

## ***Blessing the Nations: Toward a Biblical Theology of Mission from Genesis***

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*A number of different themes from the OT have been utilized in standard missiological literature to establish God's concern for humanity. This essay proposes the consideration of the blessing theme in the book of Genesis as a helpful starting point for the elaboration of an OT theology of mission. This theme is traced throughout Genesis in order to underline that a comprehensive vision of the mission of the people of God in a fallen world should include material, spiritual, and character formation dimensions.*

*Key Words: mission, blessing, Genesis, patriarchs, material and spiritual blessings, promise*

### INTRODUCTION: REFLECTIONS ON A JOURNEY

Twenty years ago I was a seminary student working toward teaching the OT in an institution in Central America. I am half Guatemalan, so this decision meant something like a return to childhood cultural roots. But those were times of great conflict in the region: the Sandinistas came to power in Nicaragua in 1979, and civil wars were continuing apace in both Guatemala and El Salvador. Going south, then, required more than preparing myself solely in the classical biblical study disciplines. It also entailed at least beginning to wrestle with defining the mission of the church in that context of poverty, racism, and violence.

During those seminary days I began reading a wide variety of works by liberation theologians, who in time would be recognized as some of that current's most articulate spokespersons: Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Míguez Bonino, Hugo Assmann, José Porfirio Miranda, and Juan Luis Segundo among others. The complex realities of Central

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America that I encountered in books, journals, and newspapers demanded a response to a host of difficult questions: Was theology a deposit one simply received and then faithfully transmitted, or was it rather something to be done "on the way" in the interaction between Christian faith and the context? What of the role of ideology in the theological enterprise, the impact of context on interpretation, and the motivations behind highlighting some biblical texts while ignoring others? Questions abounded. Of course, beyond these perhaps more theoretical concerns, there lingered the pastoral challenge: What was the evangelical church actually to do in Central America? Living and working in Guatemala for thirteen years reinforced for me the importance and urgency of these *inquietudes* (i.e., the things that disquiet). This passion to grapple with the OT as it interfaced with social realities and ethical issues, particularly within Latin America and the Two-Thirds World, became my passion and drives me even today.

These concerns at one level are missiological. I now understand, too, that my pilgrimage over these last two decades is in no way unique. It could be seconded by countless others from across the theological spectrum, who grapple with similar challenges.<sup>1</sup> The desire to somehow define more satisfactorily the biblical foundation of mission has motivated occasional forays into missiological literature. My first encounter with a more thoughtful presentation came while I was in seminary, when I read John Stott's *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, a book that impacted the evangelical debate at that time over establishing the relationship between evangelism and social action.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Stott's was a reflection based primarily upon the NT. More sustained discussion of the OT material would have to be gleaned from elsewhere.

My limited exposure to missiological textbooks has shown that many authors (e.g., Blauw, Peters, and Senior and Stuhlmüller) tend to highlight the universalism in the OT, albeit from different angles.<sup>3</sup>

1. Note the surveys in D. J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (New Foundations Theological Library; Atlanta: John Knox, 1980) 2-40; idem, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (American Society of Missiology Series 16; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991) 349-519; C. E. Van Engen, "A Broadening Vision: Forty Years of Evangelical Theology of Mission, 1946-1986," in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980* (ed. J. A. Carpenter and W. R. Shenk; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 203-32.

2. J. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1975).

3. J. Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (Foundations of the Christian Mission; London: Lutterworth, 1962) 15-54; G. W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972); D. Senior and C. Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983) 9-138.

Others point to the compassion of God (Bosch)<sup>4</sup> or to the demand for social justice (Scott)<sup>5</sup> as the OT's major contribution. I have yet to come across any recent study of the OT material of the scope and erudition of David Bosch's treatment of the NT in his book *Transforming Mission*.<sup>6</sup> My learning curve has continued as a member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity, which has continuously labored with issues of mission.<sup>7</sup>

I have briefly traced this personal journey for two reasons. First, for me the search for a biblical basis for mission has underlined the necessity of providing *a theoretical construct* that would be both theologically and biblically sound and that could provide a suitable orientation for the parameters, motivations, and goals for mission within the complex realities of life. What I hope to do in this paper is to offer

Blauw attempts to correlate the universal commitments of Yahweh with the concepts of a missionary concern for the nations and the eschatological hope of a Messiah. Peters balances this universalism with the uniqueness of the God and religion of Israel. Senior and StuhlmueLLer try to trace this impulse and its adaptations throughout the OT in its interaction with "secular" events and pressures.

4. Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 42-83.

5. W. Scott, *Bring Forth Justice: A Contemporary Perspective on Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 44-77.

6. Book-length works, such as D. Filbeck's *Yes, God to the Gentiles, Too: The Missionary Message of the OT* (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, 1994) do exist but do not reflect the level of biblical scholarship of Bosch. Some OT scholars have made shorter contributions. Note, e.g., J. Hempel, "Die Wurzeln des Missionswillens im Glauben des Alten Testaments," *ZAW* 66 (1954) 244-72; G. E. Wright, "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," in *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (ed. G. H. Anderson; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961) 17-30; J. N. Oswalt, "The Mission of Israel to the Nations," in *Through No Fault of Their Own: The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard* (ed. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 85-95; E. A. Martens, "Ezekiel's Contribution to a Biblical Theology of Mission," in *Die Mission der Theologie: Festschrift für H. Kasdorf zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. S. Holthaus and K. W. Mueller; Mission Academics 5; Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 1998) 46-58. C. J. H. Wright is Principal of All Nations Christian College, a missionary training college in England, but is best known for his contributions to OT social ethics. For a study from a prominent scholar of a previous generation, see H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1944).

7. The most prominent names of the Fraternity that have been translated into English include Samuel Escobar, René Padilla, and my former colleague in Guatemala, Emilio A. Núñez. Note, e.g., R. Padilla, *Mission between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / Buenos Aires: Nueva Creación, 1985). Escobar's contributions have come primarily in journals. A recent contribution is his programmatic "Mission Studies Past, Present, and Future," *Missiology* 24/1 (1996) 3-29. Also note his *Evangelio y realidad social: Ensayos* (Lima: Presencia, 1985); *De la misión a la teología* (Buenos Aires: Kairós, 1998). E. A. Núñez has most recently published a book-length study in Spanish: *Hacia una misionología evangélica latinoamericana: Bases bíblicas de la misión (Antiguo Testamento)* (Miami: Comibam, 1997).

some reflections on the theme of blessing in the narratives of Genesis<sup>8</sup> as a possible candidate for this formidable task.

At the same time, it is important, I believe, to recognize that this "content" is inseparable from issues of character formation and faith development. An understanding of mission is deepened within the crucible of history, in the contact with hunger, revolution, politics, and other social tensions. Genesis allows us not only to appreciate the divine articulation of the mission of the people of God but also to trace the stumbling steps to its appropriation in the lives of the book's characters. In other words, the mission to be a blessing cannot be separated from pilgrimage.

### MISSION AS A CALL TO BE A BLESSING

#### *A Foundational Passage: Genesis 12:1-3*

It is a commonplace that presentations of mission in the OT turn to Gen 12:1-3. A primary attraction of this passage is the clear embrace of the world in its purview through the phrase "all the families of the earth" in v. 3.<sup>9</sup> The term "families" (מְשִׁפְּחוֹת) connects back to the Table of Nations (10:5, 18, 20, 31, 32) so, whatever else the call of Abram might entail, at the very least one can see that it is designed to reach to "all" the peoples descended from the sons of Noah. The global effect

8. The term "narrative" is a deliberate choice of words to signal that our approach focuses on the final form of the book instead of on its hypothetical sources. Of the many approaches sensitive to the literary features of the book of Genesis we have been most helped by D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOTSup 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978); R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); L. A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (JSOTSup 96; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); T. D. Alexander, "Abraham Re-assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12-50* (ed. R. S. Hess, P. E. Satterthwaite, and G. J. Wenham; Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1993) 7-28; idem, "Messianic Interpretation in the Book of Genesis," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess and G. J. Wenham; Carlisle: Paternoster / Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 19-39. For sensitive and scholarly evangelical alternative approaches to the issue of the sources and that appreciate broader literary and canonical connections, note G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1A; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987) xxv—xl; R. W. L. Moberly, "Paradigms for Pentateuchal Criticism," in *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 176-205.

9. In light of the many lexical and theological connections between the call of Abram and the Primeval History, only a few of which will be highlighted in this paper, Speiser's comment is surprising: "There was nothing in the preceding accounts to prepare us for Abraham's mission" (E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* [AB 1; New York: Doubleday, 1964] 87).

is enhanced in a different fashion by the word "name" in v. 2, which harks back to the Babel narrative that depicts the scattering of humankind (11:4). Continuity is thus complemented by contrast: Abram and the nation which will spring from him are not to exhibit the same sort of disobedience and prideful aspirations as were exhibited at Babel; greatness will come by divine grace, not human pretense.

Gen 12:1-3 also contains the first instance of the declaration of the promises to the patriarchs. These promises and their repetition and reworking in later chapters in Genesis contain several elements, but I will focus on the theme of blessing.<sup>10</sup> It is this theme, I believe, that will define the mission of Abram and his descendants to "all the families of the earth." These opening lines of chap. 12, however, contain a number of interpretive issues of a technical nature. I will deal briefly with several that are pertinent to our purposes.

The centrality of the blessing theme is readily evident in several ways. To begin with, there is the striking repetition of words derived from the root בָּרַךְ: the verb "bless" appears three times, the noun "blessing" twice. In addition to this lexical observation, a structural analysis reveals that 12:1-3 can be subdivided into two symmetrical parts around its two imperatives.<sup>11</sup> The meaning of the first imperative in 12:1 ("go") seems clear enough, but the interpretation of the volitive

10. Note the surveys of research and detailed critical studies (though from different perspectives) on the patriarchal promises by C. Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers* (trans. D. E. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); R. Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (trans. J. J. Scullion; JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 43-136; D. M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures in Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 177-95. Critical discussions often center on the form, provenance, and date of the different promises to the patriarchs. Different authors posit distinct themes as the primary focus of the promises. Von Rad, in light of his Hexateuch framework, believes the land promise to be central for the Yahwist (*Genesis* [trans. J. H. Marks; rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972] 13-43; idem, *Theology of the Old Testament* [trans. D. M. G. Stalker; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962] 1.129-75). For Westermann, it is the promise of progeny (*The Promises to the Fathers*). For Wolff, it is the promise of blessing ("The Kerygma of the Yahwist," in *The Vitality of Tradition* [ed. W. Brueggemann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 41-66). Although Rendtorff takes a view contrary to Wolff's position on the Yahwist (Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process*, 108-36), he does believe that the promise of blessing holds the patriarchal narratives and other promise themes together (ibid., 48-84). Cf. the view on the importance of blessing from an evangelical perspective by W. C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) passim.

11. 12:1-2a	Go . . .	I will make you a great nation I will bless you I will make your name great
12:2b-3	Be/you will be a blessing . . .	I will bless those who bless you I will curse those who treat you lightly by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

of "bless" in v. 2b is more problematic because of the syntax (וַיְבָרֶךְ, *waw* + imperative after a cohortative). The two primary options (of those not requiring an emendation)<sup>12</sup> are "so that you will be a blessing" and "be a blessing."<sup>13</sup> In other words, either Yahweh is affirming the certain result or goal of his creation of a people ("a great nation"), or he is giving Abram a command and a responsibility.<sup>14</sup> The first possibility is descriptive, the second prescriptive. Those who decide for "so that you will be a blessing" believe that these words describe how Abram would embody the blessing of God and be a paradigm of blessing for others, whether through their direct contact with him or because of his renown as the recipient of God's favor (cf. 48:20; Zech 8:13). Nevertheless, both interpretive options (i.e., result or command) in their own way communicate that the reason for the existence of the people of God and hence their mission to "all the families of the earth" involves the transmission of blessing to others. Subsequent narratives reveal just how well the divine intent materializes and to what extent Abram and his descendants are faithful to this commission.

Third, the structural layout underscores that for the people of God to be a blessing (vv. 2b-3), they must first receive it (vv. 1-2a). An intriguing tension in the later narratives is precisely this relationship between the experience of blessing in the lives of the patriarchs and the nature of the interaction they have with those around them. Interestingly, it is assumed in 12:3 that more will have positive dealings with the patriarchs than negative (note the plural מְבָרְכֶיךָ, "the ones who bless you"; the singular מְבָרְכֶיךָ, "the one who treats you

12. Some would repoint the 2ms imperative to a 3ms perfect and translate the clause as "it [i.e., your name] will be a blessing" or "so that it will be a blessing"—e.g., Speiser, *Genesis*, 85-86; cf. BHS.

13. Many commentators believe that the construction communicates consequence or purpose ("so that you will effect/be a blessing"). Note, e.g., U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 2: *From Noah to Abraham* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964) 314; Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," 137 n. 28; C. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 144, 152; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 266; N. M. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 89; cf. GKC §110i. We prefer the view that the verb be taken to hold the imperatival force (cf. 17:1). Others agreeing with this interpretation include Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 53-55; V. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 369-70 n. 3 (yet note his comments, p. 373); Alexander, "Abraham Re-assessed Theologically," 12-13 n. 10.

14. If the verbal form is taken with an imperatival sense, the consequence can be shifted to the following clause, which begins with the cohortative in a dependent relationship to it (וַיְבָרֶךְ), "so that I may bless . . .". Cf. Alexander, "Abraham Re-assessed Theologically," 12; GKC §108d; B. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 34.5.2 [hereafter VValtke-O'Connor].

lightly").<sup>15</sup> Divine first-person verbs dominate these lines. Ultimately, Yahweh is the bestower of blessing upon Abram and the rest of humankind alike.

A fourth point, and a celebrated interpretive crux with ramifications for defining the mission of the people of God, is the translation of the Niphal of "bless" (בִּרַךְ) in 12:3c. Complicating matters is the fact that in the book of Genesis similar phraseology appears in the Niphal a total of three times (here; 18:18; 28:14) and in the Hithpael twice (22:18; 26:4). Opinions differ over whether the verb here should be taken in a passive sense ("will be blessed through you"),<sup>16</sup> as a reflexive ("will bless themselves"),<sup>17</sup> or in the middle voice ("will find blessing").<sup>18</sup> Very often scholars make their particular syntactical choice and then argue to flatten all instances to the same rendering. This procedure is utilized in a number of the English versions as well.

At stake for some who defend the passive is a key textual basis for the conviction that Abram and his descendants are to be mediators of the divine blessing to the rest of the world. I would suggest, however, that a careful reading of the passages might allow for both the passive and the reflexive translations in the book (the middle voice option would be a mediating position).<sup>19</sup> In both 18:18 and 28:14, where the Niphal is used, one can recognize that blessing involves the direct intervention (hence, mediation) of a patriarch: Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah in chap. 18, and the words of Yahweh to Jacob

15. Cf. P. D. Miller Jr., "Syntax and Theology in Genesis XII 3a," *VT* 34/4 (1984) 472-76.

16. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1: *The Pentateuch* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 194-95; Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, 315; Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 12-14, 30-32; Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 374-76; Sarna, *Genesis*, 89; Alexander, "Abraham Re-assessed Theologically," 13 n. 12; cf. Waltke-O'Connor 23.6.4a. Note LXX; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8; KJV; NIV; NRSV has the passive in the Niphal passages but cites the alternative of the reflexive in a marginal note.

17. Speiser, *Genesis*, 85-86; von Rad, *Genesis*, 160; R. B. Chisolm Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 84-85; cf. Deut 29:18[19]; Isa 65:16. Some would, however, also offer a different translation of the preposition כְּ + 2ms suffix: "through you" (Speiser), "by you" (von Rad). Both Speiser and von Rad allow for the possibility of the passive. Westermann supports the reflexive rendering, but he does not make a sharp distinction between it and the passive meaning (*Genesis 1-12*, 151-52). Cf. GKC §§51e, 54f. Note RSV (in the Niphal passages a passive rendering is mentioned in the marginal notes), NEB, NJB, NJPS.

18. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," 135 n. 2; C. W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament* (SBLDS 95; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 31-33 n. 3; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 277-78; cf. GKC §51e.

19. Note that NRSV has the passive in the Niphal passages and translates with the reflexive/middle in the Hithpael passages. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 195.

at Bethel anticipate the fruitful effects of his labors in Paddan-aram, a benefit that Laban himself will later acknowledge (30:27-30).

The contexts of the Hithpael passages, though, are distinct. In the divine declarations of both 22:15-18 and 26:2-5 what is explicitly commended is the faith and obedience of Abraham (cf. 22:12). If the significance of the reflexive is that others will bless themselves as they look to Abraham as a model, then this nuance fits very nicely with the focus on his steadfastness in these two passages. In other words, the passive and the reflexive both reflect the point of the narratives in which they appear and have a contribution to make to a theology of mission: the patriarchs and their descendants are to be channels of blessing to others, as well as a paradigm of faith to which others might aspire. One can opt for the passive here in 12:1-3 and still appreciate the appropriateness of the reflexive as an extension of the mission.

To summarize these very cursory initial observations, Gen 12:1-3 discloses that the mission of Abram and his descendants is to be a blessing. This blessing both for themselves and the world is to come from God's hand. The blessing to others will be realized directly through the people of God, but their lives can serve also as a paragon of a relationship with Yahweh. Even though much thus far has been said about "blessing," I have studiously avoided defining the concept. This is the point to which we now must turn.

### *The Meaning and Context of the Blessing*

The theme of blessing<sup>20</sup> first appears in the creation account of Genesis 1, where God blesses the animals and humans (1:22, 28). The term is specifically related to fertility in both instances, with its juxtaposition with the command to "be fruitful and multiply." This word of blessing is part and parcel of an ordered and benevolent work of God, which he pronounces "good" and "very good" (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), and then crowns with a final blessing on the seventh day, his day of rest. From the very beginning, then, blessing involves the favor of God. In this context it refers primarily to creaturely prosperity, which is secured by divine initiative and is to be experienced within the framework of a proper relationship with God.<sup>21</sup> This perspective is reinforced in chap. 2 with its picture of the

20. For extensive discussions of the Hebrew term, see J. Scharbert, "ברכה, בריך," *TDOT* 2.279-308; M. J. Brown, "ברך," *NIDOTTE* 1.757-67; Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament*. Also note C. Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). Blessing can flow from God to humans, between humans, and from humans to God. Our primary concern will be with the first category.

21. The divine initiative is evident in God's word. The setting is of a positive relationship between the Creator and humans, as expressed by the term "good" and the establishment of the Sabbath.

special provision of a garden and the presence and care of Yahweh God. The blessing, therefore, from the very beginning has both material and spiritual dimensions.

With the sin of the third chapter everything changes. The general context of blessing for the creation is altered by a curse on the ground (3:17). The man and woman are judged in ways that make begetting of progeny painful and their sustenance the fruit of harsh toil (3:16-19). Yahweh God's warning about the certain consequences of disobedience (2:17) is fulfilled in a surprising number of ways, as the following narratives describe how death is unleashed upon humankind.<sup>22</sup> While death at first glance is apparently postponed but not forgotten in the decree that humans will return to the dust (3:19), what is not explained there is just how death will come. The following texts provide a series of answers; death is everywhere. Some will experience a bloody end through fratricide and uncontrolled vengeance (4:8, 14, 23-24); others will live long but succumb to natural causes (the refrain "and he died" in 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31); the rest, except for Noah and his family, will drown by divine judgment through the flood because of the corruption and violence that had filled the earth (6:5-7, 11-12; chaps. 6-8); finally, God delegates the authority to punish by death (9:5-6). Clearly, there is no tree of life east of Eden.

But death is more than the termination of physical existence. Chapter 3 details the human estrangement from God evidenced in their hiding, the refusal to accept responsibility, and the expulsion from the garden without any hope for reentry.<sup>23</sup> The serpent's

22. A variety of explanations have been offered to deal with the apparent non-fulfillment of *מוֹת תָּמוּתְךָ* ("you will surely die," 2:17). Some that have been suggested are that what is meant is that immortality is lost, that divine grace overrides the sentence of judgment, or that the phrase means only that death would be a certainty but not immediate. Moberly proposes that the ambiguity of the text points to the idea that the foretold death actually works out as a qualitative difference in human existence. See "Did the Serpent Get It Right?" in R. W. L. Moberly, *From Eden to Golgotha: Essays in Biblical Theology* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 52; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 1-27 (essay originally appeared in *JTS* 39 [1988] 1-27). Our more narrative approach seeks to point out the progressive unfolding of the significance and scope of 2:17.

23. Note the close reading of the text offered by A. J. Hauser, "Genesis 2-3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation," in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (ed. R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura; Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 383-98 (essay originally appeared in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* [ed. D. J. A. Clines, D. M. Gunn, and A. J. Hauser; JSOTSup 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982] 20-36). Based upon analogies between Genesis 1-3 and features in the Tabernacle and Temple, Wenham suggests that the expulsion in Genesis 3 from the narrator's point of view is also a picture of a kind of death later articulated in the Law, when those who are unclean are forced out of the camp (cf. Lev 13:45-46). See Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 432-34; idem, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,"

temptation to hubris (3:5), with all of its disastrous consequences, is echoed in the anger of Cain and arrogance of Lamech, men who have no regard for human life, the violation of boundaries (6:1-4),<sup>24</sup> and the audacity of those refusing to fill the earth, who seek a great name for themselves and even to reach to heaven itself (11:1-4).

Within this context, where the "fallenness of the Fall" is so all-pervasive and self-destructive,<sup>25</sup> what of God's intention for material and spiritual blessing? After a vague word of hope in the mention of a seed in 3:15,<sup>26</sup> exemplary individuals surface with the births of Abel (4:1-4) and Seth (4:25-26), Enoch's walking with God (5:22, 24), and especially with Noah. While this obedient man (6:22; 7:5, 9, 16; 8:15-19) reflects the godly characteristics of those before him as he also walks with God (6:8-9) and offers sacrifice (8:20-21), at the same time he supersedes them. With Noah there is revealed the first strong hint at mediation: in a powerful turn of events it is said that he will relieve the curse on the ground and the frustration of tilling it (5:29; cf. 8:21); the original blessing is largely repeated in 9:1,<sup>27</sup> and it is with Noah that God makes a covenant that guarantees reprieve from another devastating judgment (6:18; 9:8-17). But this reversal

in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*, 399-404 (essay originally appeared in the *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Period of the Bible* [Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986] 19-25). The succession of types of physical death in the ensuing chapters forces us to take the warning more literally. Our reading also is limited to the Genesis narrative and is not a broader, canonical interpretation.

24. This is a notoriously difficult passage. For interpretive options see the commentaries. No matter one's interpretation, however, it is clear that there has been some sort of violation of appropriate limits.

25. I have found Thieliicke's exposition of the implications of the Fall for human existence and Christian ethics particularly illuminating: H. Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 1: *Foundations* and vol. 2: *Politics* (trans. W. H. Lazareth; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966-1969).

26. The words of Eve in 4:1, 25 might suggest that Abel and Seth were thought in some way to be a fulfillment of 3:15. In light of subsequent canonical revelation, some claim a messianic reference is implicit in 3:15, which has been called the "Protoevangelium." The point here, though, is that at this particular point in the Genesis narrative any such far-reaching referent is not clear. See the helpful discussion in Alexander, "Messianic Interpretation in Genesis," especially 27-32; cf. J. Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *TynBul* 4/1 (1997) 139-48. Examples of missiological textbooks understanding Gen 3:15 as foundational for the development of a messianic hope include Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, 83-86; Núñez, *Hacia una misionología evangélica latinoamericana*, 82-90.

27. There are some changes to the blessing and commission of Genesis 1 in 9:2-7: the notion of subduing the earth is not repeated, the animals will now dread humans and be their food, and the delegation of the authority to execute others for violence means that the harmonious order of the beginning has been cruelly shattered.

is shockingly turned back on its head. Noah is soon lying drunk in his tent, unconscious and disgraced (9:21-24).<sup>28</sup>

This context of sin, failure, and disappointment in Genesis 3-11 is the backdrop for the call of Abram. The litany of frustrations to God's desire to bestow on humankind those initial blessings of creation helps the reader to appreciate the power of the design of the mission given in 12:1-3. The divine intention is there reaffirmed. Abram and those who will come from him will now be Yahweh's instrument to bring his blessing to "all the families of the earth." The genealogy of Abram, the *הוֹלֵל דָּת* of Terah (11:27-32), connects him back to Shem (11:10-26) and so to Noah (10:1ff.; 6:9), and this in turn is connected back ultimately to the earlier genealogy of humankind (5:2ff.).<sup>29</sup> Patriarchal history, in other words, is inseparable from universal history; in fact, it is expressly inaugurated for humankind, for mission. Not surprisingly, when Abram receives the mandate in 12:1-3 and begins to move, he immediately encounters Canaanites (12:6). Thus begins the interaction with the "families of the earth" (12:6).<sup>30</sup>

### *The Unfolding of Blessing in Genesis 12-50*

The rest of the Genesis narratives develop the material and spiritual aspects of the blessing theme in passages which utilize the root *בֵּרַךְ* and in other related passages which do not but which broaden its conceptual field by drawing other elements into its scope.

The material blessings are made manifest in a number of ways. To begin with, the issue of fertility, which is prominent in the creation account, is reflected in the patriarch's concern for descendants. Yahweh continues to repeat the promise of progeny (13:15-16; 15:1-6; 17:16; 18:10-19; 22:15-18; 26:2-5; 28:13-15; 35:11-12; cf. 28:3; 48:4, 16,

28. Once again, as in the case of 6:1-4 (see above, n. 23), commentators disagree in their interpretations. Whatever the meaning of Ham's uncovering of Noah's nakedness, the relevant point for our discussion is the failure and shame of Noah occasioned by his excess.

29. Several authors that attempt to appreciate the contribution of the genealogies to the narrative development within Genesis include: N. Sternberg, "The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis," *Semeia* 46 (1989) 41-50; R. S. Hess, "The Genealogies of Genesis 1-11 and Comparative Literature" in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*, 58-72 (originally appeared in *Bib* 70 [1989] 241-54); T. D. Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *TynBul* 44/2 (1993) 255-70.

30. Some have interpreted the phrase "the persons [souls] that they had acquired" (*הַנְּפֹשׁ אֲשֶׁר-רָעִשׂוּ*) in 12:5 as proselytes won by Abram even before the call of 12:1-3 (e.g., Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, 320-21). Most, however, take this to be a reference to the acquisition of slaves and an anticipation of the patriarch's accumulation of wealth (e.g., Wenham, *Genesis* 1-15, 278).

19), and the text records how the number of Abraham's descendants does in fact grow, both within the chosen of his line (21:1-3; 25:1-11; 29:31-30:24; 35:22-29; 46:8-27; 47:27) as well as from the rejected heirs Ishmael (16:15-16; 25:12-18) and Esau (36:1-5). The patriarchs also enjoy concrete benefits: they accumulate flocks, servants, and wealth (13:2; 24:35; 26:12-14; 30:43; 39:5), and are able to find the water so coveted by others (26:17-22). They acquire prestige, most prominently in the eventual rise of Joseph to power in Egypt (39:2-6, 21-22; 41:41-45) and, due to this position, Jacob is received by the Pharaoh himself (45:16-20; 47:1-12) and later is mourned with affection and honor by the Egyptians (50:1-14).

In accordance with what had been decreed by God, as the patriarchs are blessed materially, others are, too. In coming to the aid of his nephew Lot, Abram defeats Chedorlaomer and his allies, thereby securing freedom from service for five kings (chap. 14). Later Abraham intercedes for Sodom, and Lot and his family are rescued from destruction by the angels on the basis of God's relationship with Abraham (18:22-33; 19:29). Abraham will intercede once more, for Abimelech, and thereby that king's wife and slaves are able to bear children (20:7, 17-18). Jacob serves Laban for many years, and Laban's flocks multiply under his care (29:20, 27-30; 30:29-30). Potipher's household, Joseph's fellow prisoners, the head jailer, Pharaoh, and all of Egypt are all favored because of the character and diligence of Joseph (chaps. 39- 41; 50:20). Finally, mention should be made of 18:19, where Yahweh declares that part of Abraham's duty and that of those after him is to "keep the way of the Lord in order to do righteousness and justice." These rather abstract terms establish that this mission also includes an ethical component toward others; this charge is immediately followed by the concrete counter-example of Sodom in chap. 19.

The blessing of the patriarchs, at the same time, can also be "spiritual." The Genesis narratives do not provide many details about patriarchal worship,<sup>31</sup> but some practices are cited. Abram's first act in the land of Canaan is to construct altars and to call upon the name<sup>32</sup>

31. Note the helpful discussion and contrast with Israel's later religious practices in Moberly, "The Religion of the Patriarchs" in *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 79-104; cf. A. P. Ross, "The Faith of Abraham at Worship," in *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 729-35.

32. Some have taken the clause וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה, not as "and he called on the name of the Lord," but rather as "and he proclaimed the name of Yahweh." This and similar verses would then point to a public verbal witness of the patriarchs in the land. For this view, see Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 120 (on 4:26); Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, 332; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 267-68. This is an interesting suggestion with important implications for mission, but the closest parallels are in Exod 33:19 and 34:5,

of Yahweh<sup>33</sup> in worship (12:7-8). This pattern of altar (or memorial) building and invoking the deity (13:4, 18; 21:33; 26:25; 28:18; 35:7) is repeated in later narratives. They pray and witness the response of God (18:22-33; 20:7, 17; 32:9-12; cf. 24:12). The patriarchs also enjoy the promise of divine presence and help (26:2-3, 24; 28:15; 31:3; 39:2-5; 46:3-43).

But theirs is not a mute faith. The patriarchs verbalize to others the reality of Yahweh that they have experienced in their lives: they tell of his provision of wealth (30:30; 31:5-13; 33:10-11; cf. 24:35), his protection and guidance (31:42; 50:20; cf. 24:40-49, 56); his giving of children (33:5); his help in interpreting dreams (40:8; 41:12-16, 25-33, 50-52); and their commitment to his moral standards (39:9).<sup>34</sup> In turn, several of those whom they meet recognize the presence and hand of God: Abimelech (with Abraham, 21:22-24; with Jacob, 26:26-29), Laban (with Abraham's servant, 24:31, 50; with Jacob, 30:27; 31:29, 50, 53), and Pharaoh (41:39). A most intriguing case is Abram's interchange with Melchizedek, king of Salem, in chap. 14 after his military victory.<sup>35</sup> In a surprising application of 12:3, Melchizedek blesses the patriarch by God Most High (אל על יי; vv. 19-20).<sup>36</sup> Though in one sense, this king seems to "have it right," the narrative affirms through Abram's response that this God, who has granted him success, is indeed Yahweh himself (v. 22).

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with Yahweh himself as the subject of the verb. In those passages the idea is probably that Yahweh is making manifest his nature. Perhaps it is best to leave this interpretation as a possibility and to look for clearer confessions of faith by the patriarchs elsewhere. See the following paragraph in our discussion.

33. In light of Exod 6:3 (cf. Exod 3:13-15) an important issue within Genesis studies is the use of the name *Yahweh* in relationship to patriarchal faith. We feel comfortable with the position that what is at work is a theological interpolation, which canonically anticipates later narratives and reveals that the God of the Exodus was indeed the same as the God of the patriarchs. In other words, it is important to distinguish the theological issues communicated through the literary art of the narratives from the historical reconstructions of patriarchal religion. For fuller discussions of this point of view and interaction with other interpretations, both critical and conservative, see G. J. Wenham, "The Religion of the Patriarchs," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 161-95; Moberly, "Why Is the Name of YHWH Used in Genesis?" in *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 36-76.

34. One could also add perhaps Jacob's blessing of Pharaoh here (47:10), but no content of his gesture is provided.

35. See the helpful review of scholarly discussion and the theological reflection on this incident by J. G. McConville, "Abraham and Melchizedek: Horizons in Genesis 14," in *He Swore an Oath*, 93-118. A point of contention is the use of the name *Yahweh* by Abram in v. 22 in light of Exod 6:3. The divine name is absent from the Septuagint and Syriac. The comments in n. 32 above would also be appropriate here.

36. Note the threefold use of the root בָּרַךְ in these verses.

The individual narratives of Genesis, therefore give multiple examples of the families of the earth being blessed directly through the mediation of the patriarchs and their looking to them as embodiments of divine blessing and as pointers to God. Space does not permit developing the seed theme in the book, but ultimately there are pointers to a future individual from Judah who will be the channel of blessing (49:8-12).<sup>37</sup>

This section of the paper began by establishing that the "content," so to speak, of the mission of Abraham and his descendants to the world is to be a blessing. The development of this theme in Genesis makes it clear that this blessing comes from the hand of Yahweh God. In addition, the intended blessing cannot be limited to either the material or the spiritual. The text does not make such a dichotomy an option. On the one hand, the blessing moves into the very tangible stuff of everyday life. On the other hand, the blessing is inseparable from worship, prayer, and the confession of God before others. Those who deal with the patriarchs not only see the benefits enjoyed by his people, but some of them also come to acknowledge Yahweh as the bestower of blessing.

#### MISSION AS PILGRIMAGE

The second component of the mission mentioned in our introduction is the character formation of those called to be a blessing. Our discussion of this point necessarily will have to be brief.

The patriarchal narratives of Genesis can be summarized as tales of journeys—journeys of a number of different types.<sup>38</sup> From the very beginning, there are the physical travels from one end of the land to the other. Abram, for example, crosses into Canaan and then moves through to Shechem, then close to Bethel, and on toward the Negev (12:5-9). There are several forays into Egypt (chaps. 12, 39-50) and trips north to acquire wives (chaps. 24, 28-31). By the end of the book, all that the patriarchs own in the land are a few small plots of ground (chap. 23; 33:18-20; 50:10-13), and Joseph can only require of his sons an oath to return his bones to Canaan (50:24-26). Much earlier, in 15:13-16, Abram (and the reader) is advised that the possession of

37. See, e.g., Alexander, "Messianic Interpretation in Genesis"; idem, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 6-18; idem, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology," *TynBul* 49/2 (1998) 191-212; cf. R. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (Studies in Biblical Theology 5; London: SCM, 1967). Note Kaiser's own particular development of the seed theme throughout the entire Bible in *Toward an Old Testament Theology*.

38. Clines will label the entire Pentateuch a "travel story" (*The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 102-11).

the promised land will remain a distant hope. No roots; just a couple of graves.

The most important journey is that of faith. The patriarchs are continually challenged to believe and act on the promises of God for progeny, material benefits, land, divine presence, and aid. Their experience "is entirely concerned with a future bound to a past out of which the present lives."<sup>39</sup> Obstacles arise; expectations are frustrated; failures suffered. Nevertheless, not all is negative.<sup>40</sup> Two related passages, which highlight pinnacle moments of trust and obedience, particularly stand out.<sup>41</sup>

In chap. 15 Abram expresses his doubts about Yahweh's promise of many descendants. After being shown the stars with the assurance that his progeny would equal that number, the textual evaluation of his reaction of belief reads "and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (15:6). There are two principal interpretations of this line. The first is that Abram's exercise of faith in God's words is counted for his own righteousness; the second is that the faithfulness exhibited here results in Yahweh's continued commitment to bless Abram's descendants.<sup>42</sup> Either nuance can find support in this and subsequent narratives, although at this point the emphasis would seem to be on the first option—that is, on the immediate response of the patriarch.

The initial commendation of 15:6 reaches a climax in 22:15-18.<sup>43</sup> Abraham's willingness to sacrifice the son of promise powerfully demonstrates that he has passed the divine test (v. 1) and truly fears Yahweh profoundly (v. 12). The significance of the angel of the Lord's

39. This nice turn of phrase is taken from *ibid.*, 116. W. Brueggemann suggests that the promise theme throughout the OT provides the assurance and theological claim that present circumstances cannot negate the beneficent intentions of God (*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997] 164-73).

40. Turner's reading of the patriarchal narratives and the growth in the faith of the characters are especially insightful and provocative (*Announcements of Plot in Genesis*). Note also discussions on the archetypal scenes, their similarities, and the importance of observing the differences, in Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; and Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. Cf. Moberly, "The Old Testament of the Old Testament," in *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 105-46.

41. Other important passages could include, for example, 32:22-32; 50:20.

42. For the former view, see, e.g., Alexander, "Abraham Re-assessed Theologically," 14-15; for the latter, Moberly, "Abraham's Righteousness (Genesis 15:6)" in *idem*, *From Eden to Golgotha* 29-54 (essay originally appeared in *Studies in the Pentateuch* [ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 41; Leiden: Brill, 1990] 103-30).

43. Alexander suggests that the covenants of chaps. 15 and 17 are formally ratified in chap. 22, because of Abraham's obedience ("Abraham Re-assessed Theologically," 18-22). In line with his interpretation of 15:6, Moberly holds that Abraham's obedience guarantees the enjoyment of blessing by his descendants: "The Earliest Commentary on the Akedah," in *idem*, *From Eden to Golgotha* 55-73 (essay originally appeared in *VT* 38 [1988] 302-23).

comments is especially underscored by the divine oath (v. 16) and the syntactical construction of the promises of blessing and seed (v. 17).<sup>44</sup> To the centrality of belief for mission is now added the importance of costly obedience. The divine approbation is later echoed in Yahweh's revelation to Isaac: Abraham's obedience secures the ongoing extension of God's blessing to "all the nations of the earth" (26:3-5).<sup>45</sup>

A careful reader of Genesis, however, is not so easily convinced of the paradigmatic virtues of the patriarchs. Well known are such disturbing miscalculations as having wives pose as sisters (chaps. 12, 20, 26), Jacob's lying to acquire the coveted blessing (chap. 27), and the slaughter of the Shechemites (chap. 34). Other problematic passages can surface if read from other latitudes. For example, for those of us who have lived in contexts of oppression and armed conflict, one can only wonder why the text has Abram blessed after war (chap. 14). Yahweh promises dominion to his people (17:6, 16; 22:17; 35:11; cf. 21:22-24; 24:60; 26:26-33; 49:8) and Joseph's rise to power under God's sovereign hand of grace certainly must be some sort of fulfillment. But then he expropriates the property of all of Egypt for Pharaoh (47:13-26), thereby creating the monster of a government that would cause the groanings of the people in the book of Exodus. Since I have returned to the United States, I hear others ask about the stories of the women: how are they portrayed; what is their role and worth?<sup>46</sup>

At one level, the need to pause over these narratives suggests that living out the appointed mission cannot be divorced from difficult choices encountered at these crossroad experiences. It is in these moments that faith is tested and discernment learned. Chapters 15 and 22, in other words, cannot happen without these darker times.

Martha Nussbaum's work can be helpful here.<sup>47</sup> She proposes that good literature can cultivate moral reasoning by portraying realistic characters and situations. The reading experience can sharpen ethical

44. Infinitive absolute + imperfect: בְּרַךְ אֶתְּךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ; ("I will surely bless you") and הִרְבֵּה אֶתְּךָ ("I will surely multiply"). One could mention other items, such as the emphasis on "son" (v. 16) and the combination of similes ("like the stars of the heavens and the sand which is on the seashore"), which is only found here in Genesis.

45. J. H. Sailhamer will go so far as to say that 26:5 is fundamental for understanding the Pentateuch's contrasting of Abraham, the man of faith, with Moses, in *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

46. E.g., P. Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 9-35 [Hagar]; A. O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 67-98.

47. M. C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1995). For appropriation of Nussbaum in OT studies, see J. Barton, "Reading for Life: The Use of the Bible and the Work of Martha C. Nussbaum," in *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium* (ed. J. W. Rogerson, M. Davies, and M. D. Carroll R.; JSOTSup 207; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 66-76; M. D. Carroll R., "Living

sensitivities and decision-making. How much more should this be true when we move from her discussions of realist novels to a sacred canon! I would only adjust her point regarding moral reasoning to that of missiological reflection. We must not avoid the benefits that will come from dealing honestly with this rich, yet intricate, narrative that is Genesis. It is in the reading that we can wrestle with the "stuff of life."

But there can be another level of struggle for the reader. It is at the level of the appropriation of the text itself, with all of its problems and possible challenges to our own ethical sensibilities or experiences, when trying to develop a theology and guide to mission praxis. At this point, one committed to the OT as Scripture must realize the complexity of establishing missiological affirmations from the text within any given sociocultural, political, and ideological context. The narratives of the text require learning to articulate anew such foundations of evangelical faith as the nature of the Bible, its inner workings as canon, and the character of God in order to be truly faithful to the call to bless the nations.<sup>48</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper has had as its purpose to propose the theme of blessing in the book of Genesis as a fruitful starting point for elaborating a biblical theology of mission in the OT. This multidimensional theme can move debates beyond the false dichotomy between the material and the spiritual, while incorporating both. It allows for a strong emphasis on a particular chosen people, while pointing out that they exist for the world's sake. There is stress on worship, verbal witness, and the importance of growth in faith and obedience.

Much work, of course, remains to be done to deepen insights within Genesis itself. What is needed as well—though this lies beyond the purview of this essay—is the tracing of the trajectories of the several components of the blessing theme in Genesis through the OT and into the NT.<sup>49</sup> It is there, of course, that we find that we, too,

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between the Lines: Reading Amos 9:11-15 in Post-war Guatemala," *Religion and Theology* 6/1 (1996) 50-64.

48. Examples of wrestling with these and other issues in light of the recent theological, ideological, and hermeneutical discussions include F. Watson, *Text, Church, and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in the Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

49. Missiological texts will utilize the Genesis 12 passage in several different ways, such as to underscore the universal concerns of God, the election of the people of God to reach the nations, or the divine commitment to act within history. Ours has been an effort to develop the theme of blessing and this in ways that ultimately might suggest possible connections with the mission of the people of God in the NT (cf. Scott, *Bring Forth Justice*, 44-60). Of course, we are aware that several theological traditions

like Abraham, can have faith credited to us as righteousness (Rom 4:1-25; Gal 3:6-9) as we trust in that one seed and ultimate mediator of the divine blessing, who is Christ (Acts 3:25-26; Gal 3:14-18; cf. Rom 15:8-12). The reception of blessing, as in the OT, requires that the people of God today continue to be models of faith and mediators, too, of the manifold blessing of God to "all the families of the earth."

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within the evangelical community continue to debate the level of continuity and discontinuity between the OT and NT. Recognition of at least some sort of continuity in themes, however, can also lead to the consideration of a degree of continuity in the mission of the people of God in both testaments. Note the discussions from very different theological perspectives on the development of the blessing theme (and of other components of the Abrahamic promise) by, e.g. T. E. McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) esp. 15-58; C. H. H. Scobie, "Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology," *Tyn-Bul* 43/2 (1992) 283-305; C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: BridgePoint/Victor, 1993) 128-211, 284-301; Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 41-47; idem, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings."