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# ABRAHAM IN GALATIANS AND IN GENESIS<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is to focus on the portrayal of Abraham in the letter to the Galatians and the book of Genesis respectively and to put it in perspective. What are the similarities and differences in the portrayal of Abraham in the Biblical books of Galatians and Genesis respectively? Three promises are made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3: land, progeny and blessing. It is interesting that, in each one of the passages investigated, emphasis is laid mainly (but not exclusively) on one of the promises. In Genesis 12-25, attention is paid to the promise of land and on Abraham as a blessing to the nations, but the emphasis is mainly on the problem of progeny. When Abraham resurfaces in the exilic time, the promise of the land seems to be the primary focus. In Galatians 3, the main emphasis is on blessing as the third part of the promises made to Abraham.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is a truism to claim that Abraham serves as an important figure in both the Old and the New Testament. The Abraham narrative makes up a sizeable volume in the book of Genesis (11:27-25:11) and he is regarded as a major patriarch even though the people of God was named after Abraham's

- 1 An expanded version of a paper read at an international congress on the Letter to the Galatians, 16-18 March 2012, Department of New Testament, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Research done for this paper has been supported by the National Research Foundation of South Africa.
- 2 I am honoured to dedicate this article to Prof. H. C. van Zyl, a respected and true scholar in the field of New Testament studies, an excellent administrator, a mature human being blessed with wisdom and discernment, a trusted colleague over a period of more than twenty years and someone I consider a good friend.

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grandson Jacob/Israel and not after him. Abraham is also referred to in the rest of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy, Joshua, I Kings, I Chronicles, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Psalms and Nehemiah). In the New Testament, Abraham plays an important role, especially in the Pauline letters (Rom. 4:1-12; Gal. 3:6-20; 4:21-31; II Cor. 11:22) but he is also mentioned in other New Testament writings. Abraham is mentioned frequently in the Gospels (Matthew 1:1-2; 3:9; 8:11; 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 1:55; 1:73; 3:8; 3:34; 13:16, 28; 16:23-30; 19:9; 20:37; John 8:39, 40, 52-58), several times in Acts (3:13,25; 7:2-32; 13:26) and Hebrews (6:13,15; 7:1-10; 11:8-17) as well as in James (2:21-23) and once in I Peter (3:6). Abraham is also mentioned in the writings of Jesus Sirach (44:19-21).

The aim of this paper is to focus on the portrayal of Abraham in Galatians and Genesis and to put it in perspective. What are the similarities and differences in the portrayal of Abraham in the Biblical books of Galatians and Genesis respectively? Does Paul's interpretation of the Abraham narrative concur with the Genesis account or not? Examining this issue and making use of the figure of Abraham will help us understand Paul's argument in Galatians better. This contribution will not deal with the interpretation of Abraham in Jewish thought during the time of Paul as is customary in commentaries on Galatians (Longenecker 1990:110-112; De Boer 2011:187-188). The aim is rather to investigate the similarities and differences between the portrayal of Abraham in Galatians and Genesis. Brief attention will also be paid to the interpretation of Abraham in the exilic literature of the Old Testament as another interpretation of Abraham apart from the one in Galatians. This contribution will also focus mainly on Galatians 3:1-14 due to constraints of time and space.

## 2. ABRAHAM IN GALATIANS

Paul's use of the Old Testament and the use of Abraham in particular has been one of the foci in research on the letter to the Galatians in recent years (Tolmie 2012:123-124). Abraham is mentioned first in Gal. 3:6: "Consider Abraham: He believes God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (NIV). Why does Abraham surface in Paul's argument in Galatians 3? Current scholarship holds that Paul reacts to a specific conviction in the Galatian community of believers based upon an interpretation of Abraham. It is possible that Paul's opponents appealed to Abraham to justify their beliefs on circumcision. According to this conviction, one is required to receive the circumcision as a sign of the covenant (Gen. 17:4 et seq.). This will result in them being heirs to the promise made to Abraham and his obedience to the will of God and thus the Torah, thereby emphasizing the works of the law (Bethune 1987:193-194; Tolmie 2005:109-110; Fee

2010:126; Ciampa 2010:159). Paul takes up the very figure of Abraham and argues to the contrary. In this way, Paul draws an alternative picture of Abraham that is different from the one held by his opponents.

## 2.1 An analysis of Paul's argument

Galatians 3:1-4:7 forms the heart of the epistle (De Boer 2011:165). Paul's argument centres around the gift or promise of the Spirit, which does not depend on the observance of the law.

Those who receive the Spirit from faith can consider themselves the legitimate offspring of Abraham, for they are the heirs of the promise that God made to Abraham apart from any observance of the law (De Boer 2011:165).

The contrast between the works of the law and the "faith of Jesus Christ" is already introduced in 2:16 and is taken up here to be argued in a new way.

Paul rebukes the Galatians in Gal. 3:1-5 for their misunderstanding of the Gospel by way of six rhetorical questions. In essence, a sharp contrast is drawn between observing the law and faith. A similar contrast is also made between the flesh and Spirit. The Spirit was not bestowed "on the basis of the works of law" but "on the basis of what was heard of faith" (De Boer 2011:173) or "believing what you heard" (Longenecker 1990:102). The works of the law (3:2, 5) and the flesh (3:3) are contrasted with believing what they heard and the receiving of the Spirit (3:2, 5). Clearly, these are mutually exclusive, with faith and the gift of the Spirit as the preferred options. In the case of the Galatians, the opposite has happened. They have moved away from faith and the Spirit in the direction of the flesh and the works of the law. The concepts of faith and the Spirit are both important themes argued in the letter (Tolmie 2012:134-136).

Then, in verse 6, an appeal to Abraham is made. Verse 6 is not a stand-alone or unconnected sentence, but in fact is the final clause of the rhetorical question posed in verse 5 (Fee 2010:128). Scholars agree that Paul's argument presented here is not easy to follow (Betz 1979:137), and De Boer (2011:190) cautions us that the analogy that Paul uses here must not be pressed too far. According to Paul, quoting Gen. 15:6, Abraham was justified by faith, which has the meaning of "to have trust or confidence in" God. God accounted this to him as rectification (Martyn 1997:298). The quotation from Gen. 15:6 is a close quotation from the LXX and is close to the Hebrew text of Gen. 15:6. For Paul, the important issue to take into consideration here is the fact that this verse does not make mention of any merit in Abraham's deeds of obedience to the law.

Consequently, the Galatians should know or recognize that those who believe are children of Abraham (verse 7) – a formulation unique to the Pauline letters (Martyn 1997:299) – including the Gentiles (verse 8). Those who believe like Abraham are equally acceptable to God (Dunn 1993:162). Thus, the children of God are not those observing the law but rather those who are justified by faith. To put it more concisely, people of faith are the sons of Abraham. The important figure of Abraham serves as proof of this claim. By way of personification (Dunn 1993:164), Paul argues that Scripture itself foresees that those who believe will be justified, and in this sense, the gospel was announced in advance. The key issue emphasized by Paul is Abraham's faith and the link established between Abraham and members of the congregation through faith. By combining another two verses from the Abraham narrative in Genesis (12:3; 18:8), it is stated that all nations will be blessed in Abraham. Once again, a close relationship is drawn between Abraham and the Gentiles. Because of the fact that they are incorporated in Abraham, they share in Abraham's blessing (Martyn 1997:301; Ciampa 2010:163). The concept of blessing is crucial to the understanding of Paul's argument. Blessing is linked to faith ("those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" – verse 9). Paul's understanding of the blessing referred to in Gen. 12 and 18 is that blessing equals faith in Jesus Christ.

After an excursion on those "under a curse" because they observe the law in contrast to the righteous who live by faith (verses 9-13), Paul returns to Abraham in Gal. 3:14. Once again, the theme of blessing is picked up. Believers are redeemed so that the blessing that was given to Abraham may also be extended to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ so that, by faith, they may receive the promise of the Spirit.

## 2.2 Considering the context of Paul's argument

Paul's argument develops from the believers' personal experience of faith and the Spirit to a call on the authority of Scripture (Longenecker 1990:106; Amadi-Azuogu 1996:112). The call upon Scripture signifies the normative value of Scripture in the Galatian community and must serve as an aid in settling the dispute with the opponents (Hansen 1989:112). What Paul did was to make use of an important figure from the Scriptures to serve as an illustration of God saving people through faith and not by the works of the law (Tolmie 2005:111). Both the authority of Scripture and Abraham as an important figure of faith are used in Paul's argument (contra De Boer 2011:189, who opines that Abraham himself is being summoned as an authority and not the Scripture as such).

Paul states clearly that Abraham is reckoned as righteous by faith in response to the promise of God. Abraham's faithfulness is not under trial and is not a precondition to being considered righteous by God (Longenecker 1990:109-11). Quite significantly, Abraham's righteousness is proclaimed before his circumcision (Gen. 17) so that circumcision cannot be counted as a prerequisite for gaining God's favour. Furthermore, nothing is said in Genesis 15 about Abraham's adherence and/or his obedience to the Law of Moses. Abraham is considered righteous only because of God's promise and the patriarch's faith. Genesis 15 recalls the incident where Abraham's belief was counted to him as righteousness preceding the narrative of Genesis 17 (Fee 2010:129). For De Boer (2011:191), Paul's appeal to Gen. 15:6 serves to illustrate that the exclusive relationship between believing and justification "has its precedent and thus its anticipation in the first patriarch himself".

In this sense, Paul emphasized an aspect of Abraham's relationship with God that was different from the emphases in Jewish writings. Here, in Galatians, the emphasis Paul laid was on Abraham as the one righteous by faith in response to God's promises. In Jewish tradition, Abraham's righteousness is also stressed but then in conjunction with Abraham's acceptance of circumcision in the covenant of Gen. 17:4-14 (Longenecker 1990:110-111). According to Fee (2010:130), Paul's argument was not a matter of convenience for him but of deep theological conviction.

In an illuminating article, Lategan (2002:121-130) emphasizes the importance of history in Paul's rhetorical strategy. In particular, the use of Israel's history as a way of Jewish self-understanding is highlighted with its focus on Moses, the giving of the Torah at Sinai and the institution of circumcision (Lategan 2002:125). According to Lategan (2002:128), Paul offers an alternative point of orientation in the figure of Abraham rather than Moses. So, what Paul did was to appeal to the history of God's people (in this case Abraham) and to argue a theological point that the new salvation brought about by faith in Christ does not depend on observing religious customs but rather on the faithful acceptance of his promises (Lategan 2002:127-128). This can be seen in Abraham who, from a historical perspective, preceded Moses and the law. Equally important, he was justified by faith before he was circumcised. Thus, Abraham serves as an example of someone who is justified by faith without the law or the observance of religious practices.

Of course, Paul's argument must be understood and appreciated in the context of the first century. In this case, Punt (2006:88-91) explains the first century as one in which, on the one hand, the Scriptures were considered to be sacred and normative, but at the same time, it was also considered

as a living text open to contemporisation. Because the Scriptures were seen as inspired God-given texts, they were an inexhaustible fountain of truth. Furthermore, in early Judaism, the notion existed that the exegete of Scripture was also inspired, which means that layers of textual meaning not previously explained exegetically may be discerned (Punt 2006:90).

For these reasons, the way in which Paul argued his case is not foreign to the way in which Scripture functioned or was interpreted. Making use of the figure of Abraham, but interpreting him from quite a different point of view than that of his opponents, Paul built an impressive and convincing argument from the authoritative Scriptures. Furthermore, Paul's style was probably known to the readers via Greco-Roman rhetorical techniques, which they would have understood (Longenecker 1990:99).

### 3. ABRAHAM IN GENESIS

Irrespective of the angle from which one approaches the patriarchal narratives in Genesis in general (Gen. 12-50) and the Abraham narrative in particular (Gen. 12-25) – be it from a historical-critical point of view or from a literary perspective – it is an extremely complex, diverse and rich text.

#### 3.1 The thrust of the Abraham narrative in Genesis

The Abraham narrative serves as a link between Genesis 1-11 and the rest of Genesis (12-50). Abraham's ancestors are already mentioned in the closing verses of Genesis 1-11 where the reader is introduced to Terah, the father of Abraham. They lived in Ur of the Chaldeans but eventually moved to Haran, where they settled. From Haran, Abraham was called by YHWH to "leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1).

The rest of the patriarchal narratives (Gen. 25-50) serve as an explanation for Israel's presence in Egypt, where they had to suffer the extremities of hardship as it is told in the first chapters of the book of Exodus followed by the narratives of Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

Genesis 12:1-3 provides the reader with a clear indication of what the thrust of the Abraham narrative is all about. What Abraham has to leave he is also promised. YHWH commanded Abraham to leave his country but was promised a land; he had to leave his people and his father's household but was promised a progeny and, in addition to that, he would be a blessing even to the extent that "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Abraham received a threefold promise from YHWH: a land, a

great nation, and he was blessed and would be a blessing. Brueggemann (2003:45) is thus correct when he states,

It is clear that the theological theme around which all of this disparate material is gathered is the theme of promise from God to the ancestors of Israel.

All three of these promises are dealt with in the rest of the narrative. Concerning the land, it is said that Abraham moved to the land of Canaan and arrived there (Gen. 12:5), travelled through the land in the direction of an area in the hills east of Bethel and from there he moved toward the Negev, indicating that Abraham in effect occupied the land. Later on, he had to buy a piece of land in Ephron's field in Machpelah from the Hittites to provide for a proper burial site for his deceased wife, Sarah. When Abraham and Lot parted ways, the promise of the land was reiterated to Abraham (Gen. 13:14-18).

The most important part of the promises made to Abraham is the promise of posterity. Brueggemann (2003:45) regards it as the initial promise that dominates the entire narrative, and Leder (2010:67) regards the problem of barrenness as a major conflict in the patriarchal narratives. Right at the beginning of the narrative, it is said that Abraham took his wife, his nephew Lot and all his possessions to set out for the land of Canaan. Conspicuously, no mention is made of any children accompanying Abraham and his wife. Instead, Gen. 11:30 ominously states, "Now Sarai was barren, she had no children". The rest of the Abraham narrative is all about the fulfilment of the promise of a great nation while Abraham and his wife were still childless and Abraham was already 75 years of age.

The third promise involves the blessing made to Abraham, namely that he would be a blessing also to other peoples, as foretold in Gen. 12:3, which can be seen in his dealings with Abimelech (Gen. 20:29) when he prayed to God for the healing of Abimelech, his wife and slave girls so that they could have children and thus be blessed. Ishmael, who was not the fulfilment of the promise of progeny, also shared in the promise of blessing. Later in the narratives about Joseph, Joseph acted on behalf of the Egyptians and other nations in providing ample food during a period of a lengthy and severe drought. Thus, Joseph was a blessing to the nations, as foreseen in the promise made to Abraham. Brueggemann (2003:46) interprets the third promise as that Israel's life in the world is a means and source of well-being for other nations. Right from the beginning, the nations were part of God's dealing with Abraham and his descendants. It is remarkable that the blessing to all nations of the earth is made directly after Gen. 1-11, where the nations are described as moving further and further away from God. With the nations under a curse (Gen. 3:14-19; 4:11-12;

9:25), Israel is now presented as YHWH's agent in the world bringing a blessing to the world under curse (Brueggemann 1997:498).

### 3.2 A consideration of the theme of faith in the Abraham narrative

Paul does not give an exposition of the promises made to Abraham. He is more interested in two concepts used in the Abraham narrative, namely faith and blessing. The concepts of faith and blessing should also be investigated within the broader spectrum of the promises made to Abraham.

Abraham is known as the father of the faithful but, in fact, in the Genesis narrative he is portrayed as the not so faithful Abraham. It is seen in the most important of promises made, namely that of a great offspring. Repeatedly, Abraham takes matters in his own hands by trying to let the promise to him be fulfilled by his own efforts. This is seen in his dealings with Lot. In Gen. 15 he pinned his hopes on Eliezer of Damascus, one of his servants (Gen. 15:2-3). Still later Hagar, an Egyptian maidservant of Sara, bore him a son (Ishmael); yet another attempt at fulfilling the promise of a son and a great nation.

Gen. 15:6 can be understood as a statement from the side of YHWH that Abraham trusted YHWH and would be viewed by the deity as righteous. Righteousness or justice is often regarded as ethical norms in Israel living up to certain ways of behaviour in the realm of human relationships. In Gen. 15, it seems that righteousness has the connotation of a disposition or attitude towards God and not only the appropriate behaviour in human relationships (Birch 1999:82).

Yet, Abraham is seen as the father of the faithful. He trusted YHWH in forsaking everything and venturing into the unknown with only the promise of God to rely on. His dramatic obedience in the events concerning the "binding of Isaac" is enduring evidence of his faith. In Gen. 15:6, a profound statement is made in connection with Abraham's faith.

According to Von Rad (1975:171), "faith" is indeed a key word in the Abraham narrative, even though it occurs only once (Gen. 15:6). According to Von Rad (1975:171), to have faith in Hebrew means "to make oneself secure in YHWH" or to "fix oneself on YHWH" (Von Rad 1981:185). Abraham directed his faith to something in the future – the promise of posterity – and he believed it to be something real and "made himself secure" in it. So, Abraham's faith was directed primarily to YHWH and his promises. There was nothing in himself that Abraham could have looked to "to make himself secure". Abraham did not base his faith upon "new generative

powers in his loins” and he did not have any new expectations for Sarah (Brueggemann 1982:144). Rendtorff (2005:27) sees Abraham’s faith as his confidence in the reliability of the promises and the guidance of God. To believe means “to rely on someone”, “to give credence to a message”, “to consider it to be true” or “to trust someone” (WBC). Faith is the correct response from man to God’s revelation and is therefore an act of trust.

The next verb is equally important. That Abraham believed was “reckoned” or “counted” as righteousness. It may be that a cultic background where priests approved of an offering is assumed (Von Rad 1981:184) or where it is declared acceptable. According to Rendtorff (2005:27), the phrase “and he reckoned it to him as righteousness” can be interpreted in two ways. It may mean that God counted Abraham’s faith as righteousness, but it may also mean that Abraham recognized and acknowledged God’s promise as an expression of God’s righteousness (Rendtorff 2005:27). Whatever the case may be, it signifies trust between both parties (Birch 1999:79).

Righteousness is a term that expresses relationship. Thus, a man is called righteous when he conducts himself properly with reference to an existing communal relationship that does justice to the claims this relationship makes on him (Von Rad 1981:185). In this text, faith/trust is regarded as the quality that makes a person righteous in his relationship with God.

The context of Gen. 15:6 is also important. Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. This utterance is made in the context of Abraham’s doubt as to whether God’s promise of a progeny would come true. God’s reiteration of his promise is then strengthened by a covenant ceremony (Gen. 15:9-18). Faith needs to be strengthened, and that is done by a ceremony of making a covenant. The covenant is a response to Abraham’s willingness simply to believe the promises YHWH made to him (Birch 1999:79).

### 3.3 A Consideration of the theme of blessing in the Abraham narrative

Brueggemann (1997:165, 168) describes blessing as the bestowal of life force, birth, reproduction, energy, prosperity, abundance, well-being. In the Abraham narrative, blessing is comprised of especially four elements: progeny, land, prosperity and peace (Jung 2011:147-149).

Not only the blessed one receives the blessing. In many cases in the Old Testament, the associated ones, such as, family, friends, neighbours, community, even animals, and possessions also share the blessing with

the blessed one. They participate in and enjoy the blessing together (Jung 2011:154). Blessing is also seen as reciprocal. This applies to human relationships and the relationship between human beings and God (Jung 2011:168). It goes without saying that God is regarded as the ultimate source of blessing. It is clear that blessing is seen very much in material terms and not as something spiritual.

### 3.4 Abraham in the rest of the Old Testament

It is interesting that Abraham is not that prominent in the rest of the Old Testament. He is mentioned in the Psalms, but then he resurfaces in the exilic prophetic literature (Is. 41:8; 51:2; 63:16; Jer. 33:26; Ezek. 33:24; Micah 7:20). Therefore, it would be worthwhile to take a closer look at the way in which Abraham was viewed in exilic times.

### 3.5 Abraham read against an exilic background

Rendtorff (2005:448) remarks how often theological reference to the patriarchs is connected with the promise of land. There is little doubt that the experience of the exile affected the life, thought and religious convictions of Judah in a major way. Not only did they lose the kingdom of David with all the promises attached to it, but the exile also had a grave effect on the way Judah thought of YHWH, their God since times immemorial. The nagging question they had to answer was whether YHWH was defeated by Marduk, the chief god in the Babylonian pantheon of gods now that the temple – the dwelling place of YHWH – was devastated (Brueggemann 1997:149-150; Becking 1999:4-5). The exile also affected the psyche of the Judeans. To be exiled is an experience of displacement involving a sense of severe loss. They were homesick for Jerusalem. There was a depressing sense of helplessness or inability to have an influence on the course of political events. There was bitterness toward those who stayed behind, and they suffered from a severe sense of guilt (Albertz 2003:104-105). Moreover, they also lost the land they had once entered as a living proof of the fulfilment of a promise YHWH had made to them as far back as Abraham together with promises of abundant fruitfulness, a land flowing with milk and honey.

In Ezekiel 33:24-26, Abraham and the land are linked explicitly to the situation of the exile. The mere mention of Abraham would have brought back more memories than that of the figure of Abraham alone. The narratives connected with Abraham will also be recalled. Tiemeyer's (2008:65) conclusion is that the character of Abraham is an important and a recurring theme in exilic Judahite texts. Especially the land is emphasized;

hence, the relevance of the promise of land made to Abraham is apparent. Abraham was a foreigner to whom God himself made the promise of land to him and his descendants. The exiles who had been deprived of their land could now hold on to the promise of the land once made to Abraham. So, since Abraham was only one man when the land was given to him, the people remaining in the land believed that, although they were few, they could lay claim to the land (Terblanche 2011:255).

### 3.5.1 The promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3)

In this regard, the promise made to Abraham in the programmatic text of Genesis 12:1-3 becomes relevant. A threefold promise was made to Abraham: an unidentified land, fatherhood of a great nation and the blessing of the nations of the earth through him (Gen. 12:1-3).

Two matters are significant for the purpose of this investigation: first, the promise of land, and second, the location of the promised land. Significantly, the promise of land comes first. Without land on which to make a living, a great many offspring would have no meaning. The promise of land was made when Abraham was still outside the land. Later history of Abraham shows that Abraham occupied only a small part of the land, which, as a matter of fact, he had to buy from the original owners. Although in Deuteronomistic circles the conditional promise of land may have been in jeopardy during the time of the exile, there was another promise of land that the people could rely on – the unconditional promise of the land made to Abraham. As Abraham lived by the promise of land, the exiled people would also. The land may have been lost to Judah in the harsh reality of the exile, but the promise YHWH made to Abraham would have been kept. The promise of land to Abraham was made unconditionally, that is, without the claim of obedience to the Torah; therefore, Israel could hope to be restored to the land because of God's faithfulness to his promise made to Abraham (Brueggemann 2003:47). However, one must not think that the mentioning of land in the first place renders the second part unimportant. The exiles would have recognized themselves as the descendants of Abraham as a fruit of the promise of a great offspring.

Brueggemann (2008:270) asks the question to whom the promise of land is addressed. He answers by pointing out that a promise of land is made to those without land. He then goes on to identify four possible candidates, all of them considered landless. He mentions nomads, slaves and peasants as likely candidates, but then, interesting enough, also includes exiles. In this regard, Brueggemann (2008:271) argues that, since the final form of the Old Testament text was completed in the sixth century exile,

we may imagine that the land promises in the final form of the text are addressed to displaced and deported Jews who have been scattered into other lands and who yearn for a return home to the land.

According to Brueggemann, even though the land promises are much older than the sixth century, they could be re-heard in a second listening. What happened was that the land promise made once, which was fulfilled with Israel's initial occupation of the land when it was said that YHWH gave them rest (Jos 21:43), became the ground for hope for the people who were exiled later. YHWH's promise of the land received a new meaning in the context of the people outside the land during the Babylonian exile. This may be alluded to in Isaiah 41:8, which says that, as YHWH took Abraham from the ends of the earth, he would bring the seed of Abraham back to the land from which they were taken into exile (Terblanche 2011:272).

### 3.5.2 The motif of entering and re-entering the land

There is an interesting motif of ancestral entering and re-entering the land. The story of Abraham is a story of constant migration: from Ur to Haran, Canaan, the Negev, Egypt and then back to the Negev, to Beth-El and eventually to Hebron. In Genesis 11:28-12:9, Abraham receives a calling from God to leave Ur in Chaldea to an unknown land promised to him. It is likely that this calling from Ur is an allusion to the people in exile calling from Babylon (Tiemeyer 2008:54). Just as Abraham had once been called from Ur, the exiles were called from Babylonia back to Judah. It is also interesting to note that Abraham moved into the land without any military actions or aggressive invasion of the land, just as the Judeans re-occupied the land when they returned from exile. Of particular interest is the journey from Canaan to Egypt recorded in Genesis 12:10-20. It is clear that Abraham did this in contradiction to YHWH's wish. However, YHWH intervened in Egypt, and Abraham returned to the land once again. According to Albertz (2003:259), this incident serves as a critique on Judeans who emigrated to Egypt in exilic times. Clearly, the intent of Abraham's stay in Egypt is to show that Egypt was not the place to stay – the land promised to them was the place where they belonged. The mention of Egypt would certainly bring back memories of Israel's stay in and subsequent deliverance from Egypt. When one reads this narrative against the background of the exile, Abraham's move to Egypt may also serve as a metaphor for the stay in exile. So, just as Abraham, the founding father of the people of Judah, once moved to Egypt but re-entered the land under the guidance of YHWH, so the exiled people would also again re-enter the land from exile.

## 4. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

### 4.1 Similarities

While the theme of faith is not the primary focus in the Abraham narrative, it is nevertheless an important sub-theme. Genesis 15:6 is of paramount importance in the Abraham narrative. In a simple sentence consisting of only five words, a major statement about Abraham is made. He believed YHWH and that was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Paul's interpretation of Gen. 15:6 not only fits his purpose for the problem he addresses in Galatia, but it is also a legitimate text to quote. This statement was made exactly in a context where Abraham doubted the promises God had made to him. There was really no merit in Abraham upon which God could have reckoned him to be justified. Not even faith itself can count as merit in Gen. 15. Although it might be that, in some other cases, Paul makes use of passages in the Old Testament that have the same terminology as the one he uses in his argument, even if the meaning of the terms in the cited text are different from the meaning Paul intends (De Boer 2011:191), in this case, Paul is true to the theological point Gen. 15 wants to make. This appeal to God's faithfulness, irrespective of the people's obedience to the Torah of Moses, was also made in exilic times when the promise of land was reclaimed not from the conditionality in Deuteronomistic circles, but from the unconditional promise made to Abraham.

If one considers the broader framework of the curse upon the nations in Gen. 1-11, which is reversed with the promise of the blessing in Gen. 12:2-3, the curse pronouncement in Gal. 3:13 takes on an added meaning. To live by faith is to reverse the curse upon the nations.

### 4.2 Differences

A major difference concerns the concept of blessing. Blessing in Genesis, and in the rest of the Old Testament, for that matter, is understood in material terms. In Genesis, blessing has the notion of acting on behalf of and to the benefit of foreign nations. Already in the Abraham narrative are examples of how Abraham came into contact with foreign kings. In Galatians, the concept of blessing taken from Abraham is equalled to the gospel. Even though there is a difference in meaning, there is also a relationship between Galatians and Genesis 12:3. Genesis 12:3 opens up the way to and for other nations beyond the chosen people. In this sense, Brueggemann (2003:48) regards Gen. 12:3 as an "immense ecumenical venture" that broadens the horizons of Israel beyond itself.

De Boer (2011:190) draws our attention to a difference between Abraham and the Christians. According to De Boer (2011:190), the “believing of Christians means placing trust in Christ whereas the believing of Abraham means giving credence to God”. Thus the believing of Christians is not only different in kind, but also directed to Christ and not to God.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Three promises are made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3: land, progeny and blessing. It is interesting that, in each one of the passages investigated, emphasis is laid mainly (but not exclusively) on one of the promises. In Genesis 12-25, attention is paid to the promise of land and to Abraham as a blessing to the nations, with the emphasis on the problem of progeny that eventually resulted in the birth of Isaac. When Abraham resurfaces in the exilic time, little attention is paid to either the issue of progeny or the idea of blessing – the emphasis is on the issue surrounding the promise of the land. When Paul makes use of Abraham in Galatians 3, the land promise is not used, and while the promise of progeny is mentioned in Galatians 3:7 (“those who believe are children of God”), the main emphasis is on blessing as the third part of the promises made to Abraham (“So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal. 3:9). Abraham is an important figure in both the Old and the New Testament. Especially the promises made to him received attention by the Biblical authors. This contribution demonstrates how the different promises function in different parts of the canon of Scripture. In the Old Testament, progeny and land are emphasized. When Paul makes use of Abraham, he uses the promise of blessing in his argument.

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*Keywords*

Abraham

Genesis

Galatians

*Trefwoorde*

Abraham

Genesis

Galasiërs