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ISAAC AND THE WELL OF GERAR IN THE LIGHT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Isaac and the well of Gerar in the light of archaeological evidence. In the Old Testament, Well-Water was one of the primary sources alongside ‘springs’, ‘rainfall’, ‘dew’, ‘streams’ and ‘cisterns’. Today, the digging of boreholes for private and public consumption is similar to the idea of wells in the ancient Near East. The fundamental question is: is there archaeological evidence that supports the life and culture of the Patriarchs in the ancient Near-East, the excavation of Gerar and the evidence of wells? This research aims to examine the life of Isaac and the well of Gerar in light of archaeological evidence. The researcher used the *bibliographical historical research method* to evaluate facts. The findings revealed that the Nuzi, Mari, and Ebla tablets are significant archaeological discoveries that support the Patriarchs’ life and culture. Isaac the Patriarch was an actual figure who lived at Beersheba and Gerar from the excavation expeditions. He dug wells for domestic use and for his cattle that brought about conflict between him and the people at Gerar. Besides, Isaac serves as an exemplary leader in conflict resolution. He did not fight back or hire men to fight for him when confronted; instead, he resolved the conflict faced at Gerar peacefully. Thus, in the light of archaeological evidence, Isaac the Patriarch serves as an exemplary leader for everyone to emulate in a hostile environment.

Keywords: *Isaac the Patriarch, Archaeology, Well of Gerar, Patriarchal Era, Archaeological Evidence*

INTRODUCTION

The digging of boreholes for both private and public consumption today is similar to the idea of Well in the ancient Near-East. It is one of the primary water sources alongside ‘springs’, ‘rainfall’, ‘dew’, ‘streams’ and ‘cisterns’ in the Old Testament.¹ As essential as it is for humans and animals, there are instances of conflicts and violence associated with wells in the Old Testament, precisely the situation of Isaac and the community at Gerar. Well-water was perhaps safer than that of springs because it was common practice to use

¹ John J. Bimson, *The World of the Old Testament* (London: Scripture Union, 1988), 89-90.

large stones to cover the top of a dug well to protect it from contamination and eventual evaporation.²

Some wells supply water all-round the year, while others are mostly seasonal. Wells that are shallow in depth most often will not last long. Due to the lack of sufficient water supply during drought seasons, the scramble for it often leads to quarrel or fight in some areas in Africa, like the situation of Isaac at Gerar. Despite Isaac's several attempts to provide a well for his cattle and the community, his generosity was confronted with cruelty and opposition from the people at Gerar. However, Isaac's character towards the inhabitants at Gerar with the issue of well serves as an example to emulate in a hostile environment. This research aims to examine the life of Isaac and the well at Gerar in light of archaeological evidence. The fundamental question is: is there archaeological evidence that supports the life and culture of the Patriarchs in the ancient Near-East, the excavation of Gerar, and the evidence of well? The researcher used the *bibliographical historical research method* to study the character of Isaac and the well of Gerar in the light of archaeological evidence. This means that secondary sources are used to examine and interpret facts.

AN OVERVIEW OF ARCHAEOLOGY

This section focuses on the overview of archaeology, generally described as the study of ancient remains. The following excavation, deciphering, interpretation, and publication are some key concepts used in archaeology. Thus, the views of some scholars are considered as follows:

Norman Gottwald opines that "archaeology is the recovery and systematic study of the material of the past, from which inferences are drawn about the culture and the history of the people who left the remains."³ According to Gottwald, the recovery of ancient remains like artefacts and relics are subject to careful examination to derive meaningful information about the life and cultures of ancient peoples. Williams Dever concurs that "Archaeology is not merely an antiquarian pursuit, the discovery of fascinating relics; it is an intellectual inquiry, one that seeks to penetrate and illuminate the human experience in the past."⁴ From Dever's assertion, the recovery of ancient remains is not an end in itself; rather, the discovered material is carefully examined to extract information about the custom of ancient peoples for today's audience.

Walls posits that "Biblical archaeology selects those material remains of Palestine and the neighbouring countries that relate to the biblical period and narrative which

² Ibid.

³ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible Socio-Literary Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmann, 1984), 49-50; see Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1998), 14; and Hill Andrew E. and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 57.

⁴ Williams G. Dever, "Archaeology, Syro-Palestinian and Biblical" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol. 1 A-C* (London: Doubleday, 1992), 354; see Allan R. Millard, "Archaeology" in *The Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Kelvin J. Vanhoozer (Gen. Ed.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 60.

helps the understanding of the history, life and customs of the Hebrews.”⁵ Biblical archaeology as a branch of archaeology focuses more on material remains that supports the claims of the existence of some biblical characters (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), places (Haran, Shechem, and Beersheba), and the tablets (Nuzi, Mari and Ebla). The excavation of ancient remains to a large extent has helped to clarify doubts and debunked claims that critics have raised over the years about the historicity of the Patriarchs. For this writer, archaeology is the recovery or excavation and the examination of ancient remains to deduce meaningful information about the life and cultures of ancient peoples. Nuzi, Mari, and Ebla tablets are some of the recovered clay tablets that are significant in understanding the Patriarchal era. This paper highlights a few of the tablets in the following section.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE DURING THE PATRIARCHAL ERA

The previous section underscores that archaeology is the study of the ancient remains to understand the custom of the past, precisely the Patriarchal period. In this section, the following archaeological discoveries Nuzi, Mari and Ebla tablets, respectively, are considered as seen below.

Nuzi Tablets

Nuzi in ancient Near-East was a town east of ‘Ashhur’ and west of ‘Arrapkha’ precisely during the second millennium B.C. It is located around Baghdad. The excavation of this city was conducted in 1925-1931 by ‘The American School of Oriental Research’ in synergy with ‘the Harvard University’.⁶ The findings of this expedition reveal that the Hurrian’s were the main occupants of this area; also, they discovered several thousand of both private and public archives of texts written in cuneiform that were perhaps in existence during the Nuzi period.⁷ In a similar note to Speiser’s claim, Mullo Weir concurs “ ... The ruin, including a temple in seven levels, a palace with some painted rooms, and many private houses, contained pottery and other small objects. Most important, however, were some 4000 cuneiform tablets influenced by Hurrian vocabulary and idiom.”⁸ From the

⁵A.S. Walls, “Archaeology” in *New Dictionary Bible* (Downer Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), 69.

⁶E.A. Speiser, “Nuzi”, in *the Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia K-Q Vol 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), 573.

⁷Ibid.

⁸C. J. Mullo Weir, “Nuzi” In *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* D. Winton Thomas (Ed) (London: oxford University Press, 1967), 73; see Cyrus H. Gordon., “Biblical Custom and the Nuzu Tablets”, *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol 3, 1 (1940), 9; and Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible Socio-Literary Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmann, 1984), 170.

Gottwald posits that “a vast range of customary legal practices evidence in the Nuzi tablets suggested close affinities with the marriage, family, and inheritance customs of the ancestors of Israel.” (170). For Gottwald, the Nuzi tablets are a possible source with great insights in understanding the family custom and law of the patriarchal narrative. The tablets reveal that a barren wife was allowed to choose a slave girl for her husband to raise her children to explain the case of Sarah and Rachel with their housemates (Gen.16:1-2; 30:9). Also, it emphasises the security of the slave girl and her children (Gen.21:9-14) and a husband is allowed to adopt his wife from her real brother (Gen.12:11-13; 20:2, 12; 26:7). Furthermore, these tablets make provision for

analysis of Speiser and Weir, Nuzi is not fiction but a reality. The Hurrian's were the occupants, and the discovered tablets written in cuneiform are useful facts subject to interpretation. Selman's judgment that the Nuzi tablets, to some extent, has aided in clarifying the Patriarchal narrative is a valid claim.⁹ The descriptions of these tablets reveal the nature and pattern of life in the ancient Near-East before the advent of writing. Also, the tablets bridge the ancient past to contemporary society. The Mari is another significant tablet besides the Nuzi tablets, as explained in the next section.

Mari tablets

Mari was an ancient city west of Euphrates in Mesopotamia. The current Tell-el-Hariri is a city along the 'Syro-Iraqi' frontier, a caravan path in the ancient Near-East.¹⁰ Before the excavation of this city, Parrot asserts: Mari was well known in some documents like the 'cuneiform texts' and the annals of King Hammurabi.¹¹ The mention of Mari in the above tablets indicates that this city most likely was a busy caravan routes path in the ancient Near-East.

The excavation of Mari commences with the discovery of a 'headless stone statue' by the Bedouins at *Tell Hariri* in 1933. This discovery witnessed several others under the direction of Parrot in synergy with the Louvre Museum in 1939, 1951, and 1956, respectively, with approximately ten different excavations.¹² These excavations reveal building like the temple of the 'goddess *Ishtar*'; a '*ziqqurra*' for the king of the Land; a 'sprawling palace' of 300 hundred rooms. They discovered twenty thousand cuneiform tablets that date the reign of Kings *Iasmash-Adad*, who began the building of the palace,

a brother to sell his birthright to another (Gen.25:29-34) as well as provision for childless couples to adopt someone who would care for them before and after bury hence own their property when they are dead, with the exception of a son born to the family (Gen.15:1-4; 31:1-2). Besides, the household god *teraphim* a kind of special deed for the inheritance (Gen.31:34), the purchase of the cave of Machpelah (Gen.23) and the deathbed testament or blessing, by the head of the family had a force of law (Gen.27:35-37; 48:8-22) in the Nuzi tablets. (Gottwald, 1984, 170).

⁹ M. J. Selman, "The Social Environment of the Patriarchs", Tyndale Bulletin 27 (1976) 114.; see J.A Thompson, *Archaeology and Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 22; and G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology Abridged Edition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 22-23.

Thompson submits that Abraham's descendants maintained contact with this city of Nuzi for quite some time, for instance, Isaac's wife came from this area, and Jacob as well lived there for about twenty years. In line with this, Ernest Wright admits that the Patriarchs are of Aramaean's descent (Deut. 26:5; Gen.25:20; 28:5; 31; 20, 24). They equally had a close affinity with Aram-Naharaim (Gen.24:10) or Peddan-Aram (Gen.25:20), and Haran where they spent some time in their life journey.

¹⁰ H. Lewy, "Mari" in *the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia K-Q Vol 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), 266.

¹¹ A. Parrot, "Mari" in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* D. Winton Thomas (Ed) (London: oxford University Press, 1967), 136.

¹² Lewy, 264.

and *Zimri-lim*, who completed it.¹³ Cynthia Astle concurs that archaeological excavations of twenty thousand clay tablets in the ruins of the city of Mari today's Syria. As the capital city of king *Zimri-Lim* around the eighteenth century B.C, the town was conquered and destroyed by King Hammurabi.¹⁴ Within the ruins, they discovered tablets written in an ancient cuneiform script, which was considered one of the first forms of writing.¹⁵ Some of the tablets were dated back as far as 200 years before *Zimri-Lim's* time, which may probably be approximated to the time that Abraham's family departed from the city of Ur.¹⁶

The personal names of person and town that correspond to Abraham's descendants are some valuable information that the Mari tablets suggest for the understanding of the people and place during the Patriarchal era. The Ebla tablet is another significant tablet.

Ebla (Tell Mardikh) Tablets

Ebla is another significant tablet that shed light on the archaeological discoveries during the Patriarchal period. Hazel Perkin ascribed the excavation of Ebla city to a team of Italian archaeologists in 1975. The outcome of their excavation reveals the existence of a room in the royal palace of an old Semitic kingdom with thousands of clay tablets written in a strange language.¹⁷ In line with Perkin, Woude reveals the excavation of the Ebla library south of Aleppo, the Hittite texts from Boghazkoy and the Ugaritic tablets of the eighteenth to the twentieth dynasties are some valuable tablets that enable the understanding of ancient Syria and Palestine in the Second Millennium.¹⁸ To buttress the assertion of Perkin and Woude about the city of Ebla, Hoerth describes Ebla as a growing commercial centre in the ancient Near-East that witnessed the frequent influx of people as well as a caravan for both political and commercial purposes.¹⁹ This may suggest that the city of Ebla was perhaps a busy commercial centre where the frequent influx of people and goods for commercial purposes was typical in the ancient Near-East.

The Ebla tablets reveal names that are closely related to the Patriarchal period, like Abraham (*Ab-ra-mu*), Esau (*E-sa-um*), Saul (*Sa-u-lum*), Israel (*Is-ra-ilu*) and Eber (*Ib-rum*). Also, the Ebla tablet portrays *Ya* to mean YHWH, suggesting a close affinity between the 'Eblaite' and the Hebrew language.²⁰ The mentioned names of people and places with

¹³ Ibid., 265; see Gleason L. Archer, Jr *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 170.

¹⁴ Cynthia Astle, "Archaeological Evidence About the Biblical Story of Abraham", <https://www.thoughtco.com/archaeological-evidence-abraham-in-the-bible-116875> 25-10-20.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.; see Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10000-586 B.C.E* (London: Doubleday, 1990), 225.

¹⁷ Hazel W. Perkin, "Tell Mardikh" in *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* Edward M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison (Gen Ed) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1983), 440.

¹⁸ Woude A.S. Van der, *The World of the Old Testament: Bible Handbook, Vol.II* Sierd Woudstra (Translated) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 8.

¹⁹ Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, 72.

²⁰ Perkin, 441.

close association to Abraham support the Patriarchs' historicity in the ancient Near-East. Thus, the Nuzi, Mari, and Ebla tablets are presumably the predominant archaeological discoveries that parallel and support the custom of the Patriarchal period. Isaac and the Patriarchal period is discussed in the next section.

ISAAC THE PATRIARCH AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The archaeological evidence from the previous section reveals that the Nuzi, Mari and Ebla are essential tablets that support the existence and culture of the Patriarch. Based on this, this section focuses on Isaac the Patriarch and archaeological evidence.

The story of Isaac appears in Genesis 21-28. He is generally known as the Promised son to Abraham and the father to Esau and Jacob in the Old Testament. Some scholars suggest that Isaac's role in the Patriarchal narrative is more of a link of God's promises from Abraham to Jacob. Henry Jackson Flanders and co., suggest: "Isaac appears in the Old Testament as a transitional figure between the two imposing personalities of Abraham and Jacob. Since he was the measure of neither of these men, most of his story is fused with the traditions concerning them."²¹ Similarly, William Albright concurs: "Isaac plays an integral role in the Patriarchal tradition and cannot be ignored by any serious historian."²² Based on this, Faith Adebayo aligns with the thoughts of Flanders and Albright that Isaac plays a transitional role between Abraham to Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel.²³ Flanders, Adebayo and Albright perhaps suggest that the part of Isaac is indispensable in the Patriarchal narrative given that he is the link of God's promises from Abraham to the twelve tribes of Israel.

The above mentioned archaeological evidence like the Nuzi, Mari and Ebla tables indicates that Isaac was a real figure in the Old Testament. The latter followed the examples of his father, Abraham. Ronald Hendel postulates that archaeological evidence reveals that Isaac lived in close association with the northern Negev, especially the oases of Beersheba and Beer-lahai-roi (Gen. 24:62, 25:11, 26:32-33).²⁴ Also, from archaeological excavation, findings identify the name 'Isaac-El', which could mean 'May the god *El* smile'. For Hendel, the interplay between the name Isaac and Israel in Amos 5:5; 8:14 may suggest that the "J" source designate the name for the northern tribe and presumes that Isaac is perhaps the founder of the religious practice at Beersheba (Gen. 25:23, 25).²⁵ The writer

²¹ Henry Jackson Jr. Flanders, Robert Wilson Crapps, and David Anthony Smith. *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Old Testament* 2nd edition (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1963), 110.

²² William F. Albright, "From the Patriarchs to Moses: From Abraham to Joseph," *Biblical Archaeologist. The University of Chicago Press Journals*, 36, 1 (1973), 19.

²³ Faith O. Adebayo, "An Examination of Scriptural and archaeological Evidences for the Historicity of Biblical patriarchs", *Asian Journal of humanities and Social Studies* (ISSN: 2321-2799) Vol.03-Issue 05, October (2015), 361.

²⁴ Ronald S. Hendel, McCarter, P. Kyle, Jr. "The Patriarchal Age: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. *Ancient*, 1999. <http://www.basarchive.org/bswbBrowse.asp?PubID-BSKAI> Volume200. Access 25/10/20

²⁵ Ibid.

admits that Beersheba is one of the significant areas where the Patriarchs spent some time in their life journey. However, Hendel's reading of Isaac as the founder of the religious practices in Beersheba may not be factual, given that he took over his father Abraham, who visited the area before him.

William Martin traces the life of the Patriarchs and links them to specific areas in the narrative. He maintains that the Patriarchs as nomads continuously move from one place to another. While Abraham's dwelling place is near Hebron, Isaac lived more at Beersheba and Gerar (Gen. 26:23; 28:10) south of Palestine. He bridges Patriarch Abraham to Jacob, as already mentioned above.²⁶ Beersheba, according to Martin, may suggest where Isaac spent most of his time. Similarly, Schofield explains Abraham's journey from Shechem, Bethel, Hebron to Beersheba. He asserts that Isaac and his father once lived in Gerar, a city that lies on the pathway to Egypt. He traces further that archaeological discovery of Gerar submits that during the time of Isaac, the Hyksos were once in control of Gerar before the Philistine invaded the area at about 1200 B.C.²⁷ It may appear that Isaac spent more of his time in Beersheba and Gerar than anywhere else during the Patriarchal period. Edward Campbell posits that "Shechem appears as the site of more distinct patriarchal narratives than any Palestinian city. The 'Yahwist' has Abraham visit the sacred place, with its 'oak of Moreh...it is Jacob and his sons who seem to be at home in or near Shechem. It is thus associated with all the patriarchs except Isaac."²⁸ For Campbell and Ross, Abraham and Jacob have an affinity with Shechem more than Isaac. The oak of Moreh speaks of Abraham's first visit to the land while Jacob and his sons lived in Shechem. However, Isaac may not have dwelled in Shechem as much as Beersheba and Gerar, where he is linked to the story of the 'Well' at Gerar. The well at Gerar is explained in the next section.

THE WELL AT GERAR AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Archaeological evidence, as mentioned above, reveals the custom and practices of the Hurrians at Nuzi in parallel to the Patriarchal period. Besides, the custom and practices are the evidence of the excavation of Well that existed during the Patriarchal era. Thus, this section focuses on the Well at Gerar and archaeological evidence under two sub-points: the excavation of Gerar and the proof of a Well at Gerar.

The Excavation of Gerar

The city of Gerar is a real town that existed in the ancient Near-East. The excavation of this town supports the biblical existence of the patriarchs, particularly Abraham and Isaac. Edward Musgrave Blacklock explains that '*Tell Jemmeh*' is the original site for Gerar south

²⁶William C. Martin, *These were God's People: A Bible History* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Southern Company, 1966), 25.

²⁷ J. N. Schofield, *Religious Background of the Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1947), 75.

²⁸ Edward F. Campbell, Jr. and James F. Ross, "The Excavation of Shechem and the Biblical Tradition", *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol 26, No 1 (Feb, 1963); 1-27.

of Gaza. W. J. Pythian-Adams led the excavation of this site in 1922, and five years later, another excavation was conducted by W. F. Flinders Petrie. Petrie extended his excavation to the sixteenth century B. C.²⁹ Although, Blaiklock admits that Petrie findings were later challenged by D. Alon, who decided to name 'Tell Abu Hureirah' in 'Wadi Es-Sariah' in the South East Gaza. From his analysis, the excavation reveals that the site was a 'Tell' not a 'Hill' city that was occupied during the Bronze Age period. For Blaiklock, the community of 'Tell' experienced prosperity during the Middle Bronze Age, which he suggests maybe the time of the Patriarchs (Gen. 10:19; 20:1, 2; 26:6, 20); based on this, it supports the treaty that Abraham, as well as Isaac, entered with Abimelech in Gerar.³⁰

Cohen describes Gerar as an essential city along the Mediterranean Sea South of Canaan. Isaac and his father, Abraham, once lived there. He opines that these patriarchs were friends with King Abimelech. Abraham and his son Isaac entered into a friendship treaty with Abimelech at Gerar.³¹ In line with Cohen's thought on Gerar, Flanders assumes that Isaac experienced several conflicts with the people of Gerar because of the well-water crisis. It may appear that the shortage of water for both domestic and animals husbandry in ancient Near-East was a recurring avenue for tension and conflict between the nomads and the city-dwellers; for instance, Isaac and the people at Gerar.³² On a similar note, Yohanan Aharoni suggests that the Patriarchs once lived at Gerar towards the western Negeb, where water often was in short supply for domestic usage and animal husbandry. Besides the water crisis, he traces the constant challenges the patriarchs faced with raiders, especially the 'Bedouin' people. He assumes that settlement was only possible at Negeb with the help of a formidable government to resist the raiding 'Bedouin' during the drought season. The 'Bedouin' raiders often terrorized the settlers and loots from their homes.³³ On a similar note, James concurs: Abraham and Isaac were confronted with several conflicts and violence from the inhabitant of Gerar.³⁴ Water shortage is a prevalent challenge in some communities today. The lack of it threatens both human beings and animals in the city.

William Hanna Thomson reports that in the extreme south of Palestine where Isaac lived, water supply for humans and animals was often difficult. The only mean was to dig

²⁹ Edward Musgrave Blaiklock, "Gerar" in *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*. R. K Harrison (Gen Ed.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1983), 210.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ S. Cohen, "Gerar" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible in four Volume E-J* George Arthur Buttrick (Gen. ed) (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 381-382.

³² Smith, 111.

³³ Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible* (London: Burns and Oates, 1967), 26.

³⁴ James K. Hoffmeier, "The Wives' Tales of Genesis 12, 20 & 26 and the Covenants at Beer-Sheba," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.1 (1992), 81-100.

a well in the valley that would solve the water shortage. The Philistines who lived in the area could not allow Isaac to use the well water that his father Abraham dug in that area. They filled it up with earth and attempted to unearth it to get water made with resistance and opposition from the native of the land.³⁵ It is commendable to say Isaac chose to resist them by digging many more wells at the valley of Gerar, where he settled with his men and cattle. This writer may concur with Thomson that one complimentary lesson from this act is that Isaac did not use his arm trained servants to fight the community of Gerar nor sort the help of neighbouring kings like his father to come to his assistance.³⁶ However, there are instances when action is needed to stop repressive individuals. If it means using arms or the court of law will solve a prevailing repressive behaviour, it is wise to apply it. Sunday Didam Audu and Afolarin Olutunde submit that “Water was a major part of the livestock support...in Genesis 21:22-34, water was a major reason for a covenantal relationship between Abimelech, Philistine King of Gerar and Abraham.”³⁷ The water crisis in the Old Testament is evident in several instances, as explained in the next section.

The Proof of a Well at Gerar

The previous section underlines the excavation of Gerar. Besides the excavation of Gerar are other discoveries like caves that were transformed into wells and cisterns for water in the ancient Near-East. Caiger explains that the findings of caves in Palestine reveal that some of them eventually became water-cistern by merely cutting a hole in the roof and designing it with a water-tight plaster for usage.³⁸ Based on the fact that cave became water-cistern, it is presumed that Isaac’s well at Gerar was the excavation of a cistern in the soft rock where the people used to collect water (Gen. 26:20, 25). Some of the excavated caves reveal human and pig bones statistics, which may connote that these caves were either used as pits to imprison, storages, or tombs (Gen. 37:24; Jer 38:24).³⁹

Bimson considers Well as one of the ancient water supply sources in the Old Testament. Abraham and Isaac are commended for their philanthropic act of providing Well water for both people and animals, particularly at Gerar as mentioned above (Gen 26:17-25 cf. Exod 2:15-19).⁴⁰ Also, Bimson submits that some communities designed Wells like Abraham and Isaac’s case with Abimelech’s people (Gen 21:25; 26:19-20) and

³⁵ William Hanna Thomson, *Life and Times of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1912), 24.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Sunday Didam Audu, and Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole. “Conflict over Water in Genesis 26;12-33: Implications for the Church in Sub-Sahara African Relation to Support for the Millennium Development Goals,” *Research on humanities and social Sciences*, Vol 3, 19 (2013), 16.

³⁸ Stephen L. Caiger, *Bible and Spade: An Introduction to Biblical Archaeology* (London Oxford University Press, 1936), 48.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Bimson, 90.

the situation of Unnamed shepherd and Reuel daughters (Exod. 2:15-19) are indicators of contentions on the issue of well in the Old Testament. The argument equally reflects the importance of Well-water in the ancient Near-East. Besides, Bimson suggests that wells were natural meeting arenas in the ancient Near-East (Gen. 24:10-27; 29:1-12).⁴¹ On a similar note, Baez-Camargo, suggests that archaeologist Aharoni led an excavation team in 1969 where a well was discovered at the top of a hill in Tell Beersheba. He alludes that the well perhaps should belong to the Patriarchs; since several instances in the Old Testament portrays the Patriarchs as well owners.⁴² The digging of a well was helpful in the ancient past as it is today in some areas.

CONCLUSION

This writer has underscored that the Nuzi, Mari, and Eba tablets are significant archaeological discoveries that support the Patriarchs' life and culture. Isaac the Patriarch was a real figure who lived at Beersheba and Gerar from the excavation expeditions. He dug wells for domestic use and for his cattle that brought about conflict between him and the people at Gerar. Isaac serves as an exemplary leader in conflict resolution. He did not fight back or hire men to fight for him; instead, he resolved the conflict faced at Gerar peacefully. Thus, in light of archaeological evidence, Isaac and the well at Gerar serve as an example for both church leaders and the Christian community.

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⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴²Gonzalo Baez-Camargo, *Archaeological Commentary on the Bible* (Garden, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1986), 20.

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