Genesis 22:1-19 – part B

Fresco from the Via Latina Catacomb, Rome (cubiculum C), painted about 320 A.D. Abraham raises his sword to slay his son Isaac.
Definite Article on Elohim
• It is very common for אֱלֹה ים to have the definite article in Hebrew.
• The Canaanites worshipped other gods, some of which required child sacrifice. The use of the definite article in this and succeeding verses may be to clarify that this test did not originate with any of the child-sacrifice demanding Canaanite gods.
וַיִּשְׁכַּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבּוּקָה וַיֵּחָבֵשׁ שָׁמוֹנָה עַל-אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקְאֹה שָׁמוֹנָה עַל בְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר אָהַֹ֥ר אָלֵּֽיך׃

וַיְבַקְּעֵ֢ו עֲצֵי עָלָהּ וַיִּקָּמֶ֣מָה אַבְרָהָּם וַיִּלְךָ֥כּ הַמָּקָּ֤וֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר-לֹּ֥וֹ הָאֱלֹהִים׃

What construction do we have here?
The Lord tested Abraham.

He said to Abraham, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, to the upper hill there, and offer him in the sight of the Lord as a burnt offering."

Abraham spoke to the young man, his son, Isaac, saying, "My son, we will go to the place the Lord has told us about; we will offer the young man as a burnt offering, for the Lord has told us about him."

So Abraham took the firewood and the wood for the burnt offering, but Isaac did not know that his father was going to offer him as a burnt offering.

As they went on their way, Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, saying, "Father! Here I am, the wood and the firewood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham said, "My son, God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering himself. Follow me, son." And they went on together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham said to his young son Isaac, "Come, we will offer the young man as a burnt offering, for the Lord has told us about him."
וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְבָּרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים נֶסֶת אֲשֶׁר אָבַרְחָם אֵלֶּה. אֲשֶׁר אָבַרְחָם אֱלֹהִים נֶסֶת אֲשֶׁר אָבַרְחָם.

X-Qatal
- Topicalization
- “and it was Elohim who was a tester of Abraham”

X-Qatal as Summary Statement
- We can further specify the function of the X-qatal in this passage because it precedes the beginning of the episode’s wayyiqtol string. In such a case the X-qatal often summarizes, like a headline, what is to follow.
- Note that, though the וַיְהִי in v 1 is a wayyiqtol, its function is Transition Marker not Historical Narrative Mainline.
Let’s look at another example:
Genesis 1:1-3
• Where is the first H.N. Mainline wayyiqtol?
• What constructions precede it?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>וְרָאָּ֖שִׁית בָּּ֗רֶא אֱלֹהִֽים</th>
<th>אֱלֹהִיִּ֣ם יִּמְרַחֵ֣פָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמִּיָּם</th>
<th>v1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>בָּרִָ֔א אֱלֹּהִיִּ֣ם יִּמְרַחֵ֣פָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמִּיָּם</td>
<td>v2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbless clause</td>
<td>וְחַשָּׁ֖ךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם</td>
<td>וְרִוּחַ אֱלֹּהִיִּ֣ם מְרַחֵ֣פָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמִּיָּם</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participle</td>
<td>וְרָאָּ֖שִׁית בָּּ֗רֶא אֱלֹהִֽים</td>
<td>וְרָאָּ֖שִׁית בָּּ֗רֶא אֱלֹהִֽים</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayyiqtol</td>
<td>v5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Genesis 1:1-3

Topicalization / Summary
X-Qatal  →  בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמְמים וָאֵת הָאֵרֶץ:

Topicalization
X-Qatal  →  והָאֵרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹּהוּ בֵּהוּ

Scene setting
Verbless clause  →  וַיְהִי עַל פְּנֵי הָיָם וַיְהִי אֲרוּם

Backgrounded activities
Participle  →  וַיְהִי אֲרוּם מְרַחְמֵת עַל פְּנֵי הָיָם

H.N. Mainline
Wayyiqtol  →  וַיַּעַמֵּר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אָרוּם וַיְהִי אָרוּם.
The first X-Qatal fits well as a summary statement for the following narrative.
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The second X-Qatal doesn’t summarize the following narrative but if a wayyiqtol were used here it would make this the first ‘event’ in the narrative and be translated something like “the earth became formless and void” which means something quite different than “now it was the earth that was formless and void”.

The use of an X-Qatal here rather than a wayyiqtol makes it less likely that the author had in mind some sort of ‘gap theory’, where verse 1 refers to a previous creation and verse 2 the destruction of that creation.

Also, verse 1 functioning as a summary statement argues against a ‘gap theory’. In the text as it stands the first action comes with the wayyiqtol in verse 3.
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The first 2 X-Qatals, the verbless clause in 2b, and the participle in 2c, provide 4 lines of summary and background material for the beginning of the narrative action in verse 3.
What discourse genre is this?

What discourse genre is this?
What discourse genre is this?

Unmitigated Hortatory Discourse

- 3 imperatives
- 0 weqatals
What is the syntax, function and translation of this qatal?
What is the syntax, function and translation of this qatal?

- Qatal in dependent clause
- Relative past background
- “which you love”
  not “which you had loved” or “which you have loved”

(Note that roots like אתָּבָּה that refer to emotional and mental activity usually require present tense translations.)
To the extent that qatal can be viewed as an attributizer, both main actors in this narrative are labelled within the first 2 verses.

- Elohim the tester (X-Qatal in v 1)
- Abraham the lover (Qatal in dep. clause in v 2)

The tester will test the love of the lover.
What construction is this?
וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְבָרִים הָאֱלֹהִים
וִאֵל אַבְרָהָם
וְהָעֲלָהוּ שָם לְעֲלֹהוּ אַחִיד הָהָרִים
וְאָשֶׁר אָמַר לָם.

What construction is this?

• **Yiqtol** in dependent clause (not participle or qatal)
• Relative **non**-past background
• “which I will tell you” or “which I tell you”
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Genesis 22:1-3

What I will tell you, my Lord's servant, the Lord who had spoken to Abraham his father, said, "Abraham, do not hesitate, take your son, your only son, Isaac, and go to the land of theUrge, to the heights of the hill of Mamre, place him on top of the mountain, and proclaim him your son, your only son, on that day, and I will test him for you."

Abraham did as God commanded him. He got up early on the morning, gathered his son and his two servants, provided the donkey, took the bread of the loaf, the water in his canteen, and the firewood for the burnt offering. He started off with his son, Isaac, toward the land of the Urge.
Gen 22:1-3

What construction is this?

- **Qatal** in dependent clause (not yiqtol)
- Relative **past** background
- “which God had told him”

By this point Abraham knows at least the place, even if he doesn’t know which mountain yet.

What construction is this?

- **Yiqtol** in dependent clause (not participle or qatal)
- Relative **non**-past background
- “which I will tell you” or “which I tell you”
בַיֵּוָּם הַשְלִישִׁי וַיָּשָׁא אַבְרָהָם אֲבֵי נְעָרִי וַיָּרָא אָבֵיָּהוּ מַרְחֵק׃ 
וַיְאִיר אַבְרָהָם אֲבֵי נְעָרִי שְׁבוּלָּךְ פֶּן בְּחַמְוֹ׃ 
וְאֵנָּה וְהַנֵּעַר נָלָךְ עַד כֵּה הִשָּׁחֲו׃ 
וַיְקָח אַבְרָהָם אֲבֵי נְעָרִי הָעִמְּלָה}

What is this?
What is this?

• Not a clause (no subject and predicate)
• It’s a “hanging fragment”
What is this?

• Not a clause (no subject and predicate)
• It’s a “hanging fragment”

Rocine says it interrupts the flow of the wayyiqtol string, and thereby creates suspense. We might translate it “It was on the third day.”
Genesis 22:4-8

What genre?
In the evening, Abraham said to his young servant:

And Abraham took his eldest son, and had the camels load their belongings, and went to the place where God had told him. When he came to the place God had shown him, he built an altar there and took some wood, and laid it on the altar. Then he passed the knife to his son, saying:

And Abraham said to his young servant, 'Look, I am bringing water to the camels.' And he said, 'You go ahead, and I will follow right behind you.' And he himself set out, and the camels followed his direction.
What genre?

"What genre?" indicates an -Cohortative genre. This genre features a pronoun that stands in for a noun or another pronoun, which is called a pronoun of the cohort. In this case, Abraham says to his son, Ishmael, or to the servant who accompanied them, 'I will do this service, and I will return to you.'

The Hebrew text reflects the genre by using the cohortative form, which is characterized by its use of a pronoun to represent a noun or another pronoun in the sentence. This form is often used to express a plan or intention, as seen in the passage where Abraham is preparing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

The genre of the text is -Cohortative, as indicated by the use of the cohort pronoun, which implies a collective action or a plan among the speakers. This genre is often used to convey a shared goal or intention among the participants of the action described in the text.
What genre?

X-Cohortative

"As for me and the lad, let us go..." or "As for me and the lad, we will go..."

The topicalization of the X-Cohortative switches the focus from the two servants to Abraham and his son: “you two stay here, me and the lad will go up there”
The 3 cohortatives are evidence of Abraham’s faith in God.

- He is a lover of his son. He already knows what God has called him to do. And he expects (or at a minimum wishes) to return with his son alive.
What genre?  

The 3 cohortatives are evidence of Abraham’s faith in God.

• He is a lover of his son. He already knows what God has called him to do. And he expects (or at a minimum wishes) to return with his son alive.

But Abraham is also a lover of God.

• He does not begrudge God. He characterizes what will happen on the mountain as worship. Also note he says “we” will worship, not “I” will worship.

The narrator has already tipped his hat regarding the outcome of the test.
There is a conspicuous similarity between this word and verse two's תֶּלֶת.
Genesis 22:4-8

Notice the character switching.
• First speaker and addressee are clearly identified (Isaac and Abraham).
• Then speakers alternate with minimal encoding.
וַיְאַמֵּר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־אֶבְרָהָם אָבִיתָם אָבִי
וַיְאַמֵּר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־אֶבְרָהָם אָבִיתָם אָבִי
וַיְאַמֵּר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־אֶבְרָהָם אָבִיתָם אָבִי
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וַיְאַמֵּר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־אֶבְרָהָם אָבִיתָם אָבִי
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וַיְאַמֵּר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־אֶבְרָהָם אָבִיתָם אָבִי

When there is over-encoding we should ask why.
Genesis 22:4-8

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Clearly this is a poignant dialog and so narrative time slows to almost a crawl.
When there is over-encoding we should ask why.

Clearly this is a poignant dialog and so narrative time slows to almost a crawl.

Narrative slows leading up to a critical question.

Extra encoding. Strictly speaking Abraham would not have to be named here.

When there is over-encoding we should ask why.
What construction is this?
בָּיָם הַשְלישִׁי נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים אֲבֵי הַנִּשְׁמָה לָמַּה לָכֵּם אֲנָּה נְשֹׁיָבָה אֲלֵם.

וַיָּשָׁם עַל־יָצְחִּק בְּנוֹ وַאֲנִי הַנֵּעֲרָה נְלָכָה עַד־כֵּה נֵשָׁהוּ אֲלֵה. נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים אֲבֵי הַנִּשְׁמָה נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים נִיְמַר אַבְרָהָּם אֲבֵי הָאָבִים

What construction is this?

• X-Yiqtol
• Topicalization in ‘Direct Speech’ genres.
• “It is Elohim who will ..."
What construction is this?

X-Yiqtol
Topicalization in ‘Direct Speech’ genres.
"It is Elohim who will ..."

What role does topicalization play here?
What construction is this?

- X-Yiqtol
- Topicalization in ‘Direct Speech’ genres.
- "It is Elohim who will ..."

Focus
- Elohim will be the provider... not Abraham, not Isaac or any other human.
- This is the point of the whole passage. God has set the redemption price (horrifically high) and it is God himself who will provide the redemption payment (horrifically costly).

What role does topicalization play here?
So... so far we have seen 3 “functions” for the Topicalization function.
• I.e. the “X-something” syntax which topicalizes the “X” has performed 3 roles in Genesis 22 so far.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V.</th>
<th>Hebrew Text</th>
<th>Syntax</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Secondary Function or Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>והם אֱלֹהִים נָשָׁה אֵרֵי אַבְרָהָם</td>
<td>X-Qatal</td>
<td>Topicalization</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A summary statement that precedes the first wayyiqtol of the narrative. &quot;Elohim tested Abraham&quot; or &quot;it was Elohim who was a tester of Abraham&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>והני וֹתְרֵשׁ נַלְכָּה עַדְכָּה</td>
<td>X-Cohort</td>
<td>Topicalization</td>
<td>Focus switch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus switch from the two servants to Abraham and his son. “You two stay here. Me and the lad, we will go up there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>אֱלֹהִים יָרָה לְוֹ וֹשָׁה לְעַלָּה בּוּ</td>
<td>X-Yiqtol</td>
<td>Topicalization</td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not a focus switch but focus on the answer to a central question in the passage. &quot;It is Elohim who will provide...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two Critical Principles

Departure from the mainline of any discourse slows the forward progress of the discourse.

This “slowing” allows the writer to redirect the attention of his audience away from the main storyline so he can clarify, elaborate, build background. In so doing, the writer can often create tension or suspense.

A departure from the mainline of one discourse can often be accomplished by a shift to another embedded genre with its own different mainline.

For instance, in this Historical Narrative, the writer departs from the mainline of his story when he shifts to one of the Direct Speech genres.