

# The Book of Genesis

Composition, Reception, and Interpretation

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# ABRAHAM TRADITIONS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE OUTSIDE THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Thomas Römer

## INTRODUCTION

When archeology of Israel/Palestine ceased to be “Biblical Archaeology” and liberated itself from the control of biblical scholars, the status of the Bible for the interpretation of archeological discoveries was significantly revised. The reconstruction of the history of Israel and Judah in the Bronze and Iron Ages needs no longer to start with the biblical accounts but rather with the interpretation of “archaeological evidence.” Only then, after this initial step, can and should biblical texts be used as secondary sources among others.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I will apply a similar methodology to the question of the origins and composition of the Abraham traditions in the Hebrew Bible. Recent scholarship regarding the Abraham cycle can be divided in two groups. The first approach argues that the formation of Gen 12–36 has to be explained in the context of a global model applied to the entire Pentateuch, namely the documentary hypothesis. Some scholars have adopted quite a late date for the Yahwist (in the exilic period) and abandoned or radically modified the Elohist document,<sup>2</sup> whereas others reaffirm,

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<sup>1</sup> For the debate about the use of archaeology and biblical sources for the construction of a history of Israel and Judah see, among others, Ernst Axel Knauf, “From History to Interpretation,” in *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel's Past* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; JSOTSup 127; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 26–64; Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (SHANE 4; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Jean-Daniel Macchi, “Histoire d’Israël ou Histoire de la Palestine?,” *ETR* 70 (1995): 85–97; Hans M. Barstad, “History and the Hebrew Bible” in *Can a ‘History of Israel’ Be Written?* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 245; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 37–64; and Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Christoph Levin, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); John Van Seters, *The Pentateuch: A Social Science Commentary* (Trajectories; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Hans-Christoph Schmitt, *Arbeitsbuch zum Alten Testament* (UTB 2146; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

sometimes quite dogmatically, the value of the classical hypothesis as elaborated by Kuenen and Wellhausen.<sup>3</sup> Yet, it seems that all scholars working with a documentary hypothesis agree that the (literary) formation of the Abraham traditions is simply part of the first edition of a narrative spanning the whole Pentateuch and undertaken by J (or E).

The second approach suggests that the (literary) link between the Patriarchs and Exodus was made at a fairly late point, and that the first stages of the formation of the Abraham traditions took place in the context of the elaboration of a Patriarchal narrative, unrelated at that point to the composition of other pentateuchal traditions.<sup>4</sup> These scholars, who favor a “fragmentary hypothesis,” present various diachronic schemas,<sup>5</sup> but they agree that a specific model for the understanding of Gen 12–36 is more appropriate than the documentary hypothesis.

Can an investigation of Abraham outside of Genesis provide some clarification in this debate? Or to put the question differently: what would we know about the Abraham traditions (and the formation of the Abraham cycle) if all that we possessed were the books of the Hebrew Bible apart from Genesis?

#### A FIRST OVERVIEW

The various references to Abraham in the Hebrew Bible outside of the Book of Genesis can be classified depending on whether Abraham appears alone or is mentioned together with other figures from the Ancestral Narratives.

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<sup>3</sup> Horst Seebass, “Pentateuch,” *TRE* 26 (1996): 185–209; Ludwig Schmidt, “Im Dickicht der Pentateuchforschung: Ein Plädoyer für die umstrittene Neuere Urkundenhypothese,” *VT* 60 (2010): 400–420. See, somewhat differently, Joel S. Baden, *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch* (FAT 68; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (JSOT-Sup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990 [German original 1976]); Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984); David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); and Matthias Köckert, “Die Geschichte der Abrahamüberlieferung,” in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (ed. André Lemaire; VTSup 109; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 103–128.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the different positions see Jan Christian Gertz, Konrad Schmid, and Markus Witte, eds., *Abschied vom Jahwisten: die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002); and Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, eds., *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (SBLSymS 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

Abraham	Ezek 33:24; Ps 47:10; <sup>6</sup> 2 Chr 20:7; Neh 9:7–8; Ps 105:42
Abraham + Isaac	
Abraham + Sarah	Isa 51:2
Abraham + Jacob (* = Israel)	Isa 29:22; 41:8; 63:16*; Mic 7:20; Ps 105:6
Abraham + Isaac + Jacob (* = Israel)	Exod 2:24; 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5; 6:3, 8; 32:13*; 33:1; Lev 26:42; Num 32:11; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:12; 30:20; 34:4; Josh 24:2–5; 1 Kgs 18:36*; 2 Kgs 13:23; Jer 33:26 (MT <sup>7</sup> ); 1 Chr 1:27–34*; 1 Chr 29:18*; 2 Chr 30:6*; Ps 105:9–10 (= 1 Chr 16:16–17)

The above list warrants a number of observations. In some texts, Abraham appears alone without the other patriarchs. Outside the Torah, he is most often mentioned in the books of Isaiah and in Chronicles. He is never mentioned with Isaac alone, but several times with Jacob (or Israel). Most often he appears in a triad with Isaac and Jacob (Israel) and those texts do generally not contain much specific information. They speak of the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Exod 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5; 1 Kgs 18:36; 1 Chr 29:18; 2 Chr 30:6), of the covenant that YHWH made with the Patriarchs (Exod 2:24; 6:8; Lev 26:42; Deut 29:12; 2 Kgs 23, 23), or of the land that he swore to give to them or to their offspring (Exod 6:8; 33:1; Num 32:11; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 30:20; 34:4). Sometimes, all three are simply called “YHWH’s servants” (Exod 32:13; Deut 9:27). These texts are probably quite late and presuppose the Patriarchal traditions of Genesis. Generally speaking, none of the texts that mention Abraham outside of Genesis can be dated before the sixth century BCE. That essentially means that Abraham’s (literary) career probably starts much later than Jacob’s.

In those passages where Abraham appears alone, Ezek 33:24 is most interesting and we will start our inquiry with that passage.

#### EZEKIEL 33:24: ABRAHAM AND THE LAND

The passage Ezek 33:23–29 contains a *disputatio*<sup>8</sup> against the inhabitants of the land (Jerusalem?) who were not in exile and who claimed possession of the land. It begins by quoting a claim of the population:

The word of YHWH came to me: “Son of man, the inhabitants of these ruins (יְשֻׁבֵי הַחֲרִיבוֹת) in the land of Israel are saying, ‘Abraham was only one (אֶחָד),

<sup>6</sup> V. 5 mentions Jacob.

<sup>7</sup> Lacking in the LXX.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* (BK 13; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1969), 817.

yet he possessed the land (יִירַשׁ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ), but we are many; to us the land has been given (לָנוּ נֹתְנָה) for a possession (לְמִוְרֶשָׁה).” (vv. 23–24)

This claim is heavily rejected by the prophet and further destruction is announced:

This is what you must say to them, “This is what the Lord YHWH says: ‘As surely as I live, those living in the ruins (אֲשֶׁר בַּחֲרִבוֹת) will die by the sword, those in the open field I will give (נֹתְתִי) to the wild beasts for food, and those who are in the strongholds and caves will die of disease. I will turn the land into a desolate ruin (וְנֹתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ שְׂמָמָה) ... Then they will know that I am YHWH when I turn the land into a desolate ruin (בַּתַּתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ שְׂמָמָה) because of all the abominable deeds they have committed.’” (vv. 27–29)

This rejection uses a play on words through the root נָתַן: Instead of the land, YHWH will “give” its inhabitants to death and their land to desolation. This might point to a conflict between the deportees of 597 and those who remained in the land.

Verses 25–26, which mention cultic reasons for the divine judgment against the inhabitants of the land, are missing in the LXX<sup>9</sup> and are therefore probably a very late addition.<sup>10</sup> It is disputed whether this oracle should be attributed to the prophet Ezekiel himself<sup>11</sup> or a “golah-oriented” redaction<sup>12</sup> revising the original message of the prophet in order to strengthen the claim that the first Babylonian golah represented the true Israel. Even if the passage is the work of a later redaction it is very plausible that Ezek 33:24 quotes an existing saying of the non-deported Judean population. Their claim about the land is probably directed against the exiles; this is clearly the case in a parallel passage in 11:14–18.<sup>13</sup> Another possibility would be that the adage refers to Edomite occupation of the land after the fall of Judah (see the root יָרַשׁ in Ezek 35:10 and the substantive מִוְרֶשָׁה in 36:2–3, 5).<sup>14</sup> But the polemical context makes it more plausible that here we witness an inner Judean conflict between the Babylonian golah and the ‘people of the land.’

<sup>9</sup> In the LXX the messenger formula at the beginning of v. 25 introduces the oracle of vv. 27–29. There is also a change between the second person singular in vv. 25–26 to the 3rd person plural in v. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Against Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 815.

<sup>11</sup> See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 818, and most commentaries.

<sup>12</sup> So especially Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezekiel): Kapitel 20–48* (ATD 22.2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 454–456. Similarly Jörg Garscha, *Studien zum Ezechielbuch: Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung* (EHS 23/23; Bern: Peter Lang, 1974), 298–302.

<sup>13</sup> Ezek 11:15 contains a parallel formulation: לָנוּ [הֵיאָה] נֹתְנָה הָאָרֶץ לְמִוְרֶשָׁה but without reference to Abraham.

<sup>14</sup> So Pohlmann, *Hesekiel*, 454–456.



The reference to Abraham is particularly interesting. Firstly, it is assumed that he is a known figure, which clearly indicates that the oldest Abraham traditions are not an invention from the Babylonian period. Secondly, he is presented as אֶחָד, as “one.” This adverb creates an opposition with the רַבִּים. It is also noteworthy that the link with Jacob or a land promised to Jacob is apparently unimportant (or unknown?). Thirdly, the text says that Abraham possessed or took possession of the land, which indicates that the saying of the non-deportees is based upon an Abraham tradition—one that told how the patriarch came to possess the land. Interestingly, there is no allusion to a divine gift or the promise of the land. Furthermore there is no indication of a “Mesopotamian” origin of the patriarch. Abraham appears as an autochthonous figure. A tradition about Abraham’s immigration from Mesopotamia would have been seen as contrary to the claims of the people who remained in the land.<sup>15</sup> Without knowing the Genesis account, one could imagine the existence of a “profane” settlement of the Patriarch. The verb יָרַשׁ is very rare in the Abraham traditions;<sup>16</sup> however, it occurs five times in Gen 15, probably the latest text of the Abraham cycle.<sup>17</sup> Therefore it seems plausible that Gen 15 presupposes the saying or the tradition of Ezek 33:24 and reinterprets it as a divine promise for “all Israel”—those in the land, and those whom YHWH will bring back to the land.<sup>18</sup> Outside of Ezekiel, the term occurs only in Deut 33:4 and Exod 6:8. The latter may also depend on Ezek 33:24. Exod 6:8 would then also be a new reading of the claim of Ezek 33:24, since Exod 6:8 announces the possession, by the Exodus generation, of the land that YHWH had promised by oath to the Patriarchs.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This supports the hypothesis that the idea of Abraham’s origin in Mesopotamia only occurs in the latest layers of the Abraham tradition; see also Köckert, “Abrahamüberlieferung,” 106.

<sup>16</sup> It is much more frequent in Deuteronomy and in dtb texts. Outside Gen 15 it occurs only in 21:10 (in the sense of “be an heir”), 22:17 and 24:60 (“possess the gates of the enemies”). In the Jacob story see the P-text 28:4 (“to possess the land of sojourning”).

<sup>17</sup> John Ha, *Genesis 15: A Theological Compendium of Pentateuchal History* (BZAW 181; Berlin New York: 1989); Thomas Römer, “Gen 15 und Gen 17: Beobachtungen und Anfragen zu einem Dogma der ‘neueren’ und ‘neuesten’ Pentateuchkritik,” *DBAT* 26 (1990): 32–47; and Konrad Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999), 172–185.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 515–516.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Weimar, *Untersuchungen zur priesterschriftlichen Exodusgeschichte* (FB 9; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1973), 150; and Bernard Gosse, “Exode 6,8 comme réponse à Ezéchiel 33,24,” *RHPR* 74 (1994): 241–247.

To sum up: Ezek 33:24 is probably the oldest attestation of Abraham outside of the book of Genesis. It shows that he is a known figure and that his tradition is related to the possession of the land.

The other texts in which we find Abraham mentioned in relation to the land are much more recent. In 2 Chr 20:7 a prayer of Jehoshaphat, which has no parallel in the books of Kings, mentions the land that YHWH gave to Abraham's offspring: "Did you not, O our God, drive out (הורשת) the inhabitants of this land (את־יְשִׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ) before your people Israel, and give it to the offspring of your friend Abraham for ever?" Interestingly, the root יִרֶשׁ occurs again, but this time in the *hiphil* and in a military sense, as is the case also especially in the books of Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges. And, in keeping with the *dtr* tradition, the 'inhabitants of the land' are the autochthonous people that must be expelled from the land. Apparently the Chronicler wants to combine the tradition of the conquest of the land with the Abraham land tradition. An additional text speaking of the gift of the land to Abraham alone is Neh 9:7–8, to which we will return later. This passage obviously summarizes Gen 15, but in contrast to this text, it quotes the standard list of the nations with six names.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we have here a strategy similar to 2 Chr 20:7. The list of the people belongs to the *dtr* tradition of the land and is now linked to Abraham. In both texts, Abraham has apparently become the most important Patriarch. This is also the case in Ps 105, a text that apparently presupposes (a first edition of) the Pentateuch.<sup>21</sup> This Psalm mentions the Patriarchs in detail (vv. 9–10), including Joseph (vv. 17–22). But, like Neh 9, Abraham receives a privileged position, since he appears at the end of the summary in 105:42 in a statement indicating that YHWH's beneficent interventions for Israel took place because of his word to Abraham (v. 42), which also includes the gift of the land (v. 44: the lands of the nations).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The standard form has six or seven names; cf. Tomoo Ishida, "The Structure and Historical Implications of the Lists of Pre-Israelite Nations," *Bib* 60 (1979): 461–490. The author of Gen 15:19–21 adds three unusual names of groups that have very positive relations with Israel, transforming the bellicose character of the list. For more details see Thomas Römer, "Abraham and the 'Law and the Prophets,'" in *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham* (ed. Pernille Carstens and Niels Peter Lemche; PHSC 13; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2011), 87–102.

<sup>21</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen* (BKAT 15.2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978), 719.

<sup>22</sup> The astonishing and singular expression ארצות גוים does not really fit the conquest of Canaan; on this expression see my comments on Ps 105.

## ISAIAH 51:2: ABRAHAM AND HIS DESCENDANTS

The saying about Abraham and his possession of the land quoted in Ezek 33:24 seems presupposed by the author of Isa 51:1–3:

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek YHWH. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the cavity, the cistern<sup>23</sup> from which you were dug.

Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was one (אהר) when I called him (קראתי), I blessed him (ואברכהו)<sup>24</sup> and made him many (וארבהו).

For YHWH will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her ruins (כל-חרבתיה), and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of YHWH ...

These verses open a section, which ends in Isa 51:11<sup>25</sup> and whose theme is the restoration of Zion: vv. 1–3 mention Sarah, Abraham, and their offspring and Zion's consolation; vv. 9–11 allude to YHWH's battle against the Sea as an image for the (new) exodus, which allows for the return of the exiles (v. 3 and v. 11 contain the same expression "joy and gladness"); and the middle section (vv. 4–8) deals with YHWH's justice and law.<sup>26</sup>

One finds rather divergent opinions about the literary unity and the date of this passage. Against the traditional attribution to Second Isaiah,<sup>27</sup> a number of scholars postulate different redactional layers.<sup>28</sup> According to

<sup>23</sup> בור (lacking in Syr) may be a gloss to explain the *hapax legomenon* מקבה.

<sup>24</sup> For the vocalization of the MT, and the rendering as a past tense in the versions, see John Goldingay and David F. Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* (ICC; 2 vols.; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 2:224. 1 Q Isa reads "I made/make him fruitful" (ואפרהו) which fits the context very well. The couple פרה and רבה appears especially in priestly or later texts of Genesis, Exod 1:7, and Lev 26:9 (in *hiphil* only Gen 17:20; 28:3; 48:4; Lev 26:9). It is difficult to decide whether this was the original text. One could argue that the MT altered the text in order to make it fit with Gen 12:2. On the other hand, the Qumran reading may also be understood as an attempt to parallel the text with a standard expression of Genesis (see Edward Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll* [STDJ 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974], 275–276). פרה in the *hiphil* is used in relation to Abraham (and Ishmael) in the P text Gen 17:6 and 20 (against Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, *Deuterijosaja 49,14–52,12* [BKAT 11/12–14; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2010], 153).

<sup>25</sup> Many commentators argue that the passage ends in 51:8, but the parallel between v. 11 and v. 3 seems to favor a delimitation 51:1–11. The correspondence between Abraham at the beginning (v. 2) and the new exodus at the end (v. 10) further support this idea.

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed structure see Frederick Holmgren, "Chiastic Structure in Isaiah LI 1–11," *VT* 19 (1969): 196–201.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance (with regard to 51:1–10), Georg Fohrer, *Jesaja 40–66* (ZBK 19.3; 2nd ed.; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986), 143–148.

<sup>28</sup> See the summary of the different positions in Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 2:221.

Steck, 51:1–8 belong to a global Isaiah redaction from the Hellenistic period, which already had the entire book in view, and reworked an older oracle in vv. 4–5 followed originally by vv. 9–10a.<sup>29</sup> Other commentators, like van Oorschot or Hermisson, consider that the different layers of 51:1–8 (9–11) were edited in the context of a still independent ‘second Isaiah scroll.’<sup>30</sup> If, as is often argued, Isa 51:1–11 takes up and reinterprets themes from other passages of Second Isaiah (and not so much from the other parts of the book),<sup>31</sup> then it seems plausible to adopt the idea that 51:1–11 constitute a homogenous text created by a redactor who revises the older material from the very beginning of the Persian period.<sup>32</sup> The exact date of Isa 51:1–3 is difficult to assess. What is clear, however, is that the evocation of Sarah and Abraham seems to presuppose and to “correct” the passage of Ezek 33:23–29.

Ezek 33:23–24

Son of man, the inhabitants of these ruins (ישבי ההרבות) in the land of Israel are saying, ‘Abraham was one (אחד), yet he possessed the land, but we are many (רבים); to us the land has been given for a possession’

Isa 51:2–3

Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was one (אחד) when I called him, I blessed him and made him many (וירבהו). For YHWH will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her ruins (כל־הרבתיה)

Both texts share common features. They present Abraham as “one” and contrast him to his “many” descendants. Both texts mention the “ruins,” even if with a different purpose. Whereas Ezek 33:24–29 is extremely hostile to the inhabitants of the “ruins,” Isa 51:3 announces the consolation of Zion’s

<sup>29</sup> Odil Hannes Steck, “Zions Tröstung: Beobachtungen und Fragen zu Jesaja 51,1–11” in *Die hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz and Ekkehard W. Stegemann; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 257–276 (reprinted in Steck, *Gottesknecht und Zion: Gesammelte Aufsätze zu Deuterocesaja* [FAT 4; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992], 73–91).

<sup>30</sup> Jürgen van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion: Eine literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (BZAW 206; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 250–253 and *passim*; he argues that 51:9–10 belong to a “first Jerusalem redaction,” 51:4–5 to an “imminent expectation” layer, and 51:1–2 and 7–8 to a “secondary Zion strand,” which is the last redaction in the context of an independent scroll containing Isa 40–55\*. Compare Hermisson, *Deuterocesaja 49,14–52,12*, 156–160.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Elliger, *Deuterocesaja in seinem Verhältnis zu Tritocesaja* (BWANT 63; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933), 200–204.

<sup>32</sup> See Hermisson, *Deuterocesaja 49,14–52,12*, 160, who speaks of a “redactional unity” (*redaktionelle Einheit*) of 51:1–8, with the possible exception of v. 6.

ruins. It looks as if the author of Isa 51:1–3<sup>33</sup> wanted to overcome the conflict between the inhabitants of the land and the exiles. Therefore he promises consolation for the ruins of Zion (v. 3) as well as the return of the exiles (v. 11), emphasizing the unity of “all Israel.” In contrast to Ezek 33:23–29, the theme associated with Abraham is not land, but offspring. This is probably also the reason for the (only) mention of Sarah (outside the book of Genesis). Does this text presuppose a written Abraham story<sup>34</sup> and if so, in which form? According to Köckert, 51:2 presupposes the priestly text Gen 11:27–32 about Sarah’s barrenness.<sup>35</sup> However, this theme also appears in the older story of Gen 16, and the root חיל is not related to sterility, but generally describes labor pains at birth. This root does not occur in Gen 12–25. The verb ברך occurs several times in the Abraham narrative,<sup>36</sup> but it is a very frequent verb for denoting God’s favorable actions towards human beings; the verb רבה is however used in the P-text of Gen 17, but again we have to ask whether this really denotes a literary dependency. The rare expression “garden of YHWH” (Isa 51:3) appears in the Lot story (Gen 13:10), but in a different context, since there it designates the former regions of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>37</sup> And finally, the root קרא is not used in the Abraham story to describe God calling Abraham,<sup>38</sup> it seems more anchored in the context of Second Isaiah, where it appears frequently to express God’s call of his people or servants.<sup>39</sup> Methodologically one can therefore explain the occurrence of this root in 51:2 as part of Second Isaiah’s theology of “divine call,” or as a *relecture* of this call, now applied to Abraham.<sup>40</sup>

Isa 51:2 suggests that the theme of offspring was an important part of the Abraham traditions, probably from the beginning. Therefore, the best solution is to consider 51:2 as an allusion to this motif, which does not depend on

<sup>33</sup> The parallels between Ezek 33:24 and Isa 51:2–3 invalidate van Oorschot’s assertion (*Babel*, 248) that v. 3 has nothing to do with v. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Steck, *Gottesknecht und Zion*, 90.

<sup>35</sup> Köckert, “Abrahamüberlieferung,” 110.

<sup>36</sup> See, however, the text-critical problem discussed above.

<sup>37</sup> This is the only other place it occurs in the Hebrew Bible; however, see “garden of god” in Ezek 28:13 and 31:8–9.

<sup>38</sup> In Gen 22:11 and 15 it is YHWH’s angel that calls Abraham in order to stop his sacrifice. The only text where the deity calls someone directly is Gen 20:9, where the object is Abimelech. In most of the other cases, it simply means “to name” or describes a human invocation of God.

<sup>39</sup> See especially Isa 41:9; 42:6; 43:1,7; 45:1–3; 48:12–15; 49:1; 51:2.

<sup>40</sup> There is a close connection between Isa 51:2 and 41:8–9. This parallel will be discussed below.

a written text from the Genesis story.<sup>41</sup> This is also supported by the somewhat strange 51:1, which has no parallel in Genesis: “Look to the rock (צור) from which you were hewn, and to the cavity, the cistern (מקבת בור) from which you were dug.” It is often argued that these metaphors apply to Abraham (and Sarah) and are based on the archaic conception of people born out of earth or stones.<sup>42</sup> This explanation supports the notion that Abraham was originally an autochthonous figure. The rock metaphor however is often applied to YHWH (see especially Deut 32:8, where the divine rock also gives birth [ילד] and [היל] to the people or to Zion). The latter would fit well with the use of בור, which reminds one of Zion as a place of abundant water.<sup>43</sup> According to Steck, the “cutting off” refers to the exile from Zion,<sup>44</sup> but this does not fit very well with the parallel construction of v. 1 and v. 2. This structure suggests that the Zion metaphor is now transferred to Abraham and Sarah. In Isa 54:1 Zion is presented as a barren woman who has not been in labor (לא-חלה) and who will have many (רבים) children. If the author of Isa 51:1 already knows Isa 54:1, his aim would be to apply the traditional metaphor of Zion/Jerusalem as a wife (with YHWH as her ‘husband’)<sup>45</sup> to Abraham and Sarah. In 51:1–3 Zion is no longer the mother, rather it becomes the place where YHWH’s beneficent intervention will happen. The new parents of Israel are now Abraham, who receives the title ‘father,’ and Sarah. This shift denotes an attempt to demythologize the Jerusalem/Zion tradition and to construct Abraham as the ancestor of ‘all Israel.’<sup>46</sup>

It should be noted, however, that elsewhere in the book of Isaiah this transfer of the title “father” to Abraham triggered a very sharp reaction. We will explore this issue more fully in the following section.

To summarize quickly the results of our analysis thus far, Ezek 33:24 and Isa 51:2 present the two main themes of the Abraham narrative in Genesis: land and offspring. Both texts probably do not depend on specific texts of Gen 12–26.<sup>47</sup> As such, they are the oldest references to Abraham outside the book of Genesis, and they lend support to the notion

<sup>41</sup> Hermann Vorländer, *Die Entstehungszeit des jehowistischen Geschichtswerkes* (EHS 32/109; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1978), 54–55.

<sup>42</sup> Fohrer, *Jesaja 40–66*, 143.

<sup>43</sup> Steck, *Gottesknecht und Zion*, 85. Interestingly the *hapax legomenon* מקבת (‘cavity’) occurs with other terms from Isa 51:1 in the Siloam Tunnel inscription; see J. Gerald Janzen, “Rivers in the Desert of Abraham and Sarah and Zion (Isaiah 51:1–3),” *HAR* 10 (1986): 139–155.

<sup>44</sup> Steck, *Gottesknecht und Zion*, 84–85.

<sup>45</sup> Van Oorschot, *Babel*, 260.

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, Sarah is not explicitly called “mother.”

<sup>47</sup> Again, note that the case is more disputed with regard to Isa 51:2.

that the oldest Abraham traditions already contained stories about the land and about Abraham's offspring.

#### ABRAHAM IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Abraham appears in all three parts of the book: besides 51:2, he is mentioned in 29:22; 41:8 and 63:16. He may therefore belong to a "book-redaction", which tries (probably in several steps) to unify the book by introducing traversing themes and recurring expressions, as shown by Rendtorff and others.<sup>48</sup>

In Isa 29:22–23 Abraham appears in a passage that announces Jacob's consolation:

Therefore thus says YHWH to<sup>49</sup> the house of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham: No longer shall Jacob be ashamed, no longer shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

It is quite possible that the apposition **אשר פדה את־אברהם** is a later addition.<sup>50</sup> It interrupts the oracle, which is addressed to the house of Jacob. The root **פדה** seems to presuppose a tradition about Abraham's liberation from his idolatrous family, which is attested in Jubilees 12.<sup>51</sup> It is likely that an older oracle, originally addressed to Jacob, was revised by a redactor who, in the context of a later edition of the book Isaiah, wanted to transform Jacob's children into Abraham's children, in accordance with Isa 51:1–3. The evocation of Abraham in this verse may therefore belong to a late redaction of the Isaiah scroll.

<sup>48</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, "Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja," *VT* 34 (1984): 295–320 (reprinted in his *Kanon und Theologie: Vorarbeiten zu einer Theologie des Alten Testaments* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991], 141–161).

<sup>49</sup> The Masoretic **אֵל** is often changed into **אֱלֹהִים** (El, god; for instance, see Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39* [BKAT 10.3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982], 1134–1135), but this is unnecessary, especially if the apposition is to be considered as a gloss or a late insert. See also **אלהים** in v. 23.

<sup>50</sup> August Dillmann and Rudolf Kittel, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (KEHAT 5; 6th ed.; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1898), 266; cf. Willem A. Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 147, who argues that the same redactor has added (in v. 23) "they will sanctify my name" and the following plural.

<sup>51</sup> Dillmann and Kittel, *Jesaja*, 266. Wildberger (*Jesaja 28–39*, 1143–1144) thinks that the **פדה** term had been transferred here to Abraham. Beuken (*Jesaja 28–39*, 148) argues that Jub 12:20 cannot be the source of this addition. However, one might ask whether the redactor already knows a similar tradition.

The oracle of salvation in Isa 41:8–13, which takes up the Assyrian and Babylonian royal oracles,<sup>52</sup> opens with the following call:

and you Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, offspring of Abraham, my friend, you whom I have seized from the extremities of the earth and called from its remote regions. I told you: You are my servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you. (41:1–8)

The triad “Israel, Jacob, Abraham” is somewhat astonishing and has no other parallels in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore one may ask whether the original text contained only the traditional *parallelismus membrorum*, “Israel // Jacob,” very common in Second Isaiah,<sup>53</sup> and whether a later redactor added the second part of the verse.<sup>54</sup> This “Abraham redactor” could be the same one who redacted Isa 29 and the author of Isa 51:1–3. He would have added the two references to Abraham in Isa 29 and 41 in order to prepare the way for the transfer from Jacob to Abraham. However, most commentators consider that the mention of YHWH’s friend Abraham was part of the original oracle. In this case it would be possible to understand v. 9—even though it is addressed to “Israel,” a name which represents the Diaspora (?) community—as an allusion to Abraham’s call out from Mesopotamia (Gen 12:1–3; 15:7).<sup>55</sup> Yet, the wording of v. 9 does not contain clear allusions to texts from Genesis, but reflects classical Second Isaiah terminology (Isa 40:28; 41:5; 43:6; 49:6, etc.). Hence, it seems more plausible to understand the reference to Abraham as a late insertion in order to reinterpret an older oracle<sup>56</sup> about the gathering of “Israel” by giving it a new foundation in YHWH’s friendship<sup>57</sup> with Abraham. The friendship language used to describe the relationship between YHWH and Abraham does not occur in the Genesis account. The only parallel is in 2 Chr 20:7, a text that may depend on Isa 41:8.<sup>58</sup> This title, which expresses a close relationship between

<sup>52</sup> Claus Westermann, *Das Buch Jesaja: Kapitel 40–66* (ATD 19; 3rd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 60–62.

<sup>53</sup> See for instance Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 189.

<sup>54</sup> Fohrer, *Jesaja 40–66*, 36 and van Oorschot, *Babel*, 54, n. 162.

<sup>55</sup> See, among others, Westermann, *Jesaja 40–66*, 60; and Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, 191.

<sup>56</sup> In later Jewish and Christian understanding this reinterpretation also affects 41:1–7. The rise and call of the unnamed Cyrus in 41:2 is related to Abraham’s call; see Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, 179.

<sup>57</sup> According to the MT the “lover” (or the “one-loving-me”) is Abraham; in the LXX, Abraham is the object of YHWH’s love (“whom-I-have-loved”). See further Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, “Abraham—Lover or Beloved of God,” in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (ed. John H. Marks and Robert McClive Good; Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters Publishing, 1987), 101–104.

<sup>58</sup> Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, 176 and 190. Outside the Hebrew Bible see CD 3:2; Jas 2:23; Sura 4:124.



Abraham and his God, may presuppose texts or traditions like Gen 18 or 22, where Abraham's loyalty vis-à-vis YHWH is depicted. This text thus prepares the reader for the "father" title given to Abraham in Isa 52:2, a title also criticized in the same book of Isaiah.

The last mention of Abraham occurs in the third part of the book in Isa 63:16:

For you are our father. Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not recognize us. You, YHWH, are our father, 'our-deliverer-from-ancient-times (מְעוֹלָם)' is your name.

The verse is part of the lamentation of 63:7–64:11<sup>59</sup> though its date is disputed.<sup>60</sup> It clearly reacts against Isa 52:3 (and probably also against Isa 58:13–14,<sup>61</sup> in which Jacob is mentioned as "father") claiming that only YHWH is the father of his people. This shows that, even if the passage 63:7–64:11 looks like an independent "psalm," it presupposes texts from Second and perhaps also First Isaiah<sup>62</sup> and was possibly created as a conclusion to the whole book of Isaiah.<sup>63</sup> Apparently there was some debate about the importance of Abraham (and Jacob?) as Israel's "father." The author of Isa 63:7–64:11 is aware of the other occurrences of Abraham (and Jacob) in Isaiah and, at the end of the book, he wants to downplay his function as an identity marker by rejecting a genealogical claim and perhaps also the entire Abraham traditions. Interestingly, the "historical summary" in v. 11 starts with remembering the "ancient days" (יְמֵי-עוֹלָם, cf. מְעוֹלָם in v. 16) of YHWH's history with his people.

<sup>59</sup> Willem A.M. Beuken, 'Abraham weet van ons niet' (*Jesaja 63:16*): *De grond van Israëls vrouwen tijdens de ballingschap* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1986); and Irmtraud Fischer, *Wo ist Jahwe? Das Volksklagelied Jes 63,7–64,11 als Ausdruck des Ringens um eine gebrochene Beziehung* (SBB 19; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989).

<sup>60</sup> Traditionally this poem or prayer was thought to reflect the situation between 587 and 525. A redactor would thus have inserted this originally independent piece; see Westermann, *Jesaja 40–66*, 306–307; Jacques Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique: Isaïe, I–XXXV, miroir d'un demi-millénaire d'expérience religieuse en Israël* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1978), 491–492; and John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66* (WBC 25; Dallas: Word, 1987), 331. More recent publications suggest a date at the end of the Persian or beginning of the Hellenistic period; see Odil Hannes Steck, *Studien zu Tritojesaja* (BZAW 203; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 241–242; and Johannes Goldenstein, *Das Gebet der Gottesknechte: Jesaja 63,7–64,11 im Jesajabuch* (WMANT 92; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001), 228–235.

<sup>61</sup> H.A. Brongers, "Einige Bemerkungen zu Jes 58,13–14," *ZAW* 87 (1975): 212–216. The exhortation to keep the sabbath in this passage ends with a promise that the addressees will be given "Jacob's inheritance." The images used are not taken over from the Jacob tradition but from Deut 32:13.

<sup>62</sup> See the texts mentioned by Steck, *Studien*, 238–241.

<sup>63</sup> This is a relatively common view in continental European research; see the presentation in Peter Höffken, *Jesaja: der Stand der theologischen Diskussion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), 2004, 99–100.

These “ancient days” do not start with Abraham, but with Moses (“They remembered the ancient days: Moses his ‘kinsmen.’<sup>64</sup> Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock?<sup>65</sup> Where is the one who put within him his holy spirit, who caused his glorious arm to march at Moses’ right who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting [עולָם] name, who caused them to march in the primeval waters [בְּתַהֲמוֹת]?” v. 11–13a). This beginning with the evocations of Moses and the Exodus shows traces of a conflict between the patriarchs and the Exodus traditions. The author of 63:7–64:11 apparently rejected the Abraham and Jacob traditions and was opposed to those who claimed Abraham as their father (אָב); YHWH’s “kinsmen” (עַם) is Moses. There are not many texts in the Hebrew Bible which apply the term “father” to YHWH (see also 64:7); in the context of the book of Isaiah the transfer of the title from Abraham to YHWH is however prepared through a number of texts, which use paternal and maternal metaphors to express YHWH’s care for Israel (42:14; 43:6–7; 45:11; 49:15 and others). The denial of the father title for Abraham taints the last mention of the Patriarch in the Isaiah scroll with a polemical note, which is later taken up in the New Testament.<sup>66</sup> The opinion presented in Isa 63:10–16 stands in contrast to a passage in Mic 7:20: “You will show faithfulness to Jacob and loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old (בְּיָמֵי קִדְמוֹת).” Here the beginnings include Jacob and Abraham, who represent the addressees of the oracle. Such a collective understanding of Abraham is rare in the Hebrew Bible and presupposes Isa 51:2–3.<sup>67</sup> The term אֲבוֹת may either refer to Abraham and Jacob or to the Exodus generation.<sup>68</sup> Be this as it may, the conclusion of the Micah scroll, which, according to Utzschneider was added in the third century BCE<sup>69</sup> and may be therefore contemporary with Isa 63:7–

<sup>64</sup> In the MT, v. 11 is quite obscure. The reference to מִשְׁפַּח עַמּוֹ is lacking in the LXX, but is present in the Qumran scroll as well as in the Vg. Instead of עַמּוֹ some Syriac MSS have “his servant.” This is certainly an attempt to make the Hebrew text more comprehensive and cannot be original. The word עַם should be understood as expressing a very close relationship between Moses and YHWH as for instance in Deut 34:10–12. The following verse also reminds one of Deut 34:10–12.

<sup>65</sup> Contrary to the MT, one should read not “shepherds” but “shepherd,” in agreement with the LXX. The “shepherd” probably refers to Moses (see Exod 3:1).

<sup>66</sup> See Matt 3:9 and John 8:31–59.

<sup>67</sup> Helmut Utzschneider, *Micha* (ZBK 24.1; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005), 169; and Jörg Jeremias, *Die Propheten Joel, Obadja, Jona, Micha* (ATD 24.3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 232.

<sup>68</sup> See for the latter solution Römer, *Väter*, 538–539.

<sup>69</sup> Utzschneider, *Micha*, 27.

64:11, clearly represents Abraham as a figure to which the addressees can identify—which is the dominant concept in the other late references to the Patriarch in the Hebrew Bible.

ABRAHAM AND THE “EXODUS” FROM MESOPOTAMIA  
(JOSH 24:2–5; NEH 9:7–8 AND PS 105)

In the Abraham narrative only one text declares that YHWH brought Abraham out of Egypt: Gen 15:7, which belongs to the latest layers of the entire Pentateuch.<sup>70</sup> According to Gen 11:27–12:5, it is Abraham’s father, Terah, who takes the initiative to leave Ur with his family in order to settle down in Harran. And, according to 12:1–4, Abram receives the divine call in Harran (see 11:31). Genesis 15:7 antedates the relation between Abraham and YHWH into its very beginnings in Ur. This idea also occurs in Josh 24 and Nehemiah. In Josh 24, “Ur of the Chaldeans” is not mentioned but clearly presupposed:

Your fathers—Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor<sup>71</sup>—lived beyond the River (בעבר הנהר) since the ancient times (מעולם) and served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. (Josh 24:2–4)

The expression בעבר הנהר parallels the Assyrian designation *eber nāri*, which was also used by the Babylonians and Persians,<sup>72</sup> here in order to designate Mesopotamia.<sup>73</sup> According to Josh 24, and in contrast to Isa 63:11 as well as many other biblical texts, Israel’s origins are not located in Egypt, but in Mesopotamia. Contrary to the beginning of the Abraham narrative, Josh 24:2 gives a reason for Abraham’s “exodus” out of Mesopotamia. The idea that the “fathers” worshipped other gods there can be explained in three

<sup>70</sup> The post-priestly character of Gen 15 (or its original version) is often asserted in recent European research; see Römer, “Gen 15 und Gen 17,” 32–47; Schmid, *Erzväter*, 172–185; Christoph Levin, “Jahwe und Abraham im Dialog: Genesis 15,” in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag* (ed. Markus Witte; BZAW 345; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 237–257; Ludwig Schmidt, “Genesis XV,” *VT* 56 (2006): 251–267; and Erhard Blum, “The Literary Connection Between the Books of Genesis and Exodus and the End of the Book of Joshua,” in Dozeman and Schmid, *A Farewell to the Yahwist?*, 89–106.

<sup>71</sup> The insertion about Terah is unanimously understood to be a later gloss, since it does not fit with the foregoing plural. It seems the glossator wanted to create a link with Gen 11:27 and avoid the idea that Abraham is part of the idolatrous “fathers.”

<sup>72</sup> Oded Lipschitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 2–3.

<sup>73</sup> In the Hebrew Bible the expression can carry two different meanings. The use in Josh 24:2 implies a Judean (or Samaritan) location of the author; see Moshé Anbar, *Josué et l’alliance de Sichem (Josué 24:1–28)* (BET 25; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 121.

different manners: (a) it could be understood as the retro-projection of the Deuteronomistic theme that the Babylonian exiles had to serve the gods of the land into which they were deported (Deut 4:27–28; 28:36 and 64; Jer 16:13);<sup>74</sup> (b) Josh 24:2 already presupposes a tradition which appears two or three centuries later in the Book of Jubilees (chapters 11–12);<sup>75</sup> or (c) this text is a midrashic rereading of the Genesis account, trying to explain why Abraham left his home.<sup>76</sup> (This rereading would have been the starting point for the story in Jubilees and later Jewish legends about the idolatrous behavior of Abraham's people in Mesopotamia.) In any case, Josh 24:2–3 presupposes the priestly parts and later elements of the Abraham narrative (e.g. Gen 15:7)<sup>77</sup> and presents Abraham as the most important of the three patriarchs. He is the only one who is called “father” (in opposition to the “fathers” in Mesopotamia), and he receives much more attention than Isaac and Jacob. The two major themes of the Abraham narrative are mentioned: land<sup>78</sup> and a numerous (רבה) offspring (see Isa 52:2). A similar picture of Abraham is found in Neh 9

You are YHWH, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans (והוצאתו מאור כשדים) and gave him the name Abraham; and you found his heart faithful (נאמן) before you and made with him a covenant (וכרות עמו הברית) to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite to his descendants (לורעו); and you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous (צדיק). (Neh 9:7–8)

This text resembles the written text of the Genesis narrative to a closer level, especially Gen 17 and Gen 15, which the author seems to quote.<sup>79</sup> The focus here is on Abraham's faithfulness (see Gen 15:6: והאמן), YHWH's justice (see Gen 15:6: צדקה),<sup>80</sup> and the gift of the land to Abraham's

<sup>74</sup> Anbar, *Josué*, 121–122. The choice that is offered to the people in 24:15 (to serve the gods of their fathers beyond the river, or the gods of the land, or YHWH) could favor such an understanding.

<sup>75</sup> Johannes Hollenberg, “Die deuteronomistischen Bestandtheile des Buches Josua,” *TSK* 47 (1874): 462–506, 486.

<sup>76</sup> Similarly Ernst Axel Knauf, *Josua* (ZBK 6; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2008), 195.

<sup>77</sup> Josh 24 was written in the middle of the Persian period and reflects the attempt to add the scroll of Joshua to the Pentateuch; see, among others, Thomas Römer and Marc Z. Brettler, “Deuteronomy 34 and the Case for a Persian Hexateuch,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 401–419.

<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, YHWH does not “give” the land to Abraham (YHWH makes him go into the whole land of Canaan), Isaac, nor Jacob, but to Esau he gives Seir. According to the author of Josh 24, the Edomite territory is also a gift of YHWH, and Israel receives the land only after Joshua's conquest (24:13).

<sup>79</sup> All roots or expressions in brackets occur in Gen 15.

<sup>80</sup> The author of Neh 9 understands Gen 15:6 to be referring to YHWH's (not Abraham's)

offspring.<sup>81</sup> Abraham's superiority is evident since this "historical summary," which starts with creation (v. 6), only mentions Abraham and then jumps directly to the fathers in Egypt without any transition. This is an indication that the original autonomy of the Abraham and the exodus traditions can still be perceived even in very late texts.<sup>82</sup>

Josh 24 and Neh 9 share several themes and expressions.<sup>83</sup> They both insist on the fact that YHWH brought Abraham out of Mesopotamia and they reflect a transformation of the original autochthonous Patriarch into an identity marker for Jews from the Babylonian Diaspora, who are invited to follow in the footsteps of their ancestor. They also indicate the growing popularity of Abraham at the expense of Isaac and Jacob in the late Persian and early Hellenistic period (which is later reflected for instance in Sir 44:19–23).<sup>84</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible this trend is also perceptible in Ps 105. As in Neh 9, YHWH's promise to Abraham functions in Ps 105 as the trajectory for the entire, subsequent history. For example, references to the divine promise to (or covenant with) Abraham<sup>85</sup> frame the historical summary in vv. 8 and 42–43. Following the evocation of Isaac and Jacob (who receive the same promise of the land as Abraham: vv. 9b–11), which contain the themes of their status as גֵרִים (vv. 12–15),<sup>86</sup> the summary shifts to the Joseph story (vv. 16–23), which is explained in a rather detailed way. This may be an indication that the Joseph story was less well known than the other traditions

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justice; for discussion on Gen 15:6, see Lloyd Gaston, "Abraham and the Righteousness of God," *HBT* 2 (1980): 39–68; Manfred Oeming, "Ist Genesis 15,6 ein Beleg für die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit?," *ZAW* 95 (1983): 182–197; and Sascha Flüchter and Lars Schnor, "Die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit: Ein rezeptionsgeschichtlicher Versuch zum Verständnis von Gen 15,6 MT," *BN* 109 (2001): 27–44.

<sup>81</sup> Contrary to Gen 15, which ends with an unusual list of 10 nations of the land, Neh 9:8 returns to the classical six.

<sup>82</sup> Römer, *Väter*, 540; and Köckert, "Abrahamüberlieferung," 115. According to Antonius H.J. Gunneweg (*Nehemia* [KAT 19,2; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1987], 129), Neh 9 belongs "zweifelloso zu den jüngsten Stücken des AT."

<sup>83</sup> For a comparison of both texts see Römer, *Väter*, 326–327.

<sup>84</sup> The praise of Abraham is much longer than that of Isaac and Jacob, of whom it is only said that they benefit from Abraham's behavior and God's promises to him.

<sup>85</sup> Abraham is already mentioned in parallel with Jacob in v. 6 where addressees are described, in the manner of Deutero-Isaiah, as offspring of Abraham and Jacob.

<sup>86</sup> The root גר may allude to Gen 17:8 or 12:10; 20:1; 21:23, 34. According to Kraus (*Psalmen*, 105) and Köckert ("Abrahamüberlieferung," 116–117), vv. 13–15 refer to the three versions of "the patriarch's wife in danger." This may well be the case. The designation of the Patriarchs as "prophets" may stem from Gen 20:7, where Abraham is called a גֵרִים. The astonishing title מְשִׁיחִים is without parallel in the Ancestral Narratives.

of the Pentateuch—an argument supporting the theory of a late insertion of the Joseph story into the narrative framework of the Pentateuch.<sup>87</sup> The Abraham-frame followed by the recalling of Israel's joyful exodus (vv. 42–43) gives the impression that the exodus and the gift of the land both depend on YHWH's remembering (זָכַר) his “holy word” to Abraham. The root may allude to the P-text Exod 2:24, but, contrary to that text, Ps 105:42 excludes Isaac and Jacob from the divine remembrance. The astonishing and singular expression אֲרֻצוֹת גֵּרִים in v. 44 does not really fit the conquest of Canaan; rather, it evokes a situation of Diaspora (see the expressions in Ezek 12:15; 20:32, 41 and also Gen 26:3). Ps 105 therefore concludes with “an open end” which may be understood either as the possibility of a new entry into the land or as a valorizing of a Diaspora situation.<sup>88</sup> In Ps 105 Abraham is not called “father” but receives another honorific title: עֶבֶר (v. 42), a term otherwise attributed in the dtb tradition to Moses<sup>89</sup> and David.

The growing importance of Abraham also appears in Ps 47:10: “The volunteers<sup>90</sup> of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham.<sup>91</sup> For the shields of the earth (מִגְנֵי אֶרֶץ)<sup>92</sup> belong to God; he is highly exalted.” In this Psalm from the Persian or even Hellenistic times,<sup>93</sup> Abraham appears as the “father” of all those who recognize that the God of Israel is the one

<sup>87</sup> Ps 105 is the only text in the Hebrew Bible outside the Hexateuch that mentions the Joseph story. For more on the current debate regarding the composition of the Joseph story and its insertion in the Pentateuch, see Christoph Uehlinger, “Fratrerie, filiations et paternités dans l’histoire de Joseph (Genèse 37–50\*),” in *Jacob: Commentaire à plusieurs voix de Gen. 25–36* (ed. Jean-Daniel Macchi and Thomas Römer; MdB 44; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2001), 303–328; Konrad Schmid, “Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch,” in Gertz, Schmid, and Witte, *Abschied vom Jahwisten*, 83–118; as well as the essay by Baruch Schwartz in this volume.

<sup>88</sup> In the latter case, Ps 105 would have a different position than Neh 9.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Ps 105:26.

<sup>90</sup> The traditional translation of “princes” is derived from the LXX; the Hebrew word indicates someone who does something voluntarily, and it becomes a “technical term for a member of a community” (HALOT).

<sup>91</sup> Some commentators and translations construct a mixture from the MT and LXX and translate: “gather along with the people of the God of Abraham.” This is a theological correction, which is unjustified; see rightly Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen: Psalm 1–50* (NEchtB 29; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993), 291.

<sup>92</sup> This may be a title for the kings of the nations (see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen*, 293). If the Psalm presupposes the Abraham narrative, one may also ask if this is an allusion to Gen 15:1, where YHWH presents himself as a “shield” for Abraham.

<sup>93</sup> It is often argued that an older “nationalistic” psalm in vv. 2–5\* has been revised towards a universalistic perspective. But both parts can be also read as a passage from the nationalistic to the universalistic perspective; see Manfred Oeming and Joachim Vette, *Das Buch der Psalmen: Psalm 42–89* (NSKAT 13.2; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2010), 40–41.

true God (see Isa 2:3–5; Zech 8:20–23, etc.). This astonishing description of Abraham as an identity figure for all people who adhere to YHWH<sup>94</sup> can be understood as an exegesis of Josh 24:2–3 or of a similar tradition according to which Abraham broke with the gods of his fathers in order to serve YHWH.<sup>95</sup> Here we see something of a first step towards making Abraham into the father of all monotheists.

#### ABRAHAM IN THE PATRIARCHAL TRIAD

In two thirds of the texts that mention Abraham in the Hebrew Bible outside of the book of Genesis, he appears first in the triad “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel)”; in many cases the triad is used to characterize YHWH as the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel).” Another frequent use is the allusion to the divine land promise (sometimes also covenant) made to the Patriarchs. It is difficult to decide what kind of Abraham and other patriarchal traditions are presupposed by these texts. They clearly know the genealogical system of Gen 12–35, and outside the book of Genesis the “oldest” attestation of this triad can be found in the P-texts: Exod 2:24; 6:3; and 6:8, which create a literary connection between the Patriarchs and the Exodus. All the other occurrences of the triad in the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy may well belong to one (or more) Pentateuch-redaction(s),<sup>96</sup> which aim to make the Patriarchs and YHWH’s promises to them the mortar of the Torah.<sup>97</sup> The two uses of the Patriarchal triad in 1 Kgs 18:36 and 2 Kgs 13:23 also occur in redactional inserts that are probably not older than the “Pentateuch redaction.”<sup>98</sup> The occurrences in Jer 33:26, which belong to a

<sup>94</sup> Interestingly “Jacob” in v. 5 represents Israel (see Deut 32:9).

<sup>95</sup> Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen*, 293.

<sup>96</sup> Römer, *Väter*, 548–549, 553, 561–566; and Konrad Schmid, “Der Pentateuchredaktor: Beobachtungen zum theologischen Profil des Toraschlusses in Dtn 34,” in *Les dernières rédactions du Pentateuque, de l’Hexateuque et de l’Ennéateuque* (ed. Thomas Römer and Konrad Schmid; BETL 203; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 183–197.

<sup>97</sup> This redaction is clearly limited to the Pentateuch. The mention of the Patriarchal triad in Deut 34:4 introduces a quotation of Gen 12:7 and reveals itself as a “frame.”

<sup>98</sup> For 1 Kgs 18:36 see, among others, Winfried Thiel, “Deuteronomistische Redaktionsarbeit in den Elia-Erzählungen,” in *Congress Volume Leuven 1989* (ed. John A. Emerton; VTSup 43; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 148–171, 167; and Susanne Otto, *Jehu, Elia und Elisa: Die Erzählung von der Jehu-Revolution und die Komposition der Elia-Elisa-Erzählungen* (BWANT 152; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 157. 2 Kgs 13:23 clearly interrupts the sequence 13:22 and 24 (in the LXX the verse has been transferred after 13:7) and probably depends on the Priestly texts Exod 2:24 and Lev 26:42 (see Martin Rehm, *Das zweite Buch der Könige: Ein Kommentar*

passage that is lacking in the LXX, and in Chronicles are, at the earliest, from the end of the Persian or more probably from the Hellenistic period. That confirms the idea that the formulaic usage of the Patriarchal triad only started at the beginning of the Persian period,<sup>99</sup> probably with P.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The investigation of the passages mentioning Abraham in the Hebrew Bible outside the book of Genesis has confirmed a current position in continental Abraham research: namely, Abraham started his literary career not much before the exilic period. That does not exclude the possibility that there were older oral traditions about this ancestor but these are very difficult to reconstruct. These traditions were probably about an autochthonous figure, as might still be reflected in the oldest mention of Abraham outside Genesis, Ezek 33:24. Here Abraham is used by the non-exiled population in order to claim its possession of the land, and this claim only makes sense if Abraham is understood as having been in the land forever. Ezek 33:24 emphasizes a strong tie between Abraham and the land but not with the other Patriarchs; on the contrary, Abraham is called “one alone” (אֶחָד). In some passages, Abraham appears together with Jacob, yet Isaac is only linked to him in the late triadic formula. The parallels between Abraham and Jacob suggest that the link between these two ancestors could have been the first step to combine a Northern (Jacob) and Southern tradition.<sup>100</sup> In any case, these passages use the two names in parallel in a postexilic context in order to express the unity of YHWH's people.

In the book of Isaiah, Abraham plays quite an important role. He appears in the three parts of the book, and, with many other themes and terms, strengthens the scroll's redactional coherence. The most important text is Isa 51:1–3, which takes up and modifies the claim of Ezek 33:24. Abraham being compared to a rock could also be understood in an autochthonous

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[Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1982], 135; for a late Persian or early Hellenistic period redactor, consult A. Šanda, *Die Bücher der Könige* [EHAT 9; Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1912], 138).

<sup>99</sup> Raymond Jacques Tournay, “Genèse de la triade ‘Abraham-Isaac-Jacob’,” *RB* 103 (1996): 321–336.

<sup>100</sup> A trace of this is perhaps still perceptible in Gen 28:13 where YHWH presents himself to Jacob as the “God of Abraham, your father.” The descriptor “and the god of Isaac” looks very much like a gloss.



sense, but more importantly Abraham here appears together with Sarah and becomes Israel's "father." This father-title is, however, contested in Isa 63:16 and the polemic shows that, during the Persian period, Abraham did not yet appeal to all groups of nascent Judaism. Nonetheless, texts like Josh 24 and Neh 9 indicate that Abraham comes to be more and more an important identity marker. Like P and later texts in Genesis, these two passages present him as an "exodical" figure whom God brought out of Mesopotamia. Abraham's growing importance is also reflected in Pss 105 and 47 in which Abraham (as opposed to Jacob) becomes the father of all people willing to worship the God of Israel.

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