

# Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites

Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives  
on Kinship with Abraham

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# ABRAHAM AND THE NATIONS

Ed Noort

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sometimes reduced to a mere slogan, the concept of “Abrahamitic faith”<sup>1</sup> is often used in the interreligious dialogues of today, in the context of their difficult position within political reality.<sup>2</sup> “Abrahamitic faith” reaches beyond the mere fact that Abraham is a literary figure in the ancient texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His specific role within the traditions of these religions is of importance, and within all three he has become the symbol for a new and decisive stage within religious history.<sup>3</sup> In this contribution, my focus is on the Hebrew Bible. More specifically, I will address those texts within the Abraham cycle in which Abraham’s relationship to the nations is discussed.

Naturally, the main focus will be on Gen 12:1–3, without doubt the passage within the Abraham cycle which has been most commented upon. This popularity already points to its function as the linchpin of the primeval history and the patriarchal narratives. Whatever their role or stage of the tradition, these verses address Abraham’s relationship with all of the families and nations of the earth. For Judaism, Abraham is the ancestor from whom the Israelite people sprang in accordance with a divine promise. For Islam, Abraham is the father of Ishmael and the grandfather of Esau, the ancestors of the Arab people from which Muhammad sprang. For Christianity, Paul linked Christ and his believers

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<sup>1</sup> E. Noort, “1.Mose 12,1–4a,” *GPM* 54 (2000): 319–324.

<sup>2</sup> In his inaugural address *Representaties van religie in het Nederlandse debat* (Groningen; University of Groningen 2008), A.F. Sanders referred to the Islamic initiative “A Common Word between Us and You” (Online: <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=option1>) of 138 Muslim leaders and the reactions on the Jewish and Christian sides. In the Netherlands the reactions were minimal. After some time, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands appointed a committee, and “open letters” play a role in the debate now (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Some examples of the reception history include: in the Old Testament Gen 15:6; Isa 51:1–2; 63:16 and in the New Testament Rom 4:1–25; Gal 3:6–14, 16, 29; 4:21–31; Heb 11:8–19; in Judaism *Gen. Rab.* 38:13; in Islam Sura 3:65, 67, 68; 6:74–83; 37:91–93.

directly to Abraham (Gal 3:16, 29). In this essay the role of Abraham is highlighted from a “diachronic” perspective. No less important, however, is the relationship of Abraham and his descendants to the neighbouring peoples, a “synchronic” perspective. They are addressed either in the final chapter of the Abraham-Lot composition (Gen 19:30–38 Moab and Ammon) or in the Ishmael/Hagar narratives (Gen 16; 21:8–21 Isaac and Ishmael).

The abrupt לך-לך (“Go”) to Abraham<sup>4</sup> in Gen 12:1 introduces the divine commandment to him to sever his bonds to country, clan, and father’s house.<sup>5</sup> Abraham then starts his journey “to the country that I shall show you.” However, Abraham’s wanderings in Palestine and Egypt are nothing in comparison to the virtual travels he has experienced at the hands of the scholarly community. Moreover, the exegetical presentation of the figure of Abraham clearly demonstrates which tendencies in exegesis were fashionable during a certain period. The figure of Abraham is a genuine mirror of the changes in exegetical preferences.<sup>6</sup>

Chronologically, the dating of the patriarchs along a timeline from 2000 BCE to the post-exilic period went into free fall, occurring within a short period of forty years.<sup>7</sup> Van Seters and Thompson successfully contested the trustworthiness and relevance of the extra-biblical evidence

<sup>4</sup> I neglect the differences in the naming of Abraham before and after Gen 17.

<sup>5</sup> M. Köckert, *Vätergott und Väterverheissung: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Albrecht Alt und seinen Erben* (FRLANT 142; Göttingen 1988), and Idem, “Die Geschichte der Abrahamüberlieferung,” in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (ed. A. Lemaire; VTSup 109; Leiden 2006), 123–124, has once again pointed out that Gen 12:1–3 presupposes the priestly תולדות תרה (“the genealogies of Terah”). With J.L. Ska, “L'appel d'Abraham et l'acte de naissance d'Israël: Genèse 12,1–4a,” in *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature: Festschrift C.H.W. Brekelmans* (ed. M. Vervenne and J. Lust; BETL 133; Leuven 1997), 370, 376, he decides that 12:1–4a is a later interpolation added to the related 11:27–32; 12:4b–5 and argues against the proposal that 11:27–32 was written as an introductory passage to 12:1–4a.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the history of research from Wellhausen to Alt, see H. Weidmann, *Die Patriarchen und ihre Religion im Licht der Forschung seit Julius Wellhausen* (FRLANT 94; Göttingen 1968).

<sup>7</sup> These developments can be best detected in the summaries of standard works. R. Martin-Achard, “Abraham I,” *TRE* 1/3:364–372 grounds the patriarchs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries BCE. Twenty years later “bleibt die Gestalt Abrahams dem historischen Zugriff entzogen” (E. Blum, “Abraham,” *RGG*<sup>4</sup> 1:71). See however, A.R. Millard, “Abraham,” *ABD*, 1:35–41: “To place Abraham at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC is ... sustainable. The extra-biblical information ... does not demand such a date, (but) it certainly allows it” (40). Cf. L.L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (London 2007), 52–56.

and Van Seters dated the patriarchal stories to exilic times.<sup>8</sup> Alt's influential religio-historical thesis that behind the "God of the Fathers"<sup>9</sup> of the patriarchal narratives there is a pre-Israelite type of semi-nomadic religion was successfully criticized by Köckert.<sup>10</sup> However, even more influential were the renewed debates on source criticism itself,<sup>11</sup> the date of the Yahwist,<sup>12</sup> the compositional structure of the narratives,<sup>13</sup> and the dating of the divine promises.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the renewed debate on the growth of the Pentateuch<sup>15</sup> also concerns Abraham.

Against this background of Abraham's travels in the scholarly world, I will first look at the figure of Abraham outside Gen 12–25, discussing the other parts of the Hebrew Bible in which he plays a role. The next step will be to return to the Abraham cycle itself, studying the oldest narratives that focus on the relationship between Abraham and the neighbouring nations: Abraham and Lot; as well as Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael. Finally, I will turn to Gen 12:1–3, paying special attention to the crucial v. 3.

## 2. OUTSIDE THE ABRAHAM CYCLE

Outside Gen 11:27–25:11 Abraham is mentioned in the priestly genealogy of Isaac and Ishmael (25:12, 19), in the divine speeches to Isaac in the Gerar scene (26:1, 15, 18), with a reference to Abraham's oath (26:3) and the renewal of the promise of land, offspring, and blessing because—in clear post-Deuteronomistic wording—Abraham obeyed God's voice (שמע בקלי) and kept God's charge, commandments, statutes, and laws

<sup>8</sup> T.L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 133; Berlin 1974); J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven 1975).

<sup>9</sup> A. Alt, *Der Gott der Väter* (BWANT 3.12; Stuttgart 1929); repr. In Idem, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (ed. M. Noth; 3 vols.; München 1968), 1:1–78.

<sup>10</sup> Köckert, *Vätergott und Väterverheissung*.

<sup>11</sup> R. Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (BZAW 147; Berlin 1976).

<sup>12</sup> C. Levin, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen 1993).

<sup>13</sup> E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Ska, "L'appel d'Abraham," 367–390.

<sup>15</sup> T.C. Römer, "Recherches actuelles sur le Cycle d'Abraham," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. A. Wénin; BETL 155; Leuven 2001), 179–211; T.B. Dozeman and K. Schmid, eds., *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (SSSBL 34; Atlanta 2006).



(וישמר משמרתני מצותי חקותי ותורתני) (26:5). The Beersheba scene repeats that the promises to Isaac will be fulfilled because of Abraham (26:24). In Gen 26 the Isaac tradition is woven into the Abraham tradition, again in clear (post)-Deuteronomistic formulations: “oath,” “to listen to Yhwh’s voice,” Yhwh’s “commandments,” “statutes,” and “laws.” In the Jacob cycle the notion of “the blessing of Abraham” (ברכת אברהם) is introduced as a well-known formula, referring to offspring and possession of the land (28:4). Genesis 28:8–9 once again portrays Abraham’s son Ishmael, but ultimately the formula “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel” prevails.<sup>16</sup> Offspring, the sworn and given land,<sup>17</sup> and the covenant<sup>18</sup> are the main themes connecting the deity and the three patriarchs. Abraham appears, with or without his patriarchal colleagues, in prayers, blessings, geographical notions, genealogies, and in the enigmatic presentation of Josh 24:2–3.<sup>19</sup>

In the Latter Prophets—important for the problems of chronology—Abraham is only mentioned seven times: Isa 29:22; 41:8–9; 51:2; 63:16; Jer 33:26; Ezek 33:24; Mic 7:20.<sup>20</sup> Here, Abraham figures in the prophetic literature on the edge of exile or later.

The last verse of the book of Micah (7:20) presupposes the promise of the land as an oath to the patriarchs:

<sup>16</sup> God of Abraham, God of Isaac (Gen 28:13); God of (our fathers) Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (1 Kgs 18:36; 1 Chr 29:18; 2 Chr 30:6); God of my father, God of Abraham, and פחד יצחק (“the fear of Isaac”) (Gen 31:42); God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac (Gen 32:9); God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:6); God of your/their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:15, 16; 4:5); God before whom Abraham and Isaac walked (Gen 48:15); God of Abraham, God of Nachor (Gen 31:53); God who chose (בחר) Abram/renamed Abraham (Neh 9:7); Yhwh appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as אל שדי (“El Shaddai”) (Exod 6:3).

<sup>17</sup> Land given to Abraham and Isaac, (now) to you (Jacob) and your descendants (Gen 35:12); land, I/he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 50:24; Exod 6:8; 33:1; Num 32:11 [אדמה]; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 30:20; 34:4); land given to Abraham, your אהב (“friend”) (2 Chr 20:7).

<sup>18</sup> Covenant with Abraham (and Isaac, and Jacob) (Exod 2:24; Lev 26:42; Deut 29:11; 2 Kgs 13:23; Ps 105:9; 1 Chr 16:16).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Gen 35:27 (Kiriath-Arba “where Abraham and Isaac as aliens lived”); Gen 48:16 (“let my name [Jacob] be perpetuated and the name of Abraham and Isaac”); Gen 49:30, 31; 50:13 (Machpelah; Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Leah); Exod 32:13 (“remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel”); Josh 24:2 (Abraham and Nahor); Josh 24:3 (the taking of Abraham from beyond the river); Ps 105:6, 42 (offspring of Abraham his servant); 1 Chr 1:27, 28, 34 (the genealogy of Abraham).

<sup>20</sup> C. Jeremias, “Die Erzväter in der Verkündigung der Propheten,” in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. H. Donner, R. Hanhart, and R. Smend; Göttingen 1977), 206–222; Köckert, “Geschichte,” 103–128.

Grant faithfulness to Jacob  
and steadfast love to Abraham,  
as you have sworn to our fathers  
in the days of old.

(Mic 7:20)

After Julius Wellhausen, scholars almost unanimously ascribe the hymnic fragments Mic 7:8–10, 14–17, 18–20 to redactional hands.<sup>21</sup> The author hopes for Yhwh’s אַמְתּוֹ (“faithfulness”) and חֶסֶד (“love”) a fulfilment of the oath made to the fathers even in the present situation of Israel’s guilt and sin.<sup>22</sup> Both Jacob and Abraham are mentioned, not as individuals but as the descendants of the fathers, the present generation in exile. In the past, Yhwh had sworn an oath to the fathers (patriarchs). Referring to that oath, the descendants of those patriarchs hope for a renewed fulfilment in the present situation.

The oldest prophetic text in which Abraham plays a part is the divine saying in Ezek 33:24–29.

Ezekiel 33

24aα Son of man, the inhabitants of these ruins in the land of Israel

(אֲדַמַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל) say:

24aβ “Abraham was only one,

24aγ and he gained possession of the land;

24bα but we are many:

24bβ the land is surely given to us to possess.” (Ezek 33:24)

Yhwh himself quotes the complaint of the people in his word to the prophet. The people addressed are the non-exiled inhabitants of Jerusalem after the fall of the city (587 BCE). They are still many, so they claim the land with a reference to Abraham, who was only one. If, according to the tradition, this one man was entitled to the land, then surely his offspring, who had a narrow escape from death and deportation, were also entitled. This claim is refuted by Yhwh because “a *right* is derived from the fact of their having been spared.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore a judgement oracle

<sup>21</sup> A.S. van der Woude, *Micha* (POT; Nijkerk 1976), 266, sees here his Deutero-Micah at work. He offers two useful corrections for the translation. תִּתֵּן (“you will give”) should be handled as a iussive and with reference to 7:15, מִיָּמֵי קִדְמוֹת should not be translated as “since the days of old,” but as “in the days of old.”

<sup>22</sup> “Die Sammlung liturgischer Stücke in 7,8–20 . . . ist aber in ihrer Fülle und in ihrem Gehalt insgesamt ein völliges Novum am Ende des Michabuches. Kein Gerichtswort ist mehr zu hören, weder Anklagen noch Urteilsansagen . . .” (H.W. Wolff, *Micha* [BKAT 14.4; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1982], 208).

<sup>23</sup> W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia 1983), 198.

follows: “Those who are among the ruins, shall fall by the sword ...” (Ezek 33:27–29).

Whether, as Köckert proposes, Ezek 33:27–28, 29 presuppose the existence of the temple, cannot be proven. Nor can the supposition that Ezek 33:24 was intended as a word of encouragement.<sup>24</sup> The text fits the chaos after the actual fall of Jerusalem. A discussion that started in Ezek 11 with a similar claim concerning the first deportations of 597 BCE, was prolonged after 587 BCE. In Ezek 11 the statement of the Jerusalemites was: “They [the exiles] are far from Yhwh, to us [Jerusalemites] has the land been given for a possession” (11:15). This claim was also denied. The question behind this denial—Are the exiles cut off from Yhwh?—is answered with the assurance of Yhwh’s presence among the exiles. Hence, the vision ends with the chariot and the כבוד יהוה (“the glory of Yhwh”), which ascends from the city to the Mount of Olives and retreat to the east (11:22–23). Although used within a negatively judged quotation, the image of Abraham is clear. Abraham is the one lone man for whom the promise of the land was fulfilled. The tradition of Gen 12 must lie in the background.

Second and Third Isaiah reveal other details:

Isaiah 41

- 8aα But you, Israel, my **servant**,  
 8aβ Jacob, whom I have *chosen*,  
 8b offspring of Abraham, who loved me,  
 9aα you, whom I took from the ends of the earth,  
 9aβ called from its farthest corners,  
 9bα saying to you: “You are my **servant**,  
 9bβ I have *chosen* you and not cast you off.” (Isa 41:8–9)

Through the adversative ואתה (“but you”), Isa 41:8–13 address the triplet Israel/Jacob/seed of Abraham. In this way, the exiled Israel is placed within the Abrahamitic tradition. The terminology is familiar: עבד (“servant”) and בחר (“to choose”) (41:8, 9; 42:1; 43:10; 44:1, 2; 45:4; 49:6, 7), קרא (“to call”) and the servant Israel (41:9; 49:3), and חזק (“to be strong”) (*piel* 41:7; 54:2; *hip’il* 41:9; 42:6 + קרא [“to call”]; 45:1). The usual translation of the apposition אהבי (“my friend”) establishes the relationship between Abraham and Yhwh within the framework of בחר (“to choose”). The stress is on Yhwh’s love for Abraham, as the versions and James demonstrate: LXX σπέρμα Αβρααμ ὃν ἠγάπησα (“the seed of Abraham,

<sup>24</sup> Köckert, “Geschichte,” 104–107.

whom I loved”), Aquila σπέρμα Αβρααμ ἀγάπητου μου (“the seed of Abraham, my beloved”), Symmachus του φίλου μου (“my friend”), Vg. *Abraham amici mei* (“Abraham, my friend”), and Jas 2:23 (φίλος θεοῦ “the friend of God”).<sup>25</sup> Within the wider context of the Hebrew Bible this position is mainly supported by Deuteronomistic literature. It is, however, contrary to the active participle of the MT (אֱהָבַי “he who loves me”). Therefore, it is no coincidence that the *BHS* proposes to vocalize the active form as a passive participle אֲהָבַי (“he who was loved by me”) in order to harmonize the classic meaning with the MT. However, both Neh 9:7 and Ezek 33:24<sup>26</sup> proclaim an active translation: Abraham, who loves Yhwh.

At this stage of the reception history, Isa 41:8b demonstrates how Abraham is on the one hand, involved in part of the identification of Jacob/Israel, while on the other hand his position is a higher one because of his love for God. Therefore, Abraham has a special status. He is an exemplary believer who loves Yhwh, who has called him from the ends of the world, not far from where the exiles were now situated (9a), and Abraham followed this calling. “From the ends of the earth” (מִקְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ) refers to the promised land, and the land is the focus of both the Abraham tradition and the encouragement of Jacob/Israel. Yhwh has even dedicated the servant’s title עַבְדִּי (“my servant”) to Abraham.<sup>27</sup> Through זרע אברהם (“the offspring of Abraham”), the promise once made to Abraham is now also applicable to the exiles.<sup>28</sup> Chosenness and covenant include Jacob/Israel. Therefore, there is hope for the future.

<sup>25</sup> Apart from this first meaning, Beuken, *Jesaja IIA*, also leaves room for an active translation of אֱהָב (“he who loves”), meaning loyalty on the part of Abraham: “because Yhwh has chosen, Abraham was capable of loyalty.” To the active interpretation and translation of אֱהָבַי as “who loved me,” see J.L. Koole, *Jesaja II* (2 vols.; COT; Kampen 1985), 1:102–103. Koole demonstrates that the archaic translation of the Dutch Statenvertaling “My lover/devotee” correctly observed this. P. Höffken, “Abraham und Gott, oder: wer liebt hier wen? Anmerkungen zu Jes 41,8,” *BN* 103 (2000): 17–22, pointed out that in the Greek translations the emphasis is on God’s acting towards Abraham, because they leave out the suffix הִזְקִיתִּי (“I took you”), pointing towards Israel/Jacob. Abraham, not Jacob/Israel, should be the addressee in this passage. He himself, like Koole, proposed an active translation, mentioning eleven parallels for participles with suffixes. *Pace* C. Jeremias, “Erzväter,” 209.

<sup>26</sup> Koole, *Jesaja II*, 1:103 and Höffken, “Wer liebt hier wen,” 21.

<sup>27</sup> The title עַבְדִּי (“my servant”) is not used in the Abraham cycle itself, but appears again in the promise to Isaac: Gen 26:24.

<sup>28</sup> Köckert, “Geschichte,” 111, believes he has enough proof to reconstruct the original text: vv. 8a, 10–13. He holds vv. 8b–9 to be a later reworking that sharpens the contours of Abraham’s profile. However, his main argument is the exceptional use of the Abraham analogy. There is no reason to deny this analogy to Second Isaiah.

## Isaiah 51

- 1aα Listen to me,  
 1aβ you that pursue righteousness,  
 1aγ you that seek Yhwh;  
 1bα Look to the rock (from which) you were hewn  
 1bβ and to the quarry<sup>29</sup> (from which) you were dug;  
 2aα Look to Abraham your father  
 2aβ and to Sarah who gave you birth;<sup>30</sup>  
 2bα Certainly,<sup>31</sup> he was but one when I called him,  
 2bβ for blessing him<sup>32</sup> and making him many. (Isa 51:1–2)

Structured by the threefold call to listen (שמע 1aα, 7aα; קשב *hip'il* 4aα), the complex of Yhwh's צדקה ("deliverance") in Isa 51:1–8 starts in vv. 1, 2 with the proclamation of those who identify themselves with the servant in contrast to those "who are far from צדקה ('deliverance')" (Isa 46:12; 48:1–2).<sup>33</sup> It is not the land, but Zion which is at the centre of interest, the usual focus of Second Isaiah (Isa 51:3). The addressees are those who respond to the servant's call to return to Zion. In Isa 51:1–3, everything is focused on the rebirth of the people, exemplified by the names of Abraham and Sarah. However, the connection to Abraham and Sarah is controversial: צור ("rock") is a usual metaphor for the deity<sup>34</sup> (Isa 44:8). In this context, the rock should refer to Abraham, of which no proof can be found.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, both

<sup>29</sup> נקב ( "to pierce") means here either the tool to drive in nails (hammer) or the result (the hole). בור ("pit") is probably a gloss, see Koole, *Jesaja II*, 2:117.

<sup>30</sup> Pol. Impf. חיל ("to give birth in pain").

<sup>31</sup> As in v. 3, the emphatic כִּי is indicated.

<sup>32</sup> 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> reads וּפְרָהוּ ("and I will make him fruitful"), from פָּרָה ("to be fruitful"), which points to the blessing itself, but is also an elaborate interpretation. The LXX offers its own interpretation of v. 2. After καὶ εὐλόγησα αὐτὸν ("and I blessed him") it adds καὶ ἠγάπησα αὐτὸν ("and I loved him"), in which God's love for Abraham is emphasized in accordance with Gen 41:8 LXX.

<sup>33</sup> W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja deel IIB* (POT; Nijkerk 1983), 109.

<sup>34</sup> D. Eichhorn, *Gott als Fels, Burg und Zuflucht: Eine Untersuchung zum Gebet des Mittlers in den Psalmen* (EHST 4; Frankfurt 1972); P.A.H. de Boer, *Second-Isaiah's Message* (OTS 11; Leiden 1956), 58–67 ("The Rock").

<sup>35</sup> In this case, the passive forms הֻצַּבְתֶּם ("you were hewn") and נִקְרַתֶּם ("you were dug") are problematic. The versions solve the problem by using active forms such as the LXX ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὴν στερεὰν πέτραν ἣν ἐλατομήσατε καὶ εἰς τὸν βόθυνον τοῦ λάκκου ὃν ὠρύξατε ("Look to the solid rock, that you hew out and to the hole, the cistern, that you dig"). De Boer, *Second-Isaiah's Message*, 65, argued that in the MT active forms should also be read: הֻצַּבְתֶּם ("you hew out") and נִקְרַתֶּם ("you bore/dig"). The rock and the cistern become metaphors for Yhwh himself. The God-seekers of v. 1 are "people who hew out the rock to find life-giving water and protecting qualities, who dig a cistern that can hold water ... Yhwh reminds ... the exiles of his wonderful and life-giving strength" (65).

Köckert<sup>36</sup> and Steck<sup>37</sup> point out that צור (“rock”) is not only used for the deity of Zion, but also for Zion itself, while the verbs refer to the exile. The contrast is made in the promise of salvation of v. 3: “Yhwh will really comfort Zion, . . . all her waste places. He will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the גן-יהוה (‘the garden of Yhwh’) . . .” Within this framework, reference is made to Abraham and Sarah (Isa 51:2). The climax of the verse is clear: Abraham has been called as the (only) one to become father to a multitude of many nations.<sup>38</sup> Zion’s motherhood is visualized by the matriarch *par excellence*, Sarah, once barren. In a combination of past and present,<sup>39</sup> the matriarch bears the new Israel (תְּחוּלֵיכֶם) “[she] who bore you”), here addressed. This presupposed image represents both priestly and non-priestly traditions, among which are Gen 11:27–32; 12:1–3; 13:10.<sup>40</sup> The focus is on the blessing and the multitude of offspring.

Isaiah 29

Therefore, thus says Yhwh, the God<sup>41</sup> of the house of Jacob, who redeemed (פָּדָה) Abraham: “No longer shall Jacob be ashamed, no longer shall his face grow pale.” (Isa 29:22)

Isaiah 29:22 is dependent on Second Isaiah, as generally agreed. The redemption of Abraham is a signal for the future redemption of Jacob/Israel. פָּדָה (“to ransom”) belongs to the field of Deuteronomistic language and is normally used to express deliverance out of Egypt (Deut 7:8; 13:6; 15:15). It remains unclear to which event in the Abraham cycle the text refers. It is either possible that a later interpretation understood Abraham’s adventures in Egypt and Gerar (Gen 12:10–20; 20) as deliverance or that Abraham being “taken away” from the pagan Mesopotamian context was seen as deliverance (*Jub. 12; Apocalypse of Abraham*). The latter

<sup>36</sup> Köckert, “Geschichte,” 109n15.

<sup>37</sup> O.H. Steck, “Zions Tröstung: Beobachtungen und Fragen zu Jesaja 51, 1–11,” in *Gottesknecht und Zion: Gesammelte Aufsätze zu Deuterocesaja* (by O.H. Steck; FAT 4; Tübingen 1992), 84–86.

<sup>38</sup> Including Gen 17:4–5; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4.

<sup>39</sup> Köckert, “Geschichte,” 109n17 and his translation “Sara, die mit euch in Wehen liegt” (108). Compare Koole, *Jesaja II*, 2:118, who defends the past meaning of the imperfect in poetic language.

<sup>40</sup> Köckert, “Geschichte,” 110.

<sup>41</sup> In accordance with *BHK/BHS*, אֱל (‘‘God’’) rather than אֵל (‘‘to’’) should be read, for otherwise the house of Jacob would have liberated Abraham. Compare O. Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja Kapitel 13–39* (ATD 18; Göttingen 1973), 221n2.

might be supported by Josh 24:2–3. Moreover, neither Gen 12 nor 20 give reason to speak of “redemption.” The point of reference may be uncertain, but the function of Isa 29:22 is crystal clear. Just as Yhwh once redeemed Abraham, he will also redeem Jacob/Israel in the future.

Isaiah 63

16a $\alpha$  Certainly, you are our father  
 16a $\beta$  for Abraham does not know us  
 16a $\gamma$  and Israel does not acknowledge us;  
 16b $\alpha$  You, Yhwh, are our father,  
 16b $\beta$  our Redeemer from old is your name (Isa 63:16)

The prayer of lament Isa 63:15–64:11 starts with the twofold imperative **וראה הבט** (“Look down and see ...”) in Isa 63:15, and reaches its first climax in the call for Yhwh’s intervention (“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down”) in 63:19b MT (64:1 RSV). The plea ends in 64:11 with the rhetorical question to Yhwh concerning whether the destruction of Zion/Jerusalem and the temple are not reason enough for a divine response. Within this complex, the reasoning in Isa 63:16 is remarkable. Yhwh’s fatherhood and the fatherhood of Abraham and Jacob/Israel are contrasted in a surprising way. Beyond the fatherhood of Abraham, the prayer’s final trust rests in Yhwh’s fatherhood. Nevertheless, the phrase “for Abraham does not know us” (Isa 63:16b) is crucial. Most scholars understand v. 16 as a statement that Israel no longer depends on these forefathers but upon the God of the exodus.<sup>42</sup> Beuken<sup>43</sup> explained the verse in a different way. With regard to Isa 63:16a $\beta\gamma$ , he argues that Abraham and Jacob no longer *wish* to know their offspring, and therefore he connects this passage to the Levi saying of Deut 33:9 (“[Levi], who said of his father and mother, ‘I regard them not’; he disowned his brothers, and ignored his children”). Only here and in Isa 63:16, do **נכר** (*hip’il*: “to regard”) and **לא ידע** (“to know not”) occur as parallels. The complete, bloody loyalty of the Levites (Exod 32:27–29) to Yhwh, unattached to kinship or offspring, and driven only by obedience to Yhwh’s word and covenant, is now transferred to Abraham. The Abraham cycle offers a point of departure for such an association: Gen 22. There Abraham also chose faithfulness to Yhwh’s command over the fate of the son of promise.

<sup>42</sup> Köckert, “Geschichte,” 114.

<sup>43</sup> W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja deel IIIB* (POT; Nijkerk 1989), 24.

In summary, the Latter Prophets use the character of Abraham in different ways. The oldest text, Ezek 33:24–29, reflects the Jerusalemites' claim on the land after 587 BCE. The juxtaposition—he was only one, we are many—presupposes the position of the group as Abraham's offspring. Abraham is claimed for this small group and Yhwh refutes the claim in the context of a judgement oracle. In the oracle of salvation, Isa 41:8–13, vv. 8–9 give Abraham a special status: he is said to love Yhwh. Corporate Israel is not only the offspring of Jacob, but also of Yhwh's servant Abraham. Isaiah 51:2 stresses the role of Abraham and Sarah as the ancestors of the exiles. The matriarch bears the new Israel, with a focus on blessing and the multitude of the offspring. Isaiah 29:22 heightens the relationship between Yhwh and Abraham theologically. Yhwh redeemed Abraham. Although the point of reference is unclear, the message is not: since Yhwh once redeemed Abraham, he will therefore redeem Jacob/Israel in the future. In Mic 7:20 Abraham is a point of reference for the divine oath and “the days of old” and at the same time the representative of his descendants through an enigmatic use of the name. Apart from Ezek 33:24–29, the prophetic texts that mention Abraham do so in a positive way: Abraham is Yhwh's servant, he loved Yhwh and is redeemed by Yhwh, and Abraham and Sarah are the real ancestors of Israel. In Isa 63 Abraham's face is changed. Now he is the ancestor who does not wish to know his offspring and he is described as a Levite, obeying Yhwh's word and covenant. Judah cannot find any comfort in the figure of Abraham after the return from exile. Only Yhwh himself can be Judah's/Israel's father.

The prophetic texts at the edge of the exile enrich the figure of Abraham. His role as an exemplary ancestor grows and sometimes he surpasses Jacob. In spite of the differences and variations in the texts, one point is clear. The supposed universalism of Gen 12 is nowhere present. The prophets do not know anything of a role for Abraham in relation to “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3). They focus exclusively on the future of exiled Israel.

### 3. LOT AND ABRAHAM

Returning to the narratives of the Abraham cycle itself, two exemplary stories highlight the relationship between Israel/Judah and Moab represented by Abraham and Lot. A strange ambivalence characterizing this relationship can be found in many texts. On the one hand Moab is the



enemy, the threat to Israel as narrated in the Balaam cycle with reference to the Moabite king Balak. Deuteronomy 23:3–4 states that the Moabites—and the following ten generations—shall be refused entry to the עֵדָת יְהוָה (“the assembly of Yhwh”), because they refused Israel crucial passage through their land.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, Deut 2:9, 19, states that Israel has no claim to the land of Moab: “Do not harass Moab or engage them in battle, for I will not give you any of its land as a possession, since I have given Ar as a possession to the descendants of Lot.” Hence, the land of Moab is granted to Lot’s descendants as a divine gift from Yhwh. The same is the case with Ammon. This ambivalence can also be found at the end of the Abraham-Lot cycle in Gen 19:30–38.

As Blum has demonstrated,<sup>45</sup> the aetiological narrative concerning the origin of Ammon and Moab cannot be detached from the preceding scenes concerning the annihilation of Sodom, the promise of Isaac’s birth, and the division of the land between Lot and Abraham. With the annihilation of Sodom the closing scene is prepared: 1. The “two daughters, who have not known a man” (Gen 19:8); 2. The two sons-in-law who refuse to leave the city (Gen 19:12, 14); and 3. The death of Lot’s wife (Gen 19:26). All of these elements are required for the events of 19:30–38 to occur. Genesis 19:30–38 is the finale of a composition that commences in Gen 13. Here, the geographical points of departure are clarified: Abraham is in Mamre and Lot in Sodom. The narrative turns on the correctness of their choices. Abraham, who allows his nephew to choose, ends up with the best part, while Lot, who takes the first choice—that of the Jordan plain, which is “like the garden of Yhwh” (13:10, 11)—eventually ends up in a cave.<sup>46</sup> From Gen 13, the Abraham-Lot cycle continues with the visit of the three men to Mamre and the proclamation of Isaac’s birth. A division of these passages in accordance with literary criticism does not lead to satisfactory solutions. However, the profoundly different themes and images concerning Abraham in Gen 18:16b–33

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<sup>44</sup> E. Noort, “Balaam the Villain,” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam* (ed. G.H. van Kooten and J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten; TBN 11; Leiden 2008), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 281. Compare H. Seebass, *Genesis II.1: Vätergeschichte I (11,27–22,24)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1997), 156.

<sup>46</sup> Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 283.

must be explained diachronically.<sup>47</sup> Van Seters<sup>48</sup> has correctly defended the interdependence of Gen 18 and 19. An original independence cannot be supported, due to the verbal similarity and the interwoven sequence of scenes: “The first episode (Gen 18) takes place at midday, the second (Gen 19) in the evening, and this accounts for all the changes in detail from reclining in the shade of a tree to spending the night in the ‘shade’ of Lot’s house.”<sup>49</sup>

The connections between Gen 13:2, 5, 7a, 8–11, 13, 18; 18:1–16a; 19:1–26 establish the closing act of 19:30–38. On the one hand, its concern is incest: the neighbouring peoples of Moab and Ammon originate from incest. Therefore, it is no coincidence that in Genesis no blessings or other promises are given or mentioned in the description of these tribes of Abrahamitic descent.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, Deuteronomy rewards the offspring of Lot with a divine promise of land. Moreover, it is noteworthy that there is no condemnation of Lot’s daughters within the story itself. In fact, 19:31 portrays the daughter’s distress: וַאִשׁ אֶין בְּאֶרֶץ לְבוֹא עֲלֵינוּ כְּדָרֶךְ כָּל-הָאָרֶץ (“and there is not a man *on earth* to come in to us after the manner of all the world”).

This portrayal demonstrates a background in which—in the case of the cave story—Lot indeed is the only remaining man on earth. The story parallels the flood narrative. However, while the flood narrative is globally contextualized through its place in the primeval history, the catastrophe in Sodom is locally restricted.<sup>51</sup> Hence, the Abraham-Lot cycle differentiates between the Moabites and Ammonites: they are neighbouring peoples and family. Their ancestor Lot chooses the part that seems the best and settles in Sodom. He is neatly plucked from the city when it is destroyed and becomes the patriarch of the Moabites and Ammonites through the acts of his daughters.

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<sup>47</sup> E. Noort, “For the Sake of Righteousness: Abraham’s Negotiations with Yhwh as Prologue to the Sodom Narrative: Genesis 18:16–33,” in *Sodom’s Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations* (ed. E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar; TBN 7; Leiden 2004), 5: “The figure of Abraham has already been developed to such an extent that Abraham ‘deserves’ to be informed of Yhwh’s plans . . . . Abraham here has become a Righteous One who must be kept informed, even of Yhwh’s plans for destruction and who, in the best deuteronomi(st)ic tradition, instructs his descendants in צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט (‘righteousness and justice’).”

<sup>48</sup> Van Seters, *Abraham*, 209–226.

<sup>49</sup> Van Seters, *Abraham*, 216.

<sup>50</sup> W. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 12–25: Abraham* (ZBK; Zürich 1976), 94.

<sup>51</sup> Even though his formulations are somewhat archaic (“heroic”), H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (Göttingen 1910), 217–220, described the background accurately.

Irony might be detected in the names. The name of the older son, Moab (מוֹאָב), in Gen 19:37 means “from father,” which is strengthened by the LXX (καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Μωαβ λέγουσα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μου “and she called his name Moab, saying ‘from my father’”). The same is the case with the name of the younger son, Ben-ammi (בֶּן-עַמִּי), the forefather of Ammon, in v. 38, which means “son of my family.” This is supported by the LXX (καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἀμμων υἱὸς τοῦ γένους μου “and she called his name Amman, ‘son of my kin’”) and by the Vg. (*Ammon, id est filius populi mei* “Ammon, that is ‘son of my people’”). However, we cannot be absolutely certain about this. Moreover, it is often overlooked that even the incest laws in Lev 18 and 20 do not mention a law against incest between father and daughter.

Leviticus 20:14 addresses sexual intercourse between mother and daughter. Moreover, in ancient Near Eastern law, incest between father and daughter only led to the exile of the father, while the daughter remained unpunished.<sup>52</sup> In the case of mother and son, incest led to capital punishment. Another mitigating factor might be that Lot was made drunk so that he would not notice anything. However, this can also be explained in two ways. First, this might be a means of freeing Lot from any responsibility. Second, the initiative taken by Lot’s daughters for the sake of procreation might be emphasized in Gen 19:32, 34. In spite of vv. 33, 35, I tend towards the second possibility.

With the birth of Moab and Ammon the cycle ends; however, returning to the Sodom scenes, the question of *why* Lot was saved arises. He is not an exemplary צַדִּיק (“a righteous one”), “although his actions are contrasted with those of all the men in the city. He offers hospitality and protection, even to the extent of sacrificing his own daughters. He goes outside to calm the crowd but that is all.”<sup>53</sup> He *looks* like a צַדִּיק (“a righteous one”) because of the foregoing scene of the dialogue and negotiations between Abraham and Yhwh. Here the fundamental question of the fate of the righteous who live among the wicked is treated. Therefore, Lot’s rescue seems to be presented as the rescue of a צַדִּיק (“a righteous one”). Nevertheless, Gen 19:29 offers another and more fitting solution: “*God remembered Abraham*, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow.” Furthermore, “According to the interpretation of this author, Lot was not rescued because he was righteous but because he was part of Abraham’s

<sup>52</sup> Code of Hammurabi § 154: <sup>67</sup>When an *awilum* <sup>69</sup>has had intercourse <sup>68</sup>with his daughter <sup>71</sup>they shall make <sup>70</sup>that *awilum* <sup>71</sup>leave the city.

<sup>53</sup> Noort, “For the Sake of Righteousness,” 14.

family.”<sup>54</sup> The oldest parts of the Abraham-Lot cycle do not include a universalistic role for Abraham. This is changed by the interpolation<sup>55</sup> of Gen 18:16–33. Abraham is now the righteous one (צדיק) who must be kept informed, even of Yhwh’s plans for destruction, and who instructs his descendants in “righteousness and justice.” The central problem of the scene can be found in Gen 18:25: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” The dilemma of Yhwh’s righteousness, exemplified by the question of whether the righteous should be slain alongside the wicked, is a theoretical problem with universalistic dimensions. However, this concerns post-exilic fields. The Abraham-Lot cycle demonstrates how an original family and group-oriented narrative of destruction and survival changed the role of Abraham and his relationship with Yhwh by insertion and composition. Consequently, the question of 18:25 concerns all humankind and the mediator is Abraham.

#### 4. ISHMAEL, HAGAR, AND ABRAHAM

As I discuss this topic in another article within this collection of essays, entitled “Created in the Image of the Son: Ishmael and Hagar in Gen 16 and 21,” here I will only summarize the conclusions drawn there. Genesis 16:12 portrays Ishmael (and his mother Hagar) as a “wild ass” (פרא אדם) who is hostile to everybody (ידו בכל ויד כל בו “his hand against all and the hands of all against him”). Therefore, “he shall dwell apart from all his brothers” (Gen 16:12b). The author looks at nomadic life in complete amazement and astonishment. Nomads and nomadic life are strange and dangerous to him. They are a threat. Nevertheless, these people are *brothers* and neighbours; and although they are distant brothers, they are still family. This is a family and tribal-oriented narrative in which Abraham has only a background role. The focus is on Ishmael and Hagar.

Genesis 21 is a late reworking of the original narrative of Gen 16. The deadly threat for Ishmael in Gen 21 cannot be read without reading Gen 22, the Aqedah. Genesis 21 is rewritten as a parallel to that narrative. *Both* sons of Abraham must go through a near-death event to be liberated by Yhwh/Elohim: “The divine promise only opens up the future after a deadly threat.”<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the real heir (Gen 15:4) is Isaac, not

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> Noort, “For the Sake of Righteousness,” 4–5.

<sup>56</sup> E. Noort, “Genesis 22: Human Sacrifice and Theology in the Hebrew Bible,” in

Ishmael, with the child of divine rather than human initiative becoming the real heir. However, both children receive the divine promise of a future great nation, although they live apart and develop different cultures. Again the focus of the Hagar-Ishmael cycle is on related tribes. It is family-oriented. There will be the blessing of progeny and land for specific groups. In other words, the horizon of the stories is not universal.

#### 5. THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM: GEN 12:1–3<sup>57</sup>

The Abraham-Lot cycle of Gen 13\*; 18–19\* and the Hagar-Ishmael cycle of Gen 16\* (21) set the stage in terms of peoples, tribes, and groups in Cis- and Transjordan, the Negeb and the Arab desert. The events and groups we meet are relatively small-scale. Returning to the beginning of the Abraham cycle (Gen 11:27–25:11), the linchpin (Gen 12:1–3) of the primeval history and the patriarchal narratives breathes universalism. Apart from the question of translating Gen 12:3 (and 2), blessings and all the families of the world take the centre stage. These blessings function to counteract the dark tones of universal judgement in Gen 2–11. Even though the exegesis of this passage is strongly connected to Von Rad and the Old Testament scholars who work in his tradition, I will start with the view of Benno Jacob. Although arguing against all of the constructions and conclusions of the Documentary Hypothesis,<sup>58</sup> Jacob's Genesis commentary reaches theological conclusions that do not differ

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*The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations* (ed. E. Noort and E.J.C. Tigchelaar; TBN 4; Leiden 2002), 4–5.

<sup>57</sup> I do not discuss here the detailed study of K.N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context* (BZAW 332; Berlin 2003), for one simple reason. Grüneberg studies the Hebrew *nip'al* in ch. 3 and concludes that the *nip'al* expresses a “middle” sense (S. Kemmer, *The Middle Voice* [Amsterdam 1993]). Moreover, he states that most *nip'al* constructions should be rendered as passive forms. Reflexive use of the *nip'al* is very rare. Therefore, 12:3b should be translated as a passive. His exegetical analysis of the corpus of texts is astute and a great help for scholars studying the blessings in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, the decisive moment of the study always comes down to his opinion of the grammatical meaning of the *nip'al*, even when text and context do not fit. A more flexible approach is offered by D. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville, Ky. 1996), 155–158. The seldom used reflexive meaning for the promises of Gen 12:3; 28:14 (18:18) was replaced in a later stage by the more common *hitpa'el* (Gen 22:18; 26:4).

<sup>58</sup> B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin 1934), 949–1049 (Anhang “Quellenscheidung”).

greatly from the successful hypothesis introduced by Von Rad four years later in *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch*.<sup>59</sup>

Jacob argues that the imperative *ויהי ברכה* (“so that you will be a blessing”; Gen 12:2b, with Masoretic vocalization) is a “command to history, a word of creation.”<sup>60</sup> The idea that a second creation is being narrated is further elaborated upon in the exegesis of v. 3b, with Jacob creating parallels between the five occurrences of the word *אור* (“light”) in the first creation story (Gen 1:3–5) and the fivefold occurrence—in different forms—of *ברך* (“to bless”). On this basis he concludes: “Es ist eine zweite Welt, die mit Abraham ins Dasein gerufen wird, die Welt des Segens durch Menschen für Menschen.”<sup>61</sup>

The fact that Gen 12 concerns the entire world and all peoples, bears witness to a universalism which, even in comparison with the latter prophets, is unequalled.<sup>62</sup> However, even though scholars have attempted to minimize its importance,<sup>63</sup> Jacob’s conclusion is: “Am Anfang der Geschichte Israels stehend, ist sich die Tora voll des Letzten bewußt, worauf sie hinausgehen soll.” Therefore, he draws a line between the “second creation” by the blessing of Abraham and the universal blessing of all nations, which is the ultimate goal of the Torah according to Jacob.

Along different lines, von Rad finds an extraordinary meaning for Gen 12:1–3. His Yahwist not only collects material but also authors Gen 12:1–3. In order to narrate the divine promise of a great nation (Gen 12:1: *גוי גדול*) and the promise of the land to the offspring, he has a given tradition before him. However, this is not the case in Gen 12:3b. The promise that through Abraham all of the nations of the earth are blessed is a theological-prophetic vision of the Yahwist himself.<sup>64</sup> This makes Gen 12:1–3 not only the close of the primeval history, but in effect

<sup>59</sup> G. von Rad, *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch* (BWANT 26; Stuttgart 1938); repr. in Idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (TB 8; München 1965), 74–75.

<sup>60</sup> Jacob, *Genesis*, 336.

<sup>61</sup> Jacob, *Genesis*, 339.

<sup>62</sup> Jacob, *Genesis*, 339.

<sup>63</sup> Jacob primarily points to Gunkel, who comments on 12:3 as follows: “Hier spricht sich unbefangen die volkstümliche Stimmung aus, welche die Propheten später so bitter bekämpft und doch selber selten ganz überwunden haben.” Gunkel argues against a passive translation of *נברכו* (“they shall be blessed”) in v. 3b because such a universalism would be a stark contrast “zu dem volkstümlichen Partikularismus” of v. 3a. (H. Gunkel, *Genesis* [GHKAT; Göttingen 1969]), 165.

<sup>64</sup> Von Rad, *Das formgeschichtliche Problem*; repr. in Idem, *Gesammelte Studien*, 74–75.

also the hermeneutical key to the whole narrative. For, according to Von Rad, Gen 12:3b answers the primeval history's open question of how God's relationship to the non-Israelite peoples and humankind as a whole should be perceived.<sup>65</sup>

The primeval history ends with a divine judgement (Gen 11:1–9). The narrative's central sentence concerning the building of the tower, *נעשה-לנו שם* (11:4a: "let us make a name for ourselves"), has its contrasting point in *אגדלה שמך* (12:2aγ: "[I will] make your name great").<sup>66</sup> While the people of Gen 11 want to make a name for themselves (11:4a), in Gen 12, Yhwh will make Abraham's name great (12:2aγ). This contrast determines the meaning of Gen 12:3b. The ultimate goal of the promise concerns the bridging of the gap between God and humanity.<sup>67</sup> Of course, Von Rad agrees with a passive translation of Gen 12:3b.<sup>68</sup> For him, Gen 12:1–3, and especially 3b, is "die Ätiologie aller Ätiologien Israels."<sup>69</sup> His exegesis of v. 3 ends with a reference to the New Testament.<sup>70</sup>

Another step is taken by Wolff in his article "Das Kerygma des Jahwisten."<sup>71</sup> Even more forcefully than Von Rad, he locates the Yahwist within the Salomonic period. The syntactical structure, with the imperative of Gen 12:1 and the fivefold imperfect consecutive in vv. 2–3a, encircling the promise, lead to the perfect of v. 3b. Genesis 12:3b "gilt damit als *die* Folge (v.3b) *der* Folgen (v.2–3a) des Auszugs Abrahams (v.1)."<sup>72</sup> Everything is focused upon the content: a blessing for all of humanity by Abraham's people.<sup>73</sup> According to Wolff, this message becomes even stronger

<sup>65</sup> Von Rad, *Das formgeschichtliche Problem*, 72.

<sup>66</sup> G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis* (ATD 2–4; Göttingen 1972), 122. With a reference to Jacob.

<sup>67</sup> Von Rad, *Das formgeschichtliche Problem*, 73: "Weder rational begründet noch in Einzelheiten schon faßbar, verkündet er [der Jahwist] als das Fernziel der von Gott in Israel gewirkten Heilsgeschichte die Überbrückung der Kluft zwischen Gott und den Menschen insgesamt." Jacob could have said this of the ultimate goal of the Torah.

<sup>68</sup> In 1938, Von Rad dedicated a footnote (Von Rad, *Formgeschichtliches Problem*, 73n99) to the question of a reflexive or passive translation, here pointing out the possibility that in a reflexive interpretation the later generations not only will use the blessing together with Abraham's name, but that they also wish to share his blessing. Interpreted in this manner, both interpretations are not too far apart.

<sup>69</sup> Von Rad, *Das formgeschichtliche Problem*, 73.

<sup>70</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 123: "Diese Weissagung, die auf eine jenseits des Alten Bundes liegenden Erfüllung hindeutet, war dem rückschauenden Blick der alttestamentlichen Zeugen von besonderer Wichtigkeit (Acts 3:25–26; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8)."

<sup>71</sup> H.W. Wolff, "Das Kerygma des Jahwisten," *EvT* 23 (1963): 73–98; repr. in Idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (TB 22; München 1964), 345–373.

<sup>72</sup> Wolff, "Kerygma," 353.

<sup>73</sup> Wolff, "Kerygma," 354.

when Gen 12:1–3—and especially 12:3b—is understood as the Yahwist’s own message set against the negative background of the primeval history. However, Gen 12:1–3 not only provides the key to Gen 2–11, the Yahwistic parts of the patriarchal narratives also provide an answer to the question of how the nations of the earth can be blessed by Abraham and his descendants. This is made clear by means of the Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, and Arameans: the intercession (Abraham), peaceful coexistence (Isaac), and economic prosperity (Jacob).<sup>74</sup> The strength of Wolff’s analysis, however, lies in its connection to the primeval history. After the stories of guilt, annihilation, and death in Gen 3–6, the rescue of Noah from the waters of the great flood (Gen 8), and the scattering of the people (Gen 11), Gen 12:1–3 stands in contrast. From this point on, humanity is blessed and all nations may take part due to Abraham.

For a moment, this line of theological exegesis seemed to be broken by an influential article by Rendtorff.<sup>75</sup> He contests the thesis that the Yahwist’s primeval history ends in Gen 12:1–3 and makes a case for it coming to a close in 8:21, after the flood ends in a divine guarantee of life on earth. However, Rendtorff’s proposal is sufficiently criticized by Steck,<sup>76</sup> who contests the idea that Gen 8:21ab refers back to 3:17 and that the curse over the earth is lifted in 8:21.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, he stresses that in 8:21–22 the keyword, “blessing,” is not mentioned, and he correctly points out that Rendtorff cannot explain the compositional place of Gen 11.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, alongside the confusion of languages, the scattering of the people is also mentioned, which is not addressed positively in any sense by the narrator. Thematically, the curse of the אדמה (“ground/earth”) is only lifted after Gen 12.

The step from curse to blessing is unthinkable without the blessing of Abraham and his descendants.<sup>79</sup> In Gen 13:10 Lot is able to describe the Jordan valley as “the garden of Yhwh” (גן-יהוה). In Gen 26:12 Isaac “sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. Yhwh blessed him.” Steck states that the lifting of the curse does not take

<sup>74</sup> Wolff, “Kerygma,” 365.

<sup>75</sup> R. Rendtorff, “Genesis 8,21 und die Urgeschichte des Jahwisten,” *KD* 7 (1961): 69–78.

<sup>76</sup> O.H. Steck, “Genesis 12:1–3 und die Urgeschichte des Jahwisten,” in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. H.W. Wolff; München 1971), 525–554.

<sup>77</sup> The other deteriorations in the quality of life in Gen 3:14–19 are not addressed.

<sup>78</sup> Steck, “Genesis 12:1–3,” 527–538.

<sup>79</sup> *Pace* Rendtorff.



place through the blessing of the earth, but because of the blessing of people, that is, the patriarchs.<sup>80</sup> Maintaining the connection between Gen 2–11 and 12:1–3, Steck maintains the tradition stemming from Von Rad and Wolff. Against the background of the primeval history, humanity partakes in the blessing due to a new initiative of Yhwh. The blessing of the world is no longer possible without Abraham/Israel. The garden of Eden belongs to the irrevocable past, but the choosing of Abraham/Israel will bring a renewed blessing to humanity.

The last name I will mention in this post-Second World War quartet of exegetes is Zimmerli, who, in his *Zürcher Bibelkommentar* on Gen 12–25, dedicates an elaborate footnote to the passive or reflexive translation of Gen 12:3b.<sup>81</sup> He enumerates the arguments for a reflexive translation, including the examples of Gen 48:20 and Jer 29:22. There are good reasons for translating 12:3b as “With you(r name) all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.”<sup>82</sup> However, according to Zimmerli, such a translation does not do Abraham justice. To use his name alone as an *example* of blessings fails to live up to the preceding promises. Not only this verse, but the whole of the Yahwistic corpus “dürfte . . . auf ein volleres Verständnis weisen,”<sup>83</sup> by which, without a doubt and in the light of the New Testament, the traditio-historical and theological surplus value of a passive translation are meant.

I have consciously chosen this quartet of German/Swiss exegetes (Von Rad, Wolff, Steck, and Zimmerli), who dominated the exegetic-theological field on this topic after the Second World War,<sup>84</sup> for it is clear that their concepts cannot be seen independently of the time or circumstances in which they were conceived. Noth’s lonely Deuteronomist, who—in his Deuteronomistic History—has no more hope for the future, sees the divine judgement over the temple and the city in 587 BCE as “die Stunde Null,” the definitive sign of the end. This interpretation is irrevocably bound to the circumstances of the war in 1943,<sup>85</sup> the beginning of the

<sup>80</sup> Steck, “Genesis 12:1–3,” 541.

<sup>81</sup> Zimmerli, *1. Mose 12–25*, 21n4.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*. In the main text his conclusion is: “über die Krisis hinaus, zu welcher Abraham und das von ihm herkommende Volk für seine ganze Umwelt wird, ist hier *ein aktives Tun Gottes an den Völkern der Welt ausgesagt* [italics E.N.]” Because of the passive translation, the peoples disappear as the subject in v. 3b and the blessing is now an act of Yhwh.

<sup>84</sup> The reception of Jacob’s work had a long way to go. It found acceptance and admiration only in the 1990s.

<sup>85</sup> M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Halle/S 1943), 108, 110. It is no

end of the *Drittes Reich*. In the eyes of the above-mentioned exegetes, the Yahwist is the counterpart of Noth's Deuteronomist.<sup>86</sup> Beyond all guilt and annihilation (the great flood), the Yahwist, as the first theologian of the Hebrew Bible, proclaims the blessing as God's definitive will for humanity.

In the years after the war, a similar image profoundly contributed to the revival of Old Testament exegesis as a theological discipline. Several factors were important here. Firstly, the unspoken wish to portray the Yahwist as the oldest theologian of the Hebrew Bible, who fulfilled the historical-critical longing to penetrate the oldest layers of the tradition. Secondly, to renew the theological reasoning of the Hebrew Bible<sup>87</sup> after its devaluation and neglect in the dark years of the Nazi regime. Thirdly, to return to the sources after the defilement of the greater part of systematic theology over the preceding years. Of course, to ascribe the theological pathos, the images, and the reconstruction of the Yahwist's *Sitz im Leben* solemnly to the circumstances would be an oversimplification. However, the context of post-Second World War Germany no doubt provided the conditions of possibility for this image to originate. Nevertheless, extreme political circumstances were not the only cause of this image. One of the most important fields of study in German exegesis during this time was the *Einleitungswissenschaft*<sup>88</sup> and its concerns for *Formgeschichte*. Thus, it was form-critical study that started the above-mentioned line of interpretation.

The profound influence of this exegetical line can clearly be observed in Seebass' later commentary.<sup>89</sup> He argues that neither the passive nor the reflexive translation can be assigned to Gen 12:3. His argument against

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coincidence that the concept of the Deuteronomist and Deuteronomistic History was unanimously accepted by scholars for decades, but that Noth's portrayal of the Yahwist without any hope for the future was opposed immediately, even in the circles of his direct colleagues and friends (Von Rad, Wolff, Zimmerli; cf. W. Zimmerli, *Grundriß der alttestamentlichen Theologie* [TW; Stuttgart 1982], 156–159).

<sup>86</sup> Von Rad's *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch* was published in 1938!

<sup>87</sup> E. Noort, "Tussen geschiedenis en theologie: Over valkuilen en mogelijkheden in de bijbelse theologie," *KT* 53 (2002): 202–223, esp. 208–211.

<sup>88</sup> H.W. Wolff, "Gespräch mit Gerhard von Rad," in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. H.W. Wolff; München 1971), 654: "Fragt man ihn welche Vorlesung er selbst wohl am liebsten gehalten habe, so nennt er die »Einleitung in das Alte Testament« sein »Kassenstück«. Da konnte er vom Literarischen und Historischen an die Schwelle des Theologischen führen. Was da zu sagen ist, wächst mehr und mehr in die Theologie des Alten Testaments hinein."

<sup>89</sup> Seebass, *Vätergeschichte I*, 15–16.

a passive translation is that the *pu'al* is already known as a passive of the *nip'al* (13×) and the latter did not lose its original reflexive meaning in all instances.<sup>90</sup> However, it cannot be a reflexive either, for then v. 3b would theologially find itself subordinate to v. 3a (Zimmerli, Westermann).

However, times are changing. The exegetical approaches have shifted the focus from critical studies of genre to critical analysis of redaction and further to composition criticism. One of the most influential studies in which the traditional image of the Yahwist is questioned can be found in this latter field.<sup>91</sup> In the work of Blum, the source critically constructed Yahwist disappears in favour of a composition of narrative cycles. Moreover, the collection of essays edited by Dozeman and Schmid is entitled *A Farewell to the Yahwist?*<sup>92</sup> After the debate over the last five years, the question mark in the title could now be replaced by an exclamation mark.

#### 6. THE DIVINE PROMISE OF GEN 12:2–3: THE TEXT AND ITS INTERPRETERS<sup>93</sup>

2aα	ואעשך לגוי גדול	I will <sup>a</sup> make of you a great nation
2aβ	ואברכך	I will bless you,
2aγ	ואגדלה שמך	I will make your name great
2b	והיה ברכה	so that you <sup>a</sup> will be a blessing <sup>b</sup>
3aα	ואברכה מברכיך	And I will bless those, <sup>a</sup> who bless you
3aβ	ומקללך אאר	and him, <sup>a</sup> who disdains you, I shall curse
3bα	ונברכו בכך	(and) all the families of the earth
3bβ	כל משפחת האדמה	shall bless themselves by you(r name)

2aα<sup>a</sup>: Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 266, already mentioned by Gispén, *Genesis II*, 26. 2b<sup>a</sup>: Sam.P. והי as in Gen 17:1; “you”: the BHK/BHS (Eissfeldt) propose the vocalization of יהיה not as a *qal* imperative singular (MT), but as a *qal* perfect consecutive: “That it (your name) will be a blessing.” The change of the vowels is defended by Giesebrecht, Gunkel, and Speiser, but unnecessary. The imperative following a cohortative expresses “a consequence which is to be expected with certainty” (GK, 110i; Gispén, *Genesis II*, 26; Seebass, *Vätergeschichte I*, 10; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 266; Westermann, *Genesis II.1*, 166); 2b<sup>b</sup>: The translation of the LXX (εὐλογητός) and

<sup>90</sup> Seebass, *Vätergeschichte I*, 15.

<sup>91</sup> Blum, *Vätergeschichte*.

<sup>92</sup> Dozeman and Schmid, *Farewell to the Yahwist?*.

<sup>93</sup> W.H. Gispén, *Genesis II* (COT; Kampen 1979); H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 164; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB; New York 1962), 85–86; K.R. Veenhof, “De zegen van Abraham,” *MAW* 27 (2008): 43–52; G. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, Tex., 1987); C. Westermann, *Genesis II.1* (BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluy 1981), 166.

Vg. (*benedictus*) “be blessed,” cf. Tg. and Pesh. (מברך), avoids the supposed difficulty of the imperative “be a blessing.” 3aα and 3bα: Chiasitic construction: אברכה (“I will bless”) // אאר (“I will curse”); and מברכיך (“who bless you”) // מקללך (“who disdains you”). 3aα<sup>a</sup> and 3aβ<sup>a</sup>: Note the plural in מברכיך (“those, who bless you”) versus the singular in מקללך (“him, who disdains you”) expressing the stress on the fivefold repeated forms of blessing in 12:2, 3. The LXX did not note the distinction: τοὺς εὐλογοῦντάς σε (“those, who bless you”), τοὺς καταρωμένους σε (“those, who curse you”). In the same way, Pesh. and Vg. (*maledicentibus tibi*), followed by BHS app. 2b and 3bα.

The importance of Abraham’s blessing from a reception history point of view lies in the interpretation of v. 3b and, derived from it, v. 2b. Noteworthy is v. 3b’s *nip’al* נברכו (“[they] shall bless themselves”), with the subject כל משפחת האדמה (“all the families of the earth”). Apart from v. 3b, a *nip’al* 3rd person plural of ברך (“to bless”) only occurs in Gen 18:18 (בו כל גויי הארץ ונברכו) “and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him”) and Gen 28:14 (ונברכו בך כל-משפחת האדמה ובזרעך) “and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves”). Both times the construction is ב + ברך (“to bless by”). In Gen 18:18, “all the nations of the earth” are the subject, in Gen 28:14 “all the families of the earth,” the latter a perfect parallel to 12:3. Genesis 18:18 can be seen as a quote from Gen 12:3. Yhwh’s deliberation (Gen 18:17–20), which precedes the dialogue with Abraham in Gen 18:23–25, is thematically connected to Ezek 14 and 18. In 28:14 the ב-construction also holds זרעך (“your offspring”). Since Gunkel and Wellhausen,<sup>94</sup> זרעך (“your offspring”) is seen as an ornament, a secondary addition.<sup>95</sup> However, in Gen 28:14 זרעך (“your offspring”) is a structural part of Gen 28:13–14, in which זרעך (“your offspring”) is placed at the end of the sentence in Gen 28:13bβ. Fokkelman has described this construction as a “double chiasmus.”<sup>96</sup> Not only on a structural level, but also with regard to content, the differences between Gen 12:3 and Gen 28:14 can be satisfactorily explained. Genesis 12:3 is focused on Abraham. The promise to make him a great nation aims of course at future offspring. The word זרעך (“your offspring”) appears finally in Gen 12:7, not in Gen 12:1–3. It is a different case in Gen 28:13–15, where in

<sup>94</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 318, considers זרעך (“your offspring”) a gloss and holds v. 14 to be secondary.

<sup>95</sup> For the normal construction, see 2 Kgs 5:27.

<sup>96</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (SSN 17; Assen 1975), 58.

the divine speech everything is focused on the offspring of Jacob/Israel. The offspring will possess the land, and the directions in which Israel will expand and where the offspring will settle are also described. There is no compelling reason to explain זרעך (“your offspring”) or Gen 12:13–14 as secondary.

The original reflexive meaning of the *nip'al* could be correct in the three parallels, but a passive meaning cannot be excluded either. A compelling reason to choose one over the other cannot be found in the meaning of *these* three texts. However, reception-historical paths are leading in different directions and these differences in theological interpretation are significant. In a reflexive interpretation, the families or the nations bless each other, having Abraham as an exemplary model. A passive interpretation holds that by means of a divine action all of the families, that is, the nations of the earth, will be blessed, with Abraham as the intermediary. The two possibilities are:

	<i>Reflexive</i>	<i>Passive</i>
12:3	and by you(r name) all the families of the earth shall bless themselves	and by you(r name) all the families of the earth will be blessed
18:18	and all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by him	and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by him
28:14	and by you and your offspring all the families of the earth will bless themselves	and all the families of the earth will be blessed by you and your offspring

How did the preference for a passive meaning, so clear from a later Christian rereading, arise? The neologism ἐνευλογέομαι (“to be blessed”) in the passive form ἐνευλογηθήσονται (“they will be blessed”) is not only used in the translation of the *hitpa'el* in Gen 22:18 and 26:4, but also of the *nip'al* in Gen 12:3; 18:18; 28:14. Hence, in general the LXX translates in the passive. The subtleties of the subject are maintained in the LXX: πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς (“all the tribes of the earth”; Gen 12:3; 28:14: כל משפחתי כל האדמה “all the families of the earth”); πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς (“all the nations of the earth”; Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4: כל גויי הארץ “all the nations of the earth”). Not only the LXX but also Sir 44:21 (ἐνευλογηθήναι ἔθνη ἐν σπέρματι αὐτοῦ “the nations would be blessed through his posterity”) uses the passive form. With the help of the LXX and supported by Sirach, the passive meaning in Gal 3:8 (ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη “in you shall all the nations be blessed”) and in Acts 3:25 (καὶ ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου [ἐν]ευλογηθήσονται πᾶσαι αἱ πατριαὶ τῆς γῆς

“and in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed”<sup>97</sup> receives its theological weight. Now Gen 12:3b functions as an argument in the discussion about the mission to the Gentiles. It is an anticipation of the universal blessing of all of the families of the earth through Jesus Christ. A common reasoning runs as follows. In the NT, the passive meaning is as obvious as in the LXX and Sirach, and whenever a passive meaning can be ascribed to the texts of Genesis, especially Gen 12:3b, a biblical theological thread can be established from Genesis to Galatians. However, can Gen 12:3 bear such a theological weight?

When we consider the parallels with the *hitpa'el*, things seem different, because only a reflexive translation is viable, Gen 22:18 (“all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves [התברכו] by your descendants”) and the literal parallel Gen 26:4 (“all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants”). In the first case, Abraham is the addressee, but the focus is on the son, who has just been saved from sacrificial death. Therefore, it is “by your descendants.” In a similar way, Gen 26:4a establishes that the context of the descendants of Gen 26:4b. Jeremiah 4:2 is somewhat different: (והתברכו בו גוים ובו יתהללו) “then nations shall bless themselves by him [Yhwh], and in him [Yhwh] they shall glory”.<sup>98</sup>

The גוים (“nations”) are in the centre, on both sides marked with “by him” (בו). The way in which the formula “bless each other” works, becomes clear in Gen 48:20 (“By you[r name] Israel will invoke blessings, saying ‘God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh’”). Ephraim and Manasseh exemplify the exceptional bearers of blessing. In the same way, the Israelites will later bless each other. Exemplary names are used to identify the quality of the blessing. This is also the case for its counterpart, the curse: “This curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: ‘Yhwh make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of

<sup>97</sup> C.K. Barrett, *Acts 1–14* (ICC; London 2004), 212, holds 3:25b to be a conflation of Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18 and correctly argues: “The promise to Abraham is certainly taken to contain a promise that the blessing offered in the first instance to him and his family would be extended to the non-Jewish people. The Christians were not the first to take the passage in this way; the LXX’s passive verb ἐνευλοσθησονται can hardly mean anything else. Whether this rightly represents the Hebrew נברכו (Gen 12.3:18.18), והתברכו (22.18), is another question; probably it does not.”

<sup>98</sup> See Isa 65:16 for the use of the *hitpa'el* (to bless each other with the name of אלהי אמת [“the God of truth/faithfulness”]). This divine name indicates that he is a God who fulfills what he proclaims. In the context of the blessing, a blessing that will take place. Therefore, Isa 65:15 strengthens the explanation that in Jer 4:2 בו (“by him”) points to Yhwh and not to Israel (Beuken, *Jesaja IIIB*, 78).

Babylon roasted in the fire'” (Jer 29:22). Psalm 72:17 (“men<sup>99</sup> may bless themselves [יתברכו] by him, all nations call him blessed”) holds, as has been widely recognized, a reflexive meaning because of the parallelism. The use of the exemplary name returns in Zech 8:13. In the divine speech it is stated: “Just as you have been a cursing (קללה) among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing (ברכה).”

The cursing indicates Israel's situation after its destruction, deportation, and exile. The word of salvation in Zech 8:12 describes the opposite situation: “The vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew.” The curse can only point to Israel as an exemplary bearer of a curse. Israel being a curse to all nations is not a viable translation in this context. Moreover, Israel's curse had become a proverbial saying: “Cursed like Israel.” According to Zech 8:12 the reverse occurs. Now all nations will be blessed like Israel. In a short and clear excursus, Westermann concludes that “Diese Parallele (Ps 72:17, wie auch Jer 4:2) die reflexive Übersetzung (von Gen 12:3b) bestätigt.” However, he continues, “Damit ist jedoch das Entscheidende noch nicht gesagt”<sup>100</sup> and argues—like Von Rad and others—for a *receptive* meaning. The formal appearance pleads for a reflexive form, but the gift of the blessing is so clear that it approaches the passive meaning. Whenever groups bless each other with a blessing like that of Abraham, the supposition is that they will indeed share in that blessing.<sup>101</sup> In this way, the boundaries between the meaning of the reflexive and passive translations are neutralized. In his study, Wehmeier argues for this solution. While he sympathizes with a passive translation, he also argues that the author would then already have used the *pu'al*.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, he holds the receptive meaning to be the most probable: “By him all the families of the earth will *gain* blessing.”<sup>103</sup>

<sup>99</sup> The connection between Ps 72:17 and Genesis has been observed by the LXX. The LXX adds *πάσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς* (“all the tribes of the earth”) from Gen 12:3 and 28:14. See app. BHS.

<sup>100</sup> C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (BKAT 1.2; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1981), 176.

<sup>101</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 176: “Wo man sich mit dem Namen Abrahams segnet, da wird tatsächlich Segen verliehen und Segen empfangen. Wo in dieser Weise der Name Abrahams in einem Segenwunsch laut wird, da strömt der Segen Abrahams über, und für dieses Überströmen gibt es keine Grenzen, es reicht zu allen Geschlechtern der Erde.”

<sup>102</sup> G. Wehmeier, *Der Segen im Alten Testament: Eine semasiologische Untersuchung der Wurzel brk* (ThDiss 6; Basel 1970), 176–186.

<sup>103</sup> Wehmeier, *Segen*, 178.

However, Blum has correctly pointed out that a receptive solution blurs the decisive difference between reflexive and passive without any concrete philological or textual evidence. Moreover, Abraham's blessing itself is not central, but rather the wish to be blessed like Abraham.<sup>104</sup> Genesis 48:20 does not turn Ephraim and Manasseh into mediators of blessing. They, like Abraham himself, are the paradigms of a blessed figure,<sup>105</sup> nothing more, nothing less. The argument that this translation reduces the theological importance of Gen 12:3 cannot be substantiated. Indeed, Gen 12:3a states that the one who blesses Abraham will be blessed himself, while the one who curses Abraham will also be cursed himself. For some scholars, it is the backdrop for Gen 12:3b where the blessing is not automatically transferred to all families on earth. Only the passive meaning of Gen 12:3b supersedes the promise of Gen 12:3a. This is a universalism of a blessed earth, but occurring through Abraham. This is the main argument of those who favour a passive translation. Consciously or not, Galatians and Acts play a major role in such reasoning.

The fact that Abraham's name affects the whole earth and exemplifies the wish for blessing can indeed be seen as the climax of Gen 12:1–3. Verse 3a states that the relationship between Yhwh and Abraham is so intense that blessing or cursing Abraham causes blessings or curses for the speaker. If the difference between the plural "those who bless you" (Gen 12:3a $\alpha$ ) and the singular "him, who disdains you" (Gen 12:3a $\beta$ ) points to an abundance of blessing, it is also a logical climax when in Gen 12:3b the reflexive form is used, with Abraham as the exemplary model: "To be blessed like Abraham." Therefore, it is no coincidence that Benno Jacob, who cannot be accused of a lack of theological interest, translates it as "und segnen sollen sich mit dir alle Geschlechter des Erdbodems."<sup>106</sup> He demonstrates no uneasiness with a reflexive translation.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, we might conclude that the exegetically and contextually bound portrayal of the Yahwist called for the thesis of a theological subordination of v. 3b to v. 3a in the case of a reflexive translation. Hence, also in a reflexive translation of v. 3b, Gen 12:1–3 functions as a link between the

<sup>104</sup> Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 352: "Dieses Ergebnis nötigt M.E. zu dem Urteil, dass es einen »Segen für andere« in den Verheissungen der Genesis nicht gibt."

<sup>105</sup> Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 349–359, esp. 352.

<sup>106</sup> Jacob, *Genesis*, 337.

<sup>107</sup> Referring to Nahmanides and Cassuto, Veenhof, "De zegen," 43–52, prefers the reflexive translation. He refers to Gen 48:20; Ruth 4:11; Jer 29:22; Zech 8:13; Ps 21:7; 37:26; 72:17; 83:12.



negatively coloured narratives of the primeval history and the blessings of the patriarchal stories. Therefore, in the context of Genesis as a whole and in light of the instrumental way the name is used here, a reflexive meaning for Gen 12:3 must be favoured.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The reflexive meaning of the *nip'al* has not been lost, and in the texts with the *hitpa'el*, the parallelisms in Ps 72:17 demonstrate the original meaning of the reflexive form: “Men may bless themselves by him (בִּי), all nations call him blessed.” The instrumental ב is clarified by Gen 48:20: “By you (בְּךָ) Israel will invoke blessings, saying ‘God make you like (כְּ) Ephraim and Manasseh.’” Ephraim and Manasseh are examples of blessings *par excellence*. The instrumental use, in which Abraham’s name is used as an ultimate example of blessing, can be seen within the same context. “To make your name great” (Gen 12:2aγ) leads to “so that you will be a blessing” (2b). His name and prosperity will be used paradigmatically in a call for blessing: “Be (blessed) like Abraham!”<sup>108</sup> Genesis 12:3aα and 3aβ substantiate this blessing. Wherever this blessing is proclaimed, it will materialize. This leads to a universal expansion. Abraham’s blessing will be so great that all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by him/his name. The accumulation of blessings indeed counteracts Gen 1–11.

In the older narrative cycles that connect Abraham to the neighbouring nations/peoples through the construction of a genealogy, a hierarchy is established between Abraham/Israel/Judah on the one hand and Moab/Ammon/Ishmael on the other. These neighbouring peoples are indeed entitled to a heritage, and a divine promise guarantees offspring and land. However, Yhwh’s promise, which is formulated increasingly in terms of covenant and oath, is directed towards Abraham and his descendants. Ishmael is blessed, but the question of the identity of the true heir is answered in favour of Isaac. The older narratives do not emphasize a universalistic meaning in the stories of Abraham, and most certainly not in a form in which the relationship to Abraham/Israel is decisive for the automatic reception of blessing (passive or reflexive). Abraham and his heirs in the patriarchal narratives are examples of blessing. Nothing more, nothing less. Even the prophets on the edge of the exile do not

<sup>108</sup> Veenhof, “De zegen,” 47.

portray Abraham as the ancestor who plays a role as a mediator of universal blessings for all the families of the earth. In his relationship with Yhwh, Abraham is the exemplary ancestor. He is Yhwh's servant, he loved Yhwh, and he is even redeemed by Yhwh. Due to this role, there is hope for the future of the exiles. He surpasses Jacob and becomes a character that can even hold his own against Judah (Isa 63). He even wishes to neglect his offspring. The prophets do not know anything of a role for Abraham in relation to "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3). They focus exclusively on the future of exiled Israel. The further development of the figure of Abraham can be observed through the secondary parts of Gen 18:16–22\*, 23–32. Now Yhwh must inform Abraham, the righteous one *par excellence*, of his plans to destroy Sodom. He is the one who can ask Yhwh: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25). It is here that a universal understanding of Gen 12:3 would work, from which the step to a true mediator of blessing is a small one. In the LXX, Sirach, and the New Testament the definitive change into a passive translation is executed. However, this is not how Gen 12 first started.