting our faith in God’s promises to carry us through (Steinmetz 63). This wandering which Abraham lives throughout his tale is another similarity he shares with the prophets; Abraham lives a life in constantly pursuit of God’s will for him instead of a life of stagnant adhesion to social mores.

In this paper, I present a case for Abraham as the foundation of the prophetic voice that arises in later texts. In fact, it is made clear in the prophetic books that Abraham’s life in relationship with God is the model by which Israel as a people is to shape itself. David Rosenburg, in his book titled simply *Abraham*, describes Abraham as the ideal of the prophets, their strongest motivation for their call to

social and spiritual reform. Rosenberg states that in the time of the prophets, [t]he covenant between Abraham and Yahweh was a guiding light, and yet it was being forgotten by Israel's leaders, relegated to the province of official religion, to the priesthood. Only the covenant could bring to mind the cosmic struggle for Yahweh's truth and justice, how it was established between Abraham and Yahweh, and how... Israel must live up to it. (242)

The prophets then took it upon themselves, with the divine inspiration and support of Yahweh, to remind Israel of Yahweh's promises spoken to and carried through Abraham in order to move the people to realign themselves with an Abrahamic kind of faith. Based on Abraham's story in Genesis, I have identified four defining characteristics of such a faith which differentiate his relationship with God from all those previously described in the text: 1) a reciprocal call between Yahweh and Abraham, 2) gradual revelation of God's will, 3) an emerging voice through which Abraham learns to speak more directly with God and 4) an anomic, deviant existence that aligns Abraham with God's mission above any existing social norms. These four characteristics very much mirror the life not only of an ideal believer, but of a prophet himself -- called by Yahweh as a trusted confidant to go against the dominant consciousness and spread God's word with strength and conviction. Abraham, therefore, can be read as the first human to walk the prophetic path.

The Reciprocal Call: Yahweh's Words and the Powerful Act of Invocation Genesis 12-13

The story of Abraham begins in Genesis 12 when Yahweh calls to Abraham -- then Abram -- with a two-part message of command and promise. Yahweh says to Abram,

Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country which I shall show you; and I shall make you a great nation, I shall bless you and make your name famous; you are to be a blessing!
I shall bless those who bless you,
and shall curse those who curse you,
and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you. (Gen 12:1-3)

The first part of God's call to Abram, the command, is clear and straight forward, but God's request is anything but simple. Abram is to pick up and leave all that he has ever known, and all that has held any value to him and his community, in order to reach a land that is distant and ambiguous at best. As Robert Davidson points out in his commentary, "no attempt is made to explain or justify this breaking of family ties"; Yahweh's message is delivered point blank, with no qualification or exceptions (Davidson 21). It is Yahweh's promise of faithfulness, therefore, that

makes the journey worth the physical, psychological and social risks for Abram. Steinmetz discusses the intimate connection between the two parts of God's call:

God commands Abraham to leave his father's house and settle a new land and simultaneously promises to make Abraham into a great nation. This promise is not simply a reward for obeying God's command; the promise and the command both are parts of the blessing which God offers to Abraham, and which Abraham is to become for others. Neither makes sense without the other. (Steinmetz 35)

Steinmetz's commentary highlights the interconnectedness of God's words with each other, an interconnectedness which comes to characterize the relationship between God and Abram as a whole. For just as Yahweh calls to Abram in Genesis 12:1 -3, Abram also calls to God through the act of invocation. The back and forth nature of their communication in these first chapters -- and which continues throughout the story of Abraham -- is what I define as the first distinguishing mark of Abraham's relationship with God: the reciprocal call.

The idea of a reciprocal call between God and Abram comes primarily from the frequency with which Abram "invokes" the name of Yahweh in this text. In order to understand why Abram invoking the name of Yahweh is such a defining trait of their relationship, I must briefly explain what it means to "invoke" and examine the role of invocation in Genesis to this point. According to the standard dictionary, to invoke is "to call for with earnest desire...to declare to be binding...to call on." In other words, it is in and of itself a type of call that the faithful can place to their God. It is made clear early in the text that there is something of great importance involved in the act of invocation that differentiates it from any other communication with God. The concept of invocation is first mentioned in Genesis 4:26 when it is stated that Enosh, the son of Seth, "was the first to invoke the name Yahweh." Enosh is the grandchild of Adam and Eve, the third human generation on the earth according to Biblical creation. The fact that he is the first to invoke Yahweh is worthy of note; clearly there is something different about this man that he calls for his God instead of waiting for Yahweh to call him first. This description comes at the end of a genealogy throughout which there has been little to no mention of all the other men's actions. It is also important to note that Enosh's action of invocation is the only deed other than procreation that is mentioned in the long genealogy of Adam and Eve provided in Genesis 4-5. The next individual to invoke the name of Yahweh is Abram in Genesis 12:8, several generations after Enosh and even the repopulation of the world.¹

¹ I find it worthy of note that even Noah, the only human being Yahweh believes is worth saving from the apocalyptic flood, does not practice invocation to his Lord. This observation furthers my thought the invocation is a truly special and important aspect of Abram's relationship with Yahweh.

As defined earlier, the act of invoking is a type of call the faithful can use to reach out to their God. In Genesis 12-13, Abraham invokes the name of Yahweh twice (Gen 12:8 and 13:4). Based on the definition of invocation, in these interactions Abram was speaking to God in the same ways God was speaking to Abram; both were the callers and both were the called. I find this extremely interesting because understanding their communication in such a way colors the entire nature of their relationship in much more egalitarian hues. To clarify, I am not claiming that human beings and God are on an equal plane – it is still maintained throughout the text that God is surely transcendent beyond Abram's, and beyond all, human grasp – but I am arguing that the rift we have wedged between ourselves and the divine is perhaps a bit too deep, a bit too wide, for what is actually suggested in these stories.

The reciprocal call established between Abram and Yahweh in Genesis 12-13 not only forms the foundation for their communication throughout the rest of Abram's story, but is yet another example of the wandering existence of a prophet. The back-and-forth of their calls and invocations mirrors the constant inner-struggle a prophet must face between voices of self and society and the voice of God, or, in Christian theological terms, how to be in but not of this world. This reciprocity also alludes to the general search for balance between human's will and God's will; a conflict most clearly illustrated by the construction and destruction of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

Janzen's commentary on the call draws upon contrasts with the story of Babel to highlight this struggle. Janzen observes that there is a vivid contrast between God's opposition to human attempts to make a name for themselves and God's intention to give Abram a great name. This contrast matches the contrast between fearful human attempts to safeguard their unity in one place by building a walled city....and Abram's willingness to follow God's call to leave his own place and people and go to a land he does not yet see. The separation from familiar place and faces, which the people in 11:4 see as filled with danger, is a separation that to Abram is filled with promise. (Janzen 15-16)

Here again Abram is seen as walking in the path of a prophet, finding the promise and hope of God's will in a fully othered, anomic life experience that separates him from his society. With the tenets of Abram and Yahweh's reciprocal call to one another and Abram's preliminary steps towards a prophetic life of wandering thus established, we now turn to the second distinguishing aspect of Abram's story: gradual revelation.

Gradual Revelation: The Constant Growth of Abram's Relationship with Yahweh

Yahweh's initial promise to Abram in Genesis 12 is a promise not only of a prosperous future for Abram but also of the faithfulness and steadfastness of God to God's chosen. This faithfulness is emphasized by the many times Yahweh renews the covenant with Abram throughout his story. In fact, "[t]his promise is to be heard again by Abram at various crisis points in his life when events seem to cast doubt on the possibility of its fulfillment (13: 14-15; 15: 5-7; 22:17)" (Davidson 19). The fact that Yahweh restates the promise to Abram in Abram's difficult times is important because it shows that God is attentive to what Abram needs; it is another example of their close relationship, for just as Abram heeds God's will and goes where he is led, so too does God follow Abram with encouragement and support when needed. The appearance of God's word in times of trouble also speaks to the concept of gradual revelation, for the full will of God is only gradually revealed to Abram as he struggles, step by step, through his life journey.

While each time Yahweh's renews the promise marks an important step in the gradual revelation in Abram's life, the most significant restatement of the covenant occurs in Genesis 17. In this chapter, Yahweh not only renews the covenant previously stated in chapter 12 -- "Live in my presence, by perfect, and I shall grant a covenant between myself and you, and make you very numerous...For my part, this is my covenant with you: you will become the father of many nations" (Gen 17: 1-4) -- but also enacts the first step towards fulfillment of the promise, by giving Abram a new name -- "And you are no longer to be called Abram; your name is to be Abraham...And I shall maintain my covenant between myself and you, and your descendants after you, generation after generation, as a covenant in perpetuity, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Gen 17:5-7). After hearing the covenant so many times before, Abraham is finally to see the promise gradually revealed through his faithful struggles.

This first step toward fulfillment of Yahweh's promise is crucial. By renaming Abraham with a God-given title, God is aligning Abraham even closer with God's will; God is claiming Abraham as God's own. This renaming and claiming of Abraham also serves as a safeguard against future struggles with discerning God's will. If Abraham is God's own, it is implied that their communication will be even clearer than before. The ability to hear and understand Yahweh's word is of utmost importance to Abraham and the continuation of gradual revelation. As Steinmetz states,

Perception...is the crucial issue for Abraham. Abraham's quest begins with finding the place and ends with finding a son, and the possibility of misperception, of finding the wrong thing or of losing sight of the

quest, is the single greatest pitfall which Abraham will face. Abraham must define his own destiny, and what he sees must not be guided by his own lack of perception or by the misperceptions of others. (Steinmetz 64)

Receiving the name Abraham from God in Genesis 17 simultaneously consoles and challenges Abraham, proving Yahweh's faithfulness through one fulfillment of the promise while still calling him forward into the unknown future. The renaming, therefore, is an extremely effective way to keep Abraham on God's chosen path, for it both supports him and leads him ever onward.

I believe that revelation is not easy. It is not a swift, clean lifting of veil. To hear the word of God, to truly hear it, is to abandon that which is familiar and accept a new type of existence that is wholly separate from the world we know -- and one that is ever changing, calling us forward. Yahweh's renewal of the promise and the renaming of Abraham is an example of the gradual process of revelation because each of these events reveals only a part of Yahweh's full covenant. By revealing God's will slowly throughout Abraham's life, God ensures their continued relationship. If God's revelation to Abraham was to be a sudden event, there would be no need for God to continually address Abraham and repeat the covenant; there would be no need for Abraham to struggle or wander; there would be no need for their continuous growth in relationship with each other. Gradual revelation, therefore, is a central tenet of Abraham's narrative. Further, gradual revelation also reaffirms that God values the act of walking alongside God's chosen, that God is beginning to long for friendly companionship from Abraham instead of the strict subordination God seemed to expect in God's previous interactions with human beings.

Abraham's Emerging Voice: The Shift from Follower to Friend Genesis 18:17-33

Throughout my discussion of the relationship between Abraham and Yahweh, I have built a case for the ways in which their interactions are much more reciprocal and even egalitarian than previous human-divine communication the Bible describes. While the close connection between Abraham and Yahweh is clearly shown through both reciprocal call and gradual revelation, the unique nature of their relationship is strengthened still in Genesis 18 which presents the reader with the unprecedented occurrence of a human directly challenging Yahweh through a personal conversation. In this conversation, Abraham and Yahweh engage each other in an ethical debate about the destruction of Sodom. This interaction is revolutionary for two reasons: 1) Yahweh willingly makes Yahweh's self vulnerable to Abraham and seems open to human persuasion and 2) Abraham freely and directly challenges his God.

Before engaging in the discussion with Abraham, God “wondered, ‘Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am going to do...I have singled him out to command his sons and his family after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing what is upright and just, so that Yahweh can carry out for Abraham what he has promised him’” (Gen 18:17-19). These preliminary thoughts show that God desires Abraham to interact with God in an honest, open manner; it is evidence that God longs for the faithful to use their own personal perspective to form a closer relationship with God.² After this reflection, God then speaks to Abraham laying out his plan to “go down and see whether or not [Sodom and Gomorrah’s] actions are at all as the outcry reaching me would suggest” (Gen. 18: 21). The fact that Yahweh chooses to speak to Abraham answers God’s own self-inquiry with a resounding *I do not want to hide from this man. He and his family are my chosen people, I want and need him to be involved.* This story, therefore, serves not only as an example of human beings’ longing to progress towards a more mature, active faith but also God’s desire to have us there and God’s dedication to meet us halfway on such a path.

The impression of a God who wants friendship with believers is furthered still in verse 22, when “Yahweh remained in Abraham’s presence,” showing that God willingly stands in a position to be judged by Abraham. Many commentaries point out that this verse is often changed from its original text to read “Abraham remained standing before the Lord”, because the traditional text “was thought to detract from the majesty and dignity of the Lord” (Davidson 69). This seemingly small change has a profound impact on the overall message of the text. Janzen notes:

the present text is marked in Hebrew Bibles as a scribal alteration made out of a deferential desire not to see God in an inferior position. Yet this is the point of the whole passage. The God who will not decide the fate of the wicked cities apart from their treatment of two strangers, also will not decide apart from the agency of this called person. The God who appears before city-states as one seeking hospitality appears before Abraham as an attendant awaiting instructions. The God who elects to know Abraham as an intercessor waits to see how as an intercessor he will concern himself with ‘righteousness and justice’. (59-60)

These points clearly support a reading of Abraham’s relationship with Yahweh as one characterized by equality and honest communication from both parties. Just as Abraham has to this point seen Yahweh as his leader, so now does Yahweh

² This verse also serves as evidence of God’s desire for reciprocal call and gradual revelation. By recognizing Abraham as an individual called, Yahweh simultaneously acknowledges Abraham’s fallibility as a limited human being and his profound value as a person of faith. Drawing Abraham into the conversation that follows shows that God is just as invested in Abraham as Abraham is in God as well as demonstrates God’s willingness to walk with Abraham through the process of revelation.

turn to Abraham for guidance. It is here, after God has made God's self fully present with and receptive to Abraham, that Abraham's prophetic voice emerges.

In the midst of Abraham and God's discussion of Sodom's appropriate fate, Abraham poses a profound challenge to his Lord: "'Do not think of doing such a thing: to put the upright to death with the guilty so that upright and guilty fare alike! Is the judge of the whole world not to act justly?'" (Gen. 18:25) The very existence of this question is powerful in and of itself. It is the first time we see one of God's people challenge God's authority; up to this point, God's will is followed exactly, promptly, almost without thought. Submission to God is automatic, and God's intentions are trusted fully. Some may point to the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from Eden as an exemplary story of disobedience to Yahweh, but that story presents an entirely different kind of dissent. For Adam and Eve, their challenge to God is something to be ashamed of, a mistake that is punished and looked upon with great sorrow and loss. In the conversation in Genesis 18, however, Abraham is unapologetically opposed to God's plan to destroy an entire city. It seems unjust, unfounded, contrary to any perception of God as compassionate and caring. So Abraham speaks up, he challenges Yahweh with a conviction previously unseen, and Yahweh encourages him to do so.

The specific challenge Abraham places to God is also significant in that it addresses the core sentiment heard throughout the later prophetic books: a call for righteousness and justice. Davidson's commentary on the text highlights the importance of this parallel:

It is characteristic of Israel's God, the God of Abraham, that he acts not only in ways that men can understand, but that he makes his intentions known beforehand to certain men who are privy to his counsel...Not only is Abraham the recipient of God's promise, but he has a responsibility placed upon him. *I have taken care of him* or 'I have chosen him'...to instruct coming generations so that they may keep *the way of the LORD*, that is, live the kind of life the Lord expects. This life can only be described in terms of doing *what is right and just*, literally, righteousness and justice. Righteousness and justice are the great, insistent prophetic demands for a society so ordered under God that the rights and needs of all are met. (68)

This commentary echoes what I have previously stated about the importance of Yahweh involving Abraham in the debate about Sodom, pointing to the trust and responsibility God places upon Abraham -- and the fact that Abraham fulfills this responsibility not with blind acceptance but by questioning God's plan -- as a mark of equal interactions governed by friendship and respect. It also goes beyond these claims, however, and points to the fact that verse 25 expresses the very

central prophetic concern of righteousness and justice for all human beings. In this moment when Abraham's voice emerges, his similarities with and significance to the prophets are clear, for both his specific concerns for righteousness and justice as well as his close relationship with God that empowers him to voice those concerns are maintained as central to the prophetic message in later books. This conversation is then yet another example of how Abraham is not only of utmost significance to the prophetic voice, but is the first man to live as a prophet in close connection with God.

Abraham and God's discussion in Genesis 18 is also important because it lays the foundation for the final step in Abraham's prophetic existence, namely his faithful acceptance of an anomic, deviant life outside the restrictions of social norms.

Deviancy: Abraham's Anomic Life Genesis 22-23

From the moment of the initial call in Genesis 12, Abraham follows a life path that deviates significantly from the social norms of his time. God's command for Abraham to leave his father, his land, and his past in pursuit of a distant but prosperous future requires a willingness on Abraham's part to live a fully anomic life; he is to be a constant wanderer valuing above all else -- any desires or expectations of self and/or society -- hearing and following God's true word. Abraham's dedication to this faithful anomic existence is put to the test in Genesis 22-23, when Yahweh commands Abraham to offer his son as a human sacrifice and waits until Abraham is about to slit his son's throat to intercede and renew the promise.

As the first prophet, the first true friend of God, Abraham is consistently asked to make personal sacrifices to maintain and strengthen his faith. Genesis 22, however, poses an entirely new type of sacrifice for Abraham; instead of leaving behind that which society values as important and setting forth toward God's promises, Abraham is now asked to kill his own son, Yahweh's long awaited gift to Abraham and Sarah, leaving an even more ambiguous future ahead. The fact that Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son -- he goes through the acts of binding and almost slitting the boy's throat -- has haunted generations of Biblical readers with significant questions about the nature of faith and the nature of God. Many see Yahweh's call for the sacrifice of Abraham's son as a significant moral lapse; for example, how could the God that so strongly condemned the murder of Abel now call for homicide in God's name? Others view it as a testament to the dangers of blind faith, proof of how an individual's beliefs can overcome his or her reason and fundamental sense of right and wrong. I argue that this text can be read, how-

ever, in a much different light, seeing it more as an extension of God's call to walk a deviant path trusting in God for aid and guidance, than a text supporting human sacrifice or the abandonment of basic morality.

Several commentaries support this interpretation of Genesis 22-23, all of which emphasize that Abraham's struggle to give up his own future, his own prosperity, his own ego, in order to maintain a true relationship with Yahweh is the main focus of the story.³ Davidson's commentary on Genesis 22-23 describes how it relates to the entirety of Abraham's call. In this text, Abraham

is commanded by God to sacrifice that which alone guarantees the future, his only son, God's own gift to him. When he sets out from Harran, Abraham has to leave his own country and kinsmen (12:1) and thus break ties with the past; now he is asked to renounce his son and thus break his ties with the future. This is the moment when that faith which Abraham put in the Lord (15:6) faces its supreme challenge...Only in the moment of obedience, does Abraham discover that what he was prepared to renounce is given back to him. (Davidson 94)

As Davidson states, it is only when Abraham is willing to give up what he values above all else, his future as provided by God in the form of a son, does Abraham see that Yahweh is truly faithful; only in the darkest hour can Abraham see the full glow of the glory of God. This reading of the story is similar to the interpretation professor and rabbi, Norman J. Cohen, presents in Bill Moyers' book, *Genesis: A Living Discussion*. He states,

It seems to me that the voice Abraham hears commanding him to sacrifice his own son is perhaps Abraham's own voice. It's Abraham's ego that needs to prove his fidelity and his faith to himself and the world. Maybe the point of the story is how Abraham comes to understand what God really wants...It's the ego of Abraham that has to be sacrificed on that mountain so Abraham can come back to the reality of who he is in relationship to God. (Moyers 224-225, 227)

Based on Cohen's reading, the sacrifice that occurs in the text is Abraham's ego and pride; he must recognize that God's will is greater than his own desires.⁴ In order to sustain his close relationship with Yahweh, Abraham must go through this trial to reach that understanding in full; he must be completely willing to

³ There is also interesting commentary based on the version of this story found in the Qumran which points to a third party, Mastema the Prince of Animosity, as the voice that demands the sacrifice. Garcia Martinez provides the following analysis of the Qumran text: the verb 'to try, to test' is not used...the verb used in our fragment is 'to bear a grudge, to cherish animosity,' the verb used to characterize the hatred of Esau for Jacob (Gen 27:41)...Be it an accusation or an attack, this work of hate against Abraham is done by the Prince of Animosity, and it is done because of Isaac...Neither jealousy nor a desire to test Abraham direct his actions; what Mastema hopes to achieve with this stratagem is to cross God's plans and make ineffective the promise to Abraham of a progeny numerous as the stars, the sand or the dust. (Martinez 49-51) While this reading does not focus on the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham as do interpretations based in the Biblical text alone, it does speak to the importance of Abraham's son. The fact that this son is a source of angelic jealousy in the Qumran strengthens an argument for him as a potential idol for his father.

go against what he, and his surrounding society, believes is appropriate, normal behavior and trust that his God will carry him through whatever chaos such abandonment may cause. It is here that I again see significant similarities between Abraham and the prophets. Both must rebel against the self and against society in order to immerse themselves into God; Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only chance at a prosperous future -- arguably the single most valuable aspect of life in his time -- marks an extremely anomalous existence chosen in order to follow God. Steinmetz's commentary goes even further, stating that "the act of sacrifice has often been seen, by both ancient and modern interpreters, as a ritual of substitution....By offering Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham is offering himself on the altar" (38). This reading claims that it is more than just Abraham's desires for a future that must be sacrificed at the altar, it is his whole self, an act of ultimate humility through which "Abraham enacts his complete dedication to his mission and, at the same time, destroys the possibility of the fulfillment of his mission" (Steinmetz 38). The paradoxical nature of this reading of the sacrifice lends itself well to the understanding of Abraham as a prophet, a man constantly co-existing in the two contradictory planes of the physical, human reality and the divine, spiritual world.

The fundamental difference between Abraham and the prophets, however, is that after Genesis 22-23, there is no account of Abraham speaking directly with God ever again. Davidson credits this severance in their relationship to the fact that Abraham's mission has been fulfilled. According to Davidson, Genesis 23 is the ultimate mark of Abraham's perfect faith, and "[o]n this basis of obedient faith the future is to be built. This narrative marks the end of Abraham's spiritual experience. God has spoken to him for the last time" (Davidson 98). For me, however, this ceased interaction does not signal the completion of Abraham's individual path with God, but rather is the point at which the prophetic voice grows beyond Abraham. Both of Abraham's sons, Isaac and Ishmael, become prophets; the result of the strange, new silence between Abraham and Yahweh is two men who dedicate their own voices to proclaiming God's will. Ishmael and Isaac's futures as prophets show that where Abraham lost his voice, his sons found their own; the prophetic voice, as lived in full by Abraham through reciprocal call, gradual revelation, emerging voice and anomy, thus passes from father to sons.

While the communication between Abraham and Yahweh may have stopped, Abraham's mission carries on. After living a fully prophetic life, Abraham furthers the message of God's faithfulness through the two sons given by God as fulfill-

⁴ I do, however, dispute Cohen's claim that the voice Abraham hears is not Yahweh. The text is quite clear that it is God that speaks to Abraham. I would therefore alter Cohen's reading to state that Yahweh is aware of Abraham's ego and calls for the sacrifice of Abraham's son to directly address that issue. I also maintain that Yahweh does not intend for the son to be harmed but aims only to stop Abraham's potential idolatry.

ment for the promise and covenant established in Genesis 12. Abraham's future, in pursuit of which he was always wandering, is secured in the continued prophetic tradition; he remains not only a father of sons, but a father of nations, a father of faiths and, perhaps most importantly, a father of the voice that continuously calls us back to true relationship with God.

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