

Abraham's Family

Edited by
LUKAS BORMANN

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A Network of Meaning in Judaism,
Christianity, and Islam

Edited by
Lukas Bormann

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This volume presents a scholarly journey through the centuries on what many religious and ethnic groups have understood as “Abraham’s Family.” To make this happen many institutions and individuals contributed time, money, thoughts, and also trust.

The research presented in this volume was part of a project at Åbo Akademi University in Finland and Marburg University in Germany funded by the Academy of Finland (Suomen Akatemia) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in 2015 and 2016. The project concluded with a conference at the Theology Faculty in Marburg in September 2016. At this conference several outstanding scholars as well as post-doc researchers and PhD students from Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States presented and discussed their ideas on Abraham’s Family in their particular field of research.

I am pleased to acknowledge publicly the contribution to this conference of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the Evangelische Kirche in Hessen and Nassau, the Evangelische Kirche of Kurhessen Waldeck, and the Ursula Kuhlmann Fund at Marburg University.

I am most grateful to the publisher Mohr Siebeck, Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, the editor Prof. Jörg Frey and the editorial board of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* for accepting the proceedings of the Marburg Conference on Abraham’s Family for publication in this esteemed series. The authors of the essays collected in the volume and I myself also thank Dr. J. Andrew Doole who proofread all contributions and made many valuable suggestions to clarify meaning and improve style. Hannah Kreß prepared the indexes for the volume. It was a great pleasure to cooperate with all the institutions and individuals mentioned in this preface.

Marburg, Easter 2018

Lukas Bormann

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Introduction

Abraham, whom the apostle Paul calls the “father of us all” (Rom 4:16), was already a central figure in Judaism and came to be important in Christianity and Islam, so that it is now very common to call this three religions ‘the Abrahamic religions.’ Some aspects of Abraham are common to all three religions: Abraham as the first monotheist or the first opponent of idolatry is one example. Some characteristics are emphasized by one of the three religions: in Judaism Abraham is ‘the father of Israel’ and also the ‘first proselyte’; in Islam Ibrahim is pictured as ‘the leader of the first community of true Islam’; in Christianity Abraham is understood as both ‘the father of faith’ and the paradigm (gr. *typos*) of every Christian believer. However, Abraham is not remembered alone, but with his family. Since more than two decades intense scholarly work has been devoted to investigating and discussing Abraham as a center-piece of religious memory and identity-building, but very seldom it is recognized that it is not only Abraham itself as a single and dominating figure but his family which is reflected upon to discuss both connections and boundaries between different but related religious and ethnic groups. In this process of remembering and redefining Abraham his family history and tradition have also been used, modified, enlarged or shortened in order to explain, encourage, legitimize or challenge ethnic or religious groups from the middle of the sixth century B.C.E. or earlier and even still today. The Abraham tradition is an issue of narrative and counter-narrative, memory and counter-memory. Besides the well-known ideas about Abraham as an outstanding figure his family is also used to define both borders of identity and connections to other groups. Moreover Abraham’s family is brought in as a network of meaning to express opposition, antithesis or common ground within and between different religious movements. The most famous example is the idea of the two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, presenting two different branches of the Abraham heritage with the aim of explaining the antagonisms and the connections between different ethnic and religious groups.

Additionally, some interdisciplinary aspects should be taken into consideration. Political science, cognitive science and linguistics emphasize that the term *family* is not only a term to denote kinship, but is also used

as a metaphor and concept of meaning to evoke previous knowledge about family and to transfer it to different areas such as ethnicity, distribution of power, ethics, and gender relations. Family as a network of meaning works as a conceptual frame to confirm or to define anew the center and the margins of social entities, to relate and to disconnect different parts of a network, or to involve a special family understood as prototypical (in our case Abraham's family) into a new conceptual frame, which means a different historical and religious context.

For the purpose of this volume the term 'Abraham's family' covers the traditions of the ancestors and descendants of Abraham named in Gen 11–36 from his forefathers Nahor and Terah (Gen 11:22) to the families of his grandchildren Jacob and Esau and their descendants (Gen 25:23–26; 36:1–43). The contributions to this volume discuss the presentation, enlarging, shortening, re-narrating and reception of Abraham's family in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The topics cover Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, Second Temple writings, New Testament, Rabbinic literature, Greek, Latin and Syriac church fathers, and also Jewish medieval interpretation and a twelfth-century Arabic travel report of a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Part I Abraham's Family in the Old Testament collects contributions which deal with the Abraham tradition of the Hebrew Bible and its historical and literary foundations. *Konrad Schmid* analyzes Abraham's family from the perspective of the literary history of the Pentateuch. He demonstrates that it is possible to define at least three main stages of the development of the Abraham tradition in the Pentateuch. He starts with the youngest literary strata, the post-priestly Abraham tradition which is dominated by God's commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his son (late Persian period), goes on to the priestly Abraham, who is seen as the common origin of many nations described as a family system (early Persian period) and ends with the presumable earliest pre-priestly Abraham tradition in which the national identity of Israel is negotiated (722 to 587 B.C.E.). *Antti Laato* asks about traces of political ideologies and diplomatic needs preserved in the Abraham tradition which has its roots in the times of the united monarchy under David and Solomon, when this monarchy was supported by Egypt. *Magnar Kartveit* presents the evidence in the Hebrew Bible, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint in connection to various ancient Jewish sources and later Samaritan traditions to demonstrate how the Samaritans related both Abraham and Joseph to Mount Gerizim, the main sanctuary of this ethno-religious group. *Lotta Valve* reflects on marriage as a central issue of Abraham's family tradition.

In the story of the wooing of Rebekah (Gen 24) several layers of interpretation can be detected. Some issues of this very detailed and elaborate story were passed over in silence by the reception history, while others were re-narrated and even further developed along halakhic principles in rabbinical sources.

Part II Abraham's Family in Ancient Jewish Literature starts with an investigation into Abraham's Family in the Book of Jubilees by *Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten*. He demonstrates that the Jubilees account is closely determined by the Abraham tradition of the book of Genesis, but stresses certain aspects of the family relations distinct from Genesis as, for example, proper lineage and the separation from the nations. However, even Jubilees was interested in the continuation of some family bonds, particularly in elaborating Abraham's affection to Ishmael. *Aliyah El Mansy* reflects on the impact of masculinity studies on the research of the reception history of Abraham's family. She finds in the re-narrating of Jacob and Esau by Jubilees two concurrent types of masculinity. Jacob is presented as the representative of a hegemonic masculinity whereas Esau represents a marginalized masculinity which is seen as endangering the model of Jewishness preferred by the book of Jubilees. *Jesper Høgenhaven* investigates Abraham and his family in Qumran Biblical Exegesis. In these texts Abraham is related especially to the priests, Levites and Zadokites. Abraham is seen as a founder of sacrificial practices and plays a legitimizing role for the priestly leaders of the Qumran community. *Michael Becker* works out some conceptual patterns which are used in ancient Jewish and Christian exegesis of the Aqedah (Gen 22). He argues that the idea of an "effective death" of Jesus may be related to some patterns of the retelling of the Aqedah in the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*. *Christian Noack* starts his consideration of Abraham's Family in Philo with the distinction of three types of Biblical commentaries produced by Philo of Alexandria with different aims and audiences. On this basis Noack demonstrates Philo's implication that his audience has in mind the full network of Abraham's family, had learned the etymological meaning of their names and will follow his allegorical interpretation which aims to win the souls of the hearers or readers for the true philosophy which is identical with the Jewish faith.

In *Part III Abraham's Family in the New Testament* the three main groups of New Testament writings which engage in the reception of Abraham's family are discussed: the letters of Paul, Luke-Acts, and the letter to the Hebrews. *Lukas Bormann* reflects on the unique designation of Abraham in Rom 4:1 as "forefather" on the background of the use of

this term in literary, papyrological and epigraphical sources. Paul designates Abraham with this term to lay the ground for his controversial redefining of Abraham's family as a model for the people of God, but surprisingly none of the deutero-Pauline literature followed these ideas and did not even mention Abraham. *Angela Standhartinger* applies some insights of intersectionality theory and historical family studies on Hagar, a marginalized figure in Abraham's family, who is presented in ancient Jewish text as a 'distant relative' to this family. *Christfried Böttrich* emphasizes that the figure of Abraham has many facets of meaning in Luke-Acts and ties together the past and the future. In distinction to Paul, Luke is not interested in Abraham as an example of faith but in his role as an image of hope and an eschatological figure who inhabits the role of a 'symposiarch in the eschaton.' *Guido Baltes* concentrates on a parable in the gospel of Luke which is called by many exegetes the center of this gospel: the Prodigal Son. He demonstrates that it is possible to read the presentation of the two brothers in this parable against the background of the siblings Jacob and Esau. *J. Cornelis de Vos* turns to the interpretation of Abraham's family in the Letter to the Hebrews. He addresses the way in which the author of Hebrews uses the figures of Abraham and his family for his ideas about a family for all but also narrows the membership to an eschatological perspective for pedagogical reasons. *Eva-Maria Kreitschmann* investigates conceptual patterns of Abraham's family-network used in the New Testament. The so-called patriarchal triad and the reference to Abraham as father is re-interpreted in a way which allows connecting the history of Israel to those outside this ethno-religious entity. Other parts of the family network are used especially by Paul to clarify but also sometimes to intensify conflicts between different groups.

In *Part IV Abraham's Family in Early Christian Literature* the reader of this volume will find a detailed 'tour d'horizon' through the reception of Abraham's family in ancient Greek and Latin patristic exegesis provided by *Martin Meiser*. Abraham's family is seen by these authors as 'familia sacra.' However, this view causes many moral concerns which lead to exegetical questions and psychological reflections of the circumstances of the behavior of the members of this family. *Anni Maria Laato* points to the fact that tradition shared by religious groups leads more often to division than to common ground. The interpretation of the prophecy of Rebecca's sons in Gen 25:19–26 by the church fathers is an example of such division between Christians and Jews through the centuries building a long tradition of different interpretations. *Michaela Durst* turns to a topic to which scholars in recent years have paid more and more attention: the

anti-Christian polemics of the emperor Julian the Apostate. His universal concept of nations includes the notion that Abraham and his specific 'ethnos' is not different from other ethnic groups and as such more related to the Hellenistic concept of national diversity than to Christianity which claims to be the true Israel.

Part V Abraham's Family in Jewish Exegesis and in Encounter with Islam presents some intriguing insights on the importance of Abraham's family in Islam and the influence of the Islamic tradition building on both Christianity and Judaism. *Reuven Firestone* focusses on Hagar and Ishmael as key personages in Islamic tradition. Although the Qur'an knows nothing of Hagar and little of Ishmael, both personas appear in detail in some early extra-Qur'anic literature and become crucial figures in the foundation story of Islam. *Mariano Gomez Aranda* demonstrates the variety and even debate within medieval Jewish exegesis about the conflict of Jacob and Esau. The main issues were the conflict between righteousness and wickedness, between rabbinic education and idolatry, and between the people of Israel and other nations. *Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler* demonstrates that Abraham and his family were both prototypes of monotheistic faith and the inventors of religious practices. She analyzes the travel account of Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217) on his pilgrimage to Mecca, the place of Ibrahim, where he arrived in 1183. In performing the rites at this holy place Muslims became part of the narrative of Ibrahim, Ishmael, and Hagar. *Catalin-Stefan Popa* focusses on the role of Abraham in the Christian theological discourse in the early Islamic period presented in the Syriac tradition. In response to the everyday reality of Islamic rule Syriac Christians connected Abraham closer to the Christian doctrine of the trinity and to Christology.

The rich variety of the contributions leads to further questions and provokes further scholarship in many areas. Altogether they demonstrate that from the very beginning of the Abraham tradition right up to its contemporary reception the single figure of Abraham was not sufficient for the purposes of the interpreters. When Abraham was remembered and previous interpretations of Abraham were challenged it was in most cases unavoidable to engage with Abraham's family as a network of meaning to define the center and the margins of ethno-religious groups.

Part I
Abraham's Family in the Old Testament

Remembering and Reconstructing Abraham

Abraham's Family and the Literary History of the Pentateuch

Konrad Schmid

1. Who is Abraham?

In the Hebrew Bible, especially in the book of Genesis where three quarters of all instances of “Abraham” can be found, Abraham and his family are not just a genealogical topic. In the framework of the concept of “Abrahamic religions” (which was so successful that it even led to the establishment of a corresponding chair at the University of Oxford in 2008),¹ Abraham is often perceived as the first monotheist, believing in the creator God. But in the Hebrew Bible this is only a marginal notion, basically relying on one single verse, Gen 15:6, which is very difficult to understand and to translate (who is “he,” “he,” and “him”? what is the meaning of the *w^eqatal* hiphil form of אָמַן?):² “And he believed YHWH; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.” From a biblical perspective, the notion of Abraham as the first “believer” must be relativized. First, according to Gen 4:26, Yahwism is as old as Enosh: “To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke (לְקַרְא) the name of YHWH.”

Secondly, even though Gen 15 is supported by Gen 22 which portrays Abraham as an unconditional believer, the focus of Gen 15 is not on

¹Nuanced or even critical evaluations of the concept are provided by ULRIKE BECHMANN, “Die vielen Väter Abrahams: Chancen und Grenzen einer dialogorientierten Abrahamrezeption,” in *Impuls oder Hindernis? Mit dem Alten Testament in multireligiöser Gesellschaft* (ed. JOACHIM KÜGLER; Münster: Lit, 2004), 125–150; IDEM, “Abraham und Ibrahim: Die Grenzen des Abraham-Paradigmas im interreligiösen Dialog,” *MTZ* 57 (2007): 110–126; JON D. LEVENSON, “The Conversion of Abraham to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation* (eds. HINDY NAJMAN and JUDITH H. NEWMAN; JSJSup 83; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 3–40; ; IDEM, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

²Cf. MANFRED OEMING, “Der Glaube Abrahams. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gen 15,6 in der Zeit des zweiten Tempels,” *ZAW* 110 (1998): 16–33.

monotheism. Rather, Abraham is the recipient of promises as well as a partner in God's covenant, according to Gen 15. Nevertheless, the idea of Abraham's conversion to biblical monotheism, i. e. Yahwism, is not absent from the Hebrew Bible, but it occurs in only one single instance, in Josh 24:2:

“And Joshua said to all the people: ‘Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors – Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor – lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods.’”

Thus Josh 24 presupposes that Abraham and his family were idolators back in Mesopotamia, and only by YHWH's calling of Abraham (Josh 24:3) did he become a Yahwist.

The beginning of the Abraham story in Gen 11 is silent about such a conversion of Abraham from idolatry to Yahwism. We only learn from Gen 11:31 that Terah, Abraham's father, and Abraham originally lived in Ur Kasdim in Southern Babylonia, but then left for Haran in Northern Syria:

“Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur Kasdim to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there.”

According to Gen 11:32, Abram's father Terah died in Haran. And this is the point in Abram's history where he receives a comprehensive promise (Gen 12:1–3), notably still in Haran:

“And YHWH said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 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 the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

Since it is YHWH who speaks to him in Gen 12:1–3 without introducing himself as such, there is no indication that Abram is viewed as having a different religion besides adhering to YHWH. The conceptual differences between Gen 11 and Josh 24 are results of their different literary historical and theological positions. Neither Gen 11:31 nor Josh 24:2 is an early text: Gen 11:31 is assigned to the so-called Priestly document (“P”) which probably belongs to the early Persian period, and Josh 24 is a post-Priestly text, as vv. 6–7 demonstrate quite clearly its dependence on the Priestly version of the crossing of the sea (Exod 14).³

³Cf. KONRAD SCHMID, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 197–213.

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(prepared by Hannah Krefß)

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