Frontispiece: *Abraham's Sacrifice* by Rembrandt, 1655.

ABRAHAM   AS   A   COVENANT   MEDIATOR

by

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A Thesis presented to the Faculty of Divinity,
Rhodes University, in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor
of Divinity

December 1977

PREFACE

Thanks are due to a number of people. To Deryck Sheriffs for arousing my interest in the subject of the Covenant and for allowing me to use a number of books and articles belonging to him. To Robin Wakely, my supervisor, for his love of Old Testament Scholarship as well as his willingness to understand a point of view which is not his own. To Rosemary Townsend for all the work she has done in correcting a script which had too many grammatical and stylistic flaws and too few commas. To Mrs White who has done the typing, for her cheerfulness even when under a lot of strain. And finally to all those who queried the relevance of this Thesis. Their questions forced me to withdraw from the maze of scholarship long enough to see that Abraham's struggles are our struggles, and that Abraham's God is ours as well.

Adamson House,
December, 1977.

CONTENTS

While Abraham's relation to God is relatively easy to study in
the Abraham stories, his relation to Israel and mankind is
difficult to understand.   Abraham is the father of all Israel,
but he is also the father of his immediate family which includes
Ishmael and others whose descendants were not among the Covenant
People.   The tension between viewing Abraham's household as Israel
in microcosm and the recognition that his household included those
whose descendants were outside the Covenant, is never really
resolved in the Abraham stories. . Even though the line of Isaac
is specially chosen, the nations are not neglected.   They will
be blessed because of Abraham (12:1-3).   At times it is made
clear'that Abraham, as an individual, would be the source of
blessing, but at other times Israel is to be the source.
Frequently it is not made clear which understanding is meant.

A scholar's view of the nature of the evidence will greatly
influence his methodology and conclusions.

Followers of this school maintain that the socio-economic background
of the Patriarchal narratives is essentialoy that of the second
millenium B.C.

The criticism of T.L. Thompson and J. Van Seters has done well to
expose the tendency to draw conclusions from insufficient evidence.
Nevertheless it remains true that Abraham could have lived in
this period about which we know so little.   Because it usually
deals with the movements of peoples and other very approximate
realities, Archaeology cannot demonstrate that God made a Covenant
with Abraham.

Source Criticism claims to be able to distinguish the sources
behind our present text, Form Criticism arises from the observation
that each literary form corresponds to a Sitz im Leben, and
Tradition History Criticism represents an attempt at discovering
the process of growth which the text as we have it, went through.
While the claims of Source Criticism need to be modified as a result
of work that has been done on ancient Near Eastern literary
techniques, there could still be a lot of truth in their claims.
However, because of the subjective nature of this kind of work,
supporters should not be too dogmatic in their claims.   This is
even more true of the Tradition History approach. While Form
Criticism suffers from a similar defect it remains an indispensable
tool for the understanding of the present text. It is the

meaning of the present text which will be the subject of this
Thesis. While remaining tolerant towards attempts at getting
behind the present text, the writer prefers to concentrate on an
approach which offers more reliable rewards.

In the Abraham stories God is the chief actor, and they are written
not by detached observers, but by men of faith whose aim is to
convince, rebuke, and edify. These factors must influence the meaning
given to "history" when it is used as a description of the
Abraham Stories. Because of the creative role that has been
attributed to the cult and etiology in the formation of the
narratives, over a lengthy period of oral transmission, many
scholars have grown sceptical of the claim that the events
described in the Abraham Stories really did happen. The
attitude of the present writer will be to accept as historically
reliable all the stories unless there is conclusive proof to the
contrary. Not only is this a well tested principle of ancient
Near Eastern studies, it takes seriously the genuine attempt by
the Israelites to record their past. Yet although the hand of
Moses must be recognized in the formation of the Pentateuch, a long
period of growth and transmission has to be reckoned with. Because
of this we can never get back to the events themselves, we must be
content with later descriptions of them.

Both archaeology and the text need to be used in a study of
Abraham.

Because Abraham is described as a mediator of   בְּרִית   ,
the most significant parallels are likely to be found in
instances where God makes a covenant with an individual who is
acting on behalf of a group.

The Treaty documents are so similar that it is possible to speak of
them as a fixed literary type. They usually consist of a preamble,
historical prologue, a list of stipulations, a list of gods, and a
list of curses and blessing. The parties to the Treaty,
particularly the vassal, commit themselves to keeping its provisions.

In form it is very similar to the Treaty. The Royal Grant represents
the giving of a gift, frequently as a reward for loyal service.
It thus constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant.

In form it is also similar to the Treaty. Law-Codes of the Old
Babylonian period were motivated by the desire for social reform.

The Covenants show the influences of various ancient Near Eastern forms. The Sinai Covenant seems to be partly based on the Treaty and Law-Code forms; the Davidic on the Treaty and Royal Grant forms, and the Abrahamic on the Royal Grant form. A study of the parallels is useful but it must be remembered that the Isralite Covenants are with Yahweh. His character gives to them their uniqueness. The Sinai Covenant in particular forms an integral part of Israelite religion. Israelite cultic worhsip makes a lot of use of the theology of Covenant. The prophets also appeal to it.

While the office is not nearly as highly developed as it is in Israel where the difference between the human and the divine demands a mediator, there are situations in Treaty making where a mediator has a function. Because of the uniqueness of Israel's Covenants, too much illumination ought not to be expected of the parallels.

Moses is God's spokesman to Israel. He also represents Israel before God. This is emphasized in the passages where Moses intercedes for Israel. But Num 14:12 shows that from God's point of view, a covenant with Moses which did not include the people is a possibility.

The Davidic Covenant in 2 Sam 7 is promissory. The promise of a dynasty would stand even if David's descendants disobeyed God. Nevertheless it is expected that future Davidic kings would obey Yahweh as did their ancestor. The kings are also expected to advance the cause of צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט . There were probably also covenants between the king and the people, as there were among the surrounding peoples (cf. 2 Kings 11:17). The king represents the people and is at the same time chosen by God. Because of his unique position, his own private life can dramatically influence the welfare of his people.

Both Moses and kingship shed light on Abraham as a Covenant Mediator.

Many of the issues raised by the Abraham Stories are dealt with for the first time here in 12:1-3. This passage also serves as a commentary on many of the stories as in a sense the are a result of the vocation and promises Abraham receives in 12:1-3 .

The call of Abraham is an act of grace following the judgement at Babel and is significant for mankind.

Their mention in 11:10-32 shows Israel's consciousness of distant kinships.

While Abraham's obedience should not be overlooked, it is God who takes the initiative and establishes the relationship.

    a) receive land (12:1)
    b) be a great nation (12:2a)
    c) be blessed (12:2b)
    d) name will be made great (12:2c)
    e) be a blessing (12:2d)
    f) God will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him (12:3a-b)
    g) people will be blessed or bless themselves because of him (12:3c).

In certain passages Abraham is understood as an individual, and his obedience is said to secure blessing for Israel and all men (26:5).   On the other hand Israel can be described as being a blessing (22:18; 26:4).   This is hardly surprising as not only is Abraham the head of his immediate family, but is the ancestral father of Israel.   In a sense therefore he is understood as Israel in microcosm.   Appeal can be made to the notion of a "corporate personality" to explain the switch from understanding Abraham as an individual to seeing him as a group.

The only reason given by the Abraham stories for Abraham's move is that it was God's wish.   It could have been in protest against the local religious solution (Jos 24:2).   While a certain amount of Yahwism may have been read back into the Patriarchal narratives, the work of Moses would have been unthinkable without the prior labours of the Patriarchs.

While the narratives nowhere give a clear-cut reason why God did not immediately fulfil His promises, part of an answer is to be found in the theme of testing.   Nevertheless as the narrative builds up to a climax with the birth of Isaac the promises are clarified and emphasized.

Abraham and his family enter the Promised Land.   It is made clear
that he does not in fact possess it.   Yet the building of an
altar is a foretaste of the worship of Yahweh which would be
enjoyed when Israel took full possession.

The weakness of Abraham serves to emphasize the faithfulness of
Yahweh as a Covenant Protector.

Whatever the practical reasons for the separation were, this event
marks the beginning of the process of pruning which takes place in
the household of Abraham.   Separation from Abraham always involves
a separation from the future Covenant Kingdom.   Lot's descendants
are the Moabites and the Ammonites (19:37f.).

Although Lot has moved away from Abraham, both Abraham and God
continue to take an interest in his welfare. This concern for
non-Israelites could also be indicated by the treaty that Abraham
makes with some of his neighbours. In this rather unique story
Abraham appears in a kingly role.

God takes the initiative in comforting the despairing Abraham
through a ceremony in which He takes upon Himself the obligation
of keeping the Covenant. This ceremony is probably the
background to the expression   בְּרָכָה   .

This Chapter serves to highlight the problem of the unfulfilled
promise.   In the context of the surrounding narratives the birth
of Ishmael seems to represent an attempt at solving this problem.
Even though Ishmael is sent out, God continues to care for him.

Again God takes the initiative and assures Abraham that the promises
of land and progeny would be fulfilled.   The changing of his and
Sarah's names marks a change in their destiny.   Abraham and his
descendants are to circumcise the males of their households as a sign
of the Covenant.   Ishmael will receive numerous blessings, but
Isaac is specially chosen by God.

God, in human form, assures Abraham that he will produce Isaac.
Because of this unique relationship with Abraham, God tells him
what is about to happen to Sodom and allows him to intercede on
behalf of its people.

God saves Lot and his family because of Abraham.

The fact that he should have learnt from his previous experience
serves to emphasize the frailty of man and the grace of God. In
spite of his partial guilt, Abraham can still act as intercessor.

A son, who is specially chosen by God, is born to Abraham and
Sarah.

The final exclusion of Ishmael, while fraught with human sin is
nevertheless the will of God. Yet because he is Abraham's son,
God continues to take an interest in him.

This is another indication of a positive attitude towards non-
Israelites.

God seems intent on destroying what He had promised Abraham. Yet
this major test, instead of breaking him, brings Abraham to the
summit of his lifelong walk with God.

These verses, in showing Israel's consciousness of distant kinships,
indicate a positive attitude towards non-Israelites.

The acquisition of land is to be understood as a prophetic sign of
what would be true after the Conquest.

Abraham's insistence that Isaac's wife not be a local Canaanite
woman is largely due to the religious threat of intermarriage.
The guidance of God in finding the right wife indicates His
concern for the promised line.

She is best understood as Abraham's concubine. Through her,
Abraham has sons. While Isaac inherits all that Abraham had, the
sons of the concubines are given gifts, and sent away from Isaac.

God honours his earlier promises about Ishmael. From now on the
fortunes of the line of Isaac will engage the reader's attention.

The stories reveal a man caught up in the struggle of faith.   But
the God who took the initiative in establishing the Covenant shows
that in spite of first appearances, He is faithful.   The stories
present various pictures of Abraham as a Covenant Mediator.
Because he is in a sense Israel in microcosm it is not strange that
he is described in the terms of Israel's most important institutions:
prophet, priest, and king.   Nevertheless the most significant
Sitz im Leben is the family. ˙While he is usually meant to be
understood as an individual representing his immediate family, his
descendants, and even all nations, at times, because he is the
founding ancestor of Israel and therefore Israel in microcosm, he
is best understood as a "Corporate Person".   He and Israel are to be
a source of blessing to the nations.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, ed. J.B. Pritchard. Third Edition with Supplement, 1969
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1907
BZAW	Beiheft, Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
Exp T	Expository Times
GK	Gesenius-Kautch-Cowley, Gesenins' Hebrew Grammar, 1976
IDB	Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, ed. G.A. Buttrick, 1962
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KB	Kohler-Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros, 1953
LXX	The Septuagint
MT	The Massoretic Text
NBC	New Bible Commentary, ed. D. Guthrie, et al., 1970
NBD	New Bible Dictionary, ed. J.D. Douglas, 1962
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
TB	Tyndale Bulletin
Th Z	Theologische Zeitschrift
TSFB	TSF Bulletin
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To a large extent the conclusions reached on the subject will be
influenced by the scholar's opinion of the nature of the evidence. When
this matter is discussed in the next chapter the writer will not claim to
have refuted other approaches; he will merely argue that his approach is a
legitimate one. The fact that the present writer chooses to view the
stories about Abraham in Genesis 12-24 as a unity,[1] does not mean that he
is unaware of important theological, literary and other differences between
the various stories.[2] For this reason the stories will be examined
seriatim in Chs. IV and V. However in spite of the different pictures of
Abraham as a Covenant Mediator, an attempt will be made in the final
chapter to provide a synthesis of the various elements. Justification
for this is sought in the assumption that the Redactor(s) did not mindlessly
combine the stories, but consciously blended them, making the whole greater
than its parts.[3] Appeal will also be made to this assumption where the
various stories are used to interpret one another. This is particularly
the case with the promises of Genesis 12:1-3. Their meaning is sought
in what seems to be their partial fulfilment in the stories that follow.

The stories do not present the reader with a single character sketch
of Abraham, nor do they contain a text of the Covenant or a systematic
exposition of the theology of the Covenant. Instead the reader encounters
the two main characters - God and Abraham.[4] God chooses Abraham, promises

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
1. Genesis 12-25 will form the basis of this study. There is a remarkable
   paucity of references to Abraham and God's Covenant with him in
   Israel's prophetic literature, cf. R.E. Clements, Abraham and David,
   p.10.

2. Our division of these chapters into stories will be based almost
   entirely on the differences in subject matter. This division will not
   automatically mean that the text is being divided into sources.
   Frequently however our division of the text into stories will
   coincide with the sources of Source-Criticism.

3. Support for this assumption will be gathered in Chs. IV and V.

4. Other characters, particularly Sarah, have their roles, but they
   are always in Abraham's shadow.

him certain things,[1] and eventually keeps His promises.   As in the
Royal Grants, Abraham's loyal obedience to God in a sense merits God's
favoaur.   Nevertheless it is clear that God is the one who establishes and
maintains the Covenant.   Although the stories leave much to the imagination,
it is sometimes implied that the greatest danger to the Promise is the
bearer himself.   In all Abraham's doubts and the events of his life God
is in control.   Abraham's attitude to the mystery of Gid taking so long
to answer His promises is a dominant theme in most of the stories.   Here
the reader encounters the anger, amazement, doubt, and faith of a man
confronted with the grace and mystery of God.   While most of what can be
learnt about Abraham's role as a Covenant Mediator is through descriptions
of what he did, the occasional description of his person is very helpful.
Descriptions of his person often serve to crystallize what we know from the
descriptions of his work.[2]   In Ch. III an attempt will be made to define
what is meant by the words "Covenant Mediator".   It will be seen that
parallels from ancient Near Eastern Treaty making are not particularly
helpful as there are important differences bsetween their idea of a mediator
and the Old Testament idea.   The ideas of a Covenant Mediator to be found
in the Moses story and in ideas associated with Israelite kingship offer
much more illumination.   The similarities between Moses as a Mediator,
the king as a Mediator and Abraham as a Mediator, do not in themselves
show how these ideas influenced one another, nor can they show who
borrowed from whom.[3]   While ideas associated with Moses and with kingship
almost certainly influenced the understanding of Abraham as a Covenant
Mediator, it will be argued that the idea of the head of a household
acting as a Covenant Mediator (i.e. receiving the Covenant on behalf of
his family), had a much more powerful influence on the interpretation
given to the figure of Abraham.

God's Covenant with Abraham would automatically include his
immediate family and even descendants.[4]   A problem arises at this point

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1.   It is interesting to see how the content of the promises is gradually
     clarified as the stories progress.
2.   E.g. the description of Abraham as   נָבִיא   helps to explain
     his work as an intercessor.
3.   The question of who borrowed from whom is usually decided on the
     basis of the scholar's opinion of the dating and the nature of the
     formation of the various works.
4.   Cf. below, pp.59-64.

because the Book of Genesis indicates that while Abraham is the father of all Israel, he is also the father of his immediate family which includes Ishmael and others whose descendants were not among the Covenant People. The tension between viewing Abraham's household as Israel in microcosm, and the recognition that his household included those whose descendants were outside the Covenant, is never resolved in the Abraham stories.[1] The problem of Election is another way of describing this tension. The words of St Paul, οὐδ ὅτι εἰσιν σπερμα Ἀβρααμ, παντες τεκνα, (Rom 9:6), are a suitable description of the process of pruning which occurred in the families of Abraham and Isaac.[2] However the attention that the Abraham stories as a whole devote to those who are sent away from the family indicates that they are far more important then being a mere negation of the true Covenant People. Both God and Abraham continue to care for them. The fact that they are related to Abraham in itself gives them some significance. This positive attitude towards non-Israelites is indicated by the structure of the book of Genesis: beginning with the creation and ruin of the world and of mankind the appearance of one man seems to be something which is significant for all men if not all creation. The existence of several treaties between Abraham and his non-Israelite neighbours also lends support to a universalistic interpretation of 12:1-3, where Abraham is a source of blessing to the nations.

A second unresolved paradox in the Abraham stories is that on the one hand because of him all men (particularly Israel) will be blessed,[3] and on the other hand Israel (i.e. Abraham's descendants) is to be a source of blessing. Thus at times Abraham is the Covenant Mediator and at other times Israel is. This is partly explained by the fact that ther is a blood relationship between Abraham and his זרע ; and as the founder of a family or nation he gives it his character.[5] Yet the

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1. The tension is particular acute in Ch. 17 where Ishmael receives circumcision, the sign of the Covenant, and yet the Covenant is said to be not with Ishmael, but with Isaac alone.

2. On the surface at least, it appears that from the time of Jacob all the tribes of Israel are regarded as elect by the Pentateuch.

3. 12:1-3; cf. 26:5. The distinction that could be made between Abraham and Israel is clear in 15:12-16, where Israel and not Abraham would be reduced to slavery in Egypt.

4. Cf. 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

5. Cf. 16:12.

distinction between the two remains,[1] together with their identification. An emphasis on their identification has led some scholars to view Abraham as not much more than a symbol of the activity of a group.[2] The fact that he is sometimes clearly distinguished from Israel should put us on our guard against seeing him merely as a "corporate person" and never as an individual. An examination of the stories will show that it is usually difficult to decide whether "Abraham" describes an individual, or Israel, or both. A study of the nature of the evidence available for studying questions like this will be of value.

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1. This is probably even more so in the case of Moses as a Covenant Mediator; cf. below, pp.40-43.
2. Cf. below, pp.63f.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

A. INTRODUCTION

In order to resolve what the text as we have it says on the subject of Abraham as a Covenant Mediator we shall have to decide whether we are presented with the Sitz im Leben of Abraham,[1] or the Sitz im Leben of Israelite tradition,[2] or a combination of both.[3] Archaeology, Source Criticism, Form Criticism, Tradition History Criticism, Redaction Criticism, and other related approaches have made claims of being able to provide the answer. While absolute certainty is an unattainable goal,[4] we must attempt to overcome the situation described by John Bright where the absence of objective criteria, recognized by the various scholars, means that a scholar's work will seldom be acceptable beyond his own school.[5] We begin by examining the contribution that Archaeology can make.

B. THE WITNESS OF ARCHAEOLOGY[6]

1. THE ALBRIGHT SCHOOL

Over the past fifty years W.F. Albright has come to dominate the interpretation of ancient Near Eastern Archaeology. His disciples,

1. This is the position of certain Fundamentalists.
2. A minority of scholars believe this; they include T.L. Thompson, The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives. The Quest for the Historical Abraham. B Z A W LXXXIII (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), p.315 et passim.
3. This view is characteristic of the Albright school; but it is also found in the work of a scholar like G. Von Rad. Cf. below for more details.
4. Cf. K. Koch, The Growth of the Biblical Tradition. The Form Critical Method. (Trans. S.M. Capitt. New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1969. Was ist Formgeschicte? Neue Wege der Bibelexegese. 2nd ed. Neukirchener Verlag, 1967), p.76.
5. Early Israel in Recent History Writing: A Study in Method. Studies in Biblical Theology XIX. (London: SCM Press, 1956), pp.15f.
6. The issues discussed here also apply to Social Anthropology, Sociology, and other related disciplines.

among them G.E. Wright and John Bright, are not so much characterized by a slavish assent to all his conclusions as a sharing of his general approach.[1]   While recognizing that the evidence of Archaeology usually has only an indirect bearing on the Old Testament,[2] they maintain that the socio-economic background of the Patriarchal narratives is essentially that of the early Second Millenium B.C.   G.E. Wright sums up:

> Archaeologically-minded students claim only that
> sufficient evidence has now been accumulated to fix
> the era in which the bulk of the patriarchal
> narratives, and indeed the patriarchs themselves
> must have originated. That is in the 'Amorite' age
> of the first half of the second millenium B.C.
> In other words, the oral tradition behind the
> present written narratives has preserved sufficient
> background to make possible the assertion that the
> patriarchal tradition is at least authentic in the
> sense that it can be fitted into an actual
> historical era of ancient history.[3]

2.   REACTIONS TO THE ALBRIGHT APPROACH

Two recent studies[4] attack Albright on his home ground: the interpretation of archaeology.[5]   What follows is an extremely brief summary of the standard arguments of the Albright School, together with some of the criticisms:

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1. For a full bibliography cf. J. Van Seters, Abraham in History and Tradition. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp.11f.

2. They would agree with R.J. Thompson, Moses and the Law in a Century of Criticism since Graf VTS, V:19. (Leiden:Brill, 1970), pp.93f. He writes: "Archaeology shows the possibility of a story having happened, but not that it did happen... The confirmation it offers is usually at best indirect."

3. "History and the Patriarchs", Exp T LXXI (1959-1960), p.294. We shall see below that C.H. Gordon suggesta a mid-second millenium B.C. dating.

4. R.J. Van Seters, op.cit. ; T.L. Thompson, The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives. The Quest for the Historical Abraham. BZAW LXXXIII (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1974).

5. The tendency to cast doubt on the contribution of archaeology to Old Testament Studies is becoming popular, cf. R.J. Thompson, op.cit. pp.135-139. He devotes a whole section to an outline of mistakes made in the interpretation of archaeology. This is a timely warning. We must 'guard against overpressing the significance of the evidence we have, simply because we have it" (R.E. Clements, Abraham and David. Genesis XV and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition. Studies in Biblical Theology, second series [London: SCM Press, 1967], p.13).

a) Patriarchal names are indeed peculiarly West Semitic, but they are not only early as they are found well into the First Millenium B.C.[1] Their early occurrence therefore does not necessarily imply an early dating.

b) There is, according to T.L. Thompson, no philological evidence for a West Semitic migration from Mesopotamia.[2] Neither can the Execration Texts be used to support this theory of a migration into Palestine at the beginning of the Second Millenium B.C.[3] Archaeological evidence from Palestine also shows that the Middle Bronze I period, far from being a period in which semi-nomads overran the country, was a period of extensive agricultural settlement.[4]

c) Albright's attempt to find an alternative to the " Amorite Hypothesis" is based on the assumption that the Patriarchal narratives are reflected in the growing caravan trade during the period of the Twelfth Dynasty and is connected both with the Hapiru and hypothetical caravan stations.[5] The weakest link in this argument is that the only connection the Hapiru are known to have with the caravans was antagonistic to peaceful trade.

d) Family customs revealed by the Nuzi tablets have been seen to confirm the historicity of the Patriarchal narratives.[6] Tablets covering the period c.1480 to c.1355 B.C. are said to reveal family customs

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1. T.L. Thompson, op.cit., pp.17-36 has many examples of late usage. Cf. also Van Seters, op.cit., pp.39-65.
2. Van Seters, op.cit., pp.87, 318.
3. Idem, p.319.
4. Idem, pp.319f.
5. Cf. W.F. Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan. A Historical Analysis of Two contrasting Faiths (London: Athlone Press, 1968), pp.56-64.
6. Cf. E.A. Speiser, Genesis. Introduction, Translation, and Notes. The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1964).

remarkably similar to those of the Patriarchs, many of which could not be explained by later Biblical practice. This argument is better than the others because it is not based on an historical analogy, but is drawn out of the Patriarchal narratives themselves. An important criticism is that many of these customs can be shown to occur later.[1] There is also the point that Genesis is unique in its detailed description of family life and therefore differences between it and other Old Testament writings should not be magnified.[2]

T.L. Thompson and J. Van Seters have done well to expose the tendency of the Albright School to draw conclusions from insufficient evidence. Nevertheless, even though many of the "points of contact" between the Patriarchs and the witness of Archaeology have been removed, it remains true that Abraham could have lived in this period of semi-darkness.

Von Rad's criticism of the Albright approach is far more to the point.[3] He questions the value of proving as historical very vague and very approximate realities like the time when the Patriarchs lived, their living conditions, and so on. This he says places us in "an area which is theologically speechless".[4] He writes:

> But when I turn to the stories of the patriarchs in Genesis, then everything told there is very special and unique, concerning events which happened only once. These stories contain an inexhaustible richness of highly characteristic and essentially unique happenings between specific men and their God.[5]

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1. Cf. J. Van Seters, op.cit., pp.65-104.

2. J. Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis. ICC (2nd ed. Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1951), p.xxxvii.

3. "History and the Patriarchs", Exp T LXXII (1960-61), pp.213-216. He is here replying to G.E. Wright, "History and the Patriarchs", Modern Issues in Biblical Studies, Exp T LXXI (1959-60), pp.292-296.

4. G. Von Rad, Genesis. A Commentary. The Old Testament Library. (3rd ed. revised. Trans. J.H. Marks. London: SCM Press, 1972. Das erste Buch Mose, Genesis [9th ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1972]).p.215.

5. Op.cit., p.215.

This quotation highlights the central problem of the Chapter - archaeology can never demonstrate that God made a Covenant with Abraham; can the text as we have it do this?

C. THE WITNESS OF THE TEXT

1. THE PRESENT STATE OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERARY CRITICISM

a) Source Criticism

According to R.J. Thompson the Grafian view of the literary development of the Pentateuch still dominates discussion.[1] Source Criticism claims to be able to distinguish the various documents that underlie the text of the Pentateuch. This is done by the application of several criteria:[2]

i) Vocabulary. The best known example of this is the use of Elohim in E and Yahweh in J.

ii) Style. J is said to be lively, human, picturesque; E is also a good narrator, but is more restrained; P is dry, statistical, genealogical; while D is exhortatory.

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1. Op.cit., p.162 et passim. Cf. J. Bright, A History of Israel (2nd ed. revised, London: SCM Press, 1972), p.69; and K. Koch, The Growth of the Biblical Tradition. The Form Critical Method. (Trans. S.M. Cupitt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969. Was ist Formgeschichte? Neue Wege der Bibelexegese. 2nd ed. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967), pp.77f.

2. What follows is a summary of K.A. Kitchen, Pentateuchal Criticism and Interpretation (Notes of lectures given at the Annual Conference of the Theological Students' Fellowship, December, 1965), pp.5f; cf. also J. Van Seters, op.cit., 154f. and S.R. Driver, The Book of Genesis. Westminster Commentaries. (London: Methuen, 1909), pp.i-xxv. Different Source Critics emphasize different criteria.

iii) <u>Doublets</u> of various kinds:

(a)   duplicate narratives which are explicitly concerned with the same events but are recorded separately in the extant text;   for example Gen 15 and 17;

(b)   repetitious narratives, each a single narrative in the extant text, but separated by critics into two or more parallel accounts;   for example the Flood story;

(c)   duplicate narratives on similar themes given as different events in the text, but considered by critics to be versions of the same theme or incident;   for example a wife being passed off as a sister in Gen 12, 20 and 26.

iv)   <u>Differing theological concepts</u>.   J is said to have an anthropomorphic view of God; E is more restrained - God acts through dreams and visions;   and P is even more restrained, expressing a very transcendent view of God.

The cumulative weight of these and similar arguments is said to justify a division of our text into various sources.[1]   The composition of these sources was said to be relatively late - J in the tenth or ninth centuries B.C., E in the ninth or eighth, D in the late seventh, and P, Post-Exilic.   When we discuss Tradition History Criticism below we shall see how many scholars have ceased to speak of fixed "documents" or assign them to a fixed date.

The use of criteria such as those discussed above has not gone unchallenged.   The strongest argument against their usefulness is based on the fact that criteria such as these are not appropriate in a discussion of ancient Near Eastern literature.   Moshe Greenberg asks:

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1.   For a detailed list of the various sources, cf. S.R. Driver, <u>op</u>.<u>cit</u>., pp.iv-xii.

For details of further subdivisions of J, E, D, and P, cf. J. Van Seters, <u>op</u>.<u>cit</u>., pp.125-131.   E.A. Speiser's work on Genesis marks a move away from the excessive splitting up of the text (<u>Genesis</u>, pp.LIVf. <u>et passim</u>.).   Cf. also J. Van Seters, <u>op</u>.<u>cit</u>. While critics disagree over a multitude of passages, there is a certain amount of common ground.

> Until we have solid studies of the styles of ancient
> Near Eastern writing, how can we speak with
> confidence about what is in and out of order...?[1]

To the present writer's knowledge, K.A. Kitchen has done the most in this
direction with his attempts at showing that the "irregularities" in the
Pentateuch are not so irregular in other ancient Near Eastern literature.[2]
In spite of the soundness of this method, critics are probably correct in
their claim that the ancient Near Eastern parallels are insufficient to
explain away all the difficulties.[3] Even E.J. Young, regarded as a
conservative by Conservatives, says that Moses probably used excerpts
from existing written documents. He adds that this may account for some
of the difficulties surrounding the use of the divine name.[4] There
is a big difference between the caution of Young's approach and the confident
claims of some to have discovered the identity of the original sources.[5]
C.S. Lewis introduces a further note of caution into the discussion with
his comment that it is virtually impossible for even the contemporary
of a writer to discern the history behind a book. He therefore asks how
Biblical scholars can claim to identify the sources used by a Redactor so
many years ago.[6] The words of D.J.A. Clines cannot be bettered as a
conclusion:

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1. "Response to Roland de Vaux, 'Method in the Study of Early Hebrew
   History'", The Bible and Modern Scholarship, ed. J.P. Hyatt (Nashville:
   Abingdon Press, 1965), p.42. Ivon Engnell's familiar words are worth
   repeating:

   > "It is necessary that we free ourselves from the modern,
   > anachronistic book-view and that we view the Old
   > Testament realistically as a product of the ancient Near
   > Eastern culture, of which Israel and its national literature,
   > the Old Testament, are a part " (Critical Essays on the Old
   > Testament, Trans. J.T. Willis, and H. Ringgren. London:
   > SPCK, 1970), p.4.

   Cf. also E.J. Young, An Introduction to the Old Testament (London:
   Tyndale Press, 1949; rev. ed. 1960), p.163.
2. Cf. Ancient Orient and Old Testament (London: Tyndale Press, 1966).
3. R.G. Thompson, op.cit., p.118.
4. Op.cit., p.163.
5. On the other hand Kitchen is probably asking for too much when he says
   that the only method of verifying such claims is to have "the actual
   documents in separate copies before our eyes alongside the works that
   have utilized them" (Pentateuchal Criticism and Interpretation),pp.35ff.
6. "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism", cited by J. McDowell, More
   Evidence that Demands a Verdict (USA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975),
   pp.341-344.

> Since in the case of the Pentateuch we have little
> hard evidence concerning its historical and literary
> origins, we do better ... to rest the weight of our
> study largely upon what we do have - the work itself ...[1]

Work being done in the field of Redaction Criticism is to be welcomed.[2]
While those using the method do not usually neglect Source Criticism,
they maintain that the exegete must come to terms with the complex unity
of the present form of the text.[3] Related to the question of the unity
of the Pentateuchal narratives, is the problem of Mosaic authorship.

While there is a growing recognition of the role of Moses in the
origins of the Pentateuch, there is still an unwillingness to say that
he was in some sense the author.[4] In Biblical Studies, as in most fields,
one has to choose a theory which accounts for more of the evidence than
its rivals.[5] The present writer's theory of the literary development

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1. "Theme in Genesis 1-11", CBQ XXXVIII:4 (1976), p.505.

2. Recent studies on the final form of the traditions include,
    R.N. Whybray, "The Joseph story and Pentateuchal Criticism", VT,
    XVIII (1968), pp.521-528; D.J.A. Clines, CBQ XXXVIII:4 (1976),
    pp.483-507. Unfortunately books are still being written with titles like that
    of P.F. Ellis, The Yahwist. The Bible's First Theologian (London:
    Chapman, 1969).

3. Cf. G. Von Rad, Genesis (rev.ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972),
    p.75; D.A. Knight, Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel. The
    Development of the Traditio-Historical Research of the Old Testament,
    with special Consideration of Scandinavian Contributions. Dissertation
    Series 1 (University of Montana: SBL, 1973), p.397.

4. B.W. Anderson writes:

    > "We cannot turn the clock backward and maintain that
    > Moses was the author of the Pentateuch in the traditional
    > sense; yet in the present stage of historical research
    > it is likewise unnecessary to go to the opposite
    > extreme and say that Moses was only peripherally related
    > to the origins of the Pentateuch. It is still true that,
    > as the first prophet of Israel, Moses was in some sense
    > the founder of Israel's religion and the fountainhead of
    > Israelite Tradition."

    (Martin Noth's Tratidio-Historical Approach in the Context of
    Twentieth Century Biblical Research", introduction to: A History
    of Pentateuchal Traditions, by M. Noth trans. B.W. Anderson
    [Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972], p.xxxii).

5. The weight given to the various pieces of evidence is the crucial
    area of debate.

of the Pentateuch is that Moses had a key role in its composition.[1]
What is meant by the words "key role" must remain undefined because there
is so much that is not known.[2]   A given passage will be assumed to be
Mosaic in some sense unless there is decisive proof for labelling it
post-Mosaic.[3]   The advantage of this method is that it avoids turning
the entire tradition into a pile of fragments and then fitting them into
some preconceived theory.[4]

While the Grafian view of the literary development of the Pentateuch
continues to dominate the discussion, there have been some significant
modifications to the theory due to some new approaches to the study of the
Pentateuch, instigated largely by the work of H. Gunkel.[5]

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1.   For detailed arguments in support of Mosaic authorship, cf. M.H. Segal,
     The Pentateuch, its Composition and Authorship, and other Biblical
     Studies (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1967); R.K. Harrison,
     Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B.
     Eerdmans, 1969); cf. J.D. Douglas, et.al. (eds.), The New Bible
     Dictionary (London: IVP, 1962), especially the article "Moses",
     pp.843-850.

2.   In the Old Testament Moses is said to have been commissioned to write
     down certain divine words, Ex 17:14; 24:4; 34:27f.; Num 33:2;
     Deut 31:9, 24; 11 Chron 23:18; cf. Engnell, op.cit., p.51 for
     comments on these references. These passages are sufficient to
     establish a link between parts of the Pentateuch and Moses, who
     could well have been literate. For a careful discussion cf. J.A.
     Thompson, Deuteronomy. An Introduction and Commentary. The Tyndale
     Old Testament Commentaries (London: IVP, 1974), pp.47-53.

3.   Cf. M. Noth, A History of Pentateuchal Traditions (Trans. with an
     introduction by B.W. Anderson. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:
     Prentice Hall, 1972. Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch.
     Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1st ed. 1948, 3rd ed. 1966), p.24.
     Differences over what constitutes "decisive proof" is one of the
     chief causes of scholarly disagreement.

4.   Y. Kaufmann makes this comment in the context of a discussion of the
     Conquest ("Traditions Concerning Early Israelite History in Canaan",
     Scripta Hierosolymitana, ed. C. Rabin [Jerusalem: Hebrew University,
     1961] , p.303). Cf. R.J. Thompson, op.cit., pp.104f.

5.   R.J. Thompson, op.cit., p.140.

b)   Form Criticism

For the sake of clarity this branch of study 'is separated from
Tradition History Criticism.[1]   Form Criticism arises from the observation
that each literary form corresponds to a setting in life or a Sitz im Leben
as Gunkel called it.   A comparison with other ancient Near Eastern forms
has helped to understand certain Old Testament forms.[2]   If a link can be
established between the two, much can be learnt by examining how Israel
altered and used them.[3]   Forms from one Sitz im Leben can be transferred
to another.[4]   Because of this secondary use of forms one must guard
against a search for Sitze im Leben which is too mechanical.

Few scholars would question the relevance of Form Criticism as it
has been outlined above.   The majority do their Form Critical work after
their Source Criticism.   Where the procedure has been reversed, as
Van Seters insists that it ought to be,[5] contradictions between the two
disciplines have sometimes arisen.   The claims of those using Form
Criticism has also on occasions conflicted with the claims of those
using the Tradition History Method.[6]

1.   Knight, op.cit., p.30. K. Koch maintains on the other hand that they
      should not be separated (op.cit., pp.39f., 53).

2.   Cf. below, esp. Ch. III where the relevance of the Treaty, Law-Code,
      and Royal Grant Forms will be discussed.

3.   Koch, op.cit., pp.22f., 51.

4.   Koch, op.cit., pp.36f. A good example of this is the use of the
      Covenant idea in the cult although it had an original legal
      Sitz im Leben, cf. below pp.36f.

5.   Op.cit., pp.157, 312, et passim. He insists that Structural Analysis
      also precede Source Criticism. What is meant by "Structural Analysis"
      is still being debated. In general terms, just as the science of
      linguistics has taught us to discuss the structure of a sentence,
      Structural Analysis seeks to discuss the structure of larger units –
      paragraphs, chapters, books (R.C. Culley, "Some Comments on Structural
      Analysis and Biblical Studies", Congress Volume, Upsalla 1971.
      VTS, V:22 [Leiden: Brill, 1972] , pp.129f.).

6.   Cf. J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old
      Testament.   The Tyndale Lecture in Biblical Archaeology, 1963
      (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), pp.33-35.

c)   Tradition History Criticism

While there are different understandings of what Tradition History is,[1] most of those who claim to use this method would agree with Knight's statement of the presuppositions of this approach:

> The majority of our Old Testament underwent a (often lengthy and complex) process of growth in real life situations, the result being a body of cumulative, multiplex traditions which reflect the life and religion of the community in various periods of its history.[2]

Following Gunkel, the individual story which is regarded as being complete in itself has been the starting point for discussion.[3]   Only by removing it from its context can we understand it.[4]   Thus we must attempt to get behind the present text and examine the various stages in the growth of a tradition - much like peeling an onion.[5]   This task is made easier because of the various redactors' reverence for the tradition: they usually do little more than provide the framework into which the traditions are fitted.[6]   Whether these traditions were oral or written is not such a crucial issue as it might appear from the vigorous polemics of some

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1.   Cf. D.A. Knight, op.cit., p.24.

2.   Ibid., p.2.   Cf. R. de Vaux, The Bible and the Ancient Near East (Trans. D. McHugh. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972. Selections from Bible et Orient.   Les Editions du Cerf, 1967), p.113, says that "it is now an indisputable fact that both documents and traditions were used in the composition of the Pentateuch and that the process extended over several centuries".

3.   Cf. J. Skinner, op.cit., pp.iii,iv, xiv, et passim.

4.   Idem, p.xiv.

5.   K. Koch, op.cit., p.53.   The Form Critic who accepts this has to examine the forms at each level (idem).   Source Criticism is always an ally of Tradition History (R.G. Thompson, op.cit., passim).

6.   K. Koch, op.cit., p.59.   Irregularities resulting from this are usually the starting point of our reconstruction of the process (idem, p.52).

Tradition Historians.[1]   It is generally maintained that over a long
period of time these traditions developed, gathered together around
themes, were worked on by redactors - all in response to the various
situations facing groups of Israelites.   These tradition fragments in
their earliest form are said to have been often attached to geographical
locations, particularly shrines, for example Shechem and Bethel.[2]

The creative power of tradition has usually been attributed to two
factors in the life of Israel: etiology and the cult.[3]

i)   Etiological narrative has been defined as, "a narrative which seeks
to explain why something has come to be, or why it has become such and
such".[4] It is an answer to the hypothetical Kinderfrage.   In spite of
the confidence of Noth and others in their use of etiology to explain in
part the Patriarchal narratives, its use remains problematic.   B.O. Long
emphasizes the need for more precise work on means of identifying cases
of etiology.[5]   Until this is done discussion in this area will simply
be a case of each scholar's personal preference.

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1.   D.A. Knight, op.cit., p.36fn.   The theory of Tradition History can
     easily accomodate written traditions as long as they are malleable
     and only relatively stable, capable of being changed and reinterpreted
     to meet the needs of the transmitters.

2.   Among others, J. Bright has been a little sceptical of this theory.
     He argues that the fact that something is recorded as having happened
     at a place does not necessarily make the tradition of it the property
     of the people of that shrine.   More evidence is needed before the
     link can be made.   (Early Israel in Recent History Writing, pp.101-103).

3.   R. de Vaux, "Method in the Study of Early Hebrew History".   The
     Bible and Modern Scholarship,(ed.) J.P. Hyatt, p.23.

4.   B.O. Long, The Problem of the Etiological Narrative in the Old
     Testament   (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1968), p.1.

5.   Op.cit., p.94.   His work is a positive but limited contribution on
     this matter.

ii)   Just as with etiology, hardly anyone is willing to deny altogether the role of the cult in the formation of the traditions.   But again the extent to which this is the case is difficult either to prove or disprove. Thus De Vaux can insist that the cult merely celebrates an already existing tradition;[1] and with equal conviction T.L. Thompson can maintain that the cult has   far more of a creative role than this.[2]

On the usefulness of the Tradition History approach J. Van Seters comes to a very definite conclusion:

> The idea held by some scholars that one can
> reconstruct a multilayered history of the tradition
> into early preliterary levels, then guess correctly
> what the meaning and function of these various levels
> were, and go on to reconstruct certain historical aspects
> of those periods is surely a great delusion.[3]

D.A. Knight, a keen Tradition Historian, expresses a similar but much less extreme opinion:

> Despite all our efforts to carry out this
> examination with as objective, thorough, and
> sophisticated means as are at our disposal, we
> must have no illusions about the fact that we are
> working in a domain of hypotheses and conjectures.
> Certainty is elusive, if not even unattainable;
> the great variations among suggested solutions to
> certain problems give silent witness to this fact.
> This hypothetical character of traditio-historical
> work makes caution essential also in our attempts
> to draw historical and theological consequences
> from our results.[4]

1.   R. de Vaux, op.cit., p.25. Cf. also G.E. Wright, "Cult and History. A study of a Current Problem in Old Testament Interpretation", Interp XVI (1962), pp.3-20, esp. p.7.

2.   The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives, passim.

3.   Op.cit., p.263fn. . He is referring to R.E. Clements, Abraham and David. Genesis XV and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition. SBT, II (London: SCM Press, 1967). We have already noted the opinions of C.S. Lewis which are very similar to those expressed here; cf. above, p.11.

4.   Op.cit., p.31.   Cf. J. Bright, A History of Israel, p.73, who says that attempts to reconstruct a complete tradition history are too speculative. It would be wrong to use the statements of D.A. Knight and Bright to reject Tradition History.   While both realize its limitations, they believe that Tradition History Criticism has a positive contribution to make.

At the risk of sounding like a Positivist the writer concludes that because of the problem of the absence of sufficient objective control in this area he will concentrate rather on approaches that offer more reliable rewards.[1]   Involved in the matter is the question of history.

2.   THE QUESTION OF HISTORY[2]

There are several problems associated with the use of "history" to describe the Patriarchal Narratives.   Firstly, while the generally accepted meaning of "history" does not include God as a participant,[3] in the Patriarchal Narratives God is the chief actor.[4]   Secondly, while the modern historian is expected to be as objective as possible, the Patriarchal Narratives were written not by detached observers, but by men of faith whose aim was to convince, rebuke, and edify.[5]

These features have led to the use of "Legend" to describe the Patriarchal Narratives.[6]   One advantage of using "history" as a

1.   Cf. above, pp.10-13.

2.   "History" is an ambiguous word;   cf. B.W. Anderson, A History of Pentateuchal Traditions by M. Noth, p.xxiii.   The next few pages will demonstrate how the word is to be used in this Thesis.

3.   F.M. Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, p.viii.

C.M.N. Sugden gives the underlying reason for this.   He writes:

> "A historian asks how he understands the world today and then by analogy with current experience proceeds to interpret events in the past ("The Supernatural and the Unique in History", TSFB LXVII (1973), p.1).

4.   H. Gunkel, The Legends of Genesis.   Biblical Saga and History (trans. W.H. Carruth, New York: Shacken Books, 1964), p.18.   The Israelites, like their neighbours, believed that Heaven controlled all history;   cf. Speiser, "Historiography and Historical Sources in Ancient Mesopotamia", Patriarchs.   The World History of the Jewish People, Vol. II;   ed. B. Mozar (Israel: Jewish History Publications, 1970), p.4.

5.   Cf. G. Von Rad, Genesis, p.69;   Gunkel, op.cit., p.10.

6.   For the German Sage, "Legend", has no uniform meaning and therefore needs careful definition;   cf. R.M. Hals, "Legend: A Case Study in Old Testament Form Critical Terminology", CBQ XXXIV:2 (1972), pp.166-176.

description of the Patriarchal Narratives is that it implies events that
actually happened in space and time. But a distinction must be recognized
between what happened and what has been written down about the event.
We have to be content with later descriptions of events. Therefore in
any historical writing the role of the interpreter has to be recognized.[1]
This is much more the case with the Patriarchal Narratives where past
events are dramatically reconstructed in the form of verbatim utterances
and the end result shows signs of selection and arrangement for theological
reasons.[2] It is therefore almost impossible to distinguish between the
original event reported in a factual way, and that which has been
transformed by the interpreter. Occasionally it is possible to detect
the difference, but the danger is that, in the absence of recognized
independent criteria, scholarship degenerates into a statement of personal
preferences. John Bright writes:

> To pick and choose from the traditions, therefore
> according historicity to this while denying it to
> that, is a most subjective procedure reflecting no
> more than one's own predilections.[3]

The approach in this Thesis will be to give the Patriarchal Narratives
the benefit of the doubt and to accept everything as historically
reliable unless there is convincing proof to the contrary.[4] According
to K.A. Kitchen this is a well tested principle of ancient Near Eastern

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1. "The event does not become a part of History until it is interpreted"
   (R. De Vaux, "Method in the Study of Early Hebrew History", The
   Bible in Modern Scholarship, ed. J.P. Hyatt [Nashville: Abingdon
   Press, 1965], p.15).

2. Cf. W.F. Albright, "Introduction", The Legends of Genesis, by
   H. Gunkel, p.viii; R.K. Harrison, op.cit., p.302. Von Rad writes:
   > "The content of the patriarchal narratives was
   > broadened because all events of the patriarchal
   > period were connected with all Israel by being
   > oriented toward the conquest under Joshua"(Genesis, p.23).

3. A History of Israel, p.76. Unfortunately his own work is not entirely
   free from this kind of criticism. He says that the only history that
   can be extracted from the Patriarchal Narratives is history in very
   broad outline, not history in any precise detail; cf. J. Bright,
   Early Israel in Recent History Writing, p.126.

4. Because of the present writer's world view, this includes descriptions
   of the activity of God.

Studies.[1] B.S. Childs, discussing the role and source of etiologies
warns against implying

> that the link between cause and effect is
> artificial and unhistorical. Only in those cases
> in which elements of the mythical causation can
> be clearly demonstrated is there an adequate warrant
> for such a move. Far more likely is a position
> which takes seriously Israel's attempt to describe
> a genuine sequence of events, even when the attempt
> is not always successful according to the canons
> of modern historical criticism.[2]

The Israelites are called to have confidence in the future because God
can act as He has in the past.[3] It is on the basis of the Exodus that
the theological hope of a New Exodus is formulated in Isaiah.[4] Von
Rad says that Israel only learned this attitude to history during a long
process of tradition.[5] This claim is to a large extent governed by
his presuppositions. He sees a sharp distinction between the actual
course of Israel's history and the Israelite records of it.[6] The effect
of radically applying Tradition History criteria is a substitution of
the history of traditions for history proper.[7] In reply to this
criticism Von Rad says:

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1. Cf. Ancient Orient and the Old Testament, pp.28-30, for a bibliography
    in support of this claim; cf. also D.A. Knight, op.cit., pp.209-211
    for a summary and a bibliography of this point of view in Old
    Testament studies.

2. "The Etiological Tale Re-Examined", VT XXIV (1974), p.397. Cf.
    J. Bright, Early Israel in Recent History Writing, p.94.

3. D.C.T. Sheriffs, Empire and the Gods. Mesopotamian Treaty Theology
    and the Sword in the First Millenium B.C. (Unpublished D. Litt. thesis,
    Department of Semitic Studies, University of Stellenbosch, 1976),
    pp.236f.

4. Cf. B.W. Anderson, "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah", Israel's
    Prophetic Heritage, eds. B.W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York,
    1962).

5. Cf. D.A. Knight, op.cit., p.129.

6. Cf. D.A. Knight, op.cit., p.176. This Von Rad says in the face of
    the fact that the outline of events from Abraham through to the Exile
    is presented as a fairly harmonious whole.

7. B.W. Anderson, A History of Pentateuchal Traditions, by M. Noth,
    pp.xxixf. Transmission history is then regarded as part of the
    history of Israel, cf. K. Koch, op.cit., p.105.

> But I certainly do not want to deny that very
> concrete historical experiences of Israel lie
> behind the framework in which the individual
> traditions are embedded.[1]

His discussion of the sacrifice of Isaac which follows, shows that this
"concrete historical experience" is not an event involving two historical
characters, Abraham and Isaac, but Israel's experience of God-forsakenness![2]

If one recognizes the creative role of the cult, etiology, and other
factors, and allows for a long period of oral transmission, as does Von
Rad, then it is easy to understand why he does not venture to speak of an
event involving two historical characters, Abraham and Isaac.[3]   One
way of solving the problem is to deny a creative role to the cult and
etiology and to deny a lengthy period of oral transmission.[4]   Another
is to recognize that although a long and complicated process may lie
behind the present text it is better to take seriously what the narratives
are trying to say than to be sceptical of their historical worth.[5]   This
is the opinion of the present writer.   Closely related to the question
of the historical value of the narratives is the issue of their Sitz im
Leben.[6]

Van Seters says that J and the other sources of the Pentateuch have
an Exilic Sitz im Leben.   The narratives are therefore interpreted against

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1.   "History and the Patriarchs", Exp T LXXII (1960-61), p.213.

2.   Exp T LXXII (1960-61), p.215.

3.   Comparative studies have shown that oral tradition, like etiology, can
      be both a reliable and an unreliable source of history;   cf. R.C.
      Culley, "Oral Tradition and Historicity", Studies on the Ancient
      Palestinian World, eds. J.W. Wevers and D.B. Redford. (University
      of Toronto Press, 1971), pp.102-116.

4.   E.g. E.J. Young, An Introduction to the Old Testament.

5.   Cf. above, p.20,   and J.A. Thompson, Deuteronomy, pp.49-53.

6.   An assumption of the Tradition History approach is that our present
      text is the product of many different periods and therefore Sitze im
      Leben.   In this paragraph, Sitz im Leben is used to describe the
      period when most of the work is said to have been done in the gathering
      and arrangement of the traditions.

the background of a despairing people in exile.[1] The opinion of T.L. Thompson is more widely accepted.[2] He says that the Davidic-Solomonic period is when the traditions behind J were brought into order.[3] Both Van Seters and T.L. Thompson have plausible arguments. This is because the narratives can be made to fit fairly comfortably into either Sitz im Leben. In itself this indicates how difficult it is to produce objective criteria which are recognized by everyone.[4] Just as a case can be made for setting the Patriarchal Narratives against an Exilic or early Monarchy background, so it can be argued that these narratives are best understood against a Mosaic background.[5]

D. CONCLUSION

Because archaeology at present only offers indirect evidence it is less important than the direct testimony of the narratives themselves. Certain Tradition Historians add that the narratives as understood by the Tradition History method are more important than the witness of archaeology.[6] Because of the hypothetical nature of Tradition History Criticism, which itself needs to be controlled by the more objective

1. Op.cit., passim.
2. E.g. B. Mazar, "The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis", JNES XXVIII (1969), pp.73-83.
3. Op.cit., pp.324-326.
4. Cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., pp.413f.
5. Unfortunately, Conservative Scholarship has yet to produce a thorough treatment of this subject.
6. E.g. R.E. Clements, op.cit., p.12.

evidence of archaeology, this is not acceptable.[1]   Neither the text nor archaeology may be neglected.

The question of the historicity of the Patriarchs could be dealt with by citing a list of reputable scholars who say that Abraham and even a divine Covenant existed in time and space.   But an equally impressive (if not more impressive) list of scholars could be gathered who are sceptical of such a claim.   The fact that there can be such differences of opinion introduces us to the heart of the problem: it cannot be proved conclusively that a theory is true or false.[2]   In this Chapter not one of the writer's arguments has been able to demolish a point of view with which he disagrees.   All that the writer hopes to have shown are the reasons why he intends adopting a certain approach, rather than another.

The lengthy discussion on the issue of historicity might be questioned by some.   Thus Von Rad in reply to the claim that the acts themselves are more important than the interpretation points out that history is interpretation.[3]   This is absolutely true, but our minds force us to ask: did it happen?[4]   Nevertheless the body of this Thesis will not be so much concerned with the question of if, when, and how it happened, as with the question of how whatever happened was understood and described by those who contributed to the formation of our present text.   The concern will thus be more with theology than history.

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1.   J. Bright, Early Israel in Recent History Writing, p.91, et passim. The debate just mentioned has received classic expression in the controversy between Noth and Bright. Roland de Vaux deserves praise for showing that the difference is not one of method, because both use the Tradition History method and both make use of the witness of archaeology, but of conclusions reached (The Bible and the Ancient Near East, pp.111-121).

2.   J. Bright, op.cit., pp.109f.

3.   Cf. D.A. Knight, op.cit., p.132; and idem, p.202 for Knight's own opinion.

4.   The fact that Yahweh had done something in space and time in the past was a constant source of faith for the Israelites that He would do so again.

CHAPTER III

THE COVENANT MEDIATOR IN ISRAEL

A. INTRODUCTION

Prophet, priest, and king were all mediators between God and man.[1]
But because Abraham is described as the mediator of בְּרִיה between
God and his family,[2] significant parallels to this function or office are
most likely to be found in instances where God makes a Covenant with an
individual who is acting on behalf of a group. Without a doubt the
Israelite institution of Kingship is an important example of the office of
Covenant Mediator, but it is the figure of Moses which towers above all.[3]
A study of Moses, a central figure in the Old Testament, and Kingship a
central institution, ought to give a good idea of the role of the Covenant
Mediator in Israel. This study will have to be preceded by an attempt
to discover more about Covenant making in Israel. In this task, a careful
use of parallels from ancient Near Eastern literary forms will help to
illuminate some aspects of the Old Testament Covenants.[4]

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1. A "mediator" is used here to mean someone who represents God to men
   and men to God.

2. Cf. below, pp.59-64.

3. G. Widengren believes that the roles of Moses and Joshua as recipients
   and custodians of the law are retrojections of the King's office
   ("King and Covenant", JSS II (1957), pp.1-32). This theory which
   robs Moses of much of his uniqueness will be discussed in more
   detail below, cf. p.43. While Widengren stresses the "office"
   of Covenant Mediator, D.J. McCarthy stresses his vocation. He
   writes, "It is the circumstances which command this position of
   mediator" (Treaty and Covenant [Analecta biblica 21 ; Rome:
   Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963], pp.169f.). It is important
   to recognize the tension that there is between "office" and "vocation"
   in Israel without favouring one at the expense of the other, cf.
   M. Noth, "Office and Vocation", The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other
   Essays (trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966.
   Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament [Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag,
   1957]), pp.241f.

4. Since G.E. Mendenhall's contribution in 1954 this question has
   received a great deal of attention ("Ancient Oriental and Biblical
   Law", BA XVII:2 (1954), pp.26-46; "Covenant Forms in Israelite
   Tradition", BA XVII:3 (1954), pp.50-76).

B.   THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN BACKGROUND TO OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS

1.   ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY MAKING

Treaty making in the ancient Near East has been the subject of a lot of discussion over the past two decades.   In a recent contribution D.C.T. Sheriffs has examined the war annals of the Assyrian and Babylonian Emperors.   He shows that particularly in the case of the Assyrian annals, the adê acts as a definite organizational principle in their historiography.[1]   This investigation of Treaty theology in historical writing is a valuable supplement to the vast amount of work that has been done on the actual texts of the Treaties.   Texts available for study show that the Treaty Form was in use from at least the middle of the third millenium B.C. until the middle of the first millenium B.C.[2] Because the Hittite Treaties are less scarce than the others, they have rightly tended to dominate all discussion of the ancient Near Eastern Treaty Form.   There are six principal features which are to be found in a typical Hittite Treaty:[3]

i)   There is a preamble, identifying the initiator of the Treaty.

ii)   The historical prologue mentions previous relations between the two parties involved.   Past benefactions by the Suzerain serve as a basis for the vassal's gratitude and future obedience.

iii)   The stipulations are obligations laid on the vassal, the most important being loyalty, particularly in time of war.

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1.   _Empire and the Gods.   Mesopotamian Treaty Theology and the Sword in the First Millenium B.C._   (D.Litt. Thesis presented at the University of Stellenbosch, 1976).

2.   Cf. McCarthy, _Treaty and Covenant_, p.12 for a chronological list of Treaty texts.

3.   While there are several exceptions, a basic pattern may be discerned in all of them, cf. McCarthy, _op.cit._, p.50.   On the pattern, cf. D.R. Hillers, _Covenant.   The History of a Biblical Idea_ (Seminars in the History of Ideas ;   Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1969), pp.29-39.

iv) Provision is made for the deposit of the text and for public reading.[1]
v) A long list of gods, including those of the vassal, is added.[2] They are to witness the Treaty and take action against the Treaty breaker.[3] Infidelity would offend the gods as well as the injured party.[4] In exacting retribution for a breach of the Treaty, the injured party is understood as an instrument of the gods. This is clear from the Hittite Treaty with Manapo-Dattas:

> Since _Uhha - LV - is_ has broken the divine oaths,
> the divine oaths seized him and I, the Sun, destroyed him.[5]

vi) There is a list of curses, invoked upon the vassal if he breaks the Treaty, and a list of blessings if he keeps it. In an age which believed in the efficacy of the curse and the blessing, this part of the Treaty Form, together with the previous one, constitute a significant encouragement to the vassal's obedience.[6] The inclusion of the

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1. D.J. McCarthy says that this clause is not a necessary part of the form because it occurs so rarely (Old Testament Covenant. A Survey of Current Opinions [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973], p.27). This is a valid objection.

2. The Assyrians listed only their own gods. On the reasons for this, cf. McCarthy, op.cit., p.93.

3. Heaven and earth can be included as witnesses (McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, p.81; cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., p.462 for a discussion and a bibliography). On the role of human witnesses in Treaty making McCarthy writes:

    "Human witnesses came into play when a treaty was restored or altered. They function as witnesses to the authenticity of the new document, not the treaty relationship itself "

    (Old Testament Covenant, p.65). For a possible modification to this cf. Hillers, Covenant, p.52 fn.4.

4. J.M. Munn-Rankin, "Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millenium B.C.", Iraq XVIII (1956), p.89.

5. Cited McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, p.94.

6. Recent work on the curse formulae includes F.C. Fensham, "Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and Kudurru-Inscriptions compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah", ZAW LXXV (1963), pp.155-175; D.R. Hillers, Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets (Biblica et Orientalia, no. 16; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964).

vassal King's people, family, land, and possessions in the promise of blessing and curse shows that the vassal represents not only himself when he enters into the Treaty.[1]   The notion of corporate responsibility used here makes sense when it is remembered that punitive acts of gods tend to be natural calamities like the plague, drought, and famine, which strike the entire community.[2]   While the vassal King involves all his people in the Treaty, it is his immediate family which has more to gain or lose depending on his fidelity.[3]   This is because of idea of solidarity is greater in the case of the family than the nation.

The other extant ancient Near Eastern Treaties are very similar to those of the Hittites; so similar that K. Baltzer can write that "the present texts make it possible to define the treaty formulary as a fixed literary type".[4]   Yet it is to be expected that each period and society will produce features that are peculiar to it.   Treaties of the first millenium B.C. really emphasize the curses.   They also mention clearly the rites which were visual aids of what would happen to the Treaty breaker.[5]   The most controversial difference is that the historical

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1.   Cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., pp.141 fn.1.   This is implied even in the treaties which do not specifically include the nation.

2.   G.E. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law", BA XVII (1954), p.27.   Cf. ANET, pp.394-396.   On the ancient Near Eastern notion of group solidarity in a Treaty setting, cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., p.153.

3.   For an example, cf. Hillers, Covenant, p.37.   Those closest to the disobedient vassal King were usually the first to feel the Suzerain's wrath.

4.   The Covenant Formulary (trans. D.E. Green. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971.   Das Bundesformular [Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, No. 4.   2nd rev.ed. Neukirchener Verlag: Neukirchen, 1964]), p.16.

5.   Idem, p.98.   On the Treaty ceremonies, cf. Hillers, Covenant, pp.40f.

prologue , a characteristic of the Hittite Treaties which are from the second millenium B.C., is almost entirely absent from Treaties of the first millenium B.C.[1] The difference has become controversial since Mendenhall used it as a means of dating the Mosaic Covenant.[2]
In reaction to this scholars have become very cautious of using the appearance of a form for historical dating since literary forms can and do have a complex and variable history.[3]

The Treaty Form cannot be properly understood in isolation from the society that it belonged to. The Suzerainty Treaty was used by powerful kings who sought to control outlying lands without outright annexation.[4] The vassal usually had no option but to accept.[5] In the Treaty established between the two parties it is the weaker who takes on himself most of the obligations.[6] While it is true that the weaker party takes on himself most of the obligations, the Suzerain does commit himself to keeping certain promises. Drawing largely from the Hittite

1. The difference loses much of its sharpness when it is seen that a number of Hittite Treaties do not have the historical prologue (McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, pp.26-28), and some Treaties of the first millenium B.C. have the historical prologue (J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament pp.14f.). There is also the fact that the Treaties we have for study are so few and are frequently incomplete; and there is some evidence that the complete documentation of a Treaty was not necessarily confined to a single document (idem , p.15).

2. BA XVII (1954), pp.56f.

3. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, p.28.

4. Idem , Treaty and Covenant, p.95.

5. Sheriffs lists three common situations: a) a forced oath after military conquest; b) submission motivated by fear of reprisals; c) diplomatic vassaldom entered into spontaneously for its defence benefits (op.cit., p.73).

6. On the Treaty as an obligation or pledge, cf. M. Weinfeld, "Berith-Covenant vs. Obligation", Biblica LVI (1975), pp.120-128. Parity treaties, which are less numerous than Suzerainty treaties, are little more than double Suzerainty treaties with both parties committing themselves (cf. J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament, p.12).

Treaties, P.J. Calderone lists the following promises:[1]

i) The protection of the vassal, his people, and his land from his enemies.

ii) The recognition and protection by the Suzerain's dynasty of the vassal's son and sometimes even grandson.[2] The accession of a king's heir was a critical time in the internal politics of a state. The vassal would therefore certainly appreciate the assurance that his heir would be successfully and permanently enthroned.[3] Sometimes these promises were even more extensive and included the vassal's dynasty.[4] The significance of promises like this is understandable in the light of the ancient Near Eastern idea that a man can possess persons in much the same way that he possesses property.[5] Thus a promise of blessing to someone's descendants is very much a promise to the person himself.

While the promises made in the Treaties were not simply verbal, they probably serve more as a motive for the vassal's obedience than as binding on the sovereign.[6]

The relationship between the benevolent aspects of the Suzerainty Treaties and the Royal Grant is very close.[7]

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1. Dynastic Oracle and Suzerainty Treaty. 2 Samuel 7, 8-16 (Ateneo De Manila University: Loyola House of Studies, 1966), pp.17-40. These promises usually occur within the list of stipulations, but are twice found in the historical prologue (idem , p.23).

2. Naturally the obedience of the vassal's son is also required.

3. Cf. Calderone, op.cit., p.30.

4. It is interesting to note that while kings prayed for their rule to continue with their sons and descendants, they received only the assurance of an immediate successor. Nowhere, it seems, did a god promise enduring kingship to a whole line (Calderone, op.cit., pp.37f.). On the probable reasons for this, cf. idem, p.39.

5. Cf. J.R. Porter, "The Legal Aspects of the Concept of 'Corporate Personality' in the Old Testament", VT XV (1965), pp.361-380.

6. Calderone, op.cit., pp.19, 23f.

7. Idem , p.33.

2. THE ROYAL GRANT IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The Royal Grant in its classical form is found in the Babylonian Kudurru documents. It also occurs among the Hittites, in the Syro-Palestine area, and in the Neo-Assyrian period.[1] It has almost the same form as the Treaty: historical introduction, stipulations, witnesses, blessings and curses.[2] The Royal Grant has several inter-related Sitze im Leben. J.N. Postgate lists some of these:[3]

i) Grants of land from the King to private individuals as a reward for loyalty and faithful service.[4]

ii) Grants of land from the King to private individuals, made in order to enable them to supply offerings to a temple.

iii) Grants of land from the King to the priests for the benefit of the temple.

iv) Decrees issued by the King determining the offerings to be received by a temple, and who should give and receive them.

The promises of land and dynasty are the most prominent gifts of the Suzerain among the Hittite and Syro-Palestinian nations.[5] These promises are unconditional. In the treaty of Hattusilis III (or Tadhalyas IV) with Ulmi-Tesub of Daltasa we read:

> After you, your son and grandson will possess it,
> nobody will take it away from them. If one of your
> descendants sins, the King will prosecute him at his
> court. Then when he is found guilty ... if he deserves
> death he will die. But nobody will take away from the
> descendant of Ulmi-Tesub either his house or his land
> in order to give it to a descendant of somebody else.6

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1. Cf. M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East", JAOS XC (1970), p.185.

2. Idem, p.185. The absence of references to swearing an oath in the Royal Grant may be a significant difference with the Treaty Form which sometimes mentions the oath (Hillers, Covenant pp.105f.).

3. Neo-Assyrian Royal Grants and Decrees (Studia Pohl, series 1; Rome, 1969), pp.2-7.

4. Together with the promise of a dynasty, Weinfeld JAOS XC (1970) concentrates almost exclusively on this element.

5. Weinfeld, op.cit., pp.184-203, esp. p.189.

6. Cited idem, p.189. Weinfeld says that this document is something between a Grant and a Treaty.

The Royal Grant constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant. Whereas in the Treaty, the curse is normally directed towards the vassal who will violate the rights of his master, in the Grant the curse is directed towards the one who will violate the rights of the King's vassal.[1]

3.   THE LAW-CODE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

In structure, the Old Babylonian Law-Codes are similar to the Royal Grant and the Treaty.[2]   These codifications of the Old Babylonian period were motivated by the desire for social reform.   The publication of a Law-Code was described as an act of mīšarum.[3]   This was usually done shortly after the monarch ascended the throne.[4]   These Law-Codes, especially the Code of Hamurabi, had a great influence on the literature of the ancient Near East.[5]   There is therefore a possibility that this form had some influence on the people of the Old Testament.

C.   THE COVENANT IN ISRAEL

In the Old Testament the evidence of Covenant making is not in specific texts but in narrative descriptions of what took place.   With this limitation in mind we shall discuss attempts that have been made to compare certain Biblical passages with texts of Treaties, Royal Grants, and Law-Codes.   It will be seen that seldom does a single form lie behind a passage: there is usually a combination of forms.   The problem is further complicated by the claim of Tradition Historians that the various stages of a developing tradition can make use of differing

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1.   Weinfeld, op.cit., p.185.
2.   Idem , Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp.148-150.   They consisted of a preamble, historical prologue, laws, and blessings and curses.   The witness of the gods is implied.
3.   Idem , p.149 fn. 1.
4.   Idem , p.153.
5.   Idem , p.150.

forms.[1]   In spite of these and many other difficulties in detail, there is clear evidence to show that Israel used various secular forms to describe her Covenant relationship with Yahweh.[2]

Certain scholars claim to detect the Treaty Form in passages describing the Sinai Covenant.[3]   There has also been a recognition that the Exodus tradition is an integral part of the Covenant at Sinai.[4] Whatever the original stipulations of the Covenant were, they were broadened to include a vast amount of legal and cultic detail.[5]

1. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, p.14.   McCarthy says that Form Criticism should not be used to cast doubt on the claims of Literary and Tradition History criticism (ibid., pp.15ff.).   J.A. Thompson thinks otherwise (cf. The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament, pp.33f.).   An example of this opinion is found in W.L. Moran's comment:

   "(The) separation of the Exodus and covenant traditions can
   no longer be seriously maintained.   The covenant with
   Yahweh demands in its very form an historical introduction
   and foundation, and this can only be the Exodus tradition."

(Review of Das Bundesformular, by K. Baltzer, Biblica XL (1962), p.104).   Great care ought to be exercised in the use of Tradition History criteria, cf. above, pp.17f.

2. The existence of inter-human Treaties in Israel shows that the Israelites were familiar with the Treaty Form (Hillers, Covenant, p.49), cf. J.A. Thompson, op.cit., pp.19f., for a list of probable instances.   It is particularly significant that בְּרִית is used of these as well as of the Divine Covenants.

3. J.A. Thompson, op.cit., pp.21f.   Other scholars who use a similar approach to that of Thompson, but who are not as detailed or confident in their conclusions are W. Beyerlin, Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions (trans. S. Rudman.   Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1965. Herkunft und Geschichte der ältesten Sinaitraditionen [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1961]), pp.49-67;   Baltzer, op.cit.,pp.27-31.

4. Moran, Biblica XL (1962), p.104; H.B. Huffmon, "The Exodus, Sinai and the Credo", CBQ XXVII (1965), pp.101-113.   For the generally held opinions of the source division of these chapters cf. B.S. Childs, Exodus.   A Commentary (The Old Testament Library, London: SCM Press, 1974); J. Muilenberg, "The Intercession of the Covenant Mediator (Exodus 33:1a, 12-17)", Words and Meanings, eds. P.R. Ackroyd and B. Lindars (Essays presented to David Whiton Thomas on his retirement from the Regius Professorship of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge, 1968; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); p.162 fn. 1.   For the present writer's opinions of the feasibility of such an approach cf. above Chapter II.

5. The detailed instructions regarding the making of a Tabernacle are a good example of this.

There is therefore some justification for Weinfeld's claim that the Sinai Covenant is moulded primarily on the Law-Code Form.[1] McCarthy has criticized the claim that the Treaty Form can be detected in the Sinai Covenant.[2] He would almost certainly have questioned Weinfeld's argument about the Law-Code Form as well.[3] This is because he maintains that the Sitz im Leben is far more likely to be cultic than legal.[4] While the secondary Sitz im Leben is probably cultic, the amount of legal material found in the narratives suggests that the primary Sitz im Leben is legal.[5]

In the case of Deuteronomy, McCarthy is far less hesitant. He writes that "it is pre-eminently a covenant document".[6] To a greater extent than the Sinai Covenant, Deuteronomy makes use of both the Treaty and the Law-Code Forms.[7] One way of showing this is to sift specific formulae from the text.[8] Allied to this method is that of outlining the thematic structure of the book. Such an outline betrays features of the Treaty and Law-Code Forms, even in the order of the themes.[9] Because the

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1. Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, pp.156f. He believes that both the Treaty Form and the Law Code Form underlie the Sinai Covenant.
2. Treaty and Covenant, pp.172f.; Old Testament Covenant, pp.17f.
3. Cf. D.J. McCarthy, Review of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, by M. Weinfeld, Biblica LIV (1973), pp.448-452. While he does not accept Weinfeld's thesis in its entirety he certainly does not reject it altogether.
4. Treaty and Covenant, pp.72f. He says that the references to Theophany and sacrifice indicate this.
5. Cf. below, pp.36f.
6. Old Testament Covenant, p.22.
7. Weinfeld, op.cit., p.157; J.A. Thompson, Deuteronomy, pp.18-21.
8. Cf. Weinfeld, op.cit., p.66.
9. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, pp.109ff.; Cf. J.A. Thompson, op.cit. pp.14-21 for summaries of the important views on the subject. (This work can also be consulted on the debate over the source analysis of Deuteronomy.) Anyone who attempts to draw up an outline of Deuteronomy will soon realize how difficult the interweaving and reptition of themes make this. This has led scholars to surmise that it consists of several cycles of covenantal structures (McCarthy, op.cit., pp.110ff.).

study of forms must include a study of their content and Sitz im Leben,
these methods need to be supplemented.[1]   A study of the distinctive
vocabulary and style of Deuteronomy reveals much that is reminiscent of
the Treaties and Law-Codes.[2]   An approach which gets even closer to the
heart of the book is that of J.A. Thompson who examines the main
theological themes of Deuteronomy.[3]   He concludes that Deuteronomy
adapts some of the main ideas associated with Treaty-making to express
Israel's relation to Yahweh.[4]   Enough evidence has been gathered to show
that Deuteronomy bears many features that can also be seen in ancient Near
Eastern Treaties and Law-Codes.[5]   The primary Sitz im Leben of at least
some of the material is probably legal.   A cultic Sitz im Leben is also
likely for some of the material, but it is probably secondary.[6]

1.   An important criticism of the approach which concentrates almost solely
     on a formal likeness to the Treaty Form is that "formula criticism" and
     not Form Criticism is being practised (R.J. Thompson, Moses and the
     Law.   A Century of Criticism since Graf, p.153).

2.   Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, pp.320-365;
     J.A. Thompson, op.cit., pp.30-35.   Cf. also W.L. Moran, "The
     Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy",
     CBQ XXV:1 (1963), pp.77-87.

3.   Op.cit., pp.68-77.   He lists the following:
     a)   Yahweh the Lord of the Covenant;
     b)   Yahweh the God of History;
     c)   Israel the people of the Covenant;
     d)   The worship of the God of the Covenant.

4.   Cf. esp. op.cit., pp.68f.

5.   This is not to say that other forms had no influence at all.   For
     example, on the influence of Wisdom, cf. McCarthy, Treaty and
     Covenant, p.136.

6.   Von Rad has done much to show that Deuteronomy is not codified law,
     but preaching about the Law, cf. Studies in Deuteronomy, trans.
     D. Stalker (SBT IX; London: SCM, 1953.   Deuteronomuim - Studien
     [Gottingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1948]), pp.15f.   Cf. below,
     pp.36f. where it will be argued that material with an original
     legal Sitz im Leben could have been used in the cult.

As with the Sinai Covenant and Deuteronomy, Yahweh's Covenant with Abraham has been interpreted with the aid of the Treaty Form.[1] Parallels that have been found with the Royal Grant Form have cast a certain amount of doubt on the use made of the Treaty Form.[2] Scholars have come to realize that the Abrahamic Covenant is different from the Sinaitic Covenant: the Abrahamic is promissory while the Sinaitic is obligatory.[3] The Davidic Covenant like the Abrahamic bears marks of the Royal Grant and is essentially a promissory Covenant.[4]

While Yahweh's Covenant with David and his dynasty bears definite marks of the Royal Grant Form, a strong case has been made for the understanding of the King as Yahweh's vassal.[5] This is the case even though there are some important differences between the Suzerainty Treaty Form and the Davidic Covenant.[6] The combination of ideas in the Davidic Covenant is paralleled only in the Suzerainty Treaties.[7]

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1. Cf. Mitchell, "The Lord's Covenant with Abram", WTJ (   ), pp.24-48.

2. Cf. M. Weinfeld, JAOS XC (1970), pp.184-203. The Covenant with Abraham, according to Weinfeld, is like the Royal Grant – a gift bestowed on an individual who has served his master well.

3. Winfeld, op.cit., p.184. The distinction between the two Covenants is not an absolute one as they have a good deal in common. The difference is one of emphasis. Cf. below, pp.51f.

4. Weinfeld, op.cit., p.184, et passim. Cf. R.E. Clements, Abraham and David, on the similarities in theology, and even origin (according to Clements) of the two Covenants. On similarities with the Noahic Covenant, cf. Hillers, Covenant, pp.98-119.

5. There is sometimes a close connection between the Royal Grant and the Treaty, cf. above, pp.29f.

6. For example there are no conditional blessings and curses in the Davidic Covenant.

7. De Vaux, "The King of Israel, Vassal of Yahweh", The Bible and the Ancient Near East, pp.152-180; Calderone, Dynastic Oracle and Suzerainty Treaty; Cf. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, pp.84f.

A number of parallels have been seen between the Treaty Form and certain Old Testament passages.[1] These claims have come under increasing attack from scholars who think that other parallels are often equally possible.[2] This very necessary qualification has been applied to the claim that the prophets consciously used Treaty concepts and language.[3] Nevertheless in the case of the prophets, Clements is probably too cautious. The Treaty is the most probable parallel writes Hillers, "not because of the verbal parallels and the parallels in imagery in themselves, but because there is such a similarity in function".[4] Much of the prophetic preaching is based on God's Covenant with Israel.[5] This, taken together with the fact that the great figures in her past were related to Yahweh by a Covenant, makes it hardly surprising that the Covenant is an integral part of Israelite cultic worship.[6]

While it is difficult to know whether the Treaty Form itself was used,[7] there can be no doubt that Israelite worship made a lot of use of the theology of Covenant.[8] The focal point of worship in the Temple was the "Ark of the Covenant" which was the throne of Yahweh and housed the two tablets of stone whereon were written the Covenant stipulations.[9]

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1. Cf. K. Baltzer, The Covenant Formulary.

2. Cf. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, pp.76f.; 88f.; et passim.

3. Cf. R.E. Clements, Prophecy and Tradition (Growing Points in Theology. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).

4. Covenant, p.138.

5. Cf. the earlier Clements, Prophecy and Covenant (Studies in Biblical Theology XLIII. London: SCM Press, 1965).

6. The Covenant is a key concept in Israelite theology. Hillers writes:

   > "It [the Covenant] combined in one scheme many of
   > her [Israel's] most important beliefs and held them
   > in a nicely adjusted balance" (Covenant, p.66).

7. Baltzer says that it probably was (op.cit., p.89).

8. Cf. J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties the the Old Testament, pp.31-33; Baltzer, op.cit., p.88. Much of the evidence we have of Israelite worship is derived from the Psalter.

9. Ex 30:6, 36; 25:22; 29:42f.; cf. 1 Kings 12:26ff.; 2 Kings 11: 4, 12, 17; 23:1-3; cf. Hillers, op.cit., pp.74-78.

In worship the righteous acts of Yahweh were declared,[1] and Yahweh as
Sovereign could command Israel's total allegiance.[2]   While the Covenant·
idea was clearly used in the cult the existence of·regular Covenant
Renewal Festivals is a debatable point.   S. Mowinckel developed the idea
that the Feast of Tabernacles which recalled the Covenant of Sinai, was
originally a New Year Festival at which Yahweh was acclaimed King.[3]
However, before the word "renewal" may be used it needs to be carefully
defined.   Strictly speaking, a renewal of the Covenant is necessary only
when it has been broken.[4]   The idea of an annual renewal is contrary to
the doctrine that the Covenant is concluded   עַד - עוֹלָם .
Its duration does not depend on a natural cycle and calendar, and its
validity can be put in question only by historical events.[5]   However,
if by "Covenant Renewal Ceremony" is meant an annual ceremony at which
the Covenant was remembered and taught, it is quite possible that there
was such a ceremony.[6]   This is one way of explaining the profound
influence that the Covenant idea had on Israel.   The instruction given
to sons is another explanation.[7]   A third explanation has often been
overlooked;   it is that historical events lie behind the narratives of
the Covenants.   Definite historical events are the only satisfactory
explanation for later beliefs.[8]

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1.   Ps 78; 105 (esp. vv. 12-41); 106; 107; etc.

2.   Ps 40:4; 92:9f.; 96:10; etc.

3.   The Psalms in Israel's Worship, Vols I & II, trans. D.R. AP-Thomas
      (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967. Offersang og Sangoffer [Oslo:
      H.Aschehoug & Co., 1951]); cf. G. Widengren, "King and Covenant",
      JSS 11:1 (1957), pp.1-32 on the supposed role of the king in this.
      Cf. below, pp.43-47.

4.   Baltzer, op.cit., p.97. Cf. idem, pp.39-60 for examples. 'Renewal'
      is not to be confused with 'ratification'. The ratification of a
      covenant takes place when there is a change of leaders in Israel (idem,
      p.97). Cf. idem, pp.63-81 for examples.

5.   Idem, pp.84f.

6.   The reference in Deut 31:9ff. at least points in this direction
      (McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, p.7). Cf. Baltzer, op.cit., p.84,
      for examples of Treaties demanding regular recitation.

7.   Moran, Biblica XLIII (1962), p.106, cf. Deut 6:20-25; etc., and Sefîre
      IC, 1ff. It would be helpful to know whether such instruction was
      purely private or whether it was also conducted publicly.

8.   G.E. Wright, "Cult and History", Interpretation XVI (1962), pp.3-20.
      Cf. above pp.17,20. It is difficult to accept that the narratives could
      have been created entirely by the cult.

The various Covenants exercised a profound influence on the life of Israel.[1] It is also plain that there are significant similarities between the Covenants, and the Treaty, Royal Grant, and Law-Code Forms of the ancient Near East. The similarities ought not to obscure the differences that there are. The central difference is that it is Yahweh who is the chief party in the Covenants. While the idea of a god being a party to a Treaty is rare, it is not unknown.[2] But the character of Yahweh gives the Covenants that He makes their uniqueness. His love, mercy and moral integrity, are without parallel.[3] It is well that we remember this as we attempt to understand, with the help of ancient Near Eastern parallels, the nature of the Covenant Mediator in Israel.

D. THE MEDIATOR IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY MAKING AS A POSSIBLE

PARALLEL TO THE COVENANT MEDIATOR IN ISRAEL

The office of Mediator in ancient Near Eastern Treaty making is far from obvious.[4] It is also doubtful whether the little that we do

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1. The Sinai Covenant was the most influential, although in certain circles the Davidic (and the associated Zion tradition) exercised a profound influence. Throughout the period of the monarchy little is heard about the Abrahamic Covenant. Scholars think that it came into its own as a result of the Exile when a new basis for Israel's relationship with Yahweh was needed.

2. The mišarum act of Urukagina is sanctified by a treaty with a god (Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, p.149). In Isa 28:15 a treaty is made with Death/Sheol. The Ugoritic epics demonstrate that Death can be regarded as a god (Hillers, op.cit., p.106). Ancient Near Eastern religion had a concept of a Lord-Servant relationship (J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament, pp.26f.). For a possible link between such thinking and Israel, cf. R.E. Clements, "Baal-Berith of Shechem", JSS XIII (1968), pp.21-32.

3. Cf. J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament, p.38.

4. For the sake of brevity and because most work has been done on the Treaties, only they will be examined in detail.

discover about the office will have much relevance for a study of the Covenant Mediator in Israel. There are five settings in which the word could apply:

a) There are cases of mediation between two parties, usually by their Suzerain.[1] In the Old Testament Yahweh can do this.[2]

b) In most Treaty making the Suzerain speaks for himself even though he might employ ministers. These ministers can hardly be considered mediators in the proper sense as they are completely effaced by the Supreme Lord who is considered to have accomplished all.[3] Israel's Covenant is with Yahweh who usually makes use of a spokesman - a mediator who stands between Him and the nation.[4] Because of the infinite qualitative difference between God and man, a mediator is needed.

c) In entering into a treaty, the king represents not only himself, but his immediate family, the people whom he rules, and his and their descendants.[5] This makes him a mediator of the Treaty in the sense that he acts on behalf of other people, standing between his family etc. and the other party to the Treaty. In the Old Testament Abraham is the best example of this.[6]

d) There are a few instances of double Treaties involving Suzerain, vassal, and vassal's subjects in various relations. There are cases where a Treaty between Suzerain and vassal is followed by a Treaty between the vassal and his subjects.[7] There is also a case of a Suzerain concluding a Treaty with the people in spite of a prior Treaty with the vassal king.[8] This example is in many ways similar to the position of Moses.[9]

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1. Cf. J.M. Munn-Rankin, Iraq XVIII (1956), pp.78, 95f.
2. Hos 2:18; Josh 24:25; 2 Kings 23:3. Cf. G. Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, I, p.130.
3. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, p.168.
4. Idem, pp.168ff.
5. Cf. above, p.27.
6. Cf. below, Ch. III.
7. For examples, cf. Baltzer, op.cit., pp.79-81.
8. Cf. Calderone, op.cit., p.22.
9. Cf. below, p.42.

e)   The suggestion that the Suzerain in imposing an oath by the gods on the vassal acts as a mediator has been criticized by McCarthy on the ground that the Suzerain acts for himself and in his own fight.[1]   This criticism needs to be modified because even though the kings alone are named as the contracting parties, they are acting as representatives of the gods of their respective states.[2]   Nevertheless the gods never feature as prominently as does Yahweh when for example He is acting through Moses.

E.   MOSES AS A COVENANT MEDIATOR[3]

From the first chapter of Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy Moses is the dominant human being.[4]   To disobey Moses is to sin against God.[5] He speaks the words of Yahweh.[6]   At times Aaron and even Miriam appear to

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1.   *Treaty and Covenant*, p.169 fn.1.

2.   Cf. Munn-Rankin, *Iraq* XVIII (1956), pp.72f.   Responsibility for foreign and domestic policy rested ultimately with the god, who as owner and ruler of the state, made his commands known to the king by means of omens (cf. *idem*, pp.70f.).

3.   Most of the discussion will deal with evidence from the Book of Exodus. The problems of dealing with this, and other books of the Pentateuch, are enormous.   For the present writer's approach, cf. above Ch. I. For a very useful summary of the doctrine of Moses as a Mediator based on Source Critical assumptions, cf. B.S. Childs, *Exodus. A Commentary*, pp.351-360.

4.   Of course Yahweh is the chief actor, but so often He acts through Moses.

5.   E.g. Num 32:23.

6.   This is made very clear in Ex 32:20-23, 25-31.   Deuteronomy on the other hand tends to represent the Law as having been given by Moses and not directly by God.   In its present form Deuteronomy is presented as preaching about the Law (J.A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, pp.12, 24, 60).

have a role that might diminish that of Moses,[1] but Moses remains the
leading figure throughout.[2]   Only Moses could ascend the mountain and
only he could persuade God to change His mind.[3]   ⌐In the intercession
passages the pattern usually is that the people are suffering or are
sinning and Moses calls on God's mercy.[4]   There is also a definite
plea-response pattern in this literary form.[5]   Moses certainly took his
unique position seriously.   In ex 32:33 he was willing to be vicariously
blotted out, and in Deut 9:18f. his intercessory activity looks very much
like an act of propitiation.[6]   It is in the context of his desperate
pleading for the life of Israel that we learn most about Moses' part in
the Covenant.

In Ex 33:12, Moses reminds Yahweh that He had said,   יְדַעְתִּ֫יךָ֜
בְשֵׁ֖ם   .   It has been shown that   יד֜ע   , when used in
Treaties and related texts, can be a technical term for legal recognition.[7]
Both Huffmon and Muilenbueg say that it is used in this sense in 33:12.[8]

1.   Cf. Ex 28:30;   15:20;   Mic 6:4.

2.   Cf. Num 12:15 where his uniqueness is graphically demonstrated.

3.   Without doubt Moses is the intercessor par excellence in the Old
     Testament (cf. J.A. Thompson, Deuteronomy, p.143).

4.   Not always does Moses intercede (cf. Num 16:15);   and at times when
     he does, he is not entirely successful (cf. Num 12:13-15).   The
     following belong to the literary form: Ex 8:8-14 (Heb. 4-10);
     8:28-32 (Heb 24-28);   9:27-29;   10: 16-19;   32:11;14, 30-36;
     33:12-17;   34:8f.;   Num 12:9-16;   14:13-19;   21:4-7;   Deut 9:13;21,
     25-29;   10:10f.

5.   Cf. Muilenberg, Words and Meanings, eds P. Ackroyd & B. Lindars,
     pp.170f.

6.   His death outside the promised land is probably not meant to be
     considered vicarious (J.A. Thompson, op.cit., pp.100f.).   Cf.
     B.S. Childs who thinks that it was (op.cit., p.372).

7.   H.B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew Y A D A ", BASOR
     CLXXXI (1966), pp.31-37;   cf. H.B. Huffmon and S.D. Parker, "A
     Further Note on the Treaty Background of Hebrew Y A D A ", BASOR
     CLXXXIV (1966), pp.36-38.

8.   BASOR CLXXXI (1966), pp.34f.;   Words and Meanings, eds. P. Ackroyd
     & B. Lindars, pp.180f.

This implies, says Muilenberg, "a personal realtionship, indeed a very personal inward relation".[1] By itself Ex 33:12 does not imply that God had a separate Covenant with Moses. But the incident described in Num 14:12 shows that from God's point of view, a Covenant with Moses which did not include the people, was a possibility.[2] Ex 20:18ff. also suggests some kind of a distinction between Moses and the people as far as God's attitude to them is concerned.[3] The distinction is even clearer if we read with LXX in Ex 34:10,   כְּרֹת וַיֹּאמֶר   . As the more difficult reading it is preferable.[4] This would imply that the Covenant was made firstly with Moses; the people participating only indirectly.[5] In much the same way, ancient Near Eastern Treaties may appear to be between kings as individuals, but in fact they are inter-national.[6] The fact that Moses is acting on behalf of the Israelite people comes out particularly in the passages where he intercedes for their wickedness.

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1. Ibid., p.177. He adds:

> "It may not be without significance that some of the most illuminating parallels are associated with Abraham (Gen 18:19), Moses (Deut 34:10), and David (2 Sam 7:20)" (ibid., p.181).

2. The fact that Moses manages to persuade God not to destroy the people need not imply that this passage contradicts the idea of a double Covenant. All Moses asks is that God remain in a Covenant relationship with the people.

3. Cf. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, pp.165f.

4. Beyerlin, op.cit., pp.78f.; J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament, p.34.

5. Beyerlin, op.cit., pp.78f. Referring to Ex 19:10, Beyerlin points out that while everyone is to consecrate himself, Moses is to do so on behalf of the community; cf. Josh 7:13 (op.cit., p.140 fn.616).

6. Cf. above p.27.

    In the light of the key role that Moses has in the Covenant, Hillers is surely wrong in his claim that the Covenant was concluded with the heads of individual families (Covenant, p.63). Neither is his later qualification sufficient to explain the role of Moses.

    He writes that Moses had

    > "a vital function at the conclusion of the pact with God, but, this concluded, he does not continue to stand between the people and God as an indispensable mediator" (ibid., p.79).

All that we are told about Moses indicates that he was one of the people. In Ex 20:18-21 his call is confirmed by the people. He is thus not simply God's mouthpiece, but represents Israel before God.[1] The elders can also be considered as representatives of the people.[2] They should be viewed as scaled down versions of Moses.[3] Moses is the chief representative of the people and of God.

The Mediator Form found in the Moses stories is believed by many scholars to have had its Sitz im Leben in a Covenant Renewal Festival, or some other ceremony, in which Moses functioned as the prototype of the Covenant Mediator between Yahweh and the people.[4] The Davidic king in Jerusalem is said to be the Covenant Mediator of which Moses is the type.[5]

F.   THE KING AS A COVENANT MEDIATOR

In speaking of the king as a Covenant Mediator it is important to state which Covenant is being referred to.   The Davidic Covenant, of

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1. Childs, op.cit., pp.371f.

2. H.R. Jones, commenting on Ex 24:1, says that Nadab and Abihu (sons of Aaron), and the seventy elders are representatives and witnesses of the people (NBC, p.134).   Sheriffs says that in Treaty contexts the elders are usually the representatives of the people (op.cit., pp.465-467).   On the role of the elder in early Israel, cf. further Beyerlin, op.cit., pp.27f.

3. Cf. e.g. Ex 18:14ff.   This reference indicates that the elders are also representatives of God.

4. Muilenberg, op.cit., p.168; Widengren JSS 11:1 (1957), pp.17-21; Beyerlin, op.cit., pp.139f.; Childs, Exodus, pp.355-360.

5. What is to be made of the similarities between Moses as a Covenant Mediator and the Davidic Monarchy is far from clear. Was one moulded on the other; and if so, which? To a large extent the scholar's presuppositions will guide his answer to these questions.   For the present writer's view of the relation between cult and history, cf. above, pp. 17, 20, 37.

which David is the mediator, should not be confused with the Sinaiatic.[1]
Weinfeld has evidence for his claim that the promise of a dynasty to
David was formulated in the style of the Royal Grant to outstanding
servants.[2] Thus even though references to David's relation to Yahweh
point strongly in the direction of Yahweh's gracious election of David,[3]
place is given for descriptions of the servant's loyalty.[4] The promise
of a dynasty would stand even if David's descendants disobeyed God.[5]
Nevertheless it is expected that future Davidic kings would obey Yahweh
as did their ancestor David.[6] Indeed the Deuteronomist put the promise
of David under condition of obedience.[7] Not only was the king expected
to obey the Law himself, he was expected to advance the cause of
וּצְדָקָה   מִשְׁפָּט .[8] During the coronation ceremony he was

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1. On the difference between the two cf. esp. Weinfeld, JAOS XC (1970),
   p.184.

2. Ibid., passim. Cf. above,pp.30f.   on the Royal Grant Form.

3. E.g. 2 Sam 7:8, cf. Ps 89.

4. 1 Kings 3:6; 14:18; 15:3; 2 Kings 20:3. Cf. Weinfeld, op.cit.,
   pp.186-188. for close parallels of concepts and even terminology
   with the Royal Grant. On the King as a vassal, cf. above, p.35.

5. Cf. 2 Sam 7:13-16.   For a parallel example, cf. above, p.30.
   While in the Northern Kingdom the idea was kept alive that only he
   who was personally called by Yahweh could legitimately be king, in
   the Southern Kingdom it was believed that David's whole dynasty had
   been called (M. Noth, "Office and Vocation", The Laws in the
   Pentateuch and Other Essays, p.241).

6. This is the case even in 2 Sam 7 where the Sinai Covenant which
   includes all Israelites, is presupposed (Calderone, Dynastic Oracle
   and Suzerainty Treaty, pp.60-66).

7. 1 Kings 2:4; 8:25; 9:4f. Cf. Ps 132:12 which shows that in some
   circles at least, during the monarchic period, there was the idea of
   conditionality associated with the promise existing alongside that of
   unconditionality (Weinfeld, JAOS CC (1970), p.196).

8. Cf. A.D.H. Mayes, "The Covenant on Sinai and the Covenant with
   David", Hermathena CX (1970), pp.37-51. After an examination of the
   use of the Sinai Covenant in the Jerusalem cult, and its use in
   prophecies originating in the Southern Kingdom, Mayes concludes that
   in spite of differences between the two Covenants, both could have
   been preserved in Judah and Jerusalen throughout the monarchy period.

handed the   עֵדוּת   together with the crown.[1] Apart from an
early resistance to kingship (1 Sam 8), the institution was not seen as a
rejection of the Lord of the Covenant. Expectations concerning the role
of the king as a Mediator of the Covenant Law is expressed in prophecies
about the advent of an ideal ruler from the house of David.[2] The
Judean monarchs described by the Deuteronomists as doing   הַיָּשָׁר
in the eyes of Yahweh like their father David, are 'those who do ·
  מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה .[3] The king's special responsibility is
to ensure that Yahweh's commands are obeyed. This meant that political
and religious loyalty were very close in Israel.[4] There must have been
specifically formulated covenants between the king and the people of
Israel, as there were among the surrounding peoples.[5] In 2 Kings 11:17
there are at least two covenants.[6] In the first, both king and people
pledge allegiance to Yahweh, and in the second, the people pledge
obedience to the king.[7] Von Rad cuts through all the debate when he says

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1. 2 Kings 11:12. "Covenant Stipulations" is a satisfactory rendering of
  עֵדוּת   cf. Kitchen, Ancient Orient and the Old Testament,
pp.106-109; Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, pp.85f.
Cf. Widengren, JSS 11:1 (1957), pp.1-32, on the giving of the Law
in this ceremony.

2. E.g. Isa 9:6; cf. 16:5; 11:1-5; 23:5-6.

3. 1 Kings 3:3; 15:11; 22;43; 2 Kings 18:3; 22:2. Cf. Weinfeld,
Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, p.154. Weinfeld likens
the king's expected concern with social justice to the acts of
mišarum (ibid., pp.154f.).

4. Deut 13 treats religious treason as if it were political (Weinfeld,
op.cit., pp.91-100). Similarly, Assyrian thought could not separate
obedience to gods from obedience to the king (Sheriffs, op.cit., p.42).

5. Weinfeld, op.cit., pp.89f. He lists several ancient Near Eastern
examples.

6. Baltzer, op.cit., p.79 favours two, but Moran suggests three
(Biblica XLIII (1962), p.106)!

7. Other possible examples are 2 Kings 23:3; and 1 Sam 12, which up to
v.14 resembles a covenant between king and people, and then looks
like a covenant between the people (including the king) and Yahweh
(McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, p.142 fn.4).

that he suspects dittography.[1]   On the basis of alleged parallels with double treaties in other nations, Baltzer questions such a move.[2]   But McCarthy has pointed out that the parallels are not exact.[3]   Nevertheless it remains possible that a double covenant is referred to in 2 Kings 11:17: a religious one between God, and the king and people; and a political one between the king and the people.[4]   While the king is responsible for seeing that   הקדצו   טפשמ   are practised by his people, because of the uniqueness of his position, his own private life can dramatically influence the welfare of his people.

The historical books present the king as very much of a mixed blessing, but the Pslams, as recent study has shown, reveal the king as the focal point in Israel's life.[5]   While a bad king brings a curse on the people, a good king brings   הקדצ ,   הכרב , and much else.[6]   A.R. Johnson has argued that this concept of the king as a

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1.   Studies in Deuteronomy. SBT, IX. Trans. D. Stalker, from rev.ed.
     (London: SCM, 1953.   Deuteronomium-Studien Göttingen: Vandenhoek &
     Ruprecht, 1948), p.64 n.1.
     The Chronicler also excludes the second covenant (2 Chr 23:16).

2.   Op.cit., p.79.   Cf. above, p.39.

3.   Treaty and Covenant, pp.142f. fn.4.

4.   Weinfeld, op.cit., pp.87f.   Weinfeld says that the Chronicler omitted
     the reference to a political covenant for theological reasons (ibid.,
     pp.87f. fn. 8).

5.   Whether the king was thought of as divine, charismatic, or anything
     else, is not the concern of this Thesis.   For Methodological
     principles which should govern such discussion, cf. M. Noth, "God,
     King, and Nation in the Old Testament", The Laws in the Pentateuch
     and Other Studies.   For a thorough survey of the problem, cf.
     D.J.A. Clines, "The Psalms and the King", TSFB LXXI (1975), pp.1-6.

6.   2 Sam 21:1-14; 24:10;25; cf. 2 Sam 3:28f.; 14:9; Jer 15:4; and
     Ju 17:6; 21:25.   Psalm 72 is the best known of many references
     in the Psalms. Cf. A.R. Johnson, Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel,
     (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), p.3.

source of blessing is based on the idea of the king as a corporate
personality.[1] While there could be some truth in this claim, it has
been pointed out that what he calls the "psychical community" in Israel,
does not extend much further than the family.[2] Nevertheless whatever
the precise reasons are, there is a definite link between the lifestyle
of the king and that of his people.[3] The Davidic Covenant was therefore
potentially a great source of blessing to the Israelites, expecially
those in the south. The king served as the chief mediator between
Yahweh and Israel. On the one hand he was chosen by Yahweh and on the
other he represented the people.[4]

G.   CONCLUSION

The function of the mediator in ancient Near Eastern Treaty making
is not as highly developed as it is in Israelite Covenant making. The
main reason for this is that Israel's Covenant is with Yahweh who is holy.
The institution of kingship and the figure of Moses are the most important
instances of the office of Covenant Mediator in Israel. While both
Moses and kingship shed light on Abraham as a Covenant Mediator, it is the
family, with the father as head, which provides the most significant
Sitz im Leben.[5] This will be the subject of some discussion in the
next chapter.

1. Ibid., p.6.

2. J.R. Porter, "Legal Aspects of the Concept of 'Corporate Personality'
    in the Old Testament", VT XV (1965), p.368. For a full discussion
    of the notion of a "Corporate Personality", cf. below, pp.63f.

3. Cf. the examples above p.46 fn.6.

4. Cf. 1 Sam 12:13 where both elements find expression.

5. For the average Israelite, the family was the most significant
    institution to which he belonged.

CHAPTER IV

ABRAHAM'S CALL AND THE PROMISE MADE TO HIM: A STUDY OF 12:1-3

A.   INTRODUCTION

Many of the issues raised by the Abraham stories are dealt with for the first time here in 12:1-3. This passage also serves as a commentary on many of the stories as in a sense they are the result of the vocation and promises that Abraham receives in 12:1-3. Coming immediately after Chs 1-11, this passage is very significant, marking the transition from Primaeval to Sacred history. While it provides the key to understanding Primaeval history, Primaeval history is the key to understanding Israel's election. Abraham is specially called so that he would be a blessing to Israel and to all men. Even though his obedience in a sense merits God's call and promises, the emphasis is on God's gracious activity. As a mediator of blessing, the person and work of Abraham are at times described in terms usually associated with kingship. While kingship ideology is used to describe the role of Abraham, it is the family which provides the most important background. Abraham is the head and as such the representative of the members of his family. The relation of Abraham's call to the history of the Second Millenium B.C., and the religious beliefs of Abraham are difficult matters. But the most perplexing problem is the extent to which Abraham is to be understood as an individual and as a "corporate person". A study of the universal background to 12:1-3 will serve to introduce the problem.

B.   THE CONTEXT: CHAPTERS 1-11

1.   THE UNIVERSAL BACKGROUND

These chapters begin with the creation of the world and of man. The stories reveal God's intimate and personal concern for all men. Unfortunately man rejects God's way. Yet in spite of this God repeatedly

reveals His mercy by for example clothing Adam and Eve and providing the sign of the rainbow. But this element of grace is absent at the end of the Primaeval history when the nations are dispersed and judged. The call of Abraham (12:1-3) which marks the transition from Primaeval to Sacred history is thus meant to be understood as God's act of grace.[1] The reader's attention is moved from mankind in general to this one man. This rapid switch in itself indicates that somehow this one man is significant for all men.[2] Just as in the tenth generation after Adam there arose Noah, a righteous man who became father of the new humanity after the flood, so in the tenth generation after Noah comes Abraham.[3] Dequeker writes:

> The answer to the question: "why was Abraham, the father of Israel, elected?" is to be found only in the history of mankind, as it is described in the primaeval history. Abraham was called to become a blessing for all the peoples on earth. As long as the primeval and universal dimension of Gen 1-11 is not taken into account, Israel's salvation history will seem outrageous.[4]

2. RELATIVES IN MESOPOTAMIA

The mention of Abraham's relatives in 11:10-32 is far from being only incidentally significant. The same can be said of 22:20-24.

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1. G. Von Rad, Genesis, pp.152-154. Cf. N.E. Wagner, "Abraham and David?", Studies on the Ancient Palestinian World. Fetschrift to F.V. Winnet, eds. J.W. Wevers and D.B. Redford (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1972), pp.121ff., who suggests that this view is acceptable only if one has decided that there is Yahwistic material prior to the Abraham story.

2. G. Von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays, p.67, says that Genesis 12:1-3 is the real conclusion and explanation of pre-Patriarchal history.

3. On the link between the Noahic and the Abrahamic Covenants cf. L. Dequeker, "Noah and Israel. The everlasting divine covenant with mankind", Questions disputées d'Ancien Testament, ed. C. Brekelmans. (Bibliotheca Eplemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium XXXIII. Gembloux: Leuven University Press, 1974), pp.126-129.

4. Ibid., p.125.

These passages show Israel's consciousness of distant kinships.[1]   The
twelve tribes of Israel are not only descended from Terah through
Abraham, but through Sarah (cf. 20:12), and through Rebekah, Leah, and
Rachel of the lineage of Nahor, son of Terah.   Abraham insists that
these ancestral mothers of the Covenant people come from his old home
(24:1ff.).   Thus even though Abraham is commanded to leave, there are
still strong links binding him to his old home.   The career of Lot,
which receives a remarkable amount of attention in the Abraham stories,
shows clearly that Abraham's relatives are the first recipients of blessing.

The mention of Sarah's barrenness in 11:30 makes the reader conscious
of the paradox of God's initial speech to Abraham.[2]   The reference to
Abraham's age in 12:4 has the same effect.

C.   A STUDY OF 12:1-3

1.   THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP ESTABLISHED

Unlike the nations who set out to make a name for themselves by
building a great tower, Abraham is called![3]   Muilenberg writes:

> Now a nation is to be born under the direction
> and providence of the God of history, and in Him
> it will find the source of its life and the
> meaning of its destiny.[4]

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1.   D. Kidner, Genesis, p.144.

2.   G. Von Rad, Genesis, p.159.   There was no greater sorrow for an
     Israelite or Oriental than childlessness.   To die childless is a
     terrible fate (Num 27:4).   The theme of the barren ancestress runs
     through the Patriarchal stories like a red line.   The effect of this
     is a heightening of the grace of God in remedying a situation which
     man could not really solve.   Cf. 1 Sam 1 where barrenness precedes
     the intervention of God.

3.   Cf. J. Muilenberg, "Abraham and the Nations.   Blessing and World
     History", Interp. XIX (1965), pp.389f.

4.   Ibid., p.392.

Even though ‏בְּרִית‏ and other words for a Covenant are not used here,
a Covenant is clearly implied. This is indicated by the fact that
Abraham is chosen by God and that the provisions are essentially those
which are found in the passages dealing specifically with the Covenant,
like Chapters 15 and 17.[1] This repetition of the Covenant promises
in the Abraham stories is for the sake of emphasis: it shows that it
is "fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass".[2] This is the
main reason for the repetition of the promises throughout the Abraham
stories. However, because of the changing context in which the promises
are found as well as the slight changes in content, each promise will
more than repay careful study.[3] These promises provide the thematic
bond uniting the Abraham stories as well as the whole Book of Genesis.[4]
The Covenant is renewed for every Patriarch.[5] Indeed Cassuto could
be correct in saying that in Genesis

> We are presented with a picture of a single course
> of life, duplicated and triplicated both in its
> general outline and in the detailed events, which
> is strengthened and confirmed by the three-fold
> narration of the message of good tidings.[6]

The reason why God takes such an interest in Abraham is a mystery, but
Abraham's obedience is one of the factors.

In a sense Abraham can be said to have received the Promise as a
result of his obedience,[7] but God's grace is the dominant factor.[8]

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1. J.J. Mitchell, "Abram's Understanding of the Lord's Covenant",
   WTJ ( ), p.38. McCarthy says that the promises indicate a
   Covenant (Old Testament Covenant, p.81).

2. U.Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part II, From Noah
   to Abraham. A Commentary on Genesis VI 9 - XI 32. Trans. I.
   Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1964),
   p.340. For ancient Near Eastern examples cf. idem, pp.342ff. Cf.
   also Sheriffs, op.cit., p.137 for an example of the reiteration of
   a promise in order to allay fears that it would not be fulfilled.

3. This will be done in the next Chapter.

4. Wagner, Studies in the Ancient Palestinian World, eds. Wevers and
   Redford, p.136; Von Rad, Genesis, p.166.

5. Cf. 26:24; 28:3f., 13, 15; 32:12; 35:9-12; 48:16.

6. Op.cit., p.343.

7. This idea of a reward for loyal obedience is to be found in many of
   the Royal Grants, cf. above, pp.30f.

8. Cf. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, p.54. McCarthy adds,

   "The continuation of such a covenant is not dependent upon
   the obedience of the human party; it remains pure grace on
   God's part"(ibid., p.54).

There is a combination of Law and Grace throughout the Abraham stories.
While the Sinai Covenant emphasizes Law, the Abrahamic and Davidic
Covenants emphasize Grace.[1]   Because the Davidic and the Abrahamic
are similar in this respect, Van Seters and others maintain that the
Abrahamic Covenant was moulded around the Davidic promise to a dynasty.[2]
There certainly are similarities between the two Covenants but the
evidence does not show who borrowed from whom.   The fact that much of
the thought and language common to both is also found in the Royal
Grants means that too much should not be made of the similarities.

2.   THE CONTENT OF THE PROMISE

a)   The promise of   ר֫וֹ֫א   is the first to be mentioned
(12:1).   At this stage the promise is only implied.   He is to leave
home and go to a land which God would show him.   This promise is made
specific in later passages.[3]   The theme of the Promised Land, says
Speiser, is prominent with all the Patriarchs, and central to the mission
of Abraham.[4]   This can be accepted as long as it is remembered that
without an heir the inheritance of the land would not be possible.
This is made acute because the promise of land was not fulfilled in
Abraham's lifetime.   Promises are made to Abraham which would only be
fulfilled in his descendants (ז֫ר֫ע) .   Von Rad puts it well:

> The relation of the patriarchs to the land in which
> they live appears as something temporary; indeed,the
> entire patriarchal period thus becomes theologically a
> peculiar intermediate state, a wandering from promise
> to fulfilment which gives to all events the character
> of temporariness and at the same time mysterious
> portent.[5]

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1.   Cf. Hillers, Covenant, p.105. Because of the difference between
     the Sinai Covenant and the Abrahamic, the Abrahamic cannot be simply
     described as a pale reflection of the Sinaitic.
2.   Op.cit., p.274; cf. R.E. Clements, Abraham and David, passim.
3.   Cf. 12:7.
4.   Speiser, Genesis, p.L.
5.   Genesis, p.22.

Von Rad presents some reasons based on the Tradition History method
which partly explain this phenomenon. He says that the original
promise was for the immediate possession of cultivated land by these
semi-nomadic Patriarchs.[1] Thus originally it did not recknon with a
stay in Egypt and a second conquest under Joshua.   The reader of the
Hexateuch is now meant to understand the Land Promise as referring to
the Conquest.   While there is probably a lot of truth in this,
15:12-16 ought to be taken more seriously.   The existence of a grand
promise side by side with its non-fulfilment is not so strange.   It
is a description of the problem of waiting for a promise to be fulfilled.
Throughout her history Israel had to face this test of faith.   In
the next Chapter it will be seen how men wrestle with this problem.

   b)   As with all the promises, the promise that God would make him
גּוֹי גָּדוֹל is also subject to the tension of what Karl Barth
described as living in the "not yet".   The term is significantly **גּוֹי**
and not **עַם** .   **עַם** refers primarily to relationships of
consanguinity.   Thus one speaks of a dead person as being "gathered to his
people".[2]   The word **גּוֹי** , unlike **עַם** , requires a territorial
base, since the concept is a political one.[3]   The fulfilment of this
promise, that is, the evolution of **עַם** into **גּוֹי** , is affirmed
in the confession of faith of Dt 26:5-9.[4]   Abraham will indeed be made

גּוֹי גָּדוֹל .   That Israel is to receive more than national
greatness is made clear by 17:20f.

   c)   God promises Abraham, **וֶאֲבָרֶכְךָ** .   The main
presupposition of the Israelite understanding of **בְּרָכָה** is that

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1.   Ibid., p.22. Cf. R.E. Clements, Abraham and David, p.34, who says that
     it was originally a promise of land by the god of Mamre which the
     Yahwist transformed into a promise of Israel's future greatness.

2.   E.g. Gen 25:8, 17.

3.   Cf. 17:20; 18:18; 21:13, 18; 46:3; Ex 32:10; Num 14:12; Dt 26:5.
     Notice the inextricable link with the Land Promise. On the distinction
     between **עַם** and **גּוֹי** , cf. E.A. Speiser, "'People' and 'Nation'
     of Israel", JBL LXXIX (1960), pp.157-163; R. de Vaux, The Bible and the
     Ancient Near East, pp.111f.

4.   R. de Vaux, op.cit., p.112.

Yahweh is free to give or withhold it.[1]   It is usually associated with a
material increase in life.   The promise of innumerable descendants is a
primary ingredient of this blessing.[2]   In the context of what follows
this also implies the birth of a son.   Another aspect of the promised
blessing is material prosperity.[3]   The original Sitz im Leben could be
cultic;[4]   but it could also have something to do with the blessing for
those who keep the Covenant Law, that is, obey God.[5]   The blessing
promised here in 12:2 could well be the result of Abraham's obedience.[6]

d)   The next aspect of God's promise to Abraham is   וַאֲגַדְּלָה
שְׁמֶךָ   .   In contrast to the story of the Tower of Babel,
Yahweh now intends to give what men attempted to secure arbitrarily
(cf. 11:4).   This could be an allusion to the royal names given to the king
at his coronation .[7]   More likely is an interpretation which recognizes
that the idiom "win a (great) name" is connected in the ancient Near East
particularly with victory over enemies.[8]   To receive a "great name" is a
consequence of Yahweh's highly effective Covenant protection.[9]

1.   Von Rad, Genesis, p.159.
2.   Cf. Gen 13:16; 15:5; 17:5f.; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:14;
     35:11.   Cf. Von Rad, op.cit., p.166.
3.   J. Van Seters, op.cit., p.272.   Cf. 12:16; 13:6; 24:35; 26:13.
4.   J. Van Seters, op.cit., p.272.
5.   Idem, p.273.   Cf. Dt 7:12-14; 28:1ff., and Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the
     Deuteronomic School, pp.116-157.
6.   Cf. 22:1ff. where a similar act of obedience results in a promise of
     blessing (22:16-18).   Cf. also below, p.118.
7.   There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate this, cf. Sheriffs,
     op.cit., p.161 n.2.
8.   P.J. Calderone, Dynastic Oracle and Suzerainty Treaty, pp.45f. Cf.
     Jer 32:20; Isa 63:12, 14; Neh 9:10; Dan 9:15.   Cf. the related
     theme in the Abraham stories of "possessing the gates of enemies"
     (22:18; 26:40).
9.   Idem, p.46.   Calderone in his interpretation of 2 Sam 7:9 comes to
     the conclusion that there is a definite link between Yahweh's
     Covenant with David and the giving of a name (op.cit., p.46).   In
     the light of a possible connection between 12:1-3 and royal ideology,
     2 Sam 7:9 is an interesting cross-reference; cf. Van Seters, op.cit.,
     p.275.

e) וְהְיֵה בְּרָכָה , is more difficult to interpret.

As MT points it, the translation of וְהְיֵה is either "and you shall be", or "so that you will be", thus relating the blessing directly to the giving of a great name in 12:2c. J.J. Mitchell says that it is not simply a promise but also a command and therefore must be recognized as an imperative.[1] There does not seem to be any reason for not linking 12:2d to the making of a great name in 12:2c, and for seeing it as both an imperative and a promise.[2] Blessing will be the effect of being given a great name. The identity of the recipients of the blessing becomes a little clearer in 12:3.

f) All attention is focused on Abraham in 12:3. God says,

וַאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ אָאֹר .

Here again Von Rad captures the heart of the meaning:

> The promise given to Abraham has significance...
> far beyond Abraham and his own seed. God now brings
> salvation and judgment into history, and man's
> judgment and salvation will be determined by the
> attitude he adopts toward this work which God
> intends to do in history.[3]

The word קלל can be used to call a formula of curse upon a person.[4]
The root q - L - L is used in the Tukulti-Nimurta Epic to mean the breaking of a Treaty. To despise one's oath is to belittle (qullulu) the gods, thus calling down the Treaty curse on one's head.[5] Apparently to belittle

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1. WTJ (   ), p.35 fn. 28, cf. Cassuto, op.cit., p.314.

2. Speiser, Genesis, p.86 says that the pointing of the verb as a second person singular by MT and other ancient versions is syntactically unacceptable. He favours a third person singular, "that it may be a blessing". However in the light of the great interest shown in the man Abraham in 12:3 it is better to retain the problematic MT reading.

3. Genesis, p.160.

4. 2 K 2:24; 1 Sam 17:43; (Isa 8:21). It can also mean, "trifling with", "taking no notice of".

5. J.J. Mitchell, WTJ, (   ), p.35 fn. 27 uses this example. However it is not clear that there is a Covenant that can be broken by the outsider. On the other hand the use of קלל here could indicate a very positive attitude to the Gentiles as it implies that there is a Covenant for them to break.

Abraham with whom the Lord has a Covenant, is to belittle God Himself.[1]
The result of this is that God will "bind (the guilty party) with a curse".[2]
Noticing that the MT has קְלֶלְךָ, "him who curses you", in the
singular while מְבָרֲכֶיךָ, "those who bless you", is in the plural,
Von Rad concludes that the thought of judgement is almost overarched by
the words of blessing.[3]   Apart from the fact that מְקַלֶלְךָ is plural
in some MSS and ancient versions, the switch from plural to singular is
probably only for the sake of diversification and variation in the
parallelism.[4]   The promise contained here in 12:3 indicates that mankind's
relation to God will be determined by its attitude to Abraham.   The
Chapters that follow spell out more clearly the significance of Abraham's
special and unique relationship with God.[5]   While Abraham's own
obedience and faith must play a part in this, God's election of him is
the crucial factor.

   g)   The <u>niph'al</u>,   וְנִבְרְכוּ   , in 12:3c is the subject of
controversy.   There are two main interpretations.   The <u>first</u>, with LXX
in support, argues that because it is <u>niph'al</u>, which is generally, though

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1.   J.J. Mitchell, <u>op.cit.</u>, p.35 fn. 27.   Similarly the bearer of the
     Royal threat in the context of the Suzerainty Treaties is invested with
     all the authority of his master, cf. Sheriffs, <u>op.cit.</u>, pp.111-114.
     To insult him is to insult the master.   Sheriffs convincingly
     explains the incident of Elisha and the she-bears (2 K 2:23ff.) along
     these lines (<u>op.cit.</u>, p.156).

2.   This is the meaning of   אָרַר   (<u>KB</u>).   God curses, e.g. Gen
     3:14, 17;   4:11;   and men curse,e.g. Gen 9:25;   27:29.   Cf. Ak.
     arâru, "bind, enchant".

3.   <u>Genesis</u>, p.160.

4.   Cassuto, <u>op.cit.</u>, p.315.

5.   Cf. 2 Chr 20:7;   Isa 41:8.   On Abraham as an "example of piety", cf.
     Van Seters, <u>op.cit.</u>, p.273;   Von Rad, <u>Genesis</u>, p.175.
     J.A. Thompson writes:

         "The onomastica of the ancient Near East, as well as of
         the Old Testament, show that it was common for a clan
         chief to be associated in an intimate personal way with a
         deity and even to have his own name for the deity" (<u>The
         Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament</u>, p.27).

not always, passive, it can be translated "they shall be blessed".[1]
This implies that the privileges enjoyed by Abraham (and his descendants)
would be extended to all men.   Abraham is assignéd the role of mediator
of blessing in God's saving plan for   כָּל־מִשְׁפְּחֹת
הָאֲדָמָה.[2]   This is a slightly expanded form of the teaching in 12:2b.
Those who support the <u>second</u> interpretation of   וְנִבְרְכוּ   ,
point out that the niph'al can have a reflexive meaning.   The translation
would be, "they shall bless themselves".   Support for this is received
from the occurrence of the hithpa'el in parallel passages 22:18 and 26:4.
This form can be reflexive or reciprocal, but is seldom passive.[3]   Speiser
says that this means that the nations of the world would point to Abraham
as their ideal either in blessing themselves or one another.[4]   This is a
possible interpretation and the effect is not as trivial as Von Rad thinks.
The reflexive meaning takes full account of the human response to God's
offer.[5]   It is difficult to decide which of the two interpretations is
correct.[6]   It is possible that the writer had both meanings in mind.[7]
In the Abraham stories which follow it is clear that Abraham's life had a

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1. Von Rad, <u>Genesis</u>, p.160.   Cf. the use of the <u>niph'al</u> in parallel
    passages, 18:18;   28:14.

2. Speiser, <u>Genesis</u>, p.86, says that   מִשְׁפָּחֹה   means "political
    communities", rather than families.   Cf. below, p.62.

3. <u>GK</u> 54g.

4. <u>Op.cit.</u>, p.86.   For the proverbial use of names in blessing, cf. Gen
    48:20;   Zech 8:13;   Isa 65:16;   Ps 72:17;   and the opposite in Jer 29:22.
    Von Rad critically says that this interpretation "reckons with a remnant
    of the magical-dynamic notion of blessing" (<u>op.cit.</u>, p.160).   This is
    not necessarily the case.   They could bless themselves because of
    Abraham (cf. 26:5) or he could be an example.

5. The Covenant is open to the Gentiles (e.g. 17:12f.) but they must
    wholly belong to the community (cf. Ex 12:45), cf. Kidner, <u>Genesis</u>,
    p.130.

6. Cf. J. Muilenberg, "Abraham and the Nations", <u>Interp</u> XIX (1965),
    pp.392f.

7. This conclusion finds some support in the fact that the parallel
    passages use both the <u>niph'al</u> (18:18;   28:14) and <u>hithpa'el</u> (22:18;
    26:4).   This suggests that both senses could have been in the
    mind of the author;(Source division would naturally destroy this
    argument).

definite effect on those around him.   This favours the first interpretation.
It is interesting to notice that in this understanding of ‏בְּרָכָה‎
there is a link with the ideology of kingship.[1]   It is through the king
that blessings come on the whole realm.[2]   Parallel passages 18:18;
22:18;   24:4;   and 28:14 show that the blessing extends beyond the nation
itself and has imperial dimensions.[3]   These passages also show that the
blessing is mediated through Abraham and his offspring.   In 18:18,
Abraham is the blessing, and in 22:18 and 26:4 his descendants are, and
in 28:14 both Abraham and his descendants are a blessing.   But at this
stage (12:1-3) only Abraham himself is mentioned.   Although an heir is
essential for the fulfilment of the promises in 12:1-3 this promise is
left until later.[5]

3.   THE TWIN IDEAS OF ISRAEL BEING BLESSED BECAUSE OF ABRAHAM AND

   HERSELF BEING A BLESSING TO OTHERS

   The idea of Abraham securing blessing for Israel and in turn the
nations is clearly taught in 26:5, (24).   Van Seters' comment is worth
quoting in full:

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1.   Cf. J. Van Seters, op.cit., p.274.

2.   Cf. above, pp.44-47.

3.   Cf. the coronation blessing in Ps 72:17. Van Seters says that 12:3c
   and parallels) does not have in mind the Davidic or Solomonic Empires
   which never had such effective dimensions, but is an imitation of the
   great Empires of the eighth to sixth centuries B.C. (op.cit., p.275).
   While 12:3c could be patterned on the Empires, it is not necessary
   that they be first millenium B.C. Empires.

4.   Cf. Ps 47; Jer 3:1-4:4; Isa 19:23-25, and the commentary of
   Muilenberg, "Abraham and the Nations", Interp XIX (1965), pp.394-396.

5.   The promise of an heir is so important that if it be removed the
   narratives would fall apart (N.E. Wagner, op.cit., p.138).

> Abraham's past obedience effects a blessing for
> the following generations as well. This is
> certainly a concept of the 'merits of the fathers'
> that ensures the destiny of the people as a whole.
> While one may regard the phraseology of 26:5 as
> Deuteronomic it is quite a different conception
> of love and blessing. It suggests that in spite
> of Israel's sin, which brought about the exile, the
> promise of land and offspring made to Abraham are
> still good.[1]

While the Abraham stories do not conceal the weak sides to Abraham's character, it is clear that the reader is meant to be impressed by Abraham's obedience.[2] The idea of one man's merits being effective for another is difficult to understand, but the idea of the ancestral founder of a family or nation giving it its character,[3] as well as that of a corporate person,[4] help to explain the phenomenon.

The first hint that Abraham is not the only one involved in the call and the promise is found in 12:4f. where Abraham's nephew Lot, Sarah, all their possessions and אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בְחָרָן ,[5] are mentioned. Abraham had left בֵּ֫יתּ יְבִיו .[6] He now forms his own בַּ֫יִת . While the literal meaning of בַּ֫יִת is a house with a roof and walls,[7] it is frequently used to describe the family.[8]

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1. Op.cit., p.273. As this quotation hints, Van Seters sets 12:1-3 against an Exilic background. The Exile was proof that the Covenantal relationship based on the obedience of the Israelites was broken, and with it the legitimate claim to the land. According to Van Seters, 12:1-3 establishes a new basis for the relationship (op.cit., p.265).

2. Cf. below Ch.V.

3. Cf. 16:12.

4. Cf. below, p.63.

5. Cassuto suggests that these נֶ֫פֶשׁ could have been converts (op.cit., pp.320f.); but they are probably slaves. Cf. esp. Ch. 17 for the frequent mention of slaves as part of the family unit.

6. 12:1; cf. 24:38.

7. Cf. 12:15; 19:2, 3, 4, 10, 11; 24:32; etc.

8. Cf. 12:1; 14:14; 15:2, 3; 17:12, 13, 23, 27; 18:19; 20:13, 18; 24:2, 7, 23, 27, 28, 38, 40. On a similar usage of אֹ֫הֶל , cf. Skinner, op.cit., p.251.

However the distinction is not always clear.[1]   בַּיִת   when understood
as a social unit is a community centering on one man, the father of the
house.   He has absolute authority over his house which in early times
included life and death (38:24).[2]   It is in relation to him that its
members are viewed.   J.R. Porter says that the Israelite family usually
consisted of the following:

> The head of the family and his wife, his father and
> mother, step-mothers, sisters (and sometimes their
> husbands), sons and daughters and their spouses,
> grandsons and grand-daughters (and sometimes perhaps
> their husbands), the father's sisters (and perhaps
> their husbands), the mother's sisters (and perhaps their
> husbands), the father's brothers and their wives, the
> head's brothers and their wives, and his mother-in-law
> or mothers-in-law.[3]

This outline of the possible members of an Israelite family is based
largely on Porter's study of Lev 18.[4]   The position of the slave is an
interesting one.   Because they are not mentioned in the absolute
prohibitions of Lev 18, Porter concludes that they do not belong to the
group in the full sense.[5]   The tension of belonging and yet not quite
belonging is seen clearly in 17:1ff. where slaves are to receive the
sign of the Covenant like Isaac, but the promise about Ishmael is not as
grand as that about Isaac.   He is also compelled to leave the Covenant
family, something which could not have happened to Isaac.[6]   Strictly

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1.   Cf. 12:1; 19:2; 24:27; etc.

2.   Note the wiles of the women in the Patriarchal narratives who use
     craft to overcome this limitation on them.

3.   The Extended Family in the Old Testament   (London: Edutext Publications,
     1967), p.21.   Membership is as much determined by common dwelling
     place as it is by common blood (idem, p.21).

4.   He says that the regulations found here are primarily designed to
     preserve the group's peace and well-being (ibid., p.9).   These
     absolute prohibitions show the extent of the family.

5.   Ibid., p.21. Cf. R. De Vaux, Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions.
     Trans. J. McHugh (London: Harton, Longman & Todd, 1974 . Les
     Institutions de l' Ancien Testament   [Paris: Les Editions du Cerf,
     n.d.]),p.85, who says that slaves were a real part of the family.

6.   Cf. below, pp.99-102.

speaking, the slave is a chattel, belonging to his master by right of conquest, purchase or inheritance.[1]   Yet slaves did have certain rights and while it depended largely on the character of his master, his lot was usually tolerable.[2]   A distinction is sometimes made between יְלִיד בַּיִת   and outsiders who are bought.[3]   The יְלִיד בַּיִת ranked close enough to members of the family to be entrusted with tasks of considerable importance and responsibility, cf. 24:2ff.[4]   Nevertheless they had the same social status as those who had been bought.[5]   Because female slaves could among other things be concubines to the master of the house, they are a special case.[6]   The mothers of the twelve tribes is Israel include concubines (cf. 35:23-26).   It is therefore likely that concubines were full members of the family, in this early period at least.   This world which consisted merely of family groups, where servants lived with the master of the house, had to a large extent passed away by the eighth century B.C.   A new social class had made its appearance - that of wage earners.[7]

The Patriarchs knew no society other than the family unit as they did not participate to any great extent in the society of their neighbours.[8] In the sphere of an independent family events like a quarrel or the birth of a child have a special importance.[9]   For most of Israel's history the

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1.   De Vaux, op.cit., p.84.

2.   Idem, p.85.

3.   17:12, 23, 27; Lev 22:11; Cf. Jer 2:14.

4.   Speiser, Genesis, p.104.   Cf. De Vaux, op.cit., p.82, where he says that the expression could also refer to all those who have certain obligations to the master of the house when it is necessary to take up arms, cf. 14:14.

5.   De Vaux, op.cit., p.82.

6.   Idem, p.86.

7.   De Vaux, op.cit., pp.22f., 73.   This is of some importance in the dating of the narratives.

8.   Cf. Holt, op.cit., p.92.   Chapter 14 is an exception to this.

9.   Cf. Von Rad, Genesis, pp.34f.

family is the social unit of which people felt themselves to be really a part. It was the most significant unit to which he belonged.[1]

בַּיִת is very flexible and may even include the entire nation,[2] or a considerable section of the people.[3] מִשְׁפָּחָה , found in 24:38, 40, 41, usually refers to something a little bigger than a household, but more limited than the tribe.[4] However the line of distinction between בַּיִת and מִשְׁפָּחָה is fluid.[5] The close link between בַּיִת and מִשְׁפָּחָה can be seen in 24:38, 40 where the two are used interchangeably. In the case of an עַם the kinship link becomes even weaker as the group expands. Yet still they have their focus on an ancestral father; he binds them together.[6] This can also be said of גּוֹי .[7] Beginning with the promise to make Abraham a "great nation" in 12:2 (cf. 18:18), the promise expands to include גּוֹיִם (17:4-6).[8] Sarah also comes into her own as an ancestress with the promise that she would be a mother of nations (17:16).

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1. J.R. Porter, The Extended Family in the Old Testament, p.7. Cf. Pederson, op.cit., p.274, where what he calls the "psychical community" in Israel is said to confine itself largely to the family group.

2. E.g. "the house of Jacob" or "the house of Israel".

3. E.g. "the house of Joseph" or "the house of Judah".

4. Pederson, op.cit., p.46.

5. Idem, pp.46f. Cf. Porter, op.cit., pp.6f., especially his comment on the danger of using Jos 7:16f. as a standard.

6. Pederson, op.cit., pp.55ff. בֵּית אָב is often used to describe the kinship group. In the mouth of the daughter בֵּית אֵם is just as appropriate, cf. 25:23; Ruth 1:8; Song 3:4; 8:2 (Van Seters, op.cit., p.246). The word מוֹלֶדֶת is also used to describe one's kindred, cf. 24:4; 31:3; 32:10; 43:7; etc. Cf. also אֶרֶץ מוֹלֶדֶת in 24:7; 31:13; etc.

7. On the differences between עַם and גּוֹי , cf. above, p.53.

8. It is never made absolutely clear in the Abraham stories whether this promise refers simply to a blood-link between Abraham and nations, which would be his descendants, or whether the idea of the conversion of the nations is implied as well.

As the head of a family which is in one sense Israel in microcosm, Abraham represents his family before God.[1]   Isa 41:8f. is of interest in this regard.   Van Seters writes:

> Here God's election and call of Abraham from a
> distant land is viewed as Israel's election also.[2]

Thus in the Abraham stories, Abraham is at times the source of blessing to the nations and at other times it is Israel.[3]   This tension is summed up in J.R. Porter's definition of what is usually meant by the expression "corporate personality":

> "Corporate personality" may be taken to imply that,
> in certain spheres and on certain occasions, the
> individual is considered as indistinguishable from
> the group to which he belongs.[4]

This idea has been worked out in some detail by J. Pederson,[5] H.W. Robinson,[6] and A.R. Johnson.[7]   Criticism of this means of interpretation has shown that it has to be used prudently.[8]   An example of an overuse of the method is the theory that the individuals one meets in the Patriarchal narratives are in fact tribes.[9]   Driver's balanced criticism can hardly be improved upon:

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1.   This idea of representation is found in a highly developed form in the
     Treaties and Royal Grants where the parties make arrangements on
     behalf of their whole dynasty;   cf. 21:23.

2.   Op.cit., p.265.

3.   Muilenberg, "Abraham and the Nations", Interp XIX (1965), p.393.
     Cf. above, p.58.

4.   "The Legal Aspects of the Concept of 'Corporate Personality' in the
     Old Testament", VT XV (1965), p.361.

5.   Israel. Its Life and Culture I - II (London: Oxford University Press,
     1926).

6.   Esp. "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality", BZAW LXVI
     (1936), pp.49-62.

7.   Esp. The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God
     (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961).

8.   J.R. Porter, VT XV (1965), pp.361-380; J.W. Rogerson, "The Hebrew
     Conception of Corporate Personality: A Re-Examination", JTS XXI:1
     (1970), pp.1-16.

9.   Hardly anyone still supports the theory in all its details.

> An unsubstantial figure, such as Canaan (9:25-27)
> might be an example of a personified group of
> peoples ... but the abundance of personal incident
> and detail in the patriarchal narratives as a
> whole seems to constitute a serious objection to
> this explanation of their meaning: would the
> movements of tribes be represented in this veiled
> manner on such a large scale as would be the
> case if this explanation were the true one?[1]

Bearing this criticism in mind I. Engnell says that in the Abraham stories
there is an oscillation between the individual and the group.[2] H. Gunkel's
theory is more sophisticated. He says that while caution is needed, we
must reckon with the possibility that some of these figures do not
originally represent tribes, but only came to do so in later times.[3]
While there is some evidence for an oscillation between the individual and
the group in the Abraham stories, in the present text it is primarily an
oscillation between Abraham understood as an individual and as all

Israel.   Thus Israel and the nations are blessed because of Abraham,
and Israel is herself a blessing to others.

4.   THE BACKGROUND TO THE CALL

A theory closely related to the one just discussed is implied by the
work of the Albright school.   In their concern to provide the historical
background to the move of Abraham from Mesopotamia they have given much

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1.   Genesis, p.lvii.   Cf. Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel. From its
     Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile, trans. M. Greenberg (London:
     George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961.   , יחזקאל קויפסם]
     'ת בירישה'ת : פ'ס תולדות האמונה הישראל'ת
     קדם עד סוף ב'ת שנ' [Tel-Aviv: Bialik Institute-
     Dvir, 1937ff.]), p.219.
2.   Critical Essays on the Old Testament, p.54.
     It is along these lines that he explains the apparent contradiction
     between 18:11 and 25:11.   He says that in the first passage Abraham
     is an individual while in the latter he represents a collective group.
3.   The Legends of Genesis, p.20.

attention to the migration of peoples from Mesopotamia.[1]   The problem
is that very often these reconstructions obscure what the text is actually
saying.[2]   Speiser, while agreeing that the context of the call of
Abraham is to be found in the migrations from Mesopotamia, rightly says
that "the stated reason for the journey should nto be dismissed off-hand".[3]
The reason given is staggering in its simplicity - God told him!   We
are not even told by the text what Speiser says about the migration being
in protest against the local religious solution.[4]   Indeed the Abraham
stories as a whole carry no hint of a battle with paganism and idolatry.[5]
Neither does Abraham appear to have that much missionary zeal.[6]

The question of the religious beliefs of Abraham has been the subject
of much debate.[7]   Almost all modern scholars accept the theory that later
Yahwism has been read back into the Patriarchal narratives.[8]   While there is
probably a lot of truth in the theory, the problem lies in deciding what is original
and what is a later interpretation.   One thing that is clear is that the
monotheistic world view had no real antecedents in paganism.[9]   Add to this
the fact that the work of Moses would be unthinkable without the prior
labours of the Patriarchs,[10] and it has to be recognized that the Patriarchs

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1.   Cf. J. Bright, A History of Israel, pp.85-91.

2.   Cf. e.g. below, p.81.

3.   Genesis, p.XLV.   But it is only with the eye of faith that we
     discern the initiative of divine providence (Holt, op.cit., p.173).

4.   Op.cit., p.LVI.   Jos 24:2, however, suggests this.

5.   Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, p.222.   The refusal to intermarry
     with the local inhabitants is the only hint of this, cf. below, pp.121f.

6.   Segal, The Pentateuch, p.139.

7.   For a thorough discussion of the subject, cf. M. Haran, "The Religion
     of the Patriarchs.   An Attempt at a Synthesis", Annual of the Swedish
     Theological Institute IV (1965), pp.30-55.   Unfortunately he neglects
     the work of Conservative scholars including J.A. Motyer, The
     Revelation of the Divine Name (London: Tyndale Press, 1959).

8.   E.g. Von Rad, Genesis, p.198.   But cf. Albright, Yahweh and the Gods
     of Canaan, pp.94f.

9.   Kaufmann, op.cit., p.2.

10. Speiser, Genesis, p.L.

and Abraham in particular did some valuable work.[1] In Jos 24:2
(cf. 14f.) we are told that Abraham's ancestors were pagan.[2] On the
other hand the blessing that Noah bestowed on Shem implies that knowledge
of the true God was preserved by the descendants of Shem.[3] Abraham is
presented as the inheritor of this tradition. Abraham as head of an
independent family would have been a leader in the family cult.[4] It is
possible that the concept of a "father's god" has a connection with the hou
house and personal gods of Nuzi and Ur.[5]

Whatever the exact nature of Abraham's faith, the request that he
leave home and break ancestral bonds was to expect of an ancient man
almost the impossible.[6] The accumulation of expressions, "your country ...
your kindred ... your father's house" indicates that God knew that He was
making no small demand on him.[7] Abraham obeys blindly and without
objection.[8]

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1. Haran writes, "It is probable that the religion of the ancient Hebrews
    contained something which made it close to Yahwism – something which
    helped to make the acceptance of the latter by the tribes of Israel
    so swift and easy" (op.cit. p.48).

2. Genesis contains faint hints of this, cf. 31:19ff. and 31:53. On
    the associations of the names "Terah" and "Sarah" with moon-worship,
    cf. Cassuto, op.cit., pp.266, 276.

3. Cassuto, op.cit., pp.301f. This could explain why Abraham insisted
    that Isaac's wife be from his relatives in Mesopotamia, cf. below,pp.121f.

4. J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament,
    p.27. Cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., p.435 on the chieftains acting as
    cultic leaders in the covenant ceremony.

5. Cf. Haran, op.cit., p.50 fn. 28 for bibliography. For a summary of
    A. Alt's contribution to the understanding of Patriarchal religion,
    cf. Haran, op.cit., p.51 fn. 34. Alt says that the concept of the
    "father's god" is a very early layer of tradition.

6. Von Rad, Genesis, p.161.

7. Driver, Genesis, p.144.

8. In spite of the fact that the promises that God had made would have
    been very attractive, it was a courageous step to take.

D.   CONCLUSION

Not only does a study of 12:1-3 introduce the reader to the themes
which will run through most of the Abraham stories, but also to the tension
in the understanding of Abraham's person.   While he is usually meant to
be understood as an individual representing his immediate family, his
descendants, and even all nations, at times because he is the founding
ancestor of Israel and therefore Israel in microcosm, he is best
understood as a "Corporate Person".   This explains the existence, side by
side, of the ideas of Israel and the nations being blessed because of
Abraham,and Israel herself being a blessing to the nations.

CHAPTER V

WAITING FOR THE FULFILMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The narratives nowhere give a clear-cut reason why God did not immediately fulfil His promises.[1]   Part of an answer is to be found in the theme of testing which runs through all the narratives.   Von Rad is correct in saying that the background to the idea of testing is to be found in the ritual of the ordeal.[2]   The idea seems to be that God is seeking to bring to light guilt or innocence.   In his capacity as the recipient of the promise, Abraham (and to a lesser extent Sarah and the other characters) is faced with a number of tests.   "While the author is much too fine an artist to spell out the viewers' thoughts",[3] it is clear that Abraham fails some of these tests.[4]   But even more clear is the fact that he passes the two greatest tests - the call from Mesopotamia (12:1-3) and the command to sacrifice Isaac (22:1ff.).[5]

The narratives are arranged in such a way that there is a constant switch from the climax of faith to the anti-climax of unbelief along with the switch from the climax of Promise to the anti-climax of non-fulfilment.[6] The suspense is maintained throughout - will God's purpose be thwarted?   In order to emphasize the reign of God the narrator places Abraham and the possibility of the fulfilment of the promise in a desperate situation.[7] This is also the case with the subordinate characters.[8]   The narratives

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1. Thus in 15:3 no reason for the sojourn in Egypt is given.   The usual interpretation of exile as a curse following disobedience to the Covenant is absent.   On exile as a curse cf. e.g. ANET , pp.532-537.
2. Genesis, pp.239f.   On the ritual cf. Ex 15:25b;   1 Kings 8:31f. It is also applied to the history of Israel, e.g. Dt 13:3;   Judg 2:22. Cf. M.G. Kline, "Oath and Ordeal Signs", WTJ XXVII (1965), pp.115-139.
3. Speiser, Genesis, p.143.
4. E.g. 12:10-20.
5. On the relationship between obedience and the Covenant cf. above Ch.III.
6. E.g. 12:1-9 and 12:10-20;   and 18:1ff. and 20:1ff., and also cf. below, p.91.
7. E.g. 12:10-20.
8. Ishmael's career is an example, cf. the promises of 16:12;   17:20; 21:13;   but cf. 21:15f.

show how human decisions, even sinful ones, are used by the sovereign God.
Chapter 21, verse 12 is a brilliant example of this. The reader does not
expect that God would be on Sarah's side, but rather on Abraham's.
Commenting on this, Von Rad says that this shows how He "pursues his great
historical purposes in, with, and under all the headstrong acts of men".[1]
As the story progresses the promises are emphasized by repetition[2] as well
as clarified. Thus the Land Promise hinted at in 12:1-3 is clearly
promised in 12:7, and in 13:14-17, 15:17-20, 17:1ff., and 23:1ff. it receives
even more clarity. The same is true of the promise of a son and numerous
progeny. What is implied in 12:1-3 is stated in 13:16, 15:4 , and 17:1ff.
Things begin to become even more definite with the mention of the name
"Isaac" in 17:17; the promise of a definite time in 17:21, 18:10 and the
climax in 21:1ff. The continuance of the line is assured in 24:1ff.

B.   THE   ACCEPTANCE (12:4-9)

In these verses we find Abraham and his household entering the Land of
Canaan. The bondage and unsuitability of the land is emphasized in
12:6b (cf. 12:9). But in a theophamy God makes specific the promise of
land (12:7). This is a sophisticated form of the Land Promise as it takes
into account the fact that Abraham himself would never really own the land.
The promise is made in connection with his descendants (זֶרַע).[3]

The fact that the narratives mention various places which Abraham
(and Jacob) visited is according to Cassuto highly significant. He
maintains that Abraham's itinerary is presented as an "ideal conquest",

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1.   Genesis, p.233.

2.   On repetition for emphasis cf. above, p.51.

3.   זֶרַע has different shades of meaning in the Abraham stories
     (cf. Speiser, Genesis, p.LXVII). This allows the writer to veil
     what he is saying. The reader often finds it difficult to know
     whether Isaac or the descendants are being referred to.

a prefigurement of what would happen later during the Conquest.[1] Abraham
moves from Shechem (12:6) to Bethel (12:8) and then on to the Negeb (12:9).
These strategically important centres were occupied by the invading armies.
They occupied Bethel (Josh 7:2; 8:9; cf. 8:14)[2], Shechem or more
specifically Mount Ebal (Josh 8:30) ; from there the invaders moved into the
Nogeb region (Josh 9:1ff.).   There could be some truth in Cassuto's
theory but the parallels could exist simply because these were strategic
positions.

The building of the first altar in Canaan (12:7) is a highly significant
act.[4]   It is a foretaste of the worship of Yahweh which would be enjoyed
when Israel took full possession of the land.

C.   THE PROMISE IN DANGER (12:10-20)

The reader holds his breath as the promise appears to be in ruins when
Sarah is lost to Abraham.[5]   The greatest enemy of the promise is the
bearer himself.[6]   Abraham appears to have lost his vision of the promise
so quickly.[7]

The question of the morality of Abraham's action has been the subject
of some debate.   The dilemma facing Abraham was something like this:

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1.   Genesis, Vol. II, pp. 204f.
2.   The actual reference occurring in both 12:8 and Josh 8:9 is to a place
     between Bethel and Ai.
3.   This is the conclusion that Sheriffs comes to (op.cit., p.410).
4.   Cf. Von Rad, Genesis, p.162.
5.   The narratives imply that no other ancestress would do; cf. 17:15f.
6.   Von Rad, Genesis, p.169.   In the context of this narrative the
     statement is true, but it certainly is not true for all the stories.
7.   Cf. Kidner, Genesis, p.116.

i)   If he were honest Sarah would be safe but he would probably be slain. This would mean the end of the promise.

ii)   If he were dishonest Sarah's honour would be endangered and he would probably lose her but his life would be spared.   To give him the benefit of the doubt he could have thought that he must do all he could to preserve the possibility of the fulfilment of the promise.

Abraham made the wrong decision - he is unable to reply to the heathen King's rebuke.[1]   Instead of being a blessing to the nations Abraham had been a curse.[2]   It is easy to scold Abraham from the security of a few thousand years later, but he should have trusted God to keep His promise.   A point made very clearly in this story is that God is in complete control.[3] Abraham had chosen what he thought to be the lesser of two evils but he had forgotten about God.   Perhaps he should not have moved from the Promised Land at all even though "the famine was severe", but trusted God instead. Yet Abraham's weakness gave occasion for a manifestation of the Lord's faithfulness as a Covenant Protector.[4]   The story thus has a far more powerful message than an exaltation of Abraham's shrewdness and Sarah's beauty.

Most scholars today believe that the three parallel passages are variants of the same tradition.[5]   A recent contribution is that of J. Van Seters. He argues that 20:1ff. is based on 12:10-20 and 26:1-11 is based on the first two.[6]   On the other hand conservative writers still maintain that the three narratives describe three events.[7]   It is impossible to evaluate all the opinions at this stage.   All that we need notice is that the duplication of essentially the same story in the three narratives emphasizes their main theme - the Lord's faithfulness as a Covenant Protector.[8]

1.   Skinner, Genesis, p.250.

2.   Wolff, op.cit., p.148.   For the half-truth contained in Abraham's duplicity, cf. below p.111 fn.5.

3.   In the other two forms of this story (20:1ff.; 26:1-11) the idea of the saving intervention of God is also of special interest (Von Rad, Genesis, p.170).

4.   M. Kline, NBC, p.93.   Cf. above p.31.

5.   E.g. Skinner, Genesis, p.315.

6.   Op.cit., pp.167-191.

7.   E.g. Kidner, Genesis, pp.115-117.   Cf. above Ch. II.

8.   On the idea of duplication for emphasis cf. above, p.51.

D.   THE SEPARATION OF LOT (13:1ff.)

Coming after the shame of the Egyptian experience, the trip to Bethel could be viewed as a kind of pilgrimage.[1]   Nevertheless the main function of 13:2-7 is to introduce the reason for the separation from Lot.   The problem arose from the fact that "their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together" (13:6b).   Abraham had earlier been promised that he would be blessed and that he would be a source of blessing for others (12:2f.).   This part of the story partly fulfils the promise.[2] The כָּבֵד מְאֹד of 13:2 is in antithetic parallelism to the   כָּבֵד הָרָעָב of 12:10.[3]   Abraham had brought some of his wealth with him (12:5) as well as gaining more by rather devious means (12:6).   But this chapter implies a rather rapid increase in material blessing, thus necessitating the separation.   Lot's contact with Abraham meant that he received blessing from God via Abraham.[4]

The narrator usually devotes a lot of attention to the characters of those who leave Abraham's house.[5]   The chief functions that the character of Lot has in most of the narratives is to provide an example of what Abraham is not[6] and to show how Lot receives blessing, in spite of everything, because of Abraham.[7]   Another reason for Lot's prominence may be due to the possibility he offered Abraham of an heir.   Adoptions like this were a fairly common practice.[8]

There are very practical reasons why a large group of semi-nomads should split up.[9]   Strife between רֹעֵי and רֹעֵי was intolerable for Abraham (13:8).   The way in which the division is handled by Abraham

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1.   Kidner, Genesis, p.117.

2.   Cf. 24:35f.

3.   Cassuto, Genesis, p.363.

4.   Cf. 30:30.

5.   For a character sketch of Lot, cf. Von Rad, Genesis, p.224.

6.   Cf. Ch. 18 as contrasted with Ch. 19.

7.   In spite of his weakness and implied involvement in the corruption of Sodom he was deemed worthy of salvation, cf. 19:29.

8.   M. Kline, NBC, p.93.   Cf. below, pp.92, 99 fn.4, 113.

9.   Cf. Von Rad, Genesis, p.171.

reveals his generosity.[1]   The affair by way of contrast also reveals the greed of Lot in choosing the better part.[2]   That it is the more fertile part is made abundantly clear by the first part of 13:10.   But the reader knows what Lot did not know - that the Lord would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (13:10b).[3]   The fact that a selfish decision actually benefited Abraham is another indication of the Providence of God.

Separation from Abraham always involved a separation from the future Covenant Kingdom.   Thus Lot's descendants are the Moabites and the Ammonites (19:37f.).   Similarly Ishmael is excluded from the Covenant family (16:1ff.; 21:1ff.), and the sons of the concubines are sent away from Isaac (25:6).   In all these instances Abraham takes the initiative, even in the case of Ishmael once he realizes that this is the will of God (21:12).   This is the case with Lot as well - Abraham introduces the discussion!   Yet in spite of this exclusion, both God and Abraham continue to take an interest in them.   This is especially true of the Lot stories (14:1ff.; 18:16ff.; 19:1ff.).

From 13:14 the interest shifts to Abraham.   In contrast to Lot who chooses his own land (13:11), Abraham is given his by God.[5]   The promise of land is given with great clarity.   In 13:14 he is called to look at the land which he and his descendants would be given for ever.[6]   The summons in 13:17 is a symbolic legal act by which the occupation of land is recognized in Law.[7]   A new feature of the Land Promise here is that it is to remain   עַד - עוֹלָם   .[8]   The other promise mentioned here also makes

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1.   Skinner writes, "The narrator has finely conceived the magnanimity which springs from fellowship with God" (Genesis, p.252).   Cf. Wolf who says that this is part of Abraham's being a blessing (op.cit., p.148).   Skinner, op.cit., p.253.

2.   If 13:13 is taken to imply that Lot deliberately chose to live with wicked men, then the narrative really does present him in a bad light.

3.   Speiser observes the irony of its appearance and what would become of it (op.cit., p.98).

4.   Cf. M. Kline, NBC,   p.98.

5.   Cf. Von Rad, Genesis, p.173.

6.   From the heights of Bethel large stretches of Palestine are open to view (Speiser, Genesis, p.97).

7.   Cf. Von Rad, Genesis, p.173 (and bibliography).

8.   On עוֹלָם - עַד as a legal formula cf. Weinfeld, JAOS XC (1970), p.199.

use of a practical illustration in order to convince Abraham.   His
descendants, Abraham is told, will be as many as the dust of the earth.
In this context "the dust of the earth" refers to a vast number.[1]
This illustration is parallel to that of the innumerable stars of 15:5,
and the sand which is on the seashore of 22:17.   In all three instances use
is made of the idea of confirming a divine promise by a sign.[2]   These
passages also contain a hint of a dynastic promise.[3]

E.   THE RESCUE OF LOT (14:1ff.)

On the question of the historical accuracy of this chapter there have
been widely differing opinions.   Thus while Speiser says that "the
narrative has all the ingredients of historicity",[4] Von Rad can say that
it "contains so much that is fantastic, historically impossible, and
miraculous".[5]   The question of historicity is of secondary importance for
this Thesis.   Far more important is the unusual portrait of Abraham
with which this chapter presents us.

He appears as "a travelling prince of war".[6]   Nevertheless this is not
the only time that Abraham is portrayed as a king.   Kingship ideology could
underlie some of the interpretations of the person and work of Abraham in
the narratives.[7]   In 23:6 the "Hittites" call Abraham אֱלֹהִים נְשִׂיא .

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1.   Cf. 28:14; 2 Chron 1:9; and Ex 8:16; 2 Sam 22: 43.   It does not have
     the derogatory connotations that one finds in Isa 40:12.

2.   Cf. e.g. 2 Kings 20:8ff.; Isa 7:10-17.

3.   Van Seters, op.cit., p.256.   Cf. 2 Sam 7:12,16; Ps 89:29ff.;
     132:11-12; cf. Jer 33:20ff.   On the idea of dynasty cf. above, p.29.

4.   Genesis, p.109.

5.   Genesis, p.175.   Most recently cf. J. van Seters, op.cit., pp.296-308.
     Much of Van Seters' discussion is directed against J.A.Emerton, "Some
     False Clues in the Study of Genesis XIV", VT XXI (1971), pp.24-47;
     Idem, "The Riddle of Genesis XIV", VT XXI (1971), pp.403-439.

6.   Von Rad, Genesis, p.175.   Cf. Speiser who says that he is portrayed
     as a powerful sheikh (Genesis, p.104).

7.   Cf. below, e.g., p.107.

The term ‎נָשִׂיא , says Speiser,"designates an official who has been 'elevated' in or by the assembly, hence 'elected'".[1] Skinner adds that the phrase "means one deriving his patent of nobility straight from Almighty God". Von Rad says that in the context it has a double meaning. For the natives it was little more than urbane politeness, but for Israel's ears it was "a lofty title of honour with which faith revered Abraham".[2]

In 14:1ff., although Abraham may at first appear as any secular king, he is far from it. Von Rad can be sceptical of the reported military achievements of so small a group,[3] and Kidner can defend the historicity of the report on the grounds that Abraham had allies (14:13) and that there was an element of surprise in the well planned night attack,[4] but both miss the main point of the narrative. The identity of the enemy forces is revealed with almost tedious detail in order to emphasize that Abraham's relatively puny side won a great victory over much stronger international armies.[5] This theme of God giving victory to His people against enormous odds runs through most of the Old Testament.[6] God is with Abraham in a special way. This chapter illustrates the dignity of Abraham's position among the potentates of the earth.[7]

M. Kline finds the reason for Abraham's intervention in the stipulation contained in many vassal treaties that the vassal must dispatch forces to protect the overlord's interests at the report of trouble. And, according to Kline, "Yahweh's peculiar territorial claims were impinged upon by Chedorlaomer's claims on Canaan".[8] This interpretation is probably accurate but Abraham's concern for Lot, his kinsman, is also very important. In 14:12 Lot is mentioned as the   בֶּן ־ אֲחִי ־ אַבְרָם and in 14:14,16 he is described as Abraham's אָחִי . That these

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1. Genesis, p.170.

2. Genesis, p.248.   In Ps 105:15 = 1 Ch. 16:22 the Patriarchs are called ‎מָשִׁיחַ as well as ‎נְבִיאִים .   While ‎מָשִׁיחַ frequently describes royalty it is also used of other people who are specially called by God, cf. De Vaux, Ancient Israel, pp.104f.

3. Ibid., pp.177f.

4. Genesis, p.120.

5. Cf. Driver, Genesis, p.155; Skinner, Genesis, p.264.

6. E.g. Jdg 7:1ff.

7. Cf. Skinner, Genesis, p.255.

8. NBC, p.94.

references to Lot occur both in the description of the situation of need
(14:12) and in the description of what the expedition achieved (14:16),
shows that the plight of Lot was the main reason for Abraham's action.
God, like Abraham, clearly continues to show an interest in Abraham's
kinsman even after they have separated themselves.

The occurrence of אַבְרָם בַּעֲלֵי בְרִית ־ of in 14:13 is
the first recorded instance of a specific covenant between Abraham and his
neighbours. It is translated by Mitchell as "free-citizens of the covenant
of Abram".[1] The important cross-reference is in Neh 6:18 where

בַּעֲלֵי שְׁבוּעָה refers to those nobles of Judah who allied
themselves to Tobiah. It (Neh 6:18) is not strictly a "Parity Treaty",
but a voluntary allying of weaker men with a more powerful overlord.[2]
Similarly here in 14:13 it is a Parity Treaty but Abraham is the most
important party. He alone gives his name to the Covenant.[3] It is also
he who organizes and wins the battle and who speaks for all in the
conversation with the King of Sodom (vv. 14-24).

The exact theological significance of the treaties in the Abraham
stories is left unclear. On the one hand they could have no more than
the incidental significance comparable to those of David.[4] On the other
hand so much of the mundane in the everyday life of Abraham's family seems
to have significance because this family is a scaled down version of what
Israel became. At the very least these treaties indicate that Abraham
was willing to co-operate with his neighbours.

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1. "The Lord's Covenant with Abram;" WTJ (   ), p.31. He maintains that
    בַּעַל here refers to a free-man as distinct from a slave. This is
    possible even though it is a little rare. Cf. Akkadian, bēl adē
    u māmīt, "Participant in a compact under solemn oath" (Speiser,
    Genesis, p.103).

2. Mitchell, WTJ (   ), p.31fn.21. On שְׁבוּעָה , cf.below, p.116.

3. Mitchell says that in the ancient Near East "the covenant of X"
    normally implied that X was the superior party (WTJ, p.32fn.22).

4. E.g. 2 Sam 8:6,14; 10:19. The terms "serve", "servants" imply this.
    For more details cf. J.A. Thompson, The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties
    and the O.T., pp.12-20.

Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek is especially difficult to interpret because of its brevity.[1]   The reason for their meeting is something of a mystery.   R.H. Smith's theory is that the story presupposes a suzerainty treaty.   Melchizedek's city, he says, is at the mercy of Abraham's forces as his servile actions and fawning blessing upon Abraham show.   It is probably he who pays the tithe, says Smith, because he is the weaker party and must bribe the aggressor into departing from the city peacefully.[2]
Smith translates   סַלְכִּי-צֶרֶק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם   as "Melchizedek, a submissive king".[3]   This departure from the usual understanding of
שָׁלֵם   as a geographical location is interesting.   Smith admits that before the end of Old Testament times there was an equation between Salem and Jerusalem.[4]   Nevertheless he prefers to understand   שָׁלֵם   as an adjective describing Melchizedek.   He points out that   שָׁלֵם   is a word often closely associated with   Treaty   making.   The noun   שָׁלוֹם   is the outcome of   בְּרִית   .[5]   He argues further that the root   שָׁלֵם   can indicate a relationship of subservience.[6]   Smith's thesis stumbles against the fact that Melchizedek is described as   כֹּהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן   .
This God is the "maker of heaven and earth" - the universal God, and is clearly meant as a name for   יהוה   by the Redactor (cf. 14:22).   While the unspecified blessing could be nothing more than diplomatic custom,[7] there is no reason why it should not be understood as a genuine blessing.   Smith's comments on   שָׁלֵם   as an indication of a covenant relationship are more convincing and it is possible that   שָׁלֵם   refers to both a geographical location and a relationship.

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1.   R.H. Smith and other Source Critics increase this problem by isolating 14:18-20 from their immediate context, cf. "Abram and Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20)", ZAW LXXVII (1965), pp.129-152.

2.   Smith makes much of these similarities with the Keret Legend.

3.   ZAW LXXVII (1965), p.145.

4.   Ps 76:3(2); 110; Cf. Smith, op.cit., pp.140f. for his comments.

5.   Ibid., p.142 fn.29. Cf. W.F. Albright who says that   מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם   should be emended to   מֶלֶךְ שָׁלוֹמוֹ   and translated "a king allied to him", i.e. a king allied to Abraham ("Abram the Hebrew", BASOR CLXIII (1961), p.52 fn.75).

6.   Op.cit., pp.143f. fn.32.   E.g. Amos 1:9 (cf. 1:6).

7.   Smith, op.cit., p.135.

The meeting between Abraham and the King of Sodom has more to teach about Abraham's relation to God and his fellow men. In 14:22 he rejects the offer of loot "with proud and almost disdainful magnanimity".[1] The reason given by Abraham is that he had sworn[2] to God that he would not take the smallest thing. The reason why he swore this oath to God, says Abraham, is that he did not want anyone to say, "I have made Abraham rich". This is a strong affirmation of faith in the God who shall provide the best for Abraham.[3]

F. THE COVENANT EMPHASIZED (15:1ff.)

While Von Rad can say that "there are too many contradictions in the chapter for one to think of it as an organic narrative unit",[4] Van Seters has argued in favour of its unity.[5] What follows will not only depend on this conclusion of Van Seters, it will to some extent prove it.

The human partner in the Covenant ceremony is almost completely passive.[6] God plays the active role throughout, taking the initiative from 15:1. In 15:1-11 Abraham is fairly active: he doubts and complains (15:2-3), he believes (15:6), he doubts again (15:8), he provides the ingredients for the ceremony (15:10) and he drives off the birds of prey (15:11). But from 15:12 he is absolutely passive as he is in a deep sleep.[7]

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1. Skinner, op.cit., p.255; Skinner says that this is the climax of the narrative (op.cit. p.271).
2. Cf. Speiser, Genesis, p.104 on הֲרִמֹ֫תִי יָדִ֫י Cf. Ex 8:8; Num 14:30; Ps 106:26.
3. Abraham does not appear to have viewed the situation like this in 12:16.
4. Genesis, p.182. He adds that a satisfactory source analysis of the present text seems almost impossible because it is in such a mess (ibid., p.183).
5. Op.cit., p.261, cf. idem , pp.249-278.
6. Contrast with this the bargain-like covenant of say 21:22ff.
7. The state of תַּרְדֵּמָה excludes the sleeper from contact with his surroundings (e.g. 1 Sam 26:12). It is a supernatural sleep induced directly by God (cf. נָפַל עַל in 15:12) as a preparation for His work (cf. esp. 2:21).

The subject of the Chapter is Abraham and his people.   The only
mention of the nations is in 15:14 where the Egyptians who enslaved the
Israelites would be judged and despoiled and the "Amorites"[1] in 15:6
would be punished for their sin.   God curses those who curse Abraham.[2]
Abraham is the specially chosen recipient of revelation.

In 15:1 (cf. 15:4)   הָיָה דְבַר־יהוה אֶל־אַבְרָם .
This prophetic formula is foreign to the Hexateuch.[3]   The same is true
of the fact that it was   בַּמַּחֲזֶה .[4]   Indeed the combination
of these two different modes of prophetic revelation is unusual.[5]
Undoubtedly Abraham is being described in prophetic categories.   In
20:7 God calls Abraham   נָבִיא .[6]   Like the prophets he stood in a
special relation to God and could therefore act as an intercessor (cf. 20:17).[7]
The same was true of Moses, the Covenant Mediator par excellence, who is
also described as   נָבִיא   (cf. Dt 34:10).

The first thing God says to Abraham is that he must not fear.   The
fear being described could be that experienced on being directly confronted
by God in an age when men really believed in the power of divinity.[8]
An even more probable meaning of   יָרֵא   in this context is the fear that a
desperate situation will not be resolved.   The command not to fear therefore
indicates that God has come with salvation.   God goes on to describe Himself

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1.   אֱמֹרִי is normally the name of a specific people, but sometimes it is
      also a collective term for the pre-Israelite population of Canaan.   The
      wider usage is probably intended here (Speiser, Genesis, p.113).

2.   Cf. above, pp.35f.

3.   Von Rad, Genesis, p.183.

4.   Baalam's vision (Num 24:4,16) is the only exception.

5.   They are kept distinct except perhaps in Ezekiel (Van Seters, op.cit.,
      p.253.

6.   Cf. Ps 105:15.

7.   Cf. below, p.111.

8.   E.g. Ex 3:6.   Cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., p.158 for ancient Near Eastern
      examples of this kind of fear; and idem., p.163 for an instance of the
      need for those outside a covenant to fear.

9.   E.g. 21:17;   26:24;   46:2f.   Cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., pp.142f. for ancient
      Near Eastern examples.

as Abraham's ‏מָגֵן‎ ,[1] a metaphor of protection.[2] Following from this
God says that Abraham's ‏שָׂכָר‎ shall be very great. Usually ‏שָׂכָר‎
means payment which has been earned.[3] Von Rad has noticed that in later
literature it can be used in the sense of God's free gift.[4] The context in
which this word occurs should determine its meaning. While Abraham's
faith and obedience in a sense merit God's promises, as has been noted,
it is God's election and grace which are by far the more important factors.[5]
It is therefore reasonable to interpret ‏שָׂכָר‎ as a "free gift".
This free gift is described in the verses that follow as including
numerous progeny and land.

Yet in spite of this assurance in 15:2, Abraham is still sceptical.[6]
He asks ‏מַה תִּתֶּן לִי‎ . Speiser translates it as, "to what
purpose are your gifts?"[7] The real subject of his anxiety is his
childlessness.[8] He is very dissatisfied that his heir will be
‏בֶּן מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא דַּמֶּשֶׂק אֱלִיעֶזֶר‎ . The exact meaning of this

1. Emendations have been proposed. For a detailed bibliography and
    discussion cf. R.E. Clements, Abraham and David, pp.17, 64.
    MT makes good sense as it stands.
2. While the military setting is primary (e.g. 2 Chr 23:9) the metaphor was
    also used in the cult; cf. e.g. Ps 3:3; 28:7; 33:20. Cf. Von Rad,
    op.cit.p.183.
3. For the view that it here refers to the payment of soldiers, cf.
    Clements, op.cit., pp.17f. and Van Seters, op.cit. p.254. From this
    Van Seters concludes that "this genre of oracle belongs to the sphere
    of the royal court and in this specific form fits the time of the late
    monarchy and exilic period"(ibid.). This is not the only possible
    Sitz im Leben.
4. E.g. Isa 40:10; 62:11; Jer 31:16 (op.cit.p.183). Even though the
    present writer doubts the claim that this passage is late, these references
    are not valueless as they could indicate a latent meaning in ‏שָׂכָר‎ .
5. Cf. above,pp.51f.
6. Von Rad writes, "His despondent scepticism in the face of the assurance
    of divine protection and the exceptionally great divine gift borders
    almost on blasphemy" (op.cit.), p.183).
7. Op.cit., p.111.
8. Van Seters, op.cit., p.255. Cf. Speiser, op.cit. pp.111f. for a good
    attempt; cf. also H.L. Ginsberg, "Abram's 'Damascene' Steward",
    BAOS CC (1970), pp.31-32 for a suggested emendation.

phrase is extremely difficult to unravel. As a result explanations of
it are seldom convincing and nothing can be built on it. We shall look
at three explanations of Eliezer's identity:

a) According to Speiser[1] we have here another instance of Hurrian customs
which the patriarchs followed.[2] In Hurrian family law two kinds of heir
were sharply distinguished:

i)   the <u>aplu</u> or direct heir;

ii) the <u>ewuru</u> or indirect heir whom the law recognized when normal
inheritors were lacking. Such a person could be a member of a collateral
line, and at times even an outsider.

If subsequently an <u>aplu</u> appeared he would replace the <u>ewuru</u> as chief heir.[3]

b) W.F. Albright[4] claims to have an even better explanation. He finds
the background in a common practice of the day, well attested at Nuzi, of
adopting a merchant in order to get capital. The adopted merchant would
thus be entitled to inherit. Albright's explanation makes little sense
in the context of 15:2 because as far as the present writer has been able
to discover the adopted merchant's rights <u>could not</u> be violated by the
arrival of a son. Abraham clearly believed that a son would be a genuine
heir! In 15:3 Abraham describes Eliezer as בֶּן־בֵּיתִי . Ginsberg
thinks that it means "steward",[5] but the evidence for this is slim. All
that can be said about the expression is that it reveals a close link with
Abraham, although not as close as that with Isaac (15:4).[6]

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1. <u>Op.cit</u>. pp.111f.

2. Von Rad says that it would have to be a Hurrian or some other custom
    because Israel does not know a general rule like this for regulating the
    inheritance (<u>op.cit</u>., p.184). But cf. W.F. Albright, <u>Yahweh and the
    Gods of Canaan</u>, p.58 fn.31.

3. M. Kline, <u>NBC</u>, p.95. Cf. <u>NBD</u>, pp.362f. for a bibliography.

4. Most recently cf. <u>op.cit</u>., pp.57f. This explanation is to a very
    large extent dependent on his theory about Abraham as a donkey
    caravaneer.

5. <u>BAOS</u> CC (1970), p.31 fn.1.

6. The idea of a home-born slave is expressed by יְלִיד בַּיִת (cf.
    17:12, 23). Therefore בֶּן־בֵּיתִי probably does not mean a
    slave.

c)   Finally, L.A. Snijders[1] compares קֶשֶׁמ with the קֶשֶׁמ
of for example Isa 33:4 which describes the aggressive activity of locusts
attacking crops.   In line with this is the fact that in Israel's history
Damascus is frequently mentioned as an adversary.[2]   From this he concludes
that Eliezer is meant to be understood as a usurper who would take the
place of Abraham's true seed.[3]

Out of the three understandings of the role of Eliezer, Speiser's is
probably correct, Albright's is probably wrong, and Snijders' too speculative
to evaluate properly.   What is clear from 15:2f. is that Abraham did not
regard Eliezer as a true son who would inherit the promise.[4]   For a man of
his time there was probably also the anxiety of not having a son to secure
a restful afterlife.[5]

But again the Word of the Lord comes to him in his anxiety in 15:4f.
Eliezer will not be his heir but a son would.   The words אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא
מִמֵּעֶיךָ mean literally, "what comes from your own body".[6]   The Old
Testament can speak of a legal heir as a "son" (e.g. Ruth 4:17), so the
emphatic expression settles a legitimate doubt for Abraham.[7]   Abraham's
own son, it is said, shall be his heir.[8]   This word יָרַשׁ is a
very significant one here and throughout the Chapter.[9]   Frequently it
suggests the idea of a violent transference of property and translations
like "subdue" or "take possession" are appropriate.[10]   In most cases the

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1.   "Genesis XV.   The Covenant with Abram", OTS XII (1958), pp.269-271.
2.   E.g. 2 Sam 8:5;   1 Kings 11:25.   "Damascene" is probably the correct
      rendering of הוּא דַּמֶּשֶׂק .
3.   In 15:3 Abraham describes Eliezer as יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי . יָרַשׁ can
      have aggressive connotations, cf. below p.83.
4.   Kidner, op.cit., p.122.
5.   Speiser, op.cit. p.115.
6.   מֵעִים means "(place of origin of man) belly, inward parts"
      (K.B.), cf. 25:23.
7.   Kidner, op.cit., p.123.
8.   Note the similarities with 2 Sam 7:12 (Van Seters, op.cit., p.255).
9.   For a detailed study of its use cf. Snijders, op.cit., pp.267-271.
10.   E.g. 22:17;   24:60.   In these passages the possession of the gate of
      enemies is spoken of.

object of the verb is the land, especially Canaan.[1]   The idea of a
legitimate inheritance is certainly not absent.   Thus Israel is given
the repeated assurance that the Lord has given the Land to it.   The
tension between being given the Land and the need to go in and conquer it
is found in many of the writings which theologize about the conquest.[2]
Here in 15:4 the primary meaning of רשׁ' is that of legitimate inheritance,
as the son had it by right.   His own son would occupy his place.

The promise of a son is emphasized and expanded in 15:5 when God brings
Abraham out of his tent and uses the starry sky to show him the extent of
the promise.[3]   This illustration is parallel to that of the dust of the
earth in 13:16 and the sand which is on the seashore of 22:17.[4]   So shall
his descendants be.

Abraham's response to this grand promise is one of the key theological
statements of the Old Testament.   It is said that "he believed" (הֶאֱמִן)[5]
The brevity of the words conceals the total significance of the act of
believing.   While they sum up the whole of Abraham's life (in spite of
repeated falls), they refer in the context mainly to a specific moment.
Descriptions of the act of believing are a very difficult historiographical
problem.   M.Kline[6] overcomes some of this difficulty with his theory that

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1.   Other things that can be taken over are social position (cf. e.g. 49:3f.,
     25:23; 27:29) and religions tradition (18:19).   These meanings are
     implied in   רשׁ'   even though the word is not used in all the
     references.   Cf. Snijders, op.cit., p.269 fn.15.

2.   E.g. Dt 1:8.

3.   The idea of God taking someone to a certain spot to view something is
     more characteristic of later prophetic visions, cf. e.g. Ezek 8-11
     (Van Seters, op.cit., p.256).

4.   Cf. above, p.74; below, p.118.

5.   Speiser says that the basic sense of this hiph'il form of the verb is
     "to affirm, recognize as valid" (op.cit., p.112).

6.   "Abram's Amen", WTJ XXI (1968), pp.1-11.

הֶאֱמִן ‏ can mean both "believe (in)" and "declare 'Amen'".[1]
As a stock-phrase אָמֵן is used in the confirmation of a Covenant.[2]
Because this chapter makes so much of the Covenant idea it is very possible
that הֶאֱמִן here in 15:6 not only shows an inward faith but also
an outward affirmation of his acceptance of God's promissory Covenant.
It is an act of faith בַּיהוה .[3] Abraham's trust and affirmation
were both personal (i.e. in the Lord) and propositional (i.e. in the promises
of the previous verses).[4] Following from Abraham's trust God
וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה . Von Rad's definition of צֶדֶק cannot be
bettered:

> Every relationship brings with it certain claims upon
> conduct, and the satisfaction of these claims, which issue
> from the relationship and in which alone the relationship
> can persist, is described by our term צֶדֶק .[5]

The primary relationship in Israel is the Covenant of Sinai. In this as
in other Old Testament covenants, the relationship between God and Israel
is established before the giving of the Law. Obedience to the Law, while
it cannot be used to establish the relationship, flows out of the
relationship.[6] Yahweh is the Righteous One,[7] and He shows this by
fulfilling His part of the Covenant relationship.[8] In Ps 143:2b the
Psalmist writes, "no man living is righteous before thee", yet he appeals
to Yahweh's righteousness (vv.1 and II) for deliverance from his
adversaries (vv.3,9, and 12). Particularly in the later writings of the

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1. On the notion of a stock-phrase being verbalized (or vice versa)
   cf. ibid., p.2.

2. Esarhaddon's Nimrud Treaty, lines 494-512, and Deut 27:15ff.
   Cf. also Ex 4:31; Isa 7:9; 28:16; Hab 1:5; Job 29:24 cf.22;
   39:24 cf.25; Ps 116:10; which could be understood in this sense.
   Frequently אָמֵן functions as a liturgical assent after praise and
   blessing of God, e.g. 1 Chron 16:36; Ps 41:14(13); 72:19;
   89:53(52).

3. Cf. 21:23; Isa 65:16. To swear by His name is virtually the same as
   to fear and serve (Dt 6:13; 10:20; cf. Ps 63:12(11); Isa 48:1;
   Jer 4:2; 5:7; 12:16).

4. Kidner, op.cit., p.124.

5. Old Testament Theology, I, p.371. For a similar interpretation cf.
   E.R. Achtemeir, "Righteousness in the Old Testament", IDB IV, pp.80-85.

6. Cf. e.g. Dt 6:25; 24:13.

7. E.g. Ps 7:9; 103:17.

8. E.g. Ps 89.

Old Testament we find "righteousness" meaning virtually the same as salvation.[1] There is a close connection between the Righteous and faith.[2] Genesis 15:6 is an excellent example of just such a trust in God's Covenant promise which results in righteousness. God reckoned (חשׁב) his faith to him as righteousness. This "reckoning" was, as Lev 7:18; 17:4; and Num 18:27 show, an important judging function of the priests, whereby they, as those authorized by God, had to approve the offering that was presented.[3] In 15:6 God approves of Abraham. This is not because of any works but because of Abraham's faith alone.[4]

From 15:7 the promise of land receives attention.[5] In 15:7 the promise is preceded by a preamble and an historical prologue similar to the Treaty Form.[6] Yahweh brought him out of Mesopotamia in order to give him this land to possess.

Coming so soon after 15:6 the doubt of Abraham in 15:8 has been put down to the result of the conflation of various sources. It is not necessary to resort to such drastic conclusions once it is realized that the oscillation between doubt and faith goes on throughout the Abraham stories, and is in fact a characteristic of all honest belief in God. Abraham's doubt here in 15:8 also acts as a stylistic device to introduce the Covenant Ceremony.

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1. Cf. Isa 50:8.
2. The Righteous are those who wait for Him (Isa 33:2; Mic 7:7-9); who hope in Him (Pss 69:6; 71:5, 14; 146:5); who seek after Him (Ps 69:6, 32); who trust in Him (Pss 71:5; 143:8).
3. Von Rad, Genesis, pp.184f.
4. Thus writes Von Rad the Lutheran (ibid., p.185).
5. Without land, the promise of descendants could hardly have been fulfilled. There is therefore a close link between the two (cf. Snijders, op.cit., pp.266f.).
6. M. Kline, NBC, p.95. Cf. Ex 20:2. This parallel has not gone unquestioned, cf. Clements, Abraham and David, who says that "I am Yahweh" is originally cultic (p.20). Nevertheless, Treaty making is probably the primary Sitz im Leben. For consistent attempts at finding the Treaty form in 15:1ff. and other Abraham stories, cf. Kline, WTJ XXVII (1965), p.116 and Mitchell, WTJ (   ), pp.34-36.

The ceremony described in 15:9ff. is presented as a reply to Abraham's doubts. It is difficult to decide whether the ceremony is only an acted out curse[1] or whether there is also an element of a sacrificial offering to God.[2] There can be little doubt that the ceremony describes an acted out curse similar to that in Jer 24:18.[3] The idea behind the cutting up of the animals and passing through the pieces is, "so may it befall me if I shall not observe the words of the covenant".[4] If the two parties to a Treaty were equals then both passed between the sections of the dismembered animals[5] and thus left themselves open to the fate of the animals if they violated the agreement. In the case of the Suzerainty Treaty it would be the weaker party who took upon himself obligations of this sort.[6] It is in Treaties of the first millenium that the dramatic act of this kind is a feature.[7] The sacrificial aspect of the Covenant ceremonies is

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1. E.g. Van Seters, op.cit., pp.101-103; Kline, NBC, p.95.

2. E.g. M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant", JAOS XC (1970), pp.196-199.

3. While there are strong similarities between the two passages there are important differences. The most important being that Gen 15 speaks of God committing Himself to faithfulness, while in Jer 34 Israel had clearly committed herself and had failed! Cf. also McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, pp.60f.

4. For example, Bir Ga'yah declared in his treaty with Mati'ilu, "(As) this calf is cut into two so may Matî'el be cut into two" (J.A. Fitzmeyer, The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefîre, IA: 39-40).

5. The writer in Archives royales de Mari, II:37, is very concerned that the rite of cutting up the animals be carried out correctly. This is because "the correct performance of the ritual grounds the efficacy and the validity of the bond between the parties"(McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, p.55). For an example of the belief that the validity of the treaty depended on the use of the right kind of animal, cf. J.Munn-Rankin, "Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millenium B.C.", Iraq XVIII (1956), pp.90f. And for notes on the kinds of animal used here in Gen 15, cf. Speiser, Genesis, pp.112f. The careful cultic details are also reminiscent of the sacrificial system although the Covenant Ceremony is sufficient to explain the phenomenon.

6. Jer. 34:19f. is a good example of this. Cf. Speiser, op.cit. p.112.

7. Weinfeld, op.cit., p.198. Van Seters uses this to say that Gen 15 belongs to the first millenium (op.cit., p.258). McCarthy tentatively suggests that an earlier covenant had these new features added (op.cit., p.61). While we have to admit that a first millenium background for Gen 15 has probability on its side, it is very dangerous to use literary forms for historical dating; cf. above, p.28.

on the other hand found mainly in the second millenium.[1]   Weinfeld is
probably correct in saying that the ceremony in Gen 15 is both sacrificial
and symbolic.[2]   The fact that God Himself[3] passes through the divided
carcases indicates this total commitment to His side of the Covenant.   In
other Old Testament passages this is called "swearing by Himself".[4]
There seems to have been a tradition in Israel in which the superior
committed himself.[5]   Yahweh showed in the clearest way possible that He
would remain faithful to His Covenant.

The dread that creeps over the scene in the next few verses begins
in 15:11.   Here birds of prey (עַ֫יִט) threaten the ceremony.
They could be an evil omen or power which would at the last moment
thwart the conclusion of the Covenant.[6]   More probably they are a
symbolic curse.[7]   In addition to this we may well have a reference here
to the omen contained in 15:13-16 as birds of prey were primary symbols
of the Egyptian monarch.[8]   Verse 15:12 first describes the sun going

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1.   Weinfeld, op.cit., p.198.

2.   Op.cit., p.198.   For a thoughtful discussion, cf. McCarthy, Treaty
and Covenant, pp.53-57.   He concludes that the evidence is slightly
more in favour of the acted out potential curse interpretation.

3.   Cf. below pp.89f. for discussion of פַּ֫חַד עֲשֵׁן וְלַפִּיד אֵשׁ .

4.   Van Seters, op.cit., p.103; cf. Snijders, op.cit., pp.37f.   E.g.
22:16; 26:3; cf. Dt 32:40; Jer 22:5.

5.   D.J. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, p.125.   The elders of Israel
swear to the miserable Gibeonites (Josh 9:15), and more significant
is Yahweh's Covenant (e.g. Dt 4:13; 7:12).   As a result of a
study of treaties in 21:22-24; 26:26-33; and 31:49-54, McCarthy
concludes that the superior and not just the inferior binds himself to a
treaty   by oath (CBQ XXVI (1964), p.188).

6.   Von Rad, op.cit., p.187; Skinner, op.cit., p.281.

7.   With the possible exception of Job 28:7 all the other occurrences of
עַ֫יִט   are in the context of judgement (Isa 18:6; 46:11; Jer 12:9;
Ezek 39:4).   Cf.   עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם   of Jer. 34:17-20 which
portray the final act in the curse symbolism (M. Kline, NBC, p.95).
On birds of prey as a curse symbol, cf. Hillers, Treaty Curses,
pp.44f.; cf. Isa 34:11-17.

8.   Van Seters, op.cit., p.258.   There must therefore be some significance
in Abraham's act of driving them off.

down,[1] and a deep sleep coming on him. As the verse proceeds the tension mounts and the symbols become more terrifying. A terror[2] and a great darkness[3] fall on him. This is the context of the prediction that Abraham's descendants would certainly[4] be sojourners[5] in a land that was not their own - Egypt as every reader would know. Being removed from one's homeland is often listed as a curse.[6] The same can be said for the prediction that they would be slaves there.[7] They would also be oppressed there.[8] This would happen for four hundred years. Von Rad says that the purpose of 15:13-16 is etiological, and is designed to clarify the riddle of a promise that was not fulfilled for many generations.[9] Thus the Egyptian bondage did not come as a surprise to a weak God - He predicted it![10] Yet no reason for this exile is given.[11] The picture in 15:13-16 is not completely black. The blessing of Abraham's seed would be accomplished through the cursing of the Egyptians and the Amorites who cursed them.[12] God would execute judgement and vindicate His people[13] and they would come out with great possessions.[14] For

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1. For darkness as a curse symbol, cf. F.C. Fensham, "Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and Kudurru Inscriptions compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah", ZAW LIIV (1963), pp.170ff.

2. Cf. Ex 16:16; Dt 32:25.

3. Cf. Isa 8:22 where חֲשֵׁכָה is used together with צָרָה , "distress", to describe the judgement of God, cf. above fn. 1.

4. Note the use of the infinitive absolute of יָדַע for emphasis, cf. 15:8!

5. The גֵּר is someone who on account of war or famine has been constrained to leave his original place and tribe. He lacked the privileges and protection enjoyed by full citizens. Cf. De Vaux, Ancient Israel, pp.74-76.

6. E.g. ANET , pp.532,537.

7. Slavery is one of the implications of exile.

8. On עָנָה cf. Ex 1:11f; 22:21f. (used of the גֵּר); Dt 26:6; etc.

9. Genesis, p.187. The text presents it as a genuine prediction: etiologies are not necessarily unhistorical.

10. In Deuteronomy and the later prophetic books the fulfilment of prophecy becomes an important proof of the true Word of God (Van Seters, op.cit., p.259).

11. Generally in Israel, exile is a punishment for covenant breaking.

12. M. Kline, NBC, p.95. Cf. above, pp.55f.

13. Cf. 1 Sam 2:10; Josh 3:13; Ps 50:4; etc.

14. The despoiling of the pagan seems quite a popular theme, cf. 12:16; Ex 12:35f.

Abraham himself there are three signs of blessing. Firstly, he would not face exposure of the dead which is a curse.[1] Secondly, Abraham would go to his fathers[2] בַּעֲמֹלִים . He would not be troubled by exile or any other disaster.[3] Finally he would live to "a good old age".[4] To die old was considered a special grace of God.[5] The strange mixture of blessing and curse found in 15:13-16 reaches its contradictory climax in 15:17. Here a smoking oven (תַּנּוּר עָשָׁן) and a blazing torch (לַפִּיד אֵשׁ) pass between the dismembered carcases. These have usually been held as symbols of theophany.[6] עָשָׁן and אֵשׁ have definite connections with theophanies,[7] but neither תַּנּוּר nor לַפִּיד suggest it. It is possible to interpret these symbols as those of theophany, but by theophany we should not simply understand an appearance of Yahweh. The context of darkness and dread makes it likely that we should also read into the event the notion of the terror of the Lord which consumes unholiness.[8] Another way of interpreting these symbols has been suggested by Speiser.[9] He says that the oven and the torch are both details found in Akkadian texts pertaining to magic. They are listed together in an incantation against witches. He concludes that a combination that worked so well against witches would be no less impressive as an ominous feature in a covenant. Another suggestion is

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1. Cf. Hillers, op.cit., p.68.

2. This phrase is strictly speaking associated with the family grave, but here it can be little more than a common expression, as Abraham's real family grave was in Mesopotamia.

3. Cf. Speiser, Genesis, p.113.

4. Cf. 25:8; Jdg 8:32; 1 Chr 29:28.

5. Von Rad, Genesis, p.188. This shows, says Von Rad, that they did not see life as really being everlasting (ibid. p.262).

6. E.g. Snijders, op.cit., p.274.

7. On עָשָׁן cf. Ex.19:18; 2 Sam 22:9; Ps 18:9; Isa 4:5f.; 6:4; 14:31. Cf. Van Seters, op.cit., p.258 on a possible cultic background. On אֵשׁ , cf. e.g. Ex 3:2. However it can also imply the fire of wrath and judgement, cf. e.g. Zech 12:6. (This passage in Zecharia could be an important cross reference).

8. E.g. Ex 19:16ff. Cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., pp.164f., 168f. on the glory of the gods which terrifies enemies.

9. Genesis, pp.113f. and refs.

that of M. Weinfeld.[1] He points out that sometimes an oath was taken by holding a torch or the party being in some association with a stove or brazier. The firepot and torch of 15:17 could therefore be part of the procedure of taking the oath. At the present state of research it is not possible to say conclusively which background is the right one. It is also possible that the writer intended more than one background. Whatever the exact meaning of the symbols was, from the parallel in Jer. 34:17ff. it is likely that Yahweh Himself passed through the pieces, taking upon Himself the potential curses.[2]

The ritual of the previous verses is interpreted by 15:18a, "On that day[3] the Lord made a covenant with Abraham".[4] Scholars have said that the expression כָּרַת בְּרִית is based on the idea of cutting up an animal.[5] In support of this argument כָּרַת in itself means "to cut". בָּתַר , "cut in pieces", which occurs twice in 15:10 means virtually the same thing.[6] In 15:17 גְּזָרִים is another word used of the "pieces".[7] This is an interesting noun because of its connection with the root גָזַר which usually means "to cut" but also has associations with Treaty making.[8] From the context

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1. JAOS XC (1970), p.196 and refs.

2. Von Rad detects a certain reticence in simply identifying Yahweh with these strange phenomena - His relationship to them is not discussed (op.cit., p.188). The description carries with it a feeling of awe and mystery (Speiser, op.cit., p.124).

3. בְּיוֹם הַהוּא indicates the formal intention of a legal contract, e.g. 25:31. Cf. Weinfeld, op.cit., p.190 fn.55.

4. On כָּרַת בְּרִית as a description of the strange ritual of 15:17, cf. Von Rad, op.cit., p.188; Kline, NBC, p.95. It must also be connected with the Land Promise of the verses that follow; cf. above, fn.3.

5. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, p.53; Hillers, Covenant, p.41.

6. Speiser, op.cit., p.114. The verb בָּתַר occurs only in 15:10 and nowhere else in the Old Testament. בֶּתֶר , "piece, part", is also very rare, only occurring here (15:10) and in Jer 34:17f.

7. Also a rare word, the only other instance is Ps 136:13.

8. Cf. J.A. Fitzmyer, The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefîre, IA:7 where גזר is used in the sense of "conclude" a treaty; on the other hand in IA:40 it has the literal meaning of "cut in two". It could also be associated with circumcision, cf. the Ethiopic gzr.

as well as the associations of ‫בְּרִ‬ תֵֵ and ‫גָּזַר‬ with Treaty
making it is probable that ‫כָּרַת בְּרִ‬ ֵת has a
background in the notion of cutting up animals.[1]

The Land Promise is reiterated and given new clarity in 15:18b-21.
The delineation of the borders and the details about the land are also an
important part of the documents of Royal Grant in the ancient Near East.[2]
The comforting details given to Abraham present the interpreter with a few
problems.   On the one hand some scholars claim that the dimensions of the
land descriptions correspond to the Davidic-Solomonic Empire (cf. 1 Kings
4:21).[3]   On the other it has been pointed out that the dimensions are
far from exact.[4]

G.   THE ISHMAEL INTERLUDE (16:1ff.)

The person(s) who compiled or edited the Abraham stories had no fear
of placing passages in stark contrast side by side.   In fact it is
probably deliberate.   Coming immediately after the convincing demonstration
of the inviolability of God's Covenant promise in 15:1ff. the blunt
statement that "Sarai, Abram's wife bore him no children" (16:1a) serves
to highlight the problem of the unfulfilled promise.   In the context of
the surrounding chapters the effect of this Chapter is to retard the action
of the main narrative and to heighten the suspense.[5]   While Skinner is

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1.   It is still rather strange that ‫כָּרַת‬ was not used to describe
     the cutting.

2.   Weinfeld, JAOS, XC (1970), p.200 (and references).

3.   E.g. Von Rad, op.cit., pp.188f.   Cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.114 for the
     meaning of "the river of Egypt".

4.   Kaufmann notes that 15:18b-21 does not include Transjordan.   From
     this he concludes that the boundaries are a legacy from before the
     conquest (The Religion of Israel.   From its Beginnings to the Babylonian
     Exile, p.202).   Van Seters says that the major part of Syria, the
     Phoenician coast, and Philistia were never part of the Davidic or
     Solomonic Kingdoms (op.cit., pp.265f.).

5.   Von Rad, Genesis, p.196.

correct in saying that:

> The narrative itself contains no hint of a trial
> of Abram's faith, or an attempt on his part to
> forstall the fulfilment of the promise.[1]

Yet in the context of the surrounding narrative this chapter does contain much more than a hint of what Von Rad calls

> a fainthearted faith that cannot leave things
> with God and believes it necessary to help
> things along.[2]

Yet Sarah and Abraham should not be made to appear blacker than they are. What they did was in conformity with the family law of the Hurrians.[3] In Hurrian society as in Patriarchal society a child born of the wife's maid was considered to be the wife's child.[4] The wife could then present the child to her husband.[5]

Sarah complainingly says that God had restrained her from bearing (15:2).[6] She seeks a way in which she could be "built up".[7] Thus in 12:5 speaking to Abraham she says, "I myself put my maid on your lap."[8] Hagar is given הָשִׁל וֹ לֹ .[9] She conceives and looks with contempt on her mistress (16:4). This contempt was illegal[10] and

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1. Op.cit., p.284.

2. Op.cit., p.196. He adds that "a child so conceived in defiance or in little faith cannot be the heir of promise" (ibid.).

3. Speiser, Genesis, pp.119-121. The Patriarchs were well acquainted with Hurrian customs and often followed them (idem , p.121).

4. Cf. 30:3,9, where the child was born "on the knees" of the wife, so that the child then came symbolically from the womb of the wife itself; cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.121; Von Rad, op.cit., p.191.

5. Cf. 17:23, 25, 26, where Ishmael is called "his (Abraham's) son".

6. Cf. 20:18. The gift or denial of life is God's prerogative alone, cf. 30:2; 33:5; Ps 127:3.

7. This use of הנב is confirmed by Dt 25:9. At the same time it is an obvious word play on בן (Speiser, op.cit., p.117).

8. This is recognized legal phraseology, cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.118.

9. On this use of אשה , cf. below, p.124.

10. Cf. Speiser, op.cit., pp.117f. for an appropriate reference to the Code of Hammurabi.

Sarah is thus invoking her legal rights when she holds her husband responsible for the offence (16:5).   With Abraham's permission to do as she pleases, Sarah deals harshly with her and she flees (16:6).   It is interesting to see what an important role Sarah plays in the affair.   It is also significant that unlike the previous stories where Abraham listens to the voice of God, here he listens to that of Sarah.[1]

Hagar flees with her unborn child, yet God[2] is still very concerned with their welfare.   He commands her to return to Abraham's household and submit to Sarah (16:9).   What Hagar had done was a breach of the Law which God could not condone.   Even more important is the thought conveyed by the story that the bond between Abraham and his family cannot be broken. Abraham's responsibility for Ishmael is emphasized,[3] a responsibility further acknowledged in the next Chapter.   Yet ultimately it is not Abraham who keeps the family together, it is God!   As an indication of this truth, Ishmael's name   יִשְׁמָעֵאל   , which is given by God, means, "God hears".   The reason for this is that God hears Hagar in her distress (16:11).[4]   In response Hagar calls Him   אֵל רֳאִי   , "a God of seeing" (16:13).[5]   The name of a well also marks the occasion, בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי   , meaning literally, "the Well of the Living One who sees me" (16.14).[6]   For good measure Hagar is promised a vast number of descendants (16:10).

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1.   Cf. below, p.

2.   The manifestation of God is called   מַלְאַךְ יהוה   . There is no clear distinction between the Angel of the Lord and the Lord himself. At times the Lord speaks and at other times the Angel of the Lord, but it is clear that the speaker is the same throughout. Cf. Von Rad, op.cit., pp.193f., cf. below, p.104 fn.3.

3.   Cf. esp. 16:15f.

4.   For a repointing and redivision of MT on this point cf. M. Dahood, "The Name yišmā''ēl in Genesis 16:11", Biblica, LIX (1968), pp.87f. Plausible as his argument is, it need not concern us here as the meaning remains the same.   Since the name of a thing defines its essence, it reveals the character and destiny of the bearer. Cf. De Vaux, Ancient Israel, pp.43f.   More particularly, in this case, it is a popular etymology referring to an incident in Ishmael's life.

5.   Cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.118, on the problem of the pointing of MT.

6.   Cf. Speiser, op.cit., pp.118f. on the problem of the pointing of MT.

H.   THE COVENANT REINTERPRETED (17:1ff.)

This Chapter is generally regarded as a reinterpretation of the Yahwistic 15:1ff. by the Priestly Writer.[1]   While these chapters could well belong to two different sources, in the context of all the Abraham stories, the inclusion 17:1ff. should probably be understood as a means of emphasizing what had already been said about the Covenant.[2]

As in 15:1ff., God takes the initiative from the start.   He appears to Abraham and identifies Himself (17:1).[3]   It is also He who closes the conversation (17:22).   God takes an interest in Abraham and gives him a new name.

Von Rad has said that the change of name in 17:5 from שַׁבְרָם to אַבְרָהָם   is the result of the Priestly Writer's attempt at theologizing a double tradition.[4]   This explanation is not necessary when it is understood that the change of name conveys an important theological idea.   It is viewed as the external sign of an important change in the person's destiny.[5]   The underlying concept was probably much the same as in a king's assumption of a special throne name.[6]   Not only does the reception of a new name indicate the election of that person, it also is a mark of the bond of vassalage.[7]

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1.   E.g. Clements, <u>Abraham and David</u>, p.73.   For recent criticism of arguments for the disunity of 17:1ff., cf. Van Seters, <u>op.cit.</u>, pp. 280-287.

2.   On the idea of repetition for emphasis, cf. above, p.51.

3.   Cf. the Preamble of the Treaty Form (M. Kline, <u>NBC</u>, p.96).

4.   <u>Genesis</u>, pp.199f.   The original name   שַׁבְרָם   is best explained as "the father is exalted" (cf. Speiser, <u>Genesis</u>, p.124).   Linguistically, the medial   הָ   in   אַבְרָהָם   is a secondary extension in a manner common in Aramaic (<u>idem</u>),p.124. The text, employing popular linguistics explains it by a sound-play on   אַב־הֲמוֹן   , "father of a multitude".

5.   Cf. De Vaux, <u>Ancient Israel</u>, p.46.   This phenomenon is not to be confused with the frequent word-plays on the origin of names such as in 17:17 (Speiser, <u>op.cit.</u>, p.127).

6.   Speiser, <u>ibid.</u>,p.124.   On the possibility of this in the case of the Judaean Kings, cf. De Vaux, <u>op.cit.</u>, p.108.

7.   Cf. 2 Kings 23:34;   2 Kings 24:17;   Gn 41:45;   Dn 1:7.   Cf. De Vaux, <u>op.cit.</u>, pp.107f.

The renaming of Sarah in 17:15 from שָׂרַי to שָׂרָה is a
landmark in her career which brought her specifically into the promise in
her own right.[1]   She will be blessed with a son, and   גּוֹיִם   will
come from her as well as   מַלְכֵי עַמִּים   .   Yet the promise
is made to Abraham on her behalf!   It is therefore in a real sense a
promise to Abraham.

It is against this background of God taking an interest in Abraham
that the double imperative of 17:1 is to be interpreted.   Firstly God
says,   הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי   .   Speiser translates this as,
"conduct yourself in a way I approve".[2]   He is also commanded to be
   תָּמִים   .   This is not to be understood so much in the sense of
moral perfection but rather as a relationship to God.   It signifies
complete, unqualified surrender to God.[3]

The words which follow,   וְאֶתְּנָה בְרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ
of 17:2, indicate that in a sense the Covenant is established on condition
that Abraham lives up to the mark.   In response to this high calling and
the promise of numerous descendants, Abraham falls on his face, thus
expressing his submission.[4]   In contrast to this act of faith and
submission is 17:17 where Abraham again falls on his face, but this time
it is more than a simple expression of faith as he laughs (יִצְחָק   )
at the thought that an old couple like themselves could produce a son.
Von Rad writes:

> Combined with the pathetic gesture of reverence is
> an almost horrible laugh, deadly earnest, not in fun,
> bringing belief and unbelief close together.[5]

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1. Linguistically   שָׂרָה   employs the common feminine ending, whereas
      שָׂרַי   preserves an old and specialized feminine form (Speiser,
    op.cit., p.125).   The text itself gives no explanation of the meanings
    of the names.
2. Cf. 6:11; 10:9. (Speiser, op.cit., p.124).
3. Cf. Dt 18:13 (Von Rad, op.cit., pp.198f.).
4. Von Rad, op.cit., p.199; cf. Ru 2:10; 2 Sam 9:6; 14:22; etc. where
    it is an expression of respect towards men; and Nu 14:5; Jdg 13:20;
    etc., where it shows reverence towards God.
5. Op.cit., p.203.

Another interpretation of Abraham's laughter in 17:17 is that of Speiser who points out that צ ח ק has a wide range of meanings including "to play, be amused" and notably "to rejoice, smile on (a newborn child)". He admits that this last meaning is not the normal use of the word but says that it is more true to the context.[1] This is the probable meaning of 21:6 but Sarah's laughter in 18:12 is not a nice laugh. It is probable that Abraham's, in 17:17 also has an element of doubt in it.[2] Yet God is gracious because Abraham's צ ח ק anticipates the personal name יִצְחָק .

God grants Abraham a Covenant (17:2). Von Rad says that the use of נ ת ן and not כ ר ת which presupposes a cutting ceremony, emphasizes the fact that Abraham is a dumb recipient.[3] God's iniative is further emphasized by the use of the personal pronoun "my" in בְּרִיתִי .[4] A feature of God's Covenant with Abraham which had been disguised is brought to light in 17:7.[5] This Covenant is not only "established"[6] with Abraham but also, says God, with וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם .[7] This is similar to the Sinai Covenant where God makes covenants with Israel and with Moses.[8] Yet it is very different because Abraham is

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1. Genesis, p.125.

2. The fact that he mentions his and Sarah's ages (17:17) and has his hope set on Ishmael (17:18) indicates that he had not really understood God's promise in 17:15f.

3. Op.cit., p.199. The same cannot be said of הֵקִים , cf. fn.6 below.

4. Cf. above, p.76 fn.3.

5. The only real exception is 13:15.

6. For "confirm" as another possible translation of הֵקִים cf. Baltzer, The Covenant Formulary, p.53 fn.80 (and references). Together with בְּרִית   it occurs in Gen 6:18; 9:9; 11:17; 17:7; 19:21; Ex 6:4; Lv 26:9; Dt 8:18; Ezek 16:60, 62; 2 Kings 23:3; Jer 34:18. This last reference to Jer 34:18 is important as it establishes a link between הֵקִים   and the cutting ceremony.

7. Cf. 9:9 and 2 Sam 7:12 on וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ . "Among his contemporaries" is an acceptable rendering of לְדֹרֹתָם as דוֹר   is the age of a man from his own to his first son's birth (KB).

8. Cf. above, p.42.

related to his descendants by blood and is in a sense Israel in microcosm.
The Abrahamic Covenant is also similar to the Royal Grants which often
involve a whole dynasty.[1]   The Covenant established with Abraham will
remain in force with his descendants after his death.   Thus it can be
described as a   בְּרִית עוֹלָם   .[2]   It has been said that
because it is an everlasting Covenant it is necessarily conditionless
because nothing can break an eternal relationship.   True as this may be
in the case of certain Royal Grants and indeed the Abrahamic Covenant,[3]
similar language occurs also in for example the Parity Treaty between
Hattusilis and Rameses II.[4]   This Treaty could almost certainly be
broken if one of the parties did not keep his side of the bargain.
Another aspect of the Covenant as described in 17:17 (cf. 17:18) is
that Yahweh will be "God to you and to your descendants after you".
These words are like the "Priestly" formulation of the Covenant with Israel,
"I will be your God and you shall be my people".[5]

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1. Cf. above, p.29 , and for more detail on dynasty in the ancient Near
   East cf. esp. P.J. Calderone, Dynastic Oracle and Suzerainty Treaty,
   pp.29-40.   Cf. M. Weinfeld, JAOS XC (1970), p.199, for a detailed
   correlation of   וְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם   with
   conveyance and donation formulae from Susa, Alalaḫ, Ugarit, and
   Elephantine.   On the relation to Kingship, cf. esp. 2 Sam 7:12.
   Kingship is not the only setting, cf. Josh 14:19 (Weinfeld, op.cit.,
   pp.200f.).

2. E.g. Ps 105:10; 9:16; 17:7, 11,13; Ex 31:16; Lev 24:8; cf. Num 18:19;
   25:13.   This is described as a peculiarly 'P' phrase, cf. Driver,
   op.cit., p.ix.   It   also frequently occurs in conveyance and
   donation formulae cited by Weinfeld, op.cit., p.199.

3. Cf. e.g. Dt 9:26f., and Clements' comments (op.cit., p.68).   The
   Abrahamic Covenant is immutable, even if the Sinai Covenant be broken.

4. ANET , pp.201-203, esp. p.202.

5. Ex 6:7; 24:45; Lev 11:45; 22:33; 25:38; 26:12, 45; Num 15:41;
   Dt 24:13.   It is also a characteristic thought of Jeremiah, cf.
   7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33.
   It frequently occurs with, "and you will be my people".

Weinfeld says that these expressions of the God-man relationship are taken from the sphere of marriage/adoption legal terminology.[1] In 17:8 interest has shifted from Abraham to his descendants: Yahweh will be "their God". While this shift in 17:8 is to some extent due to the influence of the theology of a delayed Land Promise fulfilment,[2] there is here in 17:1ff. an emphasis on the privileges and duties of Abraham's descendants greater than in any of the other Abraham stories.[3]

The promise of numerous progeny in 17:2-7 is a familiar sight in the earlier Abraham stories. What is new however is that for a moment the emphasis shifts from one nation to many nations (17:4-6). He will be their father and he will also produce מְלָכִים.[4] The second half of the promise looks like a promise of a dynasty.[5] This two-fold promise cannot simply be interpreted as a reference to the two Kingdoms of Israel and Judah and their monarchies because it includes at least Ishmael and his descendants (17:20, cf. 25:12-81).[6] Von Rad could be correct in seeing here the hope of a universal extension of God's salvation beyond the limits of Israel (cf. 12:3).[7] Yet together with this emphasis is an interesting kind of nationalism. This is expressed in the difference between the promises given to Ishmael and Isaac. All the blessings that the ancient Near Eastern man sought were to be

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1. Weinfeld, JAOS XL:2 (1970), p.200. Cf. also the dynastic promise of 2 Sam 7:14.

2. Cf. below p.103 for the discussion on the sophisticated Land Promise here in 17:1ff.

3. In 17:1ff. there is an interesting oscillation between the second person singular, when Abraham is addressed, and the second person plural, when all Israel is addressed, e.g. 17:9 and 17:11.

4. The language used suggests a blood relationship between Abraham and these nations and Kings, cf. 17:7 which comes immediately after these promises.

5. Weinfeld, JAOS XC (1970), p.200.

6. Because a similar promise is made to Sarah (17:16) and Ishmael cannot be said to be her child, M. Kline argues that the promise is specifically for Israel (NBC, p.96). Much of the force of this objection is lost when it is seen that Sarah was the legal mother of Ishmael, cf. below p.113.

7. Genesis, p.200. The context of these promises could modify Von Rad's claim, as 17:7, 8 refer to Abraham's זֶרַע and to the land of Canaan.

Ishmael's (17:20).[1]   This is because God had heard Abraham's plea.[2]
In contrast to the previous verse, 17:21 is very austere.   Commenting
on this Von Rad writes:

> From the contrast it becomes clear that the
> Covenant granted by God guarantees something
> quite different from national greatness.[3]

Clearly indicated is the fact that the Covenant is only with Isaac and
his descendants.   Ishmael appears to be robbed of his rights,[4] but the
answer ultimately lies in the mystery of Election.[5]   In this process
of election even the wiles of Sarah play their part.[6]   The mention of
the name "Isaac" and his date of birth in 17:21 bring new clarity and
certainty to the promise of a son.   In asking that Ishmael   יִ חָ ה
before God (17:18), Abraham shows that he would settle for Ishmael as
the Kingdom heir.[7]   In Treaty terminology, the aspirant to a vassal
throne was made to "live" if the Suzerain established him on the throne,
particularly when he had been "killed", that is, rejected in his claims
by rivals.[8]   The implication of 17:18f. is that Isaac is the one who

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1.   He will produce numerous progeny, be the father of twelve princes and be
    made a great nation.   On "princes", cf. above, p.75.
    Cf. 25:12-18 for the fulfilment.

2.   שָׁמַע is a word-play on   יִשְׁמָעֵל   (Speiser, op.cit.,
    p.123).   Cf. above, p.93.

3.   Op.cit., p.203.

4.   The sons of the slave women Bilhah and Zilpah were given equal rank
    with those of Rachel and Leah (49:1-28) and had equal share with
    them in the land of Canaan, which was Jacob's inheritance.   But the
    reason is that they had been adopted by Rachel or by Leah (30:3-13).
    Sarah did not want Ishmael to share the inheritance (21:10) so she
    pretended to forget that she had said that the slave child would
    be hers (16:2).   Cf. 25:5f.   Cf. De Vaux, op.cit., pp.53f.

5.   Cf. Jacob and Esau stories, and the comment in Mal 1:2f.

6.   Cf. 21:12.   The woman is also active in the case of Jacob and Esau.

7.   Commenting on this Von Rad writes:

    "Abraham attempts to side-step what is incomprehensible to

    him and to direct God's interest to what is already a

    certainty, i.e. to Ishmael" (op.cit., p.203).

    This incident clearly supports the interpretation we have placed on
    16:1ff. above.

8.   M. Kline, NBC, p.97.

will "live in the sight of God".[1]   God will establish His everlasting
Covenant with Isaac.   A small problem arises here in 17:19 concerning
the nature of the involvement of Isaac's descendants in the Covenant.
As it stands MT reads that the Covenant is with Isaac   לְזַרְעוֹ
יַחֲרָיו   .[2]   However there is strong textual support in favour
of the reading   וּלְזַרְעוֹ   אַחֲרָיו   .[3]   It is difficult
to decide which is to be preferred as both interpretations of the Covenant
relationship are used of the person and work of Abraham in the Abraham
stories.. A good example of the first is 26:4f. (24) and of the second
is 17:7.   The mention of a specific Covenant with Isaac introduces the
idea of a Covenant, based on the Abrahamic, made with all three Patriarchs.
These three Covenants are sometimes regarded as a single Covenant.[4]
This Covenant is exclusive in the sense that God will only establish His
Covenant with Isaac and no-one else, not even with someone who could be
regarded as a legitimate son.

The writer of 17:1ff. is torn between two understandings of who is
included in the Covenant.   On the one hand, because he is attempting to
explain the origins of Israel's uniqueness against a background of the
origins of her neighbours, he has to maintain that God's Covenant was
with Isaac and Israel and not with Ishmael and the later Ishmaelites.
On the other hand he has to reckon with the fact that Ishmael together
with an assortment of other male members of Abraham's house took part
in the circumcision ceremony along with Abraham.[5]   The circumcision

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1.   The word   לְפָנֶיךָ   can be translated as "if you so will it"
   (Speiser, op.cit., p.125), or by the more usual "in your sight"
   (Von Rad, op.cit., p.202).

2.   Von Rad, op.cit., p.203 follows MT.

3.   When both the Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX are in agreement as they
   are here, then it is probable that their reading is the correct one;
   cf. BHS for more details.   Speiser supports this reading (op.cit., p.123).

4.   E.g. Ex 32:13.   Cf. R.E. Clements, Abraham and David, pp.66f.

5.   On the extended family in the Old Testament, cf. above, p.60.
   The men were of different status and spiritual experience.   The
   inclusion of such people as foreign slaves indicates a kind of
   universalism.   Yet it is to be remembered that in the ancient Near East
   it was assumed that the slave would have the religion of his master.
   Kidner writes:
      "For Abraham it sealed an old transaction..., for others it was
      a sudden introduction into a bond with God and each other, whose
      implications must now be grasped and lived out" (op.cit., p.131).
   The fact that women were not circumcised does not mean that they were
   excluded.   As was customary, their menfolk represented them in important
   matters such as this.

ceremony is both the Covenant (17:9f.) and the אוֹת of the Covenant
(17:11).[1] With the exception of the Philistines most of Israel's
neighbours practised circumcision as a puberty rite.[2] In Israel the
rite came to have a very deep significance.[3] M. Kline argues convincingly
that circumcision is associated with the knife rite of 15:1ff.[4] The
circumcision of the male organ of generation symbolized the cutting off
of descendants, and even worse. The curse is expressed in 17:14 where
the Covenant-breaker is to be "cut off". The use of כרת in
17:14 echoes the idiom of כָּרַת בְּרִית .[5] It is not
surprising then that circumcision symbolized consecration.[6] It is this
highly significant rite that is performed on Abraham and his household
together. The fact that the Covenant is even open to foreign slaves
hints at a universalism. Yet precisely at this point there is a strong
nationalism - those coming in must wholly belong to the community by
undergoing circumcision.[7] Davidson expresses the paradox of the Old

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1. Skinner says, "The writer's ideas are sufficiently vague and elastic
   to include both representations" (op.cit., p.294). This is the
   case in most descriptions of Treaty making.

2. Van Seters says that the ambiguity in the writer's understanding of
   the participants in the Covenant could be due to an attempt to give
   Israel's neighbours some recognition for this (op.cit., p.291).
   This could have been a contributory factor but other more important
   factors were involved, cf. above p.100.

3. De Vaux represents a large group of scholars when he says that it
   was only during the Exile that it became the distinctive mark of a
   man who belonged to Israel and Yahweh (Ancient Israel, pp.47f.).
   This is acceptable as long as it is not viewed as something which
   received little emphasis prior to the Exile.

4. "Oath and Ordeal Signs", WTJ XXVII (1965), pp.119-126; cf. above, p.90.

5. On כָּרַת בְּרִית as a description of the cutting ceremony
   in 15:1ff., cf. above, pp.90f.

6. E.g. Jer. 4:4; 6:10; 9:24,f.

7. Cf. Ex 12:43-49; and Kidner, op.cit., p.130.

Testament concept of mission very well:

> The life of Israel under the hand of God is to be
> such that this peculiar community, by its very
> peculiarity, will be in itself a powerful missionary
> agency drawing others to share in the blessings it
> has received through election.[1]

On the other hand, the limits of the Covenant are narrower than all the natural born Israelites, because those who do not circumcise their children cannot participate in it (17:14).[2]

Not only is Abraham commanded to keep the Covenant, his descendants after him are to do the same throughout their generations (17:9). The command to do this by circumcising[3] every male has led to some debate on the question of grace and works. On the one hand there is Von Rad who says that circumcision here is only the act of appropriation, of witness to the revelation of God's salvation, and the sign of its acceptance. What Von Rad says is true, but from 17:14 the fact remains that the male who is not circumcised has broken God's Covenant[5], and he shall be

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1. "Universalism in Second Isaiah", SJT XVI (1963), p.176.

2. Van Seters, op.cit., p.291. Von Rad says that this emphasis on the conscious attitude of the individual toward the Covenant is a late development as all the older rites were collective, and the individual participated in them only as a member of the group (Genesis, p.201). For an important criticism of the claim that individualism is a late development, cf. J.R. Porter, VT XV (1965), pp.361-380.

3. In 17:13 the niph'al infinitive absolute הִמּוֹל emphasizes the imperative function of יִמּוֹל (Speiser, op.cit., p.122).

4. Genesis, p.201. Hillers also maintains that circumcision is not a stipulation but a sign of the Covenant. He writes:

   > It is a mark to identify those who share in the promise
   > God makes and functions like the rainbow to make God
   > remember his own (Covenant, p.104).

5. הֵפַר is a hiphil perfect from פרר or פור, the verb is used of breaking, say fruit (Eccl 12:5), but often it is used in the sense of "invalidate due to disregard". Thus it occurs with מִצְוָה (e.g. Num 15:31); מִשְׁפָּט (e.g. Job 40:8); תוֹרָה (e.g. Ps 119:126); יִרְאָה of God (e.g. Job 15:4); עֵצָה (e.g. 2 Sam 15:34); אוֹת (e.g. Isa 44:25); בְּרִית (e.g. Isa 24:5); etc.

cut off from his people.[1]   Thus Kline has a point when he says that the Covenant is Law as well as Gospel.[2]

Abraham obeys God and he, Ishmael, and all the other males in his house are circumcised.[3]   The communal performance of the circumcision ceremony served to consummate the ratificatory proceedings of this particular Covenant.[4]

The main message of 17:1ff. has been God's Promise of descendants. A discussion of the promise of land has been left until the end so that it would not disturb the main thrust of the Chapter.   The promise of land is not as prominent as it was in 15:1ff. because it is presupposed.[5] Yet the brief reference to it in 17:8 is loaded with meaning.   As with the promise of numerous progeny it is associated with God's promise to be not only the God of Abraham but also of his descendants.   The land of Canaan which is described as   אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ   ,[6] is given

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1.   The present writer has not come across a modern scholar who suggests that the death penalty is involved here.   For example, Driver sees it as "a strong affirmation of divine disapproval" (op.cit., p.188). Some suggest that it meant excommunication from the sacred community which in those days meant ruin for the one concerned (e.g. Von Rad, op.cit., p.201; Van Seters, op.cit., p.291).   On the other hand it could be that the community was not required to enforce the Curse, but that the guilty party would be dealt with by direct divine intervention (J.R. Porter, The Extended Family in the Old Testament, p.5), cf. Ex 4:24-26.

2.   NBC, p.96.   Cf. 17:1 and above, pp.51f.

3.   Abraham and Ishmael are clearly the most important parties as 17:24-26 indicates.

4.   M. Kline, WTJ XXVII (1965), p.116.

5.   Van Seters, op.cit., p.289.

6.   The plural stands for a collective abstract (Speiser, op.cit., p.125). Regarded as a "P" word   מְגֻרִים   occurs in 28:4;   36:7; 37:1;   47:9;   Ex 6:4;   Ez 20:38;   Ps 119:54;   Job 18:19.   It represents a sophisticated attempt at defining Abraham's relation to the land.

to Abraham and his descendants as שְׁחֻזַּת עוֹלָם[1]

I. GOD CONFIRMS HIS PROMISE AND ABRAHAM

INTERCEDES FOR SODOM (18:1ff.)

Driver outlines the picture that this Chapter presents of Abraham
with these words:

> Abraham is attractively depicted: he is dignified,
> courteous, high-minded, generous, a man whom
> accordingly God deems worthy of His confidence,
> visiting him as one friend visits another,
> bestowing upon him promises and disclosing to him
> His purpose: a strong contrast to the weak and
> timid Lot, and still more so to the profligate
> inhabitants of the cities of the Kikkar.[2]

The appearance of Yahweh in human form is difficult to comprehend;[3]

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1. Another "P" word שְׁחֻזָּת is sometimes used in Genesis of a
    burial place (23:4, 9, 20; 49:30; 50:13). It is also used in the
    context of God's promise of Canaan (48:4[together with עוֹלָם
    and זְרַע אַחֲרֶיךָ] ; Num 32:22; Dt 32:49; etc.). While it
    does seem to have this technical meaning it also frequently appears
    in non-specialized contexts (e.g. 36:43).

2. Genesis, p.191.

3. In 18:1ff. there is a lack of clarity in the exact relationship
    between Yahweh and the "Three Men". In 18:1 Yahweh appears, but
    in 18:2 Abraham sees "Three Men". Throughout the Chapter there is an
    oscillation between the singular and plural pronouns. Thus e.g. in
    12:9 "they said" and in 12:10 "the Lord said". The neatest answer
    to the problem is that Yahweh is one of the Three Men. Some support
    for this is offered by 18:22 and 19:1 which speaks of two מַלְאָכִים
    arriving in Sodom. But this solution is not all that neat as
    in 18:21 Yahweh Himself has said that He will go down to Sodom. In
    19:1ff., which is often seen as a different source anyway (cf. Von Rad,
    op.cit., p.204), the messengers who obey are at times identified with
    Yahweh while in 19:13 they are seen as distinct from Him. Thus in
    19:13 they have been sent to destroy Sodom, but in 19:24 God does it.
    On the significance of this oscillation from singular to plural cf.
    A.R. Johnson, The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God,
    esp. pp.28-34 where he discusses מַלְאַךְ יהוה . In conclusion
    Von Rad is surely correct in saying that, "one must not press ... for
    a final rational clarification" (op.cit., p.211).

but it does emphasize that Yahweh is acting in a personal way.[1]   It is
possible that the hospitality offered by Abraham is meant to be understood
as a Covenant Meal and as such would serve to confirm the Covenant
relationship.[2]   Von Rad suggests that this hospitality in a sense earned
Abraham the promise of 18:9-15.[3]

The promise of a son has over the previous chapters gradually gained
clarity and concreteness and now a son is promised in the near future
(18:9-15).   As a response, Sarah's laughter (פ ח ק) and lack of
faith show up the dignified silence of Abraham.[4]   Her reason is not
difficult to understand: she and Abraham were past the age of bearing
children (18:11).   Her doubt serves to introduce the climax of the
narrative,"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (18:14).[5]

From 18:16 the focus of attention turns to the plight of Sodom.[6]

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1.   Op.cit., p.220.

2.   Cf. M. Kline, NBC, p.97.   It is unusual for the inferior party to
     provide the meal (cf. R.H. Smith, ZAW LXXVII (1965), p.136), but it
     is not unheard of, cf. Jos 9:14.

3.   Op.cit., pp.208f.   We ought perhaps not to read too much into
     Abraham's hospitality as even Lot is fairly hospitable in the next
     Chapter (cf. Driver, op.cit., p.198).

4.   According to Von Rad the woman as a negative figure of contrast was
     a favourite dramatic device (Genesis, p.208); cf. Job 2:9;
     Tobit 2:14; 10:4f.

5.   פלא may describe something "wonderful" (Ex 3:20; 2 Sam 1:26)
     or something "difficult", whether to unravel (Dt 17:8), to understand
     (Job 42:3), or as here and in Jer 32:17, 27, to effect (Driver,
     op.cit., p.194).

6.   Except for 18:20 where "Gomorrah" is used with "Sodom", Sodom is
     used to describe the whole area.   It is the prime example of the
     class which it represents.   Therefore it is the only city
     mentioned   (Speiser, op.cit., p.133).

The sin of Sodom is very great.[1] Because of this God has decided to punish them. He decides to inform Abraham of the divine secret because Abraham is in a special relationship to Him. This relationship is said in 18:18 to be important because Abraham's family, Israel, shall

$$\text{[5]וְנִבְרְכוּ [4]וְעָצוּם [3]גָּדוֹל לְגוֹי [2]יִהְיֶה [1]הָיוֹ}$$
$$\text{בוֹ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ}$$

So far the description of Abraham's calling is fairly familiar. Now in 18:19, God says,

$$\text{כִּי [6]יְדַעְתִּיו לְמַעַן [7]אֲשֶׁר [8]יְצַוֶּה אֶת־בָּנָיו}$$
$$\text{וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו [9]וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת}$$

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1. In Isa 1:10; 3:9; it is bad justice; in Ezek 16:49 it is pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease; in Jer 23:14, adultery, lying, and unwillingness to repent; but here in Genesis it is sodomy that is emphasized. This was regarded as a particularly heinous crime, cf. Lev 18:22; 20:13.

2. The infinitive absolute is used for emphasis.

3. Cf. 12:2; 17:20; 21:18.

4. This is the only time this word meaning "powerful" is used in the Abraham stories.

5. Cf. above, pp.53f.

6. The Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, and other versions do not have the suffix. Either reading is possible. On ידע as a Covenant word cf. above, pp.41f.; cf. Muilenberg, Words and Meanings, eds. P.R. Ackroyd and B. Linders, p.178.

7. BDB translates it as, "to the end" (p.775); for similar usages, cf. Dt 27:3; Jos 3:4; 2 Sam 13:5; Jer 42:6.

8. Cf. Ex 39:34 where God issues orders via Moses.

9. This phrase refers not only to his immediate family but to his future descendants, Israel, as well, cf. above, p.98.   Van Seters, who sets the Abraham stories against an Exilic background, says that by associating the Law with Abraham and constituting it as a family responsibility separate from any larger state authority, the writer overcomes the problem of a nation which had broken the Sinai Covenant and did not know where to turn (op.cit., pp.273f.). Much of the force of his argument is lost when the Exilic background thesis is questioned; cf. above, pp.21f.

[2] צְדָקָה [1] וּמִשְׁפָּט . The emphasis on right living
which is strongly reminiscent of the Mosaic Covenant, is highlighted
by the contrast with the lifestyle of the Sodomites.   The
concluding words of 18:19 are interesting.   Abraham and his
descendants are to live in the way suggested in the earlier part
the verse, לְמַעַן [3] הָבִיא יְהוָה עַל־אַבְרָהָם
אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר [4] עָלָיו .   It is difficult to know
whether לְמַעַן here means a strict condition implying that if
the demands are not met God will not fulfil His promise.   Weinfeld says
that it suggests an expectation and not a condition,[5] but Van Seters is
probably more correct in saying that it is "at least partially conditional".[6]
This is because even in the Abraham stories, which emphasize the grace of
God, the idea of obedience is never absent.[7]   Therefore in a sense the
fulfilment of the Promise to Abraham depends on the lifestyle of his
descendants.

Because of the uniqueness of Abraham's relation to God, revealed
in 18:18f., God discloses His will to Abraham.   This relationship
gives Abraham the right to act as intercessor.[8]   Abraham's explorations

1.   On צְדָק cf. above, p.84.   It is the duty of the King to act as judge
     and to uphold righteousness (Hos 13:10).   Thus in Ps 72 we have a
     picture of peace and prosperity when a King judges righteously.   This
     is to be a characteristic of the future King (and Messiah), cf.
     Isa 9:7; 11:3-5; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-16.
2.   It is what God does (18:25). Cf. Ex 15:25ff. where it is used together with
     חֹק , מִצְוָה , צְדָקָה , תּוֹרָה .   It is
     also linked with the Sinai Law (e.g. Ex 21:1).
3.   Cf. 37:22; 50:20; Ex 1:11; 9:16; 10:1; etc.
4.   It is frequently used in the everyday sense of "to speak" (e.g.
     20:8), but it is also frequently used to describe God's promise
     (e.g. 19:21); 21:1, 2; 24:7; cf. Dt 6:3; 1 Sam 25:30).
5.   JAOS XC (1970), p.195 fn.102.
6.   Op.cit., p.274.
7.   Cf. above, pp.51f.
8.   Cf. 20:7.   In this, he is very similar to Moses, cf. above,pp.41f.

into the character of God, which becomes more and more audacious,[1] is in a sense initiated by God Himself as He raised the matter (18:17). Abraham's reasons for taking on himself such a dangerous task is not simply a concern for Lot his kinsman,[2] he is concerned for all the people of Sodom. This concern is part of what it means to be a blessing to the nations.[3] Abraham's question, "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?" is not as some have thought a protest on behalf of individualism. If this were so then there would have been little point to the lengthy debate about the number of righteous people in Sodom. Abraham is not concerned wht the salvation of the righteous few, but with the question of whether the existence of the righteous few could cause a reprieve for the whole community.[4] The conclusion is that an astonishingly small number of innocent men is sufficient to stem the judgement, "so predominant is God's will to save over His will to punish".[5] We are not told why the number stops at ten, but according to Speiser the implication is that fewer people can only save themselves.[6] This interpretation is supported by the events of 19:1ff. when only Lot and his family are saved.

J. THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND THE RESCUE OF LOT
(19:1ff.)

The outcry[7] against Sodom's sin (18:20) is investigated by the Two Messengers. The incident described in 19:4-11 shows that the outcry is

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1. In those days men knew that they were but dust (18:27; cf. Job 9:12; Dan 4:32).

2. One must not minimize this concern as does Von Rad, op.cit., p.212. Cf. 19:1ff., esp. 19:29 where only Lot and his family receive the benefit of Abraham's intercession. Cf. also above, pp.75f.

3. Wolff argues that the words of 18:25, "Judge of all the earth", indicate that Sodom is to be understood as a type of all the nations (Interp XX (1966), p.148). This is possible but not probable.

4. Von Rad, op.cit., pp.211-215; Speiser, op.cit., p.135.

5. Von Rad, op.cit., p.214.

6. Op.cit., p.135. The next step is left until Isa 53.

7. צְעָקָה is a technical legal term and designates the cry for help which one who suffers a great injustice utters. Such a cry calls for an investigation (Von Rad, op.cit., p.211).

justified.[1] The first object of the visit has been achieved. The
second is to rescue Lot because he is righteous (this is the implication
at least). That Lot can escape with his family (19:12-14) indicates the
family solidarity of Lot in God's eyes. However the members are also
free to defy it as do his sons-in-law who think that Lot is jesting.
The catastrophe comes,[2] and the wavering Lot and his two daughters are
the only ones who finally escape. Abraham's role in the rescue is dealt
with in 19:29. Here we are told that God saved Lot because He remembered
Abraham. The word זכר is frequently used when speaking of God's
keeping His promise, especially His promise to the Patriarchs.[3] Sometimes
it is a confident statement of what God does, but on other occasions it
is a desperate plea. Here in 19:29 it shows that God honours the
relationship He has with Abraham. The reason for this act of God is
probably not only the intercession of Abraham but also the kinship link
between the two men. Whatever the precise reason, God saves Lot
because of Abraham.[4]

Lot moves from Zoar to a cave in the hills because he is afraid.[5]
His life becomes increasingly bankrupt.[6] The incest committed in his

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1. In 18:23-32 Abraham never doubted this. Indeed God had known all
   along (18:17). That everyone in Sodom is guilty is made clear by 19:4.

2. There is an element of truth in the claim that the catastrophe is an
   etiology explaining why the area is barren. "Sodom and Gomorrah"
   was a well known example of Divine judgement on a sinful community,
   cf. Dt 29:23; Isa 1:9f.; 13:19; Jer 49:18; 50:40; Ezek 16:46ff.;
   Hos 11:8; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9; Ps 11:6; Lam 4:6.
   On the geography of the incident, cf. Kline, NBC, p.98.

3. Ex 2:24; 6:5; 32:13; Lev 26:42,45; Ps 105:8ff., 42; 106:45;
   111:5; 1 Chr 16:15.

4. Cf. 8:1.

5. This could be interpreted as an act of faithlessness, cf. 19:21.

6. Note the contrast between the fine country in which he had dwelt
   (13:10) in a respectable house (19:2f.), and the squalor of a cave;
   cf. Von Rad, op.cit., p.224.

household[1] marked the final separation from Abraham and the Covenant Kingdom as it produced the Moabites and the Ammonites, enemies who are frequently denounced by the prophets.[2] Yet in spite of the people of Abraham and Lot going separate ways, the Abraham stories emphasize their common origin as well as Abraham's great concern for Lot.

K. ABRAHAM DOES IT AGAIN (20:1ff.)

On the brink of the birth of Isaac the ancestress is threatened when Abraham again exchanges the possibility of the fulfilment of the promise for personal safety.[3] It is clear that if the promise is ever fulfilled it will be in spite of man.[4] The fact that he should have learnt from his previous experience (12:10-20) serves to emphasize the frailty of man and the grace of God.[5]

Abraham's fall from the height of his position as intercessor for Sodom is emphasized by Abimelech being cast in the same role. God speaks

1. The narrative does not directly condemn the action of Lot's daughters. Neither is it an expression of national contempt because Israel herself had the occasional skeleton in the cupboard, cf. 38:1ff. on Judah.

2. On the etymology of Moab and Ammon, cf. Skinner, op.cit., pp.313f.

3. On his moral dilemma cf. above, p.71.

4. Cf. esp. 20:6 on how God protects Sarah in a very difficult situation. It is God who takes the initiative by speaking to Abimelech of his fate (20:3) and who in fact punishes Abimelech and his household.

5. The fact that he made the same mistake twice is used as an argument in support of the theory that the two accounts are variants of the same tradition. Cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.151. On the idea of repetition for emphasis cf. above, p.51.

to Abimelech and there is also a discussion about righteousness in
20: 3-7. The "innocence"[1] of Abimelech highlights Abraham's guilt. He
had done מַעֲשִׂים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יֵעָשׂוּ (20:9), that is, things
that are not sanctioned by the conventional code of morals.[2] Abraham had
betrayed a fundamental principle of hospitality,[3] and had been a curse
rather than a blessing. This makes his talk about יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים
in 20:11 so ironical.[4] In spite of the narrator's recognition that Sarah
was really Abraham's half-sister, thus rescuing him from being a complete
deceiver,[5] there is a veiled comparison between his treatment of Sarah
and Lot's offer of his daughters (19:8).[6]

In spite of his humiliation Abraham has a vital role in solving the
problem which he and Abimelech have created. Von Rad describes it as
"Abraham's strange role as the guilty mediator".[7] God puts Abraham
forward as the solution because he is נָבִיא and will pray for
Abimelech (20:7).[8] After the full restoration of Sarah as commanded in

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1. While God recognizes his subjective innocence (20:6) he is still
   objectively guilty of violating a marriage bond (cf. Von Rad, op.cit.,
   p.228). In addition, this is a special marriage because of the
   Promise. Like the Prophets his person and property are inviolable,
   cf. above, pp.55f.

2. Skinner, op.cit., p.318. Cf. e.g. 34:7; 2 Sam 13:12. It is an
   oblique reference to Torah.

3. Kidner, op.cit., p.138.

4. Von Rad writes,

   "The 'fear of God' must be understood here in the general
   ancient sense of reverence and regard of the most
   elementary moral norms, whose severe guardian was
   everywhere considered to be the divinity"(op.cit., p.229).

5. The practice is forbidden in Lev 18:9,11; 20:17; but 2 Sam 13:13
   indicates that it was still practised. But cf. Cassuto, op.cit.,
   p.276, who says that Abraham and Sarah were not really brother and
   sister.

6. Kline, NBC, p.98.

7. Op.cit., pp.227f. On the ambiguous role of a guilty prophet who was
   nevertheless authorized by God, cf. 1 Kings 13:11ff.

8. For the idea of the true Prophet as an intercessor, cf. Num 12:13;
   21:7; Dt 9:26; 1 Sam 12:19-23.

20:7,[1] it is reported in 20:17 that Abraham prayed to God, and God lifted his curse from Abimelech.

L. THE CLIMAX: A CHILD IS BORN (21:1-8)

Sarah's conception is said to have taken place exactly according to the Promise (21:1f.).[2] The specific promise referred to is clearly that in 18:9-15 where the Lord promises to return at a definite time. The suspense of waiting is now over, only to be dramatically revived in 22:1ff.

Abraham names his son יִצְחָק (21:3),[3] and circumcises him as God has commanded (21:4). This is a reference to the Covenant in 17:1ff. The uniqueness of Isaac is emphasized by a comparison with Ishmael in the next section. Abraham is told that in contrast to Ishmael, it is בְיִצְחָק יִקָּרֵא לְךָ זָרַע (21:12). If the name of a thing defines its essence revealing the character and destiny of the bearer,[4] then only descendants of Abraham via Isaac will have the special character and destiny. Ishmael is also called Abraham's זֶרַע in 21:13, but his descendants are never known as such.[5]

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1. The terrified Abimelech not only restored Sarah, but the gifts restored her honour completely (cf. Skinner, op.cit., p.319).

2. One of the verbs used to describe the event, פָּקַד means "visited" with favour and blessing, e.g. Ex 3:16; Ps 80:14; and esp. 1 Sam 2:21.

3. The meaning of the name is related to צָחַק . In the case of both Abraham (17:17) and Sarah (18:12) their laughter contained more than a touch of unbelief. The fact that this laughter alludes to the name of the promised son shows in a dramatic way that God can work in spite of unbelief. This element of unbelief could also be present here in 21:6 although the main idea is the devout, joyous thanksgiving of a once sterile woman, cf. 1 Sam 2:5; Ps 113:9.

4. Cf. De Vaux, Ancient Israel, pp.43f.

5. On the reasons for this tension, cf. above, pp.100f.

M.   THE PARTING OF THE WAY (21:9-21)

The arrival of the child of the promise coincides with the final exclusion of Ishmael.[1]   What he did to merit Sarah's violent displeasure is not clear.   If MT is followed on 21:9 then all that מְצַחֵק [2] need mean is that Ishmael was playing.   But if LXX which adds μετα Ισαακ του υἱου αὐτης , is followed,[3] then while "playing" is still appropriate,[4] other meanings are also possible. "Mocking" is the most likely,[5] but it could have sexual connotations.[6] If these last interpretations are correct, they remove Sarah's actions from the realm of blind jealousy to that of righteous indignation.   It is a crime to make a mockery of God's chosen.[7]   But this interpretation is not all that likely in the light of the fact that Abraham did not originally think it justified (21:11).[8]   Indeed her action could reveal a lack of faith in God's promise that Isaac would be the chief heir.[9] The reader does not expect that God would be on Sarah's side, but rather on Abraham's.   Yet God (21:12) is showing how He "pursues His great historical purposes in, with, and under all headstrong acts of men".[10]

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1.   The earlier exclusion (16:1ff.) is usually described as a parallel tradition. In spite of difficulties in some of the details, the text as we have it clearly means us to understand that the second incident happened some years after the first, cf. 16:16 and 21:5.

2.   Note the allusion to יִצְחָק .

3.   For a thorough discussion of the textual problem cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.155.

4.   E.g. Skinner, op.cit., p.322.

5.   Cf. 19:14; Jdg 16:25.

6.   Cf. 26:8.   This is not the usual meaning of the word.

7.   M. Kline, NBC, p.99. Cf. above, pp.55f.

8.   Abraham felt himself bound to Ishmael and Hagar. This was probably more than affection as legally Ishmael was entitled to a share in the inheritance, cf. above, p.99 fn.4.

9.   Cf. 17:1ff. Legally a son by a slave woman could forgo his inheritance claim in exchange for freedom. Sarah compels them to do this (Kline, NBC, p.99)!

10. Von Rad, op.cit., p.233.

Not only does the story show Abraham's concern for Hagar and Ishmael,[1] more than anything it shows God's continuing concern.   The desperate situation in which they find themselves serves to magnify the act of God in answering their cry for help.[2]   As the reader has been so often in the case of the Promise of Isaac, he here is once again certain that God's promise would fail.[3]   But no, all is not lost as God is in control. In the midst of the gloom comes the promise to Hagar that God would make a great nation of Ishmael (21:18).[4]   Earlier in 21:13 the same promise had been given to comfort Abraham, but with a significant addition,

כִּי זַרְעֲךָ הוּא   .   Abraham is the reason why God takes an interest in Ishmael.   That the boy grows up amidst the perils and hardships of the desert is proof that God is with him (21:20).[5]   However, his dwelling in the Sinai Peninsula and his marriage to an Egyptian girl indicates how far he has moved from his father's house.[6]   It is also significant that in obtaining a wife for her son (21:21) Hagar has taken over the responsibility of the father.[7]

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1.   21:11, 14.

2.   On the textual problem of who did the crying in 21:16, cf. Speiser, op.cit., pp.155f.

Even Hagar had given up (21:15f.), cf. Isa 49:15.

3.   For earlier promises regarding Ishmael, cf. 16:12;   17:20; 21:13.

4.   For the fulfilment, cf. 25:12-18.

5.   Skinner, op.cit., p.324.   On the description of "God being with someone", 21:22 is a most important cross-reference.   Cf. also 26:3, 24, 28;   28:15, 20;   31:3, 5;   35:3;   39:2, 3, 21, 23; 48:21;   Ex 3:12;   etc.

6.   Von Rad, op.cit., p.234.   On the marriage customs in Abraham's house cf. 24:3-4;   26:34;   27:46.   For a full discussion, cf. below, pp.121f.

7.   On the custom, cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.156.

N.   THE COVENANT WITH ABIMELECH (21:22-34)

This passage records a Treaty between Abraham and Abimelech.[1]   It
is not altogether clear who is the superior party.   While Abimelech was
almost certainly militarily stronger,[2] there can be little doubt that
his previous experience had taught him a lot of respect for Abraham's
God.   In 21:22 he says of Abraham that   אֱלֹהִים עִמְּךָ
בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה .[3]   This is a profound description of
Abraham's unique relation to God.   Abraham's gift of sheep and oxen
(21:27) cannot be used to show that he is the weaker or stronger party.[4]
The second group of animals,   שֶׁבַע כְּבָשֹׂת   , was more than a
gift (21:28-30).   These young ewe lambs would not be slaughtered as

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1.   It is usual to say that because two groups of animals are involved,
     two legal settings and two etiologies, there are at least two sources
     which are combined here (cf. Skinner, op.cit., p.325;   McCarthy,
     "Three Covenants in Genesis", CBQ XXVI (1964),pp.179ff.).   On the
     other hand Speiser, op.cit., p.160,and Sheriffs, op.cit., pp.400ff.,
     maintain that the whole narrative can be logically interpreted as
     it stands.   This is to be preferred, cf. above, Ch.I.
     Because of the striking similarities with 26:26-31 it has often
     been said that they are parallel traditions.   For a careful statement
     of the Conservative point of view which sees them as consecutive,
     cf. Sheriffs, op.cit., pp.404-414.

2.   He brings his army chief to show this (21:22).   He also slightingly
     uses the verb   גוּר   to describe Abraham's status in 21:23
     (Speiser, op.cit., p.159).   Abraham had been scared of Abimelech
     (20:11);   this is probably still the case although at Beersheba, he
     is beyond the immediate control of Abimelech.

3.   The same is said of Isaac (26:28), Jacob (30:27), and Joseph (39:3).

4.   Gifts were frequently offered by the superior party, but occasionally
     the weaker offers a gift, usually in the form of a bribe (cf.
     McCarthy, CBQ XXVI (1964), pp.182f. for examples).   Cf. Sheriffs,
     op.cit., p.401 for the theory that it was for a Covenant Meal (and
     partly for sacrifice) which the superior usually provided.

1. they would be used for breeding בַּעֲבוּר תִּהְיֶה ־לִּ֫י לְעֵדָה
In 21:23f. Abraham swears an oath and in 21:31 both do.[2]   The words of
21:27b כָּרַתִ בְּרִית may be an alternative expression for
נִשְׁבַּע used in connection with Treaty making.[3]   The proceedings
are linked to the dual etiology of the words שֶׁבַע and נִשְׁבַּע.
(21:31).[4]

It is difficult to decide who the superior party is although the
fact that Abraham has a strong God on his side suggests that he is
superior.   Both agree in 21:23 to deal loyally with each other.[5]
The Covenant is not with Abimelech alone but with his descendants as
well (21:23).[6]

0.   THE GREAT TEST (22:1-19)

The suspense which has been woven into the narratives comes to a
frightening climax as Abraham faces his greatest test.   A harder test
could not have been devised as all Abraham's hopes are centred on his
only son Isaac - and God knows it!   In 22:2 God describes Isaac as

7.   אֶת ־בִּנְךָ אֶת ־יְחִ֫ידְךָ אֲשֶׁר ־אָהַבְתָּ

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1.   For the meaning of עֵדָה as "witness", cf. McCarthy, CBQ XXVI
     (1964), p.186;   cf. 31:44 where עֵד is either a written or oral
     text (idem, p.186).

2.   For the custom in Israel of the superior swearing an oath, cf. above, p.87.

3.   Mitchell, WTJ ( ), p.33.   McCarthy suggests that the two phrases
     were kept apart in the early period (op.cit., p.181).   Sheriffs is
     rightly sceptical of this claim which depends so much on source
     analysis (op.cit., p.401 n.1).

4.   Speiser, op.cit., p.160.

5.   On the meaning of חֶסֶד , particularly in the context of Treaty
     making, cf. below, p.

6.   The nouns נִין and נֶכֶד both refer to progeny (Speiser,
     op.cit., p.159).   Cf. Job 18:19;   Isa 14:22.

7.   Cf. 22:12, 16.   The regular adjective for "one" is not used, but a
     noun meaning "the unique one" (Speiser, op.cit., p.163).   Isaac is
     not the only natural son (cf. 21:11) but he is the unique one, cf.
     above, p.100.

The frequent use of ‭בְן‬ with the personal pronoun in this Chapter emphasizes the relationship between Abraham and Isaac as well as indicating the cost involved in what Abraham plans to do (22:2, 8, 9, 10).

The reader is told that God is testing Abraham (22:1).[1] But he very soon finds himself caught up in the agonizing tension of Abraham's plight.[2] Von Rad's comment on the story deserves to be quoted in full:

> It concerns something much more frightful than child sacrifice. It has to do with a road out into God-forsakenness, a road on which Abraham does not know that God is only testing him.[3]

To Abraham God must appear bent on destroying the work which He has started.[4] Yet this major test, instead of breaking him, brings him to the summit of his lifelong walk with God. With the absence of comment in the text concealing and at the same time revealing the depth of his anguish; Abraham obeys without question. His "here am I" of 22:1 (cf. 22:11) shows that he is receptive to the will of God. The fact that it takes at least three days before he is in a position to do the strange deed (22:3) shows that his obedience stands firm.[5] Also noteworthy is Isaac's passive obedience.[6]

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1. This is the only time ‭נסה‬ is used in the Abraham stories. It means "to test in order to know", cf. Ex 15:25; 16:4; 20:24; and esp. Dt 8:2.

2. Cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.164. The drama is heightened rather than decreased by the fact that so much is left unsaid.

3. Op.cit., p.244.

4. The thought that, of all people, the temptation should come from the God of Israel, is emphasized by placing the noun "God" before the verb ‭נסה‬ in 22:1 as well as attaching the definite article (‭הָאֱלֹהִים‬), cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.162.

5. Von Rad, op.cit., p.240.

6. He is now old enough to carry wood (22:6) and ask intelligent questions (22:7). Yet there is no indication that he struggled against what seemed to be his fate.

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It is possible that in the midst of the blackness Abraham saw a
spark of hope.[1]   Kierkegaard's "Knight of Faith" knows well the despair
of the "Knight of Infinite Resignation", but at the same time he believes
"by virtue of the absurd" that all is not lost.[2]   True to Abraham's past
experience of Him, God does not break His Promise.   He stops the
offering at the last minute and miraculously provides a ram as a sacrifice.
וַיַּעַל אֹתוֹ ‎.[3]   This gracious provision by God is emphasized by
the use of popular linguistics (22:14).[4]

In passing the test Abraham has shown that he fears God (22:12).[5]
Because of his total obedience God promises Abraham certain things.
The old promises of blessing and numerous descendants are repeated (22:17).[6]
A new promise in 22:17b is that   וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֵת שַׁ[7]

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1.   Cf. 22:5, 8. Kidner thinks it possible (op.cit., p.143).

2.   Johannes De Silentio [S. Kierkegaard] , "Fear and Trembling: A
     Dialectical Lyric", A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. R. Bretall (London:
     Oxford University Press, 1947).

3.   This is the logic of substitution. An important parallel is the
     belief that the first-born in Israel belonged to God (e.g. Ex 22:29).
     God symbolically took the first-born, but gave it back to its parents
     upon payment of a redemption price (Driver, op.cit., p.221).

4.   The verb   רָאָה   usually means "to see", but it can mean "to
     provide" (cf. 1 Sam 16:1c).   That it means "provide" here has the
     support of its use in 22:8. In 22:14 the first use of the verb is
     active   יִרְאֶה   and alludes to 22:8, while the second is passive,
     יֵרָאֶה   and is connected by Speiser with   מֹרִיָּה   in 22:2
     (op.cit., pp.163f.).   Cf. Van Seters who says that   מֹרִיָּה   means
     something like "the land of the fear of Yah(weh)" (op.cit., p.238).
     This is possible but difficult to prove.

5.   This is not an emotional reaction to the reality of God, but the cause
     of his admirable obedience (Von Rad, op.cit., pp.241f.); cf. 20:11;
     42:18; 2 Kings 4:1; Isa 11:2; Prov 1:7; and esp. Job 1:1, 8.
     Cf. further above, p. 111 fn.4.

6.   Note the use of the infinitive absolute of   בָּרַךְ   and   רָבָה
     for emphasis.   On the image of the stars of heaven cf. above, p.83
     and on the dust of the earth, cf. below, p.118.

7.   Cf. above, pp.82f.

שְׁעַר אֹיְבָיו .[1]   There is also the familiar promise of
being a blessing to all men in 22:18,[2] but significantly for the first
time it is Abraham's descendants who will be the source of blessing.
All these promises are assured because   בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־יְהוָֹה
(22:16).[3]

P.   FAMILY TIES (22:20-24)

These verses tacked on at the end of an exciting chapter, which are
impatiently passed over by the reader, have an interest of their own.
That it is recorded as an event in Abraham's life indicates that at least
he was interested in the news and by implication Israel would be as well.
They show Israel's consciousness of distant kinship.[4]   It is interesting
to see how tribes spring up all around Abraham.[5]   As with Ishmael twelve
tribes are traced back to Nahor, Abraham's brother.

Nahor's grand-daughter Rebekah (cf. 24:15) and great grand-daughters
Leah and Rachel become ancestral mothers of the Covenant People.   The
omission of Laban (cf. 24:29) from the genealogy serves to centre attention
on Rebekah.   This focus on the Israelite ancestresses continues through
the next two chapters.[7]

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1.   Cf. 24:60 where   שַׁעַר   is also used with   יִרַשׁ . To
     possess the gate of a city is to control it as it is the administrative.
     and military centre, cf. 14:20.
2.   On the meaning of   וְהִתְבָּרֲכוּ   , cf. above, pp.56-58.
3.   Cf. above, p.87.
4.   Kidner, op.cit., p.144.
5.   Cf. those arising from his second wife Keturah (25:1-4), and
     Ishmael (25:12-16).
6.   Cf. 11:27 for the relationship between Abraham and Nahor.
7.   Kline, NBC, p.100.

Q. A STAKE IN THE LAND (23:1ff.)

The death of Sarah serves as the occasion for the first legal acquisition of land by Abraham. The living could get by as sojourners, but the dead required a permanent resting ground.[1] This shows that the Patriarchs did not go entirely unrewarded.[2] It is possible that the acquisition of land in this Chapter should be understood as a prophetic sign of what would be true after the Conquest.[3] This Chapter describes a very worldly incident, but because of its association with the Land Promise it is a central part of Israel's faith.

The loyal background to the Chapter has been discussed by several scholars.[4] On the one hand M.R. Lehmann sees in Ephron's offer of both the cave and the field (23:11) an attempt to subject Abraham to the feudal duties which pass from seller to buyer when an entire property is bought. This practice is recorded in the Hittite Code, 46 and 47.[5] G.M. Tucker

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1. Speiser, op.cit., pp.171f. In the ancient Near East all families of distinction had a family sepulchre (Driver, op.cit., p.225). The next Chapter emphasizes the importance of Abraham's family arrangements being carried out in a dignified and proper way.

2. Von Rad, op.cit., p.250. Abraham is buried in the family sepulchre (25:9), as well as Isaac (35:29), Rebekah and Leah (49:31), and Jacob (30:13).

3. Kline, NBC, p.100. Cf. Jer 32:6-25. The fact that this is not yet true is emphasized by the definite distinction made between the

   בֵּר (23:7), and the עַם הָאָרֶץ (23:12,13);

   Cf. Speiser, op.cit., p.172.

   Through repetition great stress is laid in the text on the owners of the land, בְּנֵי חֵת (23:3, 5, 7, 10, 18, 19). Their precise identity is something of a mystery. Speiser tentatively suggests that they were a non-Semitic as well as non-Canaanite people of pre-Israelite Palestine (op.cit., p.172).

4. The Chapter is not a legal text but a narrative; therefore it should not be expected that all the features found in ancient Near Eastern contracts be mentioned.

5. "Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law", BASOR CXXIX (1953), pp.15-18.

is critical of this theory because Abraham did not hesitate to buy the
entire field, nor did he ever insist that he wanted only the cave.[1]
Neither can we know whether the field was Ephron's only possession.[2]
Tucker maintains that the Chapter has characteristics common to ancient
Near Eastern legal usage from many periods.[3]   He is probably correct.

Whatever the legal background be, the significance of the Chapter is
that it shows Abraham receiving a foretaste of what all Israel would one
day enjoy.   There is therefore a reason for the inclusion of this Chapter
in the Canon, even though it contains so much legal diplomacy.

R.   THE PROMISED LINE SECURED (24:1ff.)

The Abraham we meet in 24:1 has been blessed in all things,[4] but
he is obviously near the end of his life.   If the promises of God are to
be realized, the acquisition of a wife for Isaac is of utmost importance.
In this matter Abraham again faces a testing challenge to his faith in
God.   His belief that Isaac's wife ought not to be one of the local
Canaanite women, but as in 24:4 a woman from Abraham's home land and
kindred,[5] is mainly because of the religious threat of intermarriage.[6]

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1.   "The Legal Background of Genesis 23", JBL LXXXV (1966), pp.77–84.

2.   Kidner, op.cit., p.145 fn.1.

3.   Loc.cit.

4.   The character of this blessing is revealed in 24:35f. The narrator
      enjoys the fact that because of his prosperity, Abraham can manage
      the marriage of his son "according to his status and desire" (Von
      Rad, op.cit., p.254).

5.   On   מוֹלֶדֶת   , cf. above, p.62 fn.6.

6.   Von Rad, op.cit., p.255. Cf. Dt 7:3, 4; 1 Kings 11:4; Ezra 9.
      The relatives in Mesopotamia at least respond favourably to what God
      is doing. Laban recognizes that God has spoken (24:51) and their
      blessing of Rebekah (24:60) is very much like God's blessing of
      Abraham and his descendants (2:17). Cf. above, pp. 65f. for a
      discussion on the possible religious beliefs of Abraham's
      Mesopotamian relatives.

There is also an element of the idea that it is good to marry members of one's own tribe anyway,[1] thus in a sense preserving racial purity.[2] While Treaties of peace with local authorities are in order,[3] a bond as close as marriage is not. This is one of the first signs of tension between Abraham and his neighbours.[4] One could possibly detect in this passage the inference that for the Patriarchs to intermarry with the Canaanites would be a rejection of God's promise to give all the land of the Canaanites to them.[5] Whatever his reasons were, Abraham felt very strongly that his future daughter-in-law should not be a Canaanite but a member of his kinship group in Mesopotamia. But equally strongly he believes that if the girl is not willing to leave her home, Isaac is not to leave the Promised Land to join her (24:6, 8). This is because God had called him and his family from his father's house and had promised them the Land of Canaan (24:7). There could be no going back on this. He must have agonized over the thought that a suitable wife would not be found and the promise would be in ruins.[6] But all these careful safeguards become unnecessary because Yahweh is clearly in control.[7] God does prosper the Servant's journey.[8]

In 24:12-14 the Servant places the situation in God's hands. The answer follows like a miracle.[9] Not only does she turn out to be generous, beautiful, and a member of the right family, but she and the family agree to the plan.

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1. Cf. De Vaux, Ancient Israel, pp.30f.

2. Van Seters maintains that racial purity is the most important factor here in 24:1ff. (op.cit., p.277).

3. Cf. 14:13; 21:22-39; etc.

4. Van Seters, op.cit., p.277. References like 22:17 in particular suggest this as well.

5. Van Seters maintains that this is the case (op.cit., p.277).

6. The fatalism of 24:6, 8 is softened in the Servant's description of the event which has Abraham saying that the Lord will send His angel with the Servant to bring success to the mission (24:40).

7. Guidance and divine control are the underlying themes of the whole Chapter (Van Seters, op.cit., p.241f.). This is not really found anywhere else except in the Joseph stories (Von Rad, op.cit., p.259).

8. Cf. 24:21, 40, 42, 56.

9. God's willingness to intervene is indicated by the fact that He answers even before the Servant has finished praying (24:15).

His Servant honours Abraham in the way he relies fully on God.[1]
There is a relationship of extreme confidence between Abraham and his chief
Servant. The oath sworn by the Servant is the expression of this.[2]
The Servant acts almost as a mediator between Abraham and God when he
calls on Him to show חֶסֶד to his master (24:12, 14). When
God grants him success he thanks Him for showing חֶסֶד as well
as אֱמֶת (24:27). Thus in his appeal to God's חֶסֶד the
Servant is referring to God's Covenant Promise of numerous progeny.[4]

With the arrival of Rebekah in the closing verses of the Chapter it
becomes clear that Isaac and his new wife are replacing Abraham and Sarah.
Thus the Servant calls Isaac אֲדֹנִי (24:65).[5] The words of MT

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1. Von Rad comments that he carries out his commission with "emphatic
dignity and distinctions" (op.cit., p.254).

2. In 24:3 Abraham says, וְאַשְׁבִּיעֲךָ ; later in 24:8 it is
summarized as מִשְׁבֻעָתִי ; and in 24:41 it is אָלָתִי .
That an oath can constitute a Treaty, cf. Gen 26:27ff.; and above, p.116.
Part of the taking of an oath in 24:3 is the ceremony in 24:2 where
the Servant places his hand under Abraham's thigh. Speiser's
interpretation of the rite is probably correct:

> "Since sons are said to issue from their father's
> thigh (48:26; Ex 1:5), an oath that involved touching
> this vital part might entail the threat of sterility
> for the offender or the extinction of his offspring"
> (op.cit., p.178).

The only other ceremony like this is also a death-bed scene (47:29).

3. Cf. 24:49 where the two words also appear together. Wherever the
two occur together the quality of loyalty inherent in the concept of
חֶסֶד is emphasized (N. Glueck, Hesed in the Bible, trans.
A. Gottschalk, indrod. G.A. Laure, ed. E.L. Epstein [Cincinnati:
The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967], p.72), e.g. 32:11; 47:29;
Ex 34:6; Dt 7:9; 2 Sam 2:6; 7:15f.; 15:20.

4. Glueck shows that חֶסֶד , when describing the God - Israel
relationship of בְּרִית , expresses the content of בְּרִית
(op.cit., pp.73f.). Cf. Dt 7:9, 12; Neh 1:5; 9:32; Dan 9:4;
1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chr 6:14.

5. This could imply that Abraham had died and that Isaac was the new
master. On the other hand it could simply suggest that Isaac now had
a position of authority as well.

in 24:67, הָיָהאֶהֱלָה שָׂרָה וְאֹפ are grammatically difficult. As a solution Speiser suggests that שָׂרָה וְאֹפ is a scribal error and was moved up from the end of the verse.[1] On the other hand Von Rad not only retains MT but says that it contains an important theological truth. He argues that the mention of Sarah's tent is important because it signifies that the <u>new</u> ancestress has arrived.[2] As the less desperate solution, Von Rad's is to be preferred.

S.   KETURAH (25:1-6)

Although וְאִשָּׁה , which usually refers to a wife, is used of Keturah (25:1),[3] she is better understood as פִּלֶגֶשׁ .[4] Abraham has several children by her. If this section is taken as chronological then Von Rad is correct in saying that it detracts from the uniqueness and extraordinariness of Isaac's birth.[5] The Editor has probably allowed a topical arrangement to dominate the chronology at this point.[6] The purpose of this Chapter is to show the various branches which grew from the Abrahamic stem.[7] Thus in 25:1-6 we are told of the Keturah branch, in 25:12-18 of the Hagar branch, and in 25:19ff. of the Sarah branch. Because of her secondary importance, Keturah is only mentioned in the Abraham stories at this late stage.

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1.   <u>Op.cit</u>., p.182.

2.   <u>Op.cit</u>., p.259.

3.   וְאִשָּׁה does not always mean "wife" as even Hagar is וְאִשָּׁה to Abraham (16:3).

4.   1 Chr 1:32 describes her as such, and 25:6 speaks of the sons that Abraham had by פִּילַגְשִׁים . The plural could suggest that Hagar is included in the term, cf. Speiser, <u>op.cit</u>., p.187, for a careful discussion.

5.   <u>Op.cit</u>., p.261. Note that Abraham is near to death (24:1; 25:8) and years previously he had been too old to bear a son, cf. 17:17.

6.   Kline, <u>NBC</u>, p.101. Keturah could thus well have been a concubine in Abraham's house when Sarah was still alive.

7.   Cf. Driver, <u>op.cit</u>., pp.243f.

The teaching of earlier chapters is summed up concisely in 25:5f. Isaac inherits all that Abraham had, but the sons of the concubines are not neglected altogether - they receive gifts. We are also told that Abraham sent them away from his son Isaac.[1]

T.   THE CONTINUATION OF GOD'S BLESSING (25:7ff.)

When Abraham has blessedly passed from this life,[2] God's gracious activity continues to manifest itself, particularly in the life of Isaac. God blesses Isaac as he had blessed Abraham (25:11, cf. 24:35f.).[3]   He even lived in a place specially associated with God's blessing, בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי.[4]

In 25:12-18 the reader's attention is focussed on Ishmael.   The passage shows that God has indeed honoured his earlier promises.[5]   Ishmael has produced שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר נְשִׂיאִם לְאֻמֹּתָם (25:16). From Abraham's seed via Isaac twelve tribes would also arise![6]

Having dealt with this branch of Abraham's descendants, the narrator turns his gaze to the specially chosen line of Isaac (25:19ff.).   From now on they will occupy his full attention.[7]

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1.   Cf. 21:14. Note the brief reunion after Abraham's death (25:9). This is paralleled by that of Jacob and Esau at Isaac's death (35:29).

2.   On long life and a peaceful death and burial as blessings, cf. above, p.89.

3.   Even though in 17:20 God promises to bless Ishmael, Isaac seems specially selected for blessing here.

4.   25:11, cf. 16:14.

5.   Cf. esp. 17:20f.

6.   Cf. also 22:20-24 for another occurrence of the number twelve.

7.   It is interesting to see how the pattern of Ishmael is repeated in Esau. At first he too is discussed in great detail but after a while forgotten as Jacob is concentrated on.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Abraham stories present the reader with both the self-disclosure
and the mystery of God.   God takes the initiative in calling Abraham
and in giving him a superb selection of promises, as well as in showing
His faithfulness by preventing Abraham from destroying the possibility
of the fulfilment of the promises.   In spite of his lapses into
disobedience, Abraham shows a remarkable amount of faith in the purpose
of God even when he is faced with the fact that God does not seem to be
keeping His side of the promise.   Nevertheless, even though the promises
are partially fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime, the birth of Isaac is
presented as the climax.   His birth makes possible the fulfilment of the
other promises.

The reader of the Abraham stories is confronted with a series of
pictures of Abraham as a Covenant Mediator.   While each story should be
allowed to present its own unique point of view, it is just as important
that the Abraham stories be seen as a whole.[1]   When this is done it
becomes clear that there are certain themes which are common to most of
the stories.   The most notable theme is the sovereign control of God.
This theme serves as the canvas on which the idea of Abraham as a
Covenant Mediator is painted.   What is known about him as the Mediator of
God's Covenant is derived not only from the events of his life but also
from descriptions of his person.   These descriptions of his person serve
to crystalize that which can be deduced from his work.

Not only is Abraham called   נָבִיא   (20:7), but certain
aspects of his work are expressed in terms that could have been used to
describe a prophet (15:1; 20:7, cf. 18:23-33).[3]   Although he is never
called a priest, there are a few hints that suggest that he can be
interpreted against a priestly Sitz im Leben (e.g. 13:18; 15:9-11).[3]
There is a lot of evidence to show that Abraham is meant to be understood
as a king.   This is suggested particularly by the references to

1.   On the contribution of Redaction Criticism, cf. above, p.12.

2.   Cf. above, p.79.

3.   As the head of an independent family in a pagan country, Abraham
     would have played a leading part in the family cult.

Abraham as a source of blessing (12:1-3; cf. 18:18f.).[1] That Abraham can be described in the terms of the three important institutions of Israel should not appear strange, because as the ancestor of Israel, he is Israel in microcosm.[2] These and other <u>Sitze im Leben</u> have an influence on the overall understanding of Abraham as the Mediator of God's Covenant. But the most important and obvious <u>Sitz im Leben</u> is the family.[3] As the head of an independent family, Abraham enters into a relationship with Yahweh. Because of the current idea of the solidarity of the family, Abraham's בּיﬨ would automatically be involved in the Covenant.[4] While he is usually meant to be understood as an individual representing his immediate family, his descendants, and even all nations, at times because he is the founding ancestor of Israel and therefore Israel in microcosm, he is best understood as a "Corporate Person". This explains the existence, side by side, of the ideas of Israel and the nations being blessed because of Abraham, and Israel herself being a blessing to the nations.

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1. Cf. above, p.58.

   The promises made to him of land and progeny are very similar to those made to the king who is the recipient of a Royal Grant. They are also similar to the promise made to the Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7). Because these features are to be found in documents covering a vast stretch of time, they cannot be used for dating the Abraham stories.

2. Isa 61:1 also combines the three offices, cf. M. Noth, <u>The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Essays</u>, pp.248f.

3. It is possible that the family is the primary <u>Sitz im Leben</u> and kingship the secondary. Cf. 2 Sam 7 where language from the sphere of relationships within a family is used to express the God-king relationship.

4. Because Abraham's immediate family includes those like Ishmael whose descendants are not among the Covenant People some of the stories make it clear that these people are not full members of the family. Allied to this is the practice of the sending away of those who are not truly Covenant People.

בְּרָכָה is one of the main features of the Covenant.
The stories are in a sense a partial fulfilment of 12:1-3.[1] They
show how Abraham and his immediate family are the first recipients of
blessing.   Even though Ishmael and Lot are sent away from the Covenant
family, Abraham continues to be a source of blessing to them.[2]   His
intervention on behalf of Lot his kinsman shows that he and God are not
only interested in Lot, but also in Lot's neighbours.   This positive
attitude to the pagan nations is also suggested by the mention of Abraham's
kinsmen in Mesopotamia, the inclusion of foreign slaves in the
circumcision ceremony, and the existence of treaties between Abraham
and some of his neighbours.   Yet even in 12:1-3 there is an element
of particularism: the blessing of the nations is dependent on whether
they respond positively to what God is doing through Abraham.   This
teaching about the universalism and particularism associated with the
person of Abraham becomes very significant when it is realized that
Abraham, as the founding ancestor of Israel, can be understood as Israel
in microcosm.   What is true of him will therefore be true of Israel too.

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1.   While the stories can be used to interpret 12:1-3, the fact that
     they are only in partial fulfilment should prevent us from allowing
     them to dim the grandeur of these verses.

2.   Ultimately God is the source of all   , but it appears
     that all those associated with His Chosen One are blessed as well.
     Yet the character of the blessing is different. God's Chosen are
     blessed in a special way, cf. above, p.99.

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