

# We Have Found Water: Patriarchal Paradigms For Cross-Cultural Mission<sup>1</sup>

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In 1984 I participated in a task force, sponsored by the International Mercy Corps, which looked at the plight of the Palestinians in the territories occupied by Israel after the war of June, 1967. One of the resource persons who helped us understand the situation was Rabbi Yehezkel Landau, a representative of Oz va Shalom, a Jewish organization pushing for peaceful and just treatment of the Arabs within Israel.

Rabbi Landau suggested that there is more than one paradigm in the Old Testament for relating to other inhabitants of the land which God had promised Israel. In addition to the Joshua model of conquest and force which modern Israel follows with a vengeance, there is what he called the Patriarchal Model, exemplified by Abraham, a model of patient and peaceful coexistence. Immediately, I felt the force of the paradigm, not only as a model for Israeli-Palestinian relations, but also as a model for any cross-cultural venture. After all, missionaries are usually "aliens and sojourners" (Gen 23:4) in the lands which host them. This essay explores the relevance for cross-cultural communication and witness of four narratives in Genesis: the separation of Abram<sup>2</sup> and Lot (13); the encounter of Abraham and Melchizedek (14:13-24); Abraham's negotiation with the Hittites for the Cave of Machpelah (23); and the struggle between Isaac and the herdsmen of Gerar over water (26:12-33).

The essay adopts a literary and canonical perspective in its hermeneutic. That is, each narrative is studied inductively in order to discern the intent of its final form in the canon of Scripture authoritative for synagogue and church. While the critical theories about the origin and development of the narratives are not ignored, I draw conclusions from the text as Scripture given to "every generation of believers."<sup>3</sup>

The essay will argue that the presentation of Abraham and Isaac as models for how to relate to the people of the land of Canaan peacefully, patiently, and constructively is an explicit intention of the narratives in their canonical form. In spite of the fact that God has given them the land

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(13:14-17; 26:3-4), and in spite of the fact that Abraham is strong enough to take it for himself (14:1-12), Abraham shows an amazing freedom to let others choose (13:8-13) and to make contact with the spiritual traditions of the people of Canaan (14:17-23). Abraham shows a peace-loving acceptance of the cultural forms of the people of the land (23). And Isaac, in a way that is reminiscent of his father's own irenic persistence in digging wells, wins the respect of his detractors (26:12-33). The promise to them insures that God will give them land and progeny, but the assurance that it is God's promise enables them in their best moments to rest on that promise and proceed peacefully and persistently to accept the realities of their lives as "strangers and sojourners" (23:4) among the people of the land.

I have illustrated a possible application of each of the paradigms with an important issue in the global mission of the Church: Abraham's generosity to Lot suggests a model for ecumenical cooperation; the patriarch's attribution of the name of a Canaanite deity to the Lord of Israel models an appropriate theological contextualization; his negotiations with the Hittites for a place to bury his wife models an acceptance of indigenous practices; and Isaac's response to the injustice and rejection of Abimelech provides a paradigm for peaceful and patient response to resistance and rejection.

The essay is offered in appreciation for the work of an esteemed teacher, G. Herbert Livingston, whose analysis of narrative types in the Pentateuch has contributed to its argument.<sup>4</sup>

Since all four narratives involve, in one form or another, the triumph of peaceful persistence in the face of events which could precipitate violent rejection, the last model epitomizes all relations with the people of the land. And thus, the delayed announcement of Isaac's persistent shepherds symbolizes the ultimate victory of all paradigms of peace: "We have found water!" (26:32).

## COPING WITH CHOICES ABOUT TERRITORY

When the pressures of their growing wealth caused Abraham's herds-men and Lot's herds-men to quarrel over the grazing territory they shared, Abraham decided to divide the land, giving Lot first choice. Lot seized the opportunity without hesitation: "And Lot...saw that the Jordan valley<sup>5</sup> was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord...so Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley," (13:10-12) leaving for Abraham the land of Canaan.

Particularly where mission agencies proliferate in a common land, mission across cultures involves choices about territory. To cope with the problem, delegates at mission conferences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries opted for ecumenical cooperation, developing the concept of *comity*. According to this procedure, territory shared by mission agencies would be divided, giving a sphere of influence to each.



For most mission entities, according to Stephen Neill, the concept worked well, but some agencies and individuals abused, circumvented or ignored the practice.<sup>6</sup> The story of the separation of Abraham and Lot provides contemporary mission organizations with a paradigm for ecumenical cooperation in coping with choices about territory.

Three important movements make up the plot of the story: (1) Abraham offers his kinsman, Lot, first choice in a division of the land of Canaan; (2) Lot, ignoring the parameters of choice which Abraham offers, opts out of the land of promise in response to the lure of a fertile valley exposed to cities of sin; and (3) Abraham receives the whole of the land of Canaan and a promise of progeny as numerous as the dust of the earth.

The opening verses of the passage suggest prosperity. When Abraham and Lot return from Egypt to the land of promise, Abraham is very rich and Lot, his kinsman, "also had flocks and herds and tents" (13:1-5). This prosperity is evidence of the blessing referred to in the promise that forms a *leitmotif* in the saga of Abraham and his descendents:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves (12:1-3).

In addition to evidence of divine blessing, the journey chronicled in the early verses of the passage represents a restoration and renewal of the patriarch's involvement in the land of promise. Two phrases in Gen 13:3 are parallel in structure: "to the place where his tent had been *at the beginning*" (3b); and "to the place where he had made an altar *at the first*" (4a). The parallel structure calls attention to the two phrases and to their parallel components, place and beginning. They speak of restoration and fulfillment, of homeland and worship.

But in spite of the potential salutary effects of return and restoration, and because of their mutual prosperity, the kinsmen can no longer "dwell together" (6a and 6b).<sup>7</sup>

Abraham must divide the land with Lot (8).<sup>8</sup> The choice which Abraham offers Lot is clear from the passage itself. Abraham and Lot are situated at "the place where his tent had been at the beginning, *between Bethel and Ai*" (3), looking out over the land. References to "the land" (*hā'āres*) abound in this brief chapter.<sup>9</sup> And, as we shall see below, it is important for the reader/hearer to know that "the land" which is to be divided between Abraham and Lot is the Land of Canaan.

We can discern from the story itself how Abraham intended to divide the land. He says, "If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left"(9). Orientation

eastward is assumed in Semitic directions, see *wāqēdmâ* (forwards, 15), west being behind one's back (*'āhôr*) or toward the sea, as in *weyammâ* (seawards, 14). From this orientation one's right hand indicates the south (here: *hassemô'l*) and one's left, the north (here: *wēmînâ*).<sup>10</sup> Abraham says to Lot, "Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand (north), then I will go to the right (south); or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left"(9). In other words, Abraham has decided to divide the land into north and south, giving Lot first choice as to whether he wanted northern Canaan with the Bethel-Ai axis as southern boundary, or southern Canaan with that axis as northern boundary.<sup>11</sup> The irony of the story arises when Lot makes his choice.

*He ignores the promised land altogether*, opting for the verdant Jordan valley, *leaving the whole of Canaan* to Abraham. Lot accepts Abraham's offer to choose, ignoring the parameters of choice. The story does not suggest at all that his kinsman took the best land, leaving Abraham with the dry and unfertile remainder. Rather, the narrator makes clear that Lot has opted for a paradise infected with temptation. To be sure, he chose the most luxurious part of the area: "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord . . ." (10). But the structure of the narrative presentation of Lot's choice is instructive:

And Lot lifted up his eyes  
and saw the whole of the Jordan valley  
that it was everywhere well watered  
    before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah  
like the garden of the Lord  
like the land of Egypt  
in the direction of Zoar (13:10).<sup>12</sup>

In the middle of the description of this well-watered garden of Eden, stands a reminder of the fate of its cities. Even the reference to the land of Egypt suggests to Hebrew readers and listeners both a well-watered valley and a land of slavery. The structure of verse 12 makes clear that the choice of Lot is to be contrasted with that of Abraham, as the land of Canaan is contrasted with the cities of the Jordan valley: "Abram dwelt in the *land* of Canaan, while Lot dwelt among the *cities* of the valley..." (12).

Verse 13 makes explicit what the narrative style foreshadows: "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord." Abraham never offered Lot the verdant valley over against the arid hill country, he offered to share with him the land of Canaan. In his departure to dwell among the more promising cities of the valley, Lot opted out of the promised land.<sup>13</sup>

Abraham's effort to end strife by dividing the land and his generosity in giving his kinsman the first choice<sup>14</sup> appear thwarted by Lot's response to



the lure of the well watered “garden of the Lord”(10), and blatant disregard for Abraham’s terms of choice. Nevertheless, God’s plans are not thwarted and His promises are renewed. Just as the chapter begins in hope of restoration and renewal, an act of settlement and an act of worship (13:1-4), so the chapter ends with the restoration of the promise (14-17),<sup>15</sup> renewal of the gift of the land (17), settlement in it (18a) and an act of worship (18b).

Finally, through the parallels in and around the two passages of direct address,<sup>16</sup> the story suggests that in his generous treatment of Lot (8-9) Abraham acts in the way the Lord would act (14-17). He offers Lot half the land, while the Lord promises Abraham the whole land. Abraham says, “Is not the whole land before you?” (9) and the Lord says, “For all the land which you see I will give to you...”(15). The stress on the whole land is suggested in both passages by specifying of directions, in the first by the directions left (*haśśemô’l*) and right (*hayyâmîn*), and in the second by the directions, “toward the north” (*sāpônâ*), “toward the south” (*wanegba*), “toward the east” (*waqēdmâ*), and “toward the west” (*wayammâ*).

In fact, the whole of v 14 through 18 have striking parallels in vv 10 through 13. The phrase, “And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the whole Jordan valley,” in v 10 is paralleled by the divine command in v 14, “Lift up your eyes and see...that all the land...” The initiative taken by Lot (11) in response to Abraham’s offer of choice is contrasted with God’s imperative to Abraham, “Arise, walk...” (17). The promise of future progeny in the land (15, 16) parallels the reminder of the destruction of the cities of the valley (10; see also 13). Just as Lot “chose for himself (*wayyibhar-lô*) all the Jordan valley, and...journeyed east (11),” so the Lord told Abraham, “Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you” (17). The last clauses of verse 12 and verse 13 are parallel to verse 18: “and [Lot] moved his tent (*wayye’ehal*) as far as Sodom; and the men of Sodom are evil and sinners to the Lord—bad ones”<sup>17</sup> (*wehatta’im laYHWH me’ôd*) (12c-13); “So Abraham moved his tent (*wayye’ehal*), and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the Lord” (*wayyibên-sâm mizbēah laYHWH*) (18). These parallels suggest that the storyteller intends to point out that Abraham, in acting like his Lord, provides a model of self-giving for the people of Israel, who are to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). And, since Abraham is clearly a New Testament model as well, this passage becomes paradigmatic for every generation of believers.<sup>18</sup>

The freedom to let others choose is a vulnerable freedom. But such generosity mimes God’s own and trusts ultimately in His promise—even when plans run amuck. Granting freedom and responding freely are what inheriting promises is all about.

As tensions resulted from the blessing of God in the lives of Abraham

and Lot, so tensions have resulted from the many mission agencies that have begun work in the same territory. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century, when English Bishop G. A. Selwyn founded the Melanesian Mission in the Southwest Pacific, he was in full agreement with the concept of missionary comity. One of his founding principles was “never interfere with any Christianization already undertaken by any religious body or sect whatsoever.”<sup>19</sup> The Anglican Melanesian Mission practiced this during the first half century of relatively slow growth in their territory. But during the period Darrell L. Whiteman has called the “era of missionary penetration” (1900-1942), when the mission was experiencing gratifying growth, the “proselyting monopoly” of the mission was suddenly eclipsed by the influx of competing mission groups. Most of the newcomers were completely unencumbered by any principle of comity and the Melanesian Mission was forced to compete on all fronts. Denominationalism provided a convenient structure to perpetuate indigenous quarrels and traditional divisions in Melanesian society.<sup>20</sup> One mission even built blatantly competitive schools on either side of those established by the Melanesian Mission.<sup>21</sup> Although the Melanesian Mission decided it had to enter into competition with competing missions, in fact it continued to concentrate almost exclusively on the territories where it had always worked.

Nevertheless, under the leadership of a variety of bishops,<sup>22</sup> and blessed by the gracious emergence of an indigenous evangelistic brotherhood,<sup>23</sup> the Melanesian Mission contributed significantly to the emergence of a truly Melanesian Christian community. Their choices about territory were ignored or circumvented by others who, for reasons of their own—expanding their own territory or making every territory unsafe for heresy—took advantage of the system or circumvented it altogether. If the mission did not go on as a paragon of virtue, it did amount to a paradigm of grace. It contributed to the emergence of an imperfect but increasingly indigenous Christian community among the people with whom they have born witness for nearly a century and a half. A part of the reason may lie in their participation in an Abrahamic paradigm of peace.<sup>24</sup>

This Abrahamic paradigm suggests that to ignore the parameters of choice for reasons of self-indulgence courts disaster and can remove one from participation in the ongoing purposes of God. But the paradigm also suggests that the blessing of God and a renewal of the assurance of His promises arises out of a situation where his own kind of generosity is exercised and faithfulness is maintained even in the face of a surprising lack of responsibility.

## ADJUSTING TO INDIGENOUS THEOLOGIES

According to Mircea Eliade, the “almost universal belief in a celestial divine being, who created the universe and guarantees the fecundity of the



earth [is] quite beyond doubt.”<sup>25</sup> And Raffaele Pettazzoni has shown that, in addition to celestial “high gods,” there are some “supreme beings” which are oriented toward the earth.<sup>26</sup> Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek, king of Salem (14:17-24), suggests that the belief of a people outside the biblical tradition in a creator God may be an important point for theological contextualization.<sup>27</sup>

Chapter 14 begins like an ancient Near Eastern chronicle, “In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar...” (1). Verses 1 through 11 report the great successes of Chedorlaomer and the three kings associated with him in putting down rebellion (4-7) and defeating the kings of the five city-states in the Valley of Siddim (8-11).<sup>28</sup> The reader/auditor of the chronicle is made privy to the awesome power of the four rulers from afar as they subdue a long list of peoples and humiliate the five kings from Sodom to Zoar, some of whom fall clumsily into bitumen pits and others flee chaotically into the hills. In fact, the chronicle appears to have little to do with the protagonists of Genesis until, rather suddenly, Lot, “the son of Abram’s brother,” turns up among the booty which is carried off by the escaping northern hosts.<sup>29</sup>

In response, Abraham, in a way reminiscent of the great deeds of the Judges, combines his forces, including some 318 choice and trusted warriors, chases the escaping victors, routs the mighty kings at Hobah, north of Damascus, and returns with spoils of war—including his liberated kinsman, Lot.

After his return, Abraham is received warmly by the king of Sodom; and the priest of El Elyon (*‘el ‘elyôn*), God Most High, blesses the victorious patriarch, serving bread and wine, in the name of the pagan god he serves. Abraham responds by giving the king a tenth of all the spoils of war, a generous gesture which elicits a disclaimer from the king of Sodom who would be content with merely the return of his citizens. But Abraham will take nothing that belongs to the king lest it be noised about that he has become wealthy at the king’s expense. Abraham swears he will take only what has already been consumed and a share for the men who fought with him (17-24). Here again we have the great and gracious patriarch, this time defeating enemies of the land of Canaan and dealing with its people in magnanimity and confidence.

But an interesting detail of the narrative can hardly escape its reader/hearer: when Abraham swears by the Lord, he also swears by the pagan god served by Melchizedek, “El Elyon, maker of heaven and earth” (19 and 22).<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the ancient patriarch, or a later narrative theologian, sees a correlation between the Canaanite deity, El Elyon, and Yahweh, the God of Israel. Brueggemann treats this passage as evidence that Scripture dares to claim that the God who calls Abraham and gives Isaac is indeed the God worshiped in Canaan as the God of fertility even though the Canaanites did not know his true name. The Canaanites worshiped him as

“Most High God,” but it was the liberated Israelites who knew his name.<sup>31</sup>

Evidence from ethnology and the cross-cultural study of religion,<sup>32</sup> along with the biblical convictions that people are “created in the image of God” (Gen 1:26-27) and that “God has put something in the created order”<sup>33</sup> to draw people to Himself (Psa 19:1), suggest that the kind of theological contextualization that emerges in this patriarchal paradigm ought to be possible among just about all peoples.<sup>34</sup> The experience of Vincent Donovan with the Masai of East Africa offers a contemporary example of adjustment to, and transformation of, an indigenous theology.

When Donovan decided to take the gospel message, unadorned with other gifts and services, directly to the proud Masai of East Africa, he found that in order to communicate he had to listen and learn. One thing he learned was that the Masai could talk about a Supreme Being. “For the Masai,” he discovered, “there is only one God, *Engai*, but he goes by many names.”<sup>35</sup> Two of the many convictions they have about this High God are that he<sup>36</sup> dwells beyond the pale blue dome of sky, beyond its deepest patches of blue; and that “he loved rich people more than poor people, healthy people more than sick...loved the Masai more than all the other tribes, loved them fiercely, jealously, exclusively.”<sup>37</sup> Engai was both far beyond the earth and its limitations and “trapped” as the tribal god of the Masai. While Donovan had to admit that his people had also treated the High God as though He were their own, he invited the Masai to join him in seeking out the High God, freeing Him from the Masai, freeing the Masai to love all people.

In the process, the Masai learned also that Engai was not only as high as they thought, and less uniquely their own God than they thought, but also much more involved with them than they had expected. A Masai elder who had become the priest’s teacher put it this way:

You told of the High God, how we must search for him, even leave our land and our people to find him. But we have not done this. We have not left our land. We have not searched for him. He has searched for us. He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God.<sup>38</sup>

Not every person or community to whom the cross-cultural witness goes will have a concept of God ready-made for the communication of the gospel, but most will. We must dare to find that point of contact for communication; for the Most High God who made the heavens and the earth is the Lord.

#### CONFORMING TO LOCAL CUSTOM IN THE CRISES OF LIFE

Death strikes close to home and can be a better bridge than even an



indigenous theology. There is very little that unites people more closely than an experience of suffering as intense as bereavement. The acceptance of indigenous practices at such a time helps the missionary identify with the indigenous people. Not only does the burial of Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah (23:1-20) represent a permanent commitment to the people of the land at a time of human vulnerability and solidarity, it demonstrates the accommodation of the patriarch to the cultural traditions of the Hittites among whom he lived as an alien and a pilgrim.<sup>39</sup> The incident of Abraham's patient and humble negotiations for a burial site for Sarah provides a model for identification with "the people of the land" (23:7,12,13).

Sarah captures the attention of the reader at the outset of the chapter. Through the presentation of her age, the repetition of the phrase "years of the life of Sarah," the place of her burial, and the completion of her husband's full rites of mourning,<sup>40</sup> the reader/hearer senses the significance of the patriarch's loss and its pain. The complete absence of her name in the long negotiation with the Hittites in favor of frequent references to Abraham's "dead," preserves the fragile protection against unbearable agony which such institutions effect. Sarah's name emerges again in verse 19 where her actual burial functions with the first two verses as an *inclusio* for the story of her burial.<sup>41</sup>

The narrative of negotiation abounds with evidence of Abraham's close adherence to custom in this most intense of life crises. Beginning at verse 3, the repetition of certain features of the narrative provide clues to the structure of the negotiation. First of all, the parallels and contrasts of the four verses which begin with the verb, *wayyāqôm* ("And he arose" [3,7,17 and 20]) offer a hint that we are dealing with stages of Abraham's negotiation with the Hittites. Verse 7 adds *wayyistahû* ("and he bowed") to its *wayyāqôm*; and adds '*am-ha'ares*' ("people of the land") to its mention of the Hittites. The verb *wayyēdabbēr* ("and he said") also occurs in both verses.

In fact, vv 3-6, and 7ff. represent two stages of the negotiation. The first stage involves merely the privilege of burying Sarah on land belonging to the Hittites. The second involves the more delicate task of obtaining the specific cave which Abraham wants from its owner, Ephron, the Hittite. Verse 12 also features the verb used in v 7, *wayyistahû*. And the verb used in both vv 3 and 7, *wayyēdabbēr*, occurs at the outset of v 13. These parallels signal (in spite of the omission of *wayyāqôm*) another stage in the negotiations. Verses 12-16 treat the coming to terms and the paying of the full price for Ephron's property. Verse 17 also begins with *wayyāqôm*, but clearly does not mean "Abraham arose and..." Rather it should be translated, "So the field went over to Abraham..." which, according to Gene M. Tucker, is equivalent to "a transfer clause in an actual contract."<sup>42</sup> Here the verb signifies the final stage of the transaction (17-18), the ratification of the contract<sup>43</sup> in the presence of the Hittites and

all the people who “enter the gate of the city.”<sup>44</sup> The occurrence of *wayyāqôm* in v 20 is treated below.

There is a plethora of occurrences of words from the Hebrew root, *GBR*, “grave,” “bury” (4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 19, 20).<sup>45</sup> All parties to the negotiation see this as significant. The constant reminder of the purpose for the negotiation heightens its importance and solemnity and deepens the potential identification with the people of the land. It also contributes to the irony and force of the event since it increases the awareness of the vulnerability of Abraham and thus the impact of the price he eventually agrees to pay for the burial ground.

Judging by its repetition and use, another prominent word in the negotiations, “give” (4, 9 [2x], 11 [3x], and 13), contributes to the almost humorous irony of the transactions.<sup>46</sup> In the ritualized generosity of this formal transaction, “give” serves as a euphemism for sell, and “take,” mentioned but once (13 [RSV “accept”]) when Abraham urges Ephron to take the money for the land, turns out to be the order of the day. Ephron, who finally offers a definite price for the land, culminates this ritualized generosity by acting as though to do so is a mere trifle: “My Lord, listen to me! A piece of land priced at 400 shekels—what is that between you and me?” (15).<sup>47</sup> Any reader with the requisite cultural background can hear Abraham saying, “A lot!”<sup>48</sup> Four hundred shekels for a piece of land like Ephron’s is exorbitant. Jeremiah paid 17 shekels for a field (Jer 32:7) and the King, Omri, paid 6,000 shekels for the whole area on which Samaria was to stand (1 Kgs 16:24).

In light of the intricacies and artifice of the negotiations, it is also startling that Abraham accepts the price suggested by Ephron without hesitation of any kind. In fact, this is just one of several indications in the passage that Abraham is going overboard to court the cooperation of the Hittites in general whom he begs to intercede for him with Ephron. He refers to himself at the outset as *gēr-wētôsab* (4a), “a stranger and a sojourner among you,”<sup>50</sup> a category of persons who, in contrast to the “natives” or “the local people” (*‘am-hā’āreš*, 7, 12 and 13), apparently did not have the right to acquire property by means of a standard transaction,<sup>51</sup> or at least did not have any land to use for the burial of their dead. Abraham appeals to the circumstances surrounding his request, the burial of his dead, an appeal likely to influence the Hittites, and an appeal to which they frequently refer as well. Furthermore, the patriarch bows to the people of the land at two important points in the negotiations (7, 12) out of thanks, respect and/or adherence to custom. Finally, the narrator is elaborate in noting that, “Abraham agreed with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants” (16).<sup>52</sup>

Finally, vv 19 and 20 close out the account. Verse 19, forming an inclusio with the first two verses, closes the narrative *as a story of the*



*burial of Sarah*. But verse 20, a kind of repetition of vv 17-19, closes the story again. Beginning with another *wayyāqôm* ("So the field became...<sup>53</sup>), it ends with *benê-ḥet* ("the Hittites"). The delay of *benê-ḥet* to the very end of the narrative stresses precisely this ethnic community. Just as verse 19 closes the story as a narrative about the death and burial of Sarah, so verse 20 closes the narrative as a record of Abraham's negotiation with the Hittites.<sup>54</sup>

Like Abraham's interaction with the king of Sodom (14:17-24), his deliberations with the Hittites in this chapter can be treated as a "Covenant Negotiation," a type of story, according to Livingston, "concerned with relationships between ethnic groups, which may be made harmonious if a covenant can be made between them."<sup>55</sup> Clearly, the story intends to provide a model for God's people who, by creative conformity to custom at a time of vulnerability and crisis, can effect harmonious relations with the people of the land.

Dr. George Hartley, a Methodist medical missionary to Liberia, discovered this patriarchal paradigm in the crucible of grief. According to an African tale polished by repetition, Hartley resided on a hill in a bungalow of his own with his wife and one small son. He was well removed from the village both physically, culturally and spiritually, for none of the villagers seemed at all interested in the message of salvation. One very sad day the young couple's only child died of malaria. The missionary went to the village carpenter to have a small coffin made for the child's body. After the coffin was ready, the carpenter accompanied the missionary and his wife with the remains of their son to the burial spot outside the village near their house. At the outset, neither parent showed any emotion; for the wife had already spent herself in weeping and the husband had not yet begun. Their stoical demeanor seemed rather peculiar to the African whose own mourning traditions allowed deep and intense emotional expressions of grief.

When the missionary began to read the prayer book slowly in the performance of his duties at his son's grave, it seemed perfunctory to the African carpenter. Then suddenly, in the midst of the verses of Scripture he was reading, the missionary collapsed over the coffin of his child in agonizing, tearful convulsions of grief. While the bereaved father wept out of control, the African carpenter ran back to his village proclaiming to everyone who would listen, "White men also cry!"

Many villagers accompanied the carpenter back to the grave where the father, slumped over the remains of his son, still sobbed with grief. But now the Africans joined the white couple in the mourning, blending the sound of their own funeral drums and dancing with those of the sobbing father. In the aftermath of this human crisis, the village people became interested in the Gospel of Christ and a church was formed among them.

Through negotiations congruent with the customs of the Hittites, Abraham obtained a place to bury the wife he grieved. In doing so, he

established himself in the land. Dr. Hartley's grief, with the help of the carpenter, brought the African villagers and their mourning customs to Hartley, who, established in the land as a fellow human sufferer, was able to bring the church of Jesus Christ to the African village.<sup>56</sup>

#### PERSISTENCE AND PEACE-MAKING IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE AND REJECTION

In a creative and perceptive essay on the future of the Christian world mission in Asia, Kosuke Koyama suggests that the West has been "both *gun* (wounding) and *ointment* (healing) for the East."<sup>57</sup> When Alfonso de Albuquerque began his assault on the fortress of Malacca on behalf of the Portuguese spice trade, he encouraged his men with the assurance that the Lord was blinding the judgment and hardening the heart of the king of Malacca, an obvious reference to the liberation of Israel and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. But Koyama argues that it was Alfonso's heart that was hardened in two ways. The guns he carried on his fleet symbolized that his heart had been hardened by greed and hatred for Muslims, and the cross perched high above his fleet symbolized the further hardening that resulted from using a biblical paradigm to justify his conquest.<sup>58</sup> How do we know which paradigm to choose? Why not the Joshua paradigm of conquest? Why the peace and patience of Abraham? We choose with Koyama on the basis of the crucified mind. We choose out of the paradigm of the Anointed One who was wounded: "The missionary ointment itself, then, can be fragrant only in so far as the fragrance of Christ is in it...."<sup>59</sup> That very fragrance graces our final paradigm.

In Genesis 26 we find Isaac rejected by Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, who commands the patriarch, "Go away from us" (16).<sup>60</sup> After being unjustly forced away from at least two wells which they had dug themselves, the persistence of Isaac's entourage in opening yet another old well paid off. That last well, to be named Rehoboth, was not disputed by the herdsmen of Gerar; God had finally given them *Lebensraum*. In the end, the two princes made peace at the invitation of Abimelech (28-31), the dryness of their alienation having been watered by the kindness of Isaac (30). The final phrase of the episode becomes both its theme statement and an epigram for all the paradigms we have examined: "We have found water!" (v 32).<sup>61</sup> Patient, persistent response can turn what looks like rejection into blessing.

In digging wells tenaciously, Isaac is re-living the patient persistence of his father, Abraham, who had already made a covenant with Abimelech over disputed water rights at Beer-sheba (21:22-34). In both parallel narratives there is a recognition of prosperity, a conflict over water, and a covenant leading to peace.

In fact there is additional evidence in chap. 26 that the narrator intends to remind the reader/hearer of Abraham while hearing about Isaac. In a theophany (1-5) God promises Isaac what he has promised Abraham



before him. The rationale for the blessing connects Isaac with Abraham, “because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (5). In addition, both patriarchs try to pass their beautiful wives off as their sisters under threat of their lives (6-11; 12:10-16; 20:1-7).<sup>62</sup> Even the order of the events is similar although it is interrupted by additional material<sup>63</sup> in the case of Abraham: a promise of blessing (1-5; 17:1-21); a stratagem of protection (6-11; 20:1-7); and a covenant of peace (12-33; 21:22-34).<sup>64</sup> Finally, in this chapter, virtually the only material in the Torah about Isaac, Abraham is mentioned eight times (1, 3, 5, 15, 18, 18, 24, 24), including specific references to Abraham’s wells (15, 18, 18).<sup>65</sup> There is a sense in which this chapter about Isaac is a part of the Abrahamic cycle.<sup>66</sup>

Although he is forced into the land of Gerar by famine (1), a land which the Lord promises to him (2), Isaac prospers to the extent that the Philistines become jealous, causing Abimelech to reject him: “Go away from us; for you are much mightier than we” (12-16). Whatever else those marching orders may have meant, they clearly testify to the prosperity that attends Isaac under the blessing of the Lord.<sup>67</sup> In contrast with his father’s fate, when Isaac’s stratagem to protect himself by claiming that his wife is his sister is found out, Abimelech grants him the protection that enables him to prosper among the Philistines. Brueggemann suggests that a comparison of these three “type stories”<sup>68</sup> points to the blessing of wealth which Isaac enjoys.<sup>69</sup>

The use of the root *GDL* three times in v 13 suggests that the narrator intends to focus on the intensity of Isaac’s wealth: “The Lord blessed him (12c), and the man grew rich (lit. great) (*wayyigdal*) and kept on growing richer (lit. greater) and richer (lit. greater) (*wayyēlek hālôk wegādēl*) until he was very rich (lit. great) (*‘ad kî-gādēl me’ôd*).”<sup>70</sup>

Critics have noted that the description of Isaac’s wealth is hardly that of a small cattle nomad. But it appears that the purpose of the narrative is not to present a consistent image of the small cattle nomad,<sup>71</sup> but to show how men of power and wealth can still do what is necessary to get along with others in the same land. Here again, reading the narrative canonically helps us get at the meaning of the Scripture for every generation of believers. Just as Abraham’s victory over the four kings who carried Lot off (14:1-11) contributes to the reader/hearer’s appreciation of his voluntary submission to the traditions of the Hittites (23:1-20), so here the presentation of the wealth and blessing of Isaac increases the impact of his ability to exercise irenic patience and restrained persistence in making peace; he could have done otherwise. The greatness of Isaac grew out of the Lord’s blessing and did not lead “to the extension of his domain or to victory over his opponents, but to final peace.”<sup>72</sup>

A literary analysis of Genesis yields confirmation that Genesis 26 intends to present Isaac as a model for interpersonal and intercommunal relationships. The chapter separates two stories of fraternal strife. The

first in Gen 25: 29-34 tells the story of Jacob's taking advantage of his famished brother to buy his birthright (*bekôrâ*), and the second in Genesis 27 (1-40) narrates the deception of Jacob in acquiring his brother's blessing (*berākâ*). The assonance of the two words (*bekôrâ* and *berākâ*) suggests that the two stories belong together, having been deliberately separated by Genesis 26. In addition, since chap. 26 reveals no knowledge of the twin brothers, the chapter probably belongs sequentially to the period in which Isaac and Rebecca had no children. According to Stanley Walters, Genesis 26 "stands precisely where it does in order to function as a paradigm, a counter-paradigm for inter-personal relationships, to the duplicitous and destructive pattern shown in chaps. 25 and 27."<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, chap. 26 stands second in the Jacob cycle (Gen 25-35), balancing palistrophically<sup>74</sup> the next-to-last chapter of the cycle (34), which features the duplicitous defeat of the inhabitants of Shechem by the sons of Jacob in the wake of the defiling of their sister, Dinah. It, therefore, serves as a contrasting paradigm for relating to the people of the land.

Livingston considers the closing episode of the chapter (26-33) a "Covenant Negotiation," a story which, as we mentioned above, almost always takes place between ethnic or intertribal groups.<sup>75</sup> Here again, we have evidence that the narrator intends this story as a paradigm for cross-cultural or inter-ethnic relations.

Isaac's servants have dug another well (25b). Suddenly Abimelech and his entourage, including military officers, arrive on the scene. The reader is prepared to see Isaac and his company dispossessed of their wells once again. To our surprise, on their own initiative, Abimelech and his men ask for a covenant (*berît*), and the two parties eat together to seal the agreement. After the departure of Abimelech and company (26-31), the narrator concludes his story of cross-cultural well digging: That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water" (32).

Hebrew narrative makes its points subtly and indirectly. One way it does this is by the juxtaposition of images. Here the well narrative is interrupted by the *berît* with Abimelech, and only then comes the good news, "We have found water." Evidently the story intends the well and its gift of water to be a symbol of the life which amicable relationships between peoples bestow on a society. Again, following Walters's careful reading of the text, this is the third use of *māsā'* ("find") in the story (see also 12<sup>76</sup> and 19). The two-word report, *māsā' nû mayim* (We have found water!), captures graphically and cryptically the narrative's relentless insistence that the way to life is a determination to follow the promise-and-command ("Stay in the land," [2]) with patience and persistence in peace-making.

There are few people whose mission careers have been more fully permeated with the fragrance of the patience of Isaac and the suffering of Christ than Adoniram Judson (1788-1850). A brilliant and precocious



student, Judson graduated from Brown University at the age of nineteen, valedictorian of his class. After completing seminary, Judson sailed for India in 1812 expecting a fruitful career. That voyage began the long series of rejections and setbacks that became his life. Immediately upon arrival in India, he was ordered to leave. After losing a child at sea he began work in Rangoon, Burma, where he labored with the language and mission for seven years before he baptized his first convert. The king of Burma, a firm believer in non-theistic Theravadin Buddhism, rejected him because he believed in one eternal God. Later he was incarcerated by the Burmese for twenty-one months under indescribable conditions as part of a group of human sacrifices Burma intended to offer as insurance for victory over the British with whom they were at war.<sup>77</sup> His wife, who gave birth during his imprisonment, suffered during this time from malaria, smallpox and spotted fever. Whenever she was conscious and not delirious she clung to the promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." To Judson's great sorrow, both his wife and child died within six months of his release.

After the war Judson, now released by the victorious British, served as an interpreter in negotiating peace between the British and the Burmese. He went on to translate the Bible into Burmese, publish a grammar of the Burmese language and complete most of a comprehensive English-Burmese dictionary. When in 1850 he died at sea, buried without a prayer, he had, in addition to his other setbacks, lost two wives and several children. At the same time, however, the Burmese church had seven thousand members.<sup>78</sup> By the early 1980s there were some 900,000 believers in the Christian community that Judson had birthed.<sup>79</sup> Adoniram Judson, wounded for the Anointed One, lived out the paradigm of patient endurance.

## CONCLUSIONS

This essay has attempted to demonstrate the paradigmatic significance of some Old Testament patriarchal episodes for cross-cultural mission. The cross-cultural application of these stories is not just one possible application. Rather, it emerges from the analysis as a primary application of all four narratives which we have discussed.

Three of them contain what Livingston has designated Covenant Negotiations (14:12-24; 23:1-20; 26:1-33). This narrative type treats "relationships between ethnic groups, which may be made harmonious if a covenant can be made between them."<sup>80</sup>

Three of the narratives contain other literary clues indicating that their purpose involves modeling constructive behavior among the people of the land. In the first narrative (13:1-18) the parallels between the choice offered Lot by Abraham and the gift of the land offered Abraham by the Lord, suggested Abraham as a model for Israel and every generation of believers. The prominence of the Hittites in the narrative of the purchase

of the cave of Machpelah, and the fact that the second conclusion of the story ended with a reference to them, suggested that Abraham's dealing with them was important to the narrator. The position of chap. 26 between two unfortunate interpersonal paradigms, and its position corresponding to chap. 34 of Genesis, an opposite paradigm for treating the people of the land, again points to the narrator's intention to present Abraham and Isaac as models for "strangers and sojourners."

Abraham and Isaac are not weak people who have no choice but to cooperate. Rather they are portrayed as strong, wealthy and prosperous, their penchant for generosity, accommodation, negotiation and patience being a function of their determination to follow promise and command, a position that is frequently reinforced by promise and blessing.

The incident of Abraham's dividing the land with his kinsman, Lot, suggests that disputes over land should be carried out in a way that models the Lord's own generosity and faithfulness, even when these procedures are ignored by others. Abraham's response to the priest-king Melchizedek models the important task of finding contacts in the theological constructs of other cultures. Abraham's negotiation for a burial place for his wife provides a window into cross-cultural relations that respect the traditions of a host people and involve commitment to live among them. And Isaac's patient redigging of wells, his freedom to let vengeance go in favor of kindness, models the kind of attitude that cross-cultural witnesses could very well exhibit in their relations with others, even when they are rejected or ignored.

Effective cross-cultural mission relies on the promise and blessing of the Lord, rather than on making claims, securing privileges and insisting on rights. After drought, famine, opposition, resilience, and patience will come the cry of joy, "We have found water."

## NOTES

1. I am indebted to Darrell L. Whiteman, in the area of missiology, and Eugene E. Carpenter and Stanley D. Walters, in the areas of biblical studies and Hebrew, for helpful suggestions.

2. For the change of name from Abram to Abraham, see H. L. Hicks, "Abraham," *IDB*, 1964 ed. In this article I am using Abraham throughout except in quotations from other sources.

3. Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: an Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), *passim*. A helpful survey of Childs's contributions to a canonical criticism is provided by Gerald T. Sheppard in "Canon Criticism: the Proposal of Brevard Childs and an Assessment for Evangelical Hermeneutics," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 4(1974):3-17. See also James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism. Guides to Biblical Scholarship*, Gene M. Tucker, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

4. Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1974).



5. The RSV, which I have used throughout this article unless otherwise noted, uses “valley” for the Hebrew word *kikkar*. This word refers to the typical flap of bread, as well as the weight called the talent. Both objects are round as well as flat. Since “circle of the Jordan” is obviously strained, the word “plain” can also be used (Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes. Anchor Bible*, [Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1964], Vol. 1, p. 96). I have retained the traditional “valley” because the distinction is of little significance for my argument.

6. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 542.

7. The phrase, identical in the Hebrew, is *lāšēbet̄ yaḥdāw*. Speiser (*Genesis*, p. 96) considers v 6 an addition from P. Nevertheless, in the final narrative, the repetition of their inability to dwell together suggests both the degree of their wealth and a contrast with the prosperity and hope of the opening verses.

8. Speiser holds that the reference to the Canaanites and Perizzites in v 7 “appears to point up the danger of dissension among Abraham’s followers at a time when the land was ruled by others” (*Genesis*, p. 96).

9. There are seven references where the definite article is used alone or with a preposition: 6, 7, 9, 15, 16[2x], and 17.

10. See *BDB*, pp. 411-412, p. 969; Other references cited in Larry R. Helyer, “The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives,” *JSOT* 26(1983):79.

11. *Ibid.*, 79.

12. I have departed from the RSV translation here in order to reveal more accurately the structure of the Hebrew. Is there a suggestion in these verses that, like the Garden of Eden, paradise is always a place of temptation?

13. Larry R. Helyer maintains that “the biblical sources are unanimous in establishing the eastern boundary of Canaan at the Jordan River from its exit at the Sea of Chinnereth to the Salt Sea. From the southeastern end of the Salt Sea the border ran in a southwesterly direction toward Kadesh Barnea and then over to the Mediterranean, along the Brook or Wadi of Egypt (cf. Num 34:1-29; Jos 15:1-14; Ezek 47:13-20). Clearly Gen 13:12 indicates that Zoar, Sodom, and Gomorrah were not located in the land of Canaan and this notation coincides with the border description.” (“Separation,” pp. 79, 80; and documentation in note 15, p. 87.)

14. “Although the choice of territory rests with the older man, Abraham generously cedes his right to his ward.” (Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 96.)

15. The story is about more than land. The Lord also promises to make Abraham’s descendents as numerous as the dust of the earth, a promise stated and repeated in v 16: “I will make your descendents as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted.” Indeed, Larry R. Helyer interprets the separation of Abraham and Lot as one of eight crises which threaten the fulfillment of God’s promise to make of Abraham a great nation, the promise which is also the theme, according to David Clines (*The Theme of the Pentateuch. JSOT Supplement Series*, 10 [Sheffield, UK: University of Sheffield, 1978], p. 29. Cited in Helyer, p. 81.), of the Abraham cycle (Gen 11:27-25:11). (Helyer, “Separation,” p. 85.)

16. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), Ch. 4.
17. The translation is my own.
18. See Rolf Rendtorff, *Men of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 13. G. Herbert Livingston considers Gen 13:2-18 a "Moment of Decision" type narrative (*The Pentateuch*, 1974, p. 244), the only one of the four passages treated here which he does not consider under the type, "Covenant Negotiation" (*Ibid.*, pp. 247-8). While the Moment of Decision type may be associated with an established custom of society, it is not, in contrast to the Covenant Negotiation type, consistently associated with relationships between ethnic groups (*Ibid.*, pp. 247-48).
19. Darrell L. Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1983), p. 101.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 173 and 174.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
22. Whiteman's analysis of three types of missionaries is fascinating and lays to rest the stereotype of the missionary fostered by such books as Michener's *Hawaii* (*Ibid.*, pp. 205-219).
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-198.
24. "The era of the Melanesian Mission has come to an end, but the era of the Church of Melanesia is just beginning. Mission impact and influence will undoubtedly continue to be felt for years, but the Church of Melanesia is now a Christian fellowship group of Melanesian believers" (*Ibid.*, p. 424).
25. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Trans. Rosemary Sheed, Meridian Books (New York: World, 1970 [1963]), p. 38.
26. Raffaele Pettazzoni, "The Supreme Being: Phenomenological Structure and Historical Development," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1959), pp. 59-66.
27. If Albright (William F. Albright, "The Historical Background of Genesis XIV," *Journal of the Society of Oriental Research* [1926], 231-269) and Speiser (*Genesis*, pp. 108-109) are correct, this chapter of Genesis makes up one of the oldest documents in the Pentateuch, attesting at the same time to the authenticity of the historical Abraham. Abraham's mustering of 318 men for the battle (14), the reference to him as Abram the Hebrew (13), the casual mention of the cities of the area (1-12), along with the unique character of the chapter argue for its ancient vintage. Even the mention of Melchizedek, Speiser finds, "merits a measure of confidence" as to historicity in "its own right" (*Ibid.*, p. 108).
28. Understandably this chapter has stimulated a lot of research (See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: a Commentary* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985], pp. 182-185). Westermann believes that the chapter is made up of three originally independent parts: the *report* of the campaign (1-11 or 12), into which have been assumed three enumerative lists of kings (1-2; 8-9) and peoples (5), and which does not mention Abraham; the *liberation narrative* (12-17, 21-24), which "corresponds at every step with the narratives of liberation from the period of the judges"; and the *Melchizedek episode*, which has been inserted into the framework of the liberation narrative. On the surface, the episode of Abraham's rescue of Lot and his encounter with Melchizedek appear to be part of the overall



event initiated by the invading kings. But, according to Westermann, the difference in type between 1-11 (report) and 12-24 (narrative) indicate that the two parts have a different origin (Ibid., pp. 190-192). Speiser argues that the whole chapter was excerpted or adapted from a foreign source which already mentioned Abraham (*Genesis, 12-36* p. 108). Our concern is to assess the meaning of the whole chapter along with the Abrahamic paradigms as a whole, in which task vv 1-11 become very significant (see below).

29. Westermann cites this as part of the evidence for the separate origins of vv 1-11 and 12-24 (*Genesis 12-36*, p. 190).

30. The combination 'el 'elyôn occurs in the OT only in Psa 78:35. *Elyon* occurs in parallel with *El* in Num 24:16 and Psa 73:11 and elsewhere with *Elohim*, *Shaddai*, and *Yahweh* (ibid., p. 204). Speiser considers El (Elyon an "authentic Canaanite deity" and Abraham's apposition of El (Elyon to Yahweh suitable and the probable basis for a later Israelite identification of them (*Genesis*, p. 109). Since El is known in Canaanite religion as creator of the earth, and (Elyon as creator of the heavens, their combination in Genesis 14 as creator of heaven and earth makes sense. Such a composite deity makes sense as an equivalent of the Israelite Yahweh. I am indebted to my colleague Lawson Stone for help with this issue.

31. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Pr., 1982), p. 136.

32. See notes 24 and 25 above.

33. Henri Maurier, *The Other Covenant: a Theology of Paganism*, trans. Charles McGrath (New York: Newman, 1968 [65]), p. 213.

34. Maurier (Ibid., 213 and 4 *pass*) is convinced that Christians should be looking among people outside the biblical tradition for evidence of the action of God's economy among them. He cites the encounter of Abraham and Melchizedek as evidence of this economy at work in the biblical period. On a more popular level, Don Richardson (*Peace Child*, 3rd. ed. [Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976]; and *Eternity in Their Hearts* [Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1981], p. 7), whose encounter with the Sawi tribe in Irian Jaya taught him that there are structures of understanding among people for whom the gospel is completely new that provide them with a redemptive analogy for understanding it, has found in the encounter of Abram and Melchizedek an example of just such a point of contact or bridge for understanding. Richardson traces the witnesses among the various people of the earth to the reality of the Most High God, from Mars Hill in Athens, through the Koreans and the Chinese, to the Karen of Burma.

35. Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 42.

36. Ibid. Like the Lord, Engai is neither male nor female. The Masai, in fact, sometimes use female pronouns to describe Engai and sometimes male.

37. Ibid., p. 43.

38. Ibid., p. 63. As the lion goes after its prey, so God has pursued the Masai.

39. For the question of the identity of the *benê-het*, "children of Heth," see Speiser, who thinks they are probably Jebusites, early inhabitants of Jerusalem, closely related to the Hittites of history and non-semitic people (*Genesis*, p. 173); and F. F. Bruce ("Hittites," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [1982 ed.]), who is convinced that they are probably not to be confused with the northern

civilization of the same name. There are two major proposals as to how the negotiation of Genesis 23 should be read in its historical-cultural context. The first sees the negotiation featured in the text as so remarkably faithful to similar transactions found among Hittite records as to secure the historicity of the event. The Hittite Code, found at Boghazkoy, which flourished in Patriarchal times and was destroyed in 1200 B.C.E., contains parallels to the negotiation in Genesis 23 which, according to Manfred R. Lehmann, "confirms the authenticity of the 'background material' of the Old Testament, which makes it such an invaluable source for the study of the social, economic and legal aspects of the periods of history it depicts" (Lehmann "Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law," *BASOR*, 129 [1953]:15). William F. Albright in an editorial note to Lehmann's article (p. 18), John Bright (*History of Israel* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959], p. 72), C. H. Gordon ("Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," *JNES* 17 [1958]:29), and K. A. Kitchen (*Ancient Orient and Old Testament* [London: Tyndale, 1966], pp. 23, 51) have supported Lehmann's interpretation. Three aspects of the negotiations connect it with the Hittites: (1) Paragraphs 46 and 47 of the Hittite Code indicate that, if a seller sells his whole property, certain feudal services need not be paid by the seller on the property (see v 11); (2) The Hittite Code is in distinct contrast at this point with that of Hammurabi since the latter is interested in the feudatory person, while the Hittite Code speaks to the feudatory property; and (3) The prominent mention of the trees in the description of the property transferred from Ephron to Abraham (17) is a characteristic feature of Hittite business documents which list the exact number of trees for each large real estate sale.

There appear to be no defenses of this position published since Gene R. Tucker critiqued it in his article advocating what I am calling here the second major position ("The Legal Background of Genesis 23," *JBL* 85 [1966]:77-84.) This position sees the negotiation in the context of later history and Neo-Babylonian culture. Tucker argued that Lehmann's specific connections with Hittite law could not be maintained, and that the passage exhibits several characteristics common to Near Eastern legal transactions of many periods and some specifics which it shares with Neo-Babylonian documents: (1) The negotiation between Abraham and the Hittites is not to be explained as an attempt to avoid feudal services, but as "an account of normal legal negotiations which were conducted with elaborate hospitality and exaggerated politeness." (OT parallels for giving more than a buyer requests include 2 Sam 24:22-23a; 1 Chron 21:23). (2) The mention in v 9 that Abraham will offer Ephron "the full price" for his land has parallels in Sumerian and Akkadian final contracts where the mention of the full price points to the finality of the transaction. However, the Akkadian texts of Neo-Babylonian times specify "the price of his field, silver in full," more exactly paralleling the literal meaning of the Hebrew expression in verse 9, *b<sup>h</sup>keseḇ malē*, "for the full silver." (3) The final verses of the chapter, representing a report of a contractual agreement, include parallels with the Neo-Babylonian "dialogue document," including a feature not generally found in standard Old Babylonian and Assyrian parallels, namely, the payment clause as main clause. (4) Finally, Tucker notes that "since trees are noted as appurtenances in—among others—the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian conveyances and some of these documents even record the *number* of trees on the land, the specification of the trees in Genesis 23 cannot be construed as evidence for the application of Hittite law or custom" (ibid., pp. 83, 84). Westermann (*Genesis 12-36*, pp. 371,372) and John Van Seters (*Abraham in History and Tradition* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975], p. 99) support Tucker's position, finding the parallels with the "dialogue document" convincing. Our concern here is not with the early or late date of the chapter, nor with evidence for the congruity of the story with the cultural realities of the patriarchal



period. We are content to see the clear way in which the narrator stresses Abraham's acceptance of local custom as a way of relating positively and peacefully with the ethnic community among whom he lived.

40. Abraham completes the rites of mourning comprehended by the expression *wayyābō 'abraham lišpōd l'esara welibkōtāh*, a hendiadys, based on a fixed expression (also in Ezek 24:23). The verb *wayyābō* ("he went in") designates what takes place as a ritual action. A more detailed description of the rite is given in Ezek 24:15-17, 22-23b. The lament for the dead has its original setting in the family (Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 373; Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 169 n.2).

41. Brueggemann looks at this focus on Sarah as a part of the movement of the whole Abraham story: "In the chapters now before us [23:1-25:18], we deal with three elements in the transition of the promise to the generation of Isaac: (a) the death of the *mother* (23:1-20), (b) a *wife* for the son and heir (24:1-67) and (c) the (p. 194) death of the *father* (25:1-18). These transitional elements are presented after relaxation of the main tension of the narrative in 22:1-13. Chapters 23-25 function in the Abrahamic narrative in the way chaps. 34-36 function in the Jacob narrative and the way chaps. 47:28-50:26 function in the Joseph account. They treat necessary concerns. But in each case, they lie outside the main dramatic development" (*Genesis*, pp. 194-195).

42. "The Legal Background of Genesis 23," p. 83. See also BDB, 878 A, 7.b.

43. Westermann holds that this "contract-like conclusion" does not require that the purpose of the transaction, i.e. burial, be specified (*Genesis 12-36*, p. 375).

44. These are, of course, the people of the "city government" or "town council" (Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 169).

45. This supports Westermann's conviction that the source here is P. He assigns the passage to P because (1) Genesis 23 elaborates on the account of Sarah's death, following up on 21:2-5, and continued at 25:7-8; (2) the Priestly character of the frame verses for chapter 23, 1-2 and 19, read together, is obvious; (3) the verses of elaboration, 3-18, 20, cannot be separated from the frame verses because they enable the deceased to be buried; and (4) the repeated phrase "Bury your dead!" is congruent with the Priestly concern with ritual burial (*ibid.*, pp. 371, 372). In fact, he finds, the procedures for burial in the chapter are "very unlikely in the patriarchal period [and accord] but poorly with the life-style of the small-cattle nomad" (*ibid.*, p. 376). Genesis 23, like chapters 17, 23, and 28, typical of P, provides narrative detail, making the patriarchal story the basis for a typical concern of P—family rites. Even Bright noted that we cannot say how Hittite law came to be followed in Palestine at the time of Abraham (*History of Israel*, p. 72). And F. F. Bruce considers the identity of the Hittites of Palestine referred to in the Bible (Gen 23; 26:34ff; 27:46; Num 13:29; Deut 7:1; 1 Sam 26:6; 2 Sam 11:3-24; 23:39; Ezek 16:3, 45) "an unsolved problem" of biblical research, holding that Lehmann's argument, outlined above, is questionable ("Hittites," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1982 ed., p. 723 A,B).

46. A further irony may very well confront the Hebrew hearer/reader at this point in the narrative. He or she would certainly think of God's promises to "give" (*nātan*) the land to the people of Israel. The expression occurs, for example, 167 times in the book of Deuteronomy in connection with God's gift of land (e.g., 12:1, "These are the statutes and ordinances which you shall be careful to do in the land which the Lord, the God of your Fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live upon the earth").

47. According to Manfred R. Lehmann, the conventional analysis of this passage is that Ephron, through the cunning use of false generosity, wrested a huge price from Abraham for his land ("Abraham's Purchase," p. 15). Lehmann (*ibid.*, p. 15) disputes this interpretation of the word "give," suggesting that in the context of the Hittite Code, which he considers the key to understanding the negotiation, "give" means sell or pay (see v 13). Lehmann's interpretation has been significantly questioned by Gene R. Tucker ("The Legal Background," pp. 77-84) whose depiction of the narrative's character differs from both the conventional analysis and that of Lehmann. Tucker says, "The passage is an account of normal legal negotiations which were conducted with elaborate hospitality and exaggerated politeness" (p. 78). He cites David's purchase of a threshing floor from Araunah as a parallel example (2 Sam 24:16-24; 1 Chron 21:18-27 [Ornan]). Both my own reading of the passage and my own experience with Middle Eastern bargaining support Tucker's assessment.
48. Brueggemann sees here a parallel with the "intense bargaining between Abraham and God in 18:23-33." (*Genesis*, p. 195).
49. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 375.
50. Speiser translates, "resident alien," considerably less colorful—but appropriate to the meaning. (*Genesis*, p. 172).
51. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 373.
52. "The expression '...at the full current price,' occurs in 1 Chron. 21:22-24 in the same sense and context where David buys Ornan's threshing floor" (Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 374).
53. Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, ed. Kautzsch/Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 111k.
54. According to Brueggemann, "The structure of the passage is straightforward. It begins with the need for a grave (1-4) and concludes with the resolution of the problem (17-20). Between the problem and the resolution stand a long, detailed narrative of negotiation (5-16) which enables the movement to resolution..." (*Genesis*, p. 195).
55. *The Pentateuch*, pp. 241-260. Other examples in Genesis of negotiations between ethnic groups include 21:22-34; 24:1-67; 26:26-33; 29:1-30; 29:31-30:43; 31:1-55; 33:5-17; 33:18-34:31 (*ibid.*, p. 248).
56. I am indebted to my colleague, Timothy Kiogora, for this story.
57. Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalo Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974), Ch. 4: "Gun and Ointment," pp. 47-61.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 57 and 209-224. See also his use of the New Testament paradigm of the anointing of Jesus at the home of Simon, the leper, at Bethany (p. 56).
60. Van Seters considers the reference to the king of the Philistines "an important ideological statement." It points to the king as an irreligious person, a ruler of an irreligious people (*Abraham*, p. 178).
61. "This statement...is the decisive verdict on Isaac as a man genuinely blessed" (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 225).
62. Van Seters holds that the intention of the story in chap. 26 is suggested by the fact that Isaac's life is directly parallel with Abraham's in the chapter's early



verses. He attributes the parallels to “an artificial literary tradition about Isaac based directly on the traditions of Abraham” (*Abraham*, p.183).

63. These episodes, though they are not treated here, also have paradigmatic significance for mission. For example, here in chaps. 21 and 22 we have two desert experiences of two sons of Abraham. In one, God tests Abraham through the child of promise (22:1-19); and in the other God protects in the desert the child who is not heir to His promise (21:1-21). These parallel events provide further evidence that chosenness entails testing and that not to be chosen is not to be rejected. Between these two narratives of providence (“And God was with the lad” [21:20], and “God will provide...” [22:8]), we have a story of Abraham’s patient commitment to living among the people of the land (21:22-32). The presentation of these three narratives in sequence suggests that chosenness is not incompatible with God’s universal care, and that patient gestures of good will together with trust in God without reservation (22:16) are ways of being God’s witness in the world. One can dig wells instead of building walls and still trust God to fulfill his promises!

64. According to Van Seters, “it cannot be fortuitous that in this account various motifs and elements are present from both the previous episodes in the life of Abraham in the same *sequence of events* and with a closer literary unity than exists between story A [Gen 12:10-16] and chap. 13” (*Abraham*, p. 189).

65. Westermann sees v 15 as misplaced. It should go with v 18 (*Genesis 12-36*, p. 426).

66. The degree to which chap. 26 refers the reader/hearer to Abraham is indicated by Van Seters’ conviction that the permission of Abraham to prosper in Abimelech’s territory can only be explained by the assumption of the narrator of the Isaac parallel to 12:10-16 and 20:1-7 that Isaac, like his father, was granted the privilege given by Abimelech to Abraham in the earlier story [20:1-7]. There the king says, (20:15), “See, my land is before you; dwell wherever you please” (*Abraham*, p. 188). Both Van Seters (*ibid.*) and Westermann (*Genesis 12-36*, p. 425) agree that the reader of chap. 26 is kept constantly reminded of Abraham.

67. According to Walter Brueggemann, the theme of chapter 26 is the connection between prosperity and blessing (*Genesis*, pp. 221-226).

68. Robert Alter identifies the three-times-told story of “a patriarch driven by famine to a southern region where he pretends that his wife is his sister, narrowly avoids a violation of the conjugal bond by the local ruler, and is sent away with gifts” as a typical biblical “type story” (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 49 and 50). He illustrates the function of these type stories with that of “the encounter with the future betrothed at a well” (*ibid.*, pp. 51-62), showing that the constancy of the type allows the narrator to communicate special information through distinctives in the stories or the omission of them.

69. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 224.

70. See *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, par. 113u; and BDB, p. 233 A. Westermann protests that “‘greatness’ does not suit the patriarchs either economically or politically. It is only when the life-style of the patriarchs was no longer known that one could speak of them in this way” (*Genesis 12-36*, p. 426).

71. Westermann considers v 16-17, +15, 18 an ancient account because it includes an itinerary and a dispute over water, typical concerns of small cattle nomads (*ibid.*).

72. *Ibid.*, p. 430.

73. Personal correspondence, February 7, 1985. I am indebted to Professor Walters for the insights in his whole paragraph.
74. A palistrophe is also called a chiasm or concentric structure. The device has been recognized as characteristic of Hebrew narrative for centuries. For the bibliography see Eugene E. Carpenter, "Literary Structure and Unbelief: A Study of Deuteronomy 1:6-46," *ATJ* 42(1987): 83, n. 5.
75. Livingston, *Pentateuch*, p. 248.
76. The Hebrew verb is obscured by the English translation, "reaped" (RSV).
77. According to William Henry Allison, Judson hardly ever comments on this agonizing experience in his writings (*Dictionary of American Biography*, 1943 ed.).
78. David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: a Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World A.D. 1900-2000* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 203.
79. Sherwood Eddy, *Pathfinders of the World Missionary Crusade* (New York: Abingdon, 1945), pp. 29-33; and Edward Judson, *The Life of Adoniram Judson* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1883).
80. Livingston, *Pentateuch*, p. 247.