

גוי IN GENESIS 35:11 AND THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE OF BLESSINGS FOR THE NATIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

When Jacob left Paddan-Aram to return to the land of Canaan, God appeared to him at Bethel and blessed him, saying, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. . . . I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you” (Gen 35:10–12; ESV, emphasis added).

God’s promise to Jacob in Gen 35:11 is puzzling. Surely, the nation of Israel shall come from Jacob, but who is this “company of nations” (קהל גוים) that shall come from Jacob? Despite this enigmatic statement in Gen 35:11, few interpreters have addressed the issue.¹ Those who comment on the phrase, קהל גוים, may be categorized in two ways. First, some interpret קהל גוים as referring to the tribes of Israel.² Second, others point out that it alludes to Gen 17:4–5, where God promised to make Abraham “the father of many nations.”³ The first proposal has noticeable weaknesses considering the semantic range of גוי and in light of the parallels of the Abrahamic promise

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¹ The major commentaries which did not discuss this phrase include: Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Int; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982); S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (15th ed.; Westminster Commentary; London: Methuen, 1948); Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997); Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis = Be-reshit: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation and Commentary* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989); John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2d ed.; ICC 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; New York: Doubleday, 1969); Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; rev. ed.; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972); Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. John J. Scullion; Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985).

² G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 165; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 381; Meir Zlotowitz, *Bereishit: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1986) 1:1511. See also Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 63, where he claims that “‘nations’ must mean ‘tribes’” in Gen 35:11.

³ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC 1B; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005) 202; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 260; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Waco, TX: Word, 1994) 21.

and their reiterations in the Genesis narrative. The second proposal has its strength in relating the passage to Gen 17:4–5, but has yet to articulate the nuances between the promise made to Abraham and its reiteration to Jacob. This relationship must, in turn, be understood within the broader framework of the Abrahamic promise and its development in Genesis. This article proposes that the promise of “a company of nations” coming from Jacob is closely related to the initial promise to Abraham regarding the blessings for the nations and discusses the eschatological implications of such an understanding.⁴

II. THE UNLIKELIHOOD OF גוֹיִם IN GEN 35:11 AS “TRIBES”

Among the interpreters who propose that גוֹיִם in Gen 35:11 should refer to “tribes,” most do not offer an explanation, with the exception of Victor Hamilton, who refers to Ezek 2:3 as a parallel to support his rendering.⁵ Ezekiel 2:3 reads, “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, I send you to the sons of Israel, to rebellious nations, who have rebelled against me. . . .’” Hamilton cites Moshe Greenberg, who takes גוֹיִם הַמְּרֻדִים “rebellious nations” and בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “sons of Israel” to be appositional.⁶

However, his argument is weak for two reasons. First, scholars have proposed a few possibilities regarding the meaning of גוֹיִם in Ezek 2:3. (1) There are textual variants in which גוֹיִם either could be singular or the whole phrase אל-גוֹיִם could be an unintentional insertion in the MT.⁷ (2) If the plural is correct, then two other proposals include: (a) בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “sons of Israel” and גוֹיִם הַמְּרֻדִים “rebellious nations” are not appositional, and thus Ezekiel was sent by God to the sons of Israel, as well as to the rebellious nations (cf. Ezek 25–32);⁸ or (b) בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “sons of Israel” and גוֹיִם הַמְּרֻדִים “rebellious nations” are appositional, and thus גוֹיִם could either refer to the tribes of Israel as an assembly of nations (cf. Gen 35:11) or to the two kingdoms of

⁴ I use the term “eschatological” in this article to refer to the expectation of “a period in which Yhwh triumphs over evil, redeems his people Israel, and finally rules the world in peace and salvation” that is present in the latter prophets. This era is marked by the restoration of Israel from the exile, the renewal of the covenantal relationship with Yhwh, the rule of Yhwh or a Davidic king, the punishment of the wicked (both Gentiles and unfaithful Jews), and the conversion of some pagans to Yhwh as his people (Bill T. Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* [ed. Jerry L. Walls; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008] 25, 27–29). The NT writers believed that this era was inaugurated by the first coming of Jesus Christ, and it will be consummated at the second coming of Christ (cf. Acts 3:21) (Christopher Rowland, “The Eschatology of the New Testament Church,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* [ed. Jerry L. Walls; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008] 57, 59, 68–70).

⁵ Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50* 381.

⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* 63.

⁷ The Syriac version reads singular while the LXX leaves out the phrase גוֹיִם הַמְּרֻדִים and has אל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “house of Israel” instead of בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “sons of Israel” (Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19* [WBC 28; Dallas: Word, 1994] 10, n. 3a; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997] 115, n. 15).

⁸ Lamar E. Cooper, *Ezekiel* (NAC 17; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 75.

Judah and Israel (cf. Ezek 35:10; 36:13–15; 37:22).⁹ Without mentioning the other possible meanings and the problematic nature of גוים in Ezek 2:3, Hamilton picks up the most unlikely possibility, in which the commentators on Ezekiel have referred to Gen 35:11 as a possible parallel, leading to a circular argument.

Second, the words commonly used to denote the tribes of Israel are מטה and שבט.¹⁰ גוי “nation” is distinctly political in nature as reflected by its frequent use with מלכה/מלך “king/kingdom.”¹¹ גוי is also often paired with עם “people,” a kinship term having a much broader semantic range, which implies “a sense of ethnic community based on blood relationship.”¹² This pairing is seen clearly in the blessing of Isaac on Jacob in Gen 28:3, of which Gen 35:11 is reminiscent, as well as Jacob’s reiteration of the theophany at Luz (Gen 35:11) in Gen 48:4. Both Gen 28:3 and 48:4 use the phrase קהל עמים “a company of peoples” instead of the קהל גוים “a company of nations” in Gen 35:11. Since Gen 35:9–11 involves God’s promise that “kings shall come forth” from Jacob, גוי is naturally used in conjunction with מלך instead of עם. Therefore, while קהל עמים may have a broader semantic range to mean either “a company of people” or “a company of nations,” קהל גוים has a narrower meaning of “a company of nations.”

This is supported by the fact that although the plural form עמים is used in the Pentateuch to refer to people of the same race (e.g. Gen 17:14; 25:28; Exod 30:33) or of a different race (e.g. Gen 27:29; Exod 15:14), גוים is consistently used in the Pentateuch to refer to nations of various ethnicity as political entities.¹³ Furthermore, the grammatical constructions קהל עמים “a company of peoples” in Ezek 23:24; 32:3 and קהל גוים “a company of nations” in Jer 50:9 refer to the armies formed from a coalition of various ethnic groups or nations.¹⁴

The only other possibility of גוים referring to the “tribes” of Israel is in Gen 48:19 where Jacob prophesied that the descendants of Ephraim shall become מלא־הגוים, literally “the fullness of nations.” Most commentators agree

⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* 63; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24* 115, n. 15.

¹⁰ Eugene Carpenter and Michael A. Grisanti, “Tribe,” *NIDOTTE* 4.1261; John R. Kohlenberger and James A. Swanson, *The Hebrew-English Concordance to the Old Testament: With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 2040.

¹¹ Daniel I. Block, “Nations/Nationality,” *NIDOTTE* 4.966.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ גוים occurs in the Pentateuch in 55 verses: Gen 10:5, 20, 31, 32; 17:4, 5, 6, 16; 17:16; 18:18; 25:23; 26:4; 35:11; 48:19; Exod 34:10, 24; Lev 18:24; 26:33, 38, 45; Num 14:15; 23:9; 24:8, 20; Deut 4:27, 38; 7:1, 17; 8:20; 9:1, 4, 5; 11:23; 12:2, 29, 30; 15:6; 17:14; 18:9, 14; 19:1; 20:15; 26:19; 28:1, 12, 65; 29:15, 17; 29:23; 30:1; 31:3; 32:8, 43. Other than Gen 35:11 and 48:19, in which the meaning of גוים is discussed here, all the other instances refer to nations as political entities of various ethnicity.

¹⁴ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 734; William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986) 1251; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004) 383; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2* (trans. James D. Martin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 475; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 202.

on the main emphasis that this phrase contrasts Ephraim with Manasseh, who will only “become a people” (יְהִי־לָעַם). Several proposals have been made regarding the meaning of the phrase. For example, (1) Westermann proposes that the phrase is a typical formula of the promise of increase; (2) Hamilton suggests it refers to the intermixture of non-Israelite people in the tribe of Ephraim; (3) Speiser renders it as “shall become a quantity sufficient to constitute nations”; (4) Mathews notes an alternative rendering as “a whole nation in themselves,” citing Isa 31:4 מְלֵא רֹעִים “a whole band of shepherds” as a parallel grammatical structure; and (5) Waltke suggests that it refers to the name of Ephraim being used to refer to the northern Israelite kingdom, as a representative of all the other northern tribes.¹⁵

Of all the proposals above, perhaps only Waltke’s suggestion may imply that גֵּוִים in Gen 48:19 refers to “tribes.” However, it is noteworthy that the Hebrew plural can be used not only to refer to more than one of a countable noun. It can also be used as intensification to indicate that the referent “is so thoroughly characterized by the qualities of the noun that a plural is used.”¹⁶ Therefore, מְלֵא־הַגֵּוִים in Gen 48:19 would mean that the descendants of Ephraim would become “full of the qualities that nations would entail,” and not likely to refer to Ephraim as the representative of the other Israelite tribes in the northern kingdom.¹⁷

Therefore, as discussed above, the consistent use of גֵּוִים in the Pentateuch to refer to political entities is strong evidence that the גֵּוִים in Gen 35:11 should actually be translated as “nations.”¹⁸ This understanding of גֵּוִים as “nations” is further supported by the parallel between Gen 35:10–12 with Gen 17:1–8, which will be further discussed below.

III. גֵּוִים IN GEN 35:11 IN RELATION TO THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE OF BLESSINGS FOR THE NATIONS

1. *The Abrahamic promise of blessings for the nations in Gen 12:3b.* The call of Abraham in Gen 12:1–3 plays a prominent role in the book of Genesis. The divine call initiates the promise to bless Abraham in Genesis. God promised to bless Abraham and to make him into a great nation, which entails descendants and land (Gen 12:2; cf. 12:7), and declares that “all the families

¹⁵ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50* (trans. John J. Scullion; Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 191; Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50* 639; Speiser, *Genesis* 358; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* 881; Waltke, *Genesis* 600.

¹⁶ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) §7.4.3a. See also Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. T. Muraoka; 2 vols.; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblio, 1991) 2. §136f. Waltke states that in this usage, the referent is a singular individual. The examples he cites are Ps 74:13–14 and Job 40:15–19. In this case, זֵרַע (the descendants of Ephraim), is a collective singular noun. Historically, Ephraim was also the representative of one nation, the northern kingdom of Israel. Therefore, it is very likely that the plural here (גֵּוִים) is used as intensification.

¹⁷ Cf. Speiser, *Genesis* 358.

¹⁸ Although גֵּוִים may possibly refer to the two nations Judah and Israel in Ezek 35:10; 36:13–15; 37:22, it nonetheless refers to them as two political entities and not as “tribes.”

of the earth shall be blessed by him" (Gen 12:3b). These three elements of the promise, namely descendants, land, and blessings for the nations, continue to be developed in the rest of Genesis as well as in the Pentateuch.¹⁹

Not only is Gen 12:1–3 central to the development of the patriarchal narrative, it is also central to the hope of reconciliation between humanity and God. The Abrahamic promise is a reconciliatory initiative taken by God in response to the persistent alienation of humans from God in the primeval narrative (Genesis 1–11).²⁰ Furthermore, it is also a reaffirmation of God's original intention to bless humankind (Gen 1:28; cf. Gen 9:1).²¹ Therefore, the blessing for the nations by God through Abraham (Gen 12:3b) is the climax of the Abrahamic promise.²² This fundamental element of the Abrahamic promise is not only present in the last reiteration of the promise to Abraham (Gen 22:17–18), but also in the first reiteration of the promise to Isaac (Gen 26:3–4) and Jacob (Gen 28:13–14), respectively.

In Gen 12:3b, God promised that in Abraham "all the families of the earth shall be blessed."²³ The verb בָּרַךְ "to bless" is in the Niphal stem in Gen 12:3b

¹⁹ T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 98–99; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 256.

²⁰ On the one hand, the recurring narrative cycles in the primeval narrative, namely Adam, Cain, flood, and Babel, indicate the intensification of sin and the persistent alienation of humankind from God (von Rad, *Genesis* 153; David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* [JSOTSup 10; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978] 70). On the other hand, in the linear genealogies, introduced by the תולדות formula, establish the main line of descendants in the primeval narrative and trace the line of hope to Abraham, through whom all the families of the earth shall receive the blessings of God (Gen 12:3b). These genealogies seek to show the continuity with and the legitimacy of the last descendant in the genealogy (Pierre Berthoud, "Le thème de Genèse 1 à 11," *Le revue réformée* 31 [1980] 263–64; Richard S. Hess, "The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11 and Comparative Literature," *Bib* 70 [1989] 248; T. D. Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *TynBul* 44 [1993] 259; David C. Hopkins, "The First Stories of Genesis and the Rhythm of the Generations," in *The Echoes of Many Texts: Reflections on Jewish and Christian Traditions* [ed. Lou H. Silberman et al.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997] 40–41; Thomas Hieke, *Die Genealogien der Genesis* [Herders Biblische Studien 29; Freiburg: Herder, 2003] 317).

²¹ Clines, *Theme* 85–86; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* li–lii, 275. In fact, some scholars have noted that Adam's commission to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28) has been passed on not just to Noah (Gen 9:1–7), but also to Abraham and his descendants. For example, G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Temple* (NSBT 18; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) 94–96; Jeremy Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It: The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989) 28–31, 39; Gary V. Smith, "Structure and Purpose in Genesis 1–11," *JETS* 20 (1977) 309–19; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 21–26. Besides contemporary scholars, Beale also mentions two sources of Jewish tradition (*Midrash Tanhuma Genesis* 3:5 and *Tanhuma Yelammedenu* 2:12) which applies the commission in Gen 1:28 to Noah and Abraham.

²² See also T. D. Alexander, "Abraham Re-Assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50* (ed. R. Hess et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 13; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 374; Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (4 vols.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003) 1.156.

²³ Gen 12:3b מִתּוֹךְ הָאָדָמָה בְּכָל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה וְנִבְרָכוּ בְךָ כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

and in its reiterations in Gen 18:18; 28:14, but it is in the Hitpael stem in the reiterations in Gen 22:18 and 26:4. There has been much discussion on (1) whether the force of the Niphal (נברכו) and the Hitpael (התברכו) is passive (“they shall be blessed”); middle (“they shall wish a blessing upon themselves”); or reflexive (“they shall bless themselves”); and (2) whether the force of the Niphal and Hitpael is synonymous or distinct in Gen 12:3b and its various reiterations.²⁴ I take the Niphal to be passive (“they shall be blessed”) and the Hitpael to be estimative-declarative reflexive (“they shall declare themselves as blessed”) for the following reasons.²⁵ First, although there is definitely a semantic overlap between the pairs of words (גוי/משפחה, ארץ/ארמה, התברכו/נברכו, ארץ/ארמה) in Gen 12:3b and its reiterations, it can be established that the variations are intentional and bear a slight difference in nuance. For example, *משפחה ארמה* is used in Gen 12:3b as a link to Genesis 1–11, especially to Genesis 10–11. *משפחה* occurs five times in Genesis 10, of which it occurs four times together with *גוי*, portraying how each clan of people eventually evolved into a nation. It is also used in Gen 28:14 as an *inclusio* to Gen 12:3b. To show further the continuity of the later reiterations of this blessing with the Table of Nations (Genesis 10), Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 use *גוי הארץ* instead of *משפחת הארמה*. As *גוי* carries strong political overtones, it is therefore natural to use it with *ארץ*, which has stronger political connotations than *ארמה*.²⁶ Second, the patriarchal narrative repeatedly portrays how other people are blessed or cursed by God on account of Abraham and his descendants (examples include Abimelech, Laban, Potiphar, Pharaoh, and Egypt). Furthermore, Laban declared himself as blessed by God due to Jacob (Gen 30:27). Nowhere in the narrative do we see people actively seeking blessing for themselves by their association with Abraham or invoking his name as a formula and paradigm of blessing as a middle or direct reflexive reading would entail. Therefore, the passive Niphal and the estimative-declarative Hitpael best fit the context of Genesis. This understanding of the force of the Niphal and the Hitpael is essential to our understanding of how the motif of the blessing for the nations is developed later.

2. *The reiteration of the Abrahamic promise of blessings for the nations in Gen 12:3b to Jacob.* The first reiteration of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob is in Gen 28:10–15, when Jacob was on his way from Beersheba to Haran in

²⁴ A detailed discussion on this topic is beyond the scope of this article. For a summary of the various positions see, for example, M. Daniel Carroll Rodas, “Blessing the Nations: Toward a Biblical Theology of Mission from Genesis,” *BBR* 10 (2000) 23–24; John H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 393–94.

²⁵ For the semantic nuance and examples of estimative-declarative Hitpael, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew* §26.2f. Outside of Genesis, the Hitpael of *ברך* occurs five times in Deut 29:18; Ps 72:17; Isa 65:16 (2x); Jer 4:2. Of these five instances, Deut 29:18; Ps 72:17; Jer 4:2 have strong estimative-declarative nuances in their context, especially given the strong estimative-declarative nuances of the parallel verbs in Ps 72:17 (*יִשְׁרְרוּ* “may they call him blessed”) and Jer 4:2 (*יִתְהַלְלוּ* “they shall boast”). An estimative-declarative nuance also fits the context of Isa 65:16, where the remnant of God’s people declares their blessedness because God has restored them.

²⁶ Block, “Nations/Nationality” 966; Michael A. Grisanti, “ארמה,” *NIDOTTE* 1.273.

order to flee from Esau. Shortly prior his departure, Isaac had formally bestowed the Abrahamic promise on Jacob (Gen 28:3–4). As with the first reiteration to Isaac (Gen 26:3–5), all three elements of the Abrahamic promise, namely descendants, land, and blessings for the nations, are also reiterated to Jacob in his first encounter with God. The wording of Gen 28:14 concerning the blessings for the nations is the exact replica of the initial promise to Abraham in Gen 12:3 *כל משפחת האדמה* “and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you,” with the addition of *ובזרעך* “and through your offspring” at the end of the phrase. The form of Gen 28:14 therefore shows the link and continuity of this reiteration with Gen 12:3. As this is the last reiteration of the Abrahamic blessing for the nations in Genesis, it is most likely that the wording of Gen 12:3 is replicated here as an *inclusio*. The reiteration in Gen 28:14 also captures the development of the means of blessing from Abraham himself (*בך, בו* in Gen 12:3; 18:18) to his offspring (*בזרעך*) in Gen 22:14 and 26:4.

Genesis 35:10–12 is the second reiteration of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob. A number of scholars have noted the parallels between the theophanies to Abraham in Genesis 17 and to Jacob in Genesis 35.²⁷ More specifically, John Walton observes the parallels in the identification of God as *אל שרי*, the indication of acceptance of the covenant with change of name, and the emphasis on many descendants, nations, and kings will come by them.²⁸ The land promise is also affirmed in Gen 17:8 and 35:12. The elements of descendants and land in the initial Abrahamic promise in Gen 12:2, 7 are obvious in both Genesis 17 and 35. The third element of blessings for the nations is further developed in Abraham becoming “the father of many nations” and in “a company of nations” that will come from Jacob.

The promise of Abraham becoming “the father of many nations” is commonly understood as being fulfilled by the nation of Israel, the descendants of Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18), the descendants of Abraham’s concubine Keturah (Gen 25:1–5), and the descendants of Esau (Gen 36:1–19, 31–43).²⁹ Sarah was also given the same promise in Gen 17:16, the fulfillment of which perhaps is understood by the nation Israel and the descendants of Esau. However, some scholars note the parallel promise made to Sarah (Gen 17:16) and conclude that “the nations” cannot only refer to the descendants of Abraham by Hagar (i.e. the Ishmaelites) and Keturah, but has implications beyond physical descendants.³⁰ Paul Williamson argues that the metaphorical usage of *אב* “father” to portray the idea of counselor, protector, or benefactor in the

²⁷ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* 202; Waltke, *Genesis* 260; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* 21.

²⁸ Walton, *Genesis* 461. See also Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and its Covenantal Development in Genesis* (JSOTSup 315; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000) 168, n. 85.

²⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* 161 and 165; Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50* 401; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* 202.

³⁰ William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984) 73; Alexander, “Abraham Re-Assessed” 17–18; Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T & T Clark, 2004) 210.

Hebrew Bible suggests that Abraham's fatherhood here goes beyond genealogical linkage and implies that Abraham shall be a spiritual benefactor of many nations, "the mediator of God's blessing to them."³¹

Given the parallel between the theophanies to Abraham in Genesis 17 and to Jacob in Genesis 35, the "company of nations" that shall come from Jacob should very well be understood in the same light. It may be argued that the "company of nations" coming from Jacob refers to the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel. However, this is unlikely because, as seen above, the noun קהל implies a multitude being assembled.³² Two nations can hardly be regarded as "a multitude of nations." Furthermore, later on in the OT, the prophets look forward to the unification of kingdoms of Israel and Judah at the eschatological restoration (e.g. Jer 3:18; Ezek 37:15–28). Therefore it is unlikely that the "company of nations" refers to the two divided kingdoms.

In the theophany to Abraham in Genesis 17, Yahweh declared that he shall be the God of Abraham's descendants (Gen 17:8). "You shall be my people, and I will be your God" is a motif that not only recurs in the Pentateuch, but also in the prophets.³³ Immediately after God changed Jacob's name to Israel, he declared that "Israel" shall become of "a nation" and "a company of nations." As early as in Genesis, "Israel" as "the people of God" is portrayed as consisting of the physical descendants of Jacob—the nation of Israel—and a multitude of nations. The nuance between the promise made to Abraham in Gen 17:4–5 and its reiteration to Jacob in Gen 35:10–12 is as follows: while Abraham becoming "the father of many nations" may still be fulfilled through the other physical descendants of Abraham, Jacob becoming "a nation and a company of nations" can only be fulfilled beyond his physical descendants.

However, both Genesis 17 and 35 are not clear as to specifically how the multinational dimension of the promise is related to Abraham and Jacob. There are no apparent indications in the Pentateuch, or in the history of Israel in the OT, of the fulfillment of "a company of nations" coming from Israel. This promise may, then, have eschatological implications related to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessings for the nations.

IV. ESCHATOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ISRAEL AS "A NATION AND A COMPANY OF NATIONS"

In Genesis, one of the possible ways the nations may be related to Jacob is in their subjection to the rule of Israel's king (cf. Gen 27:29; 49:10). When

³¹ Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations* 158–60; cf. Alexander, "Abraham Re-Assessed" 17–18. Alexander notes that the concept of "father" in Genesis 17 most probably is not limited to physical descendants but to all who are circumcised, as well as all the nations who are associated with Abraham because he is a channel of divine blessing to them. On אב, see Christopher J. H. Wright, "אב," *NIDOTTE* 1.219–23.

³² BDB 874; *HALOT* 3.1079–80.

³³ For the phrase "you shall be my people, and I will be your God" in the Pentateuch, see Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12. The shorter phrase "I will be your/their God" also occurs in Exod 29:45–46; Lev 26:44–45. For same phrase in the prophets see, for example, Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 34:30; 36:28; 37:23; 37:27; and Zech 8:8.

Isaac blessed Jacob in Gen 27:29, he said, “Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. . . . Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you” (ESV). The last phrase of the blessing is a clear allusion to the initial Abrahamic promise in Gen 12:3. When Jacob blessed Judah in Gen 49:10, he said, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (ESV). This theme of the universal rule of the Israelite king continues to be developed in the other parts of the OT.

1. *Nations are blessed by the eschatological rule of God and the messianic king.*

a. *Psalm 72:17.* Psalm 72 is a prayer for the king of Israel that he may reign with righteousness (Ps 72:1–2). In this royal psalm, the psalmist prays, “May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. . . . May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him. . . . May all nations declare themselves as blessed in him, may they call him blessed!” (Ps 72:8, 11, 17). It is very likely that Ps 72:17 alludes to the reiteration of the Abrahamic promise in Gen 22:18.³⁴ Lexical connections include “name” (שם), “bless” (ברך), and “nations” (גוים). Structurally, parallels to the patriarchal promises are the use of כל-גוים “all the nations,” the preposition ב, and the third person plural Hitpael יתברכו “shall be blessed.”

It is important to note that these structural parallels are closer to the reiterations of the Abrahamic promise in Gen 22:18 than to Gen 12:3.³⁵ This observation is significant, as זרע “seed” in Gen 22:18 very likely refers to an individual descendant of Abraham rather than Abraham’s descendants collectively.³⁶ Psalm 72 is not only a royal psalm used during the monarchy but

³⁴ Ps 72:17 MT: יהי שמו לעולם לפני-שמש ינון שמו ויתברכו בו כל-גוים יאשרוהו; LXX (=Ps 71:17): ἔστω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ εὐλογημένον εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας πρὸ τοῦ ἡλίου διαμενεῖ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ εὐλογηθήσονται ἐν αὐτῷ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη μακαριοῦσιν αὐτόν. The translator of the LXX has apparently understood this verse as an allusion to Gen 12:3b LXX εὐλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς.

³⁵ The MT of Ps 72:17 is closer to the reiteration of Gen 12:2–3 in Gen 22:18 and 26:4 והתברכו הגוים, using the Hitpael of ברך “bless” instead of the Niphal in Gen 12:2–3, and גוים “nations” instead of משפחות “families.” See also T. D. Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *TynBul* 48 (1997) 365; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* 298–99; John Goldingay, *Psalms* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006–7) 2:393. The connection between the Israelite king as the seed (זרע) of Abraham is established above.

Other interpreters who see Ps 72:17 as an allusion to the Abrahamic blessing for the nations include: Charles A. Briggs and Emilie G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms II* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1907) 137; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 504; A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (New Century Bible; 2 vols.; Greenwood, SC: Attie, 1972) 1:526; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 80; Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations* 169–70; J. R. Wisdom, *Blessing for the Nations and the Curse of the Law: Paul’s Citation of Genesis and Deuteronomy in Gal 3.8–10* (WUNT 133; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2001) 37–39.

³⁶ Most interpreters commonly take זרע (seed) and the singular pronominal suffix (איביו “his enemies”) in Gen 22:17–18 to be a collective singular. Therefore, many modern English translations

also looks forward to an eschatological ideal king who will reign over all the earth (Ps 72:8).³⁷ In Ps 72:17, the third person pronominal suffix of the preposition (בו “in him”) clearly refers to this eschatological ideal Israelite king, a descendant of Abraham, who will reign over all nations (Ps 72:11).³⁸ Therefore, it is apparent that the “seed” in Gen 22:18 is now identified with this ideal king of Israel.

The connection between the Abrahamic promise and the Israelite monarchy is found in both Gen 17:6 and 35:11, as seen above, where God explicitly declared that “kings will come forth” from Abraham and Jacob respectively, as well as in 2 Sam 7:9, where God’s promise to David to make his name great alludes to the Abrahamic promise in Gen 12:2. The motif of the eschatological reign of Israel’s king over the whole earth in the royal psalms (Ps 2:8; 72:8–11) is also reminiscent of the development of the Abrahamic promise in Gen 28:14, where Jacob’s descendants will extend to the north, south, east, and west, as well as Gen 49:10 (cf. Gen 27:29), where many peoples and nations shall submit to Israel’s king.

The translation of יתברכו in Ps 72:17 has generally been either passive (“be blessed”) or reflexive (“bless themselves”).³⁹ Grüneberg argues that Ps 72:17b should be translated as “all the nations shall use his name to utter a blessing” to match the parallel יאשרוהו “shall call him blessed.”⁴⁰ He further argues that Ps 72:8–11 clearly portrays the nations as tributary subjects of the king, and 72:4 does not imply that the king would look after the welfare of all the nations.⁴¹

render the phrase as “their enemies” (e.g. NASB, NLT, NKJV, TNIV, NRSV). Only KJV and ESV translate the personal pronoun as singular, that is, “his enemies.” However, Alexander argues that while the word זרע is usually used collectively in Genesis, it could also refer to a single individual (e.g. Gen 4:25; 21:13; Alexander, “Abraham Re-Assessed” 24–25). Alexander strengthens his argument further by citing Collins’s grammatical analysis that the criterion for discerning whether an instance of Hebrew זרע is singular or collective is in the number of the pronoun that refer to the term (Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note [Genesis 3:15]: Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?” *TynBul* 48 [1997] 139–48; Alexander, “Seed’ in Genesis” 363–67). In the case of Gen 22:17, the singular pronoun “his” (the antecedent being זרע) is used as a suffix to the word “enemies” (אֹיְבֵי). Therefore it is possible that the זרע “offspring” here refers to an individual descendant of Abraham. Alexander adds that although the first זרע in Gen 22:17 definitely refers to a very large number of descendants, the non-conversive ו in the final clause (וְיִרְשָׁ) allows the possibility that the referent of the second זרע in Gen 22:17 to be different from the first (Alexander, “Seed’ in Genesis” 365).

³⁷ Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations* 169; Beale, *Temple* 153–54; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993) 321. Bauckham also notes that Justin (*Dial.* 121.1–2) could have followed Jewish interpretive tradition to interpret Psalm 72 messianically.

³⁸ This motif of eschatological reign of the Israelite king over the whole earth is also apparent in Ps 2:8.

³⁹ Passive: for example, LXX, ESV, TNIV, NRSV, JB, Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II, 51–100: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 17; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968) 179; Wisdom, *Blessing* 38; Direct reflexive: for example, RSV, NASB, Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms II* 137; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* 75; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990) 200.

⁴⁰ Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003) 213–14. Instead of understanding the reflexive Hitpaal as “bless themselves,” Grüneberg coined it with the term “speech action Hitpaal,” to refer to the utterance of blessing by invoking someone’s name.

⁴¹ Grüneberg, *Abraham* 215.

However, the כִּי introducing Ps 72:12–14 more likely indicates the reason that the nations should serve him because he looks after their welfare.⁴² The ideal king of Israel, as the suzerain king, looks after his vassal nations as their helper (עֲזָר) when they are afflicted and threatened by invading enemies.⁴³ The description of weakness and oppression in vv. 12–14 fits this imagery very well. Therefore, the Hitpael in Ps 72:17 may be understood as estimative-declarative reflexive—“the nations declare themselves as blessed on account of him,” the ideal eschatological king of Israel, because he rules righteously and cares for them.⁴⁴

b. *Jeremiah 4:2*. Another way in which the nations may be related to Israel may be seen in Jer 3:6–4:4, which looks forward to the salvation of the nations at the restoration of Israel. Allusion to the Abrahamic promise in this passage can be seen as follows. Yahweh promises that at the time of restoration, Israel will “increase and multiply” in “the land that I gave your fathers” (Jer 3:16, 18; cf. Gen 12:7; 13:14–17; 15:18–21; 26:3–4; 28:13–14). הֲרַב וּפְרִיָהם “you shall increase and multiply” in Jer 3:16 clearly alludes to the reiteration of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob in Gen 35:10, where Yahweh commands Jacob to “be fruitful and multiply” (פְּרָה וּרְבָה). At that time, Jerusalem shall be called the “throne of the LORD,” and “all nations shall gather to it . . . and they [i.e. the nations] shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart” (Jer 3:17 ESV).

At the restoration of Israel, וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ גוֹיִם בּוֹ “nations shall declare themselves as blessed in him” (Jer 4:1–2) when they come under rule of Yahweh at his throne in Jerusalem (Jer 3:17).⁴⁵ There is some ambiguity as to the referent of “him” in בּוֹ. From the context, “him” is likely to refer to God.⁴⁶ In the Abrahamic promise, although the nations are blessed “in, or on account of” Abraham and his offspring, Yahweh is still the divine agent of

⁴² Goldingay, *Psalms* 2.389; Tate, *Psalms 51–100* 221. Tate renders the כִּי in Ps 72:12 as “for, because,” although he notes Dahood’s translation of כִּי as the condition to the king’s longevity in Ps 72:15 (cf. Ps 89:30–32). See Dahood, *Psalms II* 178–79, 182–83. It is unlikely that כִּי in verse 12 is the protasis to the apodosis in verse 15 as the clauses are too far apart. More likely, כִּי introduces a causal clause following the main clause(s) (both clauses are parallel) in verse 11. Verses 12–14 are not just a repetition of verses 2 and 4. It may be argued from the context that verses 2–4 refer to God’s people Israel, and verses 12–14 to the nations. Contra Briggs and Briggs, *Psalms II* 135–37; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* 79–80.

⁴³ J. A. Thompson, “Near Eastern Suzerain-Vassal Concept in the Religion of Israel,” *JRH* 3 (1964) 4. Thompson notes that in most cases of the standard Near Eastern treaty pattern, “the economic and military support of the vassal was an essential element in the treaty,” and that “promises of help in time of danger and of blessing from the gods for loyal service” were written into the treaty documents.

⁴⁴ Contra Grüneberg, *Abraham* 213–15. See also pp. 471–472 and n. 25 above on the discussion on the Niphal and Hitpael of בָּרַךְ “to bless.”

⁴⁵ Interestingly, James D. G. Dunn notes that “*Psalms of Solomon* 17 expects ‘God’s eschatological rule as king (to be) manifested and realized through the rule of the Son of David, the Lord Messiah’” (*Jesus Remembered* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003] 392).

⁴⁶ See also Thompson, *Jeremiah* 213. On the other hand, *Tg. of Jeremiah* takes the pronominal suffix to refer to Israel.

the blessing (Gen 12:3; 22:18). Therefore, “to be blessed on account of Abraham and his offspring” amounts to being blessed by Yahweh.⁴⁷ Because of the other allusions to the Abrahamic promise in the context of Jer 3:6–4:4, as seen above, even if the pronominal suffix to the preposition (ב) refers to Yahweh, and not to Abraham or his offspring, it is still clear that Jer 4:2 is alluding to the Abrahamic promise of blessings for the nations.⁴⁸

The translation of the Hitpael יתברכו in Jer 4:2 is commonly reflexive (“bless themselves”) but occasionally passive (“are blessed”).⁴⁹ However, both the Hitpaels in Jer 4:2b, יתברכו and its parallel יהללו “they shall boast,” have strong estimative-declarative reflexive nuance.⁵⁰ Therefore, Jer 4:2b may be understood in this way: at the restoration of Israel, the nations will gather to the presence of Yahweh at Jerusalem, and they will “declare themselves as blessed” on account of Yahweh because of the salvation that has come upon them—they shall “no longer walk according to the stubbornness of their evil heart” (Jer 3:17). Jeremiah proclaims that at the restoration of Israel, nations would be drawn to God and be blessed (Jer 3:17; cf. Isa 2:1–4; Mic 4:1–3; Zech 8:22–23).⁵¹

⁴⁷ See also Thompson, *Jeremiah* 213 n. 28, and p. 471 and nn. 20–21 above on the relationship between Gen 12:2–3 and the primeval narrative. In view of the relationship of Gen 12:1–3 and the primeval narrative, it is clear that God is the divine agent in the blessing of the nations. Abraham is the means by which God will bring about the blessing to the nations. The divine agency of the blessing is also indicated in Gen 12:3a where it describes how God will bless or curse people on account of their relationship with Abraham. Therefore, the preposition ב in Gen 12:3b may be understood from the context as the means or cause of the blessing, but not the agent or the name by which the blessing is invoked. See *DCH* 2.83–84; *HALOT* 1.105 on the use of the preposition ב as means or cause. Dumbrell notes that the parallel phrase in Gen 21:12 “tips the scale in favor of an instrumental sense” for Gen 12:2 (William J. Dumbrell, “The Covenant with Abraham,” *Reformed Theological Review* 41 [1982] 49).

⁴⁸ Contra Grüneberg, *Abraham* 218–19; William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986–1996) 1.86. McKane argues that Jer 4:2 is neither an allusion to Gen 12:3b nor to 18:18 because the Hitpael is used in here and not the Niphal. However, the blessing for the nations is also reiterated in Gen 22:18 and 26:4 using the Hitpael. Therefore, Jer 4:2 can be still be alluding to the concept of the blessing for the nations in Genesis. Scholars who see some degree of allusion to Gen 12:3b include John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 24; Thompson, *Jeremiah* 1980; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1–25* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 128–29; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 156; F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (NAC 16; Nashville: Broadman, 1993) 79; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1999) 326; Wisdom, *Blessing* 39.

⁴⁹ Direct reflexive: for example, ESV, TNIV, NASB, NKJV, JB, RSV; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20* 324; Thompson, *Jeremiah* 205; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* 62; Carroll, *Jeremiah* 155; Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25* (WBC 26; Dallas: Word, 1991) 63; passive: NIV, NRSV; Huey, *Jeremiah* 77, 79; Wisdom, *Blessing* 39.

⁵⁰ Some interpreters who take the direct reflexive readings understand Jer 4:2 to mean that the nations see Israel as a paradigm of blessing, and thus use Israel as a byword of blessing when they bless themselves. For example, Thompson, *Jeremiah* 213; McKane, *Jeremiah* 1.86; Grüneberg, *Abraham* 218. However, the Hitpael of ברוך is more likely to have the nuance of an estimative-declarative reflexive than a direct reflexive. See pp. 471–72 and n. 25 above on the discussion on the Niphal and Hitpael of ברוך “to bless.”

⁵¹ McKane, *Jeremiah* 1.74.

2. *Nations that are called the people of God.* There are also prophetic texts in which other nations are specifically designated as “the people of God.” In Zech 2:11 (MT 2:15), Yahweh declares that when he once again dwells in the midst of Zion, “many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be *my people*” (ESV; emphasis mine). There are two passages in the book of Isaiah that have a similar concept as Zech 2:11 (MT 2:15).⁵² First, in Isa 56:3–7, the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh by keeping his covenant need not regard themselves as separated from Yahweh’s people.⁵³ Instead, Yahweh will bring these foreigners to his house, which is called “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa 56:7).

Second, in Isa 19:18–25, the prophet looks forward to the day when the Egyptians will worship Yahweh in their own land.⁵⁴ Not only so, the Assyrians will also worship with the Egyptians (Isa 19:23). “In that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, . . . whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt *my people*, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance’” (Isa 19:24–25 ESV; emphasis mine).⁵⁵

3. *Eschatological fulfillment of Jacob becoming “a nation and a company of nations.”* From the above, we can conclude that God’s promise to Jacob of “a nation and a company of nations” coming from him finds its fulfillment eschatologically when the salvation of the nations is included at the

⁵² See also John T. Willis, “Exclusivistic and Inclusivistic Aspects of the Concept of ‘The People of God’ in the Book of Isaiah,” *ResQ* 40 (1998) 3–12.

⁵³ The noun used in Isa 56:3, 6 is נכר, and it is used in the OT to refer to non-Israelites (e.g. Gen 17:12, Exod 12:43; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003] 136; HALOT 2.300; DCH 5.694–95; A. H. Konkel, “נכר,” *NIDOTTE* 3.108–9).

⁵⁴ There are scholars who think that the cultic centers for Yahweh in the five Egyptian cities were set up by the Jewish diaspora in Egypt rather than by the Egyptians themselves. For example, Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary* (trans. R. A. Wilson; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 107–8; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 318–19. However, Hans Wildberger points out that the expression of “swearing allegiance” to Yahweh has to refer “either to Egyptians who had associated themselves with Judaism or to Jewish communities that sought to win proselytes” (*Isaiah 13–27: A Commentary* [trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997] 268). Furthermore, there are no good reasons to deny that the Egyptians themselves are not involved in the worship of Yahweh (Isa 19:21). The context of the oracle concerning Egypt (Isa 19:1) makes it clear that the reference to “Egyptians” in the judgment (Isa 19:1–17), and the “Egyptians” who will worship Yahweh (Isa 19:21) are consistent.

⁵⁵ The epithets “my people” and “the work of my hands,” which are used to describe Israel’s relationship with Yahweh (e.g. Isa 5:13; 29:23; 40:1; 45:11; 58:1; 60:21; 64:8 [MT 64:7]), are now used for Egypt and Assyria. Blenkinsopp notes that geographically Assyria, Israel, and Egypt occupy the middle of the known world (as set out in the “Table of Nations” in Gen 10), “a central zone in which the Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:1–3) attains its fullest instantiation.” Wildberger also thinks that Egypt and Assyria probably represent the peoples of the earth (Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39* 319–20; Wildberger *Isaiah 13–27* 280). See also Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39* 111; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 380–81; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Waco, TX: Word, 1985) 260; Walter Groß, “Israel und die Völker: Die Krise des YHWH-Volk-Konzepts im Jesajabuch,” in *Der neue Bund im alten* (ed. Erich Zenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1993) 156.

restoration of Israel. At that time, the nations are blessed when they come under the eschatological rule of Yahweh (Jer 3:17; 4:4) and the messianic King (Psalm 72). The people of God would then consist of the nation of Israel, and a multitude of nations who have returned to Yahweh to worship him.

If this interpretation of Jacob, who was renamed Israel, becoming “a nation and a company of nations” in Gen 35:11 is correct, it may also have implications on understanding Paul’s appropriation of the Abrahamic promise regarding the salvation of the Gentiles in Gal 3:6–14 and the “Israel of God” in Gal 6:16b. Paul understands that the Abrahamic promise of blessing for the nations has been fulfilled in Jesus (Gal 3:8, 14), who is Christ, the Messiah, the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16; cf. Gen 22:18). Paul assures the Galatian Christians that they are all children of God and offspring of Abraham by faith in Christ Jesus, regardless of their ethnicity, social status, or gender (Gal 3:26–29). The people of God now consist of everyone who has been identified with Christ Jesus, Jews and Gentiles alike.⁵⁶ Such an understanding is certainly in line with what we have seen in Gen 35:11; Psalm 72; Isa 19:24–25; 56:3–7; Jer 3:6–4:4; and Zech 2:11 [MT 2:15].

Given the inextricable relationship of Gen 35:11 with the Abrahamic promise of blessings for the nations, Gen 35:11, where Israel, the people of God, has been defined as “a nation and a company of nations,” may well be an important background in understanding Paul’s closing benediction in the letter of Galatians: peace and mercy upon the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16b).⁵⁷ This view of Gen 35:11 as the background of Gal 6:16b is in line with Paul’s overall argument in the letter of Galatians, and it would lend weight to the understanding that the phrase “Israel of God” refers to the entire Galatian church—both Jewish and Gentile believers.⁵⁸

4. Israel, the people of God, and the church. Related to this study is the issue of the relationship between Israel and the church as the people of God. This study resonates with Walter Kaiser’s understanding that the inclusion of Gentiles as the people of God together with the descendants of Jacob is all along present in the Abrahamic-Davidic-new covenant.⁵⁹ Kaiser also rightly notes that in view of Zech 2:11 (MT 2:15) and Isa 19:24–24, “even before New

⁵⁶ Paul uses τὰ ἔθνη to refer to “the Gentiles,” the same word that is used in rendering גוים “the nations” in the LXX and in his quotation of Gen 12:3b (Gal 1:16; 2:2, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15; 3:8, 14).

⁵⁷ Scholars have debated rather vigorously on whether the “Israel of God” in Gal 6:16b refers to all Christians in Galatia (both Jewish and Gentile believers) or only to Jewish believers. It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in the details of the discussion. For an overview of the debate see Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990) 297–99; G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6,16b,” *Bib* 80 (1999) 205–11.

⁵⁸ My argument of Gen 35:11 as the background of Gal 6:16b is not in contradiction to Beale’s argument of Isa 54:10 and its surrounding context as the background of Gal 6:15–16 (Beale, “Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God” 204–23). Paul may be alluding to more than one OT text in Gal 6:15–16. The other phrases such as “new creation” and “peace and mercy” may well be alluding to the Isaianic texts proposed by Beale.

⁵⁹ W. Kaiser, “The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34,” *JETS* 15 (1972) 16; idem, “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of Gentiles (Amos 9:9–15 and Acts 15:13–18): A Test Passage for the Theological Systems,” *JETS* 20 (1977) 108.

Testament times, the concept of the people of God encompassed both believing Israel and those believing outside of that nation.”⁶⁰ Indeed, I agree with Kaiser that the promise is “the single, inclusive, everlasting plan of God announced and continuously expanded,” and “this promise spoke of one people—a ‘people of God.’”⁶¹ However, Kaiser, who does not include Gen 35:11 in his discussion, argues that “not even in one text” out of the “73 appearances of the word ‘Israel’ in the New Testament” can it be established that “Israel” is “equated with the Church.”⁶²

Contrary to Kaiser, I have argued above from the development of the Abrahamic blessing for the nations, especially from Gen 35:11 and the context of the letter of Galatians, that the “Israel of God” in Gal 6:16b refers to the entire Galatian church—both Jewish and Gentile believers. Just as Gal 6:16b is the only NT text in which “Israel” could very likely refer to both Jewish and Gentile believers, Gen 35:11 is also the only OT text that specifically refers to “Israel” becoming “a nation and a company of nations.” Nevertheless, this understanding of “Israel” as referring to both Jewish and Gentile believers in Gal 6:16b does not imply that God has entirely ceased his covenantal relationship with the Jewish people after the birth of the church, a notion that Kaiser rightly opposes.⁶³ As Kaiser points out, Romans 9–11 sets forth how God will still have mercy on ethnic Israel in his soteriological plan.⁶⁴

Some may argue that since the only way of becoming the people of God from the time of Jesus Christ is by faith in him, then the church, who is the body of Christ including both Jewish and Gentile believers, is now the covenantal people of God. However, the focus should be on Christ as the fulfillment of the covenantal relationship rather than the church, for the church is also subject to the same weaknesses as the nation of Israel.⁶⁵ The natural and grafted branches of the olive tree are subjected equally to both the severity and the kindness of God (Rom 11:21–24). Both believing Jews and Gentiles are the people of God only by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, who is the seed of Abraham, the true Israel, and the son of David.⁶⁶

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have seen that in Gen 35:11, God’s promise to Jacob that he will become “a nation and a company of nations” is intricately related to

⁶⁰ W. Kaiser, “Israel as the People of God,” in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers’ Church* (ed. P. Basden and D. S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman, 1991) 103.

⁶¹ Kaiser, “Davidic Promise” 100.

⁶² W. Kaiser, “An Assessment of ‘Replacement Theology’: The Relationship between the Israel of the Abrahamic-Davidic Covenant and the Christian Church,” *Mishkan* 21 (1994) 11. For Kaiser’s interpretation of Gal 6:16b see Kaiser, “Israel as the People of God” 101–2.

⁶³ Kaiser, “Israel as the People of God” 105–7.

⁶⁴ Kaiser, “Israel as the People of God” 101, 105–7; idem, “An Assessment of ‘Replacement Theology’” 11–17.

⁶⁵ See also S. Motyer, “Israel (Nation),” *NDBT* 586.

⁶⁶ For a survey on how Jesus is presented as the true embodiment of who Israel should be in the Gospels, see S. Motyer, “Israel (Nation)” 584–85.

the initial Abrahamic promise of blessings for the nations in Gen 12:3b and God's promise in Gen 17:4–5 that Abraham would become “the father of many nations.” This reiteration of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob in Gen 35:11 is a development of Gen 17:4–5. While the promise that Abraham will become “the father of many nations” may still be fulfilled to some extent by his physical descendants, the promise that Jacob will become “a nation and a company of nations” can only be fulfilled beyond his physical descendants. Nonetheless, even in the case of Abraham, we have seen also that it is likely that Abraham as “the father of many nations” goes beyond genealogical linkage and implies that Abraham shall be a spiritual benefactor of many nations, “the mediator of God’s blessing to them.” Therefore, the *קהל גוים* in Gen 35:11 does not refer to the “tribes of Israel,” but to “the multitude of nations” that would be included as Israel, the people of God.

This promise was not fulfilled in the Pentateuch or in the history of Israel in the OT. However, the salvation of the nations and their inclusion with Israel as the people of God are prophesied in the eschatological texts such as Jer 3:6–4:4; Isa 19:24–25; 56:3–7; and Zech 2:11 (MT 2:15). Psalm 72 also speaks of the nations being blessed when they come under the righteous rule of the messianic king, the seed of Abraham. This promise is finally realized in Christ Jesus, through whom the blessing of Abraham comes to the nations (Gal 3:8–16). The “Israel of God” now consists of both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ (Gal 6:16b).