

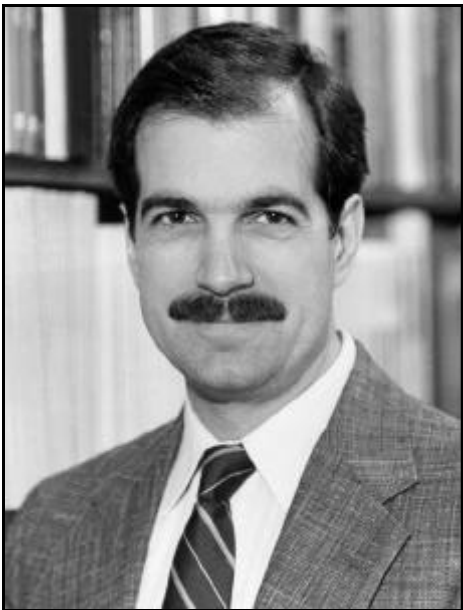
Rendsburg at AU

On May 9, 2000 Gary Rendsburg of Cornell University presented *Reading the Abraham Story*, a lecture focusing on literary techniques applied to the biblical narrative. Dr. Rendsburg stresses the conflict created by the promise of a son and the barrenness of Sarah. The essence of literature is drama that needs to be played out, the narrative inviting the reader to see how conflict is resolved.

In Gen 12 Abraham is called by God and moves, but Sarah does not. Biblical narrative, according to Rendsburg, often dispenses with chronological sequence. This is evident in chaps. 16-22 where 13 years pass without notice. Then, in Gen 17 the sequence of events slows to focus on the building drama.

Stage presentation is crucial for understanding Gen 21. Up until this point, there are one main (Abraham) and four minor (Isaac, Hagar, Ishmael, and Sarah) characters. Narrative can't have too many people on stage at the same time or the scene becomes too crowded. Thus, chap. 21 reduces Ishmael's status and excludes both Hagar and Ishmael from the scene.

In Gen 22 a new literary twist occurs. God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son. Rendsburg suggests that this story



Gary Rendsburg

can only be understood from the various angles presented in biblical literature to heighten the drama of the narrative. The primary angle is Abraham as the central character. As he builds an altar and prepares to sacrifice, the story becomes filled with details that force the reader to follow his every action. The drama builds until he is holding the knife in his hand and is about to sacrifice Isaac.

Focus is a key to understanding the binding of Isaac. At the outset, the reader thinks that Abraham is going to kill Isaac. But a careful analysis of vs. 1 reveals that God instead intends to test Abraham. Now the reader knows what the real characters do not; the focus is on Abraham, not Isaac. This foreshadowing prevents the reader from being overwhelmed by

the surprises of the story. (Moise Isaac)

Beaulieu Studies Tablets

Paul-Alain Beaulieu, assistant professor of Assyriology of the Department of Near Eastern Languages at Harvard University, was at the Horn Archaeological Museum from July 9 to 29, 2000 studying its Neo-Babylonian Tablets. The particular tablets that Dr. Beaulieu studied were originally part of a private archive of Itti-Shamash-balatu and his son Arad-Shamash from the city of Larsa and are dated to the 6th century B.C. Beaulieu eventually plans to publish these tablets

along with others from the same archive at Yale and Princeton Universities.

(Paul J. Ray, Jr.)



Paul Beaulieu.