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## The God of the Patriarchs as a Common Heritage of Judaism and Christianity

### 1. The God of Genesis (Abraham and Isaac)

The story of Abraham and Isaac shows some aspects of the nature of God (his transcendent and immanent) and his activities in the time of the patriarchal period. The God of patriarchs is the God of Moses, the God of the prophets (OT) and the God of the apostles (NT). The roots of this believers based on ancient traditions collected in Torah. The Genesis is the first part of Torah. The article begins with a presentations of the formation of Torah, its place in canon, history of interpretations and importance for Judaism and Christianity. After this presentations the assay examines two pieces of Genesis: the Abraham's story (Gn 15;17) and the Isaac's story (Gn 22). God's covenant with Abraham was the most importance event in the time of patriarchs. The God reveled his face as a Savior of the human being. The same picture shows the Isaac's fate (Gn 22). The examination of the description of God in Gn 15; 17; 22 gives the indication of the importance of his characterization for understanding the theology of Judaism and Christianity.

#### 1.1. Genesis: an integral part of the Torah

The Hebrew Bible (HB), which is also an important part of the Old Testament, consists of three components: the Torah<sup>1</sup>, the Prophets and the Writings (cf. the prologue to the Book of Sirach) while the Torah<sup>2</sup> is the core of the Judaism<sup>3</sup> tradition

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<sup>1</sup> E. GRYPEOU, H. SPURLONG, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters Between Jewish and Christian Exegesis*, Leiden 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The Tora consists of five books (Gn, Ex, Lv, Nm and Dt). In exegesis it is also called the Pentateuch, cf. A.S. JASIŃSKI, *Wstęp ogólny do Pisma świętego*, Opole 1990, p. 5–7.

<sup>3</sup> On the Tora see: E. BLUM, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, Berlin 1990; F. CRÜSE-MANN, *Der Pentateuch als Tora. Prolegomena zur Interpretation seiner Endgestalt*, EvTh 49 (1989),

and very important part of Bible for Christianity<sup>4</sup>. The Pentateuch was not written in one historical epoch but it was composed for a long time until it finally achieved the canonical form. It must also be remembered that the text completing the Torah (Dt 34:1-12) follows in Jos 1:1-5, so there is not any sharp division between the tradition of the Torah<sup>5</sup> and that of the so called Former Prophets (Jos, Jgs, 1–2 Sm, 1–2 Kgs)<sup>6</sup>. The Former Prophets have been incorporated into the general category of the Prophets, which comprises also the Later Ones. All those books constitute kind of a commentary to the Torah. Both these parts of the HB (i.e. The Torah and the Prophets) permeate each other. This becomes obvious in the perspective of the history of God's salvation, having been realized in different stages of Israel's history<sup>7</sup>. The course of historical events was an essential factor in shaping the religious consciousness of the Chosen People.

The Old Testament message is completed with its third component: the Writings. A special place in this collection of texts belongs to the Psalms whose time of origin was the longest and includes both the period of the nation's birth and the Hellenistic one (II century BC)<sup>8</sup>. The Psalter has been finally shaped into five books, resembling the five books of the Torah. The Writings comprise two types of books: sapientary and historical ones. An example of the former is Prv, Jb or Eccl and of the latter is 1–2 Chr, Ezr or Neh. Despite the advancing tradition, the central place has always been taken by the Torah which remains the fundamental text for the rabbinic scholars. In the past, their religious research constituted a new collection of texts, namely the Talmud. This *magnum opus* is the intellectual fruit of many generations

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p. 250–267; P. HAUBEERT (ed.), *Le Pentateuque. Débats et recherches*, Paris 1992; V. LENZEN, *Leben mit der Tora. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem jüdischen Denker Jeshajahu Leibowitz*, LebZeug 47 (1992), p. 296–303; A. DE PURY, *Le Pentateuque en question*, Genf 1989; B. SEIDEL, *Entwicklungen der neueren Pentateuchforschung im 20. Jahrhundert*, ZAW 106 (1994), p. 476–485; J. HUDDLESTON, *Recent Scholarship on the Pentateuch: Historical, Literary, and Theological Reflections*, RevQ 55 (2013), p. 193–211; TH. RÖMER, *Zwischen Urkunden, Fragmenten und Ergänzungen: Zum Stand der Pentateuchforschung*, ZAW 125 (2013), p. 2–24; J.-L. SKA, *Il cantiere del Pentateuco. I Problemi di composizione e di interpretazione*, Bologna 2013; E. GRYPEOU, H. SPURLONG, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters Between Jewish and Christian Exegesis*, Leiden 2013.

<sup>4</sup> I. KALIMI, T. NICKLAS, G.G. XERAVITIS, H. HÖTZINGER (red.), *Scriptural Authority in Early Judaism and Ancient Christianity*, Berlin 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Dt 34,1-9, describing Moses' death, witnesses also the canonization process of the Pentateuch, cf. C. DOHMEN, *Der Tod des Mose als Geburt des Pentateuch*, in: (ed.) C. DOHMEN, M. OEMING, *Biblischer Kanon, warum und wozu? Eine Kanontheologie*, Freiburg 1992, p. 54–68.

<sup>6</sup> In the Roman Catholic canon, these books are part of the historical collection. In the opinion of scholars they make a redaction of the Deuteronomic spirit, cf. M. NOTH, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, Stuttgart 1948.

<sup>7</sup> The Biblical concept of creation has always comprised the soteriological aspect as the creation and the salvation make two aspects of one Divine activity toward the created world, cf. N. LOHFINK, *Der Schöpfergott und der Bestand von Himmel und Erde. Das Alte Testament zum Zusammenhang von Schöpfung und Heil*, in: (ed.) G. ALTNER, *Sind wir noch zu retten? Schöpfungsglaube und Verantwortung für unsere Erde*, Regensburg 1978, p. 15–39.

<sup>8</sup> Psalms embody theology in prayers which are also a confession of the creed, cf. G. RAVASI, *Psalmy*, Częstochowa 1998, p. 11.

of rabbinic schools both in Palestine (the Jerusalem Talmud) and in Babylon (the Babylonian Talmud).

Jesus and his Apostles respected the authority of the Old Testament books but the Roman Catholic canon has incorporated also other texts, external to the HB, namely some books of sapientiary and didactical character (Wis, Sir, Tb, Jdt) as well as of historical and prophetic one (Bar, 1–2 Macc)<sup>9</sup>.

### 1.1.1. Pre-exilic Torah formation

Formation of the Torah is one of the most interesting subjects of the Old Testament exegesis. Its turning point was the critical research of the XIX and XX centuries. Examining the subject, J. Wellhausen could already avail himself of many accomplishments of his precursors<sup>10</sup>. The Torah has ceased to be perceived as a literary monolith and its authorship by Moses has become symbolic<sup>11</sup>. Despite the intensive research for the last 200 years, the scholars have not succeeded fully in describing what precisely the formation of the Torah looked like till it reached its present shape. New questions arise, for instance how did the Torah influence the formation of other Biblical books (*Wirkungsgeschichte*)? Scholars have been investigating the decisive time for the Torah formation, i.e. the Babylonian exile and the Persian period. As it is well known, the Wellhausen's theory was based on the model of strata (sources) and, with certain modifications, it remains valid until today. More modern theories say about the basic description of the Israel's history in the fundamental text of Dt.H (in German Dt.G), completed by the Priestly tradition<sup>12</sup>. This gave the Torah the theological character and cleared the text from accidentally patched narration.

More and more modern research methods are presently being applied to the Torah, among others the so called Canonical Approach<sup>13</sup>. This sets out with two fundamental assumptions: the focus is laid in the final accessible text, i.e. the canonical text (synchrony) but the researcher investigates also the formation process of the final text (diachrony). Here a question arises: How did the process of canonizing

<sup>9</sup> On the Biblical canon see: J. HOMERSKI, *Kanon Ksiąg świętych*, in: (ed.) J. SZLAGA, *Wstęp ogólny do Pisma świętego*, Poznań 1986, p. 69–97.

<sup>10</sup> J. ASTRUC, G. EICHHORN, J.S. VATER, M.L. DE WETTE, K.H. GRAF and others.

<sup>11</sup> Fundamental books by J. WELLHAUSEN are: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, Berlin 1883; *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, Berlin 1894; *Die Composition des Hexateuch und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, Berlin 1889.

<sup>12</sup> The Priestly redaction presents the fundamental theological topics in another way than Jahvist's redaction, the two of which interweave at the beginning of Genesis. One can see it clearly in the description of the onset of the sinful condition of man, cf. N. LOHFINK, *Die Ursünden in der priesterlichen Geschichtserzählung*, in: (ed.), G. BORNKAMM, K. RANER, *Die Zeit Jesu*, (F.S. für HEINRICH SCHLIER), Freiburg 1970, p. 38–50.

<sup>13</sup> B.S. CHILDS has been researching this issue for many years; the results are presented in *Die Theologie der einen Bibel I*, Freiburg 1994, p. 93–104.

the text run? The Canonical Approach respects the authority the text enjoys both in Judaism and in Christianity.

The Torah acquired its final form in the Persian period and thus studying this stage in Israel's history is of special importance for proper comprehension of the Pentateuch formation<sup>14</sup>. It was a time of transition from the Israeli period to the beginning of Judaism tradition. Modern scholars tend to specify three periods: the Hebraistic one, the Deuteronomistic one and the Judaism one<sup>15</sup>. The Persian period was enormously theologically creative and introduced many new elements to the shaping process of the Torah. The scholarly analysis includes also the origin and functions of legal statements which tended to be interpreted in theological context and thus constituted substance for the Judaism religion.

We may ask: what were the principal stages in the final formation of the Torah text? The fundamental assumption, expressed above, is that the Pentateuch is not a random collection of texts but a literary elaboration containing the Torah of God (of Moses) where the legal elements play essential role.

The Israeli history reveals that during the monarchy the religious revival happened in the reign of king Josiah. This is described in 2 Kgs 22:1-23.30. It was then that the book of Deuteronomy was announced the legal foundation for the whole kingdom and thus the Torah text became normative for the Israeli community. During Josiah's reign there was the initial stage of the formation of the canonical character of the Torah and especially of Deuteronomy (Dt.) which played an important role in the whole process of shaping the Deuteronomistic theology (Jos – 2 Kgs). This tradition presents also the history of Israel since conquering Canaan<sup>16</sup> till the Babylonian exile. It was then, during the reign of king Josiah, that Dt merged with other traditions which in the future would make the complete text of the Pentateuch. The Book of Deuteronomy has a dual character, historical and legal, and it lays the foundation of the Torah theology which is the revelation of God's redemptive will toward Israel. It is an important factor of the forming religious concepts in the Old Testament tradition where the theological and the political contexts are equally important.

### 1.1.2. Post-exilic Torah formation

After the exile Israel existed under the Persian sovereignty and had to obey foreign kings. One may thus ask a question: How normative was the Torah within

<sup>14</sup> S. LEIBOLD, *Raum für Konvivenz. Die Genesis als nachexilesche Erinnerungsfigur*, Freiburg 2014, p. 112–134.

<sup>15</sup> The Deuteronomic period was critical in shaping the Israeli monotheism, cf. G. BRAULIK, *Das Deuteronomium und die Geburt des Monotheismus*, in: (ed.), E. HAAG, *Gott, der einzige. Zur Entstehung des Monotheismus in Israel*, Quaestiones Disputatae 104, Freiburg 1985, p. 115–159.

<sup>16</sup> According to the Book of Joshua, Israel conquered the Promised Land by means of military methods (war); war in the Bible and its moral evaluation is an important issue in the Old Testament exegesis; cf. N. LOHFINK, *Die Schichten des Pentateuch und der Krieg*, in: (ed.), E. HAAG, *Gewalt und Gewaltlosigkeit im Alten Testament*, Quaestiones Disputatae 96, Freiburg 1983, p. 56–70.

the context of Persian laws? It was then that the Pentateuch found its final redaction basing on the idea of God's will expressed in law<sup>17</sup>. To what degree was the idea accepted by the Persian authority (Reichsautorisation)<sup>18</sup> ruling the post-exilic life? A historical fact is that Persepolis rulers allowed significant religious freedom<sup>19</sup> to the conquered peoples. An example of this was the restoration of Jerusalem sanctuary (Zerubbabel) and of the Israeli community (Ezra, Nahemiah). It is equally well known that the huge Persian empire based on general legislation but in individual societies the local laws may have been accepted, provided they and the general laws did not clash. For this reason the mission played by Ezra and Nehemiah<sup>20</sup> in Jerusalem was of special importance. King Artaxerxes gave Ezra his procuration (Ezr 7:12-26) written in Aramaic, the official language of the empire. The document cited in the Bible is not the original version of the formal decree but late redaction made in Judaism spirit, stressing legal elements in the shaping process of the Pentateuch. Ezra's religious reform is known to have been based on the Judaism law (the Law of God) which was, naturally, approved by the Persian king and thus became the king's law. In effect, God's law served also for the Persian empire. The Torah set of laws concentrated mainly on the cult of Yahweh. The law and the sanctuary became strictly combined and the Torah became, in effect, a holy book. The developing Judaism rested on the book which was a significant element creating the Israelis' religious consciousness. Accepting the law meant also loyalty to the sovereign (Persia). The legislation was consequential not only for pure juridical cases but also for the religious development as the religion became more and more judaistic, i.e. it rested on instructions drawn from the Law.

An open question is the exact origin, contents and extension of Ezra's law. The book, Ezr 7:6, describes the reformer in question as "well-versed in the law of Moses". The law came from the Pentateuch but Ezra not necessarily referred to the whole text of it. He could use only the law of Deuteronomy or of the Code of Legal Holiness (Lv 17-26) or eventually of more general priestly redaction<sup>21</sup>. We lack sufficient extra-biblical data to define precisely the contents and extension of the law promulgated by Ezra. What seems certain is his reference to the law of Moses in its significant passages<sup>22</sup>. The fifth century BC (the restoration of Israel)

<sup>17</sup> J. BERMAN, *The History of Legal Theory and the Study of Biblical Law*, CBQ 76 (2014), p. 19-39.

<sup>18</sup> On the subject see: U. RÜTERSWORDEN, *Die persische Reichsautorisation der Tora*, ZAR 1 (1995) p. 47-61.

<sup>19</sup> On Persian culture see: M. SKŁADOWSKA, *Kultura perska*, Wrocław 1995.

<sup>20</sup> The chronology of Ezra public activity is still open; on this subject see: H. LANGKAMMER, *Księgi Ezdrasza – Nehemiasza* (PSST V/2), Poznań 1971, p. 85-95.

<sup>21</sup> The Code of Legal Holiness is a complex text with fundamental issues of the history and redemption (Lv 26:11-13), cf. N. LOHFINK, *Die Abänderung der Theologie des priesterlichen Geschichtswerks im Segen des Heiligkeitsgesetzes*, in: (ed.), H. GESE, H.P. RÜGER, *Wort und Geschichte* (F.S. für Karl Elliger zum 70. Geburtstag), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1973, p. 129-136.

<sup>22</sup> I. CARDELLINI, *Mosè, il legislatore di Israele*, Lat 79 (2013), p. 663-673.

was an essential moment for the shaping process of the Pentateuch but it did not end in Ezra's times.

The religious reform, made in that time, was decisive for the process of Torah canonization, which took place probably in IV c. BC. Before that time the text of various books had been modified according to the new challenges faced by every generation. The process fostering new legal formulas, according to the challenges of the times, could not last for ever. It aimed at particular task, i.e. to canonize the text and make it sacred and normative, unchangeable and open only to commentaries.

### 1.1.3. The idea of the canon

The term of "canon" comes from Greek κανών, meaning a stalk, a stick, a measure, a province, a rule, a norm, a list or a catalogue<sup>23</sup>. When referred to a book collection the term means their definite number and contents, close to any alterations. Such reference to the Biblical books is quite late, however, as it appears in IV c. CE and in Christian, not Jewish circles (Laodicea synod, 360 AD). In Hebrew the term had a descriptive equivalent, canonical books were those which "make the hands impure", i.e. which were perceived as sacred, similar to sacred implements (in the sanctuary cult), requiring ritual ablution before touching them. Originally, the expression referred to the exemplary structure, the sanctuary, where the cult was observed in strict accordance to the set of rules. In the times of Judaism, similar notion was ascribed to the written Torah, as to the exemplary text, close to any modifications. In such perception, text became classic, sacred, authoritative and canonical.

The standard text was, thus, a merger of many schools, currents and movements which had been shaping the Torah for many centuries. The following generations of the Chosen People, constituting the national and religious traditions, had selected the material according to various criteria (the credo, ethical, wisdom, historical, linguistic or esthetical norms) and thus decided the final form, linguistically and textually. In the course of time the text became classic, a point of reference, source of citations and base of authority.

### 1.1.4. Position of the Torah

The Torah was holy and grand<sup>24</sup>. It became 'a written sanctuary' and thus an important God-meeting venue, whose glory, as it is known, settled upon it. Such attitude toward the Torah has significant effect for Judaism when the sanctuary was destroyed, in 70 AD – there was not a sacred shrine any more but Israel has never lost

<sup>23</sup> In early rabbinic epoch there was no strict idea of canon but some ideas of it appeared during the so called Jabneh synod; G. STEMBERGER, *Jabne und der Kanon*, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 3 (1988), p. 163–174.

<sup>24</sup> The Torah as specific kind of evangel is described by G. BRAULIK in his article on the justification, see: G. BRAULIK, *Gesetz als Evangelium. Rechtfertigung und Begnadigung nach der deuteronomischen Tora*, Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 79 (1982), p. 127–160.

their touch with God (The Torah has become the actual sanctuary). For Christians, always respecting admirably the inspired books (2 Tm 3:16), the Torah has become part of the holy scripture, a transmitter of religious tradition and a liturgical reading, completed with other texts.

Having become a canonical text the Torah became normative and formative for the whole Israel. It means it had been finally emerged from other existing texts of similar contents but which were never accepted completely by the religious community or perceived as binding. During the canonization process the final text had been defined and since then it could never be changed as it was believed to contain the norms for the whole religious community. The believers learned about the religious precepts not only from the scripture but also from the interpretations announced by scholars from many rabbinic schools in ancient Palestine.

Commentaries to the canonical text always played an important role. The demands of the Law had to be adapted to each subsequent epoch. In the same time they secured believers from erroneous interpretation, misunderstanding or excessive latitude in dealing with the text. The canonical text was never treated as hermetic, shut in lifeless letter. Rather, it was perceived as source of rich revelatory message to be discovered by the coming generations of Israel.

The Torah contemplated by Israel became the pledge of consolidating monotheism. Its authority surpassed the prophets' whose activity bloomed especially during the monarchy. The Torah became the central canonical book collection, a point of reference for other books albeit canonical but perceived as kind of commentaries (the Prophets and the Writings) to this essential part of the Bible.

#### 1.1.5. Torah interpretations

There were also extra-biblical teachings (*halacha*)<sup>25</sup>, which instructed what Torah believer's life should look like. The Greek translation of the Torah, called the Septuagint (LXX) respected its authority and stressed its role in religious life. Another example of Torah adoration was the Qumran community, which used to live beyond the sanctuary cult but would concentrate on strict obedience to Torah precepts<sup>26</sup>.

Torah canonization did not close God's revelation to Israel. This revelation was dynamic and open to future events though God always demanded Israel's obedience to what had already been revealed: "You must add nothing to what I command you, and take nothing from it, but keep the commandments of Yahweh your God just as

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<sup>25</sup> *Halacha*, basing on the holy scripture, presented everyday norms of life, cf. M. SIMONETTI, *Między dosłownością a alegorią*, Kraków 2000, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> The first translations of the HB were the so called *targumim*, which were not literal translations but often paraphrases adapting the text to the challenges of time, cf. M. MCNAMARA, *I Targum e il Nuovo Testamento*, Bologna 1978, p. 83–86.

I lay them down for you” (Dt 4:2)<sup>27</sup>. The text explicitly says that the Torah expresses Yahweh’s will, independent from any human factors. God’s will is immutable towards man. It has been expressed in human way and thus can be recognized by man even though the process will never be easy as it means transition from the human sphere (the text) to the divine one (God’s will). This is the reason why the given text needs interpretation. God’s plan does not refer to the literary form of the book but to the precepts set for man obliged to follow Yahweh’s commandments. Understanding the commandments and applying them into human life determine the sense of the scripture, which in time has acquired final literary form.

The Torah, heart of Judaism, has also played significant role in Christianity formation. Its authority was respected by Jesus and his first disciples, which finds its expression in the gospel of Matthew. The New Testament writers often referred to the Torah but they had equal respect for other parts of the Bible (the Prophets and the Writings), i.e. they indiscriminately respected the whole Old Testament. Christians treated the Torah in another way as the rabbinic tradition<sup>28</sup>. The difference came from recognizing the gospel to be the climax of God’s revelation, performed in Jesus Christ<sup>29</sup>. Jesus himself, referring to the Old Testament scripture, said he had come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17). He considered the Decalogue binding<sup>30</sup> but gave it new interpretation: he radicalized<sup>31</sup> it. The validity, however, of the very sophisticated cultic precepts was disputable. Judaism used to revolve them even after the destruction of Jerusalem and the sanctuary. Christianity kept distance to the particular precepts because it believed that the new cult in Spirit and truth (Jn 4:23) had liberated it from the subjection of the law. St. Paul wrote straightforwardly about the curse of the Law from which we had been ransomed by Christ (Gal 3:13)<sup>32</sup>.

In modern European languages the term “Torah” is usually explained with the juridical word “law”<sup>33</sup>. This limited connotation deprives the Torah of the spiritual

<sup>27</sup> This verse is an introduction to Dt. 4:4-8, which shows the position that the Tora enjoyed in Israel’s history, cf. G. BRAULIK, *Weisheit, Gottesnähe und Gesetz – zum Kerygma von Deuteronomium 4,5-8*, in: (ed.), G. BRULIK, *STUDIEN ZUM PENTATEUCH* (F.S. für WALTER KORNFELD zum 60. Geburtstag), Wien 1977, p. 165–195.

<sup>28</sup> Presently the relations of Judaism and Christianity are subject of theological research, cf. W. STEGEMANN, *Tora – Nomos – Gesetz. Zur Bedeutung des Judentums für das Christentum*, in: (ed.), M. STÖHR, *Lernen in Jerusalem – Lernen mit Israel*, Berlin 1993, p. 148–168.

<sup>29</sup> Jesus Christ was interpreted in the New Testament as fulfillment of messianic expectations of the Old Testament Israel, cf. E. ZENGER, *Jesus von Nazaret und die messianischen Hoffnungen des alttestamentlichen Israel*, in: (ed.), W. KASPER, *Christologische Schwerpunkte*, Düsseldorf 1980, p. 37–78.

<sup>30</sup> In the Biblical tradition the Decalogue was strictly connected with the idea of covenant, cf. G. BRAULIK, *Die Abfolge der Gesetze in Deuteronomium 12–26 und der Dekalog*, in: (ed.), N. LOHFINK, *Das Deuteronomium. Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, Leuven 1985, p. 252–265.

<sup>31</sup> This is the message of the Sermon on the Mount, cf. J. KUDASIEWICZ, *Ewangelie synoptyczne dzisiaj*, Warszawa 1986, p. 211–213.

<sup>32</sup> Paul’s teaching about the justification was based on the pair of antonyms: the Law vs the Faith, cf., H. LANGKAMMER, *Teologia Nowego Testamentu II*, Wrocław 1984, p. 148–168.

<sup>33</sup> In Hebrew the term “law” may be expressed by many roots, cf. G. BRAULIK, *Die Ausdrücke für „Gesetz” im Buch Deuteronomium*, *Biblica* 51 (1971), p. 39–66.



element and narrows its message down to ritual formalism which cannot feed human soul. Perceiving the Torah in strictly legal categories turns it into lifeless letter, and when compared to God's revelation in Jesus Christ there is a risk to treat the Torah as gospel's negative. And yet, the Torah is the source of knowing God's plans toward man. This plan has always been full of mercy and loving kindness.

## 2. God's covenant with Abraham

Abraham's choice was extremely important for the whole history of redemption described both in the Old and the New Testaments<sup>34</sup>. Personal contact with God has brought the image of God being close to man. Abraham was considered to be God's friend. He is perceived as such in all the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The patriarch is thus the most "ecumenical" character of all and is called the "father of faith"<sup>35</sup>. The historicity of Abraham has been presently widely discussed<sup>36</sup>. The question has been studied from the historical, archeological, ethnological and religiological perspectives. Here we shall not deal with this issue but we shall rather concentrate on God's covenant with Abraham (Gn 15 and 17).

### 2.1. בְּרִית in The Book of Genesis

The Hebrew term בְּרִית appears 287 times in the HB (27 of them are in Genesis)<sup>37</sup>. The first time it appears is the context of God's decision to destroy humankind (the flood): "For my part, I am going to send the flood, the waters, on earth, to destroy all living things having the breath of life under heaven; everything on earth is to perish. But with you I shall establish my covenant (בְּרִית) and you will go aboard the ark, yourself, your sons, your wife, and your sons, wives along with you" (Gn 6:17-18). The issue merely mentioned here was developed further in the description of God's covenant with Noah (Gn 9). Speaking about the term of בְּרִית, we must say that its meaning is quite broad. The general idea is connected with some obligation. This is indicated by the root בָּרָה, which in Akkadian means "to see". Although we cannot define accurately what the term בְּרִית means basing on terminological analyses, we must admit that this term was broadly used in describing various events

<sup>34</sup> J.B. DABHI, *Abraham: Our Father in Faith*, Jeev 43 (2013), p. 87–101; S. BONGIOVANNI, *Abraham: un padre dell'esperienza umana*, RdT 54 (2013), p. 31–46.

<sup>35</sup> He is considered the father of faith in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, A. TH. KHOURY, *Abraham: ein Segen für die Völker nach der jüdischen, christlichen und islamischen Tradition*, BK 59 (2004), p. 9–17.

<sup>36</sup> J.H. LE ROUX, *Waar is Abraham dan?*, Verbum et Ecclesia 22 (2001), p. 326–340.

<sup>37</sup> E. KUTSCH, בְּרִית, *Verpflichtung*, THAT I, p. 341.

of redemptive character in the HB. Apart from the covenant established by God with Noah and Abraham, Genesis describes also covenants established by people: Abraham – Abimelech (Gn 21:27), Isaac – Abimelech (Gn 26:28), Laban – Jacob (Gn 31:44)<sup>38</sup>. These are extremely precious witnesses because they allow us to claim that the Biblical בְּרִית describing a relation between Yahweh-God and Abraham and his descendants had its origin in historical practices of the ancient nomadic people. It does not mean that the practices were copied into the God – man relationship. On the sacral level such relation ceased to be just horizontal but became vertical. Thus בְּרִית in interhuman relations is not identical to the בְּרִית between Yahweh and his people (man). There are some analogies but the essence of God’s covenant with man differs from covenants among people.

## 2.2. Covenant with Abraham (Gn 15)

There were events in the relationship of God and Abraham that became manifestation of the Divine reference to whole mankind. Abraham became its representative and his life, especially his relation to God, became of universal character. Choosing Abraham, God assures: “I shall bless those who bless you and shall curse those who curse you and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you’ (Gn 12:3). What we find here is the effect of the relation that Yahweh<sup>39</sup> established with Abraham who obeyed God and left his homeland to go into a foreign land. The fundamental event of choosing Abraham by Yahweh and Abraham’s faithful obedience became the prehistory of the בְּרִית established between God and the patriarch. Since then Yahweh would be Abraham’s guide as is straightforwardly expressed in Gn 15:7: “I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldaeans to give you this country as your possession’. The statement reflects Israel’s consciousness from as early times as formation of national and religious traditions and illustrates well the basis of the relation between the people (Abraham’s children) and Yahweh. The initiation, then, belongs to God who transformed Abraham’s life which showed in “bringing him from Ur of the Chaldeans’. Since then this “bringing’ became the *Leitmotiv* of the salvation history culminating in Jesus Christ who consummated the “bringing’ or transition by means of his Passover.

And yet even a faithful man needs some encouragement from God, some assurance that God’s influence is effective and redemptive. This question occupied Abraham’s thought and that is why he asks: “Lord Yahweh, how can I know that I shall possess it?’ (Gn 15:8). Abraham’s confusion is similar to Mary’s in Luke 1:34: “But Mary said to the angel: ‘But how can this come about, since I have no

<sup>38</sup> A. JANKOWSKI, *Biblijna teologia przymierza*, Kraków 1997, p. 40–51.

<sup>39</sup> The name of Yahweh appears in Genesis because of the Yahwist redaction, J.St. SYNOWIEC, *Patriarchowie Izraela i ich religia*, Kraków 1995, p. 96.

knowledge of man?”). These two pictures at the two opposite points of history reveal the specific character of relation between people of faith and Yahweh<sup>40</sup>. Faith does not make the believer free of questions and God respects irresolution of His children and answers their questions which come not from disbelief but from awareness of how serious the matter is.

Both Abraham and Mary got their answers which became rich sources for every believer considering his/her faith not only as his/her personal thing but as part of more universal phenomenon<sup>41</sup>. Actually every person deciding to believe sets his/her position within the horizontal and vertical dimensions.

Abraham got his answer soon; Yahweh told him: “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon” (Gn 15:9b). God speaks to Abraham in a way fully comprehensible to him. Animal sacrifices were popular in his society. The animals mentioned were accessible. They were parts of supplies for nomadic life and Abraham and his family were just raisers of sheep and goats. The patriarch simply chose the best pieces of his animals. He knew they were not for consumption but for sacrifice and thus he split them in two except for the birds (v. 10). Such behavior testified to Abraham’s religious intuition.

The carcasses attracted birds of prey (v. 11), symbolizing forces of evil trying to destroy the relationship between Abraham and God but unsuccessfully. The following events were determined by Yahweh who made a trance fall upon Abraham (v. 12) to cleanse him and enable him to accept more Yahweh’s words: “Then Yahweh said to Abram: ‘Know this for certain, that your descendants will be exiles in a land not their own, and be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I shall bring judgment on the nation that enslaves them, and after this they will leave, with many possessions’” (Gn 15:13-14). God does not tell Abraham about his personal fate but about the fate of his descendants which complies with the dynamic character of the redemptive history that constantly goes forward, towards new great deeds of God and new protagonists of the redemptive acts. At the end of the history there is the Child: “And the angel answered, ‘The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God’” (Lk 1:35). The descendants of Abraham would suffer the Egyptian captivity but would eventually be delivered and would return to Canaan, i.e. the land of Amorites. These promises soon came true, namely in Moses’ (and Joshua’s) times who was God’s appointed leader of the people. Yet it was

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<sup>40</sup> The modern Biblical theology stresses the homogeneity of the redemptive history, H. LANGKAMMER, *Teologia Starego Testamentu*, Rzeszów 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Also other Biblical texts refer to this universal character, D.J. HUMAN, *An ideal for leadership – Psalm 72: The wise king-Royal mediation of God’s universal reign*, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 23 (2003), p. 658–677.

Yahweh to lead the people through the wilderness in the shape of column of fire or a column of smoke (cf. Ex 13:21). A kind of prefiguration of this God's work was Abraham's vision: "When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passing between the animals" (Gn 15:17). Yet it was not the climax of the event which came later: "That day Yahweh made a covenant (בְּרִית) with Abram in these terms: 'To your descendants I give this country, from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the River Euphrates'" (Gn 15:18). Yahweh behaves as absolute sovereign disposing all wealth. Some of the wealth was given to Abraham, namely the territory from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates. It was a land between Egypt and Mesopotamia, therefore a land between the civilization centers of that time. God, according to the covenant, obliged himself to realize the promise<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, Abraham was not obliged to perform any preliminary deeds, Yahweh's gift was absolute. This situation revealed what God was like and what possibilities became available to man when chosen by Him. Perhaps Yahweh established the covenant because of Abraham's faith. His faithful obedience disposed him to accept Yahweh's great gifts whose beneficiaries were the patriarch's descendants. The gift of land was deeply inscribed in the hearts of Israelis and in times of national calamities and exiles they longed for their Sion, i.e. Jerusalem, for the sanctuary, for Yahweh residing there. The religious Zionism is deeply positive as it refers to this most fundamental Divine promise given to Abraham and sealed with the covenant which did not demand any precondition on the part of the man. Such is the meaning of the covenant described in Gen 15; it is of fundamental character and has never been annulled. It was not the only one, however, that is why we must allow the description of Gn 17<sup>43</sup>.

### 2.3. Covenant with Abraham (Gn 17)

Gn 15 contains the merged J-E traditions while Gn 17 comes from solely P tradition. This difference is of great importance for interpreting the text because it expresses other than Gn 15 religious ideas, formed later than those of J-E<sup>44</sup>. The difference shows also in the way of presenting the covenant. Before the P redactor described the covenant establishment he had informed (Gn 16:15-16) about Ishmael's birth and Abraham's age (eighty-six). Chapter 17:1 also offers chronological data: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old Yahweh appeared to him and said: 'I am El Shaddai. Live in my presence and be perfect'". Sixteen years had thus passed since Ishmael's birth when God revealed Himself to Abraham. God introduced Himself

<sup>42</sup> J.J. NIEHAUS, *God's Covenant with Abraham*, JETS 56 (2013), p. 250–257.

<sup>43</sup> On the subject of Gn. 15 and 17 see: P.R. WILLIAMSON, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*, Sheffield 2000.

<sup>44</sup> P.F. ELLIS, *The Men and the Message of the Old Testament*, Minnesota 1962, p. 59.

with the name of Shaddai, i.e. the one familiar to the patriarchal society. The text uses the holy name of Yahweh which is a mark of its later redaction since the name, as we know, was revealed much later, to Moses<sup>45</sup>. The relation of Abraham to God was described in the fullest detail in this chapter. The patriarch was obliged to act (walk) always in God's presence (הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי). In this way Abraham became as if excluded from living solely nomadic life. Since then the fundamental dimension of his life became the vertical exchange, supposed to radiate on his whole life. The patriarch is said to be blameless (תָּמִים)<sup>46</sup>. He is to follow the example of another holy man, Noah: "Noah was a good man, an upright man (תָּמִים) among his contemporaries, and he walked with God" (Gn 6:9). The demands Abraham was to fulfill were thus very high. He was to be a friend of God which should show in righteous relations with people. For the P redactor the important issues were the ethical ones and this is why Abraham had to fulfill many preconditions before he could enter into the covenant with God.

Having told this fundamental precept, Yahweh revealed to Abraham His decision: "And I shall grant a בְּרִיתִי between myself and you, and make you very numerous" (Gn 17:2). God fulfills His first promise of the descendants (Gn 12:2)<sup>47</sup> and then the stress put on the land (Gn 15) was transferred to the descendants, therefore, the motif became personalistic. God made many promises to Abraham in the covenant when the patriarch remained prostrated (Gn 17:3). Since then Abram was to be called Abraham and become a father of a host of nations (v. 4-5). In consequence he became the protoplast of royal dynasty (v. 6). The covenant would also be valid for Abraham's descendants and thus it would be called עוֹלָם (everlasting); finally God promised also the land of Canaan as permanent (עוֹלָם) possession (v. 7-8)<sup>48</sup>. Abraham became a kind of new Noah as his covenant became simultaneously universal and particular (directed toward Israel, i.e. the direct descendants of Abraham, and Canaan).

The covenant in question was given its external sign, the circumcision: "This is my covenant which you must keep between myself and you, and your descendants after you: everyone of your males must be circumcised (הַמּוֹלֵל)" (Gn 17:10). Circumcision was common among the neighboring nations and in Egypt<sup>49</sup>. There, it was not a religious practice but an initiation to marital life. In Israel, circumcision was made when the baby boy was eight days old and with this the baby became a member

<sup>45</sup> G. FISCHER, *Das Mosebild der Hebräischen Bibel*, in: M. GÖRG, *Mose – Name und Namensträger. Versuch einer historischen Annäherung*, in: (ed.), E. OTTO, *Mose. Ägypten und das Alte Testament* (SBS 189), Stuttgart 2000, p. 84–120.

<sup>46</sup> J.P.J. OLIVER, תָּמִים, DOTTE IV, p. 306–308.

<sup>47</sup> J. EBACH, *Ihr sollt ein Segen sein. Das Leitwort und die Bibel: Eine Problemanzeige*, BK 58 (2003), p. 62–70.

<sup>48</sup> A.S. JASIŃSKI, *Według postanowienia wiecznego Boga. Aionios w Nowym Testamencie*, Opole 1991, p. 34–35.

<sup>49</sup> W.H. PROPP, *The Origins of Infant Circumcision in Israel*, *Hebrew Annual Review* 11 (1987), p. 355–370.

of the Chosen People. Lack of it was of grave consequences: “The uncircumcised male, whose foreskin has not been circumcised – that person must be cut off from his people: he has broken my covenant” (Gn 17:14). This practice then was not just adventitious but essential for all generations of Israel.

Another consequence of Abraham’s covenant was the change in Sarai’s, Abraham’s wife’s, name into Sarah (v. 15). Despite her old age she was yet to become the mother of the son of promise who would push aside Ishmael, the son of Hagar the maidservant<sup>50</sup>. Here Abraham had his doubts whether he still could, a hundred-year-old man, become a father, especially that Sarah was similarly old. God dispelled his doubts assuring that also his son, Isaac, would be embraced by the everlasting covenant (v. 16-19).

### 3. Yahweh’s pledge (Isaac)

The tale of Isaac’s binding (Gen 22:1-19)<sup>51</sup> is one of the most thrilling texts in the whole Hebrew Bible<sup>52</sup>. After the chapter (Gn 21) of Sarah’s and Abraham’s son, Isaac, being born in fulfillment of God’s promise, the reader goes to the text where God demands from Abraham to sacrifice the boy. The text of Gn 22:1-19 is a mixture of E and J<sup>53</sup> sources therefore the motifs described there must have been known in various Israeli traditions and were perceived as specially important issues of religious teaching.

#### 3.1. Precepts given to Abraham

The tale begins with the statement: “It happened some time later that God put Abraham to the test (נסה)” (Gn 22:1a). One may ask: after what events? The text in Gn 21:22-34 says about the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech<sup>54</sup>, a mixture of J and P sources rather than E. We can eventually suppose that Gn 22 is a redaction. Thus the motif of Isaac’s binding was adopted into the tale cycle present in Genesis. The introductory verse says that Abraham was put to the test (נסה). However the term נסה happens once in the book of Genesis, only in this passage<sup>55</sup>. It is used again in

<sup>50</sup> Ph. DREY, *The Role of Hagar in Genesis 16*, Andrews University Seminary Studies 40 (2002), p. 179–195.

<sup>51</sup> H. BARRIOS TAO, *Del sacrificio de ‘Abrahàn’ al sacrificio de su ‘descendencia: exégesis y teología narrativa del sacrificio en Génesis 2,1-19*, Fran 52 (2010), p. 15–55.

<sup>52</sup> This topic is also found in the Qur’an, J. KALTNER, *Abraham’s Sons: How the Bible and Qur’an See the Same Story*, BR 18 (2, 2002), p. 16-23, 45-56.

<sup>53</sup> P.F. ELLIS, *The Men and the Message of the Old Testament*, p. 60.

<sup>54</sup> The issue will be found again in Isaac’s story (Gn. 26), F. CRÜSEMANN, *Abraham und die Bewohner des Landes: Beobachtungen zum kanonischen Abrahambild*, EvTh 62 (2002), p. 334–348.

<sup>55</sup> WSHP I, p. 507.

the Exodus tale (Ex 15:25. 16:4. 17:2. 22:20). In the wilderness, God put his people to the test and *vice versa*. The difference laid in the fact that putting the Chosen People to the test was supposed to mould them while putting God to the test showed the people's doubt in Him. The redactor of Gn 22:1 used the term נִסָּה to stress from the very beginning the didactic character of the tale. God moulds Abraham and thus moulds His Chosen People. The reader is supposed to interpret the tale in such a way as to feel inspired to follow Yahweh's will in everything.

The other half of the verse is a typical example of the dynamic relation between God and man: “‘Abraham! Abraham!’ he called. ‘Here I am!’ he replied” (Gn 22:1b). God is the one who speaks to man and searches him/her. Similar situation was when Yahweh called to Adam after he had sinned, but then Adam avoided God and hid himself (Gn 3:10). On the other hand, Abraham was eager to answer God. The patriarch exhibited full readiness, openness to disposal and trust, to meet Yahweh. God's command is verse 2: “‘God said: ‘Take your son, your only son, your beloved Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah where you are to offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall point out to you’”. This verse reveals the drama of the tale. Yahweh's attention is here focused on Isaac, here called the only son (אֶת־יְהוֹדָד), the beloved one (אֶשֶׁר־אֱהָבָה)<sup>56</sup>. Ishmael, expelled with Hagar to the desert (Gn 21:14-16), was not taken upon consideration in such context as the promise of the child was fulfilled completely and uniquely in Isaac. We may feel free to take the expressions “your only son’ and “your beloved Isaac’ as synonyms. In Abraham's heart no other son, born before or after Isaac, could be defined in this way. Yet the beloved boy did not belong to Abraham but, eventually, to God. The patriarch was fully conscious of that. He was ready to fulfill trustfully any command from Yahweh, even of particularly painful character. So it was in case of Isaac. God told him to take the boy and go to the land of Moriah<sup>57</sup>. This name appears again in 2 Chr 3:1, in a passage about the Jerusalem sanctuary. Abraham was then told to go to the place which in future was to become the cultic center of Israel. That localization was confirmed by Flavius Josephus (Antiq 1, 13, 1) and St. Jerome. It seems, however, that the reference to Moriah was an intentional reflection of 2 Chr 3:1 in order to give it deep theological implication.

Abraham was to go to Moriah to sacrifice (לְעֹלָה) his beloved son. In context of sacrifice, the term עֹלָה appeared first when Noah made his offering (Gn 8:20), however here the exact sacrifice was birds and animals. Practices of offering children to gods were quite common in Canaan and other neighboring peoples<sup>58</sup>. They were part of their religious beliefs. The idea was to offer the firstborn, a reflection of which

<sup>56</sup> These terms are also found in New Testament Christology, J. RATZINGER, *Tajemnica Jezusa Chrystusa*, Kielce 1994, p. 15–18.

<sup>57</sup> A. VAN DEN BORN, *Moria*, BL, p. 1171.

<sup>58</sup> Ch. CHIARA, *Il regno del nemico: La morte nella religione di Canaan*, Brescia 2003, p. 25–34.

could also be found in Mosaic law: “To Yahweh you must make over whatever first issued from the womb, and every first-born cast by animals belonging to you: these males belong to Yahweh” (Ex 13:12). Immolating a child was, however, unthinkable although some of the sinful kings did perform such acts: “(Ahaz) did not do what Yahweh his God regards right, as his ancestor David had done. He followed the example of the kings of Israel, even causing his son to pass through the fire of sacrifice, also copying the disgusting practices of the nations whom Yahweh had dispossessed for the Israelites” (2 Kgs 16:2). Abraham must have heard about such practices. He had only begun his relationship with God so, considering the social context of the tale, we could say that the patriarch was eager to fulfill completely his God’s will<sup>59</sup>. His preparations might testify to this: “Early next morning Abraham saddled his donkey and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He chopped wood for the burnt offering and started on his journey to the place which God had indicated to him” (Gn 22:3). The text describes the fully of detail what he did and when. Noteworthy is keeping the wood at hand: Abraham did not want to arrange everything offhand at the site, he rather wanted to have everything ready to fulfill God’s command.

### 3.2. Isaac’s fate

The patriarch must have known the land where he was going. Perhaps it was of some cultic importance at that time. They were walking three days with two servants, who were then dismissed (vv. 4-5). Abraham did not want any witnesses to the act of his obedience to God. Then he was ready to immolate the child. Yet before he started to, we read the dialogue of extreme theological significance: “Isaac spoke to his father Abraham: ‘Father?’ he said. ‘Yes, my son’ he replied. ‘Look’ he said ‘here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?’” (Gn 22:7). We have a son – father relationship here. Isaac was very trustful toward his father whom he called אָבִי (my father) and was immediately responded with הִנְנִי בְנִי (here I am, my son)<sup>60</sup>. This exchange of these simple formulas reflected the strong bonds between the characters. They are some portent of the New Testament relationship between the Father and the Son. However, this typology was yet to come. Abraham was in predicament: on one hand he was obliged to obey God’s command, and on the other hand he did love Isaac. Finally he overcame himself to follow Yahweh’s command. When they arrived at the site Isaac realized it was him to be sacrificed on the altar (v. 9). The next verse revealed the patriarch’s determination: “Abraham

<sup>59</sup> W. REISER, *Isaak darf nicht geopfert werden: Predigt zu 1. Mose 22, 1-14*, TZ 46 (1990), p. 178–183.

<sup>60</sup> These expressions come from patriarchal mode of speaking and stress the intergeneration bonds, F.H. WIGHT, *Obyczaje krajów biblijnych*, Warszawa 1998, p. 89–90.



stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill his son”. Nothing suggests he hoped for any fortunate interruption. But suddenly again we have a dialogue, resembling formally the one between Isaac and the father and yet of another dimension. It starts in v. 11: “But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ he said. ‘Here I am’ he replied”. The word actually came from God (in v. 7 the word came from Isaac)<sup>61</sup>. God called Abraham with his name. The reply was identical to the one given to Isaac: **הִנְנִי** (Here I am). Abraham’s presence was in dual dimension there: the presence for Isaac and the presence for Yahweh, but it was the latter that prevailed.

The patriarch remained in full disposal for God. The words that followed the ordeal approved his obedience: “‘Do not raise your hand against the boy’, the angel said. ‘Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your own beloved son’” (v. 12). First of all God forbade Abraham to immolate his son. In no circumstances would God accept such sacrifice. It was a lesson for Abraham as well as for all the future generations. In Israel there would never be immolation, Yahweh would find no pleasure in it. It was an extremely important lesson as Abraham’s descendants would constantly be tempted to immolate their firstborns, according to the examples of their neighboring nations<sup>62</sup>.

God appears in that scene as defender of human life: “do not harm him”. The firstborn son would stay Yahweh’s particular belonging but a sign of this would not be sacrificial slaughter but eagerness to serve God. Yahweh had his grand plan for Isaac and thus stopped Abraham’s hand explaining in this way the meaning of the whole situation. The patriarch was put to the test. Despite frequent contacts with Abraham God still would make him face various challenges. As the Creator, God knew him to the bottom but gave him free will and possibility to say no. Because the patriarch proved obedient Yahweh said the significant words beginning with the formula “Now (**כִּי עַתָּה**) I know (**יָרְעָתִי**)”. This “now” was a special moment in human history, the time when God informed man about His friendly presence. God’s “knowing” was not nominal but simple telling Abraham that He noticed his obedience<sup>63</sup>. That obedience comprised eagerness to fulfill any Divine wish. Abraham was tested in the hardest possible way which was recognized by Yahweh in the words: “Now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your own beloved son”. For a seminomadic man, having a son was a matter of absolute superiority, especially for the leader of the tribe. In Abraham’s case there was also another reason, the religious one, i.e. the promise he had got from God about becoming

<sup>61</sup> On Yahweh in Abraham’s history cf. A.S. JASIŃSKI, *Slużcie Jahwe z weselem. Kyriologia starotestamentalna na tle Źrodowiska biblijnego*, Opole 1998, p. 143–147.

<sup>62</sup> Idolatry was specially significant during the decline of Israeli monarchy in Jerusalem, C.R. MARTINEZ, *La idolatria en el profeta Jeremias*, Mayeutica 19 (1993), p. 265–303.

<sup>63</sup> A. THAREKADAVIL, *The Call of Abraham and Formation of the Chosen People*, BBh 30(2003), p. 115–162.

a father of many nations with Isaac's being the only heir<sup>64</sup> of this promise. The boy's premature death would have wrecked everything. Probably Abraham did not understand why he was told to destroy God's promise and immolate Isaac. It must have been the most tragic moment in the patriarch's life. In such dramatic situation God let him know himself rather than He got to know him. The patriarch could experience his ability to perform even most demanding tasks because of the faith he kept in God.

### 3.3. Another promise

The next section of the story (Gn 22) is silent about Isaac but comes back to the promises given to Abraham. The patriarch first offered the sacrifice, an animal one: "Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son" (Gn 22:13). The patriarch felt the need to offer a sacrifice as the site had become sacred: he had a revelation of God who strengthened his faith. The spiritual sacrifice was accepted in the heaven while, down on the earth, the stone altar received the animal sacrifice. From the New Testament perspective we have here a distant prophetic indication of the God's Lamb who would take away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29)<sup>65</sup>. Abraham's faith became the onset of faith for the new people and preparation to accept more Yahweh's initiatives. The experience of Abraham in the land of Moriah had, essentially, pedagogical meaning. On the one hand the patriarch realized the magnitude of Divine demands, and on the other hand he experienced Yahweh's redemptive power which can always save man from any tribulation.

The venue of the sacrifice became of special importance which resulted in the name given to it by Abraham: "Abraham called this place 'Yahweh provides'; and hence the saying today 'On the mountain Yahweh provides'" (v. 14). The patriarch behaved according to what he had experienced. He realized that it was a place where he had met God in a special way therefore he did not hesitate to name it "God will see". The patriarch may have the contact with God before but the experience in the land of Moriah became a new discovery for him, the discovery of God's presence, and undoubtedly a source of joy from finding such friendly power.

The tribal tradition preserved the significant experience of Abraham residing in Canaan. At that time the territory did not belong yet to Abraham's descendants – that would happen at Joshua's times. The experience was commemorated almost 1000

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<sup>64</sup> E. NOORT, *Genesis 22: Human Sacrifice and Theology in the Hebrew Bible*, in: (ed.), E. NOORT, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, Leiden – Boston – Cologne 2002, p. 1–20.

<sup>65</sup> On Abraham's sacrifice in the NT perspective see: E. KESSLER, *The Sacrifice of Isaac (the Aqedah) in Christian and Jewish Tradition: Artistic Representation*, in: *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible*. London – New York – Sheffield 2002, p. 74–98.

years later when David chose the mount called Moriah<sup>66</sup> for the sanctuary. The final part of v. 14 already expresses the air of the monarchy<sup>67</sup> when the text in question was redacted: “Hence the saying today ‘On the mountain Yahweh provides’”. The Israelis deeply believed that Yahweh’s glory resided in the sanctuary. There a believer could meet his Creator. In this way two grand traditions, the Abraham’s and the David’s ones, were combined and the religious experience of the Chosen People became more homogeneous.

In consequence of the Moriah experience Abraham became not only a special friend but also a partner to Yahweh. How significant character he became is reflected by the introductory formula in v. 15: “The angel of Yahweh called Abraham a second time from heaven”. Therefore the experience did not finish with Abraham’s burnt offering. Yahweh’s second speech opened another relation on the event. The voice came from heaven, i.e. from God’s abode. It seems that the second revelation was even more significant than the first one, the first being perhaps a kind of preparation for the main message God wanted to give Abraham. The following verses contain magnificent message, the very heart of the whole tale of Gn 22:1-19.

Firstly, Yahweh solemnly declared: “I swear by my own self, Yahweh declares, that because you have done this, because you have not refused me your own beloved son...” (v. 16). This verse has prophetic flavor: “Yahweh’s oracle” (נְאֻם־יְהוָה)<sup>68</sup>. This formula is frequent in prophetic language. Quite exceptional, however, sounds the formula “I swear by my own self”. Here and Ex 32:13 are the only loci where God swears by himself. The expression came undoubtedly from later tradition and meant the fundamental act of focusing upon Abraham, so significant for the whole history of Israeli people. God referred to Abraham’s act: “you have not refused me your own beloved son”. The patriarch believed that everything good he had belonged to Yahweh who could dispose them as He wished. Abraham’s behavior was the consequence of the fundamental trust he had already had when he set off to the land that God would show him (Gn 12). The Moriah experience revealed the depth of his trust, a base for his future obedience as he was still only beginning to witness God’s redemptive acts.

Secondly, Yahweh strengthened his blessing: “I will shower blessings on you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants will gain possessions of the gates of their enemies” (Gn 22:17). The motif of promise and blessing appeared earlier, in Gn

<sup>66</sup> A.S. JASIŃSKI, *Jerozolima. Promień miłości Jahwe*, Kraków 1999, p. 22–26.

<sup>67</sup> The text of Gn 22:15-18 is a separate literary section, L. RUPPERT, *Genesis 22,15-18: Eine Relecture von Gen 22 aus joschijanischer Zeit*, in: (ed.), L. RUPPERT, *Gottes Wege suchend*, Würzburg 2003, p. 111–128.

<sup>68</sup> M. FLOYD, *Basic Trends in the Form Critical Study of Prophetic Texts*, in: (ed.), M. FLOYD, *The Changing Face of Form Criticism*, Grand Rapids – Cambridge 2003, p. 298-311.

12:1-3<sup>69</sup>. Yahweh revealed the consequence of his acts. Right after rescuing Isaac, He promised the descendants numerous as the stars. This comparison was very significant for the patriarch. The nomads used to look in the sky full of the stars and galaxies. The comparison encouraged Abraham to look far into the future because he knew that Isaac would be the only heir to the promise, a helpless boy trusting his father. In God's promise one could hear the presage of the events of Joshua's campaign of subjugating the fortresses of Canaan. For those who were reading the text the promises had already been fulfilled. Israel had indeed become *populous*, living in towns with Jerusalem as their crown (conquered by David). Israel had had the fights against enemies (אֲיִבִי) behind. Actually those had been religious enemies, endangering the purity of newly born faith in Israeli's hearts.

Thirdly, we could see the universalistic dimension in Yahweh's speech: "all nations (כָּל הַגּוֹיִם) on earth will bless themselves by your descendants because you have obeyed my command". (v. 18). Israel would become an example for other nations. The blessing bestowed upon Israel would become a gift for others, too, and thus the fortune and prosperity of the Chosen People was a necessary condition for (all) other nations to be fortunate. Abraham's history, despite its particularism, was not of national exclusivism. The patriarch was rather presented as a hope for other peoples. Abraham's faith became an onset of new history of humankind.

The Elohist redactor of the Isaac's tale finished it with a topographical remark: "Abraham went back to his servants, and together they set out for Beersheba, and Abraham settled in Beersheba" (v. 19). The Beersheba motif<sup>70</sup> became a frame for the tale as it appeared at the end of the preceding chapter (Gn 21:31-33). As we know the name of the town could be translated as "Well of Oath". The oath-motif was present in v. 16 and thus it seems that the whole tale of Gn 22:1-19 aimed mainly at stressing God's faithfulness and grandeur of His promises. These eternal truths are the contents of the magnificent and dramatic tale of Isaac's bonding.

\* \* \*

The covenant of God with Abraham was the first historical event that sealed human vertical relations. God's covenant with Noah had not been historical but merely human hopes of intimate relation with the Highest. It was God Himself to evoke the hopes in man. The description of the Noahite covenant was a prelude to Yahweh's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. God's choice of Abraham has changed

<sup>69</sup> Abraham's blessing became an important factor in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, A. T. KHOURY, *Abraham: ein Segen für die Völker nach der jüdischen, christlichen und islamischen Tradition*, BK 59(2004), p. 9–17.

<sup>70</sup> In the following epochs this town became the southern frontier of Israel, P.F.-M. ABEL, *Géographie de la Palestine I*, Paris 1938, p. 299–322.

human history for ever. Since then Yahweh would repeat His redemptive initiatives, sealed with covenants with Isaac, Jacob and with Moses on Sinai. From the New Testament perspective the climax was found in Jesus Christ who established a New Covenant in His blood (Lk 22:20). The New Covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34) saying that it would be accessible for all and written upon human hearts: “No, this is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel when those days have come, Yahweh declares. Within them I shall plant my Law, writing it upon their hearts. Then I shall be their God, and they will be my people” (Jer 31:33)<sup>71</sup>. Circumcision of flesh would be replaced with spiritual circumcision of heart. In this way God’s precept for a blameless man would be fulfilled.

The unique Biblical universal perspective (in Jesus Christ) took its beginning in God’s choice for Abraham. The two descriptions of the covenant with him show the enormous importance Israel has always put on the event which enabled man to live in touch with Yahweh and to accept all His initiatives, including the ones of בְּרִית. Man sometimes failed Yahweh’s expectations, Israel would break the precepts. In such hardships Abraham was always looked upon as an exemplary and source of inspiration to renew the relationship with God. Even the book of Genesis shows Abraham as blameless (תָּמִים), another Noah. In this way Yahweh’s plan was fulfilled, the plan to create new humankind whose full manifestation would be the incarnation of God’s Son, the image of God (2 Cor 4:4).

The soteriological interpretations of the Isaac’s tale found in rabbinic and Christian sources affirmed the important significant of the story (Gn 22) for the both religions<sup>72</sup>. Abraham hoped that God might be capable of restoring life to his son. Isaac appears as the figure of the risen one (New Testament)<sup>73</sup>.

## God of Patriarchs as a common heritage of Judaism and Christianity Part I. God of Genesis (Abraham and Isaac)

### ABSTRACT

The God of Patriarchs is one of the most important problem of the Old Testament. Here I argue that the problem is actually so severe as has been before (in recent scholarship). First I presented the Book of Genesis (an integral part of the Torah), then the God’s covenant with Abraham and Isaac. The story of Abraham and Isaac shows some aspects of the nature of God (his transcendent and immanent) and his activities in the time of the patriarchal

<sup>71</sup> This topic was taken in the Letter to the Hebrews, A. VANHOYE, *Struttura e teologia nell’Epistola agli Ebrei*, Roma 1988, p. 34–39.

<sup>72</sup> U. VON ARX, *Genesis 22 in der frühen Kirche*, SScr 11 (2013), p. 51–94.

<sup>73</sup> M. REMAUD, *Isaac et la foi en la résurrection des morts*, NRT 132 (2010), p. 229–242.

period. The God of patriarchs is the God of Moses, the God of the prophets (OT) and the God of the apostles (NT). The soteriological interpretations of the Isaac's tale found in rabbinic and Christian sources affirmed the important significant of the story (Gn 22) for the both religions. Abraham hoped that God might be capable of restoring life to his son. Isaac appears as the figure of the risen one (New Testament).

## Bóg patriarchów jako wspólne dziedzictwo judaizmu i chrześcijaństwa Część I. Bóg Księgi Rodzaju (Abraham i Izaak)

### STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł podejmuje kwestię teologicznego znaczenia (dla judaizmu i chrześcijaństwa) relacji Boga z wybranymi postaciami starotestamentalnymi Abrahamem i Izaakiem. Punktem wyjścia do analizy były teksty zawarte w Księdze Rodzaju (Rdz 15; 17; 22). Na początku ukazano miejsce Księgi Rodzaju w Torze i znaczenie tego zbioru pism w judaizmie oraz w chrześcijaństwie. Księga Rodzaju jest pierwszym pismem Tory (Pięcioksięgu), a jej redakcja była bardzo długim procesem, która brała początek już w epoce patriarchalnej (tradycje ustne), a skończyła się w czasach perskich. Pismo to ma wielkie znaczenie zarówno w tradycji judaistycznej, jak i chrześcijańskiej (Księga Rodzaju otwiera kanon Biblii w obu religiach).

Najważniejszym wydarzeniem w życiu Abrahama było zawarcie przymierza z Bogiem (Rdz 15; 17). Patriarcha został nazwany „ojcem wiary”. Judaizm akcentuje aspekt partykularny relacji Bóg – Abraham i traktuje patriarchę przede wszystkim jako protoplastę Izraela, narodu, który stał się dziedzicem obietnic danych Abrahamowi. Chrześcijaństwo podkreśla w tej relacji aspekt uniwersalny, patriarcha uważany jest bowiem za ojca wszystkich wierzących, także uczniów Jezusa Chrystusa.

Dzieje Izaaka są kontynuacją historii Abrahama i jego relacji z Bogiem. Najważniejszym wydarzeniem w życiu Izaaka był epizod opisany w Rdz 22 (ofiara w Moria). Abraham został wypróbowany w wierze, bowiem Bóg polecił mu ofiarować syna obietnicy (Izaaka). Uratowany przez Pana Izaak, stał się spadkobiercą obietnic Bożych. W judaizmie jest traktowany przede wszystkim jako znak wierności Boga oraz wypełnienia obietnicy potomka, natomiast w chrześcijaństwie podkreśla się znaczenie typiczne ofiary Izaaka, która zapowiadała ofiarę Jezusa Chrystusa.

**Keywords:** God, Judaism, Christianity, Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Genesis, Torah, Covenant, Promise.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Bóg, judaizm, chrześcijaństwo, patriarchowie, Abraham, Izaak, Księga Rodzaju, Tora, przymierze, obietnica.

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