The tracing and analysis of shared exegetical or interpretive motifs in early Jewish biblical interpretation have become a major component in the study of Jewish intellectual history in the second temple and rabbinic eras. In recent years, J. Kugel has focused the attention of researchers in this area on the interpretive traditions which appear to

* This paper has its origin in honors courses in Early Jewish Biblical Interpretation at Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women of Yeshiva University. After we had studied a good deal of the comparative exegesis of the Aqedah, my students and I noticed that angels kept appearing. My thanks to all of those undergraduates who helped start this work on its way. After the oral presentation of this paper at a session on “Angels in Second Temple and Talmudic Literature” at the 31st Annual Meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies in Chicago in December 1999, a number of colleagues, from near and far, drew my attention to a range of secondary sources which were germane to my topic. I thank, in particular, Dr I. Kalimi for referring me to L. Kundert, *Die Opferung/Bindung Isaaks. Bd. 1: Gen 22,1-19 im Alten Testament, im Frühjudentum und in Neuen Testament* and Bd. 2: *Gen 22:1-19 im frühen rabbinischen Texten* (WMANT 78-79; Neukirchen-Vluyn; Neukirchener Verlag, 1998), and Dr Y. Eliav for D. Lerch, *Isaaks Opferung christlich gedeutet: Eine auslegungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1950), both of which made surveying earlier treatments much easier. In the course of my rewriting this paper, I re-encountered an important essay by Prof. M. Kister, “Observations on Aspects of Exegesis, Tradition, and Theology in Midrash, Pseudepigrapha, and Other Jewish Writings,” *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J.C. Reeves; SBLEJL 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994) 1-34. On pp. 7-15, 20 and 26-28 nn. 36-52, and p. 34 nn. 88-91, he discusses many of the same texts with which I shall deal in this article, although from slightly different perspectives. My thanks to Dr A. Brill, Ms. Ch. Levin, and Dr H. Najman for commenting critically on the penultimate version of the paper.

1 The pioneering work in this area may be said to be G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1961; 1973), and many scholars have followed in his footsteps. The discovery of the Qumran scrolls and the “rediscovery” of the Pseudepigrapha played a significant role in generating scholarship in this area, once scholars realized that there was more to early biblical interpretation than Philo, Josephus and rabbinic literature.
respond to textual stimuli within the Bible, even those of the most subtle sort. In order to demonstrate the commonality of traditions and to classify them conveniently, Kugel has adopted the sometimes extremely productive approach of “naming” exegetical motifs, and I shall adopt his useful device of naming motifs and their variations in my discussion. The goal of this paper, however, is not to analyze only the relationship between a slice of early Jewish biblical interpretation and the biblical text, but to extend some of Kugel’s methodology to study the development of midrashic motifs. I shall examine the complex evolution of a type of motif which may or may not be textually generated. We shall observe how the traditions grow from early to later versions, attempt to comprehend the ways in which they function in their various literary manifestations and what they teach about the worldview of their composers. It should be stressed that, from the standpoint of exegetical history, common traditions which are not textually based are more likely to be shared than textually linked observations which could have been arrived at independently by different interpreters.

I. Introduction

Angels play no role in the biblical narrative of the Aqedah in Genesis 22 until an “angel of the Lord” appears in 22:11 and calls to Abraham from the heavens, ordering him to desist from the sacrifice. Shortly thereafter, following Abraham’s offering of the ram as the sacrifice in place of his son, and his naming the site “the Lord will see,” the angel reappears (22:15 הָעָזֶר), praising Abraham’s devotion and blessing him and his descendants (22:16-18). In most of the extended retellings of the Aqedah in late antiquity, however, angels play a more significant role, beginning at an earlier point in the story. In fact, there is virtually no such lengthy rewriting of this narrative where angels do not appear. The goal of this essay is to survey and classify the roles which angels play in a number of post-biblical paraphrases of the

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3 The notable exceptions to this observation are Philo and Josephus. In the case of Josephus, a review of Rengstorf’s concordance shows that Josephus never employs the