1. Introduction

The proposition, first formulated by Karl Elliger and mediated to English and Hebrew scholarship by Israel Knohl, Jan Joosten, and Jacob Milgrom, among others, that H postdates P, has had wide-reaching implications for scholarly understandings of the history of the formation of the Pentateuch.¹ Knohl’s further innovation in the identification of a post-Priestly Holiness school (HS) made up of a Priestly group situated in Jerusalem that was responsible both for Lev 17–26 and editing across the Pentateuch, has contributed to the breadth of these implications.² Others have adopted Knohl’s proposals to a greater or lesser extent, with the overall result that the traditional assumption of a Holiness Code predating P has been reversed so that “there is now almost unanimous acceptance that H presupposes at least a final form of the Priestly document.”³ This rep-


2. This essay adopts both Knohl’s proposal of a “school” working within the tradition of H and his HS siglum (Sanctuary of Silence).

3. Nihan, From Priestly Torah, 10.
resents a significant shift, at least in English-language scholarship, from assumptions current even ten to fifteen years ago, and, partly as a result of this shift, scholarly interest in the Priestly tradition in its broadest sense has recently burgeoned.

The focus of this essay will be the implications of recent scholarship concerning the work of the Holiness school for interpretation of the ancestral narratives within Genesis. In The Sanctuary of Silence, Knohl identified a relatively large number of texts outside the so-called Holiness Code that he attributed to his HS. Others, including Milgrom, followed Knohl’s lead in this regard, although sometimes in a more circumspect manner, recognizing fewer HS incursions into non-H texts. In the case of Genesis, however, scholars have shown a marked reticence to recognize the editorial influence of the Holiness school. Knohl himself initially pointed to only a small number of instances of possible HS editing in Genesis: Gen 17:7–8, 14; 23 and 36. Others have been even more circumspect. Christophe Nihan, for example, has denied the influence of the Holiness school anywhere in Genesis, with the possible exception of 17:14. More recently, Knohl has recognized a “linguistic connection” between Gen 1:31–2:3 and the Priestly account of the building of the tabernacle in Exod 39:32–33, 42–43 and 40:33, encouraging him to add this Genesis text to a growing list of HS editorial interventions in Genesis, further affirming the Holiness school as the final editor of the Pentateuch.

Against this background, Jacob Milgrom’s contribution to the study of HS editing in Genesis, although cautious, has been significant. As early as 2000 Milgrom was of the view that his HR was the redactor of the three books at the center of the Pentateuch (Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers) and was open to the possibility that, if Knohl were right about HS editing of Gen 17, 23, and 36, as well as Deut 32:48–52, and if these were the final editorial editions to Genesis and Deuteronomy, then the possibility that HR was the editor of the Pentateuch as a whole not only could but must be considered.

5. See Milgrom, Leviticus 17–22, 1337–44; Nihan, From Priestly Torah, 564–75.
7. Nihan, From Priestly Torah, 570.
Before his death, Milgrom was one of a very small number of scholars who considered the possibility of H-related editing in Genesis in anything more than a cursory way. In 2003 Milgrom argued that H_R was responsible for the entirety of the first creation story, Gen 1:1–2:3. In that piece he drew on earlier work by Yairah Amit but went further to canvass the possibility of more extensive H_R editing of Genesis. He nevertheless urged caution, counseling against drawing definitive conclusions about the influence of H_R in Genesis “until the redactorial picture of Genesis is clarified.” Later, in 2007, Milgrom expressed the view that there was insufficient evidence of the work of H_R in Genesis and Deuteronomy to conclude that H_R was the editor of the entire Torah but nevertheless went on to claim that, if he had been right in his argument that H_R was responsible for Gen 1:1–2:3, “then H_R indeed played the deciding role in editing the book of Genesis.”

Since 2007 there has been some limited interest in the possible role of the HS in Genesis. For example, Martin Arneth sees a post-P, non-P layer in Gen 1–11 that displays a dependence upon and a sympathy with “Holiness Code” legislation, and Bill T. Arnold’s 2009 commentary proposes the HS as the “final editor” of Genesis. However, there has been

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9. Milgrom, Leviticus 17–22, 1443. Milgrom used the siglum H_R to identify a redactor analogous to Knohl’s HS.


only little focus on possible HS activity in the ancestral narratives. Significant in this respect is the work of Jakob Wöhrle, who has noted parallels between Lev 17:9–14, 23–27 and Exod 12:43–49 that persuade him that the two passages can be attributed to the same late Priestly redactional stratum.16

That there should be reticence in considering the presence of HS editing in the ancestral narratives, and especially in non-P narratives, is perhaps not surprising. The very nature of narrative makes it unlikely that extended passages of recognizable H language, predominantly legal in nature, will be found. It is both more difficult and more speculative to attribute editing to a particular school on the basis of common single words or short phrases, typically found in narrative, than on the basis of more extensive quotations, such as are sometimes found in legislative prose. These difficulties are magnified in the case of Genesis, which has its *Sitz im Leben* prior to the advent of the law, so that the presence of any recognizable legal language at all is unexpected.

These difficulties notwithstanding, we should not be wholly dissuaded from considering the possibility of HS editing within Genesis, recognition of which might, in fact, throw some light upon some current puzzles and curiosities. For example, some apparently redactional material in non-P Genesis narratives has been traditionally characterized as “Deuteronomistic.” Yet, as David M. Carr has shown, this redactional material, while in some ways consonant with the Deuteronomistic profile, diverges from it in significant respects. Carr has termed such redactional material “semi-Deuteronomistic.”17 Others, such as Rendtorff, Weinfeld, Wenham, and more recently Ska, have observed aspects of this same redactional material that fit the Priestly profile.18 Recent developments in HS scholar-

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ship may offer a possible solution to the mystery of such “mixed D and P texts.”¹⁹ In particular, the view of a growing number of scholars, primarily European and American, that H shows signs of dependence on D as well as P,²⁰ opens the way to seeing the HS as responsible for some redactional material in Genesis that displays both Deuteronomistic and Priestly characteristics.

Among those who recognize H’s dependence upon both D and P, Nihan and Jeffrey Stackert go one step further, arguing that H employs a “hermeneutic of literary revision” with respect to both.²¹ In the context of identifying the provenance of redactional material, this insight has important consequences. For example, if Nihan and Stackert are correct that H not only depends upon D but also revises D, then it cannot be assumed that non-P text in Genesis that contains traces of Deuteronomistic language or themes should, for that reason alone, be attributed to Deuteronomistic editors. Indeed, it cannot be assumed even that such textual material must be sympathetic to the Deuteronomistic program. In fact, precisely the opposite may be true, so that the identification of Deuteronomistic language in a text may indicate that this text should be read not with the grain of Deuteronomistic thought but rather against it. Accordingly, interpretations that read Deuteronomistic understandings into Genesis narratives on the basis of the presence of semi-Deuteronomistic language may be missing, or even camouflaging, interpretations of the text that are most consonant with the intention of the author/editor.


²⁰. Those who consider H to be dependent upon both P and D include Nihan, From Priestly Torah, 547; Eckart Otto, “The Holiness Code in Diachrony and Synchrony in the Legal Hermeneutics of the Pentateuch,” in The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions, ed. Sarah Shectman and Joel S. Baden, ATANT 95 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009), 135–56, esp. 139; Jeffrey Stackert, Rewriting the Torah: Literary Revision in Deuteronomy and the Holiness Legislation, FAT 52 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 9, and others listed there.

²¹. Nihan, From Priestly Torah, 547; Stackert, Rewriting the Torah, 219.
An example will help to illustrate this point. In his *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, David Carr identifies three related texts that he considers additional, late, and semi-Deuteronomistic: Gen 18:17–19, 22:15–18, and 26:3bβ–5. Each of the three texts contains a divine promise that has been termed the “nations-blessing promise.” The promise is notoriously difficult to interpret, but in the most general terms the patriarch is promised by God that all the nations of the world will be blessed, or will bless themselves, in, by, or through him or his posterity. Although Carr expressly dismisses the idea that these passages were produced by a strictly “Deuteronomistic” editor, his view that the three passages were “the work of an author/reviser who creatively revised and extended the non-P Genesis tradition, while working in a context where Deuteronomistic themes and language were ‘in the air,’ contributes to his readiness to see in these texts elements that link them to what he terms “late trends in Israelite literature,” which, he suggests, are “often linked to varying extents with the theology and language of specifically Deuteronomistic literature.”

Carr lists three elements that characterize these trends, one of which is “opposition to foreigners and their influence on Israel—especially to Canaanites [sic].” He then goes on to argue that what he terms “the anti-foreign elements of the Deuteronomistic tradition” may be reflected in the reformulation of the nations-blessing promise in the verses listed above (Gen 18:17–19, etc.). For that reason, he interprets the promise in a way that emphasizes Abraham’s blessedness, rather than that of the nations, and he denies any idea of an Abrahamic vocation to mediate blessing to them.

The trend of opposition to foreigners that Carr attributes to Deuteronomistic literature is not one that is evident in HS texts, which, while stressing a need for separation between Israel and the nations, tend to be far more irenic in tone. From Carr’s discussion of the nations-blessing promise, it appears that, if his view concerning the identity of the author/reviser had been different, so that he had read the promise in light of the profile of the Holiness school, for example, rather than that of Deuteronomistic literature.

23. Ibid, 159.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid, 158.
omistic literature, then his interpretation of the promise itself might also have been different.  

This discussion begs the question whether there might be any good reason to read the ancestral narratives, or sections of them, in light of the profile of the HS. Is there any evidence pointing to intervention on the part of editors sympathetic to the tradition of H? If so, are there discernible patterns within that material, and do those patterns conform with what is known of HS editing in other parts of the Pentateuch? Given the limited scope of this essay, the best means of addressing these questions will be focused consideration of a single text. Therefore, the remainder of the essay will consist of a case study based on one of the three short passages discussed by Carr: Gen 26:3b–5. In this study, the passage will be read in the context of its narrative setting, 26:1–33, and in light of the three elements identified by Carr as characterizing late trends in Israelite literature, often linked to varying degrees with the theology and language of specifically Deuteronomistic literature: the centrality of obedience, opposition to foreigners, and the use of patterned language.

2. Genesis 26:3b–5 Read in the Context of Genesis 26:1–33: A Case Study

Genesis 26:1–33 is non-P narrative that offers a mosaic of Isaac traditions in which Isaac repeats some of his father Abraham’s past exploits. Within this text, Gen 26:3b–5 is almost universally agreed to represent a late editorial addition. The addition is a significant one: it articulates with 22:15–18 to effect the extension of the Abrahamic promises to Abraham’s son Isaac. It is also highly anomalous: the express reference to law in 26:5 is unexpected in narrative that is concerned with a time prior to the giving of the Mosaic law. This anomaly, together with the language of


28. Carr’s own delimitation of this passage has varied in publications subsequent to Reading the Fractures.

29. There is, however, little scholarly agreement as to delimitation of the passage.
the verse, has long been understood to indicate the verse’s Deuteronomistic or “semi-Deuteronomistic” provenance. Of the three short passages discussed above, Gen 26:3b–5 is the one thought to be most apparently Deuteronomistic in its language and outlook. However, although both the language and the theme of verse 5 have been viewed as consistent with those found in Deuteronomy, in fact they have more in common with language and themes found in other books, especially Leviticus and Numbers, as Wenham has noted. Indeed, Weinfeld goes so far as to say of Gen 26:5: “There is nothing Deuteronomic in this verse.” In particular, Weinfeld points out that the word “instructions” (ץַרְעָה) is never found in the plural in Deuteronomy, but only in Priestly texts. A general sense of the Deuteronomistic provenance of Gen 26:3b–5, however, has often led to its interpretation in light of the profile of D, and Carr’s approach is representative in this regard. Is the profile of D the best interpretive guide in this context?

2.1. The Centrality of Obedience

For Carr, a “sharp focus on the centrality of obedience” in Gen 26:3b–5 (and in 22:15–18) is one of the primary factors linking the passage with Deuteronomistic thought. Clearly, obedience, and specifically obedience to torah, is a crucial theme in Gen 26:3b–5. Here the extension of

31. So Claus Westermann, who finds that the collation of terms “presupposes the language of Deuteronomy” (Genesis 12–36, CC [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1984], 425).
32. Wenham, Genesis 16–50, 190. See also Ska, Exegesis of the Pentateuch, 36 n. 47: “This text is often considered to be Deuteronomist. However, the vocabulary is more Priestly than Deuteronomist, as is noted by Wenham.” In this footnote Ska undertakes a survey of the instances of each of the legal nouns found in Gen 26:5 that are used in conjunction with the verb שַׁמַּה. He finds that the instances “are not typically Deuteronomist/Deuteronomist” but also “appear very frequently in Priestly texts.” In the case of מִשָּׁה, this is especially marked.
33. Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, 75 n. 4. For Erhard Blum’s response, see his Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte, WMANT 57 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 363.
34. Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, 338. Ska (Exegesis of the Pentateuch, 36 n. 47) agrees and suggests that the plural חֵלֶם is “rather late.”
35. Carr, Reading the Fractures, 157.
the Abrahamic promises is made the consequence of Abraham’s keeping of torah, and unmistakable resonances with 22:15–18 indicate that Abraham’s conduct at Moriah is particularly in view.

Is the same focus on obedience a feature of 26:1–33 as a whole? The immediately striking point is that Gen 26 displays little or no interest in Isaac’s obedience. Here in the third wife/sister story (26:6–11), Isaac exhibits many of the same flaws displayed by his father in 12:10–20 and 20:1–18. Like those earlier accounts, the narrative of Gen 26 does not reflect any consequential misfortune to Isaac. To the contrary, Isaac experiences good fortune to a remarkable degree, given the context of famine (26:1), particularly in relation to his agricultural pursuits. The dramatic nature of this good fortune is emphasized by the use of the verb הָרָא (to become great) no less than three times in 26:13, and Wenham notes that Isaac’s hundredfold yield was the best that could be expected in Palestine.

Genesis 26:12 expressly connects Isaac’s abundance with Yahweh’s blessing, and 26:3b–5 make this blessing the consequence of Abraham’s observance of torah. The effect of these combined elements is that Isaac’s good fortune can be attributed not to his own merit but to that of Abraham by reason of Abraham’s observance of torah.

As Carr readily concedes, this conception does not fit well with the Deuteronomistic profile, in which the responsibility for observance of torah falls anew on each generation and in which maintenance of the divine relationship is conditional upon that observance. The combined effect of Gen 22:15–18 and 26:3b–5, although not entirely to relieve Abraham’s offspring of the imperative to observe torah, is that the divine promises, and indeed the divine relationship, are no longer conditional upon

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36. The nature of the literary relationship between the three Genesis narratives in which the patriarch (twice Abraham and once Isaac) passes his wife off as his sister is a matter of scholarly conjecture that is beyond the scope of this essay. Interested readers could consult, for example, T. D. Alexander, “Are the Wife/Sister Incidents of Genesis Literary Compositional Variants?” VT 42 (1992): 145–52.

37. Here the descriptor “earlier” only refers to location in the text, not to the date of composition.

38. Wenham, Genesis 16–50, 191. It is worth noting that the two earlier accounts include no comparable element of success and abundance that benefit the patriarch.

39. So Ska, Exegesis of the Pentateuch, 36: “Isaac is the first to benefit from Abraham’s ‘merits’ which is a pledge for the patriarch’s descendants. In very simple terms, the future descendants of Abraham can, like Isaac, rely on God’s fidelity to his promises by reason of Abraham’s obedience.”
that observance. Genesis 26:5 turns the element of conditionality on its head by making the promises conditional upon an *already-satisfied condition*, the observance of Abraham, and particularly Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac at Moriah. 40 Not only does this conception differ from properly Deuteronomistic understandings of covenantal relationship; it sets up a system of intergenerational merit that is incompatible with the rejection of such systems in Deut 7:9–10. 41

These factors do not point toward a redactor sympathetic to Deuteronomistic ideology and working within the Deuteronomistic profile. However, in several respects resonances can be seen with the ideology and profile of the HS. First, it should be noted that a concept of Abrahamic merit is not foreign to H. Although Lev 26, H’s counterpart to Deut 28, incorporates Deuteronomistic patterns of conditionality into P’s covenant ideology, 42 it also makes provision for the divine forgiveness of protracted and obstinate Israelite disobedience, for which there are two prerequisites. One of those prerequisites is Yahweh’s remembrance of the covenant with each of the patriarchs, with a particular focus on Abraham (Lev 26:42). 43

Thus for H, Abraham is already central to issues of justice, punishment, and forgiveness, and memory of him is a necessary element for the maintenance of the divine-human relationship. Another prerequisite is lack of opposition by H, unlike D, to systems of intergenerational punishment/merit: “those of you who survive shall languish in the land of your enemies because of their iniquities; also they shall languish because of the iniquities of their ancestors. But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors… (26:39–40).”

A second resonance with the ideology and profile of the HS is found in the fact that both Gen 26 and H make a connection between torah obser-

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40. George G. Nicol reaches the same conclusion but expresses it in terms of unconditionality rather than already-satisfied conditionality (“Studies in the Interpretation of Gen 26:1–33” [PhD diss., Oxford University, 1987]).


42. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah* 535–45, esp. 539: “But contrary to P, where Yahweh’s covenant is still unconnected with the Sinai legislation, the restoration of the divine presence is now conditioned to Israel’s obedience to the statutes (תבנית) and the commands (תורה) given by Yahweh to Israel (26:3)” (emphasis original).

43. Lev 26:42 is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where the names of the patriarchs are inverted.
vance and the fruitfulness of the land. In Gen 26 the extraordinary success of Isaac’s early agricultural endeavors is attributed to Abraham’s observance of torah, while in Lev 26 the keeping of torah is said to lead to the land’s fruitfulness:

If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full. (26:3–5; cf. 25:18–19)

In sum, when Gen 26:3b–5 is read in its narrative context it becomes apparent that its focus on obedience does not point toward Deuteronomistic conceptions of obedience. Rather, a number of resonances with H concepts and ideology appear.

2.2. Opposition to Foreigners

The second of Carr’s three elements is “opposition to foreigners and their influence on Israel—especially to Canaanites [sic], the paradigmatic pre-Israelite inhabitants of the Promised Land.”44 This element is not present in Gen 26 as a whole, which, to the contrary, presents a surprisingly universalist model for peaceful co-existence between Israel and a nation notorious elsewhere for enmity with Israel.45

Although the blessing noted in Gen 26:12 brings Isaac prosperity and increase, it does not initially bring him stability and harmonious relations with his neighbors. The Philistines become envious of Isaac’s great possessions, livestock, and household, so that Abimelech tells Isaac to go, because “you have become far too mighty/numerous for us.” So it is that Isaac leaves Gerar (26:17). That he does not travel far is suggested by the name of his new dwelling-place, “the Wadi-Gerar,” and by the fact that strife with Abimelech’s servants is not thereby averted. Isaac’s herders redig three wells supposedly originally dug and named by Abraham. Isaac reassigns to the wells the names that Abraham had given them. The name

44. Carr, Reading the Fractures, 157.
45. The Philistines are first presented as a notably warlike nation in Exod 13:17, and the history of Israeliite battles against the Philistines is recounted in the monarchic narratives.
of each well reflects a response of the Philistines. Following the digging of the first well there is contention, and after the digging of the second there is quarrelling.

When it comes to the third well, things are different. Genesis 26:22 says that Isaac moved on (וַיַּעַשֶּׁהוּ) from the Wadi Gerar before digging the third well but does not identify his destination. The verb וַיַּעַשֶּׁהוּ (to move, proceed, advance) is rarer than that used in 26:17 (וַיֵּלֶדֶנָּהוּ, to walk, go), appearing in the Hebrew Bible in the hiphil in only four other places (12:8; Job 9:5; 32:15; Prov 25:1). 46 These instances show that the verb has a sense of advancement as well as of simple geographic movement. Once again, it appears that Isaac may not have moved far in a geographic sense: no place name is given for his destination, and the statement in the narrative that the digging of the third well did not give rise to further tension with Abimelech’s servants suggests that Isaac was still close enough to Gerar for such tensions to have been at least a possible outcome. The name given by Isaac to the third well is Rehoboth (רְهوֹבָה). The root הָרוּב means “to be or grow wide or large.” This time the servants of Isaac and Abimelech do not quarrel over the well, and, following the pattern established with the first two wells, Isaac offers a brief etiology: “Because now Yahweh has enlarged/made room [hiphil of הָרוּב] for us and we shall be fruitful [פָּרֵה] in the land” (Gen 26:22).

Isaac’s association of the two verbs הָרוּב and פָּרֵה is unique in the Hebrew Bible. The verb פָּרֵה appears in Genesis on twenty-seven occasions, primarily in Priestly texts. In ten of those instances, all Priestly promise texts, it is paired with the verb הָרוּב. 47 Outside Genesis the pairing can be found in five further places: Exod 1:7 (P, where it functions as a statement of fulfillment of the earlier promises); Lev 26:9 (H); Jer 3:16; 23:3; and Ezek 36:11.

The verb הָרוֹב, while quite similar in appearance to הָרוּב, is associated with the Deuteronomistic tradition, not the Priestly tradition. In Genesis הָרוֹב appears only in 26:22. Elsewhere in the Pentateuch it occurs only in Deuteronomistic texts:

Exod 34:24: For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land when you go up to appear before Yahweh your God three times in the year. 48

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46. None of these is likely to be a particularly early text.
47. Gen 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4.
48. This chapter of Exodus has undergone extensive Deuteronomistic editing;
Deut 12:20: When Yahweh your God enlarges your territory, as he has promised you, and you say, “I am going to eat some meat,” you may eat meat whenever you have the desire.

Deut 19:8: If Yahweh your God enlarges your territory, as he swore to your ancestors—and he will give you all the land that he promised your ancestors to give you...

Deut 33:20: Blessed be the enlargement of Gad!

Here are all the appearances of the verb בֹּרֵד in the Pentateuch. In each of these texts, as in Gen 26:22, the verb appears in the hiphil, and the context is the enlargement of land or territory by Yahweh. For the Deuteronomist it is evident that this enlargement is to be achieved by means of dispossession of the nations, and this idea appears most clearly in Exod 34:24. A similar idea of enlargement at the expense of others can be seen in extrapentateuchal uses of the verb בֹּרֵד, for example, in Hannah’s prayer (1 Sam 2:1: “my mouth is enlarged over my enemies”); in Isa 26:14–15, where Yahweh’s enlargement of the borders of the land of Judah is celebrated in conjunction with punishment and destruction of Judah’s adversaries; and in Amos 1:13, where the Ammonites are castigated for enlarging their territory by means of violence to pregnant women.

The sense in which Isaac uses the verb בֹּרֵד in Gen 26:22 is different, however. It connotes neither violence nor dispossession. The thematic context is still land and the relationship between the Israelites and the nations (here represented by the Philistines), but the sense of Isaac’s statement is that, rather than enlarging Israel’s territory by dispossessing the nations, Yahweh has enlarged the land itself so that Israelites and non-Israelites are able peacefully to reside in it together, without quarrelling.

A significant change comes about between the digging and naming of the second and third wells. Hostilities cease, and Isaac is moved to

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announce a new divinely appointed reality within the land. His new relationship with Abimelech and the Philistines becomes apparent in Gen 26:26–31. A relationship previously characterized by fear and mistrust (26:16: “Go away from us, for you have become too powerful for us”) becomes one of aspirational fellowship and peace (26:28: “We see plainly that Yahweh has been with you…. let us make a covenant with you”).

No explanation for the change is offered, apart from the subtle use of the verb מָאָס (to move, proceed, advance; 26:22). It is simply the case that with the digging of the first two wells there is one state of affairs and that with the digging of the third well, a short distance away from the first two, there is a new state of affairs. Isaac announces the change but does not account for it. In one way or another, apparently, the two peoples have simply resolved their differences, or else the Philistines have simply given up the fight.

One possibility is that the degree of physical separation between Isaac and his retinue, on the one hand, and Abimelech and his people, on the other, which was effected by Isaac’s moving on (מָאָס) in 26:22, was sufficient to make a dramatic difference in the quality of the relationship between the two. There was no such movement between the first and second wells. Isaac’s servants apparently dug a second well in the same vicinity and with the same outcome: conflict. However, once Isaac put further distance between himself and the Philistines, the situation changed, and the two groups were able to cohabit peacefully. The text does not suggest a departure on a grand scale, merely a little space between the two groups, so that they could both be accommodated in a land that had been enlarged.

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50. True, the covenant sought by Abimelech is of the nature of a nonaggression pact, as was the case in Gen 21:22–23. Nevertheless, it is significant that Abimelech now seeks to achieve peace between the two peoples through relationship rather than banishment and that the word שָׁלַל, absent from 21:22–32, appears here twice.

51. A comparison with Gen 13 underlines the change. There the wealth of the respective households of Abram and Lot became so great that the land could not support even the two of them living together (13:6), without strife arising between their servants (13:8), so that they were compelled to separate. Here in Gen 26, despite the rapidly escalating wealth of Isaac described in 26:12–14 and Abimelech’s order to Isaac that he leave because he has become too powerful for the Philistines in 26:16, Yahweh’s enlargement of the land (26:22) means that there is sufficient room in it for Isaac’s family and the Philistines to achieve a degree of separation so that both can to live together within the land in peace, notwithstanding their earlier squabbles and contentions.
by Yahweh.  

If this is the sense that Gen 26:17–22 means to convey, it is reminiscent of H’s principle whereby Yahweh sets the people apart from the nations to be holy as Yahweh is himself holy (Lev 20:24–26).  

In associating the two verbs מִדְרָם and בָּדֶר in the name of the third well and its accompanying etiology in 26:22, Isaac does some new things. He suggests that the Deuteronomic promise to “enlarge/make room” has been fulfilled in an unexpected way: rather than drive out the nations to make way for the Israelites, Yahweh has made room for the Israelites and the nations to coexist peacefully. Further, Isaac makes this unexpected fulfillment of a Deuteronomic promise the cause of the further fulfillment of a Priestly promise: to be fruitful. In this way he combines otherwise unrelated Deuteronomic and Priestly language and concepts, creating something new.  

This “new” thing resembles the Priestly conception of possession of land as an אֱלֹהִים. This idea is by no means foreign to Gen 26. Here the addition of verses 3b–5 results in the surprising juxtaposition of Yahweh’s

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52. Michael A. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 46–48, has identified multiple and compelling resonances between Gen 26 and 34, arguing that the two chapters have been redactionally placed at either end of the Isaac narratives. The same idea of the land being large enough to accommodate both the circumcised and the uncircumcised is expressed in 34:21: “These people are friendly with us; let them live in the land and trade in it, for the land is large enough for them.”

53. As Nihan (*From Priestly Torah*, 478–79) notes, in H’s conception of holiness “it is the observance of Yahweh’s laws which brings about Israel’s separation (root שֵרֵד) both from the other peoples (Lev 18:2–5, 24–30; 20:22–26) and to Yahweh (consecration).” In Gen 26 Isaac’s blessings are presented as the consequence of Abraham’s observance of Torah. Indeed, in H the concept of holiness itself is enlarged, just as Isaac declares the land to have been enlarged in Gen 26:22. Knohl (*Sanctuary of Silence*, 218–19) writes of this development: “Here, too, the solution was found through changing and enlarging the concept of holiness. Holiness, according to HS, surpasses the limits of the Temple-Priestly framework; it must be present throughout the Israelite congregation and the land of Israel. The call to a life of holiness, directed toward the nation as a whole, is grounded in Israel’s separation from the nations to be a possession of God: ‘You shall be holy to me, for I, Yahweh am holy, and I have set you apart from the other peoples to be mine’ (Lev 20:26).”


promise to give “all these lands” to Isaac and his seed and the divine direction to Isaac to live in it (in particular at Gerar) as a רָעָב, “resident alien.”  

Nihan describes the Priestly concept of חונך as follows:  

in P the land promised to Israel is not given as a חונך, a personal possession, as in the Deuteronomistic tradition, but rather as a חונך, a term referring to a “Nutzungsrecht”. In this conception, Israel has a right to the land’s usufruct, but the land itself remains Yahweh’s exclusive possession.

The Priestly conception is adopted by H and can be seen most clearly in Lev 25:23–24.

The connection drawn here between Isaac’s relationships with his neighbors and the land, on the one hand, and the P and H conception of חונך, on the other, might appear fanciful, were it not for the fact of the arrival in Gen 26:26 of a new character, missing from the parallel narrative in 21:22–32. It appears that his primary function in the narrative is to bear the name חונך (Ahuzzath), thereby alluding to the idea of חונך.

In sum, Isaac declares in 26:22 a new divine facilitation for the shared occupation of land that, in its combination of D and P language, undermines Deuteronomistic conceptions while resembling the P and H concept of the possession of land.

2.3. The Use of Patterned Language

The third of Carr’s three elements is “use of certain patterned language to express these and other themes.” As we have seen, there is a great deal

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59. See, for example, Lev 25:23.

60. Carr, Reading the Fractures, 157.
of patterned language both in Gen 26:3b–5 and in the chapter as a whole, but it is of Priestly as well as Deuteronomistic derivation. Furthermore, in several instances where Deuteronomistic language appears, it is paired with Priestly language or themes in such a way as to correct the underlying Deuteronomistic ideology. A primary example is the list of legal terms in Gen 26:5, which appears Deuteronomistic but on closer inspection includes language that is distinctly Priestly and contributes to a statement regarding the legacy of Abraham’s obedience that is not at home in Deuteronomistic ideology. Other examples appear outside Gen 26:3b–5. In 26:22, as we have seen, the distinctively Deuteronomistic word הבש is uniquely paired with the distinctively Priestly word הָרִים in such a way as to undermine the Deuteronomistic tradition and to resemble the corresponding P and H conception.

A further example within Gen 26:3b–5 is connected with the nation-blessing promise that was mentioned above. This passage contains the only short phrase common to all three such promise passages (Gen 18:17–19; 22:15–18; and 26:3b–5): “all the nations of the earth.” In 26:4 the promise is formulated: “and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring.” The phrase “all the nations of the earth” appears in only one other place in the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy 28:1 reads: “If you will only obey the LORD your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth” (NRSV, emphasis added). Konrad Schmid has suggested that Gen 22:15–18 and 26:3–5 “point to” Deut 28:1.62

The sense of Deut 28:1 is that if Israel obeys it will be set “high above” all the nations of the world. Is this also the sense of the nations-blessing promise? The answer hangs on the interpretation of the verb בָּרָא, “to bless,” as it appears in the niphal in Gen 18:18 and hithpael in 22:18 and 26:4. If Carr is correct in interpreting the hithpael in 22:18 and 26:4 as indicating a focus on Israel and it signal blessing, then these verses would resemble Deut 28:1 in its conception of the relative situations of Israel and the nations. However, recent studies by Keith N. Grüneberg, André Flury-Schölch, and Benjamin J. Noonan argue that the context of Gen 18:18

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61. Commentators routinely note that the list resembles those found in Deuteronomy, such as in 11:1 and 28:1, but only rarely note the parallels with similar lists in Leviticus.

62. Schmid, Genesis, 70.
indicates that the *niphal* of יָרָב should be interpreted in a (broadly) passive sense\(^{63}\) and that the contexts of 22:18 and 26:4 suggest that even the *hithpael* of יָרָב should be interpreted in a way that focuses on the blessedness of the nations and a corresponding patriarchal responsibility for the mediation of divine blessing to them.

If Grüneberg, Flury-Schölch, and Noonan are on target, then the conception of the relative situations of Israel and the nations in each instance of the nations-blessing promise is vastly different from that of Deut 28:1. Rather than a model in which Israel is elevated above the nations (Deut 28:1), the nations-blessing promise suggests a model in which Israel (Abraham) is made Yahweh’s agent for the mediation of blessing to the nations. In Deut 28:1 the focus is exclusively on the blessedness of Israel (if it will obey), but in the nations blessing promise, the focus is on the blessedness of the nations and Israel’s vocation in that regard. Therefore, Gen 18:18, 22:18 and 26:4 do not reflect Deut 28:1 but rather correct it. To paraphrase Levinson, the citation of Deut 28:1 here “seems to function less as an acknowledgement of the authority of [Deut 28:1] than as a means to transform [it].”\(^{64}\)

Close reading of Gen 26:26–33 serves to support the findings of Grüneberg and others that the nations-blessing promise should be interpreted with a focus on the blessedness of the nations and Israel’s concomitant responsibilities. In 26:26–27 Abimelech approaches Isaac in a manner that is both unsolicited and unexpected. Whatever Abimelech’s primary motivation may be, he observes Yahweh’s presence with Isaac and Isaac’s blessedness and indicates a wish to build a relationship with him. Because of Abimelech’s express recognition of Isaac’s blessedness, it is possible to say of this narrative (in contrast to 21:22–32) that Abimelech indicates a wish to participate in Isaac’s blessedness.\(^{65}\) Here we have a graphic model

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64. Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 80.

65. Nicol (“Studies in the Interpretation,” 128) observes: “But the structural analysis of Gen 26:1–33 (Ch 1) has demonstrated a high degree of correlation between the various promises, particularly this promise of blessing for the nations, and the narrative episodes which surround them. Indeed, there is a sense in which the covenant formed between Isaac and Abimelech at Gerar could be considered paradigmatic of the way in which the foreign nations might eventually come to participate in the divine blessing by allying themselves with Israel, and through Israel with Israel’s God.”
of one of the nations being blessed, or blessing itself, by, or through, Isaac. In particular, there is a strong reflexive sense in this model, by which the nations recognize blessedness and take active steps to participate in it. Contrary to Carr’s view, however, in this reflexive model the focus is not exclusively upon the blessedness of Isaac; the text also reflects an interest in the blessedness that might attach itself to the nations in the course of their relationship with the patriarchs, and there is little indication of the “antiforeign elements of the Deuteronomistic tradition” that Carr sees reflected in the promise, as formulated with the hithpael of צאַר. The double use of the word שָׁלוֹם, once by Abimelech and once by the narrator (26:29, 31), supports the impression of the text’s interest in the nations and their well-being, in addition to that of Isaac.

None of this, of course, is to assert that Gen 26:26–32 was written to explicate the nations blessing promise in 26:4. To be sure, this study is predicated on the understanding that 26:4 postdates the narrative in 26:26–32. Nevertheless, as Carr himself argues, where language allows more than one translation, “the decisive arguments must come from the context in which these promises occur.” Verses 26–32 not only offer an apposite model for understanding a reflexive sense of the nations-blessing promise but even suggest the fulfillment of that promise.

Before leaving Gen 26:26–32 we should note one further point. We saw earlier in this case study that 26:12–16 resonate with the conception of H, found most markedly in 26:3b–5, that observance of torah leads to an abundance of the fruits of the earth. Leviticus 26 (H) also expresses the associated idea that torah observance will lead to peace in the land:

If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit…. you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid. (26:3–6).

66. Ibid., 129: “The idiom seems to imply that the nations will come to participate in the blessing promised to the Patriarchs when they actively seek to obtain it for themselves.”

67. Carr, Reading the Fractures, 158.

Just as Gen 26 portrays Isaac’s extraordinary success as a farmer, so does it portray (again resonating with H) his unexpected success at building peaceful relationships with his nearest neighbors, the archetypal enemies of the monarchical narratives: the Philistines.

2.4. Synthesis

This case study has considered the brief passage Gen 26:3b–5 in its narrative context. In doing so it has tested the “fit” with the Deuteronomistic profile against which Carr and others have interpreted the passage. Repeatedly it was found that Gen 26:3b–5, when read in the context of 26:1–33, does not reflect that profile. On occasions the study instead brought to light resonances with the profile of H. While the brief passage and its narrative context both contain instances of language and motifs associated with Deuteronomistic literature, it was found that they also contain language and motifs associated with Priestly literature, including that of H. Furthermore, a discernible pattern was found in which the text adopts (semi-)Deuteronomistic language or motifs, sometimes in association with Priestly counterparts, for the purpose of correcting or subverting a Deuteronomistic principle. In this one chapter, Gen 26, can be found challenges to the Deuteronomistic understandings of covenant, possession of land, and relationship with foreigners. This discernible pattern of correction or subversion is the same pattern that others have found in HS editorial work elsewhere in the Pentateuch, although to date there has been a marked reluctance to also identify it in narrative texts within Genesis (see §1 above).

3. Conclusion

The present essay has suggested that recent scholarship concerning H, in which the work of Jacob Milgrom has played a crucial role, points to the fruitfulness of reopening questions about the provenance of redactional material in Genesis, sometimes thought to be Deuteronomistic or “semi-Deuteronomistic.” These labels can no longer be confidently applied to these “mixed texts.” A new scholarly consensus about the relative dating of P and H and the existence of a Holiness school, together with proposals concerning H’s “hermeneutic of revision,” suggest both the need for studies of possible influence of the Holiness school in Genesis narratives and the potential fruitfulness of such studies.