3

THE KERYGMA OF THE YAHWIST

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The task of recognizing anew the relationship of the Testaments to one another is a special challenge for today's exegesis, and it involves the exegesis of both Testaments. The task cannot be accomplished from the viewpoint of the New Testament alone.

The fact that in the New Testament the Old is cited at every turn, either directly or indirectly, at first hinders the task more than it helps. The Old Testament writings are encountered widely by the New Testament interpreter in the form of atomized quotations, which to our historical sense do not really support what they are called upon to. Or one finds historical reconstructions, made from some simple series in the Old Testament, which are by no means historically verifiable for us in the same way. This difficulty which results from the ancients' manner of dealing with texts, makes it well-nigh impossible to make the relationship of the Testaments comprehensible by using only Old Testament documents as they are seen though New Testament eyes.

Nonetheless, the New Testament's recourse to these documents is not only frequent it seems to be indispensable. Even in the Gospel of John people refuse to accept who Jesus of Nazareth is except upon testimony of the "Scriptures." That in Jesus the righteousness of God comes to light in quite a new way cannot be explained without adding "the Law and the Prophets." What takes place in "faith" must in some sense parallel what happened to the Patriarchs of Israel if it is to keep to the narrow path between fanaticism and dead orthodoxy. Without the Old Testament, who Jesus is apparently remains completely hidden. The same is true for what is given in him as gift and also the knowledge of how man is to be rightly
related to him. Whether and why the reference of the New Testament to the Old is unavoidable will have to be put to the test afresh when we study the New Testament, but we ought to keep the question in mind now as we study the Old. In order to understand the New Testament witnesses we of course must take into account their ancient method of viewing texts. But first, in order to understand fully what it is to which the New Testament bears witness, we will have to recognize the Old Testament anew, in its own function as a witness, and the pertinence of that to our times.

And so, we begin by trying to understand the Old Testament kerygmata in their historical contexts, primarily the great literary works in which the proclamation of ancient Israel was compiled as "Scripture" to accompany Israel permanently. Simple analysis of language, even when supplemented by inquiry into the Old Testament world of ideas and literary conventions, will not give us the key to Old Testament intents. To find those intents we must take a different approach, concerned as much with the externals—like historical context and literary forebears—as with the internals of the texts; and once we have isolated the Old Testaments intents, we may relate them to those of the New. As an example, let us choose the Yahwist's material, which is the basic, supporting stratum of Israel. It has determined to a great extent the outline and theme of the present-day Pentateuch, the Torah, as the basic canon. "It may be said without exaggeration that, of all that the Pentateuchal narrative sets forth, it contains what is of greatest moment theologically."\textsuperscript{9}

In order to determine the message of the Yahwist, a few preliminary questions need to be clarified.

1. What is the extent of the literary corpus? We will proceed from a critically assured minimum. Following the example of others\textsuperscript{10} Gustav Hölscher\textsuperscript{11} thought he could trace the Yahwist beyond the Pentateuch, through the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, as far as 1 Kings 12:19—that is, as far as the crumbling of the Davidic kingdom after the death of Solomon. However, not only does the disparateness of the materials which have been assimilated and the linguistic usage of each resist the view of a unified Yahwistic Enneateuch, but there is, above all, an impossible diversity in the way pieces of material are linked together in the various parts\textsuperscript{12}. The latter is true even of Joshua\textsuperscript{13}. To be sure, Gerhard von Rad prefers to maintain a Hexateuch, because he sees the conquest tradition as the "basic scaffold" which supports the whole of the Yahwistic work\textsuperscript{14}. Certainly a close connection with the exodus and conquest traditions will have to be assumed for the Yahwist\textsuperscript{15}, but our question about his real intent will demonstrate his striking lack of interest in the conquest\textsuperscript{16}. For this reason we must accept Noth's compelling literary-critical proposals about the Book of Joshua; and from here on instead of the Hexateuch we will speak in terms of the Tetrateuch as the realm of the Yahwist's work. This means that the Yahwist's last large complex is the Balaam narrative, to which belongs Numbers 25:1-5, the brief passage concerning Israel's apostasy to Baal Peor.

Whether a few additional sentences in Numbers 32:1, 16, 39-42\textsuperscript{17} should be ascribed to him or not depends also on the question of just how much interest in the conquest tradition the Yahwist has and whether the conclusion of his work is, therefore, viewed as fragmentary\textsuperscript{18}. His main interest, in any case (as will be demonstrated in what follows), ends with the Balaam narrative in Numbers 22 and 24. Prior to this and a few other passages from the conquest tradition, he treats the Sinai tradition, with surprising brevity. On the other hand, the narratives of the exodus from Egypt and, above all, the patriarchal narratives are given a much more extensive form. Quite distinctive pictures of human history preface the whole. Thus the object of our investigation is the material in the Tetrateuch from Genesis 2:4b to Numbers 25:5, which nowadays is generally held by literary critics to be Yahwistic.

2. What historical situation does the Yahwist address? If, indeed, he does proclaim a kerygma, it will be important to clarify just what circle of readers his work is aimed at. Two considerations will serve initially in drawing rough limits. The various traditions of the Israelite tribes have long since grown together into a complete unity. The Sinai tradition of the southern tribes is connected with...
the exodus tradition of the Joseph tribes; the God of the Fathers is identical with Yahweh, the God of Israel, and is unhesitatingly so named; the originally varied patriarchal traditions, with their diffuse centers of tradition, have long since become the common property of all the tribes. Coalescence of the traditions to such an extent is conceivable, at the earliest, toward the end of the premonarchical period. On the other hand, there is nowhere any evidence of conflict between two Israelite states such as occurred after Solomon's death. Thus the period we have in view is generally that of David's and Solomon's empire.

This becomes clearer when the historical scope of the work is defined. If one asks which peoples besides Israel the narrator is interested in, the answer is the very peoples which, according to 2 Samuel 8, were annexed in the reign of David: the Philistines (Gen. 26:1-8; compare 10:14), the Moabites (Num. 22:24;17) and Ammonites (Gen. 19:37-38), the Arameans (Gen. 24:10;31:20), the Edomites (Gen. 25:23,30; compare 27:39 f.; Num. 24:18), and the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8-16), in addition to the Canaanites, who were conquered and incorporated into David's empire (Gen. 9:25). The great kingdoms of Babylon and Egypt are, for the author, powers long since impotent (Gen. 11:7 ff.; Ex. 14:13). At no time except during the reigns of David and Solomon does this political outlook obtain.

To be sure, one prefers to think of Solomon's era rather than David's. The high literary culture which the Yahwist shows suggests it. One finds precisely this kind of culture in the throne-succession narrative from Solomon's time. Moreover, there is the broad scope of international development, reflected in the Yahwist's enumeration of peoples in Genesis 10:8-19, 21, 25-30, and, finally, "the almost completely cultless atmosphere" which seems "like a breath of air from the freethinking era of Solomon."

A concrete allusion to Solomon's time can be seen in the saying of Isaac concerning Esau, in Genesis 27:39 f., where the qualification in verse 40b looks like a postscript: "... but it will come to pass when you 'rebel' [?], you shall break his yoke from your neck." This is a glance at the Edomite prince, Hadad, who, according to 1 Kings 11:14-22 and

The Kerygma of the Yahwist

25b, rebelled and brought a part of the Edomite kingdom back under Edomite control.

Thus we must look, most probably, for the Yahwist and his readers in the period following David's death and preceding the beginning of the reign of Rehoboam, not too distant from courtly circles—in any case, in Judah. For in the Yahwist's Joseph-story, Judah is the firstborn and the spokesman (Gen. 37:26; 43:3; 44:16-34); the Hebron-Mamre traditions are found only in the Yahwist; and the Jacob traditions of Bethel and Shechem are assigned by him (in Gen. 12:6, 8) also to Abraham, who belongs to the south. The history of Judah itself comes into the foreground in Genesis 38.

Thus we presume that the Yahwist is in the vicinity of the Solomonic capital in times when, perhaps, the first crises of the empire were already appearing on the horizon. Nonetheless, as a whole, the feeling of security and superiority is even stronger than in David's days, being sustained by the growth of wealth through peaceful trade, and by great cultural access—from architectural monuments to proverbial wisdom and literary brilliance. What does the Yahwist have to say to the Israel of this time?

3. Before we can pursue that question we must explain how, in such a work, we can ascertain whether there is any kerygmatic intention (Verkündigungswille) peculiar to it, and how it may be found. And the question is an exacting one because the Yahwist is a faithful compiler who does very little editing of material transmitted to him.

Nonetheless, his own testimony is reflected in certain variants and additions, as far as these are apparent by comparison with parallel texts—primarily with the Elohist's. His viewpoint becomes even more distinct in the way he puts together material passed on to him, and the way he allots it weight: large blocks of preliterary tradition are sometimes represented profusely, such as the patriarchal tradition, and sometimes scantily, as with the Sinai tradition. Granted, there is no bulletproof evidence that this weighting is the Yahwist's, since we cannot know what was sacrificed by later editors who interlaced his work with the Elohist and still later with the Priestly document. Independent of this, however, is the design as a
whole and, above all, the state of the great introductory edifice, the so-called primal history (Urgeschichte), which is generally viewed as the Yahwist's own literary achievement. This primal history is of extraordinary significance for determining his message, though most research up to now has succumbed to the danger of seeing it in isolation.

That the Yahwist, with his compiling, ordering, selecting, and enlarging of the tradition, means to proclaim a message first becomes undoubtedly clear in a few freely formulated insertions. He has inserted them at decisive transitions to illuminate the composition as a whole and to clarify the small variations in the tradition. Such highly persuasive bridge-passages can be discerned above all in Genesis 6:5-8; 8:21 f.; 12:1-4a; and 18:17-18, 22b-33. The passage 12:1-3 is prominent among these from the very outset because it forms the transition from the history of man to the patriarchal history; 6:5 ff. and 8:21 f. only indirectly prepare for it; 18:17 ff. continues it.

In view of this evidence for his literary methodology, therefore, it will be advisable to begin the search for the kerygma of the Yahwist with 12:1-3. The composition as a whole, of course, must confirm and elucidate the kerygma; it must give evidence of being a complete and unified redaction.

II

We turn now to the text of Genesis 12:1-4a. After the Yahwist has acquainted his readers with Abraham's homeland, family, and above all with Sarai his childless wife in 11:28-30, he continues in 12:1-4a:

(1) And Yahweh spoke to Abram: "Go from your land, from your kindred and from your father's house to the land which I will show you;

(2) Thus I will make you a great people and bless you, and I will make your name great, so that you will effect blessing.

(3) I will bless those who bless you, but whoever despises you, him will I curse. So, then, all the families of the earth can gain a blessing in you."

(4) And Abram went, as Yahweh had told him; and Lot went with him.
entirely clear. To begin with, the first three clauses contain promises to Abraham alone. The first clause promises that Yahweh will make him a great nation. The second adds that Yahweh will bless him—which may be a supplementary interpretation of the first clause, that is, Abraham's becoming a people is an effect of the blessing. Yet it is closer to the simple syntactical arrangement to regard the content of the third clause as the effect of the blessing, namely, the renown and superiority which the name of Abraham, who has become a people, will attain.

With the third clause, an initial high point is reached which, as such, was already prepared by the second. However, its real significance appears for the first time in the fact that a result clause or a clause of intention is added to the third statement of promise, with a change of subject: “... so that [or: in order that] you may become a blessing.” Like a preliminary announcement, the goal of the promised deeds of Yahweh sounds for the first time: he will make Abraham into a great and mighty people, so that they themselves may be a blessing. Yahweh's blessing for Abraham should have the result that Abraham himself effects blessing. How and for whom is not yet said.

Only the fourth and fifth clauses, which follow after this distinct caesura, form the transition whereby Yahweh announces his further deeds. They show that Yahweh's dealings toward Abraham and his people extend to their contemporaries. Those people, in their attitude to the people of Abraham, incur blessing or curse. Verse 3aβ stands in contrast as an exception, in the singular, so that the ones who are destined for blessing according to verse 2b might become the ones who are despised. It is assumed as the usual case (vs. 3aα) that those who are blessed by Yahweh are blessed by the surrounding world, too. Consequently, if verse 2 sets the goal of the Abrahamic blessing in that he himself will become a blessing, and if verse 3a adds that in this blessing the destiny of his contemporaries is decided by Yahweh, then the conclusio of verse 3b can do nothing less than make this magnificent offer: by acknowledging Abraham, all the families of the earth can gain blessing. The syntactical gradient observed above thus corresponds precisely to the movement of the whole toward verse 3b as the conclusio: in the people of Abraham all humanity can gain blessing.

2. How does the Yahwist come to such a stupendous utterance? Does it have any support in the tradition he inherited? In his interpretation how does he deal with the tradenda? If we are to clarify the special, dominant concern of the Yahwist, we will have to study his key phrase in the light of tradition history.

If anything was given to him in the patriarchal tradition, it was, first of all, the promise of the land. For it is precisely because of that promise that the patriarchal tradition adhered to Canaanite sanctuaries. Evidently the Yahwist knew it as the Shechem or Bethel tradition (Gen. 12:6 f.; 28:19). It is just as certain that the connection of the patriarchal with the exodus-conquest tradition was already a given for him. Now to those passing on the tradition of conquest, the earlier, patriarchal tradition held interest only insofar as it contained the promise of land. It is therefore quite surprising that this theme of the Promised Land, which was so decisive for the conquest tradition, and which the Yahwist was assuredly well aware of, has almost disappeared from the introductory words in Genesis 12:1-3. Land-promise appears only as a dim remembrance, in the subordinate clause of verse 1: “Go... to the land which I will show you.” “Show!” this is hardly the solemn, spectacular offer of land as it appears in 12:7 or 28:13 in the traditional material, whose motto is “I give.” The theme is reduced by the Yahwist almost to a footnote.

In preference, he takes up the promise of descendants. And apparently, the first promise in our passage, that Abraham should become a great people, proceeds from there. The Yahwist thus reaches back to perhaps the oldest, even pre-Palestinian, layer of the patriarchal tradition. The source of that primeval child—promise, which is linked to the command to go, may be the ancient piece of tradition in Genesis 15:1 ff., which is not connected with any Palestinian cult site.

Even the principal catchword of our key passage, the word “blessing” in fivefold variation, is understandable only from this ancient element of promise. As surely as this word carries on the Yahwist's interpretation, it just as surely is not his invention, having
its origin in the promise of a son and descendants, respectively; compare 24:34-36; 26:24 (J); 22:17 (RJE); 48:15 f. (E); 28:3 f. (P). Never is land the earnest of the “blessing”; land, rather, is simply something Yahweh has unconditionally promised, on his “oath”41: Genesis 24:7; 26:3; Numbers 11:12 (J); Genesis 50:24 (E). For this reason the promise of blessing in 12:2a is placed immediately after the promise of becoming a people. The result of Yahweh’s “blessing” is not land, but a beneficial, abundant vitality. “Blessing is power for life, intensification of life, accumulation of life; it expresses itself concretely as fertility which makes the soil productive, the herds numerous, and the community strong, populous, and respected.”42 Thus the promise of blessing leads naturally from the promise of increase to the promise of a great name. The blessing produces both.

Making these connections the Yahwist’s interpretation of the tradition distinctively begins. If, in the family structure of the ancients, blessing was understood as an immediately effective and powerful word (see Gen. 24:34-36), then here (attached to the promise of increase) it is promised to future ages. “Blessing” becomes the linchpin word (Deutschwort) in the great history of Israel from Abraham’s setting out to David’s empire. And though, in the Yahwist’s key passage God does not directly promise a “son” or “descendants” to Abraham (13:16 [J]; 15:5; 21:12 [E]) as the effect of the blessing (as in 24:36; 15:4; and 18:10), he does promise “a great people” and “a great name,” which were the effects, in the Yahwist’s time, of precisely Abraham’s “sons.” If what has been observed frequently is correct, that 12:2a speaks of the “great name” of Abraham as a gift of Yahweh in contrast to the self-made “name” of the builders of the Tower in Genesis 11:4, it is because this gift has taken on, in the meantime, concrete shape in the “great name” (2 Sam. 7:9) of David and in Israel’s fame, which was promised.

Now premonarchical Israel understood the conquest as Yahweh’s act to fulfill the promise of land made in the patriarchal tradition. This was a bold reinterpretation, but one congruent with Yahweh’s acts. In the same way, in the era of David and Solomon’s empire, the Yahwist reaches a no less bold—but also no less con-
secondarily in Yahweh's promise in 22:17. (The editorial addition in Genesis 22:15-18—namely, 17b–18—likens it very closely to 12:3b of our passage.) Genesis 24:60 shows that the Yahwist knows this ancient wish-saying from the traditions. It leads beyond the promise of descendants, with which it is joined in Genesis 24:60, since it considers their relation to the surrounding world; yet it covers, basically, only the promise of preeminence (12:2aβ)43—not the decisive catchword "blessing" in relation to the surrounding world.

The word turns up again in verse 3a, which has not yet been considered:

"I will bless those who bless you,
But whoever despises you, him will I curse."

It is this saying in fact that provoked the question whether there is not here "a cult-word in elevated style."44 Certainly, the Yahwist takes this saying from tradition; but he selected it carefully, to introduce his unique and principal declaration in verse 3b. And he uses the saying two more times—once at the conclusion of Isaac's blessing on Jacob (Gen. 27:29b):

"Those who curse you, let them be cursed,
But those who bless you, let them be blessed!"

And it also appears at the end of the first Balaam saying in Numbers 24:9b, where, aside from the fact that here the word of blessing comes first, it has exactly the same form. How familiar this word is to our narrator is also evident in his use of it in free variation in the Balaam story in Numbers 22:6b.

The Yahwist takes this saying as his point of departure. But his reformulation of it in the key passage shows that he wishes to carry it further. Besides, the fact that the word of blessing in Numbers 24:9b is placed first, contrary to Genesis 27:29b—and the fact that the parallel sentences are altered to make a chiasmus—changes the saying in three ways. The word of curse or blessing, formed in the cult and spoken by man, becomes the word of promise, spoken by God: "I will bless!" "I will curse!" It is thus added to the string of promises which begins with verse 2a. Secondly, the pronouncement

The Kerygma of the Yahwist

is more sweeping and severe: instead of "those who curse you," it reads, "whoever despises you." Perhaps even the placement of 'rr by qll (Piel) implies that not the one who uses the formula 'ādār against Israel has Yahweh's curse fall on him, but rather anyone who regards Israel, as God's people, as mean and contemptible46. This can be freely paraphrased as "I will curse the one who does not treat you as blessed." Finally, the singular is surprising46. The slanderer is considered the exception. Evidently, the Yahwist consciously modified the strict parallelism of the traditional cult word. The emphasis falls on the blessing, something not at all unexpected after verse 2b. Thus in verse 3a the Yahwist has covered and prepared his concluding sentence by means of the tradition. Analysis of tradition history thus emphasizes the clarity of the concluding sentence and its accentuated one-sidedness, showing that the history writer, as a witness, really wants to culminate with this very utterance: "... all the families of the earth can gain a blessing in you." Even though the Yahwist says he is only testifying to the will of God, which has always been proclaimed in Israel, we still have no proof that it was ever expressed this way before.

3. Our text is the key word in the transition from the history of humanity to the history of Israel. Along with the literary methodology of the Yahwist, its peculiarity lies in the fact that it is interpreted by the compilation of pieces of tradition in their context and by their peculiar wording. It is well known that 12:1-3 is not only the "conclusion of the primal history" (Urgeschichte), "but the real key for it."47 This accords with the fact that 12:1-3, with its peculiar stress, can only be understood together with Genesis 1-11. If read following Chapters 2-11, it patently confirms what its own inner arrangement as well as the history of tradition has shown, namely, that the decisive word is first brought by 12:3b.

The so-called primal history explains beforehand why all the families of the earth need the blessing. This is disclosed in retrospect by 12:3b as its hidden, leading question (Leitfrage). This can be summarized briefly here because the material is well known and the lines have been drawn often. With various sorts of material from tradition, the Yahwist shows persistently that his attention is fixed on all humanity, on the life of man himself (Chs. 2-3), on his
family and work, accords and conflicts, on his cultural and social deeds (Ch. 4), and on all the branches of the giant tree of man as far as they are known to his geography (Ch. 10), on the nations of the world in their hopeless dissension caused by anxiety and arrogance (11:1-9). “All the families of the earth”—this subject of his message in 12:3b is introduced in Chapters 2-11.

Of course, the reader knows precisely what humanity lacks. The word for blessing, which has five distinct variations in the key passage (Leitsatz), does not occur in the Yahwist’s history of man. (The formula bêtôn YHWH in Genesis 9:26b is not an exception because it is not a case of blessing for man.) Instead, the root ‘rr appears five times: 3:14, 17; 4:11; 9:25 and 5:29 (in a reference back to 3:17). After the curse has first been brought to bear on the Serpent and the Garden, it falls on Cain and Canaan, illustrative of men who are fathers of nations. Particularly in the paraphrase of the old saga about Noah, the first vinedresser, and in the grafting of the accursed name of Canaan onto the name of Ham (see 9:18, 22, 25), it becomes clear that segments of the subjected population who live in the empire as “servant[s] of the servants” have been introduced to point a moral. Curse destroys freedom: it expels man from a fruitful life (4:11) and thrusts him into aimless wandering and a fear of death (4:13). The word about the Serpent already shows how the curse brings complete degradation—bondage to the dust and exclusion from the community of the free (3:14); curse yields the land to thorns and thistles, widens infertility, and thereby forces man to vain and agonizing labor (3:17).

By a connecting genealogy, all these curse stories are linked together in historical order with ones which, lacking the catchword, deal with the same subject. The peculiarity here is that the curse must never totally destroy until the end; it is limited, so that man does not die but can continue to live for a goal yet unnamed. There is even a comforter in the midst of the toll and pain of life under the curse, found in the fifth ‘rr passage (5:29). Besides the five ‘rr references, there is a sixth which speaks of the curse, using the word qll (Pie4) which now, however, is negated (8:21). Yahweh speaks: “I will never again curse the ground because of man. . . .” Looking back at 3:17, this is like an advance notice of 12:3 in the negative.

The Kerygma of the Yahwist

and it indicates the Yahwist’s understanding of history: with man, nothing ever remains as it was; he faces real and great changes.

Not to curse the evil man does is not yet to bless him: But what to “gain blessing” means in 12:3 has already been prepared for somewhat, although in the negative, by the words of the curse: to enter a free and fruitful life, to come out of bondage, out of vain striving and aimless wandering, out of hubris and fear of death. And from the Babel story there is added, as an advance promise: to get over the inability of peoples to understand and act in concert.

These brief reminders of what is well known suffice to show, how the narratives which precede 12:1-3 confirm that the first message of the Yahwist may be seen in 12:3b.

But does this passage express the import of the entire work? This question has not yet been raised. To answer it we must look at the remainder of the Yahwist’s work.

III

If our analysis of 12:1-3 and our emphasis on 12:3b in connection with Genesis 2-11 have been correct, then it must be possible to read everything which the Yahwist compiles and presents in what follows in terms of his thematic question: How does the blessing come in Abraham to the peoples? How can they attain a free, productive life? Chapters 2:4b–12:3 have stated that all peoples are meant to have blessing and to what extent all peoples need it. But how all peoples are to find aid in life from Israel is something the Yahwist has yet to say; and this is the really essential matter for his audience in the Solomonic kingdom.

We may ask whether and how the Yahwist develops his theme in presenting the great complexes of tradition.

1. That he does pursue it further is apparent from the fact that twice more he grafts 12:3b, entire, onto the patriarchal tradition (18:18; 28:14). And it would also appear that the Yahwist enlarged the patriarchal tradition particularly because in it the meaning of 12:3b was carried out. The Yahwist’s theme appears stressed for the first time in his shaping of the Mamre-Sodom narrative. On his departure from Mamre, Yahweh hesitates, wondering whether he can conceal from Abraham the judgment due on Sodom (18:
Why ought he not to do it? The answer is highly significant: "Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation in order that all the nations of the earth may gain a blessing in him" (vs. 18). The gradient corresponds exactly to 12:2-3. With the reference to "the great and mighty nation" the reader is drawn into the present; he will soon be likewise reminded that Sodom is of interest precisely because it was the cradle of the Moabites and Ammonites, who had been incorporated into the empire (19:37-38). The essential matter, which makes silence impossible for Yahweh, follows his remembering of the promise that Abraham should become a people: "In Abraham-Israel shall all peoples find salvation."

Following this literal introduction of his theme, the Yahwist discloses in the subsequent narrative for the first time how in Abraham-Israel the blessing can come to those who are threatened with death. His answer is: in the unflagging, intercessory activity of Abraham-Israel for those who are perishing. The symbolization of the narrative is clearly distinguished by the fact that, in 18:25, Yahweh is addressed as "Judge of all the earth." Thus, guilty Sodom stands as an example for "all the nations of the earth" (vs. 18b). How could blessing be evidenced? In the forgiveness of guilt (vs. 26) and in the cancelling of the decision to destroy (vss. 31, 32). At the time Abraham's intercession for Sodom could not succeed. The task laid down before the Israel of Solomon's time is all the clearer: Israel's commission does not consist in agreeing with the well-deserved judgment on her subjects or even in its execution, but in unabating, intercessory activity she should be intent on forgiveness and forbearance.

All the other Abraham pericopes are probably meant to be seen in the brilliant light of this Yahwistic passage, even if they originally intended to say something else and even if they continue to keep their own secondary function. So the Abraham-Lot narrative in Chapter 13 says that the one blessed becomes a blessing by giving his brother free choice of the land. The story of the endangering of the ancestress, on the other side, reveals the corresponding curse: by lying and passing off his wife as his sister, Abraham brings evil upon Egypt instead of blessing (12:10-20). That the broad significance of the Yahwist's theme was understood in later times is shown by the redactional enlargement of the story about the sacrifice of Isaac in 22:15 ff., specifically, in the second proclamation of the angel. Here the question concerning the manner in which the blessing will be transmitted to the peoples is answered in the style of the Deuteronomist: "... because you have obeyed my voice." Verses 16-18 carry this out in narrative style: "Because you have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants... and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth gain a blessing." This is a guide for understanding the spirit of the Yahwist's thought in passages that are not directly suggestive of the theme.

Nevertheless, we will adhere to the narratives which are interpreted by the Yahwist himself. His rendering of the Isaac tradition is a particularly telling example, especially because here we can compare the Elohist's parallels which tell of the covenant of Abraham with Abimelech in Beer-sheba (Chs. 20-21). In the Yahwist's account Abimelech is presented at once as "king of the Philistines" (26:1). Here appears Israel's old archenemy, from whom David finally took the reins of hegemony over Palestine (2 Sam. 8:1). In a theophany, Yahweh gives Isaac the commission to take up his residence in the land of the Philistines (Genesis 26:3). In a literary postscript in verses 4 and 5, the key theme of 12:3b is expressly invoked, in the same words as in 22:17 f.

Still, the Yahwist himself has interpreted his message with much more originality. Isaac-Israel neglects his commission among the nations, and out of his fear guilt is brought upon them (26:10). After the story of the disavowel of the ancestress (now Rebekah), applied to Abimelech as a contrast pericope, the Yahwist begins anew in 26:12 with his catchword: "Yahweh blessed him" by giving Isaac huge harvests in the land of the Philistines. Verse 13 continues, "... and the man became great, and gained more and more until he became very great." Thus the double catchword, "great," (see 12:2a) appears in the narrative anew as an interpretation of the blessing. This feature is then placed in relation to the Philistines: "... they envied him very much" (vs. 14b). Next comes the quarrel over wells, in which Philistines figure prominently (vss. 15-16), and the covenant with Abimelech. Along with his accomplices
Abimelech exclaims, in verse 28, "We see plainly that Yahweh is with you"; and after requesting a covenant he concludes, "You are now the blessed of Yahweh." Here the Yahwist comes right to the point: the nations necessarily move into relation to Isaac as one blessed by Yahweh.

How does he effect blessing? Here the answer is: by concluding a solemn covenant (brît) with the Philistines in spite of their former hostility. In what way is the blessing worked out? Shàlôm is established (vvss. 29 and 31) in the promise to do one another no harm. Thus the Yahwist, recalling the pact with the Philistines, submits a second sermon to the Solomonic kingdom.

We hasten to the Jacob cycle. The Jacob-Esau cycle deserves only passing interest. It belongs to our subject insofar as the continuation of the blessing from one generation to the next becomes an important theme. For the possibility does arise among the brothers that one may lose it. We saw earlier that Isaac's blessing of Jacob in 27:27-29 is a distinct remembrance of 12:2-3, although it is formulated less freely. The strange plural forms, "your brothers" and "sons of your mother" in 27:29aβ, which are visibly stamped with the catchwords of the Yahwist's theme of "peoples" and "nations" in verse 29αα, nevertheless break the context of the Jacob-Esau story. In 28:14 the theme, formulated exactly like 12:3b, is repeated in the Yahwist's use of the Bethel narrative. In this the question of how to transmit blessing to the nations finds a further answer: in Israel's multiplying and expanding to the west, east, north, and south the point is reached where "by Jacob and his descendants"—this phrase is now added expressly—"all of the families of the earth may find blessing." Israel intermingles with the nations: this is the manner by which Yahweh himself brings about fulfillment of the blessing, even in the empire.

The subsequent Jacob-Laban cycle brings further illustrations. The Aramean Laban confesses to Jacob, in 30:27, "I have learned that Yahweh has blessed me because of you." In verse 30 Jacob takes up the catchword: "You had little before I came . . . and Yahweh has blessed you since I have been here." This time the blessing comes to the nations in the form of sheep: with his skill as a shepherd Jacob produces abundance among the Arameans. Beyond this point the Yahwist gives free rein to the narration, with its multiplex tensions. Yet at the end there exists here, too, a covenant of peace between Jacob and Laban (31:51-52).

To summarize: the Yahwist expounds his kerygma through the patriarchal narrative. He deals with "all the families of the earth" using as examples the Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, and Arameans. How are they to find blessing in Israel? By Israel's intercession with Yahweh on the example of Abraham; by readiness for peaceful agreement on the pattern of Isaac; by economic aid on the model of Jacob. Yahweh created the prerequisite by fulfilling the promise of increase and expansion. In what way is blessing found through all this? Blessing is found in annulment of guilt or punishment, in community life without strife, in effective material aid.

The Yahwist's theme has emerged so clearly in his use of the patriarchal tradition that it is easy to see what bearing it will give his use of other material. And in what follows he does not neglect to pursue his point.

2. The Joseph story is like a prelude to the exodus story. It is a capsule drama showing how, through the wisdom of one of the Patriarchs of Israel, blessing came even upon the powerful empire of Egypt. There is, to be sure, no direct use of 12:3b in the received Yahwistic text. It may be that in editing it was sacrificed to the Elohist passages which, in view of the subject, could hardly have said anything other than what the Yahwist did. In the Elohist the well known key word goes: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20, RSV; compare 45:3-13). Whether this reference to "many people" includes Egypt must remain uncertain in the case of the Elohist; see 46:3. But the Yahwist would certainly have meant it to include them; see 47:13-26.

We have quite a significant thumbprint in the scene with Potiphar. This officer of Pharaoh places Joseph over his entire house. Then 39:5 says, "From the time that Potiphar made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, Yahweh blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of Yahweh was upon all that he had, in house and field." The whole scene reads like a rough draft
of the coming activity of Grand Vizier Joseph and his salutary effect
upon all Egypt; see Genesis 41:49, 57. The wisdom given to the
Patriarch of Israel is here the means by which blessing is transmitted
—the effect is the preservation of life. Perhaps in the political
wisdom of Joseph the Yahwist wishes to hold a mirror before even
the “wise” Solomon and his advisors. Even distant empires, there-
fore, are not to be excluded when all the families of the earth shall
find blessing in Israel.

Under this theme the Yahwist also places the famous exodus
tradition which, in place of its old connection with the c~
which, in place of its old connection with the conquest
theme, receives an entirely new purpose53. Probably because of his
primary concern, he has seized upon and shaped mainly the plague
narratives. At its climax, in a scene that has no equal in the Elohist
or Priestly books, he dramatizes the message in a beautiful and
illuminating exchange.

In Exodus 10:28-29 all the negotiations of Pharaoh with
Moses are conclusively broken off: “Take heed to yourself; never
see my face again; for in the day you see my face you shall die”
(RSV). And Moses’ reply is as stern: “I will not see your face again.”
Thus, with artistic mastery, the completely unexpected is prepared
for in that final scene, beginning at Exodus 12:29, on which every-
thing now depends. During the night of the slaying of the firstborn,
Pharaoh himself, despite all that has previously occurred, calls Moses
again. And in the nocturnal audience he says, entirely on his own
(after Yahweh has afflicted Egypt with the curse because of the
despised sons of Joseph), “Rise up, go forth from among my people
. . . and go, serve Yahweh as you have said. Take your flocks and
your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and”—the emphatic con-
clusion of Pharaoh—“effect the blessing for me, also!” (vss. 31-32)

Here the password has been used that can unlock all the previ-
ous passages. One might even place above them the words “Who-
ever despises you, him will I curse.” Even here this statement has
no independent significance but must go beyond, to the point where
the one brought under the curse turns to find blessing in Israel.
Here the manner of transmitting the blessing is Israel’s worship. The
earlier scenes have prepared this meaning. Again and again after a
plague Pharaoh implores the Israelites, “Entreat Yahweh, that he
may remove from me . . .” (Ex. 8:8; compare 8:25; 9:28). And in
10:17: “Now, therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once,
and entertain Yahweh your God only to remove this death from me.”
The manner of conveying the blessing is thus similar to Genesis
18—intercession and forgiveness! The effect of the blessing is to be
the removal of the curse of judgment. And because Egypt was both
a world power and Israel’s overlord, the Yahwist’s narrative be-
comes particularly pointed for his contemporaries: in spite of all the
suffering received at her hands, Israel is appointed to bring even
Egypt under the blessing. It is no wonder that this facet of his kerygma
was thought about again in succeeding centuries, when
Israel once again saw herself subjugated by world powers54.

3. As thorough as the Yahwist has been in dealing with the
patriarchal and exodus themes, he is positively stingy when it comes
to the sojourn in Sinai55. But how could it be otherwise in light of
his kerygma? The peoples of the world, whom he dealt with in the
primal history, who made the patriarchal theme so fruitful, and who
figured so boldly in the Joseph and exodus stories—all these peoples
have no place whatever in the Sinai tradition. Naturally, he cannot
just omit the story, since it had earlier coalesced with the rest of the
themes56. He does not wish to eliminate it either, because Israel can
only be a blessing as indeed Yahweh’s people. The Covenant at Sinai
appoints Israel as a whole to the Abrahamic blessing. (Genesis
26:28 f. has shown us that the blessing sometimes comes in the
form of a covenant.) Accordingly, by a covenant, Yahweh validates
for the whole of Israel everything that was valid to the Patriarchs.
Beyond that, the Sinai story can provide the Yahwist with nothing
fertile. In Exodus 34:12a and 15a the Yahwist’s words on covenant-
making are secondarily expanded: “Take heed to yourself, lest you
make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go.”
(RSV) These are statements in the Deuteronomist’s style57. The
Yahwist could not easily take up anything comparable, and he did
not.

The situation is different with the conquest tradition. That the
Yahwist does not strongly accentuate it we have already seen and
understood58. But it was not as resolutely retrograde to him as the
Sinai story; for in it, Israel encountered the nations. For that very
reason the Balaam narrative, in which the Moabites appear again, comes at the end. Already, as the story passed on to him, the narrative had to do with blessing and curse, and chiefly with curse, which the Moabite king, Balak, demanded of the seer, Balaam, against Israel (Num. 22:6). The tradition is dimly visible in the word for cursing (qbb) in 22:11, 17; 24:10(J); 23:8, 11, 13, 25, 27(E)—a word not common in the Yahwist. Balaam cannot accept the demand; he must bless Israel, who is blessed. Israel's blessing is unpreventable. Thus Balak may come to know that in this troublesome Israel the blessing itself camps in his midst:

...how fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel!
Like valleys that stretch afar,
like gardens beside a river,
... and his seed shall be in many waters,
his king shall be higher than Agag,
and his kingdom shall be exalted.
... Those who bless you are blessed,
those who curse you are cursed.”

[Num. 24:5-9]

It is an open question whether Moab receives the blessing. The second saying does speak of smashing Moab's forehead (24:17). This corresponds to the plague narratives and to the distress of the opening of David's reign. The Yahwist is cautious in his treatment of this tradition. At the conclusion of the narrative (Num. 24:25) Balaam returns to his home, and “Israel went on its way.” Ascot's blessing has not yet come.

This corresponds to the first interpretive passage of the patriarchal history, where, in spite of Abraham's intercession, Sodom is destroyed, and to the exodus narrative, where Pharaoh and the Egyptians are drowned in the sea. In Numbers 25:1-5 the Yahwist links to the Balaam narrative the report of Israel's apostasy to Baal Peor, god of the Moabites. Consequently, not only did Moab lose its share in the blessing of Israel, but Israel herself, in her apostasy from Yahweh, missed the purpose which was shown her in the promise to Abraham. This concluding passage has a warning function similar to that of Genesis 12:10 ff., which follows upon 12:3.

These texts indicate to us that the Yahwist does not yet wish to write the history of the fulfillment of the promise. He has written the story of the curse upon man in a quite comprehensive fashion. At this point all the families of the earth are actually present. But that they find blessing in Israel is something the Yahwist must still put before Israel as a kerygma. To be sure, fulfillment flares up here and there: in Isaac's covenant with the Philistine king, Abimelech; in Jacob's blessed service to the Aramean, Laban; in Joseph's works among the Egyptians. Even the Yahwist preaches to a situation “between promise and fulfillment.”

The fullness—“all the families of the earth will gain blessing in Israel”—is for now present only in the promise, and it is placed before Israel as a task, with numerous examples to earnest that it works.

It must have been cutting to the hubris of those who lived ostentatiously in Solomon's days to learn that they had not obtained Yahweh's blessing, and would not obtain it until through them all nations had found blessing—deliverance to a free, productive life. Thus, for the sake of this high purpose, the Yahwist wrenches the blase back to Yahweh's beginnings, reinterpreting the traditions for his own time with compelling power.

IV

Gerhard von Rad has spoken recently about the “ceaseless actualization of redemptive history [geschichtliche Heilslakte]" which makes each generation view itself as “setting out anew toward a fulfillment.” This can be easily pointed out in the proclamation of the Yahwist. As we have seen, the Yahwist has summoned the patriarchal tradition into his own age in a surprising new form. And his message—that it is Yahweh's purpose to bless all the nations of the earth in Israel—itself produced echoes and interpretations in the following centuries.

Perhaps in the peculiar wording of Psalm 47, the Yahweh-king hymn, we hear an echo of the Yahwist:

Yahweh is king over the nations;
Yahweh sits on his holy throne.
The princes of the people are gathered
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to Yahweh;
he is highly exalted! [Emphasis added]
If Psalm 47 calls all the nations around the throne of God the "people of the God of Abraham," then Genesis 12:3b has apparently worked its way into the Jerusalem cult tradition. Here the Jerusalem cult poetry subsumes the message of the Yahwist under the figure of Yahweh's kingship. That figure of speech implies that Yahweh alone, as king of the nations, can fulfill his promise to them—but he will do it through Israel.

In a much more pointed manner, the Yahwistic theme is taken up by two eschatological, prophetic statements found in Isaiah 19:23-25: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship [Yahweh] with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, since Yahweh of hosts blesses her, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.'" In this reinterpretation the brutal empire, Assyria, and the old oppressor, Egypt, are drawn into a triple alliance for the first time, with the people of blessing, Israel, in the middle. The boldness with which honorifics belonging to Israel are attributed to Egypt and Assyria is without parallel in the Old Testament: "my people," "work of my hands." Thus, going beyond Genesis 12:3b, this passage declares that even the most obstinate world powers are included, and that "blessing for the nations" implies equal billing with Israel.

The interpretation of the Yahwist's message moves in a different direction in Jeremiah 4:1-2: "If you return, O Israel, says Yahweh, I will receive you. If you remove your abominations...and if you swear, 'As Yahweh lives,' in justice and in uprightness, then nations shall gain blessing in her, and in her shall they glory." The change from direct address to the third person in verse 2b makes it probable that we find here a secondary interpretation. True to form, Jeremiah says here that Israel can fulfill her redemptive assignment (Heilsauftrag) in the world—her task ever since Genesis 12:3b—only when she herself confesses God with undivided loyalty and uprightness of life.

Postexilic prophecy works from the opposite end of the promise—that Israel can become a curse, and in fact has been.

The Kerygma of the Yahwist
Zechariah 8:13 says, "And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong." (RSV) Accordingly, Israel requires an entirely new saving action by Yahweh, so that she may attain to her destiny among the nations of the world.

Through complete historical ruptures and total discontinuities the word of promise is continually placed before Israel, yet in such a way that new acts of Yahweh are proclaimed which match Israel's failure. The promise encourages Israel to live anew in face of the future which is announced.

Zechariah 8:23 leads a step further by offering a concrete example for the eschatological fulfillment of the old message: "Thus says Yahweh of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" The mission to humanity is illustrated in a single scene: one Israelite will draw ten foreigners. In this the universal extent is not abandoned but, rather, clarified in a new way. The ten foreigners "come from the nations of every tongue," as if the confusion of tongues at the end of the Tower of Babel narrative were standing in the background (as in Genesis 12:3). In a similar way, the foreigners' motive for coming—"we have heard that God is with you"—is reminiscent of Abimelech's reason for coming to Isaac, in Genesis 26:28 (J).

Thus in completely new situations the old word is presented to Israel in ever new forms. Transcending historical revolutions, the word of promise is revealed as a continuum, in which Yahweh's saving will in Israel remains true to itself for all the nations of the earth. This invariability is the ultimate reason why seemingly diverse kerygmatic constructions later on became "Scripture."

I will close with two questions:
A. Must not something corresponding to this be said when Paul, in Galatians 3:8, takes up the kerygma of the Yahwist and, in so doing, takes up a basic kerygmatic motif of the Old Testament? Certainly the manner of transmitting the blessing and its effect are now seen in a new light, when Paul understands the word of promise of Genesis 12:3b from the standpoint of Jesus and when he bears...